

Launching the Hydrapolemic: The Mythological Encounter With Polemic as Concept

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It may be considered a rather oblique move to convene a discussion of the Hydra and Heracles in relation to our larger initiative to ground a conceptual typology of polemics, but it serves as perhaps the most effective analogy in the spirit of poststructuralist and deconstructive critique. That is, we invoke these two “styles” of critique with their preoccupation with language and the Other: two key components to elucidate upon the notion of polemics, and more specifically, take our cues from Derrida’s idea of hydratext and Deleuze’s clarion call for concept creation. If the polemicist is considered monstrous, then it behooves us to commit considerable study to the polemicist’s monstrosity.

1: The Hydra

If and should we proceed with our nets and traps, our measuring and analyzing instruments, in search of a creature for the purposes of better understanding its rather perplexing movements, we should most definitely take stock of these tools. And indeed we should no less suspect that this creature itself will reveal the corrupt nature of our tools. This process of tool-subversion or instrument-failure emerges just at the point when the first layer of the creature is peeled away, when the biopsy is being performed, no matter how careful we are, how much we rationalize our seemingly unethical behaviour under the rubric of our grand totem of the pursuit of knowledge. But we stand at the grave of what is absent: that is, the Hydra’s inability to exist, its etiolation under the awful effulgence of Truth. It would not be that an exhumation of the Hydra from its crypt under the stone would prove to be an unethical procedure, but an impossible one, for a recalcitrant Parmenidean logic demands that we do not carry the Hydra in the memory as existent, but render it in the unspeakable (thereby written?) context of the empty grave, a grave denoting nothing, a kind of silent and empty tomb.

Hydratext: Fluid text and monstrous at that. Can we have monsters in this day and age? A horror show of weaving spectacles? Do we not demonster the monster precisely by making it available to analysis, especially with the safe fourfold allegorical return to interpretation? We “de-monster-ate”: demonstrate, show, *dico*, point. And it is with this cold finger that we

arrest (punctuation, clarification) the beast, perhaps trace for it a container, a zoo, a safe bestiary, a category (or perhaps later in the night, hovering over the notes, trace recognizable figures in an exposition whose purpose is to categorize the oblique). This is a tracing of an imaginary box around the creature rather than tracing its contours and learning its moves. This *pointing* is to be expected of/from analysis, the Heideggerian style of demonstration that reveals the *aletheia* of the moment, brings what is a monster into view, arresting it by indicating what it is not. It is by this *privatio veritas* that we recognize the monster (as something traumatic, as that which disrupts the harmony of expectation; in short, the irony of the future itself), and which also renders the monster as a supplicant to the utility of privileging the history of normality. The monster serves its inessential purpose, as “one must produce what in fact looks like a discursive monster so that the analysis will be a practical effect, so that people will be forced to become aware of the history of normality.”¹ In fact, “monstration” is not possible without the analytic model of de-monstration: again, pointing to the beast in response to the trauma it induces: “Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: ‘here are our monsters,’ without immediately turning the monsters into pets.”² In short, the monster is as such because it is subdued to a program of normalization instead of being able to manifest its true non-categorically abiding difference. Indeed, in this “pet logic for monsters,” the monster cannot be said to be an ontological problem without recourse to a stable substratum of categories that create scission between the “normal” animals and what is considered aberrant and abnormal.

What is next? Perhaps an enemy of difference, like Heracles who only has the completion of his labours in his view. Heracles abhors the difference of the Other. He knows that there is a father in the sky, and he must earn His praise through the completion of these life-threatening feats upon the earth, thereby restoring law to earth itself (he is perhaps the first cosmically ordained police officer, proceeding like a detective across the mythological terrain to resolve all the most pressing enigmas). Heracles encounters the Hydra: truly a creature of difference, of multiplicity, a *virus*-machine of sorts. Cut off one head, two grow in its place. But Heracles knows that the surest way to disable growth is to perform some kind of irreversible laceration: he cuts off the heads while Iolaus cauterizes the wounds. They have effectively stopped the wild growth of difference. The tale is now told to the young, a cautionary tale that directs thinking toward the supposed “right” and singularly accepted interpretation: cauterization of difference.

We must here limit ourselves to the Hydra, and perhaps in future works consider the surrounding labours that also demonstrate the general thrust of our inquiry.

Zeus acts as the logographer of the event, for his absent presence is much akin to the “*ghost writer* who composes speeches for use by litigants, speeches which he himself does not pronounce, which he does not attend, so to speak, in person, and which produce their effects in his absence.”³ So what is Heracles and his “speech act” against the Hydra but a function of being a police officer, a litigator, a surgeon, a wandering missionary, a hero who enacts the written command of the Law? It is the word of Zeus made manifestly present by his son to persecute the accused. Heracles’ act is not only a commemoration of the Father, but an implicitly violent demand that others internalize: (com)memorate Him from whom the Law descends. Heracles is “speaking” to the Hydra through the filter or aperture of Law, under the justification of Law, and only a “power of speech can have a father.”⁴ Indeed, in this theatrical production, Heracles is made to enact or pantomime Zeus’ will, and the Hydra is the unwitting participant in this production (of meaning).

Heracles must go about destroying all the aberrations of the land. It is unnatural for a Hydra to be, to violate the order of nature by infinite potential replication in itself. It is equally unnatural for Antaeus to violate the laws by resisting his own usurpation. So in a dance, Heracles performs against Antaeus in a physical *demonstration* that Socrates performs against the sophists by words: he lifts them up and shows them that they have no *ground*. Heracles suspends Antaeus, but not the sort of suspense that affirms becoming, but rather the degree of suspense that affirms the ground and utilizes Antaeus as a titling mechanism, a warning beacon, an object lesson, an example of Heracles’ tyranny—much in the way that Roman crucifixion, the French Revolution’s tumbrel, or colonial period hangings exemplify and reiterate the dominance of the state through a direct act of making the enemy groundless and suspended.

Of course in the Antaeus example, one may think of ground synonymously with context, so that the reason Joyce’s *Ulysses* resists the crude and invasive interpretation instruments is because it is somehow “displaced” from its artificial original context. One may conjure up a rather frightful yet amusing image of a Schleiermacher disciple taking the text to a multitude of places, looking for that one right context where the text “fits” seamlessly: square peg for square hole. The text is the knot, the bondage of discord that the

literary interpreter must untie, *resolve*, stretch out into one articulate string. To compose, to lay it out dead upon the coroner's cold slab for meticulous analysis. It is not dissimilar to Heracles' "adventure" in bondage to the Lydian queen Omphale; indeed, the *omphalos* and the anticipation of the untying, the resulting laceration leaving the scar.⁵ But what better way of abolishing difference than to disentangle the knot, and then bury it so that it will not activate the memory? Heracles' history with women—the Omphale episode only one example among many, one of maternal significance—is not very informed by fairness, and this masculine complicity follows in his treatment of the feminine Hydra. Conceptually, in the Deleuze and Guattari parlance, the Hydra qualifies as a Body Without Organs in the sense that it is full, a blank surface of potentiality, and because it lacks the requisite organ-connectors, it cannot *produce* in the generally nominal and crude sense of the term. The Hydra does not differentiate the spaces and creatures around it, nor does it differentiate within itself; it is a full body without organs, and as such it "belongs to the realm of antiproduction."⁶ Its acts of "production" only occur when a desiring-machine (such as Heracles) attempts "to break into the body without organs, and the body without organs repels [him], since it experiences [him] as an over-all persecution apparatus."⁷ Desire is encoded upon the surface of the Hydra, but not internalized as its essence lest it not be a body without organs, but rather another desiring-machine that is embroiled in constant production.

