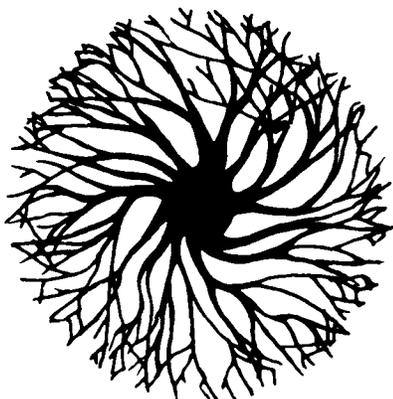


# CENTRUM



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MARJORIE PERLOFF

## Symbolism / Anti-Symbolism

*But your eyes proclaim  
That everything is surface. The surface is what's there  
And nothing can exist except what's there.  
There are no recesses in the room. . . .*  
--John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror"

Once upon a time, modern poetry (the "Age of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound") was regarded as a monolith, a fixed entity having such characteristics as dramatic tension, irony, impersonality, symbolic density, and colloquial speech rhythms.<sup>1</sup> Then critics discovered that the so-called "modern" revolt against nineteenth-century "rhetoric" and Romantic "slush" was only a myth, that there were, in fact, striking continuities between Romantic poetry and our own.<sup>2</sup> "All things are from antithesis," Yeats said, and so it was not long before "modern" poetry was rechristened "post-Romantic." "Modernism in literature has not passed," declares Harold Bloom in A Map of Misreading; "rather it has been exposed as never having been there."<sup>3</sup> The "strong poets" of the twentieth century--Hardy, Yeats, Stevens--could do no more than to "misread" their great Romantic predecessors, the "true ephebe" being that poet whose "first voices" give us "what is most central in the precursor's voices, rendered with a directness, clarity, even a sweetness that they do not often give us."<sup>4</sup> But Romantic tradition is, in itself, "consciously late," and indeed, the contemporary poets Bloom most admires, A. R. Ammons and John Ashbery, "are rendered somewhat problematic by a cultural situation of such belatedness that literary survival itself seems fairly questionable."<sup>5</sup>

It seems, then, that we are quickly approaching the end of the line. Interestingly, Bloom's "misreading" of recent literary history has been accepted even by critics who are not consciously in his camp. In The Situation of Poetry (1977), Robert Pinsky is at pains to show that "contemporary poetry is by and large traditional."<sup>6</sup> His longest chapter, "The Romantic Persistence," argues that the best poets of our time have learned the lessons laid down by Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," namely that poetry must mediate between solipsism and absorption in unconscious nature, that neither "the pure nomi-

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[Centrum, 4:2 (Fall 1976), pp. 69-103.]

nalist's perception" found in such Ashbery poems as "Definition of Blue" nor, at the other extreme, the "cool" imagism of Robert Bly or Gary Snyder is satisfactory.<sup>7</sup> In casting about for contemporary poets whose language does mediate between "solitude and sharing," Pinsky cites David Ferry's "The Soldier," which begins:

Saturday afternoon. The barracks is almost empty.  
The soldiers are almost all on overnight pass.  
There is only me, writing this letter to you,  
And one other soldier, down at the end of the room. . . .

In the course of this verse letter, in which the poet wants to convey to the woman he loves how much he misses her, the "other soldier" becomes the speaker's double:

His boots are bright already, yet still he rubs  
And rubs till, brighter still, they are his mirror.  
And in this mirror he observes, I guess,  
His own submissiveness. He is far from home.<sup>8</sup>

Pinsky concludes: "Between the spooky quiet of the material world and the quiet of solipsism, the poet arranges a kind of partnership" (p. 173).

A kind of partnership, perhaps. But if Ferry's rather self-conscious and timid recognition-poem is the best our generation has to offer, then we are indeed victims of the "belatedness" Bloom talks of. Why bother with "The Soldier" when we can read Wordsworth's "Recognition and Independence"?

No one, I submit, would argue seriously that Jackson Pollock's Echo or Jasper Johns' Target with Four Faces are merely belated versions of Constable's Hay Wain or Delacroix's Massacre at Chios. The best contemporary poems have more in common with the non-mimetic paintings of our time than with their alleged Romantic literary models; surely it is more than coincidental that poets like Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Charles Tomlinson, and David Antin have worked as painters, curators, or art critics before they came to articulate their characteristic poetic structures, and that, conversely, the painters were often their most responsive audience. Ashbery's first book, Turandot, illustrated by Jane Freilicher, was published by the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in 1953, more than a decade before Harold Bloom was to announce that he had found a worthy successor to Wallace Stevens.

Contemporary painters, I would argue, have recognized the achievements of poets like Ashbery and Antin because they have tapped the same springs of Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism: the Calligrammes of Apollinaire, the phallustrades of Max Ernst,

the objets-poèmes of Duchamp, and to go one step further back, the extraordinary Illuminations (the word means colored plates)<sup>9</sup> of Rimbaud. But as Anglo-American critics, we still find it difficult to understand the experimental nature of much post-modern poetry because the received notions we have about its modernist heritage are so distorted. Curiously enough, the revisionist doctrine that Yeats, Eliot, Stevens and their fellow-poets are post-Romantics ultimately turns out to be very much like the New Critical view of modernism-as-revolution which it sought to replace, for in both cases, the assumption is that the poetry in question is to be regarded as One Poetry.

My own view is that "Modernism" in English and American poetry was itself a time of tension between two rival strains which I shall call Symbolist and anti-Symbolist. Eliot's "Gerontion" and Williams' Kora in Hell, both published in 1920, are texts that come out of very different literary traditions. Again, Yeats's "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (1923) probably has more in common with Wordsworth's Immortality Ode than with Pound's first Malatesta Canto (Canto VIII), which dates from the same year. Or compare Stevens' "The Bird with the Coppery Keen Claws" to Lawrence's "Hummingbird," both published in 1921, and the essential difference between the two modes becomes apparent.

Contemporary poetry carries on the anti-Symbolist strain found in Pound and Williams, in D. H. Lawrence and Theodore Roethke; it openly repudiates the poetic of Eliot, as that poetic was codified by his followers, and regards Yeats as a great but remote figure. In "A Dialogue on Oral Poetry with William Spanos" (1973), Jerome Rothenberg declares:

My own discomfort isn't with the symbols per se . . . but with that "symbolism" which substitutes interpretation for presentation: the kind of distinction that put the surrealists into conflict with the symbolists & the New Critics with the surrealists . . . . The surrealist "image" is unmediated, its associations implicit & directly perceived, as in the experience of "dream," which was of course their model. In that sense, I've always assumed a continuity between the surrealists & the absurdists--with someone like Kafka or Breton, say, in his collections of "black humor," as an intermediary figure. For the absurdists the idea of the absurd itself (like "dream" for the surrealists) serves as the great simplifying image, which allows for direct presentation of conflicting impulses. This immediacy . . . seems more central to me than the formalism / anti-formalism you [William Spanos]



Yeats and Eliot are "preconcerted secret signs," suggesting, evoking, revealing layers of meaning, and the poem becomes a kind of reverberating echo chamber in which the signifiers (a) represent a multiplicity of referents signified (b). Symbolist discourse is always polysemous discourse.<sup>14</sup>

Take the first stanza of "Byzantium." Yeats's great poem has been subject to remarkably varied readings, from F. A. C. Wilson's, that Byzantium is "a symbol of the life after death, the Platonic heaven, pure intellect, where the opposites are reconciled,"<sup>15</sup> to Richard Ellmann's and Helen Vendler's more secular readings which posit that the poem is primarily about artistic creation, that, in Vendler's words, it is "about the images in a poet's mind."<sup>16</sup> The most disputed item in the first stanza is the "cathedral gong." According to Wilson, it is "Yeats's consistent symbol for the divine; the stroke of midnight means for him the moment of death" (p. 232). T. R. Henn, by contrast, refers the reader back to "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," where we find the lines:

So the Platonic Year  
Whirls out new right and wrong,  
Whirls in the old instead;  
All men are dancers and their tread  
Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.  
(p. 206)

In both poems, Henn argues, the gong symbolizes "in its violent conjunction the meeting of the religions of the East and the West."<sup>17</sup> The great cathedral dome has also been variously interpreted, some commentators regarding it as the central embodiment of eternity or, on the artistic level, perfection of form; others, like Harold Bloom, noting that the dome is, after all, "starlit or . . . moonlit"--in other words, that "the poem's phase is therefore 1 or 15, Phase 1 being the death before life and Phase 15 the full perfection of images."<sup>18</sup> As such, the dome becomes an especially difficult symbol.

But, and this is the important point, however critics read the stanza in question, all agree that its language is insistently symbolic and that Yeats is setting in opposition such antinomies as life and art, time and eternity, flux and stasis, the sense world ("The Emperor's drunken soldiery," "night-walkers' song") and the ideal world of the imagination.

A similar process occurs in the two passages cited from The Waste Land, although Eliot's sense of time and eternity is, of course, quite different from Yeats's. "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant" has already been introduced in "The Burial

of the Dead" as the one-eyed merchant or Fool of Madame Sosostris' Tarot pack; he reappears, moreover, in "Death by Water" as Phlebas the Phoenician. In explicating the passage, I can do no better than to cite Grover Smith's authoritative and thorough reading:

The Tarot Fool, Mr. Eugenides, well born but fallen on evil days, is a cosmopolite, speaking demotic French (not demotic Egyptian) and selling currants in London. The Smyrna question, culminating in the expulsion of the Greeks from Smyrna in 1923, was already of topical interest when The Waste Land was written; the merchant is from a city in turmoil, another "Unreal City," perhaps connoting the decay of the Hellenic fertility cults and the Seven Churches of Asia. The very currants of the one-eyed merchant's trade hint that the joyous grape has shriveled up in the waste land. The dried fertility symbol which he transports is equivalent to knowledge of the sacramental Grail mystery, for Jessie L. Weston points out that the cults of Attis and Mithra were spread throughout the Roman Empire partly by Syrian merchants . . . and undoubtedly, Mr. Eugenides, uniting Phlebas the Phoenician sailor and the Fisher King in his boat, is a type of these. His invitation, supposed to be a homosexual one, is a travesty of that which usually the Fisher King makes to the quester outside the Grail castle. . . .

The one-eyedness of Mr. Eugenides accords with various forms of initiation ritual or myth. Sometimes the one-eyed man is at this point a symbol of death or winter--the monster whom the primitive hero fights in his lair. . . . Mr. Eugenides . . . corresponds, moreover, to the chief actor in Frazer's account of the "ritual ride of the beardless one"--which links Mr. Eugenides with the Hanged Man and even explains partly why Mr. Eugenides is unshaven. . . . As a businessman Mr. Eugenides frequents a commercial hotel in the City and spends weekends at the famous Brighton Metropole.<sup>19</sup>

Some readers will object that this analysis is unnecessarily exhaustive, but all the allusions and symbolic meanings that Grover Smith finds in the text can be justified; he is not at all inventing meanings that are not there. One can, for that matter, point to further possibilities. The "one-eyedness" of the merchant is a traditional symbol of blindness, and most of the inhabitants of the Waste Land are "blind" in one form or another. The name "Eugenides" is a play on "Eugenics," a science which Eliot thoroughly disliked.<sup>20</sup>

The invitation to luncheon is an example of debased food ritual (i.e., the debased Eucharist), which is one of the major symbolic threads running through the poem.<sup>21</sup> Again, the name "Cannon Street Hotel" has symbolic connotations in Eliot's poetic world, in which streets that don't constitute The Way to Christ are regularly one-way streets, like those "Streets that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent" down which Prufrock travels.<sup>22</sup>

"The Fire Sermon" has glimpses of another, better world, a world not debased by possible assignations with a Mr. Eugenides. And so, after the quester hears Ferdinand's words from The Tempest ("This music crept by me upon the waters"), he has a vision of the city as it might be. In Smith's words:

The mandoline of a street musician is "pleasant," and even the Thames fishmen . . . have what seems a truly symbolic occupation, close by the church of Magnus the Martyr at the foot of London Bridge.

The church, rebuilt after the Great Fire destroyed the one for parishioners dwelling on the bridge itself (it has been known as "St. Magnus at pontem") was especially the fishmen's church. . . . "Fish," "Martyr," and vestmental "white and gold" form a complex link with the Saviour and the ritual of Easter." (p. 89)

The two passages cited thus contain two symbolic complexes: the "Unreal City" of nightmare, a decayed city of brown fog and winter, in which the speaker is propositioned by the unsavory Smyrna merchant, and the "City" one can sometimes glimpse--the heavenly city symbolized by Magnus Martyr with its "Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold," its lounging fishmen and pleasantly whining mandoline. Throughout The Waste Land, such visionary moments--for example, the Hyacinth girl passage--are embedded in a context of decay, ugliness, debased sex, "the brown fog of a winter noon." And although we can disagree as to the relative importance of the Grail legend in The Waste Land or debate the meaning of "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. (Give. Sympathize. Control.)" at the end of the poem, the symbolic opposition of the Cannon Street Hotel to Magnus Martyr, of the one-eyed merchant to the fishmen, of his "demotic French" to the "pleasant whining of a mandoline," of "brown fog" to "Ionian white and gold" is one that all readers of The Waste Land have recognized.

The Waste Land is, in short, the prototype of what we might call a "symbolic landscape." Every particular has multiple resonances, and the poem invites, indeed demands, interpretation despite Eliot's later recantation of the Notes and

his notorious comment that The Waste Land was "just a piece of rhythmical grumbling."<sup>23</sup> For decades after its appearance, poets tried to create comparable "objective correlatives" or "concrete universals." "A poem must not mean but be," said Archibald MacLeish in the heyday of the New Criticism, but in practice this simply meant that the poet must express his emotions and ideas indirectly, using the language of Symbolism, and that his poem should be self-contained, autonomous. In the wake of Eliot's poetry, there appeared what David Antin has called "a succession of poetic practices which inevitably move[d] further and further from the originating styles to the point at which the initiating impulses had lost all their energy."<sup>24</sup> Delmore Schwartz, who referred to Eliot as an "international hero,"<sup>25</sup> wrote a sonnet appropriating the opening words of the Waste Land passage just discussed:

O City, City

To live between terms, to live where death  
 Has his loud picture in the subway ride,  
 Being amid six million souls, their breath  
 An empty song suppressed on every side,  
 Where the sliding auto's catastrophe  
 Is a gust past the curb, where numb and high  
 The office building rises to its tyranny,  
 Is our anguished diminution until we die.

Whence, if ever, shall come the actuality  
 Of a voice speaking the mind's knowing,  
 The sunlight bright on the green windowshade,  
 And the self articulate, affectionate, and flowing,  
 Ease, warmth, light, the utter showing,  
 When in the white bed all things are made.<sup>26</sup>

This is, it seems to me, a wholly reductive version of Eliotic symbolism. The dense semantic fabric of The Waste Land and Byzantium is replaced by the one-to-one correspondence of allegory: in this case, the landscape of subways, automobiles accidents, and tall office buildings stands for death-in-life; the "sunlight bright on the green windowshade and white bed" stand for affection, ease, warmth--an "utter showing" of self. And that is all. Poem after poem by the sons of Eliot--MacLeish, Tate, Ransom, and later W. D. Snodgrass, Anthony Hecht, or Howard Nemerov--spins out such attenuated neoSymbolist fabrics. From the vantage point of the seventies, we can see that it was a dead end, and yet one of the finest poet-critics of the fifties, Randall Jarrell, could say, "Modernism is a limit which it is impossible to exceed. How can poems be written that are more violent, more disorganized, more obscure--supply your own adjective--than those that have already been written?"<sup>27</sup>

The obvious, perhaps too obvious, answer is that poems can be less violent, less disorganized, and less obscure "than those that have already been written." Or at least obscure in a different way. Even as Jarrell was posing his question, Pound was writing the Pisan Cantos, Williams, Paterson, and Roethke, The Lost Son. By the early sixties, Symbolism as a movement was dead even though critics have kept it alive by continuing to look for Symbolist values and hence to elevate the status of poets still working in the Eliot tradition. In 1962, the Mercure de France published a special Pierre Reverdy issue, which contained an essay called "Reverdy en Amerique" by John Ashbery. Here the battle-lines between Symbolism and anti-Symbolism are clearly drawn:

. . . la plus grande partie de la poésie américaine actuelle (et celle de l'Angleterre aussi) languit à l'ombre de T. S. Eliot. Les poètes qui lui ont succédé ont affaibli ou dénaturé le contenu intellectuel de la poésie d'Eliot, mais ils en ont retenu certains aspects superficiels: le langage sec et digne, ou le ton de J. Alfred Prufrock. . . .

Ce genre de poésie est à l'opposé de celle de Reverdy: transparente, sans "signification" philosophique. . . . Reverdy parvient à restituer aux choses leur vrai nom, à abolir l'éternel poids mort de symbolisme et de l'allégorie. . . . Dans The Waste Land d'Eliot, le monde réel apparaît avec les rêves qui lui sont propres, mais il est toujours artificiellement lié à une signification allégorique--l'usine à gaz et le "dull canal", par exemple. Tandis que chez Reverdy un canal ou une usine sont des phénomènes vivants, ils font partie du monde qui nous entoure, dont le souffle se fait sentir partout dans sa poésie. C'est comme si on voyait pour la première fois un paysage naturel, n'ayant vu jusque là que des paysages peints.

J'ai toujours regretté que les rythmes sombres d'Eliot et de Yeats, par exemple, soient au service d'une signification précise, et que leurs élans poétiques--différents, en cela, du fauçon de Yeats--soient comme un cerf-volant dont le fil est fermement tenu par le poète rivé à sa terre. Ce qui nous enchante chez Reverdy, c'est la pureté de sa poésie, faite de changements, fluctuations, archétypes d'événements, situations idéales, mouvements de formes transparents, aussi naturels et variés que les vagues de la mer.<sup>28</sup> (my emphasis)

How to give back to things their true name, to present

the "transparency" of "living phenomena" denuded of symbolic signification--this has been one of Ashbery's central poetic aims. And so we get cityscapes like the following:

These Lacustrine Cities

These lacustrine cities grew out of loathing  
 Into something forgetful, although angry with history.  
 They are the product of an idea: that man is horrible,  
                   for instance,  
 Though this is only one example.

They emerged until a tower  
 Controlled the sky, and with artifice dipped back  
 Into the past for swans and tapering branches,  
 Burning, until all that hate was transformed into  
                   useless love.

Then you are left with an idea of yourself  
 And the feeling of ascending emptiness of the afternoon  
 Which must be charged to the embarrassment of others  
 Who fly by you like beacons.

The night is a sentinel.  
 Much of your time has been occupied by creative games  
 Until now, but we have all-inclusive plans for you.  
 We had thought, for instance, of sending you to the  
                   middle of the desert,

To a violent sea, or of having the closeness of the  
                   others be air  
 To you, pressing you back into a startled dream  
 As sea-breezes greet a child's face.  
 But the past is already here, and you are nursing some  
                   private project.

The worst is not over, yet I know  
 You will be happy here. Because of the logic  
 Of your situation, which is something no climate can  
                   outsmart.

Tender and insouciant by turns, you see

You have built a mountain of something,  
 Thoughtfully pouring all your energy into this single  
                   monument,  
 Whose wind is desire starching a petal,  
 Whose disappointment broke into a rainbow of tears.<sup>29</sup>

What are "these lacustrine cities"--cities oddly emerging

from lakes like underwater plants or geological deposits? Yeats's Byzantium stands for many things--eternity, perfection, artifice, imagination, a neoPlatonic paradise, life after death--but it is impossible to say what Ashbery's "lacustrine cities" stand for. Like the Madrid of Motherwell's great series of abstract expressionist canvases, these cities merely are. Thus we are told initially that they "grew out of loathing / Into something forgetful"--a phrase that suggests that they are a figment of the poet's imagination, a "vast image out of Spiritus Mundi" perhaps. But the poem blocks all attempts to rationalize such imagery, to make it conform to a specific pattern. For if we assume, as we might when we read the first stanza, that the "lacustrine cities" are, say, the poet's defense mechanism, erected to protect himself from the fluidity of the subconscious, what do we make of the emerging "tower" "with artifice dipped back / Into the past for swans and tapering branches"? And who is the "you" that suddenly appears in Stanza 3? Or the "we" who want to relegate this "you" "to the middle / of the desert" or "to a violent sea"? Why does the "I" of Stanza 6 know that "You will be happy here"? Is he talking to himself or to someone else? In this context, the phrase, "Because of the logic / Of your situation, which is something no climate can outsmart," is particularly ironic because the "situation" has no "logic" whatever.

Ashbery's poem eliminates the traditional bases of interpretation; cities, sky, violent sea, swans, tapering branches--these don't coalesce to form a coherent symbolic system as do Yeats's cathedral gong, "starlit or . . . moonlit dome," "Miracle, bird or golden handiwork," and "Emperor's pavement." Rather, the poem's objects are floating and unanchored. Fragmented images appear only to be replaced by others; the poet seems to know they are there, but he doesn't know what they are. The reader perceives, one by one, the tower, the swans, the tapering branches and beacons, but the dream landscape which the "you" (or "I" or "we" or "they") erects and inhabits cannot be decoded. We can only say that this is a poem "about" some kind of fear, humiliation, and retaliation: the self, banished to "the middle of the desert" or "to a violent sea," begins to nurs(e) "some private project" and build its own special "mountain." But what does the poet fear and desire? Ashbery does not want to specify. In this regard, the syntax is especially misleading for the poem's sentences are generally simple subject-predicate units ("The night is a sentinel"; "But the past is already here")--sentences whose "normal" construction makes the unrelatedness of the words placed in nominative or predicate slots all the more puzzling.

"These Lacustrine Cities" resembles the Surrealist poems

of Éluard or Breton; its polarities--lake and desert, mountain and violent sea, you and I, they and we--are not resolved; on the contrary, the effect is to make the reader constantly aware of opposition, difference. "Much surrealist poetry," writes Mary Ann Caws, "instantly brings to mind the art of film, since both are above all concerned with the changing moment, with the metamorphosis of the instant."<sup>30</sup> Metamorphosis is central to Ashbery's poem; everything shifts, dissolves, evaporates, is transformed. There is no longer a transcendent realm of values which could be symbolized by the Church of Magnus Martyr with its "Ionian white and gold" or by the dome of Hagia Sophia in Byzantium. Depth is replaced by shallow space. Thus the "others" of Stanza 3 who "fly by you like beacons" are juxtaposed to the "night" which "is a sentinel." "Beacons" and "sentinels" are related by contiguity, but there is a gap between "others" and "the night." Such disjunctive metonymic relations converge to create a peculiar surface tension.

Like John Ashbery, Jerome Rothenberg creates what we might call anti-paysage, but his cityscapes fuse surrealist fantasy with a hard-edged literalism. Here is the first poem of "POLAND / 1931": "The Wedding":

my mind is stuffed with tablecloths  
 & with rings but my mind  
 is dreaming of poland stuffed with poland  
 brought in the imagination  
 to a black wedding  
 a naked bridegroom hovering above  
 his naked bride mad poland  
 how terrible thy jews at weddings  
 thy synagogues with camphor smells & almonds  
 thy thermos bottles thy electric fogs  
 thy braided armpits  
 thy underwear alive with roots o poland  
 poland poland poland poland poland  
 how thy bells wrapped in their flowers toll  
 how they do offer up their tongues to kiss the moon  
 old moon old mother stuck in thy sky thyself  
 an old bell with no tongue a lost udder  
 o poland thy beer is ever made of rotting bread  
 thy silks are linens merely thy tradesmen  
 dance at weddings where fanatic grooms  
 still dream of bridesmaids still are screaming  
 past their red moustaches poland  
 we have lain awake in thy soft arms forever  
 thy feathers have been balm to us  
 thy pillows capture us like sickly wombs & guard us  
 let us sail through thy fierce weddings poland

let us tread thy markets where thy sausages grow  
     ripe & full  
 let us bite thy peppercorns let thy oxen's dung be  
     sugar to thy dying jews  
 o poland o sweet resourceful restless poland  
 o poland of the saints unbuttoned poland repeating  
     endlessly the triple names of mary  
 poland poland poland poland poland  
 have we not tired of thee poland no for thy cheeses  
 shall never tire us nor the honey of thy goats  
 thy grooms shall work ferociously upon their looming  
     brides  
 shall bring forth executioners  
 shall stand like kings inside thy doorways  
 shall throw their arms around thy lintels poland  
 & begin to crow<sup>31</sup>

Rothenberg has said repeatedly that his are poems "not meant to be 'understood,' so to speak, as much as presented: offered up. The act of sounding the poem, like that of making it, may (as in ritual or prayer or incantation) overshadow the urge to understand it."<sup>32</sup> His is thus a poetry framed for the ear, an oracular, exclamatory poetry made up of invocation ("o poland"), imperative ("let us thread thy markets. . ."), pithy statement ("thy silks are linens merely"), and the fusion of "high" and "low" diction, as in "thy thermos bottles thy electric fogs thy braided armpits." "The Wedding" consists of a series of fragmentary utterances, noun phrases in apposition, parallel structures. The word "poland" regularly punctuates the rhythm, binding together disparate items and rising to the crescendo of

poland poland poland poland poland

This "poland" is not a symbolic setting, signifying something else. Rothenberg's "Unreal City" reminds one of Chagall's fantastic landscapes; it is a primitive and brutal world in which both bridegroom and bride are "naked," their wedding "black," their underwear "alive with roots," their armpits "braided." All life here is animal or vegetable; even the church bells have "tongues," the moon is a "lost udder," and "pillows capture us like sickly wombs." The country's urgent Catholicism ("o poland of the saints unbuttoned poland repeating endlessly the triple names of mary) turns out to be a kind of manic hunger: Poland is seen as the land of "rotting bread," "sickly wombs," "peppercorns," "oxen's dung," "sugar," and the "honey of goats." These food images function quite differently from those in The Waste Land. Rothenberg does not suggest that the rite of Communion has been debased; he merely presents

those synecdochic images that contain the dimensions of "POLAND / 1931." In the climactic fantasy that concludes the poem, the bridegroom and bride are transformed into multitudes of "grooms work[ing] ferociously upon their looming brides" so as to "bring forth executioners." In this surrealistic world of mass erection, in which the men become so "big" that they can throw their arms around the lintels of the city gates, the grooms are finally transformed into giant cocks, crowing over the whole country. And so Poland quite literally becomes a kingdom of birds and beasts.

