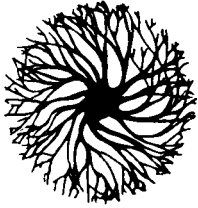


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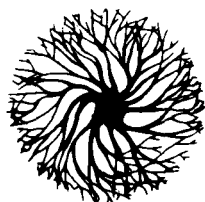
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PREFATORY NOTE

In this issue, we offer two prefatory notes, one on the *Centrum* speech-act bibliography and one on forthcoming articles.

Since the publication of Robert Meyer's bibliography in *Centrum* Volume 5, Number 2, we have received several additions, but not enough to justify our \$3.00 charge. We are therefore waiting until June 1, 1980 to compile our first edition. *Centrum* readers are invited to order copies around that date.

And *Centrum* readers can look forward to:

RICHARD KUHNS,
THOMAS MARTLAND,
DAVID HALLIBURTON &
MARTIN STEINMANN, JR. / All writing on literature as performative

CHARLES ALTIERI / On expressive implicature

PARK HONAN / On the interpretation of narrative

PETER MANNING / On subjective criticism

CHESTER ANDERSON / On fairy tales

SYLVIA MANNING / On Victorian illustration

STEVEN MAILLOUX / On the act of reading

Janet Holmgren McKay

Some Problems in the Analysis of Point of View in Reported Discourse

Discourse types, e.g., direct, indirect, and free indirect, and how they reflect point of view are topics of current interest in linguistics and literary criticism. The identification of discourse types and the relationship of point of view to them is an ancient subject. As Paul Hernadi notes (1972: 187), "...Socrates, in the third book of Plato's *Republic*, distinguished three modes of literary discourse, according to whether the poet, the characters, or poet and characters alternately speak." However, the subject has received particular attention in twentieth-century literary criticism as a consequence of the subtle manipulations of point of view that we have come to associate with modern fictional narrative techniques. The most complex discourse type — free indirect — has received the greatest attention, beginning in the early twentieth century with Bally (1912). Most recent discussions, both linguistic and literary, of discourse continue to center around it. Free indirect discourse (FID)¹ with its peculiar mixture of direct and indirect discourse features challenges theorists of both narrative and linguistic structure to incorporate it into a clear typology of discourse and to account for the point of view (POV) reflected in it.

Current research in the general areas of discourse typology and POV in language and literature breaks down into two basic approaches. One approach can be labeled linguistic because, although it may contribute to the understanding of literary style, its primary concern is to explain POV and discourse types in terms of syntactic/semantic consistency within a linguistic theory (Banfield, Fillmore, Reinhart). The other approach, while often based on textual/linguistic features, is designed for literary explication (Doložel, Genette, McHale, Ross). McHale, in his recent comprehensive survey of studies of FID, explains the latter position, which he takes, as bringing " ... the question of representation and illusionism to the forefront ... by making categories of literary representation primary, and subordinating the syntactical categories to them" (1978:257). Both approaches avoid the traditional literary critical vocabulary of "anthropomorphic and personifying terms (such as: 'omniscient' narrator, narrator with 'limited omniscience')" (Doložel 1973:5) in favor of labels based on language use, such as "represented," "quoted,"

[*Centrum*, 6:1 (Spring 1978), pp. 5-26.]

“reported” (Fillmore 1974:V-10). In addition, several of these studies share a skepticism about the traditional category “narrator” (Banfield, Fillmore, Kuroda, Ross), while positing a rather rigid consistency in assigning POV within given discourse types.

These studies generally represent a considerable advance in POV research; all of them explain POV in terms of discourse types despite the fact that they use different descriptive terminology. This essay will attempt to point out some of the major shortcomings of the studies and to identify areas that need further research. I will argue that in all indirectly reported discourse the linguistic responsibility for POV is ambiguous, but ambiguous in different ways depending on the discourse type. What is commonly designated FID has a greater **potential** for unambiguous POV representation than other indirect forms. Only directly reported discourse unambiguously represents POV. I will also argue against the concept “narratorless” as it is presented in Banfield, Fillmore, Kuroda and Ross.

