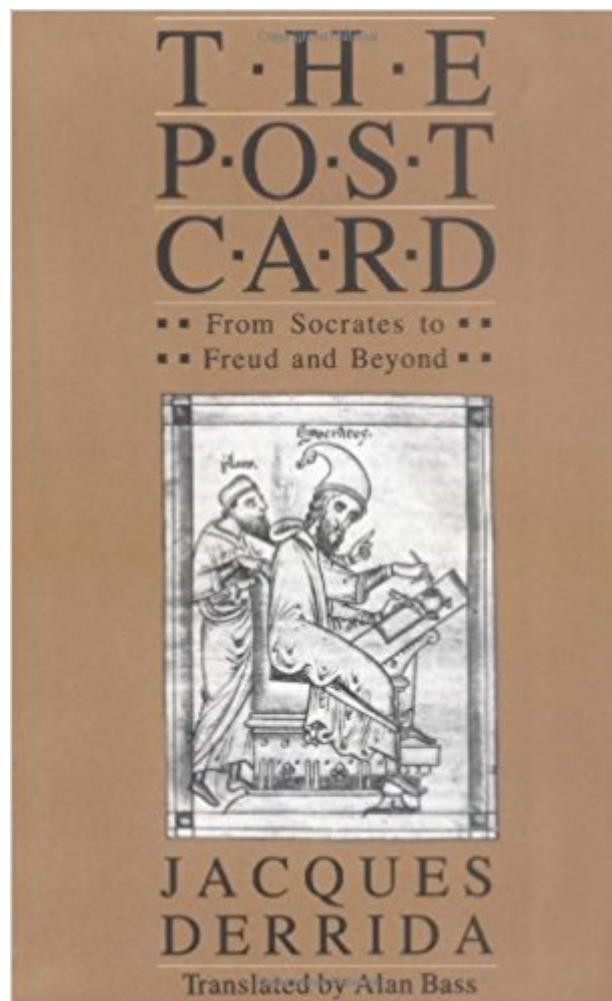




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The Post Card: From Socrates To Freud And Beyond



Synopsis

17 November 1979 You were reading a somewhat retro loveletter, the last in history. But you have not yet received it. Yes, its lack or excess of address prepares it to fall into all hands: a post card, an open letter in which the secret appears, but indecipherably. What does a post card want to say to you? On what conditions is it possible? Its destination traverses you, you no longer know who you are. At the very instant when from its address it interpellates, you, uniquely you, instead of reaching you it divides you or sets you aside, occasionally overlooks you. And you love and you do not love, it makes of you what you wish, it takes you, it leaves you, it gives you. On the other side of the card, look, a proposition is made to you, S and p, Socrates and plato. For once the former seems to write, and with his other hand he is even scratching. But what is Plato doing with his outstretched finger in his back? While you occupy yourself with turning it around in every direction, it is the picture that turns you around like a letter, in advance it deciphers you, it preoccupies space, it procures your words and gestures, all the bodies that you believe you invent in order to determine its outline. You find yourself, you, yourself, on its path. The thick support of the card, a book heavy and light, is also the specter of this scene, the analysis between Socrates and Plato, on the program of several others. Like the soothsayer, a "fortune-telling book" watches over and speculates on that-which-must-happen, on what it indeed might mean to happen, to arrive, to have to happen or arrive, to let or to make happen or arrive, to destine, to address, to send, to legate, to inherit, etc., if it all still signifies, between here and there, the near and the far, da und fort, the one or the other. You situate the subject of the book: between the posts and the analytic movement, the pleasure principle and the history of telecommunications, the post card and the purloined letter, in a word the transference from Socrates to Freud, and beyond. This satire of epistolary literature had to be farci, stuffed with addresses, postal codes, crypted missives, anonymous letters, all of it confided to so many modes, genres, and tones. In it I also abuse dates, signatures, titles or references, language itself. J. D. "With The Post Card, as with Glas, Derrida appears more as writer than as philosopher. Or we could say that here, in what is in part a mock epistolary novel (the long section is called "Envois," roughly, "dispatches"), he stages his writing more overtly than in the scholarly works. . . . The Post Card also contains a series of self-reflective essays, largely focused on Freud, in which Derrida is beautifully lucid and direct." "Alexander Gelley, Library Journal