2. *Hydratext*

However, the *principle* that motors the monster—in no way an edifying principle by the strict ordinance of that word—is left aside, perhaps even abolished or purged. The hermeneut only sees the final, right interpretation: Oedipus only sees his mother everywhere. The cauterization of difference in fact makes no mark on the beast we know as text, but rather is a cauterization of the interpreter's view. But a deconstructive exercise would keep such codifiers in reserve, these binary constructions carved out from this boundless reserve that exceeds the constructions themselves.⁸ Taking each of the Herculean labours under consideration, we come to understand how the principles of difference, of "subjectivity," and arbitrariness are laid to rest in the ground. They are demonstrated (de-monster-ated) as false, while the hero Heracles—who sets down the proper cosmic pattern of Good, Truth, and Justice through interpretation—is heralded as the

champion who conquers over these aberrations. Like Christ, he laboured so that we do not have to—except through a constant commemoration of his name, performing more labours on a miniature scale so as not to prove that the ‘hero’ laboured in vain. But of all the labours, the battle with the Hydra—indicating yet again the cunning of Heracles in conjunction with his courageous might—is the scene where we will set down the longest pause. What is Hydra, or, what is hydratext? We cannot dissociate the notion of water that the Hydra comes from both literally and by convention of its name. Some discussion will have to be devoted to the idea of hydratext as we extend this analogy of reading and textuality to water and fluidity itself.

Water plays a privileged role in the ordinance of all life. It both sustains life through the replenishing of vital personal stores of fluid for plants and animals, and it destroys natural structures through erosion, tidal forces, monsoons, and floods. In ancient China, the emperor who could control the flow of the Yangtze River—essentially taming the seemingly untamable—was on high with the divine.⁹ The formula for water itself is the scene of this birth/death cycle, where hydrogen—the first element—is by far the most simple and abundant yet most potentially powerful of the elements: the sun’s largest chemical constituent is hydrogen, and it gives freely of its accursed share without return.¹⁰ Oxygen is both needed for life and at the same time burns objects, i.e., through oxidation over time. So, both hydrogen and oxygen possess the ability to create and destroy, engendering a kind of phoenix principle, or a Deleuzian becoming-other playing out ad infinitum on the field of biochemical and geological terrain. Or, better yet, an intrinsic double-utility that places water under the prospect of Derrida’s *pharmakon*.

Water is a pernicious substance: though it obeys the laws, it has its own inner laws that subvert our attempts to ultimately control it. We may build dams, but the water will merely find another path: its flow cannot be ultimately cauterized. We may pour it in a glass, but eventually it evaporates away. We may keep it frozen and in place, but it merely waits until heat is applied and rejoins the land of moving. As we prepare the stage, it will become more apparent that water is a potent analogy in describing how text operates, always on difference. More importantly, this analogy will also figure into our question on polemics. But so far, we can only illustrate how water is adaptive but not spontaneous in its movement. The way it moves is, in some cases, very difficult to determine with absolute accuracy, and it may appear that it moves with some degree of spontaneity. It must

also be addressed that it commonly carries sediments and deposits them, an important feature for archaeo-hydrologists or geologists to plot the past movements of large bodies of water, to describe phenomena like the Grand Canyon or stalactites. Though these are effective means of recording the tracings of water, water is also very adept at erasing its own traces or replacing old ones with newer ones.

Aliquid entities attempt to divert flows or stop them entirely. Though land masses act as containers for bodies of water, there is an underground water table. When I insert a finger into a moving stream, the water finds alternate paths around my finger—it forms a rhizome, of sorts. It is perhaps no different if I were to attempt to isolate some meaning in a text: alternate interpretations result from my interruption of the flow. And much akin to the Heraclitean statement of not being able to step in the same river twice, my acts of interpretation can never be accurately reproduced: I, too, am flowing, altering my experience as the flow of life causes me to be diverted in a multitude of ways. So it is not the Lacanian *points de capiton* tying down the upholstery of text to produce meaning, for there is no way of tying down the flow of water. Though the hermeneut may freeze a particular section, this will only yield what the text looked like at one particular time. But even this is folly, for the text is, in a sense, living and moving. Moreover, one's involvement of investment in the text is not a matter of cold and sterile analysis, for when one encounters water, one inevitably gets wet (though some may be more water-resistant than others).

If water may function as a suitable analogy for text, can it also hold itself true for language itself? Water does not repeat itself, only the laws that govern its movement. One cannot reproduce an identical quantity of water or the exact arrangement of molecules in a glass. Could desire (as desire without an object, or a question without solution that thereby moves rather than is placed “on ice” in the form of a solution) also be analogous to water? What of the “lunar influence” upon water? Invoking a Deleuzian model, we can associate water with assemblages that cut through strata, forming contours and lines, picking up and depositing sediments from these strata to create new assemblages *con solidare*. Language and desire—perhaps not to be taken too exclusively—have fluidity about them; they are moved and are moving. There is conatus in desire, in language, and these in turn are moved by the operations of their own rather oblique laws. These flows have their own tension owing primarily to the constituents of their properties. Just as water is indifferent to an allegiance with anything it so carries in

terms of sediment, so too is the faculty of language where words are merely sedimentary to speaking and writing. That I speak English or French is merely the result of what my aqueous faculty of language is “carrying” due to my time or location. This same arbitrariness follows desire as well: that I desire some object or its lack is strictly what my desire “carries,” collected by my conscious deliberation of objects and non-objects. That I seek answers to questions is merely an executive operation of carrying itself, linked both to the fluidity of desire and language.¹¹

3. *Hydro-Zoography*

But we must return to Heracles and his labours; more specifically to the forensic details of his encounter with the Hydra. Heracles must satisfy Eurystheus, the jealous cousin. Not only does Heracles order the use of the firebrand to put an end to the bifurcation of the Hydra’s heads, but he also realizes the potential properties of the Hydra—which he can use in future adventures. By dipping arrows in the poisonous Hydra blood, he is armed for a future entanglement with the beast Geryon. Now the very familiar passages on the *pharmakon* in Derrida’s *Disseminations* carry particular relevance. Why is the Hydra’s blood, a poison on its own, used as a kind of cure? The Hydra is a poisonous beast of difference, but when the blood is applied by Heracles against Geryon, it functions as a cure to rid the land of a dangerous beast. This poisonous tincture is also applied against the lusty centaur Nessos who attempted to rape Deianira (Heracles’ last wife), but the centaur is resistant to the poisonous effects (a question we leave suspended, but provocative enough to fuel inquiry; perhaps the centaur—itself an aberration, a playful “monster” could not be harmed by that which is consanguineous).¹² Again the poison plays a role in the final dispatching of Heracles, when Deianira unwittingly uses it as a love salve applied to the inside of Heracles’ tunic. The blood of the corrupt genealogy acts as a *pharmakon* against the monsters and the hero himself. It is by the trickery of Nessos the centaur (an event in itself ironic due to the fact that Heracles would be defeated by both a “monster” and by one of his own weapons), that the gall is applied to the tunic. The gall burns Heracles’ flesh, and it bonds with his skin so that as he removes the tunic his skin is ripped off with it. Heracles: skinned like an animal, just as he had skinned the Nemean lion. Why this ironic twist of fate? What had Heracles done to warrant this? Perhaps it was his punishment for using the Hydra’s blood at all, or the fact that Heracles himself is

an aberration due to his inhuman strength, and so must be—like the beasts he dispatches—restored to order. The death of Heracles may be called “the thirteenth labour” wherein he de-monster-ates himself.

To comprehend the dynamics of this mythological drama, it is useful to incorporate the associative matrices that develop and are produced when we consider Heracles’ arsenal. The outstanding fact of possessing an arsenal is in league with being played out on the surface of *polemos*. When one possesses an arsenal, one is anticipating conflict. There is an investment in weapons to complement this arsenal as an attempt to rig the outcomes of chance. By having an arsenal, Heracles effectively is attempting to increase his statistical chances at success in battle. He may even tie together the procurement of effective weapons in the arsenal to his anticipated outcomes: respect, glory redounded unto him, the destruction of all aberrations, etcetera. After his defeat of the Hydra, Heracles prepares a sheaf of arrows tipped with the poisonous Hydra blood. The sheaf is a gathering together of elements into a bundle that he will utilize in his future “speech acts” against other beasts. His arsenal consists of this gathering together of the instruments of the *pharmakon*: Heracles will use poison to cure the land.

Note also our innocuous friend sent by Hera, the crab Cancer who nips at Heracles’ heel.¹³ There may be a link between the Hydra’s bifurcating, metastasizing function and our modern conception of cancer as a disease.¹⁴ Heracles’ response is less than eloquent: he issues a mighty kick that sends the crab hurtling to its death. The notion of weakness and the heel would also open up to the scene of Achilles, not to mention the similarity between Achilles’ wondrous armour and Heracles’ Nemean lion skin.