I. DEFINING POV

As Seymour Chatman noted recently (1975:215), “the term ‘point of view’... can be seriously misleading.” It is also vaguely and contradictorily defined or not defined at all by those who use it. For example, Banfield (1978:299), in response to a critique of her 1973 study, says: “‘Point of view’ itself remains undefined in Dillon and Kirchhoff. In Banfield (1973), point of view is associated with the notion ‘subject of consciousness’ (SELF), defined as the consciousness to whom all expressive elements are ascribed.” While “subject of consciousness” gets a full description, POV has to be defined in terms of it. As her argument develops, it is clear that only sentences containing expressive elements, such as exclamations, evaluative adjectives,² etc., have a POV. By contrast, Winifred Nowotny (1962:45) takes the position that “the nature of language is such that there can be no such thing as a neutral transcription of an object into words. Even if language is used as in a police description of a wanted man, it is still used from a preselected point of view.... ”

The problem, of course, is that POV operates on several planes, as Boris Uspensky (1973) notes. On the ‘ideological’ plane (Uspensky 1973:8) it is roughly equivalent to “opinion.” In literary studies it is most often taken as a synonym for “angle of vision” or “perspective.” In any of these general senses, it transcends a purely linguistic definition, but in dealing with POV as it is related to discourse types, a linguistic definition seems a necessary beginning point. In this study, I will use Tanya Reinhart’s definition (1975:127): “To say of an expression E that it is from a certain person P’s point of view, is to say that E represents P’s judgments (wishes, etc.) or that P is responsible for E.” E stands for “a nonrecursive [nonembedded clause] initial symbol E (‘expression’)” (Emonds 1976:52) or for exclamations and other forms that can stand alone but cannot be embedded: “**Three cheers for those brave volunteers!, O, damn that old man!**” (Emonds 1976:53).

Reinhart's definition excludes that aspect of POV that Gérard Genette (1972:203) has separated out as **mode**, that is, "who sees." It relies almost exclusively on what Genette designates as **voix**, "who speaks," to account for POV.³ Ultimately, for the study of POV to be integrated into modern literary criticism both aspects must be accounted for. As Hernadi notes (1972:188), "Instead of asking, 'Who speaks?' we should try to clarify whose perceptions, thoughts, and feelings inform the world of a given work of literature." However, identifying the "angle of vision" or **mode** should follow, not precede, the study of **voix**. Empirical linguistic evidence can determine the responsibility for an utterance in terms of who speaks, and where this evidence is inconclusive, it should point out at the very least the source of the ambiguity between who speaks and who sees. The impressions of the critic rather than the evidence in the utterance are usually the basis for determining the **mode**; to start with that issue is, then, less satisfactory and certainly less conclusive.

II. POV IN DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY REPORTED DISCOURSE

The second part of Reinhart's definition – direct responsibility rather than represented responsibility, which is a far more complex issue – will concern us first. In direct discourse, responsibility for utterances is a straightforward matter. Whether I say, "in my opinion, Jimmy Carter is a good president," or simply, "Jimmy Carter is a good president," the utterance, including the evaluative **good** is my responsibility. I need not believe what I say nor need it be true. Depending on such variables as intonation and paralingual signals, I can make my utterance sarcastic, doubting, etc. Nevertheless, because it is direct discourse, I am responsible for it. This pattern of responsibility applies to directly reported discourse as well. As Partee (1973) and Banfield (1973) have shown, in the construction, "Harry said: 'Carter is a good president,'" there are two speakers, the reporting "I" and "Harry." The reported sentence is Harry's responsibility, while the introductory clause is the responsibility of the speaker, "I." When we move from directly reported to indirectly reported discourse, the responsibility becomes less clear.

Partee and Banfield have demonstrated that indirectly quoted forms cannot be derived from the similar direct quotation. For example, in (1) it is not at all clear what "he" said:

1. He said my accent reminds him of you.

The statement may be an indirect rendering of "Your accent reminds me of X," or it may be a summary of any number of other direct forms, i.e., "You talk as weirdly as X does." Given this analysis, it would be logical to assume that in all indirectly reported speech, the speaker of the entire utterance is responsible for all elements in it, including evaluative words, such as **stupid** in (2):

2. Harry said his stupid brother is coming to town.

Thus, Banfield asserts that because of the nonderived relationship between directly and indirectly reported speech, this kind of sentence can only be given what philosophers label a **de re**, or as Reinhart (1975:128) calls it, a transparent reading – the **stupid** (as well as everything else) is attributable to the speaker of the sentence and not to Harry since we can never know exactly what Harry said.⁴ As Banfield maintains (1973:21): “Any expressive words and constructions in indirect speech always express the state and attitude of the speaker who reports it.” Fillmore also subscribes to this “speaker-coherence model,” as Dillon and Kirchhoff (1976:431) call it, in indirect reporting. Thus he says (1974:V-11), “Within a clause of reported speech [contrasted with quoted speech], indexical and referencing expressions are transparent, i.e., they are selected from the point of view of the reporting speech act, not the reported speech act.”

