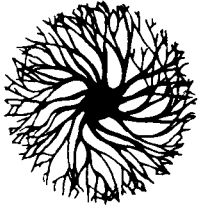


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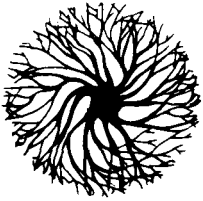
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PREFATORY NOTE

The next issue of *Centrum* New Series, Volume 2, Number 1 (Spring 1982), will contain a special section of review articles on some applications of linguistics and literary theory to the teaching of composition.

The Place of Letter-Writing in Literary History

Introduction

The papers on "The Place of Letter-Writing in Literary History" collected in this issue of *Centrum* were originally delivered at the 1980 MLA meeting in Houston, part of the session sponsored by the Division of Nonfictional Prose. They appear here substantially as they were delivered and therefore reflect the constraints imposed by their occasion. The response then was more than lively, coming to an end only under the compulsion of our having to make room for the upcoming meeting. The general topic as defined in the announcement inviting papers was broad indeed, but not unsuitably so, I think, given the largeness of the Division's purview.

Since there were a number of requests for copies of the talks, I want to thank the Editors of *Centrum* on behalf of others as well as myself for generously providing space for this publication. As the panel chair I am especially pleased to have this opportunity to thank the three panelists, not only for their willingness to participate and to give substance and shape to the topic, but also for permitting their papers to appear together, a circumstance which goes some way, at least, to recreating the original occasion.

A word on the rationale for selecting the 1980 topic. We are all aware that the editing of letters has in recent years reached epic, not to say epidemic, proportions. The Herculean labors and editorial skills which have gone into this scholarly effort are truly monumental. Offhand, and limiting oneself to English letters, one can think of the forty-plus volumes of Horace Walpole's letters, with a five-volume index yet to come, the twenty-five volumes (so far) of Newman's letters and diaries, the promised thirty volumes of the Carlyles' letters, not to mention a host of smaller editions of lesser, or at least less copious, letter-writers. New editions appear each year, and whether or not letters continue to be **written** on the old scale, the great flood-tide of letter-writing over the past several centuries is a stark historical fact, having produced a vast body of literature which has only begun to receive serious and sustained **critical** attention. Where shall we begin, and how shall we

presume, indeed!? If one ignores the fairly numerous studies of the Epistolary Novel and the Poetic Epistle, as our own topic required, there remains surprisingly little criticism that deals directly with the aesthetics of letter-writing. The modest goal of our panel was to make a beginning in this direction, to open up some unexplored areas, to suggest some ways of proceeding.

Generically, the letter might arguably be said to fall somewhere between the diary (being usually private) and the essay (being usually expository), but it is a protean form in itself. Probably few correspondents would be willing, even if they were able, to follow Carlyle's injunction to a correspondent: "tell us the biographic doings of your travelling party: dramatically, epically, lyrically . . . explain all with copiousness, frankness. Above all be autobiographic." Moreover, the areas of scholarly interest on which letters impinge — politics, economics, morals, and so on — are almost limitless. The Houston panelists, aware of these larger parameters, would agree with me, I think, that we had a sense of entering a vast, fertile, but relatively unworked field.

The papers that follow certainly touch on some of the larger questions. Professor Fruman's report on a Wordsworth letter inevitably prompts reflection as to why a great poet would be silent in his poetry about an experience to which he gave impassioned statement in a letter. Professor Ferguson raises the question of the letter-reader, the reader who is not addressed as well as the one who is, thus introducing our topic — albeit by means of a letter from fiction — into the strong and turbulent current of present-day reader-oriented criticism. Professor Rosenbaum examines letter-writing from an unusual but rewarding perspective, what might be called letter-writing as a coterie phenomenon, and opens up some complex questions bearing on cultural history. I trust that these papers, in raising and discussing their several questions, will prove to be as stimulating and rewarding for readers as they were for their original audience.

*Department of English
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WILLIAM A. MADDEN

Norman Fruman

Some Principles of Epistolary Interpretation

The neglect of the letter in contemporary literary studies is not hard to understand, for the letter is singularly unaccommodating to any of the critical systems which have dominated western thought since the rise of Imagination and Organicism some two hundred years ago. A fundamental question arises: is the letter literature at all, or is it rather some adjunctive form having its own proper interest, but little if anything to do with art?

Anyone, in theory at least, can write a letter — even a pretty good one. But that is obviously not true of a poem, or a story. No one, so far as I know, has claimed that letters are better when they admit of multiple interpretations, or that they characteristically communicate by ambiguity, irony, or organized indirection, or that they have no reference outside their own linguistic boundaries. The idea has never taken hold that the language of the letter is never the language of common life, or that a true letter has a necessary internal structure, contains within itself everything necessary for its own comprehension, balances discordant qualities, reconciles opposites, or anything of that sort.

Since it has become obligatory to quote at least once from Roland Barthes in any paper having to do with texts and subtexts, I will contribute this **morceau** from his elegant funeral oration on "The Death of the Author": "Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin."¹ But the letter seems to be inextricably rooted in a personal context and a historical milieu. The author of a letter obstinately refuses to set sail on the sea of eternity, never again to be seen from the shore. Had Keats's letters been written by his friend John Hamilton Reynolds, himself a minor poet, they would cease to be Keats's letters in a double sense. The death of the author in that case would mean the death of his putative creation, no less than the reattribution of a painting from Rembrandt to an obscure follower changes the nature of the painting, if not in the mind of God, surely in the mind of the auctioneer, museum director, and — as a historical fact — the overwhelming majority of art critics.

[*Centrum* New Series, 1:2 (Fall 1981), pp. 93-106.]

In ancient times, treatises such as that by Demetrius attempted to define the principles of what made for a good letter. The Middle Ages produced many able manuals on the subject, but since the Renaissance little has been written on what makes for epistolary excellence, and at no time, so far as I know, has there been any discussion of how to **interpret** a letter.

In this near obliviousness to problems of meaning, readers of letters differed hardly at all from critics of literature. "You can read through virtually all the major works of the important literary critics before the 20th century," E. D. Hirsch has rightly said, "without finding an extended discussion of the problem of interpretation. In Britain, writers like Sidney, Pope, Hume, Johnson, Coleridge, and Arnold simply did not question their interpretations of the texts they read. They asked of a piece of writing, 'Is it good?' or 'Why is it good?' rather than 'What does it mean?'"²

What I would like to outline here are some basic principles of epistolary interpretation. I am not primarily concerned with canons of excellence, but rather with what we must do to arrive at a valid reading. What makes a letter instructive or delightful or both will derive from some familiar categories of literary value: originality, intensity, expressiveness, intellectual power, stream of mind, and so forth; what will be singularly absent from epistolary theory are principles concerning unity, imaginative transformation of experience, plurisignification, and the delights of obscurity. I shall ignore such texts as Burke's *Letter to a Noble Lord*, *Junius' Letters*, Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, or Horace's *Ars Poetica*, which is, after all, cast in the form of a letter to a friend. These works, like Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* or Southey's *Letters from England*, are all variants of the essay and can be read as such.

But that is not true of the personal letter, a private communication between two persons which, rather suddenly, flowers into a major literary genre in the eighteenth century. Earlier examples of this form are rare, and do not exist at all in some of the world's great cultures. Clearly, this special kind of personal letter was the product of particular social conditions (which may now be passing). What is distinctive and valuable about this genre was identified by Bolingbroke in a letter to Swift:

Pliny writ his Letters for the Public; so did Seneca, so did Voiture, &c, &c; Tully did not; and therefore these give us more pleasure than any which have come down to us from antiquity. When we read them we pry into a secret which was intended to be kept from us. That is a pleasure. We see Cato and Brutus and Pompey and others such as they really were, and not such as the gaping multitude took them to be, or as Historians and Poets have represented them to us.³

Bolingbroke did not ask himself how reliable an observer Cicero was, but

responded directly to an extraordinary property of the private letter — its revelation of character. Ironically, it is Cicero's letters that have made him one of the most detested figures from antiquity, "a humbug, a spiteful, pompous, vain-glorious windbag," whom many readers, from the great historian Mommsen to the irascible Kingsley Amis, could not abide.⁴

It is the personal, the intimate, the private revelation of human character and feeling that give the letter its unique value. In the spring of 1922, Virginia Woolf picked up a volume which contained letters by both Byron and Shelley and reacted thus: "Compare [Byron's] letters with the stiff and stilted compositions by Shelley here unfortunately placed beside them. Sir Timothy's conduct is (for the first time) intelligible. To have this prig for one's son, to listen to his preachings intolerable."⁵ And here is Rosa Luxemburg exploding in a letter of 1894 to her lover and fellow revolutionary, Leo Jogisches: "Your letters contain **nothing**, but **nothing** except for *The Worker's Cause* . . . I want you to write me about your personal life. . . . every letter, from you or anyone else, always the same — this issue, that pamphlet, this article or that. Even that I wouldn't mind if **besides, despite** it, there was a **human being** behind it, a soul, an individual."⁶ Now that points us to just what we all want from a letter. It is what Carlyle asked of Jane Welsh: "It seems to me the chief end of letters is to exhibit to each a picture of the other's soul."⁷

It was the private, informal letter that awakened the biography from its long torpor to a vivid imitation of life. When William Mason had the brilliant idea of using Gray's letters in his biography, he gave an unprecedented impression of vitality and verisimilitude, which mere description, even of a close friend, could not achieve. The dead Gray, mouldering in a country churchyard, was resurrected to participate in the writing of his own biography, as Mason shrewdly perceived. But Mason manipulated, spliced, cut, and rearranged Gray's letters with outrageous freedom, as did William Hayley in his later biography of Cowper. Hayley not only garbled the letters, but falsified Cowper's unique style.

The modern scholar is faced with the dismal fact that there is perhaps not a single collection of letters more than forty years old which is reasonably trustworthy, and that **all** the letters in **all** the biographies until recently are yet more suspect. Nor are recent collections reliable, particularly when prepared for general audiences. A recent translator of Colette explains in his preface that he has followed his "own taste, trimming freely and trying simply to show Colette in her daily zest." As a reviewer properly points out, the result is a Colette the editor wishes to emphasize, and since most of the letters in the collection contain omissions, which sometimes alter the basic meaning, the collection is almost useless to the scholar.⁸

Yet despite the many shortcomings of contemporary collections of letters, wholesale suppression is not nearly so common as in former eras. Quite apart from their less stringent standards of transcription, earlier scholars regarded

quite a lot as unfit to print, including matter that merely put the author or his circle in an unfavorable light. It is difficult to overestimate the distorting power of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, a principle which operates very powerfully today. Cowden Clarke, Keats's early teacher, was expressing a conventional opinion when he said that no gentleman would publish anything that would give pain to others, or reflect unfavorably on the dead. Wordsworth was outraged by the revelations in William Allsop's *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge*, published just two years after STC's death. "The editor is a man without judgement," Wordsworth wrote to a friend, ". . . the maxim *nil de mortuis nisi verum* was never meant to imply that **all** truth was to be told, only nothing but what is true" (to Edward Moxon, 9 January 1836). As we shall soon see, about Wordsworth himself, failure to publish the whole truth in his letters resulted not merely in partial truth, but in significant distortion.

William Knight was so fussily moralistic a Wordsworth editor that one must be extremely wary of **any** of Knight's transcriptions in the absence of the original letters, many of which have disappeared. (Apropos, the disappearance of Dorothy Wordsworth's Alfoxden journal, last used by Professor Knight in 1897, permits certain disturbing questions to go unanswered.) Gordon Wordsworth admitted to Pierre Legouis that he had destroyed references to Annette Vallon and Wordsworth's French daughter. Coleridge's editors, usually members of the family, deleted crucial matter from his letters (and notebooks) which threatened to cause embarrassment. The *Edinburgh Review* for July 1885 regarded the publication of Keats's letters as "an act of sacrilege to [his] memory . . . an act of desecration." Reviewers of later editions joined in the outcry: "They distinctly lower one's estimate of Keats as a man." As late as 1926, John Drinkwater wrote, "Nothing . . . can ever justify the publication of Keats's love letters to Fanny Brawne."⁹

The bedrock principle of epistolary interpretation, then, is similar to that of any kind of literary study, though in practice very much more difficult, namely, to establish the authenticity of the text. Any interpretation of a letter from a printed version must be regarded as tentative. It is a fact scarcely understood that print cannot accurately convey the range of nuance and meaning that exists on a handwritten page. The most recent editor of Lamb's letters attempts to provide a more accurate sense of Lamb's distinctive orthography, so expressive of his sometimes playful personality, by freely using uncommon types, including **BOLDFACE**, *BOLDFACE ITALIC*, and **LARGE BOLDFACE**. The transcription is much more accurate than F. L. Lucas's had been, yet the appearance of the new page, with its unfamiliar typography, is very distracting and quite false to the experience of reading the letters themselves. Moreover, upon collating the first letter in this edition, that of 27 May 1796 from Lamb to Coleridge,¹⁰ with the holograph in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, I found twenty words printed in **BOLDFACE** for which there was — so it seemed to me and some other scholars I consulted — no warrant in the text. I found two false capitals,

three extra periods, one false comma, and four dubious indentations. I cite this not to criticize this edition, which is in many respects admirable, but to emphasize the limitations of all transcriptions.

We ought to pay far more attention than we customarily do to the origin of a text, and this is rarely provided in the editions we commonly use. Wherever a printed text is based upon a letter that has disappeared, we need to know who was responsible for the transcription and what his principles and practice were like when we can compare. For example, many of Keats's letters were first published from transcriptions made by John Jeffrey, his sister-in-law's second husband. Where Keats's original letters can be compared with Jeffrey's transcriptions, the results are simply appalling. Keats's magnificent journal-letter of September 17-27, 1819, which runs to some thirty-three priceless pages in Rollins's edition, was slashed and chopped by Jeffrey into just three pages, less than 10 percent of its original length! How then shall we handle the six letters transcribed by Jeffrey for which there are no originals? One of them is the supremely famous one on "Negative Capability," which is uncharacteristically short. Robert Gittings believes that "some of Keats's most famous phrases, such as 'Negative Capability,' may have been invented or misread by Jeffrey, and that the word 'Penetralium,' cited by Andrew Lang as showing that Keats had no classical education, almost certainly was."¹ (H. W. Garrod, with a patronizing snicker, also feared that the false case-ending of "Penetralium" told us the worst about Keats's Latin.¹²) For very different reasons, having to do with his own future reputation, the transcriptions of Keats's close friend Charles Brown cannot be trusted, and this is important wherever originals do not exist — which is often the case. Victorian pieties caused Joseph Severn and Monckton Milnes to excise from the published record evidence of Keats's suicidal despair in his final agonies.

One cannot, therefore, trust appearances, assurances, or promises where transcriptions are concerned. Things are only sometimes what they seem. A second controlling principle of epistolary interpretation derives from the unsettling fact that even with a clear holograph letter before us, we may be looking at skimmed milk masquerading as cream. If the besetting sin of earlier editors was to freely bowdlerize texts in obedience to the principle of speaking only well of the dead, modern scholars still tend to accept rather too readily appearance for reality. The tendency is understandable, and certainly preferable to going through life with a paranoid questioning of people's veracity. Nevertheless, critics who are neurotically suspicious of the reliability of fictional narrators sometimes become very upset if the truthfulness of a real author is questioned. A few grains of the questioning critical spirit so routinely applied to narrative would help greatly when approaching the private letter.

Simply stated, the second principle of epistolary interpretation is this: a text can only be securely interpreted in a context. The private letter is only part of a larger structure of personal relations within a specific situation. If we

are asked to interpret a soliloquy, we insist upon studying the rest of the play. Recovery of relevant epistolary context is rarely easy, usually arduous, and never certain. How does one ever know that one knows enough to interpret a letter? One may not even know that a letter needs interpreting, for what looks completely straightforward can be highly deceptive. I shall cite one example of this. My example is, unfortunately, somewhat controversial, and difficult to do justice to briefly; it is, however, of some interest.

On 27 December 1791, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote Josiah Wedgwood, the wealthy son of the famous potter, to thank him and his brother, Tom, for a very generous gift of £100, which they had sent so that he could refuse the post of a Unitarian minister in Shrewsbury, a job which various Bristol benefactors were trying strenuously to obtain for him. "You . . . have given me tranquillity & leisure of independence for the next two years," Coleridge wrote gratefully, years which, he hoped, would help him contribute to society "my quota of Truth & Honesty."¹³ Those who have scrambled for Fulbrights and Guggenheims and NEH grants will easily appreciate how Coleridge felt. Two long years of independence! Leisure to finish "The Ancient Mariner," which was far advanced, and to get at some of the other marvelous projects in his teeming brain. Now he would not have to leave his "dear gutter of Stowey," where his best friend and benefactor, Thomas Poole, lived, and which was within easy walking distance of his great new friend, William Wordsworth. But no sooner does he post this happy letter than a firm offer from Shrewsbury arrives. Does he turn it down, as you might expect? No, he hesitates . . . apparently.

Nine days later he actually returns the £100 to the Wedgwoods, with a long explanation: "I will state to you with great Simplicity all that has passed thro' my mind," he writes Josiah. "The affectionate esteem, with which I regard your character, makes this openness pleasant to me."¹⁴

Summary cannot do justice to the artistic and psychological complexity of the seemingly simple and open statement that follows. The twenty-five-year-old Coleridge, a husband and father, practically penniless and living on hand-outs from various benefactors, declares that he owes it to his family ("it is probable my children will come fast upon me") to think beyond the next two years. Even with the Wedgwood gift, he would have to do some work for the newspapers, and this is not a fit occupation "for a man who would wish to preserve any delicacy of moral feeling. . . . Of all things I most dislike party politics." Nor does he wish to be a minister, for this is morally compromising, too. However, if he is forced to do the unwelcome work of preaching for hire, it will be at Shrewsbury, where he has been offered a post that will give him "at least five days in every week of perfect leisure — 120£ a year — a good house, valued at 30£ a year." It would make him miserable to leave his home and friends at Nether Stowey, but — "a permanent income not inconsistent with my religious or political creeds, I find necessary to my quietness . . . it would give me very great pleasure to hear [from you] that I had not forfeited

your esteem by first accepting, & now returning it [your gift]. I acted, each time, from the purest motives possible . . ."⁵

I have had to condense this extraordinary letter severely. It pulses with a moral power, selflessness, and ethical delicacy which is surely quite rare. Coleridge sent off the letter, went up to Shrewsbury, and preached brilliantly to the Unitarian congregation there. But he did not accept the job now being urged upon him. He stalled. Why? Surely he was not going to turn down the job at this point? Five days went by, and a letter arrived from Thomas Wedgwood, this time practically begging Coleridge to accept, not the £100, but an annuity of £150 (precisely the sum he had said his salary and rent-free house at Shrewsbury would come to), a **lifetime** annuity, no strings attached, precisely what STC had said he needed, "a permanent income not inconsistent with my religious or political creeds."