Heracles’ adventures with water continue when he is requested to clean out a stable of staggering unkemptness. Instead of taking on the task in any conventional sense, Heracles exhibits his prowess over water by diverting two rivers that effectively clean out the entire stable. This indicates that Heracles has learned how to master the flow of water, to make it do his bidding. But it is not that the water is mystically under his power, but that he has a basic understanding of how he can manipulate the natural laws of water to achieve the desired outcome. Heracles learns how to make the disordered and the monstrous useful. He has transformed the Hydra into a doubly articulated utility (as a means of adding to his hero status and as the use of the Hydra’s blood), and Heracles is no stranger to allowing the existence of monsters as long as they can be translated into something useful for his own desiring ends—for even at a young age, Heracles learned how to utilize weapons

under the tutelage of the centaur, Chiron. At the completion of the twelve labours, Heracles must do battle against the river god Achelous for possession of the lovely Deianira. Achelous, a fluid creature, can alter his shape at will, but loses the battle at the moment when he consolidates (actualizes upon a potential, thereby ceasing to be a virtual creature, but an articulated and static one) his form into that of a bull (a very fertile psychoanalytic and recurrent Greek mythological motif), whereby Heracles rips off the horn, the river's phallus. But the error of the Achelous example is not only in Achelous going against his own fluid nature by consolidating into a form, but in assuming that a river entity would even attribute such importance to the phallic horn. In this story, Achelous is reduced in all respects to the level of the solidified, the repressed human—which perhaps adds an extra dimension to the etymology of his name: “he who drives away grief” (by absorbing it, no less).

What is the motivation to kill the Hydra? Heracles must gain control over difference; rig the outcome, so as to ensure that his destiny is fulfilled. By controlling difference through its annihilation, Heracles can gain mastery over his own fate (though that fate being his subjection to the poisonous blood). The moral: abolish difference in favour of a linear model of trajectory that is safe from the sporadic. Abolish chance and adhere to strict Necessity, and if the reliable logical rules do not apply in thwarting the monsters, use their own corrupt logic against them. By imputing to the beasts actions of tyranny and bloodshed against the human world, this merely adds flavour to the allegory, thereby justifying the death of said creatures and sanctioning Heracles as a hero rather than a misguided and intrinsically violent being on a long and belaboured quest to prove his manhood.

Control or violence against water is illusory at best: it provides temporary comfort and satisfaction to those who need to feel a sense of mastery (as indeed all forms of actualization are temporary “haltings” of virtual potentialities). A hermeneut, in a long quest to prove singular meaning, to achieve the wrongfully phallic Truth, undergoes these labours of interpretation, each one an instance of their cunning in abolishing difference. Just as desire is indifferent to the objects placed before it, water is indifferent to the hands that attempt to obstruct its movement. The hermeneut can only inscribe meaning upon a moving body of water—and even to etch it in ice does not guarantee permanence. It may not be, as the Goya inscription reads, that the sleep of reason produces monsters, but that reason itself constructs monsters out of what is merely different.

But does Heracles ever initiate communication with the Hydra, or does his insistence upon a pre-semiotic heritage to the Zeus-father prevent him from forging a communicative link with the Hydra? And parenthetically, we may add that the communication the Hydra provides is plural, irreducible to the acts of linear models of communication. That there can be multiple speakers in one body engaged in a multitude of acts will present Heracles with an insurmountable difficulty. It is reported that the Hydra's breath is poisonous and deadly,¹⁵ and so this property would attach to any speech acts it would perform. Poison speech, subversive speech, the rhetoric of difference: is it more likely that this allegory does not refer to a literal deadliness of speech, but rather to a figurative anomaly inherent in what the Hydra says? From sirens to sophistry, the dangers of speech are well communicated as a leitmotif, speech itself just as much of a *pharmakon* as writing, as Derrida has thoroughly discussed in his own works. Despite the communicative disorder between Heracles and the Hydra, the fact that the Hydra performs any speech act at all reifies its terrifying presence. Such a robust and self-styled noble figure following a destiny, how is it that Heracles is incapable of communication with what he perceives as a beast that, for him, violates a limited conception of natural order? One body, one head, one speech, one act: that is the way it ought to be; Heracles is incensed at the violation of this series of singularity, the lack of accord in the Hydra's *ontology* and Heracles' deeply ingrained *ethics*. It should also be noted, though in strictest candour, that the Herculean principle depicted here at the juncture of an unwillingness to communicate follows into the rhetorical structure of a unilateralism in regards to thoroughly invasive foreign policy procedures where the cauterization of difference is performed through military aggression or commercial annexations of foreign territories. The United States' lore—by far not the only nationalist manifestation—is historically loaded with an invested interest in following destinies, for example. So the charge against Heracles stands: have you ever attempted to establish dialogue with the Hydra or did you merely react to what you perceived to be an aberration, a terrorist threat?

If by dialogue we consider that the sword speaks on his behalf, and that Heracles (as *logos*) speaks for the father, then this is the form of communicative discourse that transpires. But why this act and no other? There can be no alternative to de-monster-ation in this case, according to the demands placed upon *logos*. The Hydra must be punctuated: arrested and clarified. But it is Heracles, the cosmically ordained officer of the law on a

case assigned by a jealous employer, who believes arresting the culprit will also clarify it. As clarification fails, the only alternative is to match one irony against another: Reason's inability to act reasonably in the face of the unreasonable, and the Hydra's own complex set of ironies (that are tied together in a weave—indeed, a *textum*—we set aside for the moment). Heracles acts with sword as judge and executioner, which is the only way to clarify the creature: through its destruction, its de-monster-ation. The sentence is pronounced in the name of the father who is the law, for Heracles works under His power: “before being reined in and tamed by the *kosmos* [the father as law-giver] and order of truth, *logos* is a wild creature, an ambiguous animality.”¹⁶ Heracles, *logos*, is useless without being set to task, without being sent as a curative of perceived diseases in whatever forms they take. The Hydra is indeed a creature of polemic, but it turns out that Heracles is also a polemicist, but of a different variety: his actions are sanctioned by the polemics of alleged Truth. Heracles-as-*logos* must have something to do, some purpose and foreseeable end to justify his existence, or else lapse into a crude animal state, as *Böse*.

Another charge holds: Heracles violates the sanctity of the dead by making the dead useful. By dipping the arrows and anointing them with the poison, he transforms the Hydra's purpose—itself an indication of difference, for it appears to violate the treatment of the dead. But Heracles finds himself justified because it was only a beast, unworthy of the noble treatment afforded the deceased.¹⁷ By rendering the corpse useful, he performs a crude operation of reduction that places the Hydra under the category of utility (but the Hydra was not useful alive, other than to unwittingly serve the destiny of Heracles the slayer of beasts). It is the scene of Heracles the demonstrator (a self-styled de-monster-ator) who transports the Hydra into the tight confines of double utility (blood-weapon and body-destiny). If Heracles were not so intent on his destiny or to prove his manhood through these rather arbitrary labours as given him by the jealous cousin, would he undertake different labours? It appears that Heracles fulfills the role of an assassin-for-hire whose expected payment is the respect that destiny will afford him. The killing of the Hydra is little more than an exercise, a proof of his powers, and perhaps an extraneous act.