Although the “speaker-coherence” argument seems logical in terms of linguistic consistency, it must be questioned on pragmatic grounds. Most speakers whom I have questioned give only the **de dicto** – the Harry-oriented – reading when the sentence is offered out of context.⁵ Moreover, a sentence such as (3) seems to encourage the **de dicto** reading:

3. His stupid brother is coming to town, Harry said.

However, contexts can be constructed to elicit consistently the **de re** reading, which seems to be the marked, or less predictable, one for most speakers. The simplest way to elicit the speaker-oriented reading is to use intonation – stress on **stupid**. Another method involves the discourse itself. Thus a construction like “I think Harry’s brother is an idiot, and Harry says his stupid brother is coming to town” suggests the **de re** interpretation. Other modifiers within the sentence affect the reading, a fact which indicates that there are variables that may be predictable in triggering assumptions about responsibility. Thus in (4) and (5) we get a strongly **de re** reading (along with the possible **de dicto** reading!) because of the first-person possessive pronouns, which point to the speaker:

4. Harry said my stupid brother is coming to town.

5. Harry said our stupid brother is coming to town.

In addition, some sentences of this type are less likely to be open to more than one reading, not necessarily because of syntactic constraints, but because of the hearer’s knowledge of the world. For sentence (6) (Banfield 1973:23) we get the **de re** reading with **Comrade** the responsibility of the speaker and not of Nixon, not because it is the only one permitted syntactically but because of our knowledge of who Richard Nixon is.

6. Nixon said that Comrade Lenin’s picture should be banned.

Of course, depending on the context, it is possible to give this sentence a **de dicto** reading with **Comrade** being used ironically or sarcastically by Nixon.

Conclusions about whether an indirectly reported form reflects the POV of the embedded speaker involve many considerations other than the few contextual and linguistic variables I have indicated. The hearer has to evaluate what he knows of the relationship between the reporting and the reported speaker, the general reliability of the reporting speaker, the reporting and reported speakers' attitudes toward the situation being described, etc. These "extralinguistic contextual features" (Lakoff 1972:926) are crucial to assigning responsibility. Of course, the hearer always has recourse to a direct question about responsibility. Unfortunately, this recourse is not available to the reader of a newspaper account containing reported assertions, nor to hearer/readers in a variety of other settings. The most extreme case of nonrecoverability involves indirectly reported speech in literature because there is usually no direct form behind the fictitious indirect report. As McHale notes (1978:256): "... in fiction ... there is no direct 'original' prior to or behind an instance of ID [indirect discourse] or FID [free indirect discourse]; the supposedly 'derived' utterances are not versions of anything, but themselves the 'originals' in that they give as much as the reader will ever learn of 'what was really said.'"

Despite the fact that indirectly reported speech in literature usually lacks an antecedent, studies of discourse types focusing on literary interpretation rely more on the *de dicto* interpretation of indirectly reported speech. Ross (1976:1223) says: "Indirect quotation implies that the character's actual words could be found if quotation marks were put in and some routine changes made in pronouns and verb tenses, as in **He said that he did** → **He said, "I do."** This derivational relationship also underlies Seymour Chatman's paradigm (1975:230) for methods of reporting speech and thought:⁶

	<i>Free</i>	<i>Tagged</i>
<i>Direct</i>		
Speech	I have to go	'I have to go,' she said
Thought	I have to go	'I have to go,' she thought
<i>Indirect</i>		
Speech	She had to go	She said that she had to go
Thought	She had to go	She thought that she had to go

Richard Ohmann's early transformational model (1969:144-45) to account for FID was also based on a derivational pattern linking direct, indirect, and free indirect reporting.