Fortuitously, the nineteen-year-old Hazlitt was at Shrewsbury when the fateful letter arrived. Here is his famous description from "My First Acquaintance with Poets": "Coleridge seemed to make up his mind to close with this proposal in the act of tying on one of his shoes." Little did the young Hazlitt know (or anyone else since) how much thought Coleridge had in fact put into the matter, that Coleridge had just won a very daring gamble for extremely high stakes, which involved being able to read with remarkable insight into the character of the guileless and generous Wedgwoods and simultaneously to be able to stall his Bristol benefactors, who had worked so long and hard to get him the Shrewsbury post.

Coleridge knew what neither the context nor Professor Griggs's annotation tells us, namely that the enlightened Wedgwoods had for some time been seeking worthy but impecunious young men of sterling intellectual and moral character on whom to bestow complete economic independence. They had already done so several times. Surely the reason for Coleridge's mysterious delaying tactics at Shrewsbury was in hopes of just this result. How did the Wedgwood letter get to Shrewsbury at all? It had originally been posted to Nether Stowey, where Thomas Poole, surely by prearrangement, opened it and sent off a copy at once to the waiting Coleridge.

The letters Coleridge wrote to his friends during this tense period are full of odd and obscure inconsistencies, and some outright falsehoods. Professor Griggs was so confused by the date Coleridge clearly wrote at the top of one letter that he suspected a slip of the pen, never seriously considering the possibility that the date was correct and the following sentence, which is contradicted by subsequent statements to other correspondents, deliberately false.¹⁶ I shall have to pass over the revealing web of evidence in support of this interpretation of a fateful episode in Coleridge's life, one which was to have profound consequences. Those who do not look past the text to the subtext in Coleridge are consistently misled by appearances. Instead of the "open and great Simplicity" promised, what we actually have is a brilliantly wrought fabric of flattery, stagey moral fervor, and subtle suggestion which

reveals an impressive practical shrewdness and willingness to take daring chances with which Coleridge is rarely credited but which is a consistent feature of his life. (Within two years, despite the annuity, and what he had written to the Wedgwoods about loathing the newspapers and party politics, Coleridge was in London, writing partisan editorials for the *Morning Post*.) In Coleridge, text without context is often an invitation to misreading. But what defines the limits of a context? A deeper understanding of the letters just interpreted would require more detailed knowledge of the Wedgwoods, and of Coleridge's Bristol benefactors, especially the Reverend James Pryor Estlin. To accuse a young man in Coleridge's circumstances of insincerity or manipulating his admirers may be to ignore crucial aspects of the problems confronting a poet of genius, aflame with glorious projects, daily and hourly nagged by the necessity of putting bread and cheese in his family's mouth. But before one leaps to this satisfying conclusion, one might remember Coleridge's retrospective public account of his character as a youth: "I was at that period of my life so compleatly hag-ridden by the fear of being influenced by selfish motives, that to know a mode of conduct to be the dictate of prudence was a sort of presumptive proof to my feelings that the contrary was the dictate of duty."¹⁷ Was the middle-aged Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* still manipulating his admirers?

More than any other kind of writing, the letter invites and requires footnotes, those "voices that bark from the basement." Regrettably, escalating publication costs will certainly reduce such annotation in the future. Irrevocably gone, perhaps, is the former practice of providing at least some of the important letters **from** those with whom the great corresponded, not to mention significant related materials. Prothero's edition of Byron and F. L. Lucas's of Lamb, though now superseded with respect to textual accuracy, nevertheless contain much that is important to interpretation that is unavailable elsewhere.

We have seen that a small group of letters can mean something very different from what they appear to mean, and what the author **intended** them to mean. I should like now to give a moving example of how a single letter, unknown until four years ago, and not yet published, can drastically alter accepted views and force some rethinking about all the other letters this man wrote. I refer to a letter William Wordsworth-circle letters and manuscripts which mysteriously appeared in a British junk shop a few years ago.

Until now only one letter from William to Mary was known for the entire period of 1812 to 1820. Letters between them are rare for any period — a fact that has sometimes been taken as further evidence of Wordsworth's tepid feelings for Mary. Much was made of the Annette Vallon episode when it became known half a century ago, and it has long been common in Wordsworth studies to suppose that the poet's decline was at least in part a result of the impoverishment of his emotional life after his marriage, that Wordsworth, unable to bring back the hour of splendor in the grass, grew old

in the embrace of a woman he felt no passion for. Here is part of what Wordsworth wrote to Mary from London – he was forty-two years old:

How I long (again I must say) to be with thee: every hour of absence now is a grievous loss, because we have been parted sufficiently to feel how profoundly in soul & body we love each other; and to be taught what a sublime treasure we possess in each other's love . . . the fever of thought & longing & affection & desire is strengthening in me, and I am sure will . . . make me wakeful & . . . consume me. Last night I **suffered**; and this morning I tremble with sensations that almost overpower me. I think of you by the waters & under the shades of the Wye, and the visions of nature & the Music . . . raptures of love, the love I felt for thee . . . as an expecting Bride . . . till this very moment when I am writing, & Thou most probably out thinking of me and losing all sense of the motion of the horse that bears thee. . . . Oh my beloved but I ought not to trust myself to this senseless & visible sheet of paper: speak for me to thyself, find the evidence of what is passing within me in thy heart, in thy mind in thy steps as they touch the green grass, in thy limbs as they are stretched upon the soft earth, in thy own involuntary sighs and ejaculations, in the trembling of thy hands, in the tottering of thy knees . . . oh what an age seems it till we shall be together under the shade of the green trees . . . and in that hour which thou lovest the most, the silence the vacancy & the impenetrable gloom of night. Happy Chamber that has been so enriched with the sweet progeny of thy pure bosom: with what gratitude shall I behold it! Ah Mary I must turn my pen from this course . . .¹⁸

The image of Daddy Wordsworth blurs, does it not? Had this letter been known when the Annette Vallon affair first came to light, it is most unlikely that the subsequent avalanche of speculation would have taken so extreme a form. That Wordsworth **could** write in this way throws an unexpected light on all the rest of his correspondence, which is mostly dull and impersonal. I once read, but alas have lost the note, that Wordsworth wished to make his letters dull so that no one would be tempted to publish them after his death. If Wordsworth's intimate letters to his wife have been unknown up to now, that is because the family didn't want them known. "Oh my beloved but I ought not to trust myself to this senseless & **visible** sheet of paper." Does this not tell us forcibly that Wordsworth, like innumerable others, was profoundly loathe to put some things down on paper that might be seen by alien eyes? We should not be judgmental about this. Attitudes towards privacy vary enormously.¹⁹ The **fact** is that much has been destroyed, or hidden away, much that represents a Wordsworth not acceptable to his Victorian heirs and editors. The Wordsworth we know has been to some extent gussied up. This unexpected letter throws a revealing light on the entire correspondence, and we can now see that the restraint and stiffness of the other letters give a skewed picture of the total man. The famous "Two Voices" of Wordsworth must now be extended to the correspondence. There is good reason to

suppose that Wordsworth actually did have a passionate prose voice, but that specimens of it have been destroyed or suppressed. James Russell Lowell wrote, "A letter ought always to be the genuine and natural flower of one's disposition," and Newman declared that "the true life of man is in his letters,"²⁰ but neither statement takes account of the problems of privacy and censorship, which are writ large throughout literary history.

There is a marked tendency to assume rather too readily that private correspondence, and personal notebooks for that matter, were written without any thought of possible publication. We know, of course, that Pope and Mrs. Montagu and many others took anxious pains to insure that their letters were preserved and published, and we should always remember that writers of any fame at all after the seventeenth century must have been aware that their letters might one day be exposed to prying eyes. Dorothy Wordsworth, for example, upon finishing a bitter letter to an intimate friend about Coleridge's opium addiction and deliberate falsehoods begs, twice, "**Burn** this letter."²¹ Determining when a personal letter is contaminated with the corrupting whiff of printer's ink is sometimes very difficult, and experts disagree sharply. Stephen Potter expresses a common opinion in declaring, "It is obvious that he [Coleridge] never has in mind the possibility of the posthumous publication of his letters. . . . all is written with the spontaneity of the notes and marginalia."²² I have no doubt that De Quincey was more insightful when he asserted: "I am satisfied that he never wrote a line for which he did not feel the momentary inspiration of sympathy and applause, under the confidence, that sooner or later, all which he had committed to the chance margins of books would converge and assemble in some common reservoir of reception."²³ In 1801, Coleridge delivered a violent attack on Isaac Newton in a letter to Poole, and made some highly uncharacteristic and unguardedly assured remarks about his own relative intelligence. He was obviously haunted by this, for two-and-a-half years later we find him pleading with Poole to destroy the former letter and the present one in which the request was made: "if I were to die & it should ever see the **Light**, [it] would damn me forever, as a man mad with Presumption." He wrote again for the same purpose a few months later.²⁴ Surely Coleridge had an eye on posterity from an early age. Nevertheless, it would reveal a radical misunderstanding of Coleridge to deny that his letters sometimes contain his deepest and most private thoughts.

The great sets of letters we have in English, those by Gray, Cowper, Horace Walpole, Lamb, Keats, Byron, FitzGerald, consist almost entirely of private correspondence, and yet there is a significant sense in which it must be understood that many letters, though written in silent rooms in the dead of night, were nevertheless accompanied by the ghostly clatter of the printing press. The interpreter of an epistolary text must therefore be wary of extrapolating from what may in fact be a public style to the private man. Especially where skilled writers are concerned, an easy informality may be disguising the inner person kept carefully out of sight. Rilke's letters, for example, are so carefully composed that they are not really private letters at all, but self-conscious extensions of his formal literary work. Conversely, when Gottfried Benn in a

blazing epistle described Rilke as "this little runt of a man, concealing his often degenerate existence in delicate, sickly, shameless and at the same time crafty and forever squinting and cringing subterfuges,"²⁵ we can be reasonably sure we have here the true voice of outraged private feeling, wild as Benn's views may be. Perhaps it is a judgment on our fallen state that many will enjoy reading Benn's letters more than Rilke's.

Finally, I turn, with some trepidation, to a potentially crucial feature of the holograph letter — its physical appearance and the significance of handwriting. How slight has been the interest of scholars in the subject has been demonstrated repeatedly by the paucity of facsimiles in major collections of letters. The first volume of Marrs's recent edition of Lamb's correspondence has eight illustrations, but only one is of a letter, which happens to show better than any amount of discussion how hopeless it is to represent the living page of handwriting in type. The six stout volumes of Coleridge's *Collected Letters* contain but a single facsimile, from the age of twenty-one. And the ten volumes of Leslie Marchand's new edition of Byron's letters and journals do not provide even one specimen of his handwriting, though each volume has a frontispiece.

One day a great deal will be known about the meaning of handwriting, at which time it will be regarded as primitive to interpret a letter from a transcription. To assert this will appear to many to be making common cause with palm readers and phrenologists. But skeptics would do well to remember that until Freud most of what had ever been written about dream interpretation differed little from gypsy dream books.

In recent years we have seen the beginning of the systematic study of the significance of voice, gesture, and a broad range of bodily movements that contribute to non-verbal communication. Long ago Hazlitt observed that Coleridge "continually crossed me from one side of the footpath to the other. This struck me as an odd movement," from which he was later to extrapolate psychological meaning.²⁶ Writers have always been acutely conscious of the crucial distinctions between thought, speech, gesture, and the written word. If the way one walks or shakes a salt cellar can have meaning, so, obviously, may handwriting. "Writing has this disadvantage of speaking," wrote Keats. "One cannot write a wink, or a nod, or a grin, or a purse of the lips . . . in all the most lively and titterly parts of my letter you must not fail to imagine me . . . now here, now there, now with one foot pointed at the ceiling, now with another — now with my pen on my ear, now with my elbow in my mouth."²⁷

Words embody only part of the total meaning of speech, or writing, and we have only begun to read between and around the lines of voice and manuscript. Adam Mickiewicz brooded on this very matter, and this relevant passage I have drawn from another of Rosa Luxemburg's letters:

Language is false to the voice,
 the voice is false to thoughts;
 Thoughts fly up from the soul
 before they are caught in words.²⁸

Probably everyone from time to time wonders about the personality behind a spidery script with broken lines and gossamer thin strokes, or the author of a bold hand with lines as tough as copper wires, with steady loops and firm strokes. Eventually, a great deal will surely be known about the significance of individual characteristics of penmanship. Why does Donne place his commas distinctly below the level of his other letters? What do the blurred thickness, irregularity, and narrow spacings of Milton's hand tell us? Can the orthography of Blake's letters throw light on some of the long-standing disputes about his psychological states at various times in his life? "It is notorious that William [Wordsworth] had an abnormal disability to penmanship," Ernest de Selincourt wrote, "and his calligraphy, always bad, is sometimes execrable. 'I am,' he told De Quincey, 'the most lazy and impatient Letter writer in the world.'"²⁹ Are there meanings here to be discovered? Before the riddle of the Sphinx can be solved, however, one must acknowledge first of all that there is a riddle.

No doubt we will wait a long time for the Chompolions and Freuds of calligraphy to provide us with valid keys to the interpretation of handwriting in letters, and indeed of manuscripts of all kinds. But there is no reason to doubt that come they will. Much that is now hidden will be brought to light, and many stubborn controversies may be settled at last. The private letter, which has always been precious for its intimate revelation of the human soul, has many more secrets to disclose.

NOTES

- 1 In *Image — Music — Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 142.
- 2 "Carnal Knowledge," *New York Review of Books*, 14 June 1979, p. 18.
- 3 Quoted from the title-page of Thomas Allsop's *Letters, Conversations and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge* (London, 1836).
- 4 See D. R. Shackleton Bailey's introduction to his translation of *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp. 16-17. It is

worth noting that a classical scholar like Bailey, untouched by recent developments in literary theory, takes it for granted that "Cicero's letters only come fully to life against a historical and biographical background" (p. 7).

- 5 "Byron and Mr. Briggs," *The Yale Review*, 68 (1979), 332. I have not been able to locate the edition Woolf used.
- 6 "Rosa Luxemburg: New Letters," trans. Elzbieta Chodakowsk-Ettinger, *Encounter*, 53 (September 1979), 19.
- 7 Quoted from *Nineteenth Century Letters*, ed. Byron Johnson Rees (New York, 1899), p. xvii.
- 8 See Diane Johnson's review of *Letters from Colette*, trans. Robert Phelps, *New York Review of Books*, 2 April 1981, p. 6. The recent editions of the correspondence of Steinbeck, Edmund Wilson, and Flannery O'Connor also contain numerous unidentified omissions, which the editors suppose the reader will not be interested in.
- 9 *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Rollins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), I, 5, 6-7, and 7, n. 9. Since this paragraph was written, *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Scribner's, 1981) has been published to a storm of controversy, often centering on the propriety of publishing materials which will cause pain to the living or hurt the reputation of the dead. A. E. Hotchner, the author of *Papa Hemingway*, has severely criticized this edition for indiscretion, and George F. Will speaks for many when he writes, "It is not nice to cause unnecessary pain, or to violate the wishes of the dead, just to satisfy the reading public." See the latter's syndicated column of 20 April 1981, *Minneapolis Tribune*, p. 8A.
- 10 *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. W. Marris, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), I, 3-6.
- 11 *Letters of John Keats*, ed. Robert Gittings (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, Galaxy paperback, 1970), p. xxii.
- 12 *Keats* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1926), p. 33n.
- 13 *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), I, 360-61. Hereafter cited as *CL*, I.
- 14 *CL*, I, 364.
- 15 *CL*, I, 366-67.

- 16 *CL*, I, 360 and n. 1. See also Letters 216 and 231.
- 17 *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (New York: Dutton, Everyman, 1956), p. 100.
- 18 Quoted from an unbound catalog distributed by Sotheby's in connection with a planned sale of the materials.
- 19 In 1863 Charles Dickens destroyed countless letters written to him and subsequently urged recipients of his letters to do the same. Merimée almost casually burned all his letters from Stendhal. Cosima Wagner destroyed Nietzsche's letters to her, and the vast falsifications and fabrications perpetrated by Elizabeth Nietzsche on her brother's correspondence has led to wholesale distortions of his philosophical beliefs.
- 20 See note 7, p. xiv.
- 21 *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Middle Years*, ed. E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1937), I, 366-67.
- 22 *Coleridge and S. T. C.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p. 121.
- 23 *Recollections of the Lake Poets*, ed. Edward Sackville-West (London: J. Lehmann, 1948), pp. 197-98. Four volumes of Coleridge's *Marginalia* will appear in the *Collected Coleridge* now in progress.
- 24 *CL*, II, 709, 1013-14, 1046-47.
- 25 *Times Literary Supplement* (London), 3 October 1980, p. 1096.
- 26 See "My First Acquaintance with Poets."
- 27 20 September 1819, to the George Keatses.
- 28 See note 6.
- 29 *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Early Years: 1787-1805*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd ed. revised by Chester L. Shaver (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. xv.

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Interpreting the Self through Letters

I should like to begin my discussion by offering an illustration of some of the problems attending our interpretation of letters. As you will all recognize immediately, it comes from *Emma*. Harriet Smith has received a letter from Robert Martin containing "a direct proposal of marriage" to her and has asked Emma to read it.

Emma was not sorry to be pressed. She read, and was surprized. The style of the letter was much above her expectation. There were not merely no grammatical errors, but as a composition it would not have disgraced a gentleman; the language, though plain, was strong and unaffected, and the sentiments it conveyed very much to the credit of the writer. . . .

"Yes, indeed, a very good letter," replied Emma rather slowly [to Harriet's entreaty that she give her opinion] — "So good a letter, Harriet, that every thing considered, I think one of his sisters must have helped him. I can hardly imagine the young man whom I saw talking with you the other day could express himself so well, if left quite to his own powers, and yet it is not the style of a woman; no, certainly, it is too strong and concise; not diffuse enough for a woman. No doubt he is a sensible man, and I suppose may have a natural talent for — thinks strongly and clearly — and when he takes a pen in hand, his thoughts naturally find proper words. It is so with some men. Yes, I understand the sort of mind. Vigorous, decided, with sentiments to a certain point, nor coarse. A better written letter, Harriet, (returning it,) than I had expected."¹

Through the introduction of the letter into the story, we are permitted to see quite clearly the competing claims of, on the one hand, the letter and its meaning (which here quite palpably includes the style and the mechanics of writing) and, on the other, Emma's preconceptions about Martin which threaten to override the letter and its sense. In the tug-of-war that occurs between these two elements, the letter takes Emma by surprise with its

[*Centrum* New Series, 1:2 (Fall 1981), pp. 107-112.]

credible language and sentiments, Emma regains her confidence enough to accept the letter as proof that Martin could not possibly have written it himself, and finally she weakens again as she begins to describe the letter as definitely the product of a man — a man, moreover, who sounds a good deal like an ideal — a natural version of a Prince Charming or a Mr. Knightley. At just the moment at which one would certainly expect to discover that the author of the letter had triumphed through his intrinsic sense and merit as expressed in the letter, however, Emma does not hesitate to counsel Harriet to refuse his proposal instantly.

One might well want to argue that Emma's reading of Martin's letter provides yet another especially clear-cut example of her willfulness and disregard for the facts of a good many situations. But while that point is worth allowing, this particular passage suggests that there are problems surrounding letters that go beyond the boundaries of our judgment of Emma. Especially because Austen refrains from providing the readers of the novel with a copy of the letter, what we have to deal with is not a letter but instead characters clustered about that missing letter.