The actual constitution of the Hydra of Lerna is deserving of some discussion. According to the accounts of Diodorus, Simonides, Apollodorus, and Hyginus—who disagree as to the exact number of heads the Hydra possessed—all the heads were human in appearance, but the central head was

eviternal.¹⁸ This eviternality presents us with a problem insofar as it is a deferment of its completion toward a disclosure of truth, for it is not framed by a mortal end: it possesses an origin, but no telos. In the traditional account, Heracles lopped off the heads while his associate Iolaus applied a burning iron to cauterize the wounds. Due to Iolaus' assistance¹⁹, Eurystheus discounted the labour, which would appear to raise the issue of singularity and the act: is the action of the hero only recognized if it is done without cooperation? Perhaps on the whole, this act of assistance weakens a claim of Heracles being the One, the individual hero, thereby constituting confusion as to whom honour and reverence is to be granted. A "polyheroism" would violate an existent order that seeks to invest all reverence in the singular individual who can be shown to be self-sustaining, the icon of "he who works alone." More importantly, if Heracles is the embodiment of the father's speech, the *logos*, then it is absolutely necessary that he be singular; a second figure disrupts the genealogical validity of the actor, and raises the possibility of a dissenting or oblique interpretation to take place. Unlike Heracles, Iolaus is not genealogically connected to Zeus in a salient and direct manner. Just *who* is the direct messenger of the father? This question would apply if this non-labour labour was admitted as credible. Polyheroism is far too ambiguous for this order to maintain, leading perhaps to an argument as to who the real hero actually is, plunging the modality of hero into further doubt. To be distinguished is to be singular, period, and Iolaus' assistance diminishes the accomplishment of Heracles. In addition, for there to be more than one "hero" as the two figures confront the Hydra would be an affirmation that only the logic of "more than one"—not the one—can be victorious against the creature that violates the order of positive singularity.

More interesting still would be the application of heat rather than cold as a means of halting growth. In this sense, the Hydra is well represented by physics and the properties of water (and so it *does* abide by some set of laws). When water is cooled, it expands as the molecules are set into polarization in preparation for freezing. Heracles' application of his cold steel to the heads of the Hydra does little more than extend and expand its territorial participation. When heat is applied in the use of the firebrand, the water that is the Hydra evaporates, closing off growth, causing it to contract. The heat "normalizes" the Hydra, for it is the heat of Heracles' desire that halts the fractal growth of the Hydra.

The name of the Hydra is imposed or grafted upon it at the scene of a violent encounter. This name is synonymous with monstrosity, and is the

attempt to cancel its singularity while containing it within the metaphysical category by way of a scission, a cut—but a scission that is deliberately planned in the spirit of a logic of pure exclusion. The hybrid creature must be made other, a shadow component, a non-creature. Heracles' signing of the name of the Hydra is a fiendish attempt to halt the Hydra's natural process of becoming. Heracles bears the name of the Father which he uses to (counter)sign the Other. Hydra is the "read" name while the written mark or sign of *monster* is written upon it insofar as there is an ontological claim, a copula that unites *Hydra* with *monster*.

The eviternal head was buried under a large boulder to lament for all time. The justification of the Hydra's murder was owing to its natural propensity to pollute the land and sea with its foulness.²⁰ The intent of Heracles' act was not in the service of alleviating this condition, but promoting his own destiny; otherwise, could it be said that Heracles would actually care about Lerna?²¹ More importantly, does the existence of the eviternal head suggest that Heracles was impotent in annihilating difference entirely? Perhaps, or perhaps it was almost divinely necessary that there be a witness (although if this were true, why would Iolaus not be suitable to bear witness?). Heracles could not destroy difference, but he certainly could bury it, conceal it from view. The presence of the Hydra would subsequently only be felt through the misapplication of its *vitae*, used, as we mentioned above, as a *pharmakon*.²² Heracles the assassin also becomes a kind of doctor of the land, ridding it of the outgrowths that threaten against the homogeneity of the law, treating the Hydra as a mere *apraxia*; that is, refusing to recognize the identity of the Hydra in and of itself, but only seeing its use—a theme which returns to us the idea that the monster's only true purpose in analysis is to give a privileged account of the normal. It is this use of the *vitae* that literally gives Heracles the gall to defeat other beasts. The quizzical figure of Iolaus, using his own cunning, delivers on the militaristic dictate of Heracles: the beast must be destroyed, or at least suppressed if its destruction is not possible. And so the suppression of the difference the Hydra engenders is all that can truly be afforded. The daughter of Echidna and Typhon must be put in her place, so to speak, by the male bravado of the conquering hero who acts as if his labours are not somehow linked to self-interest in destiny and manhood. Yes, we cannot forget that the Hydra is a feminine creature, and that he "who would restrain [a woman] restrains the wind and grasps oil with his right hand" (Proverbs 27:16). This is yet another classical manifestation of the formula that renders woman the untruth of truth.²³

And so Heracles performs and plays out this reversal of the castration scene against the feminine transgressor. Is the Hydra a classic example of feminine sexual reticence? Does Heracles object to the fact that he cannot force the beast to create connective syntheses with the world and be supplicant to the phallogocentric law? To allay the feelings of his own castration anxiety, Heracles transforms the Hydra from a monster to a pet, thereby completing the cycle of de-monster-ation. His suppression of the Hydra, and the feminine, makes the monster sensible and thereby cancels its title (but a title that was imposed from an outside to begin within, signifying that a categorical change has occurred).

Heracles most definitely has a “chip on his shoulder” when it comes to women. Was it not Hera who, objecting to the infidelity of Zeus and the bastard child, sent two snakes to murder Heracles as an infant? Was it not Hera who drove Heracles mad, causing him to murder his own wife and children, thus forcing him to atone by going to the oracle of Delphi to obtain his “mission plans” for his redemption? Will not Heracles associate the Hydra with the combined embodiment of Hera and the two serpents? Heracles has very serious step-mother issues which he projects onto the world, which, we may suppose, makes him a fecund candidate for psychoanalytic study. But even his name is attributed to this murderous step-mother, for Heracles means *winning glory through Hera*, rendering Hera the unwitting causal agent of his glory. But these labours are necessary for him to win his own name, to remove the signature of Hera entirely from it.

Perhaps we can approach this conflict in another way, sans genderization. What if this conflict was merely one on the level of language, as two different formations or expressions of polemics? The Hydra wishes to persist in its state, making its own unique utterances, while Heracles wishes to impose a unified grammar against the Hydra’s aberrant language of infinite exceptions. We will later detail the fundamental significance of the Heracles-Hydra conflict in relation to polemics as concept. What we will retain for the moment is the idea that a great deal of physical effort on the part of Heracles was necessary for the transformation of the Hydra from dangerous monster to safe pet. His desire to dominate the “feminine other” succeeds by the law of the sword that he employs on the behalf of his own father. This otherness may also be a corollary of the ancient Greek understanding of the Orient with all its mythological forms: the multiple limbs and heads.

The Hydra is always in a state of production and becoming, but a production that is not in the service of any human scale production, or even

adhering to conventional logic (though it may be forced into one through disjunction and conjunction). Its positive-term heads, each a plus sign of presence, are a response to the minus sign of the sword that cleaves them.²⁴ In the viewpoint of the 'hero,' the Hydra is destined for negation, and in fact cannot qualify as a distinct Other in the proper sense. This is the first transgression. The sword, as an effective tool of producing negation (at the presence of the brandished sword, the transgressive "monstrosity" is at once an *estin* and subsequently brought to its terminus as an *ouk estin*, the annulment of myth almost forecasting the arrival of philosophy), attempts to cancel the positive production of the Hydra (before replication, the production of the Hydra is in and of itself alone constituted) with the curious result that absence is made impossible, that order is not restored—first degree irony of the Hydra. In fact, the sword of the hero only exacerbates the enigma; the hero must seek other alternatives seeing as coexistence has already been ruled out by an overdetermining logic that renders cohabitation impossible. Rather, an inventive form of violence must take effect and be deployed against the Hydra. In the history of traditional theory, one intent on order with its genetic and teleological properties must confront the sporadic, the different in order to lay it to rest. Suppression and burial is the second option, the contingency plan where full frontal combat can only inflame the *potentia* of the transgressive element.²⁵ We have already witnessed such surreptitious strategies in history, such as how the Pagan festivals were obliquely subverted through replacement by Christian festivals rather than through a direct method of conversion. In the case of the Hydra and its symbolic singularity, it is convenient to rearrange the order around it until the context determines it to be a monster to be vanquished. This is the oblique method of handling that which can withstand a frontal assault without being vanquished. This siege-craft performed in the spirit of logos isolates the Hydra-event, defines it by the privation it is suddenly forced into engendering as its lack of accord with the dominant moral and logical order, and it is then de-monster-ated morally and logically through its destruction/suppression. Irrationality is confined and then suppressed in this analytic procedure. Desire is then buried under the stone law of the rational...the rational suppressant. It is curious that the rational order must apply force and pressure against that which—according to its own laws that state that the Hydra cannot be—violates the rational until the irrational is made effectively absent. It is also the event of the son of God (Heracles) enacting the will of the father, a familiar motif.