In light of the Banfield/Partee analysis, however, it is clearly inadequate to assume a derivational relationship between direct discourse and the indirect report of it, although in ordinary language use this relationship seems to account for at least one possible interpretation of responsibility. In this sense

readers of literature model their response on their experiences with nonliterary language as McHale describes them (1978:256): "In everyday production and use of represented/reported discourse, it is theoretically always possible to recover the 'original' direct utterance from the derived non-direct versions, or at least to think of it as recoverable, 'basic' to the non-direct transforms."

The examples we have looked at thus far are of the embedded clause form, involving a verb of communication (**verbum dicendi**) with or without the conjunction **that**. The fact that they are open to more than one interpretation leads to Reinhart's conclusion (1975:130): "... complex sentences of saying and believing ... are essentially ambiguous with respect to who said/believed what." I would add the proviso that they are far less likely to be ambiguous in context. Sentences need not be complex, however, to report a speech act. Forms, such as (7), cannot be given "derivational" interpretations but still hold the possibility of confusion about who is responsible for the reported portion:

7. Harry told me to thank his stupid brother.

While (7) seems likely to have a **de re** interpretation, a similar sentence (8) seems more **de dicto**:

8. Harry asked me to thank his stupid brother for him.

This more oblique reporting method is frequently used in literature. Ross (1976:1223) notes that in paraphrase sometimes "... a hint of the actual [reported] words shows through..." This is also the case in McHale's "summary, less 'purely' diegetic; summary which to some degree represents, not merely gives notice of, a speech event ..." (1978:259).

In short, every example of indirectly reported speech, no matter how it is reported, seems to have the **potential** of including elements which are the responsibility of the embedded speaker, and this possibility is often deliberately exploited in literature. As Doložel (1973:12) says: "discourse ambiguity seems to be an inherent property of the narrative text structure, resulting from the dynamic character of the opposition DN [narrator's discourse] – DC [characters' discourse]." This potential POV ambiguity in both everyday and literary language proves the "speaker-coherence" approach to be too rigid. Some examples from a first-person fictional narrative involving a great deal of indirectly reported speech illustrate both the possibility of ambiguity in embedded forms and cases where the responsibility for the linguistic elements in the embedded report clearly belongs not to the reporting but to the reported speaker.

In the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's indirect reports of what others say enable his voice to mingle with those of other characters and, as Huck says of his "victuals," "the juice kind of swaps around, and the things

go better" (p. 7). Thus in sentence (9) we find one of several instances in which Huck uses the word **sivilize**:

9. The Widow Douglas ... allowed she would sivilize me... (p. 7).

In the embedded clause **sivilize** is not Huck's word. He can't spell it, and he never uses it except to report the speech of others because it is too complex for his lexicon. In a similar way, the repetitions, emphases, and exclamation at the end of sentence (10) seem to belong to the original fictional utterance, not to Huck's report, although the reported information is not a complete clause:

10. ... she throws her arms around my neck and told me to say it *again*, say it *again*, say it *again!* (p. 147, italics in the text)

This sentence shows signs of what Page (1973:35) calls "'slipping' from indirect into direct speech ... [in] mid-sentence...." (Sentences 15-17 are also examples of this pattern.)

An interesting problem involving "slipping" occurs in Huck's reports of the speech of the runaway slave, Jim. When Huck reports Jim's speech directly, Jim speaks in a dialect quite different from Huck's, intended to represent the Black English of Twain's time. But in (11) we have an indirect report:

11. Jim said he bet she did think of it ... and he believed they must a gone up town to get a dog ... or else we wouldn't be here on a tow-head ... — no, indeedy, we would be in that same old town.... (p. 54)

"No, indeedy" is a direct discourse form so personalized that it is difficult to embed as indirectly reported discourse. In fact, for linguists like Emonds, it would be a nonembeddable expression. At the same time, the clause following this exclamation is not rendered in Jim's dialect (**ole** for **old** would be one indication of Jim speaking). Given Huck's methods of reporting, the expressive elements after the dash most probably are Jim's responsibility filtered through Huck's dialect, but the interpretation is somewhat ambiguous.

A more interestingly ambiguous example of this type involves Huck's reminiscences about his relationship to Jim.