In the strange fragmented landscapes of "POLAND / 1931" and "These Lacustrine Cities," the symbolic subways and traffic collisions found in Delmore Schwartz's "O City, City" give way to images of stark arrival and sharp outline that are yet curiously emptied of content. W. H. Auden put his finger on the difference between the two modes in his Foreword to Ashbery's first book, Some Trees, which he awarded the Yale Younger Poets Prize in 1956:

From Rimbaud down to Mr. Ashbery, an important school of modern poets has been concerned with the discovery that, in childhood largely, in dreams and daydreams entirely, the imaginative life of the human individual stubbornly continues to live by the old, magical notions. Its world is one of sacred images and ritual acts, the marriages of gods and goddesses, the recurrent sacrifices and rebirths of sacred kings, a numinous landscape inhabited by demons and strange beasts. . . .

Where Wordsworth had asked the question "What is the language really used by men?" Rimbaud substituted the question, "What is the language really used by the imagining mind?"

In "Les Illuminations" he attempted to discover this new rhetoric, and every poet who, like Mr. Ashbery, has similar interests has the same problem. . . . the danger for a poet working with the subjective life is . . . that, if he is to be true to nature in this world, he must accept strange juxtapositions of imagery, singular associations of ideas, he is tempted to manufacture calculated oddities as if the subjectively sacred were necessarily and on all occasions odd.<sup>33</sup>

Ashbery himself found these comments rather "curious": "He mentions me as being a kind of successor to Rimbaud, which

is very flattering, but at the same time I've always had the feeling that Auden probably never read Rimbaud. He was very outspokenly anti-French."<sup>34</sup>

But in fact Auden's remarks make very good sense. While his own still essentially traditional poetic stance naturally made him somewhat suspicious of the "strange juxtapositions of imagery" and "calculated oddities" of poets like Rimbaud and Ashbery, the connection he perceived between the two poets is a very real one. Indeed, "These Lacustrine Cities" is perhaps best understood as an updated version of Rimbaud's "Villes I," written roughly a hundred years earlier. The Illuminations is, I believe, centrally important to an understanding of contemporary poetry; it contains the seeds of the anti-Symbolist mode of our own time.

## II

VILLES<sup>34a</sup>

Ce sont des villes! C'est un peuple pour qui se sont montés ces Alleghanys et ces Libans de rêve! Des chalets de cristal et de bois qui se meuvent sur des rails et des poulies invisibles. Les vieux cratères ceint de colosses et de palmiers de cuivre rugissent mélodieusement dans les feux. Des fêtes amoureuses sonnent sur les canaux pendus derrière les chalets. La chasse des carillons crie dans les gorges. Des corporations de chanteurs géants accourent dans des vêtements et des oriflammes éclatant comme la lumière des cimes. Sur les plateformes au milieu des gouffres les Rolands sonnent leur bravoure. Sur les passerelles de l'abîme et les toits des auberges l'ardeur du ciel pavoise les mâts. L'écroulement des apothéoses rejoint les champs et les hauteurs où les centauresse s'épandent parmi les avalanches. Au-dessus du niveau des plus hautes crêtes, une mer troublée par la naissance éternelle de Vénus, chargée de flottes orphéoniques et de la rumeur des perles et des conques précieuses;--la mer s'assombrit parfois avec des éclats mortels. Sur les versants, des moissons de fleurs grandes comme nos armes et nos coupes, mugissent. Des cortèges de Mabs en robes rousses, opalines, montent des ravines. Là-haut, les pieds dans la cascade et les ronces, les cerfs tettent Diane. Les Bacchantes des banlieues sanglotent et la lune brûle et hurle. Vénus entre dans les cavernes des for-

gerons et des ermites. Des groupes de beffrois chantent les idées des peuples. Des châteaux bâtis en os sort la musique inconnue. Toutes les légendes évoluent et les élans se ruent dans les bourgs. Le paradis des orages s'effondre. Les sauvages dansent sans cesse la fête de la nuit. Et, une heure, je suis descendu dans le mouvement d'un boulevard de Bagdad où des compagnies ont chanté la joie du travail nouveau, sous une brise épaisse, circulant sans pouvoir éluder les fabuleux fântomes des monts où l'on a dû se retrouver.

Quels bons bras, quelle belle heure me rendront cette région d'ou viennent mes sommeils et mes moindres mouvements?

### CITIES<sup>35</sup>

What cities! This is a people for whom these dream Alleghenies and Lebanons have risen up. Chalets of crystal and wood that move on invisible rails and pulleys. Old craters surrounded by colossi and copper palm trees roar melodiously in the fires. Love feasts resound over canals suspended behind chalets. The pack of chimes clamors in the gorges. Guilds of giant singers flock together with garments and oriflammes as dazzling as the light of the summits. On platforms in the midst of whirlpools Rolands trumpet their bravery. On footbridges of the abyss and roofs of the inns the fire of the sky adorns the masts with flags. The collapse of apotheoses joins the fields to the highlands where seraphic centaureesses rise among the avalanches. Above the level of the highest crests, a sea troubled by the eternal birth of Venus, filled with choral fleets and the murmur of precious pearls and conches--the sea grows somber sometimes with fatal flashes. On the slopes, harvests of flowers large as our arms and our goblets bellow. Processions of Mabs in russet dresses, opaline, ascent from the ravines. Up there, with their feet in the waterfall and the brambles, stags suckle at Diana's breast. The Bacchantes of the suburbs sob and the moon burns and howls. Venus enters the caves of blacksmiths and of hermits. Groups of belfries sing the ideas of the peoples. From castles built of bone issues the unknown music. All legends evolve, and elks rush into the towns. The paradise of storms crumbles. The savages dance ceaselessly the feast of the

night. And there was one hour when I went down into the bustle of a boulevard in Bagdad where companies sang the joy of the new work, in a heavy breeze, going about unable to elude the fabulous phantoms of the mountains where we were to have met again.

What strong arms, what fine hour will give me back this region from which come my slumbers and my slightest movements?

"Ce sont des villes!" the poet exclaims rapturously, but immediately the reader is thrown into confusion. For what does "ce" refer to? And where are we? The description that follows is neither that of a recognizable cityscape like Eliot's river-front London nor of an ideal city of the imagination like Yeats's Byzantium. Images of magic splendor are suddenly undercut by others that present the metropolis as a kind of comic opera decor. As Nathaniel Wing notes in his excellent analysis of the poem: "Many semantic elements appropriate to an urban code are present. . . . chalets, rails, canaux, plates-formes, passerelles, toits des auberges, etc. The syntagmatic relations between these terms and other descriptive elements, however, break the implied link with reality, setting up a non-mimetic descriptive system."<sup>36</sup>

Let us see how this system works. Rimbaud's landscape is one of mountains and oceans, avalanches and whirlpools, continually shifting and dissolving without any discernible logic. The demonstrative pronouns in the second sentence, for example, have no apparent referent: what are these dream Alleghenies and Lebanons" that have mysteriously risen up for "this people"? The text provides no clue; rather, Rimbaud abruptly drops the exotic East-West imagery and shifts, in his third sentence, to crystal and wood chalets, moving on invisible pulleys. Antoine Adam has suggested various funiculars erected in the Swiss Alps during the 1870s as the source for this image,<sup>37</sup> but whatever the source, it remains mysterious and opaque. In the following sentence, we are transported to a scene of craters, colossal statues, and copper palm trees--a landscape possibly reminiscent of Vesuvius as Robert Cohn suggests<sup>38</sup>--but more akin to the artificial world of the theatre in which we accept as wholly natural backdrops depicting such a mélange of operatic effects.

In the course of the poem, the sense of place becomes more and more elusive. Canals are suspended behind chalets, platforms are found in the midst of whirlpools (another theatrical image); footbridges span the abyss. What seem to be mountain peaks turn out to be the crests of waves, and there is a con-

stant metamorphosis of land into ocean and back again, as in the sentence: "Sur les passerelles de l'abîme et les toits des auberges l'ardeur du ciel pavoise les mâts." One expects these masts to belong to ships but immediately the image fades out and "l'écroulement des apothéoses" joins fields to highlands "où les centaureses séraphiques évoluent parmi les avalanches." After a series of such metamorphoses, land and water finally merge in a hallucinatory image: the stags being suckled by Diana have their feet "dans la cascade et les ronces." From this point on, the mood of the poem becomes increasingly frenzied. "Les Bacchantes des banlieues sanglotent et la lune brûle et hurle." Venus, whose "naissance éternelle" has troubled the sea, now reappears entering the caves of blacksmiths and hermits. As the oxymoronic "paradis des orages" crumbles, savages dance ceaselessly the feast of the night. And the reader suddenly realizes that "la lumière des cimes" has been replaced by darkness.

In this context, the words "Et, une heure, je suis descendu dans le mouvement d'un boulevard de Bagdad," come as a total disruption. The eternal present, with its continuous metamorphosis of landscapes and its astonishing juxtapositions of disparate images, now gives way to one time and one place. The reference to "une heure," the past tense, the specific locale (note that Bagdad is the first actual city mentioned in the poem), and the appearance of the poet who, up until this point, has been wholly invisible (outside the picture frame or behind the curtain), in his own person--all these factors suggest that a spell has been broken. A thick breeze covers the mountains, and their "fabuleux fantômes" are impossible to elude although paradoxically unattainable. To meet there again becomes an unfulfilled wish. The moment has passed. And so, in the poem's final plaintive lines, the poet asks what "bons bras" and what "belle heure" will give him back this "region"--a region that is the source not only of vision but also of sleep, and, in the oddest conjunction of all, of "mes moindres mouvements"--of all action.

But what is the content of the poet's fleeting vision? It is all but impossible to say, for Rimbaud's historical and mythological references are at least as confusing as are his spatial images. Proper names--Rolands, Mabs, Venus, Diana--are consistently presented in a context which does not specify their meaning. The phrase "ces Alleghanys et ces Libans de rêve," for example, oddly combines the two worlds: the new Western world of the American continent, with its exotic Indian names, and the Near East of the Bible and ancient history. Again, the poem blends medieval reference ("la chasse de carillons," "Des corporations de chanteurs géants," "oriflammes," "Rolands");

faery lore viewed in Shakespearean terms (Queen Mab); the Arabian Nights (the Bagdad boulevard); and oddly inverted Greek myths (Venus born over and over again in a troubled ocean and entering caves in pursuit of blacksmiths--an oblique reference to Hephaestus; Diana, the virgin huntress, giving suck to stags). Phrases like "les centaouesses sérapiques" combine Christian and pagan connotations, and the element of fantasy is heightened by making the centaurs female. In another such fantastic image, the Maenads who sob under the burning, howling moon are referred to as "les Bacchantes des banlieues."

Rimbaud's cities are full of noises, but the music is curiously dissonant. Some sounds are lovely and mysterious ("une mer . . . chargée de flottes orphéoniques, et de la rumeur des perles et des conqués précieuses"); some dazzling ("Des fêtes amoureuses sonnent sur les canaux"); some martial and heroic ("La chasse des carillons crie dans les gorges"; "les Rolands sonnent leur bravoure"); some harsh and ugly ("Les Bacchantes des banlieues sanglotent et le lune brûle et hurle"); some ambiguous ("les vieux cratères . . . rugissent mélodieusement"). Almost every sentence contains at least one music image, but the context of the poem does not tell us how to regard them. "La musique inconnue," rising from castles built of bone, remains a secret.

Images of motion work in much the same way.<sup>38a</sup> Rimbaud's landscape is characterized by incessant explosive movement and shifting perspective, beginning with the dream Alleghenies and Lebanons which have risen up out of nowhere. The crystal chalets move both horizontally on rails and upwards on pulleys. Platforms rise above whirlpools, footbridges span the abyss, rooftops and masts shoot upward into the sky. But just when the focus seems to be wholly on vertical motion, a "collapse of apotheoses" takes place. The perspective, shifting rapidly upward and downward, now becomes vertiginous: processions of Mabs ascend the ravines but Venus descends into the caves. All the legends rise but the paradise of storms crumbles. And then vertical and horizontal motion come together in the whirlpool of the savage dance. At this point in the prose poem, the poet suddenly recalls that at "une heure" he descended into the Bagdad boulevard. This descent shatters space: as the guilds of singers go around in aimless circles, the mountain peaks recede upward and the poet abruptly descends downward into the self.

Conventional explication of a poem like "Villes" does not take us very far. Cohn argues that the Bagdad boulevard is "the dream of a calm new perspective of maturity and harmony in an ideal Orient poles removed from our contaminated Western bustle." But then he admits that the dream culminates in "a

fall of inspiration," for the mountains become phantoms and a thick breeze dims the scene. The final question is thus a "pathetic appeal to an absent father-figure" whose "strong arms . . . can show, and perhaps give, him this ideal of male effectiveness together with virile delight" (pp. 313-14).

Surely this is reading into the text. Nothing in the poem suggests that the "bons bras" must be those of an absent father-figure. The interpretation of the Oriental scene seems equally reductive. One could argue, just as easily, that it is when the poet descends into a specific place at a specific time, that his vision of timeless, spaceless cities dissolves.

In a recent essay called "Rimbaud's Simplicity," Leo Bersani observes acutely that "a criticism in search of psychological themes, with its postulation of a coherent and durable intentionality, is profoundly anti-Rimbaldian." "The more radical prose poems of the Illuminations . . . frequently propose no connection at all between two scenes or among various elements of a single scene. Metamorphosis and identity within difference are mysteries of being; in his most original poetic activity, Rimbaud, in a sense, proposes no ontological mystery at all. He gives us a scene; then it is as if the scene were washed away; and a new scene makes its appearance." Language, in such poetry, no longer serves "as a protective screen between us and the poet's secret psychological complexity"; rather, it is "obliterated by the very luminosity of the pictures which language evokes. . . . Everything is designed . . . to fascinate our eyes, to make it impossible for us to turn our gluttonous vision away from the hypnotic scene. These cineramic hallucinations attain a certain impersonality by the frankly excessive and improbable nature of the spectacle." Rimbaud, suggests Bersani, no longer constructs a mental and physical universe as do even the most obscure Symbolist poets like Mallarmé; he "merely accumulates evidence of a deconstructed world."<sup>39</sup>

Such "evidence" is present everywhere in "Villes," whose very title raises expectations that are quickly deflected as the splendid cities turn out to consist of mountains and stormy oceans, craters and whirlpools, avalanches and abysses, waterfalls and gorges. And yet, seen through a foggy window or perhaps from a certain peculiar angle or under unusual lighting circumstances, a city could take on these phantasmagoric shapes. Or again, if the city is conceived as a stage-set, all the references to crystal chalets on magic pulleys and platforms over the abyss seem quite plausible. Rimbaud's fragmented vision also recalls film in its use of dissolves, close-ups, long-distance shots, jump cuts, and shifting perspectives. Or, in Bersani's apt analogy, the poetic imagination becomes "a slide-

projector which ejects each slide almost at the very instant it is lighted up."<sup>40</sup>

Symbolist poetry, I posited earlier, is polysemous, a poetry of multiple meanings. Thus Yeats's "Byzantium" fuses such symbolic images as the "great cathedral gong," the "starlit or . . . moonlit dome," the "Miracle, bird or golden handiwork, / Planted on the star-lit golden bough," the "glory of changeless metal," and the "golden smithies of the Emperor" to create a complex symbolic embodiment of an Ideal City that can be glimpsed only for a brief moment before "That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea" reasserts itself. But in Rimbaud's "Villes," Yeatsian reverberations (the vertical axis) give way to a flat surface upon which appear disparate images, images that are extraordinarily palpable and concrete but that point to nothing beyond themselves. As Jean-Pierre Richard writes:

Le paysage cesse avec Rimbaud de se fonder sur cette unité d'impression qui le faisait, depuis le romantisme, sortir bien sage et comme tout armé de l'oeil ou de l'esprit, quand ce n'était pas de l'âme d'un tout-puissant spectateur. . . . Rimbaud cesse de tenir le monde pour un dictionnaire entr'ouvert, pour un recueil de significations déchiffrables. . . . Aussi son paysage n'est plus vraiment un paysage, mais plutôt un anti-paysage, une pure vision sans témoin. . . . Pour la première fois les choses se présentent à nous dans l'évidence de leur nudité et dans l'éclat de leur silence: pleinement devenues, à tous les sens du terme, des pieces à conviction.<sup>41</sup>

[With Rimbaud, landscape ceases to be founded on that unity of impression which, ever since Romanticism, made it appear to emerge tamed and well-armed from the eye of the mind, if not from the consciousness of an all-powerful spectator. . . . Rimbaud no longer regards the world as a half-open dictionary, as a collection of significations to be deciphered. . . . Also his landscape is no longer really a landscape but rather an anti-landscape, a pure vision without witness. . . . For the first time things present themselves to us in all their nudity and in their explosive silence: having fully become, in all senses of the term, exhibits.]

The world is no longer a half-open dictionary. Nature no longer wears the colors of the spirit. The word, says

Roland Barthes, here becomes "un signe sans fond."<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, the traditional and natural connotations of words are inverted. When Eliot, alluding to Verlaine's *Parsifal*, cites the line "Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!", the reader infers that this music image symbolizes a glimpse of the supernatural, providing an ironic commentary on "The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring / Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring." But what are we to make of "La chasse de carillons crie dans les gorges"? What does this music signify?

Or consider Rimbaud's color images. A phrase like "Des cortèges de Mabs en robes rousses, opalines" does not symbolize a particular complex of values as does Eliot's "Ionian white and gold" or Yeats's "Miracle, bird or golden handiwork," or, say, Wallace Stevens' "The houses are haunted by white night-gowns / None are green, / Or purple with green rings. . ." ("Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock"). In this particular poem, Stevens' speaker longs for "red weather," but when the poet of "Métropolitain" talks of "le sable rose et orange qu'a lavé le ciel vineux" ("the rose and orange sand washed by the wine-colored sea") in what is ostensibly a description of an urban landscape, the signification of the colors remains open. Multiplicity of meaning gives way to a strange new literalism. It makes no difference whether "Villes" or "Métropolitain" were inspired by Rimbaud's visit to the London docks or his ride on the Underground, for the cityscapes he presents are pure invention. The nucleus of such invention is, as Eric Sellin has said with reference to Reverdy's poetry, "a poetic image which is not metaphor as such. . . . It is not depiction, parallelism, or analogy, although it may occur within such frameworks; it is rather . . . a confrontation with an irreducible ambiguity."<sup>43</sup>

"Irreducible" in what sense? Here E. H. Gombrich's analysis of Cubist painting is especially helpful. The Cubists, Gombrich argues, wanted to create an art form that destroys mimetic illusion. "If illusion is due to the interaction of clues and the absence of contradictory evidence, the only way to fight its transforming influence is to make the clues contradict each other and to prevent a coherent image of reality from destroying the pattern in the plane." Cubism counters "the transforming effects of an illusionist reading by the introduction of contrary clues which will resist all attempts to apply the test of consistency."<sup>44</sup>

This is, I think, a very important perception, not just about Cubism but about non-illusionist art in general. When commentators try, against all odds, to "explain" the meaning of "Villes," to find the clue to its central theme, they don't

seem to realize that Rimbaud purposely scrambles the clues and inhibits the working of what Jean-Louis Baudry has called "le vouloir dire."<sup>45</sup> The Illuminations defies, at all turns, the "test of consistency," so that we perceive Rimbaud's astonishing images as pure presences, des pieces à conviction.

In reading such poetry, interpretation gives way to the aesthetic of participation; tension is replaced by attention. From the opening exclamation, "Ce sont des villes!", the reader is totally involved, trying to determine what these cities, so important to the poet, are like. One moves from clue to clue, trying to establish what Gombrich calls "a coherent image of reality." There are just enough "representational traces"<sup>46</sup>--the vertiginous upward and downward movement, the strange musical sounds, the repeated references to depths beneath a horizontal surface, the allusions to legendary and mythological persons and places--to reenforce our sense of relatedness, although the numerous internal contradictions prevent the formulation of a satisfactory hypothesis that might account for all the semantic elements in the poem. Thus, when we come to the crucial sentence, "Et, une heure. . .", we can only say that a dramatic change has taken place, that the eternal present has given way to a particular moment in time, that the procession of fantasy figures is replaced by the presence of the solitary poet, that some sort of ecstasy and violence give way to some sort of lassitude and loss. But a more precise "meaning" of the descent cannot be assigned. This is the irreducible ambiguity Eric Sellin speaks of, an ambiguity quite unlike Empson's famous "Seven Types" which have to do with multiple meaning.

The Symbolist poem, I suggested earlier, demands interpretation. Despite Symbolist disclaimers to the contrary,<sup>47</sup> the poems of Mallarmé and Verlaine, of Yeats and Eliot, of Rilke and Stevens present themselves to the reader as enigmas to be decoded by patient analysis. In reading Mallarmé, for example, the syntax is so difficult that we are constantly forced to stop reading. As Leo Bersani observes, "An unprecedented word order makes us ponder over the materiality of the words themselves, and any meaning we may come up with will be inseparable from the physical arrangement of the words. For it is precisely in the originality with which words have been placed in relation to one another that we immediately recognize the poetic specificity of Mallarmé's language; it is the poetic message."<sup>48</sup>

Rimbaud's syntax is the very opposite. After the brief exclamatory opening, most of the sentences in "Villes" follow a straightforward noun phrase-plus-verb phrase pattern, with

relatively little modification and almost no subordination. For example:

Des fêtes amoureuses sonnent sur les canaux pendus  
derrière les chalets.

La chasse des carillons crie dans les gorges.

Sur les plâtes-formes au milieu des gouffres les  
Rolands sonnent leur bravoure.

Des cortèges de Mabs en robes rousses, opalines,  
montent des ravines.

These "normal" declarative sentences are arranged in what looks like a stable narrative sequence, but the very stability of word order and sequence works against the possibility of complex signification. The reader can assign each word to its proper slot, but the slots often turn out to be empty because we don't really know what a given sentence signifies. The simpler the word order, the fewer the possibilities for construing multiple meanings. In this sense, syntax becomes a kind of irrelevance.

Voice, on the other hand, is all-important. It is a commonplace that Rimbaud was a much more "personal" poet than Eliot or even Yeats, but it is not easy to define his brand of "personalism." In his famous "Lettres du Voyant" (to Charles Izambard, 13 May 1871, and to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871), Rimbaud was highly critical of Romantic subjectivism; the Romantics, he declared, "n'avaient pas trouvé du Moi que la signification fausse."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, in "Villes" the "I" does not appear until the penultimate sentence of the poem: "Et, une heure, je suis descendu. . . ." Until this point, all the references are third-person. And yet Rimbaud would never have agreed with Eliot that "Poetry . . . is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality,"<sup>50</sup> or with Yeats's assertion that "if a man is to write lyric poetry he must be shaped by nature and art to some one out of half a dozen traditional poses, and be lover or saint, sage or sensualist, or mere mocker of all life."<sup>51</sup>

In sorting out these distinctions, we must try to understand Rimbaud's too-famous declaration: "C'est faux de dire: Je Pense. On devrait dire: On me pense . . . Je est un autre."<sup>52</sup> In the letter to Paul Demeny, Rimbaud declares:

Le Poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et  
raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens. Toutes les

formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même. . . . Ineffable torture où il a besoin de toute la force surhumaine, où il devient entre tous le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit,-- et le suprême Savant!--car il arrive à l'inconnu!. . . . et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues!<sup>53</sup>

[The Poet makes himself a voyant through a long, immense, and reasoned derangement of all his senses. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself. . . . Unspeakable torture in which he has need of all his faith, of all his superhuman strength, in which he becomes among all men, the great invalid, the great criminal, the great cursed one,--and the supreme Savant!--For he arrives at the unknown!. . . . and when, crazed, he ends by losing the understanding of his visions, he has seen them!]

So much emphasis has been placed on the role of drugs, alcohol, and sexual perversion in Rimbaud's programmatic "dérèglement de tous les sens," that the poet's real meaning here is often ignored. One must stress that Rimbaud is talking of a "dérèglement" which is "raisonné," that is to say, the result of a self-conscious, calculated effort, a disciplined exercise by means of which the poet sheds his conventional ego, his personal, habitual response to things. D. H. Lawrence meant precisely the same thing when he said in the Preface to his Collected Poems (1928), that his early lyrics were usually failures because "A young man is afraid of his demon and . . . the things the young man says are very rarely poetry. So I have tried to let the demon say his say," "to get hold of me and shake more real poems out of me."<sup>54</sup> Lawrence's distinction between the "young man" and the "demon" parallels Rimbaud's opposition of the "Je" and the "autre." The point is that a split must take place between the poet's "normal" everyday ego and the "moi" projected in the poem.