Heracles, as the son, is yet another figure in myth who must play the role of the *logos*. This does not prevent his animality, however, for “*logos* is a *zoon*. An animal that is born, grows, belongs to the *phusis*.”²⁶ Heracles cannot escape his animality, an animality he shares with the Hydra, but he can reconcile his complements of lack (respect, perfection, uncorrupted genealogy with the divine) through an act that is in service to the attainment of glorious ends and love from the Father. Heracles feels the deep wound or cut, another scission, from the Father. He seeks to rejoin the Father’s household, the Great Estate above, the precinct of divine law. He eventually returns, but it is at the expense of his animal body. He is restored to order and placed in the ranks of the dead hero once his death is a sealed event. The body is burned on a great pyre, a testament to the hero, so that nothing of this animal body remains. This also removes any evidence that he was a “man” in the conventional, animal sense, and so the myth can be proliferated that he was a divinely sanctioned hero. Heracles is salvaged from animality twice: the first instance by electing to take on the task of upholding the Law, and the second instance when he finally surrenders his mortal body to the flames. If this were not the case, without submitting to the dictates of the *kosmos* and the order of truth, Heracles (as *logos*) would have remained a wild beast.²⁷ Oddly enough, the Hydra also succumbs to this ordering by the *kosmos* that parcels out its existence as an ontological impossibility—the distinction between the two on this scheme being that the Hydra did not elect to be rendered “intelligible” to the order of truth.

A supplementary irony inherent in the Hydra concerns *logos* itself. If *logos* is to have an effect, there must be some degree of fear that keeps it in power.²⁸ If *logos* can provide a salve for the fear of death, then it can ensure the loyalty of the “laity.” However, the Hydra—itself immortal—has no need of *logos*, is not frightened by its pronouncements, and does not need to lose its life to replicate its *eidōs*. The Platonic notion of *anamnesis* requires that if the *eidōs* is to be replicated in a body, the former body must already have passed on. However, the Hydra can conceptually replicate its *eidōs* without dying. Curiously enough, this replication cannot take place without the antagonism the Hydra (as *mythos*) shares with *logos*—a bizarre symbiosis of its being’s determination. Only when the *logos* is somehow provoked to attack (as Necessity dictates it must) can the *eidōs* of the Hydra be actualized in repetition, as manifested by its bifurcating heads. What is repeated is the concept of growth that is virtually infinite, a property the Hydra shares with certain plant forms and, of course, the virtual properties of water’s move-

ment. All Heracles has done is to divert the Hydra to the ground, where water eventually flows.

The metastasis of the Hydra is present in the sense that it is deprived of a true ontological verity (is it or is it not?). It mutates into something other when it is seized upon by the desiring-machine that is Heracles. But before this conflict, without the presence of a prescribed *nomos* and *logos*, it gathers in itself a tight and ever-increasing reserve that eventually breaks out in an ecstatic mutation. Heracles' attack triggers the Hydra's self-protective reaction, while at the same time reiterating the law that denies the Hydra a full existence in the established criteria for ontological truth. Does it rebel by multiplying itself, its action essentially ironic in that Heracles' attempt to negate the monster merely produces more of its presence? Is it a serial repetition that goes against the banal prominence of the singular sign (the code of Zeus, the laws of the polis, or the more metaphysical idea of one essence for one existence), just as Andy Warhol's pop-art was to the fanatical monomania of 1950s American consumer culture? The analogues throughout history are rich enough to explain the sustained appeal of the Heracles-Hydra myth.

4. *The Coup and the Crypt*

The Hydra is forced by the point of the sword to reproduce itself symmetrically, a task of repetition it would not undertake if left alone. It is the denomination of transgressor that forces this symmetrical repetition. With infinite potential replication, the Hydra carries its initial number of heads to an *n*th power.²⁹ The heads replay themselves at every juncture of violence that is in itself a response to the transgressive element of the hero. However, there is something ironic about the Hydra: attempts to destroy it only cause it to multiply its life.³⁰ This repetition as irony subverts the given laws of the natural order that attempt to determine it.³¹

Coup and its smaller component, *ou*: where are we to make this cut? From where should we select that which we will cut out? And what instruments will be used? It is not that the pen is mightier than the sword, but that they are interchangeable.

...*À coup de poignard*: the necessary function of symmetrical repetition and the manifestation of the Hydra's first order irony. The homophony of *coup*, indicated by Stefano Agosti and set into lyrical motion in Derrida's *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* are well known.³² But what kind of *coup* fits here, is

suitable to/for the de-monster-ated Hydra? We've already discussed above the *pharmakon* nature of Heracles' curative attack, his *coup de force* under the command of destiny, law, manhood, and the absent father, not to mention the use of blood as poison against other alleged transgressors. The *coup* requires an instrument; in this case, Heracles' *poignard* (in the government coup, we can ally the instrument with the abstract instruments of rebellion). Heracles must overthrow the monster (made so because its existence was not sanctioned by God the father) in the name of the succeeding order that is to replace it.³³ The sword is, besides the extension of the arm or the phallus of the father, that which is to inscribe order upon apparent disorder the Hydra is made to represent (and only analysis itself is capable of forcing differential beasts into submitting to crude representation). The point or sword is the stylus of this inscription (a bloody pen that inscribes the order upon the Hydra, and is later a reinscription upon other monsters: "the pen, when you have followed it to the end, will have turned into a knife"³⁴): "style...uses its spur (*éperon*) as a means of protection against the terrifying, blinding, mortal threat (of that) which *presents* itself, which obstinately thrusts itself into view."³⁵ There is an assumption at play here in this allegorical model that there is only one sword wielded by the only one suited to carry it, a sword of Truth that will lay "untruth" to rest. However, the sword is proven impotent, flaccid, producing the ineffective and ironic outcome of multiplication rather than "to cut down" (and here a strange sensitivity emerges with the author's own name, "Faucher": *couper avec la faux*). But one cannot cut water without dispersion resulting. A veil must be thrown over water, a covering, a burial (ceremonious or otherwise), even perhaps a stone. But what prevents the eviternal head from flowing, from disseminating itself underneath the cover of order, to emerge and interrupt elsewhere? The law is enforced and inscribed *à coup de poignard*, but it is proven to be an impotent combative gesture, a rattling of the sabre. If not for the interruption of a second style introduced by the cunning of Iolau (the firebrand) and the availability of a veil, a funereal shroud (the stone), the *coup* would have been a total failure. Instead, a temporary victory is attained, a deferral of the final struggle. The stone of the law not only acts as a cautionary marker, but also designates the triumph of order over disorder (though illusory). The stone of the law also doubles as tomb, a grave marker designating what lies beneath. It is the writing of the Hydra's existence as a monster, and writing out of the Hydra's singularity as *Other*. And, as we know with such acts of writing and law, "writing...assures the law's permanence

and identity with the vigilance of the guardian.”³⁶ What is troubling about this operation where Heracles attempts to disclose his *aletheia* at the expense of petrifying the Hydra under the *lethe* of Law, is that it indicates the presence of that which, according to the natural order that the stone represents, cannot exist according to the Law. Not only can the Hydra no longer be alive, but also it could never have existed. The inscription would read: here lies that which does not exist. This would be a bold claim, for even modern science cannot conclude the non-existence of things, but only the absolutely minimal probability of their existence (the recurrent problem of induction). The paradox of the buried object gains a new meaning: something that is both present and absent. The zoographical monument becomes nothing but an empty part of a mythological bestiary. As a cautionary monument, it also states that such creatures of difference are not permitted to live lest they suffer the same ignoble negation. Moreover, Heracles effectively—in signing, sealing, and perhaps even delivering the Hydra (like a letter) unto nullity—sells it to sophistry. Are not the sophists in the Platonic dialogues presented as multi-headed, multi-tongued, all originating from the same “beast”? Do they not, like the Hydra, speak poisons into the air that Socrates takes upon himself to cure?