Emma's very ungenerous suggestion (soon discarded for its implausibility rather than its malice) that "one of [Robert Martin's] sisters must have helped him" leads us to the question of exactly what epistolary authorship involves. When we speak, for example, of Wordsworth's adapting the Miltonic style in various ways in *The Prelude*, our sense of Wordsworth's originality does not, generally, suffer from our awareness of Milton's influence on him; with the genres we recognize as literary, influence — the contribution of another — does not violate the author's claim to have produced a poem or a novel himself. With letters, however, as Emma's suggestion indicates, we tend to imagine that anyone who makes use of a letter-writing manual, the sections on letters from etiquette books, or suggestions from friends or relatives is somehow cheating. Although writing a letter with some kind of assistant may be a time-honored practice, Emma suggests that it is rather like using a pony for one's Latin translation or getting one's math answers from the back of the book. And, as in the case of those other versions of cheating, it seems dishonest because it makes it impossible for anyone to tell just exactly what the author of the letter thinks and knows on his own, as an isolated, independent self. In other words, the possibility that someone writes with the aid of another violates our desire to locate one (and only one) authentic self behind a letter.

What I would like to explore briefly is the question of the status of the self that is presumed to be involved in a letter. One of my fellow panelists, Professor Fruman, suggested in the letters that we panelists exchanged among ourselves that he is interested in providing a set of principles for literary interpretation. In a sense, Emma, by her example, has already led the way in such an enterprise as that. Indeed, my whole thesis could be summarized by saying that Prof. Fruman had help in writing his letter and his principles of epistolary criticism — whether he knew it or it, and whether he has a sister or

not. Help is inevitable rather than illegitimate. And, as Emma's example demonstrates, the interpretation as well as the composition of letters is likely to involve a collaborative effort. When Harriet and Emma read Robert Martin's letter, there can, to an extent, be said to be two letters — one for the dim and one for the perceptive. Harriet is impressed by Robert Martin's having written "as if he really loved her very much," and fears only that the letter might be "too short"; Emma provides a sensitive close reading of the letter and, while she nobly refuses to help Harriet with the wording of her reply, also offers the definitive interpretation of the letter. Although Emma never explicitly formulates her principles of epistolary criticism, it is easy to see what they involve — the sense that character is consistent (i.e. with what she has taken character to be all along in her belief that Robert Martin must be a farmer who either cannot write well on his own or that he must be, as she says, trying to "connect himself well if he can," and that Harriet must be the natural daughter of a gentleman); the sense that the style and the mechanics of letters accurately reflect social status (so that a farmer could hardly be expected to write a letter that "would not have disgraced a gentleman"); and, finally, the sense that one letter does not make a character any more than one swallow makes a summer (so that one letter, however good, does not count enough to overturn Emma's belief that Robert Martin is unworthy of Harriet Smith).

Although we see Emma trying to improve Harriet as she offers her own instructive examples of what it might mean to interpret a letter well, one thing worthy of note is that, while Emma is suspicious of the possibility of collaboration in the composition of the letter, she is perfectly content to collaborate in the interpretation of it. Of course, part of the humor of Austen's portrayal comes from Emma's sense of outrage at the possibility of Harriet's marrying a man whom she (Harriet) is too ignorant not to like. But there is a serious side as well to this interpretive collaboration. For the fact that Emma's account of the letter sent to Harriet is the definitive one functions as a reminder of the ways in which letters, probably more than most types of written language, are continually sacrificing individuality for the sake of social interaction.

Thus, although one individual may write a letter to another individual, the self that letters reflect is a highly socialized one rather than an unmediated or pure self. For behind every letter lies the possibility of collaboration in its composition, and ahead of it lies the possibility of collaboration as it is received and interpreted. Both the social conventions surrounding letter-writing and the writer's sense of the recipient's personality act to contaminate the purity of what one might take the letter-writer's autonomous individuality to be. And however much the individual self has been a primary value for much literary criticism, the hypothetical letter-writer who wrote merely to express himself, merely to get a message across, without any consideration either for his audience or for the social conventions governing the writing of letters, would be monstrous rather than pure.

The basic point here is that letters are always shaped by their attention to a very particular audience — or, as with fictional letters, an attention to a particular imagined addressee. And an excessive concern for the purity of the sender's individuality rather perversely obscures the letter's commitment to its audience. While Robert Martin wants to express himself to Harriet Smith (to declare himself, as the expression goes), he wants even more to secure her hand in marriage. And I would argue that when Richardson temporarily left off writing his book of model letters, *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions. Directing Not Only the Requisite Style and Forms to be Observed in Writing Familiar Letters: But How to Think and Act Justly and Prudently, in the Common Concerns of Human Life* (pub. Jan. 1741), and began to write *Pamela*, his shift from the practical to the fictional was not an extraordinary one. Both the letter-writer and the novel are fictional constructs, but fictional constructs that demonstrate the manifest utility of writing letters and of writing them well.

For the letter to work well, its appeal to its reader must be effective. A particularly interesting recent example of the recognition of a letter's impact occurs in Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* (which he calls a "true life novel"). In the Afterword, Mailer, in explaining his procedures in recasting direct transcripts and taped interviews for the novel, remarks that

With Gilmore's letters . . . it seemed fair to show him at a level higher than his average. One wanted to demonstrate the impact of his mind on Nicole, and that might best be achieved by allowing his brain to have its impact on us. Besides, he wrote well at times. His good letters are virtually intact.²

One might well want to shudder at the prospect of an emerging cottage industry devoted to the task of interpreting the letters of *The Executioner's Song* and trying to determine which letters were Gilmore's and which Mailer's — and exactly what percentage of each letter Gilmore and Mailer contributed to letters of "mixed authorship." But the point that Mailer seems to me to be registering very shrewdly is that it does not particularly matter who chose which words and phrases of each and every letter; the Gary Gilmore of impact is more important than Gary Gilmore as "only begetter" of the letters. As Gary's original letters to Nicole Barrett had enough influence on her to lead her to attempt suicide in a gesture of fidelity to him, so the letters that Mailer presents must make that impact plausible. As Gary Gilmore's original letters are to Nicole Barrett, so the letters that Mailer offers from Gilmore must be to the readers he imagines his audience to consist of.

Now I obviously do not want to suggest that a letter does not count unless its recipient is prepared to do exactly what the sender of the letter desires: one does not judge impact merely by the letter-reader's willingness to make a suicide attempt as proof of his loyalty to the letter-writer. But one of the interesting aspects of letters is that the letter-writer's sense of the letter-

reader's self (as it is or as it should become) frequently appears to be stronger than the writer's sense of himself. Gary Gilmore writing in prison may present a rather extreme example of the letter-writer's attempt to have his letters enact his will, but certainly the letter of instruction appears often enough through the centuries to point up the letter's function not primarily as an expression of the writer's self but rather as a means of molding the letter-reader's self. The producer who obtained Gilmore's letters "could see Gilmore was writing about everything. One place he'd give Nicole a college education with essays on Michelangelo and Van Gogh, in another, pages of fuck talk" (Mailer, p. 689). In "writing about everything" and in informing Nicole, "I want you to live like a hermit" (Mailer, p. 402), Gilmore is, of course, imparting information about his feelings and about what he knows, but the more significant aspect of these letters is the way in which the transmission of all he knows and thinks to Nicole constitutes the implicit injunction: be like me. Know what I know in order to think like me, to be like me.

Although the letter-writer is one of the most self-critical and apologetic creatures in the world of literacy, always castigating himself for his delay in writing, his lack of anything to say, or his inability to say it properly, his frequently abject stance goes along with the desire to fashion the self of the letter's recipient. On the one hand, the letter has long functioned as a long arm of education because of the letter-writer's genial desire to create or to expand a common ground between himself and his correspondent. On the other, the letter, precisely because it lays claim to a reply, registers an attempt both to generate and to enforce resemblance between the correspondents. Think, for instance, of Lord Chesterfield's famous letters to his son. Although he sends his son to school in Switzerland, Lord Chesterfield never really delegates the responsibility for his son's education. And in a letter of July 20, 1747, he sends his son not only a list of "The best models [of letter-writing] that you can form yourself upon" (including Cicero, Cardinal d'Ossat, Madame Sevigné, and Comte Bussy Rebutin), but also a draft of a letter that Philip [Stanhope] should send to his aunt with the remark that

She would not show me her letter to you; but told me that it contained good wishes and good advice; and, as I know she will show your letter in answer to hers, I send you here inclosed the draught of the letter which I would have you write to her. I hope you will not be offended at my offering you my assistance upon this occasion; because, I presume, that as yet, you are not much used to write to ladies.³

Were we to analyze the letter Philip Stanhope sent to his aunt, what self would we be identifying? (The question is, obviously, rhetorical.) And even more to the point is the problem of Lord Chesterfield's letter to Philip. When he gives advice to his son about "the best models [of letter-writing] that you can form yourself upon," the very ability to give the advice depends upon Lord Chesterfield's having formed himself upon some of those same models. And when he urges his son to accept his draft of a letter to the aunt, he

suggests something of the letter-writer's predicament; the injunction that one's correspondent pattern himself after one's own example or wishes finds a direct counterpart in the dominant writer's deep dependence upon the person to be molded. In encouraging his son to be like him, he impersonates his son writing a letter to his aunt.

I have not had anything to say about the way in which actual letters function in literary history conceived period by period. Nor have I dealt directly with the question of what kind of information letters can provide us. What I hope I have indicated, however, is the way letters represent the problems surrounding interpretation generally. Although letters may seem more directly available than other written forms for interpretations that will yield up hard facts and precise delineations of character, the apparent directness of a supposedly non-fictional form addressed, usually to someone the writer knows and knows rather well, turns out not to be very direct at all. For the apparent directness of letters indicates the pervasiveness of social fictions — and the ease with which we fall into them. Thus, I would argue that letters do not present a special case for interpretation because they are not as fictional or as literary as poems or novels. As with other forms of written language, letters will continue to present interpretive problems, but — and this is crucial — they will also continue to be interpreted. They will continue to be interpreted, however, not because we shall have arrived at more precise programs for interpreting them but rather because we are always interpreting them when we read them, whether we like it or not.

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NOTES

- 1 Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. Stephen M. Parrish (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), pp. 32-33.
- 2 Norman Mailer, *The Executioner's Song* (New York: Warner Books, 1980), p. 1021. All further citations of *The Executioner's Song* will appear in parentheses in the body of the text.
- 3 Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son*, ed. Oliver H. Leigh (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, n.d.), pp. 16-17.

S. P. Rosenbaum

Bloomsbury Letters

Let us consider letters — how they come at breakfast, and at night, with their yellow stamps and their green stamps, immortalized by the postmark — for to see one's own envelope on another's table is to realize how soon deeds sever and become alien. Then at last the power of the mind to quit the body is manifest, and perhaps we fear or hate or wish annihilated this phantom of ourselves, lying on the table. Still, there are letters that merely say how dinner's at seven; others ordering coal; making appointments. The hand in them is scarcely perceptible, let alone the voice or the scowl. Ah, but when the post knocks and the letter comes always the miracle seems repeated — speech attempted. Venerable are letters, infinitely brave, forlorn, and lost.

Life would split asunder without them.

—Virginia Woolf

I

It is tempting for the literary historian to respond to the topic of this session on nonfiction prose, "The Place of Letter-Writing in Literary History," by saying simply that it is preventive. The more he writes of them, the less he writes of it. The wording of the topic invites this kind of response because of the various meanings of the term **letter**. In the singular it is the most elementary part of written language, and in the plural it encompasses all literary culture. It is difficult to discuss a genre so ambiguously named in twenty minutes without being completely abstract, and therefore I am going to take just one particular instance of letters in literary history. It is a modern instance because there, without complicating historical obscurities, some at least of the interesting questions concerning the uses of letters may emerge.

My instance is the place of letters in the literary history of the Bloomsbury Group, a collectivity of loving friends and relations that includes E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, and Virginia Woolf as its principal writers. The

critics Desmond MacCarthy, Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, and Roger Fry, as well as the economist John Maynard Keynes, are also Bloomsbury writers, however; their writing does not figure importantly in the history of modern English literature, but it takes on a significance in the context of the Bloomsbury Group that it may not otherwise have. But before discussing the place — or rather the places — that Bloomsbury's letters have in the Group's literary history, it is necessary to be clear about the meaning of the term **literary history**. I have tried elsewhere to delimit a conception of Bloomsbury's literary history that focuses on both analytic and comparative descriptions of their interconnected texts in a historical sequence. These descriptions, viewed diachronically and synchronically, involve both the similarities and the contiguities of these texts. (See "Preface to a Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group," in the Winter, 1981, issue of *New Literary History*.) The place of Bloomsbury's letters in this idea of literary history has to do, first, with the fictive and nonfictive, public and private genres of letters they wrote, then with the transitive nature of letters that must be taken into account in their interpretation, and finally with the textual interconnections that letters display in Bloomsbury's literary history.

II

The usefulness of the term **text** in defining Bloomsbury's literary history is that it helps to avoid the central dichotomy in modern literary study between fiction, poetry, drama, and that other kind of writing that is identified only in terms of what it is not — and to which this session of the Modern Language Association is dedicated, perhaps in propitiation of our bad literary consciences. Bloomsbury was a prose literary movement (using **movement** in a very general way; their friendships preceded their fame and their manifestos.) And although Forster and Virginia Woolf wrote high fiction, they did not, as so many of their critics have, divide their own writings or those of other authors into categories of creative and non-creative prose. Both Forster and Virginia Woolf were more interested, for example, in whether a piece of writing was anonymous in its depiction of the self than in whether a given work was to be evaluatively classified as fiction or nonfiction. Their writing combines genres in the best tradition of modernist literary practice, which does not accord with the theory that divides imaginative from discursive prose. Nowhere is this fusion clearer than in their letters.

We are not, in this session, supposed to trespass into epistolary fiction, but in considering the place of Bloomsbury's letters in their literary history these territorial restrictions cannot be completely observed because of the ways in which fiction and nonfiction intermingle in their texts. One can avoid analyzing the famous deflationary "tea-tabling" effect that Forster gets from letters in his novels and that Christopher Isherwood thought so technically important in a novel like *Howards End*. (The first sentence of the novel is "One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister.") But when letters are discussed as letters in novels, or when they take on fictive characteristics

independent of any novelistic context, it becomes crampingly restrictive to keep within the boundaries of nonfiction. The epigraph to this paper, for instance, is not from one of Virginia Woolf's several essays on letters, but from a novel, *Jacob's Room*, where it nevertheless functions as a quasi-authorial essay with both fictive and truth value. The elegiac and epistemological quest of the author for her central character makes movingly significant those disembodied acts of consciousness called letters. The most fundamental distinction in Bloomsbury's letters, however, is not whether they are used in novels but whether they are private or public texts. Virginia Woolf has suggested in her essay on modern letters in *The Captain's Death Bed* that it is the privacy of modern letters which distinguishes them most sharply from those of older centuries, where they always had some public function or other. One consequence, she foolishly thought, was that modern letters such as hers and her friends' could never be published. She underestimated the social and psychological interest that would attract readers who would find aesthetically embodied in them images of lives that could not be told in biographies as well as they could be shown in letters. Our understanding of Bloomsbury's life splits asunder without these brave and forlorn acts of minds surviving their bodies' deaths.

Fiction and nonfiction mix in both the public and private letters of Bloomsbury. The personal correspondence of Virginia Woolf or Lytton Strachey indulges in hyperbolic irony where fact and fantasy are not immediately distinguishable. In the midst of the Edwardian suffragist campaign, Strachey wrote to his cousin and sometime lover Duncan Grant apropos Elizabeth Robins's play *Votes for Women* (which he thought sentimental) that he wondered how long it would take women to understand the obvious fact that "universal buggery" was the only solution to all their difficulties. In order to take this remark unironically, it is necessary to ignore its content as well as its context — Strachey grew up in a matriarchy devoted to The Cause — not to mention the letter's recipient. Or one might take the letter that Virginia Woolf's editor decided was the only "mad" one she ever wrote. In it she suggests to Strachey in 1915 that they should all subscribe to a fund to buy Clive Bell a parrot that has been taught foul language, and then persuade Bell that birds are the acme of civilization and he should study and write about them; the parrot is to be given the name of Bell's current mistress and kept in the basement under a cloth by his wife when he is not home. The feeling here is bitter but the symbolism is not mad but fictive.

Some of Bloomsbury's private letters are fictive in their form rather than their irony or their symbolism. In 1909 several members of the Group started a game in which they wrote one another imaginary letters; each writer was provided with an archaic pseudonym: Virginia Woolf was Elinor Hadyng; Lytton Strachey was Vane Hatherley. Then under these disguises the correspondents talked about their actual lives. ". . . It was in fact a kind of epistolary **bal masqué**," says Quentin Bell, "in which the disguises served only to embolden the participants."

Bloomsbury's mixing of fiction and nonfiction in public epistolary forms is more original and interesting perhaps than their private mixtures. Members of the Group wrote the usual kind of public letters to newspapers, though their content is not ordinary. E. M. Forster's rebukes of T. S. Eliot for his remarks on the death of D. H. Lawrence, or of Bertrand Russell for his memoir of Lytton Strachey, are masterly. But his most remarkable public letter is a piece called *A Letter to Madan Blanchard*. This is a letter written from the London Library in April, 1931, signed "E. M. Forster," and sent through space and time (the mail services grow older as the distance increases) to an eighteenth century sailor who went native in Micronesia. The letter speculates about his motives, and under the guise of giving Madan Blanchard news about the native Prince Lee Boo, who went the opposite direction, Forster is able to compare the two cultures from his twentieth-century point of view. It is a bizarre epistolary form, and part of the pleasure of reading it is in the mixing up of our expectations.

Forster's is not the only use of a fictive letter form for an essay in Bloomsbury. After his letter to Blanchard, Virginia and Leonard Woolf began to publish a series of essay-letters in their Hogarth Press, including Rosamond Lehmann's *A Letter to a Sister*, Francis Birrell's *A Letter to a Black Sheep*, Rebecca West's *A Letter to a Grandfather*, and Virginia Woolf's *A Letter to a Young Poet*. All of these letters adopt fictive disguises, some quite faint, for the purposes of some kind of cultural criticism. In these kinds of public letters the preposition in the title usually identifies the basis for the letter's criticism — whether it is a letter to, from, or about, whether it has to do, that is, with the sender, the receiver, or a separate topic. Virginia Woolf's letter in this series blends the fictive and nonfictive with the public and private. The letter is written to a poet called John; Virginia Woolf's biography tells us it is John Lehmann, but the letter does not. *A Letter to a Young Poet* is a critique of modern poetry which breaks off in an ellipsis when the writer shifts from the public to the private; the last sentence is, "And now for the intimate, the indiscreet, and indeed, the only really interesting parts of this letter. . . ."