But despite Rimbaud's stress on supreme knowledge, on the poet's need to arrive at "l'inconnu," the "Lettres du Voyant" do not, as many commentators have insisted, set up a program for achieving transcendence. Rimbaud was neither a "mystique à l'état sauvage," as Claudel claimed, nor a Cabbalistic seer.<sup>55</sup> Voyance is a poetic strategy rather than The Way to hidden knowledge. Indeed, Rimbaud's unknown is, as we have seen in the case of "Villes," ultimately devoid of content--an empty mystery.

The formula "On me pense" suggests, as Northrop Frye has

observed, that the poet becomes the medium of an oracle, that autonomous voices speak through him, and that he is concerned to utter rather than to address, his back turned on the audience.<sup>56</sup> Yet--and this is perhaps the key point--in Rimbaud's case, the "voices" are not those of divine oracles; they come not from outside and above, but, like the magic flood that wells up from underground in so many of his poems, from inside and below, from the poet's own subconscious. As Jean-Pierre Richard puts it, "Car si JE est un AUTRE, c'est bien JE qui produit cet AUTRE." ("For if 'I' is ANOTHER, it is still the 'I' that produces that OTHER").<sup>57</sup> Therefore the poet can claim: "J'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée: je la regarde, je l'écoute" ("I am present at the birth of my thought, I look at it, I listen to it").<sup>58</sup> In what looks like the Laingian Divided Self, the "schizoid" poet stands back and studies his real self as if it were someone else. He must renounce all conventions and habits so as to let his "demon," his hidden self come to the fore. It is this doctrine which appealed so strongly to the Surrealists and, as we shall see, to such poets as Williams, Roethke, Lawrence, Plath, and Ashbery.

If the "I" is properly distanced, the next step is that it participates in the life of other beings or of external objects. The poet, says Rimbaud, "est chargé de l'humanité, des animaux même; il devra faire sentir, palper, écouter ses inventions; si ce qu'il rapporte de là-bas a forme, il donne forme; se c'est informe, il donne de l'informe." ("The poet is responsible for humanity, even for the animals; he must make his inventions feel, smell, and hear; if what he brings back from down there has form, he gives it form; if it is formless, he gives it formlessness").<sup>59</sup>

This aesthetic of animistic projection, so different from the Yeatsian Mask or the third-person reflective mode of Stevens, is at the heart of "Villes," in which the poet, seemingly off-stage, has entered the world of the external phenomena he describes. From the very beginning, the dream Alleghenies and Lebanons rise up as if they were human. The sea, troubled by the eternal birth of Venus and dominated by choral fleets and the murmur of precious shells, is not viewed from the outside by a perceiving mind. It is seen, rather, from the inside as if the poet wanted to convey how it feels to be a troubled ocean, capable of bringing forth strange music. Again, the harvest of flowers, "grande comme nos armes et nos coupes," is perceived animistically; the poet identifies with their sexuality, their power, their noise. The following sentence is particularly interesting: "Là-haut, les pieds dans la cascade et les ronces, les cerfs tettent Diane." The image has a peculiar, somewhat unpleasant immediacy, but it is difficult at first to say why.

The key lies, I think, in the word "Là-haut," which implies that the poet is somewhere below, observing the mountain scene of Diana suckling the stags above him. But the notion of distance is negated by the reference to "les pieds dans la cascade et les ronces"--a detail one could hardly perceive from far away. Perspective is, in other words, distorted, and one has the sense that the poet himself is "Là-haut," participating in the suckling process.

Rimbaud's "dédoublement du moi" stands squarely behind the mode of Lawrence's Birds, Beasts, and Flowers, of Williams' Kora in Hell, or Roethke's The Lost Son, and it appears, in more extreme form, in poems like Ashbery's "These Lacustrine Cities," Frank O'Hara's "In Memory of My Feelings," and Sylvia Plath's "Tulips." The distance between the perceiving self (the voice that says "O City, city I can sometimes hear. . .") and the external reality perceived (a "public bar in lower Thames Street") disappears. The moon that "burns and howls" in "Villes" is no longer outside the poet's consciousness.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Rimbaud," said René Char, "est le premier poète d'une civilisation non encore apparue,"<sup>60</sup> and Delmore Schwartz, himself not at all a poet of Rimbalidian cast, believed that "Rimbaud tried out the whole century to come in advance."<sup>61</sup> If these statements sound extravagant, we should remember that Rimbaud's poetry furnishes us with what is perhaps the first example of "le retrait du signifié."<sup>62</sup> But Anglo-American poets were slow to follow the example of Rimbaud, and later of Apollinaire, Reverdy, and the Surrealists. The French poets who influenced Eliot and Stevens were Mallarmé, Valéry, and Laforgue; Eliot was, of course, also a devoted follower of Baudelaire. Yeats, whose knowledge of French poetry came chiefly from Arthur Symons, admired Mallarmé as the high priest of Symbolisme but was especially drawn to Verlaine. None of these poets had more than a passing interest in Rimbaud even though Une Saison en enfer was published in 1873, the Illuminations in 1886, and the Poésies complètes (Vanier) in 1895.<sup>63</sup>

Between 1910 and 1920, poets like John Gould Fletcher, Edith Sitwell, Aldous Huxley, and John Rodker experimented with Rimbaud's style, but the first major poet who turned to the Rimbalidian model was that great discoverer of underrated genius, Ezra Pound.<sup>64</sup> And Pound's Cantos, as I shall try to show in the following chapter,<sup>65</sup> are among the first Anglo-American poems to turn their back on the heritage of Symbolism. So began the gradual demise of what Ashbery has amusingly called the

disease of "objective correlativitis."<sup>66</sup> The future, in Frank O'Hara's words,<sup>67</sup> would belong to:

concrete Rimbaud obscurity of emotion which is simple and very  
definite  
even lasting. . . .

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For classic statements of this position, see the following: Allen Tate, "Tension in Poetry" (1938) in The Man of Letters in the Modern World, Selected Essays, 1928-1955 (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1964), pp. 64-77; Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1939; rpt. New York: Galaxy Books, 1965); William Van O'Connor, Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry (1948; rpt. New York: University Paperbacks, 1964); George T. Wright, The Poet in the Poem, The Personae of Eliot, Yeats, and Pound (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1962); Cleanth Brooks and W. K. Wimsatt, Literary Criticism, A Short History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), esp. Chapters 26 ("Symbolism"), 30 ("Eliot and Pound: An Impersonal Art"), and the Epilogue. A recent instance of this position may be found in Howard Nemerov, "What was Modern Poetry?", Salmagundi, 25 (Winter 1974), 30-46.

O'Connor's Table of Contents gives a good summary of the New Critical view of Modernism: among chapter headings are "The Employment of Myths," "The Break with Verism," "The Influence of the Symbolists," "The Influence of the Metaphysicals," "The Imagistic Symbol," "The Quality of Irony," "Tension and Structure in Poetry," and "Forms of Dehumanization."

<sup>2</sup>It is impossible to do more here than to list the most notable studies of the Romantic heritage in poetry. The following are in chronological order: Geoffrey Hartman, The Unmediated Vision, An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry (1954; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966); Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (1957; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1964); John Bayley, The Romantic Survival, A Study in Poetic Evolution (1957; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1969); Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition (1957; rpt. New York: Norton, 1963); Robert Buttel, Wallace Stevens, The Making of Harmonium (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), esp. pp. 5-6, 44-45, 219-23; R. W. B. Lewis, The Poetry of Hart Crane (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967); Donald Wesling, "The Inevitable Ear: Freedom and Necessity in Lyric Form, Wordsworth and After," in Forms of Lyric, Se-

lected Papers from the English Institute (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 103-126; Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," in Romanticism and Consciousness, Essays in Criticism, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970); George Bornstein, Yeats and Shelley (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970); Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York: Oxford, 1970); Meyer Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971); Diane Middlebrook, Walt Whitman and Wallace Stevens (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974); George Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot and Stevens (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976); Helen Reguero, The Limits of Imagination, Wordsworth, Yeats and Stevens (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976).

<sup>3</sup>A Map of Misreading (New York: Oxford, 1974), p. 28. Bloom has been writing on the nature of "belated Romanticism" in a series of books that begins with The Anxiety of Influence, A Theory of Poetry (New York: Oxford, 1973); the most recent exemplars are Figures of Capable Imagination (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) and Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977).

<sup>4</sup>A Map of Misreading, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>A Map of Misreading, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup>The Situation of Poetry, Contemporary Poetry and its Traditions (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976) p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>Pinsky, pp. 77-81.

<sup>8</sup>Cited by Pinsky on pp. 172-73. The poem is reprinted from David Ferry, On the Way to the Island (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1960).

<sup>9</sup>See Paul Verlaine, "Préface de la première édition des Illuminations (1886)," in Arthur Rimbaud, Poèmes, Les Illuminations, Une Saison en enfer (Paris: Vanier, 1891), p. v. The translation of "Illuminations" as "colored plates" has been contested but never really refuted: see T. C. St. Aubyn, Arthur Rimbaud (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), p. 112.

<sup>10</sup>Boundary 2: "The Oral Impulse in Modern Poetry," 3, No. 3 (Spring 1975), 539.

<sup>11</sup>The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 243. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>12</sup>T. S. Eliot, Collected Poems 1909-1962 (New York: Har-

court, Brace & World, 1970), pp. 61, 63. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>13</sup>See Walter Hinderer, "Theory, Conception and Interpretation of the Symbol," in Perspectives in Literary Symbolism, ed. Joseph Strelka, Yearbook of Comparative Criticism, Vol. 1 (University Park, Pa.: Penn State Univ. Press, 1968), p. 83.

<sup>14</sup>Of the countless studies of Symbolism, the ones that have particularly helped me are the following: Marcel Raymond, From Baudelaire to Surrealism, trans. from the French (1933; rpt. London: University Paperbacks, 1970), pp. 1-14; Guy Michaud, Message poétique du symbolisme, Vol. 1 (Paris: Nizet, 1951); Hugo Friedrich, The Structure of Modern Poetry, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (1956; Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974), esp. pp. 3-38; J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (1965; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1969); Angelo Bertocci, From Symbolism to Baudelaire (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1964); Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, eds., The Modern Tradition, Backgrounds of Modern Literature (New York: Oxford, 1965), esp. "Introduction to Symbolism," pp. 7-16; Irving Howe, "Introduction," in The Idea of the Modern, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), pp. 11-40; Anna Balakian, The Symbolist Movement, A Critical Appraisal (New York: Random House, 1967); René Wellek, "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History," Discriminations, Further Concepts of Criticism (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 90-121; James L. Kugel, The Techniques of Strangeness in Symbolist Poetry (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971); Charles Altieri, "From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern American Poetics," Boundary 2 1 (Spring 1973). 605-41.

<sup>15</sup>W. B. Yeats and Tradition (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 231.

<sup>16</sup>See Helen H. Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), p. 114; Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford, 1954), pp. 219-22.

<sup>17</sup>The Lonely Tower, Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats (London: Methuen-University Paperbacks, 1969), p. 230.

<sup>18</sup>Yeats (New York: Oxford, 1970), p. 384.

<sup>19</sup>T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays, A Study in Sources and Meaning (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 87.

<sup>20</sup>See Eliot, After Strange Gods (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), pp. 69-71.

<sup>21</sup>On the function of food rituals in Eliot's poetry, see Genesis Jones, Approach to the Purpose: The Poetry of T. S. Eliot (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), pp. 101-8.

<sup>22</sup>Jones discusses Eliot's street symbolism on pp. 187-90.

<sup>23</sup>See Eliot, The Waste Land, A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts including the Annotations of Ezra Pound, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>"Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in American Poetry," Boundary 2, 1, No. 1 (Fall 1972), 102. I am indebted to Antin's important essay throughout my discussion.

<sup>25</sup>"T. S. Eliot as The International Hero," Partisan Review, 12 (Spring 1945); rpt. in The Selected Essays of Delmore Schwartz, eds. Donald A. Dike and David H. Zucker (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 120-28.

<sup>26</sup>Delmore Schwartz, Selected Poems (1938-1958) (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 52. "O City, City" was first published in In Dreams Begin Responsibilities in 1938.

<sup>27</sup>"The End of the Line" (1942), in The Idea of the Modern, ed. Irving Howe, p. 164.

<sup>28</sup>Mercure de France, 344 (Jan/April, 1962), 110-12.

<sup>29</sup>Rivers and Mountains (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966; rpt. New York: The Ecco Press, 1977), p. 9.

<sup>30</sup>The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 33.

<sup>31</sup>Poland / 1931 (New York: New Directions, 1974), pp. 3-4.

<sup>32</sup>"A Dialogue with William Spanos," Boundary 2, 3, No. 3 (Spring 1975), 530.

<sup>33</sup>Some Trees (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1956) pp. 13, 16.

<sup>34</sup>Selections from an unpublished interview with David Kermani, New York, 1974; see Kermani, John Ashbery: A Comprehensive Bibliography (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1976), p. 6.

<sup>34a</sup>Rimbaud, Oeuvres, ed. Suzanne Bernard (Paris: Garnier, 1960), pp. 276-77. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>35</sup>The translation is my own but I have consulted the following: Louise Varèse, Illuminations and Other Prose Poems, revised ed. (New York: New Directions, 1957), pp. 60-63; Enid Rhodes Peschel, A Season in Hell and The Illuminations, A New Translation (New York: Oxford, 1973), pp. 136-39. Wallace Fowlie, Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1966), pp. 240-41; Paul Schmidt, Arthur Rimbaud, Complete Works (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 230-232. Of these, I find Paul Schmidt's the most effective but his translation is very free. Varèse's is, I think, the most accurate, but she occasionally translates the French into rather archaic English, for example: "les canaux pendus derrière les chalets" becomes "canals pendent behind the chalets." I have tried to compare the various translations and give the most literal one possible. Louise Varèse is the only translator who reads "les élans" as "elks" rather than as "enthusiasms" or "excitement"; I follow her on this reading because the "élans" relate back to the "cerfs" who nurse at Diana's breast earlier in "Villes."

<sup>36</sup>Present Appearances: Aspects of Poetic Structure in Rimbaud's Illuminations, Romance Monographs, Inc. Number 9 (Oxford, Mississippi: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 1974) pp. 103-4.

<sup>37</sup>See Bernard, Oeuvres, p. 501.

<sup>38</sup>Robert Greer Cohn, The Poetry of Rimbaud (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 308.

<sup>38a</sup>See Renée Riese Hubert, "The Use of Reversals in Rimbaud's Illuminations," L'Esprit Créateur, 9, No. 1 (Spring 1969), 9-17.

<sup>39</sup>A Future for Astyanax, Character and Desire in Literature (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), p. 257. Cf. John C. Lapp, "'Mémoire': Art et Hallucination Chez Rimbaud," Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises, 23 (1971), 163-75; Jean-Louis Baudry, "Le Text de Rimbaud," Tel Quel, 35 (Autumn 1968), 46-63 and 36 (Winter 1969), 33-53.

<sup>40</sup>Bersani, p. 244.

<sup>41</sup>Poésie et profondeur (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955), p. 240.

<sup>42</sup>Le Degré zero de l'écriture (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1953), pp. 69-70.

<sup>43</sup>"The Esthetics of Ambiguity: Reverdy's Use of Syntactical Simultaneity," in About French Poetry from DADA to "TEL QUEL", Text and Theory, ed. Mary Ann Caws (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1974), p. 114.

<sup>44</sup>Art and Illusion, A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation: The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1956 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), pp. 280-82.

<sup>45</sup>See Baudry, Tel Quel, 36, p. 45; cf. Miller, Poets of Reality, pp. 290-93.

<sup>46</sup>Joseph N. Riddel, in an amplification of Gombrich's argument, uses this phrase, see The Inverted Bell, Modernism and the Counter-poetics of William Carlos Williams (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1974), p. 20.

<sup>47</sup>On the Symbolist doctrine of evocation and musical suggestiveness, see Marcel Raymond, From Baudelaire to Surrealism, pp. 16-24.

<sup>48</sup>Bersani, p. 248.

<sup>49</sup>Oeuvres, p. 345. The "Lettres du Voyant" are found on pp. 343-50.

<sup>50</sup>"Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 21.

<sup>51</sup>Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 87.

<sup>52</sup>Oeuvres, p. 344.

<sup>53</sup>Oeuvres, p. 346.

<sup>54</sup>The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), pp. 28, 27.

<sup>55</sup>See Paul Claudel, "Arthur Rimbaud," La Nouvelle Revue Française (October 1912), pp. 557-67. This statement became a locus classicus in Rimbaud studies. The "myth" of Rimbaud the Cabbalist began with Rolland de Renéville's Rimbaud le voyant (1929; rev. ed. Paris: La Combe, 1946). For a vigorous refutation of de Renéville's thesis, see René Etiemble, Le Mythe de Rimbaud, Vol. 2: Structure du mythe (Paris:

Gallimard, 1954), pp. 115-122, 165-171.

<sup>56</sup>"Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," in Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 136.

<sup>57</sup>Poésie et profondeur, p. 193

<sup>58</sup>Oeuvres, p. 345.

<sup>59</sup>Oeuvres, p. 347.

<sup>60</sup>René Char, Preface, Rimbaud, Poésies, Une Saison en enfer, Illuminations, ed. Louis Forestier. (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. xi.

<sup>61</sup>"Rimbaud in Our Time" (1939) in The Collected Essays of Delmore Schwartz, p. 57.

<sup>62</sup>Baudry, Tel Quel, 36, p. 45.

<sup>63</sup>On this point, see René Taupin, L'Influence de symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (De 1910 à 1920) (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1929); Ruth Z. Temple, The Critic's Alchemy, A Study of the Introduction of French Symbolism into England (New York: Twayne, 1953); Enid Starkie, From Gautier to Eliot, The Influence of France on English Literature, 1851-1939 (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1960), pp. 81-134; Cyrena Pondrom, The Road from Paris, French Influence on English Poetry 1900-1920 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974). It is interesting that Eliot, who had evidently read Rimbaud as early as 1908, seems to have had little sympathy for the latter's "enterprise du Voyant"; see Edward H. Greene, T. S. Eliot et la France (Paris: Boivin, 1951), p. 19.

<sup>64</sup>John Gould Fletcher's Irradiations, Sand and Spray (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915) contains languid mood pieces written in direct imitation of the Illuminations. Edith Sitwell, who called Rimbaud "in some ways my closest spiritual relation" (Taken Care Of: An Autobiography [London: Hutchinson, 1965], p. 27), used certain Rimbaldian devices in such early poems as "Trams," "Merrygoround," and "The Drunkard"; see Pondrom, The Road from Paris, p. 41. In the Third Cycle of Wheels (1918), edited by Edith Sitwell (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1918), Aldous Huxley has a series of poems called "Beauty" and "Gothic" that take over specific image clusters from Rimbaud's "Fleurs," "Enfance," and "Après le déluge." In The Little Review (September 1918), John Rodker published a

series of prose poems--"Theatre Muét," an imitation of Rimbaud's "Scènes," among them--that turn the Illuminations into what can only be called "program notes," full of melodrama and gratuitous description: see The Little Review (September 1918), 12-13. The first stage of Rimbaud's reception into Anglo-American letters must thus be considered one of simple--and not very successful--imitation. Pound, as we shall see, was the great exception.

<sup>65</sup>The discussion of Pound and Rimbaud, which will constitute the second chapter of my book in progress, Landscapes Without Depth: The Retreat from Symbolism in Modern Poetry, has appeared, in somewhat different form, in Iowa Review, 6 (Winter 1975), 91-117.

<sup>66</sup>"Tradition and Talent," New York Herald Tribune: Book Week, 3, 52 (4 September 1966), 140.

<sup>67</sup>The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 331.



BRENDA DANET

## Speaking of Watergate: Language and Moral Accountability

In the December 3, 1973 issue of Newsweek, there was a report on an intriguing, though minor incident during the era of Watergate, the so-called "Slap-Tap Flap." The story began:

The floodlights were blinding on the edge of the Orlando, Fla. airstrip, and as he walked toward Air Force One, President Nixon had to squint when he reached into the darkness to shake hands with well-wishers. "Hello," he said to a 7-year-old boy and the shadowy figure of an adult at his side. "Are you this boy's mother or grandmother?" With understandable bewilderment, burly Master Sgt. Edward Kleizo of McCoy Air Force Base replied, "Neither." Mr. Nixon craned his neck for a closer look and remarked, "Of course not." Then the President slapped the sergeant's face.

It was not much of a slap. Photographs taken moments later show Kleizo smiling broadly, and afterwards assistant Presidential press secretary Gerald Warren tried to persuade reporters to describe the gesture--if at all--as a "tap" or a "pat."

This "story" was at first suppressed. Two reporters had seen the incident, and decided that Nixon had indeed slapped the man, but held back on reporting it because of controversy over Nixon's mental condition at the time. Later, other reporters heard about it, re-enacted the incident, and interviewed the "victim." Various versions contended that the President "soundly slapped" the man, that it was a "light slap," and so

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[Centrum, 4:2 (Fall 1976), pp. 105-38.]

on. Only Gerald Warren insisted on "tap" or "pat."

Which was it? Is there any objective to determine what happened? Apparently, the answer is no. Even if we had a film clip of the incident available, there would probably be ambiguities and disagreements about the interpretation. Some would talk of the influence of camera angles. Others would focus on what they thought might have been the influence of the blinding floodlights, and so on. This small incident strikingly illustrates that the work of reporters, and indeed, of anyone who gives an account of human actions--whether his own or others'--is a good deal more complex than we might think, and that the "fit of words to deeds" is highly problematic.

This article will explore three themes all having to do with the "fit of words to deeds," or, put another way, with the relation between language and moral accountability. The discussion of all three themes will draw on materials from and about Watergate, yet the issues raised are of general theoretical importance and have implications which go well beyond Watergate.<sup>1</sup> First, the focus will be on the nature of accounts and accountability. Just what does it mean to give an account of something, especially when that something is a human action? What can be said about the relation between telling what happened, and telling why it happened? When do we give reasons for our actions, and what types of reasons are there? What kinds of reasons did those involved in Watergate attempt to use, in order to get off the hook?

Second, how do we go about "fitting words to deeds" when the deeds are verbal? Very often, we convey our intentions to others in a very indirect way. Instead of asking directly for a glass of water, we might say something like "I'm thirsty." But we might also say this when we didn't mean it as a hint or request for a drink at all. The publication of the White House transcripts made this seldom-observed phenomenon a matter of household discussion during the era of Watergate.

Third, many people have commented broadly on the corruption of language by those involved in Watergate, but few have taken the trouble to be specific about the abuses of language involved. The features of Watergate Talk were not unique to Watergate. Rather, they were symptomatic of a general trend in the decline of public language. In order to better combat this trend, and to educate the public to be aware of the misuses of language in the future, we need to identify and make explicit the symptoms. The third part of this article, then, will attempt to specify as precisely as possible the

features of Watergate Talk.

I. Accounting for Watergate

It goes without saying that the Watergate hearings, the House Judiciary Committee impeachment hearings, and the various trials of the Watergate defendants were all part of a general process by which those involved were called to account for their behavior. While there is strong public consensus that Watergate was a major political scandal, perhaps the most important such scandal in American history (and I do not mean to contest that view), from the sociological viewpoint it may also be viewed quite differently, as an unusual instance of a very ordinary everyday phenomenon.

Whenever untoward, strange events occur, or when people engage in deviant or unexpected behavior, they are called upon to give an account of what they did and why. The phrase "language and moral accountability" is meant to suggest, first of all, that the ability of individuals to give an account of their actions, in words, is essential to the ongoing negotiation or processing of social order. When things go more or less as expected, there is no need to talk about actions, but when the taken-for-granted breaks down, and especially when people are perceived to have violated a social rule, they are "called on the carpet," and usually then try "to get off the hook." This is as true of events on a grand scale such as those comprising the labyrinth of Watergate as of everyday minor offenses like being late to an appointment or breaking a dish. When the offense is relatively minor, it is often enough to say "I'm sorry." As the seriousness of the event increases, it becomes more likely that more extended explanations will be expected and given, including the reasons why something happened (e.g., "I was held up in traffic;" "The dish slipped from my hand.")

Returning now to the incident of the Nixon slap, we can see that its very untowardness is what attracted attention. In fact, the reporter who wrote the account for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch explicitly said so: "I wrote about it because it was a legitimate news story. I evaluated it as uncommon behavior on the part of the President of the United States." On closer examination, describing the act cannot easily be separated from its interpretation, although these should be two quite different issues. Consider the choice of a verb to describe Nixon's act. In order to decide which verb best characterizes this incident, the observer must make inferences not only about the act involved, but about what preceded it, and about what followed. That is, he must infer something

both about the motive for the act, and its consequences. In short, the choice of "slap" or "tap" is not a neutral act at all. "Slap" implies a negative motive and consequence--Nixon wanted to hurt the man, and the blow actually hurt--while "tap" suggests a much more neutral, if not positive, interpretation of the act. "Touch" might seem to be a more neutral choice than either of these verbs in this context, yet it too would raise questions: Since when do Presidents go around touching strangers on the face? Why did Nixon touch the man?

Trivial as this incident was with respect to Watergate, it is a jarring reminder that description, explanation, and justification of human actions are inextricably bound up together. What counts as describing, explaining or justifying is problematic, and what will be honored or accepted as an adequate account of an action depends on such factors as the context in which it was elicited, the nature and perceived seriousness of the act or acts involved, and the relationships between those offering and eliciting the account, especially the relative power of the participants.