12. ... And at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now.... (p. 167, italics in text)

The last clause moves into the historical present away from indirectly reported discourse and yet it is not necessarily direct. Either Huck or Jim might be responsible for calling Huck Jim's only friend. In fact, this clause is probably Huck repeating to himself Jim's earlier words "'en you's de only fren' ole

Jim's got now"" (p. 124). If Huck's report is an echo of Jim's earlier statement, then it is that relatively unusual fictional report which does, in fact, have a direct discourse antecedent.

Sometimes Twain uses a tag, like the one in sentence (3) above, to mark examples of "slipping." In the following sentence the elliptical construction with its expressive features after the dash seems to be the duke's responsibility:

13. So the duke he said these Arkansaw lunkheads couldn't come up to Shakespeare; what they wanted was low comedy — and maybe something ruther worse than low comedy, he reckoned. (p. 120)

The tag, "he reckoned," could be merely emphatic rather than indicative of the duke's responsibility, so there is some room for ambiguity. Given the fact that Huck does not know what **low** means in this context and given the placement of the tag after the phrase that is preceded by the dash, it seems likely that that phrase is the duke's responsibility.

Finally, a very complicated sentence deliberately blurs the distinction between directly and indirectly reported discourse. (Twain revised this passage out of directly reported discourse to heighten the satire.⁷)

14. Well, by-and-by the king he gets up and comes forward a little and works himself up and slobbers out a speech, all full of tears and flapdoodle, about its being a sore trial for him and his poor brother to lose the diseased, and to miss seeing diseased alive after the long journey of four thousand mile, but it's a trial that's sweetened and sanctified to us by this dear sympathy and these holy tears, and so he thanks them out of his heart and out of his brother's heart, because out of their mouths they can't, words being too weak and cold, and all that kind of rot and slush, till it was just sickening; and then he blubbers out a pious goody-goody Amen, and turns himself loose and goes to crying fit to bust. (p. 131)

The shift into and out of the **us** with the king and duke as referents occurs in the middle of this sentence.

All of these sentences are counterexamples to Banfield's rigid "speaker-coherence" principles as they are applied to the literary text. Since these principles, which she qualifies as referring to **SELF** rather than **SPEAKER**, are important to the discussion of **FID** (discourse containing a non-I subject-of-consciousness or **SELF**), I will give them in full as she presents them in her most recent work.

1. 1E(expression)/1SELF

'The 1 Consciousness Principle. For every node E, there is a unique

referent, called the subject-of-consciousness (SELF) to whom all expressive elements are attributed' (1973:29).

2. 'If there is an // is the subject of consciousness' (1973:29).
3. '1TEXT/1NARRATOR. For every text, all first-person pronouns remain coreferential from E to E, except for the E's of direct quotation' (1973:34)(1978:290).

The subject-of-consciousness for all the Huck sentences is Huck's I, but in each sentence there is a referent other than Huck to whom certain expressive elements are or can be attributed. Banfield (1978:304) herself identifies the shape a sentence must have to be a counterexample to her first two principles. "It would be a single sentence containing either a first person and a third person SELF or a single sentence containing more than one expressive construction, where they are not all interpreted as the expression of the same SELF." She denies the existence of such sentences, but they are not at all uncommon as my examples demonstrate. In addition, sentence (14) violates the 1TEXT/NARRATOR principle.

Any sentence that involves both directly and indirectly reported speech is a possible counterexample. Thus a sentence (15) from Hemingway's *In Our Time* violates a subpoint of the first principle which "associates the style, dialect, and language of an expression with its unique speaker" (1973:24).

15. While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fassalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. (p. 70)

Hemingway captures a breathless, run-on effect by failing to mark the onset of direct discourse. In a sentence from *Vanity Fair* (cited by Page 1973:31), Thackeray satirizes his character by mixing her dialect with his summary of her speech:

16. Mrs. O'Dowd described how it had been presented to her by her fawther, as she stipt into the car'age after her mar'ge.

In his description of Prince Vasily in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy inserts a few French phrases which are clearly the Prince's responsibility as a consequence of the first-person pronominal forms (example cited by Uspensky 1973:37):

17. Prince Vasily, who still filled the same important position, constituted the connecting link between two circles. He used to visit **ma bonne amie** Anna Pavlovna and was also seen **dans le salon diplomatique de ma fille**.