Heracles signs with the *coup* as a strategic and tactical restoration to order, remedying the “diseased speech” of the Hydra by writing upon the monster the code of law which will determine the Hydra as monster. The remainder of this operation—of the Herculean labours—is the genesis of the “pure” and legitimated bestiary. The Hydra’s membership to the canon, the bestiary, the Ark (or *arche*) of animal-value is predeclined. Under the tyrannical and prejudiced sign of Zeus, to which Heracles acts as a hit man, the Hydra is driven from the internal economy of beasts and rendered an exile. But before this pivotal exile that brings elation to the law-abiding and the gods, the Hydra is defiled by a kind of castration by fire, cauterized by the firebrand that functions as the royal seal of Zeus. It is the imprint of a dead signature upon that which lives and moves, an attempt to render it static or non-existent with the use of signing. Heracles signs the Hydra out of the acceptable ontology, yet the Hydra countersigns Heracles with its blood. It is a contract signed in blood. The countersigning of the Hydra (as a signature event that occurs in the “absence” of the Hydra) effectively excoriates Heracles, exposing him for the monster he truly is.

The sign affixed to the Hydra slides off, for it is not rendered non-existent, just buried in a tomb. The act of signing deterritorialized the space

in which the Hydra was not a monster, and Heracles reterritorialized upon this space with Zeus' signature that declared that the Hydra was indeed a monster to be de-monster-ated. The Hydra is de- and re-contextualized by the sign of divine graffiti. The Hydra is declared a myth, and suddenly the entire matter is drawn to a close.

It suffices us to leave the matter open, unlike the grave, to declare that the Herculean labours are logic-intensive exercises that allegorically reflect the interests of the Greek *logos*, much in the same fashion that Biblical narratives function. A prolonged interest in this encounter with this allegorical treatment of the metonymous is further inflamed by the fact that this encounter also represents one of Heracles' non-labour labours (recalling Eusytheus' claim of discounting it). What grants Eusytheus the ability to make such pronouncements? What, according to him, is a labour? If we take labour to be a stage in the realization of self-consciousness as we find with Hegel, and according to that formulation, would not Heracles' act still be sufficient in declaring a legitimate labour, owing to the fact that he does affirm his own being by employing his problem solving ability (and merely directs Iolaus, who is now rendered the slave in this dialectic)? Certainly, but Eusytheus is the true director of the acts, for it is his stamp of legitimacy that will arbitrate as to Heracles' worthiness as a hero, even though Heracles hails to a higher law, that of Zeus. Opening this inquiry up to labour and legitimacy appears to be at the heart of the Herculean matter, for it is crucial to trace the line of descent that authorizes Heracles' acts and places them in the categorical value of hero-ness.

The scission takes place, continues to take place. The *coup* as *coupure*. A de-cision has been made from the *nomos*, from Zeus, and Heracles is the agent to deliver the cut, to act as the surgeon who will remove the cancer, even though the Hydra—when left alone—seems to be a benign entity. Heracles begins with a cut, brandishing an erection to sever a head, the principal one at that. Only the head of his God and Father is allowed to remain attached to the body of the Law. If scission “marks the text's interruption,”³⁷ Heracles' de-cision to dispatch the Hydra is a violent insertion of the law within alterity. The aberrant speech acts of the Hydra must be castrated by an authentic phallus that is legitimated by a higher law. The firebrand, the sword, the arrow: all are reduced to their polite form of the pen, but the pen is equally vicious in its scission properties...for not only does it divide parts into categories under the law it attempts to write into immutable presence, but it marks the virgin surface of difference. It com-

mits an act of graffiti upon the Hydra, de- and reterritorializing it, de- and recontextualizing it over and against its non-present nature. In more than one sense, the Hydra does not “make the cut.”

The writing, or “defacing,” upon the Hydra asserts at least three laws: 1. The Hydra is exterior and inferior to the Law; 2. The Hydra is harmful and infects the land/people (a link in the law that connects culture to land, ostensibly territory) which threatens the ordinance of Law; 3. If we must acknowledge the Hydra’s existence, it is only to affirm the unity of “proper” Being through an Other that is not “proper” under the Law.³⁸

The Hydra is a supplement, for the trace of its “signs” are never abolished because its eviternal presence will always (re)in-cite *to* memory. As a supplement, it “*is not, is not a being (on)*. It is nevertheless not a simple non-being (*me on*), either. Its slidings slip it out of that simple alternative presence/absence. *That is the danger.*”³⁹ The Hydra thwarts the Herculean dialectics of a disjunctive “or” to the supplementarity of the conjunctive “and.” To each of Heracles’ thrusts to lop off Hydra heads with the “or” of the sw”or”d, the Hydra responds with an “and...and...and...”

The implications of the Hydra on language, in what we will here call “hydratext,” is simply a restating of the affirmation of a language of difference, of a resistance to the lexicalization and structural rules that attempt to keep language rigidified in order (what Derrida would call “monstrous texts” or what others have dubbed “hydrapoetics” in this Derridean spirit). It also may prove fecund in concept-creation: hydra-technologies (as we speed toward biomechanics), hydrapolitik, hydragogy, hydragraphy, and so on. The Hydra, as ironic and resistant, could prove to be a working platform for innovative theoretical interests, but a platform not physically situated anywhere—more to the effect that it would be virtually existent, or like Derrida’s *khôra*: a non-situating situator.

5. *Blood-Pharmacy-Reserve*

It is important here that we (re)cite the effects of the Hydra’s blood before plunging into a typology of polemics. The Heracles-Hydra myth is loaded down with potent scenes that concern blood, tissue, poison, and deception. For this discussion, we will require the use of the *pharmakon*. The *pharmakon*, indicating the pharmacy, signals out for us the theatrical component of this myth, for as theatre, “it involves forces, space, law, kinship, the human, the divine, death, play, festivity.”⁴⁰ And, since we are dealing

with a fundamental transgression (Being versus Other whose metaphysical presupposition cannot be sustained due to all the counter- or differing evidence we have hitherto provided), we understand that this transgression cannot be appropriated or understood by logic, but “only within the graphics of the supplement or of the *pharmakon*.”⁴¹

The Hydra has, at this point, been “defeated,” though its revenge has yet to be enacted by another agent, that of Nessos. Nessos “commissions” Dianeira through deception to “paint” the inside of Heracles’ tunic. She willingly does this under the guarantee that the poison she is offered is actually a love salve to ensure Heracles’ fidelity, which implies yet another animalistic faculty in Heracles: that of his insatiable lust. Despite the tired mythical refrain of the woman being duped by creatures yet again when the “man” is not present to oversee the exchange, she trusts the centaur and applies the “salve” to the tunic. *Pharmakon* also extends its definition to paint. What occurs here is that a blood-painting is being applied to the inside of a garment. This painting, if it is a means of representing the Heracles-Hydra conflict, despite Dianeira’s intentions (love, possession, ensuring investment), is an instance of the *pharmakon*. More importantly, Heracles, in an unwitting symbolic moment, internalizes a re-memoration of the event, (re)citing the Hydra’s existence. There is a delicate irony here insofar as Heracles had laboured to drive the Hydra out (from the land, from the Law, and from ontology), and yet he is now internalizing the poison of the absent creature buried in a tomb. Both the poison and the salve are the properties of the *pharmakon*, and it “always penetrates like a liquid; it is absorbed, drunk, introduced into the inside.”⁴² How is Heracles to reconcile this distinction of inside/outside that he has laboured so vigilantly to maintain, yet has turned back against him and shown to be illusory? Heracles responds with a deadly allergic reaction: the blood of the Hydra fuses to his skin and causes him to tear off his flesh in the ensuing agony. Whereas he had applied the *pharmakon* of the Hydra’s blood against perceived monsters, the ultimate result became his own excoriation. The poison of his own writing (inscribing upon the surface of the Hydra that it is a monster) has returned to him and subjected him to the same retributive logic: Heracles is not “natural.” His link to the divinities, his superhuman strength, cannot be contained by the logic he acts as guardian to uphold. The Hydra’s blood as *pharmakon* performs yet another operation: the re-inscription of “monster” upon his flesh as the blood seeps into his body. As a poison, the blood-salve kills his physical body, but as a remedy it restores him to order: he dies and returns