A check of the definitions of "account" in the dictionary provides interesting confirmation of this point. The Random House Dictionary offers eleven different meanings of the word, which cluster into four groups, and only one of which stays close to the original meaning of--literally--"to count." In one sense, "account" can mean "a description of events, a narrative." In another sense, to give an account is to "explain" one's action; or to give reasons for an action. A fourth cluster of meanings revolves around the notion of estimation, evaluation or judgment. The dictionary, in fact, provides a kind of folk documentation in ordinary language, of the problems of separating description from explanation, and explanation from justification. The definition of "accountable" is particularly telling: "subject to having to report, explain or justify; responsible; answerable."

When do we give reasons for our actions? In an essay entitled "Reasons and Causes," Stephen Toulmin has distinguished between three types of situations in which it makes sense to speak of reasons for human actions.<sup>2</sup> In the first case, the kind illustrated by Watergate, we give reasons in order to justify or excuse some alleged wrongdoing. Second, in some cases, we give reasons simply to signal our intentions, to make them intelligible. For instance, when asked why I'm putting on my coat, I can answer that I'm going out to buy milk. Here, the motive for the question is merely curiosity about what is puzzling, as in questions about the natural world, not outrage at wrongdoing. A third category is what Toulmin calls "giving reasons as classifying or redescribing." In such

cases, it is enough to describe the act, to say what one is doing, to answer the other's question to his satisfaction. Suppose that you are from another culture where knitting is unknown and you are a visitor to the United States. You see a woman doing what we conventionally call "knitting." You ask her, "Why are you playing with those sticks and that string?" She replies, "Why, I'm knitting." For a member of the culture at least, simply to label the act is to make it intelligible, to provide grounds for the action. Thus, to study accounts of Watergate, or of any untoward actions, we must pay attention not only to the reasons that people offer to get themselves off the hook, but to the very words they, and others, use to describe or typify their acts.

The Oxford philosopher of language, J. L. Austin, distinguishes between two basic types of reasons to get oneself off the hook: justifications and excuses.<sup>3</sup> In everyday conversation we sometimes use these terms interchangeably, but they are not identical. As Austin suggests, a justification acknowledges that the act in question occurred and that the person accused of performing it was responsible for it, but denies the pejorative quality of the act. Rather it neutralizes the act, or transforms it into something positive, typically claiming that some higher good was served by it. An obvious example from Watergate was John Erlichman's justification of the Ellsberg break-in in the name of national security. Herbert Kalmbach's claim that the payments to the Watergate defendants were "for humanitarian purposes" is of the same type. John Mitchell testified to Senator Talmadge during the Watergate hearings that he failed to report to the President all the wrongdoing he had "discovered" in order not to jeopardize Nixon's re-election. In other words, the goal of getting Richard Nixon re-elected justified an attitude of laxness with respect to wrongdoing.

Excuses work differently from justifications. An excuse admits the pejorative quality of the offense but denies responsibility for it, usually invoking extenuating circumstances of some kind, or external forces in the physical world. Thus, to claim that one is late to an appointment because of heavy traffic is to put the blame on circumstances over which one had no control. John Erlichman's characterization of Hunt and Liddy's role in the Ellsberg break-in as a "mistake" seeks to excuse their behavior, on the grounds that their faculties as professionals on the job were "not operating." We don't usually send people to jail for mistakes; we only give them a "chewing out" and tell them to do better next time.

Claims of extenuating circumstances like wet streets in

an accident were not generally available to Watergate defendants. But there is another general category of claims which they often used as excuses: the invocation of an obligation of some sort, which prevented them from doing the expected thing. The junior witnesses at the Watergate hearings--in age or rank--could claim that they were obliged to obey the orders of superiors, or to comply with the expectations of peers. Herbert "Bart" Porter testified to Senator Baker that despite reservations about the propriety of the activities funded by the Committee to Re-elect the President, he never openly objected, "probably because of the fear of group pressure that would ensue, of not being a team player." Many talked of "going along with the game plan." Bernard Barker declared in all sincerity, "I was not there to think, I was there to follow orders." And his superior, Howard Hunt, used much the same reasoning. Asked by Senator Talmadge why a man of his fine background engaged in illegal activities, he replied that his "twenty-six year record of service to this country predisposed me to accept orders and instructions really without question and without debate." Robert Mardian accounted for his failure to report his knowledge of wrongdoing by invoking the obligation of attorney-client privilege:

. . . it was as a lawyer, not a political associate, that those persons confided in me . . . it was as a lawyer and not as a political protégé that I agreed to maintain the fiduciary obligation not to disclose that which was confided in me . . . every lawyer must, under our adversary system of criminal justice . . . respect the confidence of his client until waived by the client.

James McCord's explanation for his participation in the Watergate break-in gave still another reason:

. . . one of the basic motivations was the fact that this man, the Attorney General, had approved it in his offices over a series of meetings in which he obviously had given careful consideration to it, while he was the top legal officer of the U. S. Government, and that the counsel to the President had sat in with him during such discussions; the fact that I was advised that it was within the Attorney General's purview and authority to authorize such operations if it were in the national interest to do so.

In essence, this is to claim that one was mised, given false information. This type of reasoning again seeks to excuse the ostensible offender from wrongdoing, on the grounds that he cannot be held responsible for acts committed under false pre-mises.

In general, accounts which incorporate excuses seem to be more available to persons of relatively low rank in a hierarchy, while persons of high rank tend to absolve themselves more often through various justifications. Notice, however, that the clean analytical distinction between justifications and excuses drawn by Austin does not always hold up very well. Empirically, there are many instances where the reasons given for an act seem to fall somewhere in between. What of the claim that "the Democrats do dirty tricks too," for example? Or Jeb Magruder's claim that White House espionage activities were all right since supposedly moral men like his ethics teacher, William Sloane Coffin, engaged in illegal acts too? In a sense neither of these is a justification, nor an excuse. Rather, they reject the validity of the accusation of wrongdoing. Examined more closely, appeals to various types of obligation also waver between justifications and excuses. Insofar as they appeal to an obligation to do some higher good, or claim that some goal takes precedence over the norm in question, they border on justification. But insofar as such appeals are meant to highlight one's own lack of responsibility for the act, they are excuses.

To sum up the argument so far, being account-able for one's conduct means being responsible not only for the propriety of that conduct, but literally for being able to talk about one's actions, on demand, in order to make them intelligible to others, and to allay the tension created by the untoward. The word "moral" in the phrase "moral accountability" is meant to cover a wide spectrum of social situations, both personal and public, and of offenses great and small, in which the criteria for the assessment of responsibility for wrongdoing may be legal, bureaucratic, political, ethical, or simply those of good taste or custom. I use the word "moral" not in the narrow conventional sense but in that used by Louch, who suggests that to assess the grounds for an action is to view that action morally.<sup>4</sup>

Analytically, then, Watergate was an extraordinary instance of a very ordinary phenomenon. Minor offenses like tripping someone by accident, being late to an appointment or breaking a dish, usually provoke accounts in which, to use Erving Goffman's phrase, "Justice is summary."<sup>5</sup> Accusation, account, and response are over in a flash. In contrast, offenses perceived as of great seriousness call for full-scale accounting procedures, usually

in the courts. So great were the tension and ambiguity created by Watergate that conventional processing of ostensible wrongdoing through the courts did not suffice. The Watergate hearings were probably the most public account-eliciting event ever held in history. An estimated 80,000,000 people watched them. That the senators were not always skillful interrogators, as some lawyers have commented, was secondary to what sociologists would call the ritual and public display of deviance. From the viewpoint of society as a whole, accounts of imputed wrongdoing function as a means to restore social order. From the viewpoint of the individual, a person offering an account is engaging in what Goffman calls a "remedial interchange," in order to restore the self, or at least to make the claim of moral worth.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Accountability and Indirection in Speech

Till now, the discussion has focused on talk about wrongdoing, and some general problems of "fitting words to deeds." I turn now to a second, more specific theme: that of indirection in speech and accountability. Think how many of the events of everyday life are in fact things people say. The New York Times typically features stories on its front page in which what someone said is central: Henry Kissinger "declared today," or President Ford "warned" of something, or the Shah "invited" someone to visit, etc. Very often, then, the acts that "count" in society are verbal acts. Now, if talk is itself a form of action, it follows that some kinds of talk may themselves be untoward, undesirable, worthy of criticism in some way, even evidence of wrongdoing. One such kind of talk has to do with indirection in speech.

### A. The Prominence of Indirection in Conversation

One of the most intriguing things about how language is actually used in the world is the fact that we seldom say what we mean. Instead, we convey our intent indirectly. Think of all the possible ways to get someone to open a window. We can say, "Open the window, please," or we can ask, "Would you mind opening the window?" or, "Can you open the window?" Still another possibility is to state, "I'd like you to open the window," or, even more indirectly, to hint with "I'm hot." The first example is in the imperative; the second and third are interrogatives; the last two are in the declarative. What is apparent from these examples is that there is little correlation between the conventional grammatical classification of an utterance and the function of that utterance in conversation. Common sense would suggest that declaratives are for making assertions, interrogatives for asking questions, and imperatives

for conveying orders and requests. Yet the above examples make it clear that this is not so.

If all of these forms can convey roughly the same thing, why does a speaker choose one rather than another? Stimulated by the seminal work of J. L. Austin on speech acts, a growing number of philosophers of language, linguists, and sociolinguists are now addressing this question. New work on orders and requests is beginning to identify all the possible forms or strategies one can use, and to explore what factors account for the effectiveness and choice of indirect forms in various social situations.<sup>7</sup>

There are many possible reasons for choosing an indirect form to convey an order or request. One is to be polite. For a superior to say to a subordinate "Could you type this by tomorrow?" is to mask the authority understood by both to lie behind the utterance. The surface of the form, called by Fraser a "requestion,"<sup>8</sup> allows two possible interpretations, one as a genuine request for information, and the other as a request to go ahead and do something. The utterance leaves it to the hearer to take some of the responsibility for the interpretation of the utterance; it gives the illusion that the hearer has a choice.

Another reason to convey an order or request indirectly may be to leave one's options open. For example, a person who wants the window opened but is not sure that the hearer will be willing to carry out his request, might choose a totally indirect hint like "It's hot in here." If the hearer ignores the utterance, the speaker has saved face, he does not have to deal with the fact that his request was refused.<sup>9</sup>

There are other motives for choosing indirect forms, though only one other is of interest here. That is, the use of indirect forms to avoid accountability for wrongdoing. Work done to date on the language of orders and requests has generally dealt with "benign" situations, like getting someone to open a window, close a door, or wash the floor. What about the language of orders to destroy evidence, pay blackmail, murder a member of another Mafia family? Here, Watergate provides some fascinating but highly equivocal data.

#### B. Indirection and "Deniability" in the Nixon Administration

The extraordinary publication of the White House transcripts of conversations between Richard Nixon and his staff made the interpretation of intention from overt strings of words a national obsession. Some thought the transcripts were overwhelmingly

damaging; others failed to see what was called "the smoking pistol." An article by David E. Rosenbaum in the May 22, 1974 edition of the New York Times addressed itself explicitly to this issue. Analyzing ambiguities in the critical March 21, 1973 meeting between Nixon, Dean and Haldeman, Rosenbaum cited Nixon's statement, "We have to keep the cap on the bottle that much, or we don't have any options." Rosenbaum asked: "Was the statement about keeping 'the cap on the bottle' in the nature of a directive or an offhand remark?" In short, was this an order to pay \$120,000 in blackmail to Howard Hunt?

Similarly, in his book, Jeb Stuart Magruder reminded us of an analogous and amusing incident.<sup>10</sup> One day Gordon Liddy was in his office, and as the meeting ended, Magruder was grumbling about some columns Jack Anderson had been writing. He commented, "Boy, it'd be nice if we could get rid of that guy." Liddy left and soon afterward Magruder's assistant, Robert Reisner, burst into the office to ask in horror: "Did you tell Liddy to kill Jack Anderson?" Also in Magruder's book is a brief conversation between Gordon Strachan and himself:

Magruder     I assume you're not going to have any documents in your files that would cause us a problem.

Strachan     We won't. I assume you won't either.

Early in the cover-up Magruder addressed the following question to Mitchell:

Magruder     I have the Gemstone file . . . What do you want me to do with it?

Mitchell     Maybe you ought to have a little fire at your house tonight.

Note that Mitchell's reply is in the declarative mode, like the utterances in the other examples, all of which appear to convey an order. Here, however, the intent is more explicit than in the other declaratives because of the word "ought." A famous example from another era in history used the interrogative: King Henry II of England, having become disenchanted with Thomas Becket, is reputed to have said in the presence of his barons, "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" Or, in another version, "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" It is reported in many history books that following this utterance, the barons indeed went out and murdered Becket. Yet the evidence of Henry's own culpability for the murder of Becket is equivocal, to say the least.

In the controversial March 21 meeting between Nixon and John Dean, in which Nixon is supposed to have discussed payoffs to Howard Hunt, Nixon rarely used the imperative. In a total of 316 turns to talk (according to the Dell edition of the transcripts), there were only thirteen imperatives. Examined more closely, nearly all of these were trivial, e.g., "Sit down, sit down" to Dean as he entered the room, or "Go ahead" to keep him talking. Of the two which function as true directives for action, one is clear without context: "See if we can't get someone inspired to put that out." Here is the other, more damaging one, which requires a context in order to be interpreted:

- P. That's why for your immediate things you have no choice but to come up with the \$120,000, or whatever it is, right?
- D. That's right.
- P. Would you agree that that's the prime thing that you damn well better get that done?
- D. Obviously he ought to be given at least some signal anyway.
- P. (expletive deleted) Get it . . . (italics supplied).

The referent of "it" is obviously the money.

Most of Nixon's remarks which could be construed to convey orders or requests related to the cover-up are not in the imperative at all. For instance:

- (1) I would certainly keep that cover for whatever it is worth.
- (2) Let me say that there shouldn't be a lot of people running around getting money.
- (3) Buā should just say it was a question of national security, and I was not in a position to divulge it. Anyway, let's don't go beyond that.<sup>11</sup>

It is fascinating to contrast the March 21 meeting with the "smoking pistol" conversations between Nixon and Haldeman on June 23. There were three such conversations, which together

contained a total of 174 turns-to-talk for Nixon.<sup>12</sup> Tallying up the total number of imperatives produces strikingly different results from the March 21 meeting. There was a total of 32 imperatives, as opposed to only 13 on March 21 (the contrast is even greater when computed as a proportion of all turns-to-talk). More interesting is the change in the distribution of true directives versus the more trivial uses. There were 28 true directives ("call him;" "tell him;" "get copies;" "find out;" "put the word out;" etc.), and only four other uses of the imperative ("buck up;" "go ahead;" etc.). If we calculate the ratio of true directives to turns-to-talk for March 21 versus June 23, it turns out that Nixon was nearly twenty-seven times more likely to give orders explicitly on June 23! But in only one passage do we find two imperatives related to Watergate:

- H. The F.B.I. interviewed Colson yesterday. They determined that would be a good thing to do. To have him take an interrogation, which he did, and that--the F.B.I. guys working the case concluded that there were one or two possibilities--one, that this is a White House--they don't think that there is anything of the election committee--they think it was either a White House operation and they had some obscure reasons for it--nonpolitical or was it a Cuban and the C.I.A. And after their interrogation of Colson yesterday, they concluded it was not the White House, but are now convinced it is a C.I.A. thing, so the C.I.A. turnoff would--
- P. Well, not sure of their analysis, I'm not going to get that involved. I'm (unintelligible).
- H. No, sir, we don't want you to.
- P. You call them in.
- H. Good deal.
- P. Play it tough. That's the way they play it and that's the way we are going to play it.

The referent of "them" in "You call them in" is apparently the F.B.I.

Even in the "smoking pistol" conversation of June 23,

Nixon hardly discussed Watergate at all. As some will recall, he talked about much less significant things, his book, the activities of his family, having pictures taken. It was mainly in connection with such topics that he used imperatives. When Watergate was discussed, he more often seemed merely to approve the suggestions that Haldeman made.

In short, there is great ambiguity about what was communicated in these conversations, as there may well be to a third-party observer of any relatively unstructured conversation. Yet the country became convinced of Nixon's guilt, in large part from interpreting these very transcripts. Most of us are convinced that Nixon did convey orders to continue the cover-up, that he was an active participant in it, yet this examination of the transcripts shows how hard it would be to prove from them alone that he gave orders to commit illegal acts.

The theoretical problem raised by this phenomenon of indirection in the giving of orders should now be obvious: indirection can mask accountability for wrongdoing. A "safe" way to give an illegal order is to convey it indirectly. To use the Nixon administration's own word for it, indirection gives the speaker "deniability," which means, roughly, "the ability to get someone to do something in such a way that you can later deny having told him to do it." That is, the speaker can claim that the addressee misunderstood his intention, as Liddy actually did in the incident about Jack Anderson.

How often is the declarative or interrogative form of order-giving consciously preferred to the imperative form, so as to mask responsibility for the act ordered? Probably rarely. In Nixon's case, does the lack of imperatives when talking about Watergate betray a waning of his power and self-confidence, or is it evidence of an effort to hide what he is doing? Was this his usual way of giving orders? Or did he switch to more indirect forms because he was losing control of the situation?<sup>13</sup>

The problem of accountability is by no means specific to Watergate. We all deal with it willy-nilly in everyday life, but how does the law provide for it? To put it crudely, a person can go to jail for utterances which a court believes to be evidence of criminal behavior.<sup>14</sup> How do lawyers, judges and juries make decisions in such cases? Or, more precisely, what methods of proof does the legal process provide to handle problems of ambiguity in the speech of ostensible offenders?<sup>15</sup>

### III. The Eight Deadly Sins of Watergate Talk<sup>16</sup>

Indirection is a much less obvious aspect of the theme of accountability for patterns of speech than are some other features of the talk of those involved in Watergate. For brevity's sake, I will call these features "Watergate Talk." In recent years, there is a growing outcry against the decline of public language, and the prominence of "double speak" or "doublethink"--in talk about the war in Vietnam, in Washington bureaucratese, in the world of advertising, in academic parlance, in politics. We hear of "misuses of language," of the "corruption" of language, of "linguistic pollution," and of course, of lying and deception. Edwin Newman's book, Strictly Speaking, is sub-titled "Will America Be the Death of English?"<sup>17</sup> The corruption of language may have reached new heights in the speech of those involved in Watergate.

Recall the uncannily prophetic words of George Orwell in his classic essay, "Politics and the English Language," first published in 1946:

In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible . . . political language has to consist largely of euphemisms, question-begging, and sheer cloudy vagueness.

The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms . . . politics . . . is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer . . . But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.

Political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.<sup>18</sup>

#### A. Euphemisms

The first deadly sin of Watergate Talk was its use of Euphemisms, like "deep six," "black advance," "political intelligence capability," "stroking," "laundering," "stonewalling," "covert entry," and so on. Euphemisms are generally terms which minimize or mask the unpleasantness of something.<sup>19</sup> When there is public consensus on the term for something, as

in the currency of "rest room" for "bath room" (even the latter is really a euphemism), the question of individual or group accountability does not arise. But when a sub-group of society, especially one that wields great power, uses terms like those mentioned above, we should ask what is going on. Are these terms merely their habitual way of referring to things, or are they a way to whitewash, to members of the group as well as to the rest of us, the activities engaged in? Obviously, it is a great deal more pleasant and manageable to talk "deep sixing" than of "destroying evidency by dropping into the river."

#### B. Verbal Bloat

A second "sin" of Watergate Talk is Verbal Bloat, which has many manifestations. It includes such phenomena as using long words when short words will do, using Latin rather than Anglo-Saxon words, sheer verbosity is also part of it--taking many words to say something which could be said more simply in a few words. Related to this is redundancy, saying the same thing over and over in different ways, or even in the same way. Still another aspect of Verbal Bloat is complicated syntax. The Watergate hearings were full of examples of Verbal Bloat. John Mitchell always spoke of a "subject matter," and never a "subject," in his testimony. Nixon's men never simply "discussed;" rather, they "explored the parameters" of some issue. Witnesses always "indicated," never simply "said" or "told," never admitted they couldn't "remember," but claimed "I do not recall," "I cannot recollect," or, better yet, "My best recollection is. . ."

Nowhere is Verbal Bloat better illustrated than in the testimony of John Erlichman during the Watergate hearings.<sup>20</sup> Look now at what he had to say about the Ellsberg break-in. Senator Lowell Weicker asks him to explain why on one occasion he praised the break-in as a "proper enterprise . . . done in the name of national security," and on another he seemed to condemn it, saying that Hunt and Liddy "didn't exercise good judgment." Erlichman replies:

Sir, I've said just this afternoon essentially the same thing that you've just read. Uh I (pause) had not contemplated this break-in. It was a surprise to me. I felt that it was a mistake. I asked these people to be brought back, and I think not not 30 minutes ago I said so here. At the same time, taken as part of a chain, uh, referring now to the activities of the special unit, and going to the question which the chairman and Mr. Wilson were talking

about this morning, I don't think there's any question about the legal foundation which exists for an activity of this kind. I'm . . . I am the the sort of person who doesn't like surprises, and when I understand that an investigation is under way, uh certainly an event of this kind takes me aback, and it took me aback.

First of all, what a lot of words! What is Erlichman really saying? One proposition is that the break-in surprised him. But notice how many times he says it: (1) "I had not contemplated this break-in;" (2) "It was a surprise to me;" (3) "I'm the sort of person who doesn't like surprises;" (4) "an event of this kind takes me aback;" (5) "it took me aback." And isn't it rather ponderous to use "contemplated" in this context? As for tortuous syntax, there are four clauses in the second sentence of Erlichman's answer before he ever gets to the point: (1) "at the same time;" (2) "taken as a part of . . . of a chain;" (3) "referring now to the activities of the special unit;" (4) "going to the question which the chairman and Mr. Wilson were talking about this morning." After all these words, Erlichman has added no new information; he has not answered the question at all. He has merely repeated Weicker's words, shuffling them around a bit.

### C. Evasiveness

Weicker has to ask Erlichman a second time, this time more sharply: "Are we either justifying the break-in or are we condemning the actions of Hunt and Liddy?" Erlichman's reply illustrates a third feature of Watergate talk, Evasiveness. One can be verbose without necessarily being evasive, but the two do tend to go together, as Orwell noted. Here is Erlichman's reply:

Well, . . . I think there are a couple of subjects there, and I think the way we got into all of this in in the first instance was as to whether or not I had a concern about the propriety, speaking of the legalities now, the propriety of this event a year later, at the time of the Watergate break-in, to the extent that I was willing to suborn to perjury or bribery or all these other things that had been charged. And my response to that was that I felt comfortable with the propriety from a constitutional and legal standpoint at the time of the of the Watergate break-in. And that had been my . . . that had been my conviction and conclusion for

some time. Now I . . . I didn't express disapproval to Mr. Krogh because I felt uh some technical illegality had occurred. I felt that it showed bad judgment, it was a surprise, it was not anything that had been contemplated or approved, and I felt that those fellas ought to be brought back.

Once again we have a verbal barrage, with lots of redundancy, and it takes considerable stamina to sort things out and see what Erlichman is up to. Here he uses another tactic to evade the question: he ignores it and instead answers another question, that was not asked. The "question" he answers is "When did you first think about the legality of the Ellsberg break-in?" His "answer" is that he first thought about it at the time of the Watergate break-in. Notice, by the way, how damaging an admission this is--only when the danger of public disclosure was imminent did he think about the legality of the Ellsberg break-in! Realizing his mistake, he hastens to add, "that had been my . . . conviction and conclusion for some time."<sup>21</sup> Beyond this, he merely repeats the various statements about the break-in that he had made in the previous answer. It is as if the various statements are written on a fan, and every time he is asked about the break-in he unfurls the fan.

Erlichman evades Weicker's next question using a different tactic: he takes advantage of the grammatical awkwardness of the question.

Weicker. So your disapproval was on the basis of you were surprised.

Erlichman. I certainly was.

Erlichman knows perfectly well that the intent of the question is "Why were you surprised?" or "Why did you disapprove?" But of course he can't answer "because they got caught." Pushed by Weicker to explain why he disapproved, he continues to repeat stock phrases like "judgment was not exercised" and "it was a mistake," yet refuses to come out and condemn Hunt and Liddy: "I'm in . . . a hard place to say that . . . they are to be fired or condemned, or something of this kind." What better example of Orwellian doublespeak could we wish for? By Erlichman's own words, he disapproves of the Ellsberg break-in, but doesn't condemn the actions of Hunt and Liddy.

#### D. Equivocation

If evasion means avoiding a question by talking about

something else, another tactic in Watergate talk is Equivocation. Here, one deals with the issue but talks in such a way that one's utterance can be given at least two possible interpretations, one of which the speaker knows to be true, while other possible interpretations left to the hearer get the speaker off the hook in some way. Once again Erlichman supplies us with many examples. Early in his interrogation of Erlichman, Senator Weicker had quoted his statement in an interview with Mike Wallace on television. Among other things, Erlichman had said "this whole investigation ought to be terminated with these people." Which investigation is he talking about--the investigation of Daniel Ellsberg by the "special unit," or the investigation of the break-in by others? And what does he mean by the addition of "these people" to the utterance? Should the association of Hunt and Liddy with the project have been terminated, because they were about to "botch the job?" Or should the authorities investigating the Ellsberg break-in terminate their investigation with Hunt and Liddy, and go no higher in looking for the person responsible? Or does he mean that the investigation of the break-in ought to be terminated because it was a trivial incident?

