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The Puh-Puh-Puh Slap of the Canoe Paddle Against the Water [drawing]

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The Puh-Puh-Puh Slap of the Canoe Paddle Against the Water,
by Nicholas Stewart

he is totally absorbed, he loses that particular perspective, that inbetween perspective. A wonderful metaphor of Derrida's is this "inbetween." The typical inbetween zone of the reader of which Poulet also speaks. You might think the inbetween is a very grey area, but not in this case, not inbetween cultures. Inbetween cultures is a very interesting area — it produced writers like James, Conrad, Joyce, Beckett, and so many others. In immediate human terms it is an area that generates a lot of anxiety — you are inbetween statuses and inbetween homes, it is not easy to be suspended inbetween — but culturally speaking it is interesting to be at the crossroads of cultures, the generic intertext, at least for awhile.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries America was called the melting pot of the world, absorbing all cultures into something unique. But even in America there are still cultural differences, socio-economic differences, so that all of us are still inbetween in some way or other.

Of course. I was inbetween in Romania too, because I was studying and writing about American and British literature. I was politically "bilingual" — condemned to a schizophrenic inbetween where you profess one thing and do another . . . where you speak one language and secretly produce another. That sort of thing people call the inner exile. Many of us who came out of eastern and central Europe wonder, "How did I

adapt so quickly? so easily?" I was accused, even as a student, of cosmopolitanism and maybe that's the explanation. If ever I was assimilated, it was in the 50s and 60s.

To draw an analogy, you were artificially acclimatized to a different environment and then transplanted here. There is a shock in the transplanting process, but you are still here, trying to thrive in a new atmosphere, a new environment. How are you doing?

Right now I am trying to function as an insider as much as I can. Mircea Eliade, a great predecessor on this journey to America, talks about the ordeal of the "passage," in this type initiation into a new world. It's not easy for someone at 40 to start over again. I am at an age where people here or people in my own country relax, sit back; start to suck their fingers of the wisdom they have accumulated over the years. I realize I have an advantage over this, but there will always be some doubt, however small, "Am I inside, I mean, really inside? Or is there just some area where I am overlapping?" My situation mirrors the archetypal condition of the literary critic (which I am): desiring to gain access into the warm intimacy of the text's secrets and establish himself as an authoritative *insider*; yet knowing that his claim of objectivity depends directly on an evaluative distance from (to quote Melville) "all this din of the great world's loom." Can anyone ever solve this paradox of the interpreter inbetween cultural texts? ■