to the heavens. No undecidable must remain for this myth, so his body is burned to purify its poison, and his soul is released. Heracles, as *logos*, is the primary painting of the *eidos* at the moment that the salve works its poison/remedy and kills him. Indeed, the *pharmakon* acts as “the combat zone between philosophy and its other.”⁴³ The Hydra was the infinite reserve, the pharmacy, the boundless fund of the *pharmakon*, and “no ‘logic,’ no ‘dialectic,’ can consume its reserve even though each must endlessly draw on it and seek reassurance through it.”⁴⁴ Heracles depended too heavily on the other that was the Hydra, and the debt is repaid in an act of retributive justice. Heracles’ “logic” is not too dissimilar from Maurice Barrès, insofar as to “realize itself as a Self, the Self must work on itself, from itself, and actively and even violently defend itself against the world of others. The Self is thus always struggling against all exterior elements, especially all nonselves.”⁴⁵ Though Heracles struggled valiantly to determine himself a Self at the expense of rendering the Hydra a non-self, or Other, it turns out that Heracles’ selfhood is thrown into jeopardy once the logic of exclusion returns to haunt him.

6. *A Deleuzian Reading of the Hydra-Heracles Debacle*

Why Deleuze? Why have we selected to perform a “Deleuzian reading” of the Hydra and Heracles? If we are to eventually set up the concepts of our typology for polemics under the diaphanous banners of Hydra and Heracles, then it will be necessary to examine their respective modes of composition. Immediately, it should be remarked, the Hydra is *force* while Heracles is *power*—the distinction being that force arrives from the virtual and dissipates itself through a method of perturbing actuality, whereas power seeks to actualize (render inert through homogeny) the active force to serve some molar end. Power is the translation of force into something other, a becoming-other, into utilitarian service. The Hydra is bound up with forces, and Heracles attempts to impinge upon the multiplicity of forces the Hydra presents by claiming the singular “meaning” which he will make correspond to it...And here we mean “meaning” in that horribly limiting, static sense.

Heracles is a molar entity, the “super-subject,” the law *par excellence*. Despite his incredible physical prowess (which is perhaps meant to signal out his genealogical link to divinity and crudely express his power as upholder of the Law), the category that he inhabits possesses much more power. It

is the same with a judge whose power to sentence people from innocent citizen to guilty criminal expresses a power that exceeds the physical power of the body that pronounces judgments. The judge is an expression of the law, and the law is a power that invests certain individuals with the ability to operate under it, like a conduit or an agent. Heracles is under the categorical formation of the “hero,” but it is the hero as (re)presented in theatrical terms. This is to say that Heracles is yet another repetition of “hero-ness,” for “the hero repeats precisely because he is separated from an essential, infinite knowledge. This knowledge is in him, it is immersed in him and acts in him, but acts like something hidden, like a blocked representation.”⁴⁶ So long as Heracles houses the cargo of this infinite knowledge, he can never access it until the theatrical presentation is at an end. He must enact his destiny under the auspices of a *kuria doxa* that he cannot yet articulate (but he will have a provisional “solution” or statement once the labours are completed, and a full disclosure once he ascends in death to the gallery of the gods). The tragic circumstance for the hero in this theatrical event is that he does not fully comprehend his destiny and purpose, and his lack of comprehension leads him through xenophobia (fear of the Other), barbarous violence (the slaying of several “monsters” or “Others”), and eventually his own death. At stake is Heracles’ inability to comprehend his own role, which leads to a system of obsessions.

There are several charges that the “hero” could level against the Hydra as pertaining to its “terrorism” (thereby granting the hero the arrogant title of being just and the role as agent of this justice). Firstly, the Hydra is a solitary creature and does not engage communally with others. This associative privation is due to its incompatibility with the social body—its differences are too great—and thereby would only result in its being expelled or destroyed. That which is private lives on in the public as mysterious, and it does not take a great stretch of the imagination to foresee that this mystery will become suspicion and perhaps even a motivated fear. Secondly, its acts of physical repetition and its constituent eviternality are deemed to be violations of the laws of Nature, firmly grounded in the experience and folk wisdom of the people. What is seriously at stake, and that which prompts the hero in the annihilation of the Hydra, is not the well-being of the people of Lerna (which would be a secondary, benevolent effect), but the very irony which constitutes the Hydra. This irony, since it is a fundamental irony against Nature and the “rational” *socius*, is analogous to an inveterate terrorism. Irony, if not perpetrated and sustained by the rational collective, or confined

within certain parameters, is a violation of the *Nomos*.

The Hydra has been unfairly conscripted into Heracles' theatrical articulation of personal destiny and the reactive-molar concept of Law. The Hydra is made into a Hegelian Other, a negative, conscripted here into Heracles' Law of the Same, reduced to a weak conceptual difference (the static rather than dynamic). It is here that the Hydra is reduced further into the obvious and mundane articulations of its extrinsic and empirical differences. It is not the irony (as dynamic difference) which prompts Heracles' attack, but a banal physical difference between Nature and Monster. It is only in the unfolding of this event, this unprovoked assault, that Heracles comes to discover the intrinsic differences, the irony of the Hydra, and so must react against this irony. Heracles replays the archaic understanding of true or pure difference as being essentially evil, sinful, accursed, and edified by error. Rather than the Hydra possessing a nature of its own not mediated through a dialectic of Nature positively defined by the dogmatic metaphysical assumptions, it is suddenly cast in this theatrical production as the inversion of what is Good or True. Since it is essentially different, it must—as the embodiment of difference—“leave its cave and cease to be a monster”⁴⁷ or else it will be attacked where it lives, forced into the “light of Reason” and wither under Truth.

This operation of “flushing out the monster” from the domain of true difference entails a four-pronged movement wherein the Aristotelian formulation comes into play: *Identity* must be established at all costs. There cannot be an existent thing without an essential nature or corresponding concept, for it would be an impossible. With recourse to *Analogy*, we may come to identify the creature by what it may correspond to in terms of the concepts that already exist in the understanding. *Opposition* allows us to determine what the creature is by what it is not, or what it is in direct opposition to those things we already know. Finally, *resemblance* allows us to pick out component parts of the creature that correspond to those things whose parts we already understand; for instance, Descartes points out in the first meditation that even when painters invent bizarre creatures, their component parts will be a mixture of parts that directly resemble those parts that exist in the world.⁴⁸ These four “strategies” are designed to contain difference within Reason. Does this imply that the Hydra is an intransigent misologist? No, it is rather indifferent to the determinations that Reason imposes upon it. It is perhaps the error of Heracles to mistake the Hydra's indifference as something vicious—or, being less charitable to the Hydra,

its ignorance of the Law.

7. *Heracles-Hydra Polemic*

First of all, we should familiarize ourselves with the adjectives that adhere to the concept of polemics. For instance, it is not uncommon that we may refer to polemics as incendiary and inflammatory. These two adjectives tie in with the idea of the *pharmakon* insofar as these might be symptom effects of poison (inflammatory as inflammation, incendiary as feverish). As for the curative aspect of polemics as *pharmakon*, we will need to examine the case of Heracles and the Hydra as figural gestures toward a typology of polemics.