#### E. Hedges

A characteristic of Watergate Talk closely related to evasiveness and equivocation is the use of verbal Hedges of various sorts. The Random House Dictionary defines the verb "to hedge" as "to protect with qualifications that allow for unstated contingencies or for withdrawal from commitment," or "to avoid a rigid commitment by qualifying or modifying a position so as to permit withdrawal; allow for escape or retreat." The repeated use by Watergate witnesses of clichés like "at that point in time" and "time frame" provided a convenient hedge around the content of their testimony. Such hedges imply something like "What I am saying is true for the exact moment I am talking about, but I am not responsible for the moment that preceded or followed it."<sup>22</sup>

Erlichman's testimony on the Ellsberg break-in contains several illustrations of his peculiar talent for hedging. Asked by Senator Weicker, who has begun to "zero in" on him, if he believed that the break-in was "embarrassing," he replies, "Well, it certainly was potentially . . . embarrassing. . . ." The addition of the word "potentially" allows him to avoid admitting whether it was embarrassing or not. Only in the future, at some unspecified time or in some hypothetical circumstance, might it be construed to be embarrassing. Another time, he says, "If the thing had been presented to me in the terms that it occurred, and I had been asked for approval or disapproval, I would have disapproved it." Notice that the

phrase "in the terms that it occurred" saves him from having to say just what did happen--that they got caught!

While the use of such hedges is probably intentional, another kind of hedge used by Erlichman is probably unintentional, and in fact "gives him away." The sequence of questioning quoted here contains six questions and answers. Erlichman begins the answers to four of the six questions with the hedge "well. . . ." We use "well" sometimes just to gain time to collect our thoughts, but it is quite likely that "well" here gives away Erlichman's acknowledgement of the insufficiency of his answers.<sup>23</sup> In cases where we are asked a question and we believe it would take two hours to give a good answer but we only have three minutes, we might also start with "well." Here too, we would be signalling insufficiency, but without intent to evade the question. Given all the other evidence of Erlichman's behavior during this sequence of testimony, it seems reasonable to interpret these "well's" as evidence of his evasiveness.

#### F. Lies

Among the worst of the eight deadly sins of Watergate Talk most people would probably cite Lies. The release of additional Presidential transcripts at the cover-up trial of Haldeman, Erlichman, Mitchell and the others made crystal-clear the extent to which Nixon and his associates lied to the press and the public, as well as to members of Congress. Not only was Watergate Talk full of lies, but it was a rhetoric in which it was nearly impossible to talk about the truth. As many have noted, Ronald Ziegler, Nixon's press secretary, reconciled conflicts between current and previous statements by claiming that the previous ones were simply "no longer operative," literally, not "in force." And he was known to claim that the President "misspoke himself." I mentioned earlier the concept of "deniability," perfected if not invented by the Nixon administration. And even in the President's confession to the nation on August 5, 1974, he could only say that the taped conversations are "at variance with certain of my previous statements." This neutralization of the issue of truth is dramatically like that of the Party in Orwell's 1984. Winston, Orwell's hero, reads surreptitiously in the book of Party ideology:

By far the more important reason for the readjustment of the past is the need to safeguard the infallibility of the Party . . . to change one's mind, or even one's policy, is a confession of weakness . . . and if the

facts say otherwise, then the facts must be altered. . . . Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them . . . the essential act of the Party is to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty.

Compare this with a sequence from an interview with John Dean, published in Playboy:

- Dean . . . last summer I reread 1984 and after several years at the Nixon White House, it made fascinating, almost frightening reading.
- Playboy Do you see parallels?
- Dean The whole thing, including doublethink. If something was said yesterday, you could put out a new statement today that would completely change it.
- Playboy You mean "render it inoperative."
- Dean Exactly. I'm surprised Orwell didn't use that phrase. Anyway, when you picked up the newspaper in the morning and read the new cover story that had replaced yesterday's cover story, you began to believe that today's news was the truth. This process created an atmosphere of unreality in the White House that prevailed to the very end.
- Playboy You mean those who made up the stories were believing their own lies?
- Dean That's right. If you said it often enough, it would become true.

#### G. Amoral Use of Moral Words<sup>24</sup>

The seventh deadly sin of Watergate Talk was its blatant Amorality. Just as Watergate people removed issues of truth from discourse, they also carved away all consideration of right and wrong. Earlier, I suggested that we take the word "moral" to mean "evaluative," that to look at behavior morally is to examine the grounds for actions; among those grounds are

those we conventionally call "moral" or "ethical." If we examine closely the way Watergate people use words for the evaluation of conduct, we can see clearly that the standards they use are those of political expediency or narrow legality. Three words that are often used to evaluate actions are "proper," "ought," and "wrong." When Watergate people use these words, they privatize and narrow their meanings.

The Random House Dictionary defines "proper" as "adapted or appropriate to the purpose or the circumstances; fit; suitable," or "conforming to established standards of behavior or manners; correct or decorous." Its synonyms are "befitting, becoming, decent, polite." Thus, a "proper" act is one which conforms to standards, usually the standards of good taste or social acceptability. Watergate people never mean this. John Erlichman testified that the Ellsberg break-in was a "proper" enterprise, but he meant only that it was legal or constitutional (see section C). For Weicker, on the other hand, "proper" is stretched to mean "ethical." Thus, he could ask Erlichman whether the break-in was indeed "proper," and Erlichman could answer "yes," with little awareness that they meant entirely different things.

In analyzing patterns of speech in the Watergate hearings, one is led to ask, inevitably, was this a "PR-job," a "scenario" "put out" for public consumption, or is this how they "really" talk, even in private? The publication of the White House transcripts gave us the unexpected opportunity to check. It turns out that in the March 21 meeting alone, variants of "proper" appear six times, and in every case the context shows that "proper" means either "legal" or "politically expedient." Consider the following excerpts:

Dean Petersen is a soldier . . . I don't think he has done anything improper, but he did make sure that the investigation was narrowed down to the very, very fine criminal thing which was a break for us. . . .

Dean The report that I got from Krogh was that he (Liddy) was a hell of a good man and not only that, a good lawyer and could set up a proper operation. . . .

Nixon Let me put it this way: let us suppose that you get the million bucks, and you get the proper way to handle it. You could hold that side? . . .

"Ought" is another word which classically belongs to the

domain of ethical discourse. Returning to Erlichman's testimony on the Ellsberg break-in, we again find an illustration. In his comments to Mike Wallace in the television interview quoted by Weicker, Erlichman had said; "this whole investigation ought to be terminated with these people . . . and that ought to be the end of it." On closer inspection this is the "ought" of "value," as opposed to the "ought" of "obligation."

Then there is Nixon's famous remark, "It would be wrong." The indictment of the principal figures in the Watergate cover-up trial included a direct quotation by H. R. Haldeman of Nixon's supposed utterance. "There is no problem in raising a million dollars. We can do that, but it would be wrong." The jury underlined the last five words, believing them to be an exact quotation, yet the actual transcript of the March 21 meeting--even the cleaned-up publicly released one--contains only the following:

Dean I am not sure that you will ever be able to deliver on the clemency (for Hunt). It may be just too hot.

Nixon You can't do it politically until after the '74 elections, that's for sure. Your point is that even then you couldn't do it.

Dean That's right. It may further involve you in a way you should not be involved in this.

Nixon No--it is wrong, that's for sure.

At the very least, the meaning of "wrong" here is ambiguous, equivocal; by now only the naive would believe that the reference is simply to the ethics of granting clemency. In short, we have in this use of language the veneer of moral sensibility, but only the veneer. The vocabulary of ethical discourse appears rarely, and when it does, more often than not, its meanings are narrowed to exclude ethical issues from consideration.

#### H. Depersonalization of the Vocabulary of Decision-making

The eighth deadly sin of Watergate talk was its way of talking about acts and decisions about acts as if there is no one there to stand up and say "I did it." Watergate people talk as if institutions and organizations, or even real estate,<sup>25</sup> make decisions, not individual people, responsible for their acts. We were told that decisions emanated "from the Oval

Office," or the "White House," not Mr. Nixon. John Dean described himself as a mere "conduit" for the flow of information, a person who "followed a channel of reporting." Nixon sought to "protect the Presidency," not the President, and so on. A related phenomenon is the use of the passive voice to hide or play down the agents of action. Thus, Erlichman said that the Ellsberg break-in "was not anything that had been contemplated." Who did the contemplating? Or rather the non-contemplating? The use of the passive literally removes the agent of the act of planning the break-in from view! In his six answers to Weicker's questions about the Ellsberg break-in, Erlichman used a total of 71 verbs of which 13 were in the passive mode.<sup>26</sup>

These, then, are the eight deadly sins of Watergate Talk: EUPHEMISMS, VERBAL BLOAT, EVASIVENESS, EQUIVOCATION, HEDGES, LIES, AMORAL USE OF MORAL WORDS, DEPERSONALIZATION OF THE VOCABULARY OF DECISION-MAKING. However reprehensible these characteristics may be in themselves, what is important to stress is their consequences. The corrupt language of Watergate, so full of circumlocutions and linguistic and ethical shabbiness, made it difficult for anyone to discuss or ascribe personal responsibility for wrongdoing. Richard Gambino has rightly asked, "Could it be that so much outrageous conduct occurred at least in part because too many minds functioned through a language which extracted personal responsibility from consideration?"<sup>27</sup> Many will quickly respond, "But they didn't get away with it; they got caught!" True, unlike the world of Orwell's 1984, in real life Big Brother did not prevail, the veil of impermeability was torn away, and the offenders were convicted for their crimes (all but Big Brother himself). But how dependent on pure chance it all was. If not for the discovery of the taped doors at the Watergate complex and Alexander Butterfield's startling revelation of the existence of the White House tapes, they might well have gotten away with it. The public and the authorities saw through the cloud of language only once that language was made public.

The high drama of Watergate has already dimmed; its cast of characters has begun to fade into the shadows, and preoccupation with who did what and why is fast disappearing. But language as the vehicle of public communication may never be the same again. The linguistic habits of Watergate Talk may live on, long after Watergate is forgotten. It is important, then, to ask once again the classic question: what is the relation between language and thought? Are words merely a mirror of thought, a convenient way of referring to, or talking about something? Or do words have consequences for action? Can they make it easier to engage in reprehensible acts? At least under certain circumstances they can, as many have noted of the Nazis'

terms for the slaughter of the Jews: "final solution," "evacuation," "special treatment," "extermination," or "liquidation," instead of "killing." Shoddy language not only deceives others; it fosters deception of the self. The bureaucratization of evil is inextricably bound up with the corruption of language.<sup>28</sup>

Some of these points about the corruption of language have been made before, but they are important enough to merit making them again. And the real need is not simply to get people to agree that truth in language is important, but to develop criteria to evaluate truth in language, to learn to use these criteria, and to teach children to use them. Political analysts, journalists, students of rhetoric, and the General Semanticists have long noted these needs, but professional linguists, of all people, have studiously avoided becoming involved. It is still true that most linguists are primarily concerned with language as an abstract code, and not with actual uses of language in the world.

Fortunately, there are signs that the seeds of change are developing, and that we can look forward to serious, systematic research and educational programs in the future. The 1972 address of the President of the Linguistic Society of America, Dwight Bolinger, was entitled "Truth is a Linguistic Question," and was an attempt to rally linguists to the task.<sup>29</sup> The National Council of Teachers of English has founded a Committee on Public Doublespeak. Its most recent achievement is the publication of Hugh Rank's collection of articles, Language and Public Policy, and of a companion volume, edited by Daniel Dieterich, on how to teach children to be critical of public language.<sup>30</sup> Publishers of textbooks for the schools are also producing volumes designed to train students in critical thinking.<sup>31</sup> Researchers and teachers in sociolinguistics promise to become involved. Unlike traditional linguistics, sociolinguistics is explicitly concerned with how language is used in the world.

Laudable as the task of developing criteria for the assessment of truth in language may be, it is fraught with difficulties. We must beware, for one thing, of swallowing whole-hog a thesis of linguistic determinism. For language does not control people; it is people who must control language. A second, more specific, problem is that there is no simple way to determine what is a euphemism.

How shall we decide when a word or phrase is a euphemism? Furthermore, how can we tell when a euphemism is used not because convention dictates it, but because those using

it are hiding or whitewashing their actions? Most of us would like to "call a spade a spade." We would probably claim, for instance, that the term "spying" is more honest than "political intelligence capability," and that--to take another example from the war in Vietnam--"bombing" is more honest than "protective reaction strike." The former are gerunds, the latter phrases nominal compounds, agglomerations of nouns. We experience "spying" and "bombing" as more direct because gerunds show us more transparently what action is involved.

But there are many euphemistic words and phrases which cannot be reduced to gerunds. Take "deep sixing" for example; a more honest rendering of the idea would take more, not fewer words ("destroying evidence of wrongdoing by dropping in the river").

In short, we must not confuse length of words and phrases, or grammatical features of linguistic forms, or Latin versus Anglo-Saxon origin of words, with values. When we talk of doors and windows, trees and stones, we rarely have difficulty agreeing on a neutral term to refer to these objects. But when we speak of human actions, values creep in at every turn. Moreover, today's euphemism is tomorrow's taboo word, and there are no fences around the meanings of words, which are in constant flux. Like clothes, language is subject to the vicissitudes of fashion and social preference. And we must beware of confusing esthetics, or an admiration of articulateness or eloquence, with judgments about truth in language. In a word, there is no objective way to determine the "true" or honest way to refer to something.

If the problem of euphemisms is especially difficult, some of the other features of Watergate Talk can more easily be corrected. When he was inaugurated, Gerald Ford promised us "just a little straight talk among friends." Of course liars can talk in short sentences too, and clear, honest language is no substitute for worthwhile goals and for intelligent decisions, but they do tend to go together. "Straight talk" is the opposite of Watergate Talk. People who talk "straight talk" try to use short, simple words and phrases, express their meaning clearly and directly, tell the truth, express a concern for right and wrong, and explicitly take responsibility for their words and their actions. The advice of J. L. Austin is as fresh as ever:

Words are our tools, and, as a minimum, we should use clean tools: we should know what we mean and what we do not, and we must

sets us. Secondly, words are not (except in their own little corner) facts or things; we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realize their inadequacies and arbitrariness, and can relook at the world without blinkers.<sup>31</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This paper is the product of the unexpected juxtaposition of the Watergate hearings with my stay as a post-doctoral fellow in sociolinguistics at Berkeley, supported by the Social Science Research Council and National Institute of Mental Health. The approach and ideas were strongly influenced by members of the Berkeley language group, among them Robin and George Lakoff, Susan Ervin-Tripp, Charles Fillmore, and most especially, John J. Gumperz, who was my mentor while there and who first urged me to become acquainted with speech act theory. I am indebted to Bruce Fraser and Michael Hancher, both of whom made useful comments and suggestions on various versions of the paper.

For the reader interested in source materials for research on the language of Watergate: I taperecorded about 15 hours of testimony from the Watergate hearings, directly from a television set. The full transcript of the hearings has since been published by the Government Printing Office (Hearings Before the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities of the United States Senate, Books I-X, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973). Both audio and videotapes of selected portions of the hearings may be rented from the Television News Archive of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Examples in the text from the White House transcripts were drawn from newspaper and magazine accounts and from The Presidential Transcripts (New York: Dell, 1974).

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Toulmin, "Reasons and Causes," in Robert Borger and Frank Cioffi, eds., Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 1-16.

<sup>3</sup>J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," in Philosophical Papers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 175-204.

<sup>4</sup>A. R. Louch, Explanation and Human Action (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

<sup>5</sup>Erving Goffman, Relations in Public (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

<sup>6</sup>Scott and Lyman have elaborated on the sociological functions of accounts. See Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman, "Accounts," in their Sociology of the Absurd (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 111-143, and "Accounts, Deviance and Social Order," in Jack D. Douglas, ed. Deviance and Respectability: the Social Construction of Moral Meanings (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 89-119.

<sup>7</sup>The two slim volumes produced by J. L. Austin before his untimely death have had a remarkable impact, as readers of this journal well know. See J. L. Austin, Philosophical Papers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) and How to Do Things with Words (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). Among the more recent work on indirect speech acts are David Gordon and George Lakoff, "Conversational Postulates," Papers of the Chicago Linguistics Society, VII (1971), 63-84; Robin Lakoff, "Language in Context," Language 48 (1972), 907-927, and "The Logic of Politeness: Or Minding Your P's and Q's," Papers of the Chicago Linguistics Society, IX (1973), 292-305; John R. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," in Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3, eds. J. Morgan and P. Cole (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 59-82; Susan Ervin-Tripp, "Wait For Me, Roller-Skate," in Child Discourse, eds. Claudia Mitchell Kernan and Susan Ervin-Tripp (New York: Academic Press, in press), and "Is Sybil There? The Structure of Some American English Directives," Language in Society, 5 (1976), 25-66; Bruce Fraser, "The Concept of Politeness," Proceedings of NWAIVE IV (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1975); "Conversational Mitigation" (1976, submitted for publication); "No Conversation without Misrepresentation: A Bicentennial Message" (1976, submitted for publication); and "Strategies of Requesting" (1976, ditto); J. Clark and P. Lucy, "Understanding What is Meant from What is Said: A Study in Conversationally-Conveyed Requests," Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 14 (1975), 56-72; Brenda Danet, Nicole C. Kermish, H. Jeffrey Rafn, and Deborah G. Stayman, "Language and the Construction of Reality in the Courtroom II: Toward an Ethnography of Questioning," Working Paper #5 (1976), Law and Language Project (NSF Grant SOC-74-23503), ms. As Susan Ervin-Tripp has commented, philosophers and linguists are concentrating on explication of the structure of inference and the minimal information needed to account for what is conveyed in utterances whose surface meaning differs from their intent,

whereas anthropologists and sociolinguists are studying variation in expression as a function of social features of speakers and situations. As the title of our working paper suggests, we are currently engaged in a sociolinguistic study of questioning in the courtroom. We have developed a typology of question forms in this setting and are exploring the empirical distribution of choices in direct and cross-examination, as well as the ways in which coerciveness of question form constrains the language of the witness.

<sup>8</sup>See Fraser, "Conversational Mitigation" and "Strategies for Requesting."

<sup>9</sup>This assumes, of course, that the hearer understood the hint to convey a request to open the window. There are many cases where the intent of an utterance is misunderstood by the hearer. Some examples will be given below.

<sup>10</sup>Jeb Stuart Magruder, An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate (New York: Atheneum, 1975).

<sup>11</sup>All these examples are taken from the Dell edition of the transcripts. See the complete transcript of the March 21 meeting in The Presidential Transcripts, pp. 97-140.

<sup>12</sup>For the analysis of the June 23 meetings I have used the transcripts as reprinted in the New York Times, August 6, 1974. This version was reported by the Times to be less than complete. I do not know how much was missing. One wonders what the full version contained; perhaps it could help to decipher all the many "unintelligibles" peppered throughout the transcripts! Could these contain some hidden, damaging imperatives?

<sup>13</sup>To make valid generalizations about Nixon's style of giving orders and how it may have changed during Watergate, one would need to have comparable transcripts of conversations during more ordinary times. Unfortunately, such transcripts are not available.

<sup>14</sup>Of course, in so many ways, Watergate was a highly unusual case. For one thing, participants in a conspiracy to obstruct justice do not regularly provide the prosecutor with a taperecording of the conversation in which they planned their activities!

<sup>15</sup>This is a sub-theme of our project on law and language. We have carried out a pilot study of the handling of cases in which the offense was a threat to the life of the

president. We found considerable inconsistency in the criteria used by the various circuits of the federal courts. See Brenda Danet, Nicole C. Kermish, and Kenneth B. Hoffman, "Accountability for Verbal Offenses: The Case of Threats to the Life of the President," Working Paper #2 (1975) Law and Language Project (NSF Grant SOC-74-23503), ms.

<sup>16</sup>The discussion of the features of Watergate Talk has benefited from the work and comments of Bruce Fraser and his former student, Greg Shenaut. See Fraser, "No Conversation Without Misrepresentation," and Greg Shenaut, "Circumlocutionary Acts" (1974), ms., especially for the discussions of evasion and equivocation.

<sup>17</sup>Edwin Newman, Strictly Speaking: Will America Be the Death of English? (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974).

<sup>18</sup>George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in Orwell, A Collection of Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1956), pp. 156-170.

<sup>19</sup>A lively, historically oriented discussion of euphemisms is in Peter Farb, Word Play: What Happens When People Talk (New York: Knopf, 1974), especially pp. 79-82; Robin Lakoff also discusses euphemisms in Language and Woman's Place (New York: Harper and Row, 1975). The classic discussion for American English is probably in H. L. Mencken, The American Language (Abridged edition by Raven I. McDavid, Jr., Knopf, 1963).

<sup>20</sup>This passage from Erlichman's testimony and others cited below are all taken from a five-minute taped sequence in which he was questioned by Senator Lowell Weicker about the Ellsberg break-in. The passage is chock-full of linguistic devices to get oneself off the hook; only some of them can be discussed here. For the convenience of the reader who may wish to clarify points raised in the paper or to pursue in more detail how Erlichman handles questions, a complete transcript of this sequence, containing six questions and replies, is attached to this paper in an appendix.

<sup>21</sup>Erlichman's phrase "conviction and conclusion" may be an instance of idiosyncratic redundancy, though I believe it is an instance of what Mellinkoff calls "doubling" in legal language. This goes back to the Middle Ages when the emerging legal language of England was a peculiar mixture of Old English, Latin and French. In some cases doublets were bilingual so as to guarantee comprehension by speakers of both languages (e.g., "fit and proper," Old English and French in origin, respectively.) Sometimes the motive for using them was simply to conform with

the current fashion. Although many doublets were bilingual, some contained pairs of words of the same origin. Erlichman's "conviction" and "conclusion" are both ultimately Latin in origin. Thus, this is a good example of a stylistic feature of modern legal English which Mellinkoff and others have criticized. No longer functional, more often than not, doubling is merely verbose and pompous. For many more examples and a fascinating if somewhat repetitious discussion, see David Mellinkoff, The Language of the Law (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), especially pp. 57-59, 121-122, 331-336, 345-366.

<sup>22</sup>As Michael Hancher has pointed out, the phrase "at that point in time" is also striking for its verbosity--five words to say "then"!

<sup>23</sup>This discussion draws heavily on Robin Lakoff, "Questionable Answers and Answerable Questions," in Braj P. Kachru, et al., Issues in Linguistics: Papers in Honor of Henry and Renee Kahane (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 453-467. Other work on hedges includes George Lakoff, "Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts," Papers of the Chicago Linguistic Society, VIII (1972), 183-228, and Bruce Fraser, "Hedged Performatives," in Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3, eds. J. Morgan and P. Cole (New York: Academic Press, 1975).

<sup>24</sup>This phrase is really a pun on the double use I have been making of the word "moral." Mostly, I have used it in the sense of evaluation of the grounds for action, whatever the criteria for evaluation may be. But it is hard to be rid of the conventional meaning of "moral" as ethical. More precisely, then, this section deals with the use of evaluative words in ways which reveal that the criteria for evaluation of actions are never ethical.

<sup>25</sup>See Stefan Kanfer, "Words from Watergate," in Hugh Rank, ed., Language and Public Policy (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974), pp. 12-14 (originally a Time essay, August 13, 1973, p. 20). Of course Watergate participants did not start this habit of depersonalization. The media do it all the time.

<sup>26</sup>It is hard to say whether 13 is high or low, since it is not clear what criteria would be used to make such a judgement.

<sup>27</sup>Richard Gambino, "Watergate Lingo: A Language of Non-Responsibility," in Rank, ed., Language and Public Policy, pp. 17-29. Of the various other writings on the language of Watergate cited here, Gambino's paper comes closest to my own

description of the features of Watergate Talk, though I would like to think that his description is not quite so systematic as my own. I found his paper long after my own analysis was fairly well worked out. Like me, he stresses the consequences of such talk.

<sup>28</sup>See Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964); George Steiner, "The Hollow Miracle," in The Language of Silence (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1969), pp. 136-151; Haig Bosmajian, "The Language of Anti-Semitism," in The Language of Oppression (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1974), pp. 11-32.

<sup>29</sup>Dwight Bolinger, "Truth is a Linguistic Question," in Rank, ed., Language and Public Policy, pp. 161-175.

<sup>30</sup>Rank, ibid.: Daniel Dieterich, ed. Teaching about Doublespeak (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974).

<sup>31</sup>Examples of textbooks are Donald A. Hiatt, True, False or in Between: An Elective Course in Logical Thinking (Lexington, Mass.: Ginn, 1975), and William Sparks and Beatrice Taines, with Shirley Sidell, Doublespeak: Language for Sale (New York: Harper's College Press, 1975).

APPENDIX\*

ACCOUNTING FOR THE ELLSBERG BREAK-IN:  
JOHN ERLICHMAN AND SENATOR LOWELL WEICKER

Line 1    W:    Now, I'd like to, if I could, uh clear up uh some matters relevant to explanations . . . your explanations of the uh Ellsberg break-in. On June the 28th, 1973, you stated in a television . . . television interview . . . that . . . relative to what you told Krogh, quote, "While I expressed my disapproval in the strongest kind of terms, as he said, and as a matter of fact made clear that I thought that this whole investigation ought to be terminated with these people, that they didn't evidence good judgment and that ought to be the end of it." That was your statement in this particular television

Line 15 interview. How does your statement to Mr. Wallace less than a month ago stand up against your statement to this committee that you believe the break-in was a . . . proper enterprise uh since it was done in the name of national security?