The advantage of the epistolary form for an essay in cultural criticism is shown in the longest letter Virginia Woolf or anyone else in Bloomsbury ever wrote. Virginia Woolf's feminist polemic *Three Guineas* is a book-length letter, complete with extensive notes but no salutation or signature, written by the daughter of an educated man to an educated man who asked her in the mid-nineteen-thirties how war can be prevented. Before the answers get underway, the writer of the letter — who is not necessarily the author, for we are dealing here with a fictive form — introduces her remarks as follows:

In the first place let us draw what all letter-writers instinctively draw, a sketch of the person to whom the letter is addressed. Without someone warm and breathing on the other side of the page, letters are worthless. You, then, who ask the question, are a little grey on the temples; the hair is no longer thick on the top of your

head. You have reached the middle years of life not without effort, at the Bar; but on the whole your journey has been prosperous . . .

and so forth. What we are being given here is a justification of the public letter genre (which is also fictional) as well as an evaluation of that form that is characteristic of Bloomsbury's letters as well as those of other writers.

III

The central feature of the letter genre — public as well as private — is its inherent transitive duality. Explicitly or implicitly there is in the letter a subject and an object, a writer and a reader. Outside there may also be a correspondent and a recipient who are obviously related to the writer and reader yet not identical with them. (Some forms of public letter may have an unimportant or even non-existent recipient.) But inside the letter form there always appears to be someone addressing someone else. This is what makes the letter more closely related to the lecture and the dramatic monologue than to the reflexive diary form which lacks the convention if not, in many cases, the assumption, of an objectified reader inside the form.

The transitive character of the letter is crucial to the interpretation of the genre. In public letters the significance of the addressee needs to be clear. He, or she, or they may be the basis for the letter's criticism. *Three Guineas* is all about the world that the writer's male correspondent has made. The directness (which replaces the intimacy of the private letter) of the epistolary form makes it an effective instrument for polemics: the target is inside the letter, as it were — moreso than in a lecture or even a sermon, perhaps. It is interesting in Bloomsbury's literary history that Virginia Woolf shifted in her two polemics on feminism from the milder form of the fictive lecture in *A Room of One's Own* to the angrier form of the fictive letter in *Three Guineas*. In private letters, however, the transitiveness of the communication may be more obscure because the character of the internalized object of the letter can be taken largely for granted and not displayed, as in a public letter. When published, a private letter often needs to have its intended reader and perhaps also its occasion identified for the new public reader. Bloomsbury's idea of good letters — and they wrote good letters — was, as Virginia Woolf said in *Three Guineas*, that they should include some conception of the person: being written to. Forster said letters should pass two tests: they must express the personality of the writer and of the recipient. Strachey felt the first business of a letter-writer was to put his correspondent into a good humor. (He also thought that good letter-writers were androgynous, such as Walpole, because "the unmixed male does not express himself happily." The theory could be interestingly applied to Virginia Woolf's letters too.) For the purposes of literary history, the most significant aspect of this agreement in Bloomsbury about the importance of a letter expressing, as it were, its object as well as its subject lies not in the writing of their letters but in the reading of them.

Remarks from a Bloomsbury letter — and not just from them, either — need to be taken in their context, which most importantly includes the person to whom the letter is being written. This, as has been noted, is easier to do in a public rather than a private letter where we have to go outside the letter and fill in the personality of the recipient or the nature of the personal relationship being assumed in the letter. The interpretation of Bloomsbury's texts depends on understanding their tone. How often the irony of them is misperceived by their critics! In letters, of course, the tone depends importantly on the person to whom the letter is being addressed. One example may suffice of the necessity in interpreting Bloomsbury's letters to grasp their transitivity and connect what is being said to who is saying it and to whom it is being said. Virginia Woolf is sometimes accused these days of being anti-semitic, and the evidence cited is often taken from letters in which she refers to her husband's Jewishness. What has not been noticed enough is that these references are made only to close friends who can be counted upon to understand their affectionate tone correctly. Difficult as it is to believe after Hitler, the tone is often one of a joke or an endearment. When Virginia Stephen became engaged to Leonard Woolf, she wrote to good friends such as Violet Dickinson, Janet Case, or Madge Vaughan about the penniless Jew who was to be her husband. But in letters to friends who were not so close, friends such as Lady Ottoline Morrell (this is in 1912) or even Lady Robert Cecil, there is no reference at all to his being Jewish. Some will put this down to Virginia Woolf's snobbery, but it is far more likely that she would not joke about such matters with those whose responses she could not count on. The interpretation of Bloomsbury remarks should, if they are to be responsible, take into account whether the remark is a public fictive or non-fictive utterance, a piece of self-communing, or a letter to someone whose relationship with the writer helps to shape the remark.

IV

The primary justification for examining the writings of the Bloomsbury Group through its literary history is to be located in the interconnections of these writings — interconnections that bear importantly on the interpretation of the writings. Bloomsbury's texts are interconnected in various ways, through their dedications, similar subjects, analogous forms, through the backgrounds of their authors and the family resemblance of their ethical, epistemological, and aesthetic assumptions, and finally through the criticism that they wrote of one another's work. A good deal of that criticism was done in the form of reviews that were by no means always exercises in mutual admiration. But a significant amount of the Bloomsbury Group's criticism of one another is contained in their letters. Some of the most revealing instances of this criticism occur in letters to the authors about their works — Strachey and Virginia Woolf on her novels and his biographies, for example, or the debate between Forster and Virginia Woolf over *Aspects of the Novel*. But some of the epistolary criticism is contained in letters written not to the author but to another member of the Group. Lytton Strachey and Leonard

Woolf are revealingly critical of Forster's Edwardian novels in their correspondence. Occasionally both types of criticism are to be found about a single work, as in the interesting letter from Strachey to Leonard Woolf about his novel *The Wise Virgins* (in which a character modeled on Strachey appears) and another from Lytton to his brother commenting on the difficulties of writing to Leonard about the novel, which he did not like. Again, the inherent transitivity of the letter is essential to the interpretation of this epistolary criticism. Biography and criticism intermingle unavoidably here, yet for all its personal impurity the criticism is among the most useful we have of Bloomsbury's writings because of the emphases it gives. The evaluation in Bloomsbury's criticism of one another's work, especially in their letters where it is not called for in the way a review exacts it, is often not as illuminating as what is singled out for attention and comment. Sometimes the illumination falls on the speaker, the auditor, and the criticized text.

The place of letters in Bloomsbury's literary history can be summed up by saying that they give motives for metonymy. The letter is pre-eminently a metonymic form, and its interpretation has been neglected along with other metonymic aspects of literature, as Jakobson has pointed out, in our modern rage for analogy. If life splits asunder in Bloomsbury without letters, so does literary history. Bloomsbury's letters interconnect their texts in important ways but they are also literary texts in their own right, whether they be fictive, nonfictive, public, or private. All involve contiguities of space and time, especially the private letter, for one of its organizing principles is synecdoche: parts of the writer's life represented in the letter stand for the whole. But in all Bloomsbury's epistolary forms, the internalized speaker and listener must not be lost sight – or rather sound – of, whatever the letter's provenance or destination.

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The Language of the Thirties:
Some Literary Evidence

Historians of the language generally lament the paucity of linguistic information about the period they are studying, and have been known to dream of discovering some linguistic treasure-trove — a gramophone record of King Alfred outlining his Great Books program in or around the year 890 (78 r.p.m. at this date) or perhaps a secret tape of Chaucer's reaction to the news that he had been appointed Commissioner of Walls and Ditches in 1390. Then we could settle once and for all whether he did or did not pronounce his final e's! And I would certainly be happy to turn up some anonymous monkish list headed "New Words, 1066-1086." What a find that would be!

In the absence, however, of such unlikely records of the language of our forebears, we acknowledge the difficulty of **ever** reconstructing a complete linguistic record of the distant past. But of the more recent past — the past we ourselves have lived and still remember — our expectations are far higher. If we can still hear the voice of Enrico Caruso (d. 1921) or that of Alfred Lord Tennyson reading his own poetry, surely we can without difficulty summon up remembrance of things as recently past as the language of the thirties.

Yet the "language" of a given period is inevitably more easily conceived of than identified, since it is rare that we can say with any certainty when a particular word or phrase came into use or passed out of currency. Consider the example of interjections, oaths, and related words and phrases. Neither *Webster's I* (1909) nor the *OED* (1884-1928) contains such mild terms as **gosh**, **golly**, (from which derive **goshawful**, **goldarned**) and **gee** (from which derive **gee whiz**, **gee whilikins**). Obviously their omission reflects editorial policy rather than the absence of these words from the vocabulary of the populace.¹ The words do appear in *Webster's II* (1934), and in Burchfield's recent (1972-) supplement to the *OED* (henceforth *OEDS*), as well as in the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1969). But now that they are recorded for posterity, they have become passé, supplanted by the very taboo words they were designed to replace. And with them too have gone such innocents as

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Jumping Jiminy and **jeepers-creepers**, the latter first recorded in 1929 (*OEDS*), but popularized in 1938 by the song "Jeepers Creepers" of Mercer and Warren, cited in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939). All of these terms, incidentally, seem to have been of American origin, the significance of which fact I leave to the reader.

In 1929, too, Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* was published — a book which he himself called "a threnody, a memorial in its ineffective way to a generation which hoped much, strove honestly and suffered deeply" (p. x). What makes it particularly interesting from a linguistic point of view is the censorship of certain "offensive" words and passages — intriguingly marked in the text by a series of asterisks. Aldington expresses himself surprised by the action of his publishers, saying "To my astonishment, my publishers informed me that certain words, phrases, sentences and even passages, are at present taboo in England" (p. viii).²

One can only wonder at Aldington's "astonishment," if not feigned. After all, censorship in England has a venerable history in the twentieth century. Lawrence suffered particularly — *The Rainbow* (1915) was seized and destroyed with the publisher's acquiescence;³ *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had to be published privately in Florence (Orioli, 1928) and was banned by the customs; Joyce's *Ulysses* was first published in Paris (1922) and it too was banned in England and the U.S.A. The prevalent "official" attitude towards literature is nicely captured by Evelyn Waugh in his 1930 novel *Vile Bodies*. Upon returning from Paris, Adam Fenwick-Symes is harassed by Customs Officers when he declares his books, among which is the typescript of his *Memoirs*. The Customs Officer explains: "Particularly against books the Home Secretary is. If we can't stamp out literature in the country, we can at least stop its being brought in from outside. That's what he said the other day in Parliament, and I says 'Hear, hear . . .'" (p. 23). In the end, the decision is announced. "This book on Economics comes under subversive propaganda. That you leaves behind. And this here *Purgatorio* doesn't look right to me, so that stays, pending inquiries. But, as for this autobiography, that's just downright dirt, and we burns that straight away, see" (p. 24).

The target of Waugh's attack in this passage was Sir William Joynson-Hicks, then the Home Secretary, and a man who had acquired no little notoriety for his book-banning efforts — especially those directed toward D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Perhaps Aldous Huxley was thinking about the Home Secretary's activities when he wrote in *Brave New World* (1932) of "strange rumours of old forbidden books hidden in a safe in the Controller's study. Bibles, poetry — Ford knew what" (p. 23) and of suppression of "all books published before A.F. 150" (p. 34). But no "battle of the books" ever materialized in the thirties, at least in Britain. D. H. Lawrence died, and the attention of most other "serious" writers was diverted to the political front. In the United States, however, battle was joined in 1933 over the alleged obscenity of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Judge Woolsey's ruling in favor of the novel paved the way for the successful 1959 Grove Press challenge to censorship in

the case of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Thirty years after Aldington's protests in the preface to *Death of a Hero*, a work of artistic merit could no longer be banned merely because it used so-called "four-letter words."

In looking back at the language of the thirties, I am, however, much less concerned with taboo terms than I am with the commonplace. For commonplace terms, in part because they are commonplace, mirror the decade with which we are concerned.

In the first chapter of *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell provides a "table of equivalents" for the "essentially feudal language" in which war was conceived before it had been actually experienced. Thus:

A horse is a	steed, or charger
The enemy is	the foe, or the host
To conquer is to	vanquish
The dead in the battlefield are	the fallen
Obedient soldiers are	the brave
The front is	the field
One's chest is one's	breast
Sleep is	slumber
One's death is one's	fate
The legs and arms of young men are	limbs
Dead bodies contribute	ashes, or dust
The blood of young men is	"the red/sweet wine of youth" R. Brooke

After the nightmare reality of war, such rhetoric could no longer be sustained, he points out. Certainly, memoirs of the war — most of which were delayed for a decade by an experience the enormity of which defied immediate description — are noticeably free of the rhetorical excesses tabulated by Fussell. Whether autobiographical (Blunden's *Undertones of War*, 1928; Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, 1929) or fictionalized (Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, Henry Williamson's *Patriot's Progress*), the literature that was born of the war rejects the high style, the disarming felicity of such as Rupert Brooke:

If I should die, think only this of me
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. ("The Soldier")

They say that the Dead die not, but remain
Near to the rich heirs of grief and mirth
I think they ride the calm mid-heaven, as there. ("Clouds")

Instead we get the likes of R. H. Mottram in *Ten Years Ago* (1928):

This is the place of suffering, where men, lying in bed, with limbs supported in grotesque frames, cry out suddenly without meaning to, or lie for hours, listless, in utter torpor. . . . They must go, and they do, some under a Union Jack to the enormous cemetery, some to other places where they can be patched and mended and sent back again . . . to the same . . . in practically the same trenches. (p. 30)

Henry Williamson, in *The Patriot's Progress, Being the Vicissitudes of Pte. John Bullock* (1930), contrasts the reality of going "over the top" as in "He fell over old and new bodies of mules and men . . . and gurgling wounded, all rough-cast with greyish mud" (p. 159) or "in wildest fear he screamed out against DEATH" (p. 173) with newspaper reports of the fighting: "But the cry of 'No surrender' was in the souls of these gallant men. They had no complaint against the fate that thrust them into the morass nor any whimper against their hard luck" (p. 182).⁴

However, by the late thirties, when war once again seems imminent, Huxley, who has grown increasingly pacifist in his sympathies, finds it necessary (in an essay called "Words and Behavior," *The Olive Tree*, 1937) to challenge what he obviously sees as a new wave of indirection in the language:

When we talk about war, we use a language which conceals or embellishes its reality. . . . Even the most violently patriotic and militaristic are reluctant to call a spade by its own name. . . . they make use of picturesque metaphors . . . clamouring for war planes numerous and powerful enough to go and 'destroy the hornets in their nests' — in other words, to go and throw thermite, high explosives and vesicants upon the inhabitants of neighbouring countries before they have time to come and do the same to us. (p. 89)

In his own fiction, Huxley's own language can be every bit as direct as Williamson's, when it comes to images of war: " $\text{CH}_3\text{C}_6\text{H}_2(\text{NO}_2)_3 + \text{Hg}(\text{CNO})_2 =$ well, what? An enormous hole in the ground, a pile of masonry, some bits of flesh and mucus, a foot, with the boot still on it, flying through the air and landing, flop, in the middle of the geraniums — the scarlet ones; such a splendid show that summer" (*Brave New World*, p. 56).

And the prediction of another war, in *Eyeless in Gaza* ("quite soon — about 1940 . . . much worse than the last war . . .", p. 58) is followed by a glance back at the "beginning-of-war intoxication" found in Rupert Brooke: "'Honour has come back, as a king, to Earth.' But I suppose you're too young even to have heard of poor Rupert. . . . Honour has come back. . . . But he failed to mention that stupidity has come back too . . . as a divine *führer* of all the Aryans" (p. 61). In this passage we have one of the earliest literary examples of the use of *führer* in English. (It is dated 1934 in *OEDS*). The Spanish equivalent, *caudillo*, also entered English in the thirties (1938), soon after Franco assumed the title. (Italian *duce* appears in 1922.) Other terms associated with the rapid spread of fascism in the thirties — many of them loan-words or loan-translations — also enter English in this decade: **Hitlerian** and **Nazi** (1930); **brownshirt**, [Third] **Reich**, **swastika** (1933); **axis**, **luftwaffe** (1936); **Falangist** (1937); **wehrmacht** (1938); **blitzkrieg**, **lebensraum**, **panzer** (1939). Some of these terms — particularly those associated with the Spanish Civil War — became familiar to British readers through the **reportage** (as it came to be called from 1939) of writers such as George Orwell. *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) contains the first non-newspaper reference to "Franco's Fifth Column." The term dates from 1936, and is a translation of General Mola's "quinta columna" — an allusion to those within Madrid who were prepared to help the four columns besieging it. Ernest Hemingway also used the term as the title of a short play in 1938. It is explained in a discussion of the death of an electrician:

PETRA: Some one shot him from a window, they say. . . .

DOROTHY: Who'd shoot him from a window?

PETRA: Oh, they always shoot from windows at night during a bombardment. The **fifth column** people. The people who fight us from inside the city. (p. 46; emphasis added)

Hemingway should probably receive sole credit for making another Spanish term, "the moment of truth," a part of the language; the phrase first occurs in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) as a translation of "hora de la verdad":

The whole end of the bullfight was the final sword-thrust; the actual encounter between the man and the animal, what the Spanish call **the moment of truth**. (emphasis added)

Though Hemingway was an American writer, most of his work from *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) through *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) was set outside the U.S., and rarely escapes the European preoccupation with violence and war. Parenthetically, it is worth noting that Hemingway's first two books, *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923) and *In Our Time* (1924) were both first published in Paris by Robert McAlmon's Contact Press. The single exception to Hemingway's non-American settings is *To Have and To Have Not* (1937), a

work that dwells upon the plight of a Florida boatman driven to smuggling by the Depression. The novel ends with the hero's recognition that "one man alone ain't got no bloody f---ing chance" (p. 225). In spite of the vindication of *Ulysses*, four-letter words were still generally avoided.

But the characteristic American novelist of the period is far more concerned with the terrible realities of life in the thirties. John Steinbeck was one such, and his magnum opus is surely *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) [the title derives from the Battle Hymn of the Republic] — a work which follows a family of tenant farmers, **Okies**, from the **Dust Bowl** (1936) plains to California. Inevitably, many of the terms that became familiar in the Depression occur in its pages — **Okies** is one, of course; **relief** is another, as illustrated in the incidents following. Soon after the Joad family reaches California, Tom and his father meet another father and son on the banks of the Colorado River. From this disillusioned pair, Tom learns the meaning of "Okie":

"You never been called 'Okie' yet?" enquires one of the pair.

Tom said, "Okie? What's that?"

"Well, Okie use'ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum." (p. 280)

The significance of this redefinition of "Okie" is best seen in the light of an earlier incident — the initial meeting between the Joads and the Wilsons from Kansas. Pa [Joad] says:

"I knowed you wasn't Oklahomy folks. You talk queer, kinda — that ain't no blame, you understan'." "Ever'body says words different," said Ivy [Wilson]. "Arkansas folks says 'em different, and Oklahomy folks says 'em different. And we seen a lady from Massachusetts, an' she said 'em differentest of all. Couldn' hardly make out what she was sayin'." (p. 184)

The migrants themselves, then, are sensitive to and tolerant of the diversity in their midst. But those who dismiss them all as "Okies" will not acknowledge their diversity, and can thus ignore their humanity.