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Customer Reviews

With *The Post Card*, as with *Glas* (Univ. of Nebraska, 1986), Derrida appears more as writer than as philosopher. Or we could say that here, in what is in part a mock epistolary novel (the long section is called "Envois," roughly, "dispatches"), he stages his writing more overtly than in the scholarly works. The uninitiated reader will find Gregory L. Ulmer's *Applied Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins, 1984) indispensable for understanding this performative dimension of Derrida's work.

Whether this feature comes across fully in the English is open to question, though Bass is dependable as translator and helpful in his glosses. *The Post Card* also contains a series of self-reflective essays, largely focused on Freud, in which Derrida is beautifully lucid and direct. Alexander Gelley, Univ. of California, Irvine
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Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) was a French philosopher and writer, best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as Deconstruction. This book begins with an imaginary series of postcards written by Derrida, and proceeds to chapters about Freud, Socrates & Plato, etc. He states, "Once intercepted---a second suffices---the message no longer has any chance of reaching any determinable person, in any place whatever. This has to be accepted. But I recognize that such a certainty is unbearable, for anyone. One can only deny this self-evidence, and, by their very function, those who deny it most energetically are the people

charged with carrying of the mail, the guardians of the letter, the archivists, the professors as well as the journalists, today the psychoanalysts. The philosophers, of course, who are all of that at once, and the literature people. (Pg. 51) He states, "I am rereading your note from yesterday: what counts in post cards, and moreover in everything, is the tempo, say you. Okay, in the end more or less." (Pg. 247) In the "Notices (Warnings)" section, he observes, "The avoidance of philosophy is more active than ever, more deliberate too, more circumspect in speculation." Speculation: what Freud names in this way reassembles the entire difficulty that interests me here. What does philosophy NOT HAVE TO DO with psychoanalytic speculation? And what would the latter cause one to write in the mode of the athesis, for example in "Beyond [Good and Evil]"? Who will have speculated? On what? On whom? What will have been engaged? What will have permitted itself to become engaged in such a speculation? (Pg. 265) He points out, "Here is the objection, it is simple: If the pleasure principle were absolutely dominant, if it were the absolute master without any possible contradiction, whence would come the unpleasure to which experience bears witness in so inconceivable a way?" (Pg. 281) In the chapter on "Freud's Legacy," he observes, "If one wished to simplify the question, it could become, for example, how can an autobiographical writing, in the abyss of an undetermined self-analysis, give to a worldwide institution ITS birth? The birth of whom? Of what? And how does the interruption or the limit of the self-analysis, cooperating with the mise en abyme rather than obstructing it, reproduce its mark in the institutional movement, the possibility of this remark from then on never ceasing to make little ones, multiplying the progeniture with its cleavages, conflicts, divisions, alliances, marriages, and regroupings?" (Pg. 305) In a later chapter, he says, "There is a deep historical and theoretical complicity between psychoanalysis APPLIED to literature and the formalist withdrawal which would pretend to escape this application. We have just seen how this works in principle." (Pg. 432) In a November 1977 interview appended at the end of this book, he replies to a question, "I will tell you that I indeed feel disarmed. This evening I have come as disarmed as POSSIBLE. And disarrayed. I did not want to prepare for this session, I did not want to prepare myself. As deliberately as possible, I have chosen---which I think has never happened to me before---to expose myself to the course of a debate, and it must also be said of a show, without any defensive or offensive anticipation (which always somewhat amounts to the same). In any event with as little anticipation as POSSIBLE. I thought that if something was to occur tonight, by hypothesis the event would be on this condition, to wit, that I come without preparation, neither on display or on parade, as without ammunition as POSSIBLE, and if it is possible." (Pg.