E: Sir, I've said just this afternoon essentially the same thing that you've just read. Uh I (pause) had not contemplated this break-in. It was a surprise to me. I felt that it was a mistake. I asked these people to be brought back, and I think not not 30 minutes ago I said so here. At the same time, taken as a part of a of a chain, uh, referring now to the activities of the special unit, and going to the question which the chairman and Mr. Wilson were talking about this morning, I don't think there's any question about the legal foundation which exists for an activity of this kind. I'm . . . I am the sort of person who doesn't like surprises, and when I understand that an investigation is under way, uh uh certainly an event of this kind takes me aback, and it took me aback.

W: Well, I'm not sure I understand either your words or the words of your counsel. Are we either justifying the break-in or are we condemning the actions of Hunt and Liddy?

Line 30 E: Well . . . I think there are there are a couple of subjects there, and I think the way we got into all of this in in the first instance was as to whether or not I had a concern about the propriety, speaking of the the legalities now, the propriety of this event a year later, at the time of the Watergate break-in, to the extent that I was willing to suborn to perjury or bribery or all these other things that had been charged. And my response to that was that I felt comfortable with the propriety from a constitutional and legal standpoint at the time of the of the Watergate break-in. And that had been . . . that had been my conviction and conclusion for some time. Now . . . I didn't I didn't express disapproval to Mr. Krogh because I felt uh some technical illegality had occurred. I felt that it showed bad judgment, it was a surprise, it was not anything that had been contemplated or approved, and I felt that those fellas ought to be brought back.

- Line 45 W: So your disapproval was on the basis of you were surprised?
- E: I certainly was.
- W: Was that the basis of your disapproval?
- E: Well, no, my disapproval was because these people, as far as I knew, had been sent out there to do an investigation. I was under the assumption that it would be conducted as a normal investigation, not as some kind of a of a second story job. And uh when I heard this, my initial reaction to it was, somebody has not exercised good judgment. Now, I'm still operating under the assumption that that judgment was not exercised, at least independently by Hunt and Liddy. I have been uh uh under the assumption right along that they were operating pursuant to what they thought was approval. And so I'm I'm uh in a hard place to say that that they are uh in response to your question, they are to be condemned or fired, or something of this kind.
- Line 60 W: Are you telling me, in other words, that you thought that it was constitutional but that it was botched? Is that right?
- E: Well, I don't know what what botched means . . . uh uh . . . there's no question in my mind that if the thing had been presented to me in the terms that it occurred, and I had been asked for approval or disapproval, I would have disapproved it.
- W: All right. So that it was constitutional, but that it was embarrassing. Would that be a better word?
- E: Well, it certainly was potentially not only embarrassing uh in a . . . in a . . . what a . . . political sense or something of that kind, but uh totally uh totally out of keeping with the concept here. These fellas were going out as substitutes for the FBI. and the . . . the method, the style, the degree of investigation which I understood was going to be conducted would have been commensurate with that,

BRENDA DANET

not some some uh uh different kind or or uh  
category of investigation.

(Interrupted by roll call in Senate)

\*Originally transcribed from a cassette taperecording of the  
televised hearings; the official source is: Hearings Before  
the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities of  
the United States Senate (Washington, D.C.: Government  
Printing Office, 1973) Book 6, 2629-2630

BRUCE C. JOHNSON

## Communicative Competence in American Trial Courtrooms

Increasingly in recent years, linguists and sociolinguists have come to accept as a theoretical goal the characterization of communicative competence, defined, for example, by Gumperz and Hymes as "what a speaker needs to know to communicate effectively in culturally significant settings" (1972:vii) and by Fillmore as "knowledge of appropriate situated language use" (1973:276). This knowledge may be seen as describable by a set of rules which are sensitive to social context and which constrain language behavior.

The trial courtroom is a class of settings of considerable cultural significance in America. My purpose in this paper is to discuss some of the types of rules required in this class of settings and to make some general comments on the nature of communicative competence.\*

The significance of trial courtrooms in America is due in large part to the fact that they are the arenas for contests in which the stakes are high. For some of the participants, lack of success involves loss of property, reputation, or liberty. For others, success will pave the way for entry into higher political arenas. The outcome of court trials affects, more or less directly, the lives of all Americans. The frequency of the court trial as a literary motif in books, both fiction and non-fiction, in plays, in movies, and in television series attests the extent to which this significance is generally perceived.

Not only are court trials culturally significant, but they seem particularly indicated as a research focus for the language sciences. All societies have available to them a set of institutionalized procedures for the settlement of disputes. Viewed from a cross-cultural perspective, one important dimension of variation is the extent to which these procedures make use of physical as opposed to verbal means. Where dispute-settlement procedures rely heavily on physical means, the advantage lies with those having the greater physical capabilities. Similarly, where these procedures rely

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[*Centrum*, 4:2 (Fall 1976), pp. 139-49.]

on verbal means, as in American trial courtrooms, the advantage would appear to lie with those having the greater verbal abilities.<sup>1</sup>

However, while there is a tradition of interest in courtroom activities by scholars in several social-science disciplines, linguists have not to my knowledge been among them. Further, coverage of the linguistic aspects of courtroom activities by the other social-science disciplines and by legal scholars has been strikingly uneven.<sup>2</sup>

The most elaborated and well-personned conceptual framework available for the study of communicative competence is the 'ethnography of communication' (Gumperz and Hymes 1972, Bauman and Sherzer 1974), most closely associated with the name of Dell Hymes. In the following discussion, I will make use of this framework.

The current research direction of the ethnography of communication is toward the formulation of descriptive theories of communication as part of particular cultural systems. To this end, Hymes has provided a heuristic list of sixteen 'components of speaking' (1972), the boundaries and inter-relationships of which are as yet only dimly understood. These are:

- |                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. message form             | 9. purposes-outcomes        |
| 2. message content          | 10. purposes-goals          |
| 3. setting                  | 11. key                     |
| 4. scene                    | 12. channel                 |
| 5. speaker/sender           | 13. forms of speech         |
| 6. addressor                | 14. norms of interaction    |
| 7. hearer/receiver/audience | 15. norms of interpretation |
| 8. addressee                | 16. genre <sup>3</sup>      |

It is apparent that language behavior in courtroom interaction is constrained by numerous and various rules of speaking. Rules involving most of Hymes's components are readily identifiable. Some of these rules are discussed informally below. Note that these rules vary along a number of dimensions: the specificity with which behavior is constrained, the force and source of the sanctions involved, the provenience of the rule, and the range of situations in which the rule is applicable.

The social unit of investigation for the ethnography of communication is the speech community. A priori, and in accordance with established practice, the present study has a more limited focus. That is, I will be concerned here with a

class of settings (3) (American trial courtrooms), and more specifically with a class of scenes (4) (trials) which appropriately occur in those settings. (In fact, my personal observations are limited to one North Carolina superior court.) Other scenes enacted in courtrooms include various other court business transacted while court is 'in session.' When court is not in session, the courtroom is just another room in a public building.

The boundaries of 'court in session' are marked verbally in part by the bailiff's call of "All stand/rise," and non-verbally in part by the entrance and exit of the presiding judge. When court is in session, a distinction is made between language behavior which is part of the scene and language behavior extraneous to the scene. Extraneous language behavior, such as conversation between spectators or messages brought in to the judge or another participant, is constrained as to channel (12) in that it may be written or, if oral, in a low tone or whisper. Henceforth, I will be concerned only with language behavior that is clearly part of the scene.

The participant roles in trials are clearly defined, and for each there is a set of rules of speaking. These roles include, in addition to the parties to the case and their counsel, judge, bailiff, clerk, marshal, stenographer, juror, witness, spectator.

Here are some of the rules specific to some of the roles:

1. The stenographer (court reporter) is in most cases the most verbal of the participants in terms of production, yet he rarely speaks, and most of his messages never reach a receiver. Appropriate speech for this role is restricted as follows: he may, in a low voice, comment to the judge on the audibility of the speech of other participants; and he will, on demand of the judge, repeat portions of the speech of other participants. On the other hand, he records in written form a large, but carefully limited, portion of the language behavior of the other participants. In the event of an appeal, this transcript is the official record of the trial, but otherwise is rarely read by anyone.

The stenographer's role as hearer (7) is firmly established, and the speech of others must be audible to him. However, his role as addressee (8) is restricted. "Any directions or instructions to the court reporter are to be

made in open court by the presiding judge only, and not by any attorney" (General Rules of Practice for the Superior and District Courts [of North Carolina] #12).

2. The speech of the bailiff is restricted in general to a limited stock of routines, that is, speech acts which are completely specified by rule with regard to both message form (1) and message content (2), such as "All stand" or "Oyes, oyes, oyes; John Wesley Doe, John Wesley Doe, John Wesley Doe; Come into court this day as you are bound to do so or your forfeiture will be recorded." In this latter example, all four participant components (5-8) must be distinguished: the 'court' is the addressor (6), the bailiff is the speaker (5), those present in the courtroom, i.e., the public, are the hearers (7), and the absent Mr. Doe is the addressee (8).

3. Spectators (bystanders) are allotted no speaking roles as part of the scene, and are addressed rarely: if they violate some rule of the court, as by speaking loudly, or when the bailiff says "All stand." Furthermore, the role is an optional one since there need be no spectators. However, the role of the spectator as hearer is considered a very important one. The Constitution of the United States of America guarantees the right to a public trial, and the improper exclusion of spectators is a serious error on the part of a judge.

4. A rule of speaking concerning lawyers is the prohibition of 'leading questions.' A leading question is one that suggests an appropriate response, or more technically,

questions which so suggest to a witness the specific tenor of the reply as desired by counsel that such a reply is likely to be given irrespective of an actual memory or questions which instruct the witness how to answer on material points or put words into his mouth to be echoed back are leading (Conrad 1956:340).

Leading questions are not permitted on direct examination, that is, when a lawyer is eliciting testimony from a witness that his side has called, except

when the matter sought is merely preliminary to matters in dispute, to refresh the memory of a witness . . . on examination of hostile or adverse witnesses, on examination of children of tender years, persons who are not well versed in

in the English language, persons of sluggish mental equipment, aged and senile persons, timid persons, expert witnesses, and generally where the interests of justice so require (Conrad 1956: 341).

Certain participants are thus required, in certain circumstances, to make a judgment as to the extent to which a question suggests a response.<sup>4</sup>

5. A rule of speaking concerning witnesses is the 'hearsay' rule. In general, the 'law' does not admit 'hearsay' evidence, which is "evidence of a statement, which is made other than by a witness while testifying at the hearing, offered to prove the truth of the matter stated (Katsaris 1975:179). The 'statement' may be oral, written, or non-verbal.

This rule requires the witness in making informative statements to distinguish between what he knows from direct observation and what he knows as a result of the communicative acts of others. There are a number of recognized exceptions to the hearsay rule which will serve as an illustration of the degree of sophistication to which courtroom rules of speaking have been refined. Some of these exceptions are listed here.

Dying Declaration. A statement by a person who has since died is admissible in a murder trial if it was made voluntarily by the deceased while he knew of his impending death and had lost all hope of recovery, if it concerns the circumstances that immediately led to his death, and if he was the murder victim (Katsaris 1975:186-7).

Pedigree. "Theoretically, a man does not know his own father or birthday except by hearsay evidence because he was not present at the moment of conception and is incapable of remembering the day he was born" (Katsaris 1975:187-8). However, the pedigree exception allows witnesses to testify as to their birthday, age, parentage, and other such matters.

Ancient documents. "A record or document found to be at least thirty years of age and which is proven to come from proper custody and is itself free from indication of fraud or invalidity is admissible in evidence, if otherwise relevant" (Conrad 1956:231).

Expert witness. "A witness is not incompetent to testify as an expert by reason of the fact that his special knowledge of that particular subject of inquiry has not been derived from experience or actual observation, but from reading and the study

of standard authorities" (Goldstein and Lane 1969:14.13).

6. The Hymesian component of particular interest to many sociolinguists is forms of speech (13) which refers to the "verbal resources of a community" in terms of language varieties (dialects, languages, styles, registers or what have you) (Hymes 1972:63). Thus far, however, this component has not been mentioned.

The reason for this is that I have been discussing explicit, normative rules of the courtroom, and forms of speech (language varieties) have only a small place in these rules. They are covered by the doctrine of 'judicial notice.' "Judicial notice is the cognizance of certain facts which judges, jurors, and administrative bodies may properly take and act upon without proof because they already know them" (Conrad 1956:184). "The courts take judicial notice of the meaning of words, phrases, and abbreviations in the English language and may always refer to standard authorities to refresh their memories and understanding of such meaning" (Conrad 1956:198-9). But, as a general proposition, the courts will not take judicial notice of foreign language words" (Conrad 1956:199).

Or, as Judge Julius J. Hoffman stated after Allen Ginsberg recited the Hare Krishna Mantra during the Chicago Seven trial, "I don't understand it. I don't understand it because it was (pause) the language of the United States District Court is English" (Ginsberg 1975:11).

"When witnesses testify in a foreign language, the testimony must be translated into English" (Conrad 1956:331). (Note that for the interpreter's translations of witness's statements to be allowed as evidence requires another exception to the hearsay rule.)

Thus, the form of speech (13) used in the courts is 'English.' Foreign languages exist, but no notice, judicial or otherwise, is taken of varieties of English.

Similarly, social scientists concerned with courtroom activities consider language variation, when they consider it at all, as a variable to be controlled rather than as a variable to be investigated in its own right (O'Barr et al. 1974:1).

It is apparent, however, that participants in courtroom interaction use different varieties of English. Further, given the importance of verbal abilities in American trial courtrooms, the fact that part of this ability involves the command of and appropriate choice from a verbal repertoire consisting of

a range of varieties, and the fact that choice of variety has been shown, by Labov and Lambert for example, to influence significantly the subjective reactions of listeners, one would expect this variation to be a significant aspect of courtroom interaction.<sup>5</sup>

Thus far, I have discussed some of the rules of speaking operative in American trial courtrooms. I will conclude with some more general comments on the study of communicative competence.

Most of the rules mentioned above are 'normative' rules of courtroom activity in (Bailey's sense, rules which establish limits to permissible behavior [1969]), furthermore, they are largely explicit. The reason for this is that these rules are most readily established.

There is another set of less explicit normative rules which operate on the first set. For example, we have seen that there is a rule prohibiting leading questions in some circumstances. It would be incorrect to say, however, that leading questions do not occur in those circumstances, or even that they are not permitted. Rather, given the rule, a lawyer may choose to formulate a question in a 'leading' way or may choose not to. The opposing lawyer may then choose to make use of a repair mechanism provided by the rules, the objection, and call on the judge to decide on the propriety of the question. If there is no objection, the question and answer become part of the evidence. Even if there is an objection and it is sustained by the judge, the question may have accomplished its purpose. These rules shade into what Bailey has called 'pragmatic' rules, rules not for permissible behavior but for winning behavior.

Another aspect of communicative competence is the fact that certain of the participants, jurors and many defendants, witnesses, and spectators, are appropriately ignorant of all of the rules discussed above. Thus, Goldstein and Lane state as a fact, not as a complaint, that jurors "have not studied law, have no idea what is meant by 'hearsay,' 'best evidence,' 'secondary evidence,' 'incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial' and to them it is 'legal mumbo-jumbo'" (1969:13.2). In fact, a potential juror will generally be disqualified if he has had any legal training. The competence that the non-professional participant brings to the courtroom is just the general shared competence of the community member, which says, for example, "courtroom trials are very formal situations," and so forth.<sup>6</sup>

All of this strongly suggests that studies of communicative competence in courtroom settings, and elsewhere, should distinguish between what participants can do, what they may do, what they should do, and what they actually do do. (Compare "appropriate" in the Fillmore quotation in the introduction to this paper to "effectively" in the Gumperz-and-Hymes quotation.)

Finally, a comment on the reasons why linguists have avoided the study of language behavior in legal contexts: in the first place, there is the familiar combination of intellectual traditions and research priorities which have worked to de-contextualize linguistics in general. More specifically, I think there are reasons having to do with the highly structured nature of language behavior in these contexts: 1. language behavior in the courts is felt to be specialized, artificial, and generally unnatural. 2. So much is already known about language behavior in these situations, by certain non-linguists, that the amount of catching up that one would be required to do is intimidating.

The former reason is unconvincing because of the practical significance of the situations and because language use is always constrained by situational factors. A situation in which these constraints are particularly explicit and restrictive seems in fact to be especially valuable for understanding the nature of such constraints in general, and therefore of language.

With the latter reason I am very much in sympathy.

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#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Mack O'Barr for calling to my attention the theoretical and practical interest of language behavior in legal settings, and for insightful discussion of many of the topics included here, particularly with regard to the political aspects of the court and the previous literature on legal

language.

<sup>2</sup>A great deal of attention has been paid to the drafting and interpretation of legal documents. Thus, Sokol's Language and Litigation (1967) is "a portrait of the appellate brief." Normative rules for language behavior in the courtroom have been extensively elaborated, as illustrated below. Pragmatic rules for the same have also received some attention. Language structure and language variation, however, have been all but ignored. See O'Barr et al. 1976.

<sup>3</sup>In the body of this paper, the names of components are underlined and followed by their numbers when introduced in their technical sense, and sporadically elsewhere where clarity requires. For definition and further discussion of the components, see Hymes (1972).

<sup>4</sup>A sociolinguistic characterization of the leading-question rule involves considerations of both message form and message content, and constraints in terms of participant roles, including a detailed taxonomy of witnesses, and particular subdivisions of the scene. Violations, and alleged violations, of the rule lead to further intricacies. See Loftus and Palmer (1974) for a different tack on this rule.

The formal characterization in Hymesian terms of the hearsay rule, discussed immediately below, is a current research interest of the author.

<sup>5</sup>Language variation in American trial courtrooms has been the principal focus of the research team headed by William M. O'Barr of Duke University. See Erickson et al. in prep.

<sup>6</sup>By analogy with linguistic competence, communicative competence can be viewed as the knowledge of an ideal speaker-listener who knows perfectly all of the rules of speaking of his community. However, as suggested in the text, this involves his not knowing some of the rules in some circumstances. This is not a performance factor, but a regular feature of the system. It seems similar to the situation in a multi-lingual community in which the linguistic repertoires of subgroups only partially overlap.

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Review Article

ROBIN LAKOFF

## Why You Can't Say What You Mean

Edwin Newman. Strictly Speaking: Will America Be the Death of English? Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974. Pp. 205. \$7.95.

I remember from my childhood one of the Grimms' Fairy Tales that filled me with a particularly strong sense of uncanny awe: in fact, when I think of it now, it still does. The relevant parts of the rather intricate tale may be summarized as follows:

The six brothers of a young woman have been magically turned into geese, able to resume their human form and language for only fifteen minutes a day. They tell their sister that she can break the spell in only one way: she must gather star-flowers and sew them into six shirts, and after seven years when they are completed she must throw one shirt over each brother as they come flying overhead. If she speaks one word or laughs once during this entire period, they are doomed to remain geese forever. She sets about the task; as she is sewing, some of the king's huntsmen come by, are captivated by her beauty, and take her off to the king. He is smitten and marries her. But his mother is jealous and suspicious. When her first child is born (all the while she goes on sewing, never uttering a word), the mother-in-law spirits it away and smears the young queen's mouth with blood, telling the king she has eaten her own child and should be burned at the stake. The young woman says not a word in her defense. This happens twice more; finally, with the disappearance of the third child, the king is persuaded to have his wife burned. As she is tied

to the stake (bringing the shirts that she is still sewing with her) and the flames start to rise, the seven years are suddenly up, and the brothers come flying overhead. She tosses the shirts at them; they are all done, except for the left sleeve of the last garment. The brothers alight and resume human shape, except for the last brother who for the rest of his life has a left wing instead of an arm. This event impresses the king enough so that he orders the flames put out. Since the woman can now speak, she tells him what has been happening. The hidden children are returned, and the wicked mother-in-law is put into a barrel studded with nails and rolled into the millpond.

What impresses me about this story is the magical power it gives to the spoken word. Without speech we are as good as dead, and once we have it, we can get our heart's desire. It follows that language, being so precious, must be used very carefully indeed since it has such power for good or evil; and, misused, is impotent or noxious.

The reason the story affects me so powerfully is that, in a very deep way, I believe its burden is true. I really feel that it is folly and worse to use language in a non-optimal way. For this reason Edwin Newman's book strikes a very responsive chord, and I wish I could wholeheartedly endorse his sentiments. But as a linguist I must disavow these emotional stirrings and talk about why, dangerous as the misuse of language may be, I feel Newman's analysis of our present linguistic situation and his suggested remedies are a cure worse than the disease, and why the remedies are doomed in any event to certain failure.

Let me begin by summarizing Newman's major points. First, he feels that the media's careless and hyperbolic use of language is inculcating in all users of English--including, for a refreshing change, British English--a disregard for clarity and articulateness. In examining this aspect of his argument, we might ask whether his examples really prove his point. Do neologisms really weaken and distort our capacity for clear exposition--or does the fear of new forms of expression merely reflect a terror of anything new?

Beyond mere carelessness and obtuseness, Newman finds as his second point that those in power tend to corrupt language as well--deliberately and maliciously, with the intent to conceal and deceive. This is the function of bureaucratism, which Newman feels is burgeoning all over as, one might say, a viable alternative to the precise articulation of one's messages.

Here too we must examine both the evidence for the arguments and the arguments themselves. Is bureaucratese mushrooming? Is it being used with consciously deceptive intent? Is it, indeed, dangerous to our lives as well as our language?

Connected with these two forms of linguistic degeneracy Newman sees a growth of imprecision in speech: people seem not to know or at least to be unable to express how they feel about what they're saying, or even not to be sure what they're saying. It becomes harder and harder to pin anyone down. Newman feels this problem results from poor education--children aren't trained to think logically; they therefore can't articulate thoughts logically. Hence there arises careless neologism, bombast, bureaucratese. And here we have Newman's final, and--strangely enough--optimistic point: through mis-education of our youth we are coming close to losing our language, being rendered symbolically speechless like the girl in our fable. But if only we are willing to make some relatively slight changes in the way we educate our youth, we can redress these wrongs and become once again the possessors of the elegant, precise, and articulate tongue our ancestors used so well. (Of course, since we have by now gotten into the habit of examining Newman's questions, we find some more material for investigation here: Is the problem merely that we do not educate students in the foundations of logic? Will the superficial teaching of logic and rhetorical strategies improve things significantly?)

The fear of inarticulateness, speechlessness--of the loss of the magical potency of language--assumes such importance in Newman's discussion that it behooves us to examine this worry at the start. Why fear inarticulateness? Why has there been of late such a lot of worry about imprecise expression? Of course we can point at Watergate as the terrible example. If the participants had eschewed obfuscation and said what they meant, the whole thing, it is commonly believed, could not have happened. If, moreover, the American people had been equipped with minds able to distinguish between meaningful expression and bombastic balderdash, they could have stopped the nefarious proceedings at the outset. If, indeed, people were always aware of what they and everyone else were saying. . . . And here we interpose a cut of a paradisaical existence, the way it could be if only. . . .But paradise always contains a serpent.

The serpent here is that the concern for style manifested by Newman--and others who worry about linguistic elegance and precision--is no more than another symptom of the same disease that, elsewhere, produces verbal slop. Overscrupulousness is as noxious as negligence, and arises from similar psychological sources.

It is significant that the quarrel takes place over the use of words--at least one remove from reality. If one feels in terror of the events of the real world--and goodness knows, they are frequently terrifying--one might attempt to escape from that fear by recourse to "harmless" words. Every child has been taught to retort to a verbal insult, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Then if sticks and stones begin to fly too fast, by talking about them, we neutralize the threat--or we hope we do.

People who use words as a refuge from the terrors of action will naturally gravitate to certain kinds of occupations. Academia, especially, seems a logical place. There words are all that count. So we can understand that academics become particularly frightened when words seem to be misused, to be in danger of losing, through overuse or misuse, their accustomed magic. Ritual, as we know, consists of using the same words in the same configurations--along with similarly frozen actions--to produce magical effects. The academic rather often hopes--unconsciously, of course--for the same sorts of effects through being most inordinately careful in his choice of words and his arrangement of them. Any change constitutes a threat, a threat that the magical power of words to protect one from actuality will be dispelled, and that the weaver of the spell will be consigned once again to confront the terrors he originally fled.

But Newman is not an academic, and we cannot charge him with having woven himself a web of words wherein to hide from reality. As a newsman, he confronts the starkest terrors of our present reality perhaps more directly than does anyone else. For the doers themselves are insulated by their advisers, and besides, each one sees only the acts he himself is instrumental in bringing into being. But the reporter sees the whole cross-section of actuality directly, with his own eyes. We could almost say that the newsman is today's true man of action. How can a person who has chosen this career, and indeed excelled in it, be reproached with a fear of real action that drives him to magicalize words?

Of course, we all know about people who, out of a fear of heights, climb mountains; if driving cars fast holds terrors for you, you may find yourself driving in the Indianapolis 500. Is it too farfetched to suggest that a person who flings himself into the thick of the action by choice is precisely the one who is most afraid of action? Perhaps the doer and the academic are not so far apart, after all, just as the linguistic snob and the linguistic slob are brothers under the skin.