When the Joad family finds refuge in the paradise called a "gov'ment camp," they hear something of the attitude towards such camps by many outsiders.

"You give them goddamn Okies stuff like that [hot water and flush toilets] an' they'll want 'em. . . . They hol' red meetin's in them gov'ment camps. All figgerin' how to get on relief." (p. 455).

The reference to "relief" prompts one listener to enquire innocently of the **deputy** who is speaking:

“What you mean, relief?”

“I mean relief – what us taxpayers puts in an’ you goddamn Okies takes out.” (p. 455)

A similarly warped definition of “red” has already been provided:

“What is these goddamn reds?”

“Well sir. . . . A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we’re payin’ twenty-five!” (p. 407)

The ubiquitous **deputy** is not, of course, a coinage of the thirties per se; but the use of deputies as, in effect, hired guns by mineowners and landowners **was** characteristic of the period. In this role, deputies appear in Upton Sinclair’s *Oil* (1927), and in Dos Passos’s trilogy, *U.S.A.* The following passage summarizes the situation well:

. . . the deputies crane with their guns They stand guard at the mines They blockade the miners’ **soupkitchens** They’ve cut off the road up the valley the hired men with guns stand ready to shoot (they have made us foreigners in the land where we were born they are the conquering army) They stand at the polls they stand by when the bailiffs carry the furniture of the family evicted from the city tenement out on the sidewalk they are there when the bankers foreclose on a farm. . . . (emphasis added)

(*The Big Money*, 1936)

By the end of the thirties groups of such men were also known as “goon squads,” and were being used by labor unions and by racketeers alike. According to *Life* (November 14, 1938), “The word ‘goon’ was first popularized by college students who used it to mean any stupid person. Labor Union lingo has given it a second meaning: a tough or thug. Rival unions and factions speak of another’s ‘Goon Squads.’”

There are many terms that we associate very strongly with the thirties, just because of the poor economic situation then prevalent, though they hark back to earlier bad times. For example, **dole** (post WWI), **soup-kitchen** (1855 citation in *DAE*), **bread line** (1900 citation from *Lippincott’s Magazine*, LXV) and **hand-out** (1882, in *DA* and *OEDS*) all occur much earlier than one might imagine. On the other hand, the social legislation enacted during the period of Roosevelt’s **New Deal** (a term which had in fact also been used in the 19th century) gave birth to many new government organizations and the inevitable acronyms therefrom: **P**ublic **W**orks **A**dministration (1933); **N**ational **L**abor **R**elations **B**oard (1934); **W**orks **P**rogress **A**dministration, **R**ural **E**lectrification **A**dministration; **S**ocial **S**ecurity **A**ct (1935).

Down-and-out is also a nineteenth century innovation (earliest citation in *OEDS*=1889, in *DA*=1904), but is best remembered from George Orwell’s

Down and Out in Paris and London (1933). More than any other English writer of the period, Orwell was concerned with, one might say obsessed with, what he refers to as "people who have fallen into solitary half-mad grooves of life and given up trying to be normal and decent" (*Down and Out*, p. 7). The four works, all written in the thirties, in which he explores this nether world are: *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). In each, Orwell explores not only the life but the language of tramps, hop-pickers in Kent, **Diddykies** (gypsies), and the inhabitants of doss-houses. To the best of my knowledge, some of these terms first appear in English literature thanks to Orwell. **On the bum** is American in origin and appears as early as 1895 but only becomes widely known in the thirties, especially after its use by Damon Runyon in *Guys and Dolls* (1932) and J. T. Farrell in *Young Lonigan* (1936). In England, however, it is first recorded in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. Dorothy Hare, daughter of a Suffolk clergyman, suffers a bout of amnesia and meets a group of Cockneys on their way to pick hops in Kent:

"You on the beach, kid?"
"On the beach?"
"Well, on the bum?"
"On the bum?"
"Well, what I mean to say, kid – have you got any money?" (p. 101)

The interlocutor, one Nobby, speaks a most extraordinary dialect. For example, by way of explanation to Dorothy of his group's status, he says:

". . . we're just a bit in the **mulligatawny** [=soup], see? Because we ain't got a **brown** [=copper] between us, and we got to do it on the **toby** [=highway] . . . and got to **tap** [=beg] for our tommy [=food, bread] and **skipper** [sleep out] at nights as well" (p. 103; emphasis added)

All of these terms are likely enough in the mouth of a tramp, but one wonders how such Americanisms as "on the bum" and "in cahoots" (p. 102) have crept into Nobby's speech. Incidentally, "in cahoots" does not appear in Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (1937 and later editions), and the earliest citation in *OEDS* is for 1953.

It is apparent that though Orwell rejects "the most dismal of all classes, the middle-middle classes, the landless gentry" (*Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 37), he is no happier once he has "descended into the slime of poverty" (p. 31). True, he is sympathetic to the plight of the unemployed, and the lower classes in general, as he shows in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, but is generally repelled by modern society itself. Indeed, he seems to share what he terms: "The great death-wish of the modern world. Suicide pacts. Heads stuck in gas-ovens in lonely maisonettes. . . . And the reverberations of future wars.

Enemy aeroplanes flying over London; the deep threatening hum of the propellers, the chattering thunder of bombs" (*Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 17).

One hope for the world was that Science and Technology might save mankind, if they did not destroy it first. In the thirties scientific and technical vocabulary was becoming increasingly "visible" in the English language. Some 25 percent of the new words recorded in the *CED* for 1930-39 are manifestly technical. Among them, we find **servofeed** (1931), **cyclotron** and **ionosphere** (1932), **rheology** (1933), **magnetron** (1934), **perspex** (1937), **hydroponics** (1938), **anhedral** (1939).

But Huxley was no optimist, and his vision of a *Brave New World* (1932) of the future, in which, significantly, the years are measured not A[nno] D[omini] but A[fter] F[ord], reveals a world in which science and technology have triumphed at the expense of humanity. A particularly arresting feature of the world is the language – a language replete with technical and pseudo-scientific terminology. Human beings are produced by **ectogenesis**, and are not born but **decanted**. They are typed, in best scientific fashion, as **Alphas**, **Betas**, **Epsilons**, and so on and are dispatched to such inviting locations as the **social predestination room** and the **neo-pavlovian conditioning room**. Before decanting, eggs are subjected to **Bokanovsky's Process** (by which clones are created), and their growth is accelerated using **Podsnap's Technique**. All this is bizarre in the extreme, and so it is meant to be. My own favorite is the **College of Emotional Engineering**, since that contains a Department of Writing wherein Helmholtz Watson composes "feely" scenarios and "hypno-paedic" rhymes. These two terms warrant further elaboration. The "feelies" is one of Huxley's most wonderful neologisms – especially in the form of the *Feelytone News*. He first used the term in 1931, and the context betrays its origin. He talks of:

The theatres in which the egalitarians will enjoy the talkies, tasties,
smellies and feelies. (*Music at Night*, II.123)

Clearly "feelies" is a parody of "talkies," which was first recorded for British English in 1928 (*CED*). The term also appears in Waugh's *Vile Bodies*, too (1930) – "It's so boring to be late for a talkie" (p. 78) – and may itself take its form from "movie" (1913). Around 1930, we begin to encounter, as a subset of "talkie," the self-explanatory "weepee," to which Huxley may also be indebted. And many other terms associated with the burgeoning movie industry make their first appearance or become commonplace after 1930, too, for example, **dead-pan**. Nathanael West, for example, writes revealingly in *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933): "He practiced a trick used much by moving-picture comedians – the **dead pan**" (emphasis added).

Although the "feelies" have not as yet become institutionalized, **hypno-paedia** or sleep-teaching apparently has. When Huxley invented the term, no such technique existed. He envisaged it being used for such wholesome

subjects as "Elementary Class Consciousness" and for inculcating the axioms of the consumer society, for example, "a gramme [of **soma**, a tranquilizer] is better than a damn," "Ending is better than mending." By 1969, according to a report in *New Scientist* (30 January 216/1) "sleep-learning or hypnopaedia, as its practitioners prefer to call it, is now acquiring a new status among Soviet teaching circles."

Some of Huxley's other linguistic novelties in *Brave New World* novel are not neologisms at all, but are highly amusing nonetheless. I particularly like "Ford's in his flivver, and all's well with the world." **Flivver**, incidentally, though still widely used in the thirties, dates back to 1920 in England, and to 1910 in the U.S.A. However, in *Brave New World* some commonplace terms of the past become taboo words. The words "mother," "father," and "parent" are enough to bring a blush to the face of a child. As the *Directory of Hatcheries and Conditioning* puts it to an embarrassed student:

"In brief . . . the parents were the father and the mother." The smut that was really science fell with a crash into the boy's eye-avoiding silence. "Mother" he repeated loudly rubbing in the science. . . . "These," he said gravely, "are unpleasant facts; I know it. But then most historical facts are unpleasant." (p. 15)

And so we have come full circle. Taboo words may become commonplace, and the commonplace may — at least in Huxley's future — become taboo. Language changes — that should come as no surprise. That it does so rapidly enough for us to be aware of the process sometimes makes us uncomfortable — which no doubt accounts for our resistance to change as manifested in protests about the terrible state of the language today. And thus we all, in Shakespeare's words, "Sigh the lack of many a thing [we] sought."

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NOTES

- 1 Editorial policy in the difficult question of what to include (and how to label forms included) and what to exclude varies widely. Sometimes words, especially taboo forms, are consciously excluded (for example, **barf** = "to throw up"); sometimes the word is written in skeletal outline, e.g., **sh-t sack** "a dastardly fellow," in Grose (1796); sometimes a word is included, but "branded." **Arse**, "posterior or buttocks," is a good example. In *Webster's I*, it is labelled "Obs. or vulgar"; in *Webster's II* "now vulgar";

and in *AHD*, it has been supplanted by *ass* (still labelled "vulgar"), with *arse* now indicated as being "chiefly British."

- 2 Aldington explains the circumstances surrounding the censorship of *Death of a Hero* in his autobiographical *Life for Life's Sake* (1941). He cites one amusing example. The printed copy runs "Prehistoric beasts, like the ichthyosaurus and *****." The asterisked words represent what he calls that "horrible obscenity" Queen Victoria! However, he also admits that the book included what he calls "a few soldiers' remarks" (p. 346).
- 3 Published by Methuen, September 30, 1915. By November 13, the publishers had been fined and ordered to destroy their stock. However, the novel was published by Huebsch in New York (1916) without apparent problem. A "new edition (revised)" was published in London by Martin Secker in 1926.
- 4 *Patriot's Progress* was Williamson's second war book. His first, *The Wet Flanders Plain* (1929), is a diary of the author's reactions upon a return visit to the battlefields of a decade earlier — and parallels Mottram's work. Williamson was originally asked to provide some text for a series of linocuts by William Kermodé. But his story took on a life of its own, and Kermodé was obliged to make additional cuts.

ABBREVIATIONS

AHD: *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1969), ed. William Morris. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.

CED: *A Chronological English Dictionary* (1970), eds. Thomas Finkenstaedt, Ernst Leisi, Dieter Wolff. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.

DA: *A Dictionary of Americanisms* (1951), ed. Mitford M. Mathews. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

DAE: *A Dictionary of American English* (1938), eds. Sir William Craigie and James R. Hulbert. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

OED: *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884-1928), ed. J. A. H. Murray. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

OEDS: *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* (1972), ed. R. W. Burchfield. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Webster's I: *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* (1909). Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co.

Webster's II: Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language
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Review Article

Dickens's Illustrators

John Buchanan-Brown, *Phiz!: Illustrator of Dickens' World*. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1978. Pp. 207, 216 plates. \$14.95.

Jane R. Cohen, *Charles Dickens and His Original Illustrators*. Ohio State Univ. Press. 1980. Pp. 295, 202 plates. \$32.50.

Robert L. Patten, ed., *George Cruikshank: A Revaluation*. Princeton Univ. Press. 1974. Pp. 258, 65 plates. \$10.00.

Michael Steig, *Dickens and Phiz*. Indiana Univ. Press. 1978. Pp. 340, 126 plates. \$12.50.

John Wardroper, *The Caricatures of George Cruikshank*. David R. Godine. 1978. Pp. 144, 120 plates. \$30.00.

This list of titles barely indicates a new industry in modern criticism of the Victorian novel, and especially of Dickens. Contemporary reviewers commented upon the illustrations to Dickens's novels, and so did a number of later readers both lay and professional, but for the most part in our own century the illustrations have been neglected by trade publishing and academic criticism alike. During the seventies, however, novel-illustration was probably the liveliest area of investigation after feminist studies, and it is likely to thrive for some time. As a field, it has certain attractions. For one, it has been a work of recovery, bringing the illustrations back into print and demonstrating their right so to remain. For another, it is strongly historical, rediscovering and bringing forth the details of collaboration, reproduction, and biographical incident. For a third, a deeply ingrained reverence for illustrations has brought us books of criticism that are produced for the pleasure as well as the necessity of reading.

But problems remain in the area of criticism, or what we do after and with the recovered illustrations and information. Over a decade ago, in *Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators*,¹ John R. Harvey moved effortlessly and with-

[*Centrum* New Series, 1:2 (Fall 1981), pp. 133-141.]

out theoretical prolegomenon between caricature and verbal text, verbal text and illustration. His book changed our understanding of the sources of Dickens's art, extending them to Cruikshank, Gillray, Hogarth, and Bruegel, and of the shift in mode from the eighteenth to the nineteenth-century novel. Tactful in its claims about the significance of the illustrations, their relationship to the text, and their importance, the work was illuminating and altogether convincing.² More than ten years later, it should not still stand out as an almost unique achievement, but it does.

In 1971 the Clark Memorial Library published *Charles Dickens and George Cruikshank*, seminar papers from 1970 by J. Hillis Miller, "Sketches by Boz, *Oliver Twist*, and Cruikshank's Illustrations," and by David Borowitz, "George Cruikshank: Mirror of an Age."³ The latter is a fine biographical essay; the former is a meditation upon the nature of fiction and of art (in the general sense) that makes grist of both the texts and the illustrations in a unified and very satisfying manner. But although many of its observations along the way have had shaping influence on later discussions of the illustrations and their texts, the work as a whole has not, perhaps because its method is more J. Hillis Miller's structuralist/deconstructionist approach to art extended from fiction and poetry to illustration than a generalizable approach to illustration, perhaps because the essay was confined to the Cruikshank illustrations and hence to works of Dickens that attract less interest these days.

Robert L. Patten's volume, however, which first appeared as a double issue of *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* for Autumn and Winter 1973-74, attests to the diversity of approaches possible to Cruikshank, as well as to their varying degrees of success. The volume opens with a most serviceable, readable catalog by E. D. H. Johnson of the Cruikshank collection at Princeton. Then Ronald Paulson, in "The Tradition of Comic Illustration from Hogarth to Cruikshank," begins from where he sees that Miller stopped, with a series of questions: "what do we mean by illustration, . . . what are the various possibilities of the relationship between illustration and text. . . ? [w]hat do we mean by comic illustration? . . . how is this different from the moral or satiric tradition of graphic art. . . ?" Though this essay is not highly readable, its answers to its questions are as clear and provocative as one would expect. Tracing book illustration from the Renaissance to Cruikshank, Paulson examines the relationships among emblems, illustration, painting, independent plates, book illustration, the Hogarthian "modern moral subject," and cartoons; uses of allusion; and relationships among verbal text, illustration, and the external world. From Paulson it is a world of change to Richard A. Vogler on the relationship between Cruikshank and Dickens: from complex, theoretically rich criticism to antiquarian "reassessment" that musters to the Cruikshank-Dickens dispute over the origins of *Oliver Twist* more bad temper than the combined display of the two original combatants. Such disputatious crankiness obscures the merits of Vogler's advocacy of Cruikshank.

The next pair of essays also presents a contrast. Anthony Burton offers a review of Cruikshank's illustrations for novels, not very pointed but showing

Cruikshank's responsiveness to certain situations, such as imprisonment and crisis. At the end of the essay Burton asserts that his purpose has been to show how designs can sustain a narrative, can themselves be a sequence, but only with *Oliver Twist* is that assertion supported. John Harvey, on the other hand, shapes his essay with a strong thesis concerning the early power of Cruikshank's line and the changes it underwent. Harvey can not only speak of a weakening of the line, he can demonstrate what that is. His dissent from the characterization of Cruikshank by Chesterton and then Jane R. Cohen (in essays prior to the volume listed above) stands in relief against Vogler as a model of dispute without acrimony.

Louis James's short and informative essay looks at the "graphic conventions" of Cruikshank's "three eras" by examining one work from each. David Kunzle combines graphic tradition, economic circumstance, and the history of illustration in another highly readable essay (these are worth noting, because readability is at a premium in this field) on *Mr. Lambkin*. Michael Steig, in "George Cruikshank and the Grotesque: A Psychodynamic Approach," says that he is developing a critical language to "facilitate" discussion of the grotesque in Cruikshank, but somehow his analysis digresses and wanders into plate-summary, a pitfall of illustration-criticism to which Steig is rather prone. Harry Stone reviews again the relationship between Cruikshank and Dickens, particularly in regard to fairy tales; the essay can win a reader simply by its control of prose. Its effectiveness may have to do in part with its not taking illustration as its subject. Finally, William Feaver offers a brief description-with-praise of Cruikshank's work after 1845.

The quality of essays in this volume is uneven, and it is probably a mistake to read it through as one would a monograph. The illustrations, however, are uniformly excellent.

When illustration-criticism turns from history, be it biography or influence-tracking, to criticism, it shows a tendency to statements, or claims, for which one might long ponder the basis without finding reassurance. Even Harvey, the most critically astute of these writers, is not free of such assumptions. When he tells us that the Victorian public "was accustomed . . . to pore over the prints . . . gradually working out a wealth of visual significance" (p. 3), we can believe him because he offers us some testimony and some circumstantial evidence and because we can imagine more. But when on the same page he also states that the Victorian audience "did not easily imagine what it read," we may pause to wonder. Is there any evidence? How do we know this fact of Victorian psychology? There is a great deal of description in Dickens — and other writers — that is not reinforced by illustration: what are we to assume readers did with it? Enjoyed it as a pure flow of language? The statement also implies a change, namely that some readers, and probably twentieth-century readers, do imagine what they read. But do we know that? (I am taking "imagine" to mean "see a mental picture of," and avoiding quibbles upon its meaning.) Worse yet, this piece of information about Victorian readers has been picked up by later critics so that it has become an axiom for the field.

In a somewhat differing vein, Jane R. Cohen has argued that the need for illustrations of Dickens's novels declined as his prose became increasingly pictorial itself (p. 114 and *passim*). This position implies that the illustrations offered a pictorial supplement when the text left room for it, that the lacuna was in the text, not the reader's imagination. Thus the change in illustration followed a change in Dickens's prose rather than an improvement in the ability of his readers. Of the various accountings for the altered relationship between text and illustrations in Dickens's later novels, this one seems on the least sure grounds. The more common explanation, which ties the lessening importance of the illustrations to the decline of caricature and the rise of naturalism, has the advantage of logical connection with a documentable phenomenon.