Heracles as polemic. Heracles gathers the elements of the monstrous (the Nemean lion skin, the blood of the Hydra) and indeed bundles the poison-tipped arrows in a sheaf for warlike use at some future time. Heracles utilizes the “logic” of the monster against the monster. His polemic is intentionally violent and in service to gaining mastery of the land for his own glory. Not unlike more modern nationalist movements, Heracles attempts to define himself through both the land and by justification of a transcendent figure. It is a polemics of reduction and reactivity, for it seeks to annihilate its target, the subject of its invective. Acting under the authority of law, it is a master pundit that desires to close off or cauterize the metonymy of discourse. Multiplication of life and discourse threatens its desire to inaugurate the singular and dominant law that must be immutable enough to be inscribed upon stone for all the ages to come. Heracles arrogantly acts as the Hydra’s composer—literally, he composes it, lays it out as dead. Through his polemic, he directs the monster into the category of monsterhood, or otherness without selfhood. His method of polemic is the dialectic (*philia*) which is in direct contrast to the process the Hydra as other engenders: the eristic.⁴⁹

Hydra polemic. In contrast to the Herculean polemic, the Hydra polemic has a reserve, an infinite potentiality to multiply discourse through its many mouths. It is capable of acting in dissonant concert to produce multiple, active polemics that actually promote more discourse rather than the prohibitive function of declaring a law. The Hydra polemic is embodied by the concept creator, the artist, the philosopher, and all those who produce polemics as a means of daring creativity, and perhaps to spur others into resisting or improving upon the existent form. In contrast to the cauterizing function of Herculean polemic, Hydra polemic performs a disruption and

naturally multiplies itself when it is attacked. As eristic, it is the opposite of *philia*, and engenders discord. However, as we continue to develop this typology, this binary distinction between *eristos* and *philia* will begin to blur as we apply the *pharmakon* to the matter. No polemic is strictly one or the other, but has constituent properties of both. It should be maintained that this typological distinction would be necessary if we were to speak of polemics as a concept and not confuse or dissolve polemics into the realm of ethical discussion.

As a nascent work, we can only here sketch and forecast the more critical and deeper implications of this conceptual typology of polemics. Our future preoccupation with this matter will be to follow the thread of this typology in its manifesting polemical events, through philosophical and literary events. What we desired to achieve here, in rather capsule form, is to introduce the edifying features of our continued research in this area, to apply this typology of Hydra-polemic and Heracles-polemic to the general and specific instances of polemic beyond the ethico-legislative discussion which focuses its attention on the notions of free speech and hate speech. This typological project will take the form of a monograph wherein we may have the luxury of space to fully detail these pivotal moves in our continued understanding of polemic as a particular species-event of language and rhetoric.

Notes

¹ Jacques Derrida. *Points-Interviews 1974-1994*. Ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford University Press, 1995) 386.

² Jacques Derrida. "Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms." Trans. Anne Tomiche, in David Carroll (ed.). *The States of Theory: History, Art, and Critical Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 80.

³ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 68.

⁴ *Ibid*, 80.

⁵ For a rich discussion on the *omphalos*, see Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 8.

⁷ *Ibid*, 9.

⁸ Jacques Derrida. *The States of Theory* 127.

⁹ A most recent example in modern China would be Li Peng's costly "Three Gorges River Project" that will see the largest dam ever built. The estimated cost so far has been

around ten billion dollars USD, not to mention the nightmarish cost of relocating entire villages that will be flooded once the dam is completed. Li Peng is also known for other methods of controlling natural difference through his mobilization of the People's Liberation Army into Tiananmen Square during the 1989 student rebellion. Recalling China's one child policy, Li Peng's cauterization of the youth through unwarranted deaths ended several familial chains.

¹⁰ Georges Bataille. *The Accursed Share Volume 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989) 28.

¹¹ One can also be directed to the well-known story of Emperor Andronicus Comnenus who had requisitioned the use of a hydromancer to divine who his successor would be; the emperor's paranoia was such that he was bent on rigging the outcome of fate and killing the would-be upstart who would overthrow him. However, the divination—though fruitfully revealing some clues—was not enough to prevent Isaac Angelus' overthrowing of Andronicus who was then torn to pieces by the Constantinople mob. Events surrounding the notion of water and the removal of chance (even under the illusory banner of bestowing chance) can be witnessed in a plenum of religious and alchemical rituals, one notably being that of baptism.

¹² See Strabo 8.3.19 and Hyginus *Fabulae* 34.

¹³ As reported in Hyginus *Astronomica* 2.23.

¹⁴ Kane X. Faucher. "Modalities, Logic, and the Cabala in Borges' 'The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero'". *Variaciones Borges* 13 (Denmark: Aarhus Universitet, 2002) 129.

¹⁵ Not to mention that its speech consists of a terrible hissing (*Aeneid* 6.287).

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination* 116.

¹⁷ Closely paralleling the issue of burial in Sophocles' *Antigone*.

¹⁸ Jorge Luis Borges. *The Book of Imaginary Being*. (New York: Avon, 1969) 129. Also see especially Simonides Frag. 569 (from Servius on Virgil, *Aenied*), Apollodorus 2.157-158 and 2.77-80, and Diodorus Siculus 4.11.5; yet according to Pausanias (2.37.4) the Hydra had only one head in accordance with the general constitution of water snakes (from which the Hydra obtains its name). Rather, Pausanias reflects that the multiple heads of the Hydra was merely a form of epic hyperbole, and that the Hydra differed from other water snakes only in terms of its size and pollution qualities.

¹⁹ Theogony 313-318. Of note here would be the name of Iolaus representing "war-like" which shares space with the synonym of *polemos*.

²⁰ The type of foulness may in itself be the mere dissemination of differences that violate the logical order. Heracles, in his almost priestly capacity, must arrange for the death of the "heretic" beast that blasphemous against the ordinances of Zeus.

²¹ The Hydra acts as another benchmark in Greek lore, for Jason must slay a Hydra to obtain the Golden Fleece. It is unclear just how many Hydras are present, but this lack of accord would suggest the presence of more than one. Moreover, the Biblical narrative also has a Hydra-type beast in Revelations: the multi-headed dragon with its many crowns. The Biblical Hydra is masculinized whereas the Greek Hydra is female (Revelation 12:2).

²² It is indeed called a drug in Diodorus (*Siculus* 4.38.1), and it is applied to destroy Geryon (Stesichorus *Geryoneis* Frag. 515 and *Argonautica* 4.1390f).

²³ See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. Trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

²⁴ But it also must be said that there are "absent" signs, so to speak, of the potential the heads possess to react to the violence committed against them through their own replication.

This “plus-minus” scheme should not be taken too literally as a binary operation, for the positive is granted to the Truth while negativity is (in the Platonic formulation) bestowed ungraciously upon myth. But as a becoming-other creature, does not the Hydra occupy a middle ground, what Derrida would call *khôra*? Does the Hydra itself not speak a type of middle voice?

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 15. In suspending form, we recall here the paradox of buried objects wherein the deeper something is buried, the more likely the event will somehow manifest itself in the real. Or, to invoke Deleuze: “Is it not true that the only dead who return are those whom one has buried too quickly and too deeply, without paying them the necessary respects, and that remorse testifies less to an excess of memory than to a powerlessness or to a failure in the working through of memory.” Compare here also the notion of memory and the crypt in Jacques Derrida’s “The Pharmakon” in *Dissemination*.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination* 79.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 116.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination* 120.

²⁹ Beyond this being a natural property of the Hydra, one must ask the question of its reproduction. It does not spontaneously asexually reproduce itself, but depends on the inseminating procedure of the sword. Replication on this formulation depends on violence. But also, this bizarre sexual replication is a defensive response to the violent transgression committed against its body. Each head becomes a victory of sexual irony, but also evidence of rape.

³⁰ It is said to thrive on being wounded as reported in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.69-74.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition* 5.

³² Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*.

³³ In Hyginus *Fabulae* 30, it is Minerva who orders the destruction of the Hydra.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination* 302.

³⁵ Jacques Derrida. *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles* 39. The mere presence of such abnormality (as viewed by the *logos*) is terror itself; this idea of terror and presence is evoked again in Derrida’s “Traumatism to Promise” in *Points-Interviews 1974-1994*, and again in varying degrees of focus in *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology*.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida. *Dissemination* 116.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 300.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 111. I am taking a small liberty with Derrida’s threefold examination of Plato’s critique of writing and the law.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 109.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 142.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 153.

⁴² *Ibid*, 152.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 138.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 139.

⁴⁵ David Carroll. *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995) 23. The text from which Carroll paraphrases this is in the argument of Maurice Barrès’ “Examen des Trois Romains Idéologiques.”

⁴⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 29

⁴⁸ Rene Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960) 19.

⁴⁹ Eris is the Greek divinity of discord. For the purposes of setting up this typology, several other analogues may seem to substitute for the split between *eristos* and *philia* such as Dionysus and Apollo (Nietzsche), active and reactive *forces* (Deleuze), or heterology and “Reason” (Bataille).