In fact, as we search for an answer to our original question--why does the real or apparent decline in the ability to

use language effectively cause so many influential people so much psychological pain?--it becomes clear that it is precisely the people in important or influential positions who are apt to exalt language and to fear its power as well as its misuse. These are the politicians and office-holders themselves, for reasons discussed already; bureaucrats, whose power derives from keeping a gulf between the word and the perception of reality, and consequently to whom words become very potent instruments indeed; the representatives of the media, who use words in order to gain influence and power; and finally, academics and other members of the intelligentsia, who use words to dispel internal conflicts about real-world power, to escape, that is, from the realities of things. Since everyone who is anyone or who hopes to influence anyone who is anyone has some sort of conflict about the use and potency of language, is it any wonder that works such as Newman's appear with great frequency and arouse widespread concern and discussion? And, since fear of action is the root of overconcern with words, is it any wonder that, for all the sincere concern, virtually nothing is ever done?

Thus I hope to have given some reasons why the subject of our use and abuse of our native language is so potent for many of us; and why, additionally, it is crucially important for us to be able to be rational about what is really going on linguistically today. We must distinguish holdovers of primitive ritualism, infantile bugaboos, from reasonable worries; and we must on that basis learn to distinguish what can and should be changed from what might as well or must perforce be left to its own devices; and, once we determine what may be changed, a rational understanding of the situation may enable us to discover the best means to effect desired changes. Then ultimately I am on Newman's side as I hoped I would be, on the side of elegance and articulateness. But I decry playing blindman's bluff with the demons, as Newman seems to be suggesting we do, out of ignorance of the causes of the problems as well as misidentification of the issues.

There remains one more overriding issue which should influence our position on Newman's more specific criticisms. That is: can its speakers--should they--control language changes? Should grammarians be prescriptive? And does prescription do any good?

The issue sometimes seems moot, both to linguists themselves and to nonprofessionals, though for opposite reasons. Most professional linguists have been taught that the linguist's job is to produce grammars that describe--not prescribe--the usage of the language. If some speakers say "ain't," or are

heard to split an occasional infinitive, it is the linguist's task to show what rules these speakers have used to produce those forms. It is not his job to set up rules to uplift those benighted speakers. For instance, to oversimplify greatly (I mean to greatly oversimplify): suppose the linguist finds that his native-English-speaker informants typically produce utterances like:

I want to always have money.  
Harry likes to really yell.

The linguist's task is to show how the speaker's grammar requires or at least allows certain classes of adverbs to be inserted between to and the verb proper. His rule must allow sentences like those above to be produced, but presumably rule out entirely superficially similar structures like those below (in which an asterisk, in accordance with linguistic convention, is prefixed to a sentence that a native speaker would consider impossible):

\*I want to three times see that movie.  
\*I like to daily bathe.

It is not the linguist's job to produce what the layman probably thinks of as linguistic "rules" or "grammar," e.g.:

Do not split infinitives.  
Ain't is not a permissible word of English.

To the non-linguist, however, the question is moot in a very different sense. Most people feel that it is the job of anyone who claims expertise in the use of language to tell people how to talk: to lay down prescriptive rules. What, after all, is the point of writing rules telling people how to say things they already know how to say (as descriptive rules do)? Rather, all linguistic rules should be prescriptive.

But this assumption begs an important question: does it do any good? The purpose of a descriptive grammar is to give linguists and others insight into how the human mind works with respect to its language--using properties, and thus ultimately to understand better what it is to be human. Modesty as well as normal self-protective instincts compel me to reveal at this point that that goal is in fact nowhere near achievement--despite several decades of intensive work, linguists are far from solving the mystery of grammar; about the only thing all linguists agree on is that none of them is capable now (or for the foreseeable future) of constructing a grammar that really works, in the sense that it makes explicit the unconscious knowledge

that every speaker implicitly possesses about what constitutes a sentence of his native language, and what does not. So it is not that we are opposing the proven and efficacious notion of a "descriptive grammar" to the quixotic hope of a prescriptive one. Rather, we are turning our attention here to Newman's own concern, which happens to be a purely prescriptive grammar--and asking whether the concept has any practical utility.

From time immemorial those who have appointed themselves defenders of the (linguistic) faith have found it necessary to issue promulgations as to what may properly be said and what may not. We have records of Greek and Latin grammarians written over two millennia ago whose complaints are rather similar to Newman's: corruption is creeping into the language, people are using the wrong forms, people are descending to neologism because the old ways are losing their hold . . . and so on. In fact, we have word-lists from the 7th or 8th century A.D., compiled by the grammarian Probus, giving prescriptive rules for choosing between certain forms in Late Latin. To cite a few examples:

calida non calda	("hot")
auris non oricla	("ear")
viridis non viridis	("green")
februarius non febrarius	("February")

What is noteworthy here is that, in every case in which one of the items has survived in modern Romance languages, the surviving form can be shown to be derived from the second, "incorrect" form, not the first or prescribed. Thus, in Spanish we find, going down the list, caldo, oreja, verde, and febrero. Here we have a living monument to the efficacy of prescriptive grammar. I venture to suggest that all the efforts of all the schoolmarms of all the ages have done little more than to establish in the minds of native speakers some degree of uncertainty as to whether they should say "between you and me" or "between you and I." It is therefore suggested that grammarians turn their energies to aspects of the problem of language use that are less resistant to their efforts.

Now we can try to answer the first question we raised earlier: whether neologism is, ipso facto, evil. It is clear that if maintaining the linguistic status quo is one's principal concern--as is true if one is a prescriptive grammarian--one will perceive the new as necessarily a falling-off; the old is the good. One influential exponent of this point of view is the Governor of California, on the testimony of the columnist Herb Caen in the San Francisco Chronicle of June 3, 1976:

Now we're in New York, where Diane von Furstenberg is

giving a conservative chic party for Gov. Jerry Brown. Great fun! Tout Manhattan there. Now let's play questions and answers. First question: "Do you feel you entered the primaries a little too late?" "Or," smilingly suggests John Oakes, famed and feared editorial page editor of the New York Times, "did you enter them too early? That is, do you feel you have acquired the expertise to be President of the United States?"

Jerry curls his lip, Zenwise. "Expertise?" he says incredulously. "What kind of a word is that? Is that a word in the English language? I can't even recall the last time I heard that word used. Really. Expertise?"

Now what is worth noting here is that the word is the only way we have, in current English, to express the meaning Oakes wished to convey, without circumlocution. If there were synonyms extant, I could probably be persuaded by Governor Brown to dispose of expertise. But if there exists a concept essential for a society which no word in the language of that society adequately expresses, then the speakers of that language are not only allowed, they are just about required to adopt any lexical item that expresses the idea, be it from Greek (charisma), French (expertise), Sanskrit (karma), Spanish (machismo), or whatever. Language expands to fill its expressive needs. Were this not so, we should still be speaking proto-Indo-European, replete with asterisks. Language, like any of man's cognitive capacities, is plastic and infinitely expansive, and thank goodness for that. Therefore I resent anyone's telling me that some word isn't a word of English, because he hasn't internalized it or his dictionary doesn't contain it. The same argument should hold for morphological neologism (e.g. plurals like octopuses, singulars like data, and adverbs in -wise), repulsive as they strike us while they are new; we must remember that many forms that now seem perfectly reasonable to us, indeed the only way to say a thing, struck our ancestors similarly as peculiar; and likewise with syntactic neologisms like the sentential use of the adverb hopefully, against which Newman inveighs. Of course like any right-thinking pedant I flinch when I hear these forms, but I assure you they are the wave of the future.

The fact is that language remains alive and vital by incorporating the new. This is true to a greater or lesser extent of every language we know. We are awed by Shakespeare's command of English--it is the result of Shakespeare's--and his contemporaries'--adoption of countless words from French, Latin,

and other languages into English, infinitely enriching our native stock. At the same time and less perceptibly, writers of English have expanded the syntactic, semantic, and morphological possibilities of English in ways that no doubt seemed corruptions of our pure native tongue when they were first introduced, but seem totally native and unremarkable to us now. In the same way, I submit, the barbarisms imposed upon us by Hollywood, Washington, and Madison Avenue will, in time, be seen if they are noticed at all as enrichment rather than degradation. We must have patience, for our language will outlive us if we let it.

One way in which the rules of a language change is through analogical extension. If a rule is applicable to certain members of a semantic class of words, it is likely that sooner or later the rule will be extended to apply to all words with that general meaning. There is nothing intrinsically evil in this, but rather it is one manifestation of man's ability to generalize--that which allows us to formulate scientific hypotheses, enter into and participate in personal relationships, and learn language in the first place.

Newman seems to become terribly upset whenever he encounters such a generalization in the making. For instance consider his comments (p. 32) about a syntactic extension--the use of to + verbal complement following convince.

For long years now, one of the worst things the Times has done is to use the construction "convince to." You may convince that. You may convince of. You may not convince to. Unfortunately, this use has caught on and is now virtually accepted. There is no more chance of heading it off than there is of preserving media as a plural. Someone should convince the Times that it will bear a large part of the blame.

As our gorge rises in righteous wrath against the Times, let us pause to examine Newman's arguments. It seems to me that there is only one justifiable reason for criticizing a neologism--or any construction or lexical item, for that matter. A form of expression is worthy of criticism if and only if it interferes with the intelligibility of what it seeks to express--if it hinders the speaker in communicating his intention. If a linguistic form does so, then I think we may rightly ask why the form exists, and whether something can be done to "head it off." Even then, it is most important to ask why people wish to distort their intentions rather than merely try to legislate the distortion out of existence. We will turn our attention to such cases shortly. But for now, let us note a few things

about the phrase "convince X to Y." We find it, of course, in utterances like the following: "John convinced Bill to set fire to the armadillo."

Such a sentence is perfectly intelligible: the use of convince + to + verb does not stand in the way of intelligibility. In fact, it is virtually synonymous with the following sentence, which Newman presumably finds unexceptionable: "John persuaded Bill to set fire to the armadillo."

Now, it is the case that persuade + to + verb has a long history of use and acceptance in English. It is further true that persuade and convince share virtually all other syntactic properties, such as occurrence in the kinds of phrases Newman finds acceptable in the passage cited earlier:

John convinced Bill of the necessity to jump.  
       persuaded

John convinced Bill that bats ate cats.  
       persuaded

So we have two verbs that are synonymous in meaning and substitutable for each other in several syntactic contexts. As long as convince + to + verb is not permissible, we have a skewed and anomalous situation in the grammar of English, an irregularity for which there is no logical explanation, merely a historical accident. A child learning English learns the properties of persuade and the properties of convince, and concludes that the verbs are semantically and syntactically interchangeable. Supposing that--being Newman's child--over the course of time, he hears only sentences like:

I persuaded Bill that . . .  
 I convinced Bill that . . .  
 I persuaded Bill of it.  
 I convinced Bill of it.  
 I persuaded Bill to . . .

It is natural for the child to assume, having all these forms and their meanings at his disposal, that the fact of his never having heard "I convinced Bill to . . ." is a mere accident, and that this sentence is perfectly possible and grammatical. So he uses it when the need arises. He has thus created a regularity where formerly there was a gap, simplified the rules of his grammar, and in no way affected the intelligibility of anything he had to say. In such a case, complaining about the spread of a new form is nothing but hidebound conservatism for the sake of conservatism, especially since Newman himself gives no reasoned arguments whatsoever against the form, but merely makes fun of it on the grounds that it is new. Of course, since

neither persuade nor convince were in the vocabulary of Old English, this argument carried to its logical conclusion would force us to discard both verbs in all their uses, as dangerous foreign contaminants of the well of English undefiled.

So we see that many of Newman's criticisms are directed against forms of expression whose sole offense lies in their novelty, and I hope to have persuaded the reader that this does not constitute sufficient grounds for condemnation. But how about other cases? How shall we look at styles of communication that may legitimately be considered abuses? In particular how shall the responsible commentator on current linguistic mores view bureaucratese and imprecision? I have taken a strong laissez-faire position on pure novelty; but what is one to think when the form of a discourse precludes our understanding of it? While neologism may, through variety and generalization, make expression more concise and elegant, fuzz--my neologism for linguistic imprecision--and bureaucratese are boring, flat, and confusing. Fuzz is perhaps the more forgivable of the two since it is not deliberately chosen as a speech-style, while bureaucratese at least some of the time represents a conscious choice. But both these styles serve to make the addressee believe that that communication has taken place, when in fact it has not--or when something has been communicated other than what seems to have been. We may condemn both as insidious and potentially dangerous; they make all the participants in a discourse feel confused and incompetent. But it gets us nowhere to condemn these modes of expression without asking why they exist, if they create only dissatisfaction. For like everything else, if there were no felt need for speaking this way, it would probably never come into existence, and proliferate.

To dispose of the more ferocious dragon first: by bureaucratese I am referring to a style designed to do two things: first, to suggest that what is being communicated is harmless to the addressee or to causes espoused by the addressee; and second, to convince the addressee not to argue on the grounds that the speaker is in authority, is more intelligent as well as more powerful than the addressee. To this end the vocabulary of bureaucratese is heavily Latinate or Hellenized, and its syntax is meandering and opaque. There is a general communicative rule of thumb which we learn early at our parents' knee (which we may call the Mommy Knows Best Law), that if you can't understand what the speaker is saying, chances are it's your fault, not his. Hence we will almost always bend over backward to attribute sense and relevance to another speaker's utterance, unless it really becomes unavoidably clear that he is not being coherent. One is presumed sane until proven crazy. This rule has great social utility, but it can also be dangerous since it leads people to blame themselves if they can't understand something

or to assume that the speaker is making sense because he seems to think he is. Advertising, political rhetoric, and propaganda of all kinds depend for their existence on people making this assumption: if we assumed people irrational until proved otherwise, such forms of expression would never be persuasive, although social life would quickly become nonexistent.

We find among the types of bureaucratise political rhetoric, the language of administrators and other functionaries, diplomatic discourse, and the jargon of the professions, in particular medicine and the law, although academia is proficient in the art. One crucial property, to be discussed below, distinguishes bureaucratise from normal speech. It is most interesting that it is precisely this quality that professional advisers on rhetoric would at least in theory have us abandon in striving for "logical" thought and speech.

As Newman himself suggests, many people single out as principal culprit in the destruction of the English language our purported inability to think, speak, and write "logically." We should say what we mean, shorn of illogical, irrational emotive content. Language is used to communicate cool information. Anything else is dispensable--intrinsically dangerous.

Actually, if you listen to normal speech, nothing is further from the facts. Most person-to-person communication is done not for the purpose of exchanging pure information about the world outside the speakers, but rather in order to give the participants messages, overt or, more often, covert and not fully conscious, about how they feel about each other. It is easy to see that many conversations fulfill purely this latter function, and very few purely the former. Most conversations, of course, are a mixture; but even when we're telling our interlocutor how Saturday night's party was or how to make a soufflé, we are at the same time telling him how we enjoy talking to him, how we outrank him, how we hope he's interested in what we're saying, or any of countless other expressions of feeling. This is not rational or logical discourse, especially as its messages tend to be implicit and inaccessible to the participants' conscious minds; but if you ask someone how he found his conversation with Harry, he's apt to say that he found Harry a cool guy, Harry can really tell a good story, he wishes Harry would stop showing off--which are comments on the implicit, rather than the explicit, message.

Our feelings about who and what we're addressing ourselves to are expressible in many ways in a discourse. Perhaps most subtly, we say how we feel through gesture and stance. We use vocal inflection. And, on the purely verbal level, we can choose among lexical items that are closely synonymous--except that

they have different connotations, impart different nuances to the message; and we have choices in terms of sentence structure and sentence-type that also make a great difference in the interpretation of what we are saying, although looked at superficially one should be fully identical to another.

Thus, for instance, I have numerous choices at my disposal to describe John's appearance and behavior at a party:

John was drunk.  
John was intoxicated.  
John was inebriated.  
John was feeling no pain.  
John was stoned.

(It is important to note that, the greater the possibility that what is being said will embarrass or otherwise disconcert someone, the more choices we are apt to find. Thus, we find many words--as we see above--for describing a state of alcoholic intoxication; but many fewer for eating too much, which we don't find quite as blameworthy.)

All the five examples I have given have the same denotative content, equivalent to a policeman's report that John's blood, when tested, was found to contain alcohol above a certain precise level. (Of course, our examples are based on subjective rather than objective judgment, so that it's wrong to say the two types are truly equivalent.) But while the first comes perhaps closest to being totally value-free, the others each seem to add something to the communication--connotative content based on emotional and highly subjective decisions by the speaker of each hypothetical utterance, which, correctly interpreted, tell us something about the nature of the interchange in which the speaker is participating, his view of John's behavior, and his view of his relationship with his addressee. It's true that these additions to the denotative content carry no informative "meaning," but see what happens to the communication if you use the second, let's say, to your close friend in an informal talk, or the last in a medical report. Communication breaks down, confusion results. Can we say that these irrational additions are unimportant--or undesirable?

What bureaucratise in all of its incarnations does is bleed the language of its emotive content. Words are chosen, syntactic patterns are selected, precisely for their distancing effect, for their relative lack of connotation. The implicit message of all bureaucratise is, "This doesn't matter to you or to me--I'm above all this and if you were reasonable, so would you be." It is the implication that emotional reactions

to the communication, being illogical, are bad or stupid--the claim of our professional rhetorical establishment--that allows us to be willingly bamboozled by bureaucratic bombast, if I may borrow a stylistic unnicety from a late-lamented (or perhaps already forgotten) master of the art. The bureaucrat is saying to us, "I'm going to treat you like a reasonable adult by saying . . . ," a form of address we never use explicitly to anyone who is a reasonable adult. Thus, what Newman advocates, the use of purely logical expression, would, if carried out literally, spell victory for the bureaucracy.

The politician speaking of preemptive strikes, the doctor talking about carcinoma, the lawyer with his parties of the first and second part, all distance participants from what they're talking about. At this point someone may protest that more is going on--there is the intent to obfuscate in terms of denotation as well as connotation. I would argue rather that what makes bureaucratese so unintelligible, so obtuse, is precisely its lack of emotional content, which we speakers of human language lean on to aid our understanding, as a cat uses its whiskers to aid in its spatial perception. A cat has perfectly good eyes with which it can see, but cut off its whiskers and it will appear confused and awkward. In the same way, if the emotive content is not there as a clue to us how to go about understanding a statement, we will feel vague and disoriented about it although its intellectual meaning really is perfectly clear.

An interesting illustration occurs in Sally Quinn's book We're Going to Make You a Star.<sup>\*</sup> In face-to-face conversation, we can make use of countless subtle devices to express our feelings. But on television, many of these modes of expression are denied a speaker--so he must compensate by emphasizing those he still has at his disposal--in particular, inflectional patterns:

"If you listen to a good newscaster," Jim pointed out, "you'll notice how he will speak almost in a singing voice, going up and down, occasionally hitting certain words. It's totally different from a conversation, where you might not emphasize a word . . .

"You would never talk that way in person but you've got to on television or you sound bored and unenthusiastic." (p. 168f)

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<sup>\*</sup>New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.

It is not the Latinateness of the bureaucratese vocabulary that renders it dense--English is replete with borrowings from Latin that we find perfectly lucid. It is not that bureaucratese resorts to neologism either--we react quite differently to slang, which is at least as neologistic. Rather, bureaucratese employs Latinate neologism purely in order to keep one jump away from emotive content, to keep us in the dark about how to feel, and consequently, we sense that we cannot quite understand, but can't put our finger on exactly where meaning has eluded us.

Syntax as well as vocabulary aids the murk. Anything that absolves participants of the responsibility for the content of their utterances serves to obfuscate. Hence we find the jargons noted above swimming in passives, in "we's" used to refer to a single speaker or writer. These devices are particularly rife in my own acquired tongue, academese; in fact I have been told that the virtuous academic prefers the passive, prefers "we" to "I"--and rightly so. "It's more polite," say the arbitri elegantiarum. "It shows you aren't pushing yourself at people." Well, if your ideas really aren't important enough to fight for with all your heart, why publish at all? Rather, academese is the first and last resort of the coward who has fled the real world in the first place. It is a plea to absolve the writer from responsibility for his errors, whatever they are--the usage of academese explicitly negates the well-known footnote formula found in so many scholarly papers, "All errors, however, are the author's." The passive says, "All errors aren't the author's--they belong to the unstated agent of sentences like, 'It has been shown above. . . .'" "We" means "blame him, whoever he is. Not me." The whole thing is reminiscent of a child's attempt to get out of difficulties by inventing imaginary companions who do the dirty work.

It is probably unfair to lambaste users of bureaucratese as conscious agents of evil. Rather, they are sucked into the same trap as those against whom the language is used. One might wish to argue that it is as much the fault of the hearer of bureaucratese that it continues to exist as of the user: if people refused to stand for it, it would vanish. But absolution from responsibility is attractive to anyone--user and recipient of bureaucratese alike. We conspire to be unaware.

But still bureaucratese is created with deliberate and nefarious intent, and we may rightly condemn its users on those grounds. What about that other bete noire--fuzz, imprecision? I have said earlier that bureaucratese and fuzz were similar. And yet they feel different to us--we make different value-judgments about each.

They are similar in that both obscure. Both are worthy of attack, according to the criterion of intelligibility, because both interfere with the clarity of communication. Bureaucratese does it, in some sense of the word, intentionally, while fuzz seems less purposeful. Actually, rather than say that one was conscious and deliberate, the other unconscious and innocent, we should say that both styles are selected at different levels of awareness. Each is most certainly used purposefully--but it has been known for some time that the human psyche is capable of unconscious, as well as conscious, intent.

Fuzz, itself perhaps a fuzzy term, encompasses both lexical imprecision such as euphemism and hedging, and syntactic hesitancy as exemplified by the redundant use of expressions like "I guess" and "I think," and the use of questions where declaratives would be more appropriate.

Euphemism is the use of a word or phrase that seems innocuous to replace one that is emotionally loaded. Therefore we find euphemism most prevalent in semantic areas that a society considers objectionable. In fact one way to tell at once what a particular culture finds embarrassing is to see what parts of the vocabulary have euphemisms attached to them. For instance, in our own society we find many words for "bathroom," itself a euphemism; but many fewer for "kitchen." We may therefore hypothesize that what one does in the bathroom is considered unmentionable and embarrassing; while what is done in the kitchen is all right.

In this respect euphemism is like the technical Latinate vocabulary of bureaucratese; and indeed, that special vocabulary seems to cluster around the same concepts as do euphemisms: there are some things no one wants to talk about. But euphemism accomplishes the aim of avoidance in a different way from technical terminology.

Since sex is one of the tabooed topics, we have a profusion of ways to avoid confronting it directly. For instance, we might say either of the following sentences rather than a third, which discretion forbids my directly citing in a paper to be read by academics, but the discerning reader will know.

John and Mary were copulating in the pantry.

John and Mary were getting it on in the pantry.

In both cases, typically, it is entirely clear to both speaker and addressee what John and Mary were up to. Otherwise communication would break down, the addressee would say in all innocence, "What were they doing?", the speaker would counter with a sub-

stitute, and this game would continue until understanding was attained. But normally this roundabout system is not necessary. The speaker employs a form he is reasonably sure the addressee will understand. The difference between the first and the second examples, the former technical, the latter euphemistic, lies not in their different intents, but in how they both attempt to achieve the same result; the pretense that they are not saying what they are.

Technical terminology, a subtype of bureaucratese, manages not to seem to say what it is saying by pretending that highly-charged concepts are emotionally vacuous. This is as good as denying that they have meaning altogether. The conveyed or implicit sense of a sentence like the first is something like, "We are talking about IT all right, but we're reasonable people who don't get emotionally involved in our discourse--it doesn't bother us." But in the second, the implicit sense is, "We're not really talking about IT; if we were it would be embarrassing." Fuzz typically operates in this way; since the speaker feels, for various reasons, nervous about how the addressee will respond to what he is saying, he leaves it up to the addressee to decipher his message, so that if the addressee objects, the speaker always has the option of beating a hasty retreat. In this way fuzzy language is confusing: it seems ostensibly to give the addressee options as to how to interpret the speaker's communication, but in fact he has no true options; the options are for the speaker, to be interpreted however is most advantageous to him, which may mean not at all.

Hedging, the second kind of lexical fuzz mentioned above, has the same result. There exist both lexical hedges that qualify or mute the force of words, like sorta in John is sorta tall, meaning "John is tall relative to some standards but not others"; and pragmatic hedges that qualify the entire speech act, absolving the speaker from the responsibility for it. For instance, consider the effect of the underlined item on the force of the sentence in which it occurs:

I guess it's time to go home.  
It's sorta time to go home.  
It's, y'know, time to go home.

While each of these is evasive in its own way, all allow the speaker not to express strongly what he has to say. Although in each instance he knows perfectly well, in his little black heart, that it's time to go, he leaves it up to the addressee to determine whether it really is. (Of course, the addressee knows full well that it isn't up to him, not at all; but the speaker has weaseled out of the responsibility so who

is left?) Hence these devices impede the flow of communication. Often they are considered non-deliberate, the fault of unclear thinking brought about by a poor education, a lack of mental discipline. But the speaker knows perfectly well what he intends before he utters sentences like those above; he doesn't need a Ph.D. in mathematical logic in order to know that it is late, or he is bored. Imprecision of this type, then, is just as purposeful in its way as bureaucratese is in its. But bureaucratese arises out of power, which is why we resent it; and fuzz arises from impotence, which is why we feel impatient with it. Fuzz exists to conceal a sense of personal inadequacy, a lack of self-confidence.

Hence it is the sheerest irony--if not outright sadism--to try to cure the y'knows by jibes and criticism, as Newman seeks to do. The more a fuzz addict is criticized, the less confidence he will feel in his ability to communicate, and the more he will resort to fuzz to avoid being picked on. Similarly it should be clear that education, in its classical forms, will be of little use. Our whole educational system is set up to teach the youth to be afraid of and subservient to their teachers and others in authority; is it any wonder that students resort to fuzzy exposition in class?