For doubtful assertions, however, Steig should come first. Take, for example, this sequence:

. . . to some, the moral progress of young Martin Chuzzlewit is a paltry thing compared to the proliferation of great comic characters and the new emphasis upon vivification of the external scene. Yet *Martin Chuzzlewit* is built upon an essential superstructure of several moral progresses. Without this structure, it is doubtful whether Dickens could have achieved the triumphs of Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp — just as without Nell he could not have conceived Quilp. (p. 61)

I am less concerned with the puzzle of how to build on a superstructure than with the proposed dependence of Dickens's creative powers upon this structure. And I wonder precisely how Nell assisted in the creation of Quilp, whether any image of whatever she stands for might have done, or whether it had to be precisely Nell. What do we mean when we make statements of this kind? How do we know that Pecksniff and Sairey Gamp were not conceived entirely to the side of the novel's moral plot?

But here Steig was speaking of the text, preliminary to an assertion, itself not unconvincing, of the role of the illustrations in reinforcing the superstructure. At other times he makes untenable claims about the illustrations themselves. Still on *Martin Chuzzlewit*, he observes:

In one instance, at least, Browne's use of a particular emblem precedes Dickens', for the scale placed next to Pecksniff's poorbox in the first plate shows up in the text much later, when Martin says of his relationship to his grandfather, "and there is no such balance against me that I need throw in a mawkish forgiveness to poise the scales" (ch. 14 . . .) — a demonstration, at the very least, of the complementary relationship of author and illustrator. (p. 85)

Perhaps, however, merely a demonstration that certain emblems have become clichés, and show up accordingly both as emblem and as half-buried

metaphor? Would one assert a similar complementary relationship among other users of a common cliché?

The problem here is fundamental to illustration-criticism. How much of what one reader-observer sees will anyone else see? What is the reasonable boundary of interpretation? The problem exists with equal force in text-criticism too, of course, but there on the one hand the problem is widely acknowledged and on the other years of experience have created a roughly defined arena of fair play. In contrast, one might take the following pair of assertions:

(1) The peacock feathers displayed prominently over the mirror [in "Mr. Ralph Nickleby's first visit to his poor relations'"] resemble those which appear so often in Phiz's work that it is tempting to dismiss them as mere space fillers. They may have been a common Victorian household ornament, but an artist with Phiz's evident knowledge of graphic traditions could hardly have been unaware of the symbolic meanings of such feathers. In addition to pride, peacock feathers in a home are commonly associated with bad luck, perhaps because of the feathers' "spying eyes." (pp. 42-43)

(2) Phiz makes somewhat more play with emblematic detail in *Barnaby Rudge* than in its immediate predecessor. . . .The first instance of such a detail in *Barnaby Rudge* may provide some insight into the way Browne's invention worked. At the end of chapter 19, Mrs. Varden finds herself stupefied by the variety of food available at the Maypole, and the narrator comments that perhaps even a "Peacock" might be available for a meal. No incident from this chapter is illustrated, but near the beginning of the next chapter, in the same weekly number, we find a cut by Browne with Dolly Varden looking at herself in a mirror which seems to be decorated with peacock feathers. These probably allude to Dolly's vanity, but they may in addition imply the traditional superstition of impending bad luck. . . .It is likely that Browne in this case received his idea through an accidental process of association; such an openness to random inspiration is a cardinal virtue in a man who must produce many kinds of illustrations at so terrific a pace. (pp. 58-59)

Why isn't it equally likely that Browne in this case received his idea through the same process by which he received it "so often" before and after, to the degree that Steig later speaks of "Phiz's ubiquitous peacock feathers" (p. 306)? Either they are ubiquitous, or any given instance may require something worthy of being called inspiration: not both.

A last instance. Concerning the illustration "Sunset in the long Drawing-room at Chesney Wold" for chapter 40 of *Bleak House*, Steig notes: "One other touch may be equally important: a bedroom is discernible at the very rear of the design. It is not clear whose room this is, but would it be too

far-fetched to associate it with the marriage bed and thus with the Dedlocks' disgrace?" (p. 150). The question is rhetorical, but all the tentativeness of the proposition vanishes two pages later in the discussion of the second plate to the next monthly number, "Tom all alone's" (chapter 46): "But what is most fascinating about this plate — and surely not accidental — is that the churchyard holds the same relative position in the composition as the bedroom in the 'Sunset' plate. Hence a subtle connection is made between the liaison of Esther's parents, the Dedlock marriage bed, and the churchyard where Captain Hawdon lies and where Lady Dedlock will die" (pp. 151-52). Maybe; maybe not. There may be providence in the fall of a sparrow, and life may arise from a stellar accident.

Dickens and Phiz suffers not only from a deficit of scepticism but from its ultimate purpose, which is not to analyze and question but to praise. A less partisan purpose is implied in the opening chapter: the illustrations deserve our attention because "through inscription and emblem, . . . [they] frequently emphasize moral meanings which are understated or even unstated in the text; at times they provide crucial information absent from the text; and, finally, they offer interpretations of certain aspects of the novel, revealing implications of which the novelist himself may not be fully conscious. In the latter respect, the illustrators are Dickens' first critics" (p. 8). Without quarrelling over the "crucial," one can grant these hypotheses in large measure, and indeed Steig goes a fair way toward demonstrating them, but he spoils his case by stretching it and by a partisanship with Browne that even becomes a sort of annoyance with Dickens.

Steig's statement in behalf of the illustrations is a more extreme version of Robert L. Patten's in his 1969 essay on *Pickwick Papers*, where he says of studying the illustrations that ". . . it shows us the nature of the collaboration between artist and author; it suggests ways in which the artist influences the progress of the story; it enables us to identify emblematic settings, parallel actions, and common themes; it emphasizes the virtues of Christianity and comedy that provide the novel's values; and finally, it contributes to our understanding of the design of the novel, and its genre."⁴ Patten demonstrates these possibilities with a few well-chosen examples. None of his claims is far-fetched, and he apparently knows that his point can be made without exhausting the instances available to support it. Partisanship like Steig's, which tends not to the sarcasm of Vogler but to an over-reading of its subject and to exaggerated claims for its merits, may be a symptom of a new industry. One recalls the tireless ingenuity whereby fledgling New Critics could find pattern and unity in the most chaotic of poetry and fiction. It is a difficulty of criticism that perhaps time and general recognition themselves will solve.

More deliberate attention will have to be directed to the selection of illustrations for reproduction in works of criticism. Harvey's seventy-six illustrations are finely keyed to his text; those discussed at length but not reproduced are few, and well chosen to minimize the consequent difficulty of discussion. Steig is not so fortunate. Often in his book we find both the

drawing and the etching for an illustration, but only occasionally is some point made from the comparison. In consequence, given (one assumes) limitations due to cost, other illustrations that are discussed at length are omitted entirely, making plate-summaries necessary. Plate-summaries are as uninspiring as plot-summaries, with the added disadvantage of a deleterious transfer of medium.

Jane R. Cohen comes out between these two, and the distinctive choice in illustrations for *Charles Dickens and His Original Illustrators* is also characteristic of the book. The illustrations offered where one might have preferred another Browne (or Stone, or Cattermole, etc.) are portraits of the artists themselves, usually by other artists who did not illustrate Dickens. But on balance one accepts the choice because it suits so well the style of the book: a leisured, full, and primarily biographical review of all the Dickens illustrators, with even an appendix for Thackeray, the illustrator who wasn't. While clearly cognizant of all the criticism that has preceded her (the book is valuable for its footnotes and bibliography alone), Cohen has chosen a mode that goes back to the recovery stage of the enterprise, and does the task thoroughly. The book is in all obvious ways a re-doing of Frederic G. Kitton's *Dickens and His Illustrators*⁵ more than a lifetime later. Where narrative account is embellished by criticism, Kitton's notices of "errors" and "discrepancies" (a driver holding the reins in the wrong hand, or a leg of mutton in the text compared to a loin of mutton in the illustration), as well as of humorous "additions" that Steig will treat as emblems, are replaced by historical and other causal analyses more suited to modern taste. (See, for example, a deft and succinct discussion of the weakness of Browne's work for *A Tale of Two Cities*, p. 118.) But criticism plays only a minor and occasional role. The book is not held together by a thesis, and does not need to be. The discourse is narrative: each chapter takes form around its story of author and artist (a pair of nouns used all too frequently in place of proper names), and the chapters are arranged chronologically. The ordering of chapters is therefore almost exactly parallel to Kitton's. Because the volume is large (8½" x 11"), the illustrations are easily "dropped into" the text, instead of being bound in as a group. This arrangement combined with the fairly lavish printing creates a book that has at once the best properties of the coffee-table book and the scholarly compendium. Only in the final chapter does the method work badly, as the "Decline of the English Illustrated Novel after 1870" is delineated with point of view but little by way of thesis, with a wide range but without clear focus.

The strength of *Charles Dickens and His Original Illustrators* is in scope and thoroughness more than in originality of argument. The size of the undertaking and the value of its product must not be understated. Yet if Steig achieves less, he risks more: Cohen's work is mainly research, which must be done well; Steig's is criticism, which must be felicitous. The most difficult point in illustration-criticism is the movement between verbal text and illustration. And because of their simultaneity, their co-presence in a single collaborative text, they present problems — and temptations — that are not quite the

same as those of other criticisms that attempt to combine the study of art and literature, whether of verbal and pictorial art independently created, of one art commenting upon the other but without collaboration, or of both created by one artist, such as Blake or even Thackeray. It is on the interplay of language and picture that the critic stumbles — and it is because he did not stumble here that Harvey's work is outstanding. And it is here that mysteries of creation and reception have still to be unravelled. We know that with rare exceptions all the books we read to our young children are illustrated, and that at some point we expect them to move on to unillustrated stories, but we don't know much about why we hold this expectation or what difference it makes when we do read — or did read — illustrated novels.⁶ We need more exploration along the lines started by Paulson, firmer theoretical underpinning for the criticism, and more practical models like Harvey's and Patten's.

Deliberately apart from this critical quagmire stand John Buchanan-Brown's *Phiz!* and John Wardroper's *The Caricatures of George Cruikshank*. They don't match the glory of Gordon Ray's *The Illustrator and the Book in England from 1790 to 1914*, which preceded them by two years, a collector's work for other collectors conceived by the Pierpont Morgan as a "musée du livre," but they don't match its price either. Their interest is each in a single artist and hence in the reproduction of an ample collection of works, which are thus made available to a wider public. *Phiz!* is a volume of 216 plates preceded by a biographical and technical introduction of some twenty pages.⁷ In *The Caricatures of George Cruikshank* Wardroper adds to his introduction and 132 plates (24 in color) fairly extensive commentary, enriched with quotations from writings of the day. His hope that the result "is a panorama livelier than an official history of the time, and perhaps full of as many useful truths" is amply fulfilled. This volume calls us back from the high seriousness of criticism to the sheer indulgence of primary texts, verbal or pictorial.

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NOTES

- 1 London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1970.
2. In the same year, Q. D. Leavis's attention to Dickens's illustrations in *Dickens the Novelist* (with F. R. Leavis, London: Chatto and Windus, 1970) covered much of the same ground, but with pronouncement and legislation rather than analysis and argument, and hence to lesser effect as well as more briefly. She tells us what is "right," "wrong," "good," "disappointing," etc. (pp. 332-71 *passim*), but offers proportionally little — where Harvey offers much — by way of demonstration.
- 3 Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Univ. of California, 1971.
- 4 "Boz, Phiz, and Pickwick in the Pound," *ELH*, 36 (September 1969), 575-91.
- 5 London: George Redway, 1899.
- 6 It is curious in this regard that the man whom Gordon Ray calls the artist "who brilliantly continues the Victorian tradition of fantastic illustration" is Maurice Sendak, known widely only among parents and teachers of young children (*The Illustrator and the Book in England from 1790 to 1914*, New York: Pierpont Morgan Library and Oxford Univ. Press, 1976, p. xxii).
- 7 For a short but devastating critique of both the text and the illustrations, see Robert L. Patten's review in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 34 (September 1979), pp. 226-27.

REVIEW ARTICLE

History and Hermeneutics

George P. Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art and Thought*. Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1980. Pp. 266 + xiii, 8 illustrations. \$25.00.

George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*. Yale Univ. Press. 1979. Pp. 192 + xvi, 88 plates. \$27.50.

Herbert L. Sussman, *Fact Into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. Ohio State Univ. Press. 1979. Pp. 158 + xix, 40 illustrations. \$11.00.

When John Ruskin was a boy of eight or nine, he and his cousin Mary Richardson often spent Sunday afternoons writing abstracts of the sermons they had heard in the morning — “Mary dutifully,” as Ruskin remembers in *Praeterita*, “and I to show how well I could do it.”¹ Today, some of his abstracts remain as a testimony to Victorian piety and as a record of the mnemonic and verbal skills Ruskin possessed even as a boy. They also remain as a record of something else: the methods of scriptural interpretation practiced by evangelical clergymen during the first half of the nineteenth century and followed by their parishioners.

Those methods, as George P. Landow reminds us in *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, were primarily typological — that is, they claimed “to discover divinely intended anticipations of Christ and His dispensation in the laws, events, and people of the Old Testament.”² Landow first became interested in methods of scriptural interpretation when he wrote *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1971) and noticed their influence upon Ruskin’s thought. Ruskin himself suggested the connection: the sermons of the Rev. Henry Melvill, he claimed, gave him “all sorts of good help in close analysis.”³ As Landow realized for Ruskin and argues now for many Victorian artists and thinkers, typology is crucial to our understanding of more than religion; it shaped Victorian habits of reading literary texts and influenced theories of artistic and poetic creation. “When we

modern readers fail to recognize allusions to such typology, we deprive many Victorian works of a large part of their context. . . . Ignorant of typology, we under-read and misread many works, and the danger is that the greater the work, the more our ignorance will distort and inevitably reduce it" (VT, 3).

In *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, Landow traces the influence of biblical typology on the poetry of Tennyson, the Brownings, Rossetti, Swinburne, Hopkins, and lesser figures like Keble; on the fiction and non-fiction of Carlyle, Ruskin, Eliot, and the Brontes; and on the painting and poetry of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. As this list suggests, his book is at once general and comprehensive, surveying the multiple uses of typological symbolism and outlining the possibilities of influence rather than presenting exhaustive readings of single texts. Landow provides such readings, however, in *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*. He draws heavily from Hunt's own writings and from contemporary works of biblical exegesis to analyze all of Hunt's major paintings from *Rienzi vowing to obtain justice* (1848-9) through *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1870-1903) and *May Morning on Magdalen Tower* (1888-91). Landow makes the argument that in his early art Hunt experimented with typological elements, searching for an iconography that could fuse realistic representation with religious symbolism, and that in his mature art Hunt created such an iconography, presenting unified typological readings of real (or potentially real) historical events.

Like Landow's book on Hunt, Herbert L. Sussman's *Fact into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* is a book of readings. Sussman surmises that typological exegesis, along with "a pre-Darwinian science closely linked to natural theology," shaped the aesthetic theory and practice of Ruskin and Carlyle who, in turn, transmitted their models for art to the Pre-Raphaelites (FF, 3). He discusses the effects of this transmission in fine readings — always lucid, always engaging — of forty or so paintings and poems, concentrating on those of Rossetti, Millais, and Hunt. But the reader who expects substantial documentation for a theory of hermeneutic influence or for the historical context of Pre-Raphaelite art should turn to *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*. Landow takes considerable care to document his theory and his interpretations, thus displaying one of his strengths as a scholar, his familiarity with all the major Victorian artists and thinkers, as well as with many lesser preachers and exegetes.

Though somewhat different in approach, what all three of these books posit is a relationship between sacred and secular hermeneutics. They ask us to consider the ways Victorians read sacred texts and then to re-consider the ways we, as modern interpreters, read Victorian texts, whether sacred or secular, visual or verbal. At their best, Landow and Sussman develop some important hermeneutic strategies and employ them well. Landow points out, for example, that a painting like Holman Hunt's *The Shadow of Death* is typological not only in its details, but in its view of history. The figure of Christ, arms raised in repose and prayer, casts a shadow onto the wall and the tools of the carpenter's shop in a literal foreshadowing of the crucifixion.

Other details of the painting contribute to this prefigurative scene: "the tools become types of those used to torture Christ"; the reeds prefigure the mock scepter; the scarlet fillet that is part of Christ's head-gear, the crown of thorns (*WHH*, 119). What interests Hunt, in this painting and in so many others, is not the illustration of a religious scene, nor even the revival of religious iconography, but a theory of history and a theory of representation. Hunt believed that a subject could have a normal historical existence and yet foreshadow something else. To a viewer of *The Shadow of Death* who questioned this possibility, Hunt answered in terms that were both rational and contemporary: "many other a reformer's mother has forseen without supernatural revelation that her son's career would end under the hands of the public executioner" (*WHH*, 124). His painting, as Landow realizes, thus insists upon a providential scheme of history in which individual and seemingly random events participate, and upon a theory of realism in which material facts signify something beyond themselves.

In *Fact into Figure* Sussman also applies hermeneutic strategies well, especially in the chapters "Scripture as History" and "History as Scripture." Like Landow, he suggests that a Pre-Raphaelite "sacred picture" (or "Christian art design," as they were also called) depends upon a typological view of history, but he takes the argument a step further to show that for the Brotherhood, as for Carlyle, "human history **after** the time of Christ continues to follow providential patterns" (*FF*, 71; emphasis mine). This approach to Pre-Raphaelite history painting yields numerous rewards. Sussman gives, for instance, a brief but insightful reading of Hunt's *A Converted British Family sheltering a Christian Priest from the Persecution of the Druids* (1849-50): in his view, the painting presents "a visual analogue" to *Past and Present* by using traditional iconography to show that the history of England repeats the sacred pattern figured in the scriptures (*FF*, 71). He also gives the finest analysis I have read of the 1849 and 1870 versions of Rossetti's "My Sister's Sleep," suggesting that "the intensity of sense perception" which allows the speaker "to discover divine meaning within the events of everyday life" in the 1849 version, only "subverts," in the 1870 version, "whatever sense of the sacred is called up by iconographic associations" (*FF*, 85).

Recent theories of reading have warned us that interpreting texts can be a hazardous enterprise, one doomed to produce occasional (some would say inevitable) misreadings. Like all readers, Landow and Sussman succumb to their share of the hazards. At times, they allow their theories to determine what they find in Victorian texts; at others, they abandon their theoretical positions as they become caught in the intricacies of individual works. Landow finds **typological** allusions in *Jane Eyre* where other readers might see mere **biblical** allusions: Charlotte Bronte's comparisons of Rochester to Achan or of Jane to the Egyptians after the tenth plague do not depend, in any essential way, upon a typological theory of history or symbolism. Sussman sees in Millais's *Mariana* (1851) and *St. Agnes Eve* (1854) an "ironic reversal of Christian symbols" (*FF*, 105-07). Since these reversals are, if anything, **anti-typological** in their abandonment of a providential view of history

and of the typological connection between the material signifier and its divine meaning, they might suggest to other readers that Millais used typological symbols only to test theories of history and symbolism. Certainly they contradict Sussman's general statement that between 1848 and 1853 the Brothers "did not feel the contradictions" of their aesthetic theory, but rather "held to artistic beliefs and to stylistic practices that were so deeply shared as not to require explicit articulation" (*FF*, xvi).