500-501) Being personally more interested in philosophy than in *À l'écriture*, this was one of my least favorite books written by Derrida. But students (or just persons interested) of contemporary literature will likely find it *À l'écriture* right up their alley. *À l'écriture*

Contrary to the reviews thus far reported in regards to this "work in the traditions of *Finnegans Wake*," i would recommend reading this book to all who are interested in Derrida's philosophy of ethics. Herein we may find ephemerally expounded glimpses at Postmodernism's notions of continuity and of the legacy of ideas: a gift which we necessarily both receive and reinscribe - "What is tragic is not the possibility but the necessity of repetition" (*Writing and Difference*). Many Derrida readers have shied away from this text because of its disparate and fragmented stuttering...Don't if you have patience to listen read this treasure. It is a pastiche, a montage and a rebus. An exquisite rendition on tradition and inheritance, on presence and absence. A reminder to never stop giving and giving and giving because the most ethical one can be is through the dissemination of ideas, the transformation of the recurring within which each becomes a relative of all and none. *Finnegans Wake* approximates the same themes with Vico's philosophy of history as an addendum. By the way Vico was an avid reader of the *Cabbala*...Only Walter Benjamin can better inspire the re-visions that we need for a tragic becoming tragic. This book is extremely personal and one of Richard Rorty's favorites I might add...he was not very fond of the early Derrida...Rorty understands Derrida as only Caputo and Bennington have...This is our modern day Novalis, we may dream of dreaming our dreams!

Derrida has stated that one of the main purposes of his deconstructive readings, writing, and ruthless re-contextualization of various philosophical ideas is to minimize the "violence" of various philosophical practices- those ways of speaking, writing, which silently privilege various terms, and ideas and, perhaps unknowingly repress others. Given the other "esoteric" reviews here, it's my duty to minimize the "violence" for those people who really want to know about the book, and not about namedropping, three lines of praise. *The Postcard* is a "collection" of various love-letters, supposedly burned in a fire, which has left pieces of text missing. Derrida has also included a few essays which he believes continue the analysis begun in the loveletters [envois]. The content of the loveletters covers a broad range of philosophical and personal questions - from philosophy of language - to the relation b/w Socrates and Plato - to personal encounters in (I suppose) Derrida's life as a philosopher. But the overall effect of this - this "re-contextualization" or in other words, this casting of philosophical questions in a format not usually considered "serious" -> love letters... the

profundity, the importance, the dissemination of the questions take on a wholly different feel and effect. The feel and effect, of course, is hard to describe, but it is a way of playing with "philosophical sensibilities" -- what is "real" philosophy? What is "serious" philosophy? And what is the meaning of such questions in the most private of all communications - love letters between two intimate lovers. Of course, in typical Derridean style, he puns, and jokes his way, throwing punchlines out of every page. The envois are not an easy read. They can be tough, and confusing, especially with the 'missing text' which link ideas. The other essays included in *The Postcard* are equally a tough read, with a very interesting, but treacherous deconstruction of Lacan's analysis of Poe's "The Purloined Letter". *The Postcard* can only be understood as continuation of previously examined (Of Grammatology), argued (Limited Inc.), and illustrated (Glas) philosophical strategies employed by Derrida. And yes, Richard Rorty (an American post-enlightenment philosopher) totally misses the boat on this one. While, I believe Derrida is attempting to "play" with various aspects of the philosophical tradition (Derrida is by far the funniest philosopher, since, Nietzsche), *The Postcard* is merely a new way of asserting those same ideas Derrida laid out in *Limited Inc* and other books, that conceptual meaning is not fixed but disseminated and deferred [différance] to all possible contextual usages and instantiations. I know, this is merely one small aspect of Derrida's enterprise. But it is, I believe, the main purpose of *The Postcard*: to see how the meaning of philosophical questions regarding language, history, and the sequence of events, take on new meanings in the context of lost love letters-- the same way a Post Card, which never reaches its destination-- takes on new meanings for the unintended third reader.

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