The bureaucrat conceals the connotative content of his message from himself and others; the fuzz user conceals the denotative content. In both cases, the speaker is partly the dupe of his own intentions. We feel somehow that the bureaucrat, being in a superior position to the addressee, has the choice, could come clean; and in fact, in another and better world, perhaps he could. But the principal difference, I think, and the reason we respond differently to bureaucratese and fuzz, lies in the matter of power: the bureaucrat has power over his addressee, so that his obfuscation can hurt, and often does; and it principally hurts people other than himself. But the fuzz-user's language, coming from an inferior position, hurts no one but himself. So we feel sorry for him, or at least feel that he gains nothing by his imprecision while the bureaucrat does; that the fuzz-user could do better if he wanted to, if he only could learn to think clearly. The fact is, however, that the fuzz-user does gain from his imprecision precisely what he wants to get from it--freedom from responsibility. For those of us not so addicted, it is perhaps difficult to see why this represents an advantage over articulateness, but for a lot of people it does.

This brings us back to our original topic, the magicalization of articulateness. We have described some very different ways of coming to grips, consciously or otherwise, with the power of the word. I have suggested that, for a great many of the people who hold positions of influence, and therefore, we

may conclude, for our culture in general, the force of the word is very great indeed--a way out of worrying about the force of actions, which we have much less power to control. If you are aware of the power of words as a replacement for the power of actions, and you fear the power of actions, sooner or later words will acquire the very fearsomeness of what they replaced. You can then do either of two things, if you want to go on living comfortably:

(1) You can reassert--continually and without surcease--your power over words, show that you use them, not vice versa. This is Newman's, and incidentally Humpty Dumpty's, solution. Unfortunately, it does not reduce the noxious power of the word over you. You have to keep fighting, which is why any incursion represents a terrific threat. If you really could ignore it, of course, it would go away.

(2) You can adopt a conscious position opposite to the one you more deeply fear is true. If you believe words have great power, you can think and act as if they don't. To be articulate is to grant that words are magic--say it wrong and the spell fails. So being imprecise and bombastic is, in a rather perverse way, to deny that words are powerful for you. But again, it takes a certain amount of mental effort to be inarticulate in either of these modes; people are at their most gloriously human when they express themselves most eloquently, and in speaking sloppily we are cutting off our tongues to spite our faces. But it seems to some, apparently, that the gain is more important than the loss.

The point is that Newman's solution is just as much a stopgap measure as the forms of speech he inveighs against. Both arise out of a lack of confidence in one's attributes and abilities. If we want to restore articulateness to the language, we must work at a much deeper level than Newman envisions.

It is not enough to teach people lists of forms, like our Vulgar Latin grammarian. It is not even enough to fill their heads with logical syllogisms. Rather, students must learn very early that we have at our disposal a wide variety of styles, linguistic and psychological. It is up to their instructors to make the choice among styles conscious rather than unconscious, by explaining what the purpose (at whatever level) of each style is, and how each is apt to be received and perceived in different real-world settings. Ideally, the student, having learned this, becomes the master of his style rather than its servant, and becomes confident that what he has to say will be well received, because he has selected the best possible way to express it.

I am suggesting, finally, that schools should enable their students to be flexible in their modes of presentation of self. But this is a radical departure from our present conception of education. Education at best has always involved the inculcation of purely cognitive information that acted only upon the learner's conscious mind. But I urge now that we try to devise means to give a person control over his very personality--to make the unconscious conscious. This is an education that incorporates the highest goals of psychotherapy--indeed, is psychotherapy, except that it is prophylactic rather than curative. Clearly this sort of linguistic education is rather a more formidable goal than the teaching of "language arts" and logic would be in Newman's proposed revision of the educational system. But I think I have shown that halfway measures like Newman's have always failed and are doomed to failure in the future. Perhaps it is time to turn our energies to something Utopian, so that whatever little we achieve will at least be progress.

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## REVIEWS

Roger Fowler. Ed. Style and Structure in Literature: Essays in the New Stylistics. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975. Pp. viii + 262; Index of Names. \$13.50.

This book has seven essays, called chapters, most of which were given at a conference held in Britain in 1972. The general approach which Fowler advocates, and which most contributors at least mention, holds that the proper discussion of style needs to take "the reader"--whether real or ideal--into account. For reasons connected with the methodologies of the critics and, perhaps, with Fowler's demand that criticism be lively and reveal meaning, the connection between "style" and "structure" is never made. Before I make a general comment on the collection, a brief review of the approaches and literary targets seems appropriate.

(1) An introduction by Fowler identifies the "New Stylistics" as part of some recent trends in linguistic theory, and in Slavic and French structuralisms. (2) Donald Freeman uses transformational grammar (syntax) to analyze three poems by Dylan Thomas, "Light breaks," "The force that through the green fuse," and "A refusal to mourn." (3) E. L. Epstein explores the "mimetic" or analogical relations between syntax and word-choices in Pope's Pastorals and Blake's "Tyger." (4) Fowler himself gives a detailed account of a "good reader's" response to Shakespeare's sonnet, "That time of year," number 73. (5) Jonathan Culler joins other structuralists in the effort to state criteria for the definition of "narrative units," or plot elements. (6) L. M. O'Toole demonstrates formalist (analytic) and structuralist (synthetic) approaches to a story by Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Sussex Vampire." (7) John Rutherford uses a version of Todorov's method, from Grammaire du Décaméron, to treat "story, character, setting, and narrative mode" in Benito Pérez Galdós's 1882 novel El amigo Manso. (8) Seymour Chatman reviews some contemporary structuralist methodologies, and applies them briefly to early twentieth-century novels and stories.

Fowler claims that *The New Stylistics* can both connect linguistic analysis with "critical interpretation," and "take account of" readers' responses. The linguistic analysis can use any of a number of methodologies, just so long as the result avoids being a "bank of minute observations of phonetic and syntactic patterning." Fowler's villain in this regard is Roman Jakobson in particular, formalist analysis in general. "Critical" when paired with "interpretation" implies that the meaning of a text and its purely aesthetic features must be included in the final account of its style.

Invoking another factor, the reader, gets Fowler to approve the kind of affective stylistics projected by Riffaterre, Fish and Greenfield. Affective stylistics places the critic's personal reaction above formal semantic descriptions or discussion of semantic theory.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, affective stylistics requires no display of facts beyond citing the text, and it is unlikely to be "positivistic" or systematic. Another simplification is that affective stylistics can avoid exploring whether a given reading is agreed to by anyone else. A full-dressed account of reader-responses would involve polls, questionnaires, controlled experiments with versions of the text with the alleged stylistic-device removed or distorted, and the like. Norman Holland has given an explicit warning: "when you actually collect and compare . . . variations among interpretations, they turn out to be very much larger than one would have expected."<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the New Stylistics has as a theoretical ground, in practice it looks very much like explication de texte, especially in Fowler's essay, whose scope is a trifle broader than the specific focus on syntax made by Freeman and Epstein. Furthermore, this New Stylistics is voluminous. The three essays comprise one hundred pages of the book for six poems; at that rate, treatment of all Shakespeare's sonnets would fill somewhere between 2500 and 3000 pages. Perhaps more important for methodology, each poem is treated as a unique utterance, as indeed each is, but no obvious path exists for serious generalization or extrapolation--I will return to this point.

The four structuralist essays treat longer works; well, two of them do. Culler's rather short contribution is mostly about the criteria for a theory of plots; after contrasting the views of Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, and others, he concludes that an adequate theory needs to include changes in readers' expectations as the narrative is read, but he does not actually outline the theory. Chatman's essay is valuable chiefly as a survey of some current work on the nature of narration; it juxtaposes some speech-act theory (Ohmann's version), Stanzel's

Narrative Situations in the Novel, and work on stream of consciousness by Melvin Friedman, Robert Humphrey, L.E. Bowling. While Chatman makes comments about Mrs. Dalloway and Ulysses, the several theoretical sources are reported on but never quite melded.

O'Toole traces the relation between contemporary Soviet structuralism and earlier Formalist and Structuralist schools. Like many current versions of structuralism O'Toole adopts a working analogy with generative grammar, or at least he uses some of the terms and concepts. The deep structure is called a "theme"; the surface "text" has elements of plot, character, and imagery. The candidate proposed for the theme of the Sherlock Holmes story is "the triumph of reason over the irrational." O'Toole's analytic section clearly shows how the Fabula (chronological order of events) and Plot (story's order) are related, although he quietly assumes that the boundaries of events are well-defined. Discussions of point of view and setting isolate the familiar tension between ironic and false leads which plague Watson and the reader, and the true but cryptic information which Holmes controls. The final, "synthetic" section of the essay suggests how the thematic antithesis, irrational/rational, is manifested in Doyle's syntax, with its wealth of oxymorons, but-constructions, and parallel events. These pages get bogged down a bit amid maps, non-mnemonic symbols, and arrows, all of which presuppose that the reader knows the story quite intimately.

The second piece of structural analysis, by John Rutherford, builds on the first. This allows the analysis of character and setting to be put in terms of theme quite briefly. Rutherford then gets to the main topic, an effort to define "story," the actions and situations which are somehow interlinked. He directly confronts the issue of segmentation into events, and further into vital and accessory events. The tentative solution is a modestly simple metalanguage which lets the four main "sequences" of El amigo Manso be set out in a couple of pages. This story is augmented by an "enigma," a series of questions which in this particular novel are posed explicitly by the first-person narrator. The enigma is gradually answered, and that dialectic forms a second structure which complements, but does not mimic, the four-part story structure. Both story and enigma are illustrated in sufficient detail. The essay's reader should be able to try these strategies out on other narratives to test whether Rutherford has identified parts of a general theory of narrative.

At least two major problems are clearly left unsolved by the end of this book; the first is general, while the second is particular to the structuralist approaches. First, none of the contributors has shown in a systematic way how "style" and "structure" are to be related. This is especially striking since the style chapters treat short and lyric poems, while the structure chapters treat considerably longer prose works. One source of this difficulty is that the style chapters do not allow for generalization. Since the features most often treated by critics of poetry are of phonology and syntax, the obvious way to generalize is to count frequencies and do a statistical description and analysis of the results. However, the affective school does not think at all well of statistical approaches, they being, as they are, the sum of "minute observations" (p. 3), and not the line-by-line account demanded by Fish and others. This "new" stylistics seems to preclude the treatment of longer works, or of an author's corpus, or of the literary production of an era; if so, the critic must accept the axioms that every work needs to be treated in isolation and that the precise nature of larger structures cannot be demonstrated.

The second problem, the one for structuralists to worry about, is associated with the centrality of "theme." The theme is alleged to be the deep structure which generates all surface events from plot to characterization, even to sentence-level stylistic choices. It must, then, be easily identifiable, and preferably identifiable without extensive empirical analysis of the text (say by a formal abstracting algorithm). Further, the realization of a theme must be spelled out before a given text is analyzed, or else the allegedly formal consequences will be made up ad hoc. For instance, both O'Toole and Rutherford claim that antonyms express the themes of the books they treat. Implicitly, then, the other structures of the texts will have to be polar opposites which work out the dialectic. O'Toole comes to identify antithetical syntax with the presence of a dialectical theme. Problems arise throughout. If the theme of "The Sussex Vampire" were redefined as "the rational always does well," then the story would take on a telological dimension, since it would aim to prove the validity of a single assertion. Does this change invalidate the previous claims about syntactic and semantic features which support a dialectic theme? Another problem is that the theme of the rational versus the irrational by no means uniquely identifies "The Sussex Vampire"; it is far too general. If the generative-transformational grammar analogy is to be taken seriously, then a given theme-statement must generate only that set of texts which mean exactly the same thing, an obvious absurdity, no matter how elaborately the theme is defined. Again,

some hypothetical statistical approach might serve us, where features of all sorts were tested for the frequency of their occurrence in various texts--Doyle might prove to have significantly more antithetical syntactic structures than other writers of his era, a fact that would help confirm the validity of the claims about underlying structures.

Despite the reservations I have expressed about the approaches and theories presented in Style and Structure in Literature, it remains a useful anthology. Fowler's earlier collection, Essays on Style and Language (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) shares one important virtue with this new book: the contributors to both books maintain a healthy concern to show how abstract or "theoretical" statements can be applied to literary texts.

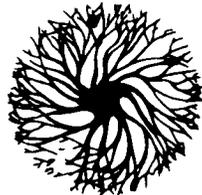
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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Fowler's reader is variously denoted by "I," "we" and "he," a further confusion.

<sup>2</sup>"UNITY IDENTITY TEXT SELF," PMLA, 90 (1975), 816; see also fn. 8.



Ronald Paulson. Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975. P. 256. \$25.00.

Ronald Paulson's work leads us, perhaps inevitably, to place rather heavy expectations upon him. Even so, his latest work does not disappoint us but further illustrates the author's considerable critical powers. This is a fine book; it is erudite, witty, and full of stimulating critical insights. Paulson's study of meaning in eighteenth-century English art offers some fresh perspectives on this challenging and chimerical subject. As he tells us early on, Paulson is interested here in meaning in terms of what a given work "imitates" (mimesis) and what it "intends to do" (to the reader/viewer), not in terms of "significance" (the sort of de facto

interpretation placed upon the work by its subsequent critics). This is necessarily a difficult tightrope to walk, since the author as critic is himself creating and defining "significance" even as he writes; it is an indication of Paulson's abilities that, in spite of occasionally tottering, he avoids falling off.

In formulating his theory of meaning, Paulson draws primarily upon visual art, and to a lesser degree upon literature and the landscape garden, formal artifacts in whose underlying structures the author discovers some important parallels. Paulson's discussion rests upon his primary contention that the "great" art of the 1760s and 70s developed not the influence of Reynolds but of Hogarth and his St. Martin's Lane Academy followers, and upon the related assertion that the greatest visual artists were not the history painters (like Reynolds or Barry) but those who worked with humble and intermediate subjects (like Stubbs or Gainsborough). This suggests that the focus of eighteenth-century art turned gradually from the heroic and sublime to the commonplace and mundane, from the visionary to the "real" world. But this is only a single aspect of the complex cumulative transition in "meaning" and its representation that he intends us to perceive.

Paulson's study undertakes a semantic discussion of what serves such diverse artists as Reynolds and Blake as "the Language of Art": both the formal construct of paint on canvas and the full range of connotations or "readable meaning" suggested by the iconography employed. The study of various works, Paulson tells us, suggests whether the artist intends his use of iconography and artistic convention as allusion (where the visual reference is overt and intended for recognition) or as an aspect of a private and personal structure of meaning (where the reference is covert). Paulson maintains an insistent focus on the relationship that an artist establishes with the traditions and materials of his medium. Contemporary criticism has come to call the artist who comfortably embraces and preserves his artistic inheritance a conservative (like T. S. Eliot), while labelling the artist who rejects or restructures that inheritance a revolutionary (like Blake or Yeats). An artist's struggle with his own choice of relationship is reflected in his art, and Paulson suggests we should look for evidence of the tension thus produced in both the visual and verbal art of the eighteenth century. We are told that one central consequence of this tension is eighteenth-century art's gradual diminution--and finally its demythologization--of traditional iconography, suggesting the revolutionary character that art was beginning to assume. Whereas pre-1750 painting, following Renaissance practice, generally attempted to function as moral philosophy, combining

conventional iconographic symbols with a narrative, moral content to create universal fictions or allegories ("explicit readable structures"), subsequent painting turned toward aesthetic formalism, reducing both conventional iconographic substance and narrative or moral content in an effort to create highly personal and variable evocative statements ("spatial or formal structures"). In short, the shift is from the complex work that must be systematically "read" (Paulson's consciously semantic term), through that whose unified impression can be apprehended in a single gestalt, toward that which is intentionally ambiguous and open-ended.

Two primary themes inform Paulson's study: (1) the shifting attitude toward conventional iconography and (2) the change in the degree of subjective involvement the artist expects or demands of his reader/viewer. His treatment of the first theme involves a discussion of Hogarth's practice of using iconography to illustrate or elaborate a subject while it simultaneously subverts both that very iconography and the ideals it purports to represent. This is not mere unconstructive satire, however, but a conscious attempt to restructure tradition, suggesting new and viable alternatives to the outworn conventions, a decidedly revolutionary impulse. For, as Hogarth's progresses in particular demonstrate, even as the iconographic suggestions of "high art" are reduced to the bathetic and the ridiculous, so too are the foibles and pomposity of modern man which they adorn similarly undermined. Hogarth intends his reader/viewer to observe the conflict of popular, contemporary motifs with the conventional iconographic suggestions of the sublime whereby they are represented in order that he may revise or reject his own expectations of meaning in arriving at what the artist actually "means." In a brilliant discussion of Hogarth's Industry and Idleness, Paulson demonstrates how Hogarth manipulates our expectations in such a way as to force us to re-evaluate stereotypical conventions and recognize the fallacy of bipolar thinking about apparent meaning and value. While the value judgements to be placed on Tom Idle and Francis Goodchild initially appear obvious, Paulson explains, we discover that this initial simplicity collapses, upon closer inspection, into an enigma: both characters exist in a world where "moral good" and "moral evil" are very much alike, a world in which the two apprentices' seemingly different fates prove largely interchangeable. In a sense, by visually manipulating the reader/viewer's expectations, Hogarth "tricks" him into agreeing with the apparently simple dichotomy, only to undercut the very premises--the carefully-engineered expectations--upon which that secure agreement is based. Hogarth's procedure in this progress provides, finally,

an essay in Skepticism in which the conclusion is not clearly resolved but is left up to the reader/viewer.

In contrast, Paulson explores Reynolds' conservative assertion of convention, emphasizing that artist's reactionary emphasis of past over present, unification over fragmentation, universal over particular (like Dr. Johnson's famous unstreaked tulip): "If Reynolds goes the way of Francis Goodchild toward unification, concentration, and the Lord Mayorship, Hogarth and his followers pursue Tom Idle toward subjects and forms of distraction, separation, particularity, and multiplicity" (p. 94). But, according to Paulson, Reynolds' attempts to utilize iconographical suggestion to "dignify" his portraits and merge them with the genre of history painting were ultimately out of step with the general march of the arts. In artists like Zoffany (who typically reduces iconography, like an extreme Hogarth, to mere pictures on the walls), Watteau and Chardin (who try to rid art of the iconographical and mythological apparatus so the objects depicted can be regarded simply as objects), and Canaletto and Piranesi (who stress the disparity between the old iconographic ideal and the diminished and corrupted modern reality) we discover further evidence of the shift away from clear, iconographical or emblematic "reading" of a work and toward general and diversified "impression-forming." Stubbs's art, like Chardin's, emphasizes objects as objects, and de-emphasizes man. In his work man is reduced; he is at odds with and inferior to Nature which, unlike the rules and regulations of artistic academicism, provides the "real" elemental forms and forces upon which artists are coming to structure their works. To the later artist, man is rather an outsider; he has much to learn from his response to the "natural," not the artificial, world.

This reduction in the role of iconography coincides with an increasingly complex function as participant for the reader/viewer. Just as Hogarth invites his audience to participate in the resolution of the artist's visual suggestions (as in Industry and Idleness), so do succeeding artists come to demand ever more from their respective audiences. Whereas the pre-1750 artist asserts a common body of experience and expectation with his audience--a clear sense of unity--the later artist tends to subvert this secure relationship in order directly to involve his audience not merely as spectators but as participants in the infinitely variable and diversified experience of the art object. In responding to Sterne (e.g., Tristram Shandy) or Gainsborough, in other words, the reader/viewer's own experience contributes heavily to the "meaning" he both imposes upon and extracts from the work. Paulson is right to stress the significance of the Lockean principle of association here where it so obviously relates to literary developments like the sentimental novel and the Gothic novel, and which involves the diversity of

shifting perspectives that Paulson considers a fundamental structural principle of both the English landscape garden and the English "conversation piece" painting. Paulson sees this effort to involve the audience as especially prevalent in Gainsborough's work. That artist's later works, conspicuously not highly finished, invite the viewer to share in the creative process by supplying details drawn from his own experience and thus making the art object also a part of that viewer's "real world" by adding it to that cumulative body of experience. The relative obscurity or ambiguity of such visual works (and the analogous verbal constructs) involves, as Paulson notes, the Burkean concept of the imaginative "pauses" in which what the artist leaves unsaid contributes to the sublimity of the work. But, as we quickly realize when we consider the practice of an artist like Turner, obscurity and suggestivity were soon to become central components of artistic "meaning." Reynolds strives for total clarity, for a definitive "meaning" that can be taken in at a single, unified view of a work. Gainsborough, moving in the direction of revolutionary, Romantic practice, avoids the intricate verbal (or verbalizable) nature of conventional history painting, choosing instead the intentionally imprecise style. We find the literary equivalent in the collapse of rational forms of communication in Tristram Shandy and their replacement by an irrational, associative form of communication that relies on the contribution made by the reader's creative imagination.

Paulson's discussion is directed throughout toward defining the shifting basis of "meaning" in eighteenth-century art, propelling us toward the recognition that universal literalism was being replaced by private (though ultimately shared) impressionism, that visual and verbal art was becoming less concerned with what the artist could put into a readable "semantic" structure than with what the reader/viewer could take out of an evocative representation (like Keats's Grecian Urn). What a work of art "meant" became increasingly a matter of what a reader/viewer himself made of the suggestive art object he observed. In a sense, Paulson seems ultimately to suggest that in being forced to participate in the particular work in order to ascertain its "meaning" (as the later eighteenth-century artist consciously intended) we become much less able objectively to stand back and "read" the work: the conventional and empirical elements and connotations are removed or transformed before our very eyes in the process of perception as our minds work upon the art object and the art object works upon our minds. In redirecting us toward this perception of the audience as mutual creator, the point so frequently verbalized by the Romantic poets and critics,

Paulson provides us with a valuable key for assessing the developments in eighteenth-century art.

Several further points deserve mention here. It is rather surprising that, in outlining the transition from iconographically-saturated art to anti-iconographic art, Paulson says very little about the changing nature of the artists' audience. Yet, as the literary example shows, the many-faceted art object perceived by a relatively elite connoisseur group was becoming at this time a different sort of many-faceted work, less iconographically or mythologically "loaded," perceived now by a much broader and more diversified audience. That this period produced the beginnings of a "proletarian" sort of art doubtlessly reflects the manner in which changing social conditions (and consequent audience dimensions) influenced artistic production, a point that really deserves much fuller consideration than it is given here.

Paulson's style is itself almost Hogarthian in its blending of candid, informal discussion with exceedingly close critical reading. This stylistic practice does get in the way occasionally, as in the discussion of Industry and Idleness, where Paulson suggests a relatively simplified reading of the plates only to subvert it by dismantling that simple expectation of meaning to reveal complexity and paradox. As Paulson tells us, "we would appear to be at the bottom of the matter, concerned with pure choice; but if we think the choice is being made by the apprentices, we are clearly mistaken: it is being made by the readers, and it is not so simple as the readers are at first led to believe" (p. 73). While Paulson is in a sense reproducing Hogarth's own procedure, the result of such verbal circling is sometimes confusing and disconcerting.

It must be stressed that one thing Paulson's book very clearly does is to frustrate attempts on our parts as readers/viewers/critics to regard the literature of the eighteenth century as totally separate from both visual art and "social art" (e.g., the landscape garden). The forms differ, of course, with the media, but the "meanings" are frequently engineered in intentionally analogous ways. Paulson's considerable attention to the visual semantics of eighteenth-century art proves very useful, as the author demonstrates in his perceptive remarks, when related to literary practice of the period. The visual art, an "older" art form undergoing transition and transformation, reveals much in particular about the newer and developing form of the novel in England, and Paulson's comments on this matter are ingenious.

Finally, the book itself is well produced. Its 162

illustrations (of various sizes) are most helpful to the reader and are, for the most part, reproduced about as well as black-and-white printing will allow, with little of the blurring or severe darkening one too frequently finds in such reproduction. It does seem a great pity, though, that at least a few of the most crucial paintings are not printed in color, since for a number of works Paulson discusses, the matter of color is quite important to the author's argument. Paulson's is the sort of book that invites consideration in conjunction with a work like Eric Newton's The Romantic Rebellion in formulating further theories about the particular artistic transformations that occurred in the eighteenth century. Clearly, it is a valuable and provocative contribution to interdisciplinary artistic scholarship.

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#### BOOKS RECEIVED

- Culler, Jonathan. Ferdinand de Saussure. New York: Penguin Books, 1977. \$2.95.
- DiCesare, Mario and Mignani, Rigo. A Concordance to the Complete Writings of George Herbert. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977.
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- McConnell, Frank D. Four Postwar American Novelists: Bellow, Mailer, Barth and Pynchon. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977. \$15.00.

STEPHEN BEHRENDT has published several studies of William Blake's illustrations to Milton's poems.

BRENDA DANET has issued several working papers on "The Role of Language in the Legal Process," work supported by the National Science Foundation. In the fall of 1977 she will resume a joint appointment in communications and sociology at The Communications Institute of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

BRUCE JOHNSON is a senior research associate with the Law and Language Project at Duke University.

ROBIN LAKOFF has published many influential articles in Language and other linguistic journals. She is the author of Language and Woman's Place (1975).

MARJORIE PERLOFF has written Rhyme and Meaning in the Poetry of Yeats (1970), The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell (1973), and Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters (1977).

The most recent of the articles on language and literature published by DONALD ROSS is "Who's Talking? How Characters Become Narrators in Fiction," MLN, 91 (1977).