Actually, I do not think that difficulties like these mar *Fact into Figure* or *Victorian Types*. Landow's comments on *Jane Eyre* add to our understanding of Bronte's delineation of character; Sussman's on Millais lead to rich discussions of Millais's paintings, more valuable than the general description of his aesthetic intention. The more significant questions are these: whether the typological approach that Landow and Sussman describe actually represents Victorian habits of textual analysis and whether it adequately interprets the texts, particularly the Pre-Raphaelite texts, it seems so suited for.

The questions become interesting with a painting like Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-50). The work is obviously biblical in subject. Both Landow and Sussman believe that it is also typological in general design and specific details. In their view, Millais depicts an imagined scene from the childhood of Jesus that foreshadows his crucifixion; details of the scene – the child displaying a nail wound in his palm, the Virgin embracing her child, John the Baptist carrying a laver, the dove hovering and the sheep bleating nearby – prefigure aspects of the crucifixion or serve as emblems of related Christian doctrine. Landow considers *Christ in the House of His Parents* an example of "the early Pre-Raphaelite use of typology as a basis for symbolic realism" (*VT*, 123), and Sussman, although he acknowledges the "tensions" of this aesthetic theory, similarly treats the painting as "the work that most clearly exemplifies Brotherhood aims for biblical painting" (*FF*, 47). The tone of their discussions suggests that both consider Millais's work a fairly accessible text, one easy to interpret if the viewer understands its typological intentions.

But in terms of historical fact, the painting was **not** an easy one for Victorians to interpret. Their knowledge of typology, which is evident in contemporary reviews of the 1850 Royal Academy exhibition, did not make the painting accessible; rather, it seemed to contribute to a hermeneutic dilemma. Recognizing the typological allusions, they were confused by Millais's unorthodox presentation of the Holy Family as ordinary, even "deformed" laborers, and they complained that the painting was blasphemous, desecratory, "heretical and damnable" – all judgments Sussman quotes. In the most famous review of all, Dickens objected that *The Carpenter's Shop*, as the painting was dubbed, depicted Jesus as "a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-headed boy, in a bed-gown," Mary as a woman "so horrible in her ugliness, that . . . she would stand out from the rest of the company as a monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin-shop in England," and St. Anne as "a snuffy old woman who seems to have mistaken that shop for the tobacconist's next door."⁴

For Victorian viewers, in other words, the typological details were being combined with other, contradictory signals, and hence they could not make the coherent typological interpretation that Landow and Sussman so easily can. The painting functioned as a kind of figure-ground drawing: if they looked at it one way, they saw a chalice; if they looked at it another, they saw two profiles. It was impossible for them to see both chalice and profiles, figure and ground, at the same time. The shapes of ugly, deformed laborers stood out against the traditional religious symbols that a typologist must choose to focus upon.

One can explain such difficulties as Dickens and others had as fundamentally political. Sussman remarks, quite justly, that two years after the 1848 revolutions, the radical implications of portraying Christ as a worker were not lost on the reviewers. But the difficulties were also genuinely hermeneutic, their cause lying less in political instability than in nineteenth-century biblical controversy, a controversy that Sussman never mentions and Landow mentions only occasionally.

Typology was not the only hermeneutic mode current at mid-nineteenth century. Early in the century and certainly by the 1840's, many English biblical critics, especially those influenced by German scholarship, were applying rationalistic and mythological techniques to the Old and New Testaments (often under the label, the Higher Criticism). Literary writers and readers knew of these techniques as well: Coleridge and Carlyle encountered them directly in their German studies; Browning, in lectures at W. J. Fox's chapel; George Eliot published a translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* in 1846; and Engels mentions the popularity of this work and others in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.⁵ By mid-century rationalistic and mythological critics had produced historically viable studies of Jesus as a lower-class laborer, political radical, and Messianic figure; of his apostles and followers as products of their cultural milieu; of the connections between Near Eastern, "oriental" religions and early Christianity; of the rabbinical traditions and secular narratives that contributed to the gospel accounts of the life of Christ. Needless to say, these studies were considered radical, even heretical, by orthodox churchmen — just as parallel elements in Millais's painting were called heretical by Victorian reviewers. These radical elements, derived not from typology but from the newer hermeneutic modes, made it difficult for mid-Victorians to read *Christ in the House of His Parents* from a unified typological perspective. The painting forced the viewer **visually** into precisely the hermeneutic dilemma he experienced **verbally** when he read the biblical text.

One might argue that Millais and the Brotherhood were attempting to reconcile the older typological with the newer rationalistic methods of interpretation. (Patrick Fairbairn, the typological theorist whom Landow quotes extensively, tried just that in *The Typology of Scripture*.) But in Millais's oeuvre, from *Christ in the House of His Parents* and *Mariana* through *Autumn Leaves* (1856) and *The Vale of Rest* (1858), almost every typological or

traditional iconographical detail becomes, in context, parodic or ambiguous. Millais seems only to be interested in creating hermeneutic dilemmas, not in solving them. Rossetti, too, seems only superficially concerned with typological solutions; as Sussman implies in his readings of the original and revised versions of "My Sister's Sleep" and "The Blessed Damozel," and as other poems such as "The Burden of Nineveh" and "Jenny" confirm, Rossetti preferred to explore the difficulties (or impossibility) of interpreting the visible world or of relating any visible object to a transcendent meaning. Perhaps only Hunt, whose Christian faith made biblical hermeneutics a personal obsession, attempted to reconcile the methods and symbols of orthodox typology with the newer discoveries of the Higher Criticism. Even at that, it would be fairly easy to argue that mythological, not typological, hermeneutics was the dominant influence on much of his late painting, especially on *May Morning on Magdalen Tower*. What other Victorians – Carlyle, Browning, Tennyson, Eliot – made of the conflict of hermeneutic methods remains for scholars to explore.

We need to consider various hermeneutic modes available at mid-nineteenth century not because they provide "better" interpretations of Victorian literature and art but because they remind us of the dilemmas Victorian interpreters faced – and modern critics repeat – when confronted by a text. One effect of the Higher Criticism was to alter the concept of revelation and thus the role of the interpreter in the discovery of meaning. According to orthodox typology, God has revealed divine truth to man in the scriptures, partially in the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, fully in the life of Christ and teachings of the apostles in the New. Meaning is complete, fixed. The typological interpreter has only to study the biblical text faithfully and apply its patterns accurately. In the Higher Criticism, revelation becomes a process, one that occurs as a reader confronts a sacred text and interprets it for himself and for his generation. Meaning is fluid, never complete but always being created by the interpreter and the interpretive community. If one intends to discover meaning, typology is always the easier mode, for it assures the interpreter that he will understand his text if he studies it well. But in the Victorian era, only the pious or the timid or the dull expected typology to be all-sufficient. More sophisticated readers felt the burden of interpretation and the contradiction of meanings that multiple hermeneutic modes impose.

Because of their own critical sophistication, Landow and Sussman provide consistently appealing readings of Victorian texts, readings that acknowledge that tensions do exist. The limitation of a typological approach to texts, however, lies in its tendency to ignore – or, rather, to lessen – such tensions. When Ruskin was a man in his sixties, he thought back over the sermons of his youth and remarked that they embodied "the habit of many good men . . . not to allow themselves to doubt or question any part of Bible teaching." Of Henry Melvill, the great homiletic typologist, Ruskin specifically complained that he "dutifully forb[ade] himself any dangerous fields of inquiry, explained with accuracy all that was explicable in his text, and argued the inexplicable into the plausible with great zeal and feeling."⁶ Rooted in a

conservative theory of revelation, typology all too frequently encourages its practitioners to search for the single, fixed meaning of a text and, if necessary, to argue the inexplicable into the plausible. The problem is that some Victorians deliberately constructed texts resistant to single, fixed meanings.

If Ruskin once complained of Melvill, he at the same time acknowledged his great intellectual debt. To Melvill's sermons, he owed "all sorts of good help in close analysis" and especially his introduction to the principle of context, that "habit of always looking, in every quotation of the Bible, what goes before it and after."⁷ All of us, when reading Landow and Sussman, should be like young Ruskin. We should look to their work for all sorts of good help in close analysis and a reminder of the principle of historical context in the act of interpretation. To both, we owe appreciation for challenging studies of biblical hermeneutics and secular literature in the Victorian period.

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NOTES

- 1 *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1908), vol. 35, p. 72.
- 2 My citations from Landow and Sussman are to the texts included in this review: *Victorian Types*, *Victorian Shadows (VT)*, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism (WHH)*, and *Fact into Figure (FF)*.
- 3 Ruskin, vol. 35, p. 388.
- 4 Charles Dickens, *Works* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1908), vol. 22, p. 237.
- 5 *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Panther, 1969), p. 265.
- 6 Ruskin, vol. 35, pp. 387-88.
- 7 Ruskin, vol. 35, p. 388.

REVIEW

John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge Univ. Press. 1979. Pp. 187 + xiv. \$17.95.

Since the publication of his book *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), John Searle has shared with J. L. Austin the focus of attention paid by philosophers and linguists to speech-act theory, one of the major contributions to the philosophy of language in our century. In his latest book, *Expression and Meaning*, Searle provides us with a collection of essays, several of which he has read and circulated widely (two were first read to the Center which publishes this journal). Their appearance in a single volume has long been awaited. The papers continue in the vein of *Speech Acts*; indeed, they are essentially an application of the theory developed there to a set of important puzzles and problems in the philosophy of language.

The book would be "a must" if for no other reason than that it is by Searle himself. Fortunately, it is well-written, clear, interesting, and the significant kind of contribution to philosophy that we have come to expect from Searle. I shall begin by briefly summarizing each of the seven papers individually, and then shall discuss the set in a more general way.

"A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts" addresses three questions: how many kinds of illocutionary actions are there; how adequate is Austin's categorization of them (as verdictives, expositives, exercitives, behabitives, commissives); and how are the different types realized in English syntax? Warning that we should not be misled into supposing that there are as many (or few) illocutionary acts as illocutionary verbs (a warning which we shall see is a main theme of this book), Searle gives twelve "significant dimensions of variation": differences in point; differences in direction of fit between the words used and the world (we either try to match the world to our words, as in commands, or vice versa, as in assertions); differences in expressed psychological states, in strength, in status of speaker and hearer, in the way the utterance relates to speaker/hearer interests, in the relation of the utterance to the rest of the discourse, in the propositional content as deter-

mined by illocutionary force indicators (for example, as in reporting the past or predicting the future); differences between acts that require speech acts and those that do not, between those that require extra-linguistic institutions and those that do not, between those where the illocutionary verb has a performative use and those where it does not; and differences in style.

According to Searle, Austin's classification does not distinguish illocutionary force and illocutionary verbs and has no consistent principle upon which it is based. Hence it is characterized by a great deal of overlap and heterogeneity.

Hoping to improve upon it, Searle proposes "to take illocutionary point, and its corollaries, direction of fit and expressed sincerity conditions, as the basis of constructing a classification. In such a classification, other features — the role of authority, discourse, relations, and so on — will fall into their appropriate places" (p. 12). He systematically shows how this can be done with assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. For example, the point of the first is informative, with the direction of fit being from word to world and the expressed psychological state, belief; the point of directives is getting someone to do something, the fit is world to words, and the expressed psychological state is wish or desire. After discussing the syntactic structure of each of these, Searle concludes that the classes of illocutionary verbs and illocutionary acts are not co-extensive and that there are not an infinite or indefinite number of things we can do with language.

The second essay is entitled "Indirect Speech Acts." Searle deals here with this problem: how can someone say something, for example, **I want you to do it** meaning that, and at the same time meaning something else, for example, **Please do it**? The answer lies, he believes (I think correctly), in the fact that speakers and hearers share mutual knowledge and powers of reason and inference. It does not follow, Searle argues, from the fact that a sentence can be used to do something other than its usual use (for instance, a question containing the word 'can' can be used to make a request) that it is part of the word's **meaning** that it include the other use. (This, I think, is related to Searle's claim that there is a distinction between illocutionary force and illocutionary verb — here he wants to separate force and core meaning.)

There are two crucial features of indirect speech acts: 1) there must be a strategy for establishing the existence of ulterior illocutionary point beyond the illocutionary point contained in an utterance's meaning, and 2) there must be a device for finding out what that ulterior point is. The first requires principles of conversation, the second requires a theory of speech acts and shared background information. Searle concludes, in this chapter, that axioms or rules can never be enough to allow us to figure out what is going on in discourse any more than rules or axioms would allow us to figure out, on any particular occasion, what people are perceiving. Rather, successful communication requires background information and the ability to make inferences in special contexts, neither of which can be packed into a set of rules or axioms.

The problem of the third chapter, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," is this: in fiction, words seem to have their ordinary meaning, but the rules attaching meanings to the world seem to fall apart. Searle distinguishes fiction from literature and fictional speech from figurative speech. In fiction, he says, authors **pretend** to make assertions and the like where the kind of pretense involved doesn't involve deception. Thus a thing's being fictional depends on an author's intentions.

But how is this kind of pretense possible, asks Searle. How do we recognize and understand fiction? Because, he answers, we have a set of extralinguistic, non-semantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world that the rules governing language use ordinarily make. These conventions depend upon those rules and hence in that sense are "parasitic." An author can pretend to refer only because he or she can succeed in referring. Readers know when authors are so pretending by seeing what counts as a mistake; that is, it is inappropriate to accuse an author of making a mistake when he or she writes sentences that are literally false. Again, as in the case of indirect speech acts, success depends upon shared knowledge between writers and readers.

In "Metaphor" Searle maintains that the problem of how metaphor works is a special case of the general problem of how a speaker's meaning and sentence meaning can come apart (as it does also in indirect speech and fictional discourse). It is a case of discovering what the **speaker** means and hence of knowing his or her intentions. Here the task is to state the principles relating sentence meaning and metaphorical utterance meaning, and this goes beyond semantic competence as it is typically construed.

In order to understand metaphor, we must first understand the concept of literal utterance on which it depends. In literal utterance, a) literal sentence meaning is equivalent to speaker meaning, b) literal meaning only determines a set of truth conditions relative to a set of background assumptions that are not part of semantic content, and c) the notion of similarity plays an essential role, that is, knowing that a general term is true of a set of objects is to know that these objects are similar with respect to the property picked out by that term. We must distinguish metaphor from this and other speech forms (irony and indirect speech, for instance) where these conditions do not hold. We need also to explain the "sense of loss" we feel when a metaphorical remark is paraphrased literally, while still accounting for the fact that the paraphrase is true if and only if the metaphorical remark is true.

There are three elements of a metaphor according to Searle: 1) the subject of the expression **S** and the object(s) it refers to; 2) a predicate **P** and its literal meaning, truth conditions, and denotation; and 3) the speaker's utterance meaning **S** is **R** and its truth conditions. The initial problem is to relate **S**, **P**, and **R** as well as the information and principles used by the speakers and hearers so that we can see how the speaker can utter **S** is **R** and

mean and communicate **S is P**. How and why does **S is R** "call to mind" **S is P**?

Searle characterizes existing theories of metaphor as falling into one of two general types: I) comparison theories — theories which maintain that there is comparison of two objects; and II) semantic interaction theories — theories which posit some kind of verbal opposition or interaction. Comparison theories fail to distinguish between the meaning of the utterance and the inference made when it is heard. Theories of the second type fail to distinguish utterance meaning and speaker meaning. And Searle believes, "It is essential to see this point, because the main problem of metaphor is to explain how speaker meaning and sentence meaning are different and how they are, nevertheless, related" (p. 87). For example, similarity functions as part of a comprehension strategy, not as in literal utterance, where it functions as part of the utterance meaning. Comparison theories do not tell us how to get from **R** to **P** and leave the nature of the similarity unspecified.

Searle attempts to provide a rational reconstruction of the steps we go through in order to comprehend metaphorical utterances. There must be 1) a strategy for determining if metaphorical interpretation is called for, 2) strategies for computing possible values of **R**, and 3) strategies for restricting the range of **R**. The first comes from cues like obvious falsehood, nonsense, or other clear violations of the rules of speech acts or conversation. "Where the utterance is defective if taken literally, look for an utterance meaning that differs from sentence meaning" (p. 105). The second consists in our looking for ways in which **S**'s might be like **P**'s; the third, in seeing which ways are likely or possible properties of **S**. Searle thinks that semantic interaction theories are best seen as a kind of strategy at this third level.

In "Literal Meaning," Searle challenges the view that the literal meaning of any sentence can be determined independently of context. Rather, he argues, it is relative to a set of contextual or background assumptions. That the meaning of even an apparently obvious, non-context bound sentence such as **The cat is on the mat** in fact depends upon such assumptions is seen when we imagine a cat and mat floating together in outer space. Is the cat **on** the mat? Always? Never? Our understanding of this easy sentence is inextricably bound to our scientific theories and interpretations. Sentences have application only "relative to a set of background assumptions which are not and for the most part could not be realized in the semantic structure of the sentence" (p. 128). (By now this is one of the familiar refrains of Searle's book.) The assumptions are infinite in number. Since we could always point to further assumptions, we could never literally mean what we say if meaning necessarily were wholly specifiable independently of context.

Donnellan's distinction between "Referential and Attributive" is the subject of the sixth paper in this volume. Consider the sentence **Smith's murderer was insane**. If Smith's murderer does not exist (if, for example, Smith died of natural causes), according to Donnellan, and if 'Smith's murderer' is being

used attributively, then the sentence cannot be true. If, however, 'Smith's murderer' is being used referentially, then the sentence can be true even if Smith were not murdered. Thus the phrase is being used attributively if we mean **Smith's murderer, whoever he was, was insane** and referentially if we mean something like **Smith's murderer, standing over there, is insane**.

Searle believes this distinction is best understood by seeing that all reference is "under an aspect," that "reference always involves a linguistic representation of the object referred to" (pp. 142-43). In referential use, even if one actually uses one expression (aspect) that is not satisfied by the object (as in the case of believing that the man over there is Smith's murderer and referring to him as such even when he isn't actually the murderer) one could use one that is. Eventually "we will reach bedrock. . . . We will reach an aspect such that if no one satisfies it the statement cannot be true and if one person satisfies it the statement will be true or false depending on whether that person is insane" (p. 145). This "bedrock" Searle calls the "primary aspect." It is "that aspect under which reference is made that actually counts in the truth-conditions of the statement" (p. 147). In attribution the expression always expresses the primary aspect of reference, so the sentence in which it occurs can only be true or false if some object satisfies it.

It follows from this, argues Searle, that the **de re/de dicto** distinction is one between ways of reporting beliefs, not between different kinds of belief, as some philosophers have thought. A reporter can decide how much of someone else's belief he or she is merely going to report and how much he or she will commit himself or herself to. **De dicto** reporters don't commit themselves to the existence of the object of someone else's belief; **de re**, they do. Speakers are more likely to make **de re** reports of secondary aspect references and to make **de dicto** reports of primary aspect references. In **de dicto** reports, we know that the actual aspect used by the person about whom a report is made is crucial to its truth, hence it is part of the report. In **de re** reports the aspect is not crucial and hence may be secondary.

The final paper is entitled "Speech Acts and Recent Linguistics," and in it discussion centers on the work of two linguistic approaches that Searle believes are mistaken. The first is exemplified by John R. Ross's 1970 paper "On Declarative Sentences." Ross's thesis is that declaratives are implicit performatives and must be derived from deep structures that explicitly contain a performative verb, "I," and "you," for example, "I say to you S."

Searle believes that this thesis rests on a general argument that is not valid: "For any language L and any two forms F and G, if F and G generally occur together in the surface structure of sentences, and if facts about the form or presence of one are determined by the nature of the other, then for any sentence S in which F occurs in the surface structure, but G does not occur, there is some deep structure of S in which G occurs, but where it is deleted in the surface structure" (p. 165). Some might have accepted this argument just for simplicity's sake, but Searle thinks "the appearance of simplicity rests on

an unexamined assumption," namely, that "the rules which specify the distribution of syntactical elements must mention only syntactical categories" (p. 166). That this is a faulty assumption is a main theme of Searle's book. "In a speech situation there is a speaker, a hearer, and a speech act being performed by the speaker. The speaker and the hearer share a mutual knowledge of those facts together with a mutual knowledge of the rules of performing the various kinds of speech acts. These facts and this knowledge enable us to account for certain syntactical forms without forcing us to assume that the facts themselves have some syntactical description or representation in the deep structure of sentences that they help to explain" (p. 167). I shall return to this point below.

The second misguided approach is found in "Conversational Postulates" (1971), by David Gordon and George Lakoff. Their answer to the question, how it is possible to say something, mean it, but also mean something else (for example, "Can you pass the salt?") lies in the existence of known conversational postulates. Searle believes that the weakness of such a view is that an unnecessary supposition, that is, the existence of conversational postulates, is made to account for the data.

It is clear, I'm sure, from these brief summaries that Searle covers a great deal of interesting and important ground. Each of the papers merits individual detailed discussion. But it is more appropriate in reviewing the book as a whole to raise more general questions. Searle is interested in problems that are special cases of the question, "How can we say something, mean it and mean something else too?" and this question relates all of the essays to each other. Indirect speech acts, fictional discourse, and metaphor are all instances of this. And his answer is that, whatever the answer, it will never be wholly syntactic — another theme relating the essays. Speaker meaning and sentence or utterance meaning are not equivalent, and neither depends solely on the words uttered. Even literal meaning is not simply a function of words in the sense that it is determinate independently of context. Understanding and successful communication are based in mutual knowledge and reasoning powers of speakers and hearers.

In the past Searle has been attacked by people who think that they have counter-examples to his rules for determining what speech acts are being performed. Mitchel Ginsberg, for example, claims that the result of the following is counter-intuitive ("How to Say It and Mean It," *Philosophical Studies*, 22 (April 1971), p. 45):

S and H are alone in a park. S turns to H and utters T, 'That was a Norwegian elkhound.' (S thought H might have mistaken the animal for a German shepherd.) Ex hypothesi, by so acting (uttering T), S produces in H knowledge, awareness, etc., that the states of affairs specified by the rules of T (except those H **already** knew about, was aware of, etc.) obtained.

Now, knowing of H's knowledge, awareness, etc., that these states of affairs have obtained, S again utters T. But S cannot think it possible to produce this knowledge in H since one cannot think it possible to bring about a state of affairs one assumes to obtain already.

The counter-intuitive consequence, Ginsberg thinks, is that the second utterance cannot be an assertion. But in this situation as Ginsberg describes it, wouldn't we in fact do as Searle predicts and describe the speaker's second (or third or fourth) utterance of **That was a Norwegian elkhound** as an assertion and perhaps something else as well? Wouldn't we be more likely, given the context, what we know about the speaker, and so forth, to interpret it as an expression of emphasis, admiration, or boredom — or as evidence that the speaker's mind is wandering again? One thing in favor of Searle's system is that it allows for the flexibility and creativity that successful communication requires.

Like understanding in general, linguistic understanding depends upon the knowledge and experience we bring with us to any situation. Non-natural meaning (to use Grice's term) is similarly a matter of knowledge and reasoning. Thus a newspaper on my neighbor's porch after 10 A.M. can mean that she is sick, but no set of rules will by itself tie together newspapers on porches and sickness. This main point of Searle's is, I believe, absolutely correct. Nonetheless, in dealing with questions of how we manage to understand one another's speech acts, he seems to believe that there is something essentially or uniquely linguistic involved that makes linguistic understanding essentially different from other kinds of understanding. Searle contributes a great deal in his effort to dispel the belief that meaning can be characterized syntactically, but I wonder if he goes quite far enough, or as far as he himself really wants to go.

Consider one of the examples he discusses in Chapter VII in connection with his criticism of Ross. How do we understand **Frankly, you're drunk** when there is no verb for 'frankly' to modify? (Clearly it is not '[a]re'.) One explanation (Ross's) is that we perform (unconsciously or inexplicitly) reverse transformations from surface to deep structures. That is, we've learned ourselves to make transformations from **I say to you frankly that you are drunk** to **Frankly, you're drunk** and know what others mean now by positing similar transformation. Another explanation (Searle's) is that we share mutual knowledge of speech situations and acts and rules for performing speech acts.

How should we decide which of these explanations is preferable? Perhaps by Occam's razor (Don't needlessly multiply entities.)? Yes, says Searle. The second explanation depends only on speakers and hearers and acts, not on words "in the air" (p. 170). Rules, he says, govern speakers, not words. "Since we already know a speech situation contains a hearer, a speaker, and a speech act, it is an unnecessary complexity to introduce deleted syntactic elements corresponding to these entities" (p. 170). The rules governing directives, for example, already refer to a hearer, so we don't need to

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introduce 'you' to explain our understanding of the meaning of an apparently subjectless utterance.

And in discussing Gordon and Lakoff, he says, "I will not here set out the steps necessary for the hearer to derive the primary indirect illocution from the literal secondary illocution since they are stated in some detail in Chapter II. The apparatus necessary for the hearer to make the inference includes a theory of speech acts, a theory of conversation, factual background information, and general powers of rationality and inference. . . . And the hypothesis being put forth . . . is that all the cases can be analyzed using the apparatus, without involving any 'conversational postulates'" (p. 176).

But do we really have enough for an explanation? Searle accuses Gordon and Lakoff of using conversational postulates without adequately explaining what they are. He prefers the sort of explanatory system favored by him and Grice. However, it seems to me that a "theory of conversation" on Searle's line, based as it is on rules governing speech acts, contains something very similar or at least analogous to conversational postulates. And are not Searle's rules every bit as much "in the air" as are Ross's words? Searle needs to show us how exactly his rules differ from Gordon and Lakoff's postulates, and how he can claim to have shaved his system with Occam's razor where they have not.

I have a similar kind of worry in connection with Searle's (and others') taxonomical work. What is the role of a taxonomy of speech acts in linguistics or the philosophy of language? Is it theoretical? Does a taxonomy of the sort Searle lays out in the first chapter of this volume allow us to do something which we could not do without it? And, if so, what?

There are many sorts of actions, linguistic and non-linguistic, that people can and do perform. Why should we think taxonomies can be given for them? And if one succeeds in giving one, what does it teach us, about action or something else, that we didn't already know? At least two different reasons (above and beyond the interest or amusement provided) might be given to explain the purpose of a taxonomy: a) it gives a system which picks out or refers to essential differences in the world; and b) it gives an efficient or convenient method for doing a job at hand. If the latter, evaluation depends, of course, on knowing what the job at hand is.

I happened to have just read Searle's taxonomy article when I went to my county service center to report and replace a stolen driver's license. One goes to these centers for a variety of reasons: to get licenses of several sorts, to pay bills, and so forth. And of course there is the usual standing in line and waiting that always characterizes such business — with sufficient time for me to wonder if I could do a taxonomy of Hennepin County Service Center actions, and to discover that, with sufficient time (and energy) it would be possible. One such taxonomy would be **intentional** — in terms of the **point** of various visits, for instance, to obtain a driver's license, a dog license, a hunting

license, a wild rice license, or whatever. Another could be done **extensionally** in terms of color of waiting slip given out, location of lines in which visitors stand, waiting seat area, to mention a few.

My own nominalistic leanings lead me to suspect that a speech-act taxonomy is no more likely to pick out essential divisions of human behavior or the world than would a taxonomy of Hennepin County Service Center action. So we must then see what jobs there are the doing of which is facilitated by a particular taxonomy. In the service center case it might be argued that one would allow us to arrange the office and schedule employees efficiently. Until we are clear what the jobs are that Searle's approach enables us to do, it is impossible to criticize him. At one point Searle accuses Austin of suggesting a category when there is not enough justification "sufficient to warrant a separate category." But I fail to see what the standards of sufficiency are that he applies.

Searle's book stimulated another philosophic nerve which has worried me off and on in the past few years. The term 'rule' is a crucial one in speech-act theory, but is used quite loosely. I am personally as guilty of using it as though it were clear as are most others. This rather cavalier use was exemplified in a recent review of Noam Chomsky's *Rules and Representations* by Ian Hacking in the *New York Review of Books* (October 23, 1980, p. 47). Hacking says, "What [Chomsky] means by a rule is plain enough from his examples. There should be a rule for forming questions out of declarative sentences, say, take the verb that comes after the first noun phrase and move it up front. . . . Such a rule works on the analysis of the sentences. . . ." What is clear is that Hacking is talking about what rules **do** — not what, in general, they **are**. It may be that 'rule' is a primitive term and cannot be defined in speech-act theory — that rules simply are what they do. But I keep hoping that someone with insights like Searle's will eventually take on this discussion.

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Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in His Context*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1979. Pp. 361+ ix. \$28.50.

In her earlier book, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), Marilyn Butler demonstrated with a wealth of convincing detail that, so far from being detached from the controversies of her day, Jane Austen was a deeply committed polemical writer. In *Peacock Displayed* she adopts an essentially similar approach to another satirist of the Romantic period who was of a very different political coloring. In many ways, indeed, Thomas Love Peacock presents us with the opposite kind of problem from Jane Austen. Whereas her satire stems from clearly defined values, its relation to the ideological battles of the day is less obvious to the modern reader; Peacock, on the other hand, simply stuffs his work with satiric comments on contemporary debates, but leaves his own standpoint very unclear. The result, as Butler puts it, is that "Peacock, unlike Jane Austen, has never persuaded the world of his seriousness." As the subtitle of her book, "A Satirist in his Context" implies, Butler's avowed aim is to place Peacock in his intellectual setting, and to reveal from that setting an overall consistency of values and seriousness of purpose in his work.

To begin with, she attempts to clear the ground:

It should be clear that any approach to Peacock's characters by way of received ideas about characterisation will get nowhere. His figures are neither personalities from real life, nor the rounded characters of novels.

Peacock's characters, argues Butler, are not so much "characters" as expressions of contemporary ideas—not so much "humours" as syndromes.

Of *Headlong Hall* she writes:

The dialogue requires not characters, but spokesmen. Foster and Escot represent between them a gallery of eighteenth-century intellectuals. Their debate is the grand debate of the Enlightenment

on the nature of contemporary society, and whether or not it is conducive to the happiness of the individual.

In the case of these earlier figures, Foster, Escot, or Milestone, Butler makes a good case. She points out that, for instance, though many of Milestone's arguments closely resemble those of Humphry Repton, the one thing he actually **does** (blowing up an ancient tower in the cause of landscape "improvement") parodies a scheme of his ideological arch-opponent, Uvedale Price, at Powis Castle. It is reasonable to suppose that the doctrinal battles over landscape aesthetics between Price and Payne Knight, on the one hand, and Repton on the other, would have been sufficiently well-known for Peacock's readers to appreciate this deliberate rearrangement. Yet even here we must pause. If the distinction between the two parties is as clear as Butler plausibly suggests, what is the **purpose** of what she calls this "moving kaleidoscope of allusion"? Surely not to imply that there is no real difference between the two factions? But if not that, then what? — for if it does not indicate an ideological shift, but merely something that Repton **might** have done, then we can stay with the old thesis that Milestone is a caricature of Repton.

If this approach of Butler's fails to solve all the problems of characterization in *Headlong Hall*, the difficulties are multiplied in later books. In *Nightmare Abbey*, which she rightly (in my opinion) sees as perhaps Peacock's most perfectly constructed novel, Butler produces her most startling argument by stoutly denying the popular identification of Scythrop with Shelley. Scythrop is, she claims, a parody of the German Romantic attitudes exemplified in Coleridge. His indecision between the two girls, Marionetta and Stella, is not Shelley's between Harriet and Mary, but an **allegorical** one of the contemporary artist caught between light literature and tragic ("L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso"). Now this is a fascinating and original case, and Butler argues it with a wealth of plausible detail. Certainly there is a polarity between the two fictional girls not so easy to see in Shelley's real-life wives. Yet, as before, Butler's argument remains tantalizingly incomplete. To begin with, even granted that there is a literary allegory in *Nightmare Abbey* (and Butler's argument is here very persuasive), Peacock surely must have known that most of his readers in any way familiar with the Shelley story would have assumed that Scythrop **was** Shelley. The parallels are too glaring to be missed. Even if in some allegorical sense he is not, it is still true that Peacock is inviting the comparison in order to fool us—and this is a possibility that Butler does not discuss. As so often with Peacock, it is not so much a question of whether Scythrop is, or is not, an exact representation of Shelley, but of the degree to which Peacock is recognizably using aspects of Shelley's life or ideas, and of his purposes (satiric or aesthetic) in so doing. In this sense, to claim that Coleridge rather than Shelley is the principal influence on *Nightmare Abbey* is simply disingenuous.

There are, in any case, other problems with the "Coleridgean" theory. According to Butler, Coleridge makes what amounts to a double appearance in

Nightmare Abby. His transcendental metaphysics and political conservatism are amusingly parodied in Mr. Flosky (one of Peacock's best creations) who, if we are not permitted to accept as a portrait of Coleridge, embodies many of his arguments in caricature. But simply because of the presence of Flosky in the book as a character, it is the more difficult to accept without qualification Butler's assertion that the book is "largely cast as a reply to Coleridge's opposition to the French tradition in his *Lay Sermons*, and his praise of the Germans in *Biographia Literaria*." Neither the gothicism—which Butler ascribes to the influence of Godwin's *Mandeville*—nor the central love-triangle of the plot are distinctively Coleridgean, and apart from Mr. Flosky's pronouncements there is little recognisably from either the *Lay Sermons* or the *Biographia*. To go on to claim that Scythrop's indiscriminate reading of German literature has made him a radical rather than a conservative to "tease" Coleridge begins to sound like special pleading. A character is "Coleridgean" in so far as it is like Coleridge; Scythrop is radical, and in so far as he is, he more closely resembles Shelley than Coleridge.

As was already apparent in her earlier books, Marilyn Butler is more at home with the prose than the verse of the period. She is very much at home with the history of ideas, particularly utilitarian ones, and less conversant with the movements of feeling and sensibility (including religious sensibility) that activate so much of Romantic poetry. These are excellent gifts for interpreting Peacock, but they are much less adequate for dealing with a poet like Coleridge. Thus Butler's main authority for Coleridge seems to be Wellek rather than any more modern or sympathetic critics. She tends—inexplicably—too identify Romanticism with "irrationalism" in the face of recent scholarship on the subject and can even express surprise that Shelley sees "the different powers of the mind as complementary, and by no means allows that unchallenged primacy—which we have come to expect of the 'Romantic'—to the creative imagination." Had she studied Wordsworth's "Letter to Mathetes," which Coleridge published in *The Friend* in the same year as *Nightmare Abbey*, this might have come as less of a surprise.

As a result Butler's attempt to set Peacock in the context of the public debates of the period is sometimes oddly one-sided. For instance, she claims that

Peacock's satires, begun in 1815, illuminate the moment when Wordsworth and Coleridge are rejected by the next generation of poets, on ideological grounds, as literary leaders; when Byron, Shelley, and Keats take over as, in Shelley's terms, spokesmen for the spirit of the age. Peacock's work offers a unique commentary on the extent and nature of the literary revolt.

While it is undoubtedly true that Byron, Shelley, and Keats were in reaction against Wordsworth and Coleridge, it is more questionable whether they constituted the kind of coherent movement that Butler suggests "extrovert," "comical," and "critical"). Shelley, for example, is a political

radical in a way that Byron and Keats are not; Byron belongs to a very different world of ideas from Keats. Moreover, in 1815 all Coleridge's great prose work (in criticism and philosophy) had yet to be written, and it was he, more than Shelley or Peacock, who, for better or worse, was to shape the coming Victorian debates about art.

Closely allied with her suspicion of "irrationalism" in the Romantics is Butler's own attempt to show how Peacock, in spite of a genuine "religious feeling" that was largely classical and pagan, is basically an orthodox Utilitarian. Again, as a corrective to those who would see Peacock as intellectually uncommitted and emotionally conservative (sharing the prejudices of his supine clergy, Dr. Gaster, or Dr. Opimian), this is useful—but not (it seems to me) the whole story. The use of a sociological model for the decay of poetry in *The Four Ages of Poetry* (one of the cleverest things Peacock ever wrote) is, I believe, much more complicated than Butler suggests. He detested such trains of reasoning, and yet had the pessimistic insight to suspect that they might be truer than he wanted to believe. To imply, as Butler does, that Peacock could accept the argument from Forsyth's *Principles of Modern Science* that, at a certain stage of cultural evolution poetry would be (and indeed, ought to be) redundant, is, in my view, to miss the whole thrust of Peacock's irony.

Yet, for all my doubts about some of her conclusions, Butler's book is one of the most stimulating and scholarly I have read in a long time, and must be the best book on Peacock yet to appear. She draws upon a wide and curious knowledge of debates and journalism of the period, and places Peacock more firmly in the context of contemporary controversy than any previous critic (including Howard Mills). She is never dull, and even at her most provoking she is worth close attention. *Peacock Displayed* is a must for anyone interested either in Peacock or in the cultural history of the later Romantic period.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Altieri, Charles A. *Act and Quality: A Theory of Literary Meaning and Humanistic Understanding*. Amherst, Massachusetts: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1981. \$27.50.

Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981. \$15.00.

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CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

WILLIAM A. MADDEN has published *Matthew Arnold: A Study of the Aesthetic Temperament in Victorian England* (1967) and is co-editor of *The Art of Victorian Prose* (1968).

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FRANCES FERGUSON is the author of *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (1977). She currently is working on books on the sublime and on ideologies of education in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England.

S. P. ROSENBAUM has edited *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary, and Criticism* (1975) and at present is writing a literary history of the Group.

J. LAWRENCE MITCHELL, editor of *Computers in the Humanities: Selected Papers* (1974), has written recent articles on Sylvia Townsend Warner and on Ray Garnett as illustrator.

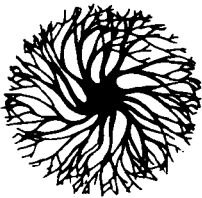
SYLVIA MANNING is the author of *Dickens as Satirist* (1971) and other essays on Victorian literature.

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