III. POV IN FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE

Banfield uses the label "subject-of-consciousness" to account for the most complex method of mixing directly and indirectly reported discourse, and thus of manipulating point of view, FID. Despite the confusion that exists about the labeling of this form, its basic characteristics are generally agreed upon. As Dillon and Kirchhoff (1976:431) assert: "In general, the material that appears in FIS [free indirect style] is to be understood as a representation of a character's expressions or thoughts as he would express them Thus, although the pronouns referring to the character are third-person, not first, and the tense (usually) 'back-shifted' from the tense the character would use, in other respects the material is given as he would assign it rather than as the narrator would." Apart from verb tense and pronominal forms this discourse type is as close to direct discourse as an indirect form can be — a fact that prompts Fillmore to say (1974:V-II): "In represented speech it is nearly possible to represent his [the reported speaker's] exact words; but in reported speech it is not."⁸

If FID is so similar to directly reported discourse, then it should be relatively easy to identify the POV expressed in FID. It should be, as Fillmore suggests, that of the reported speaker. The expressions of FID are not uttered directly by the reported speaker, but, to use the first part of Reinhart's POV definition, "E represents P's judgments (wishes, etc.)" (1975:127). The problem, of course, is that these are not direct discourse forms and because they have some features in common with indirectly reported forms, they should be open to the ambiguous interpretations we have just discussed. In order to separate represented from indirectly reported speech and to free FID from the restrictive *de re* interpretations of indirect forms, Banfield, following Kuroda (1973, 1976), argues that represented discourse (RD) is a "speakerless" phenomenon — the presentation of a point of view outside the normal communication paradigm that is usually used to explain language. Their analysis is based on the fact that many examples of RD or FID cannot be derived from tagged indirect forms precisely because of the features RD/FID has in common with directly reported discourse. However, this nonderived relationship can be accounted for syntactically, as will be demonstrated below, thus making the "speakerless" solution far too radical.

FID, unlike other indirectly reported discourse, admits exclamations, broken sentences (elliptical or fragmented forms), and an unusual distribution of sentence patterns usually restricted to nonembeddable sentences (such as subject-auxiliary inversion in questions). So, for example, constructions occur as in (18) and (19):

18. If only — if only — it were not for Roberta now!

Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy* (p. 425)

19. Had she opened it yet? Did she know what was in it?

Richard Wright, *Native Son* (p. 175)

We know in (18) that this is the protagonist's expression because of the two sentences which immediately precede it: "The thought was like some sweet, disarranging poison to Clyde. It fevered him and all but betrayed him mentally." Yet the sentence is not constructed to permit a narrator's introductory tag, "Clyde said to himself **that**." In addition, although the surrounding narrative is in the past tense, (18) uses the present tense deictic marker **now** with the subjunctive verb **were**. The example from *Native Son* (19) is surrounded by similar third-person narration: "He stopped listening. In Peggy's hand was the kidnap note...." Wright might have proceeded in the third-person: "Bigger asked himself whether she had opened it." Instead, however, he shifts to a form like direct discourse without marking the shift.

The special features of these FID forms prompt Kuroda and Banfield to label them "nonreportive" in that they reflect a subject-of-consciousness (SELF) without the mediation of a narrator/speaker.⁹ As Banfield concludes (1973:33): "This analysis of the free indirect style as an expression containing a third-person subject-of-consciousness thus supports Kuroda's hypothesis that not all sentences conform to the paradigm of linguistic communication in terms of speaker and addressee..." It follows then that "...not every sentence contains a speaker..." (34).

The concept of a "speakerless" style is an interesting one; the label reflects in large part what writers using FID attempt to convey — consciousness without the intervention of a narrative voice. However, the Kuroda/Banfield argument is open to criticism on several counts. First, Reinhart offers a syntactic solution to the absence of a controlling clause, and thus of a speaker, in FID. She speculates (1975:157-8) that an underlying parenthetical (he said, etc.) controls sequences of FID. A parenthetical would follow rather than precede the sequences in question, and thus avoid the problem of embedding. FID sentences would then be equivalent to Reinhart's subject-oriented sentences containing parentheticals (SCP's). Sentence (20) is a subject-oriented SCP, the main clause reflects Ed's POV, and contrasts with (21), a speaker-oriented SCP, in which the main clause reflects the POV of the speaker of the entire utterance:

20. He_i would be late, Ed_j said.

21. Ed_j will be late, he_i said. (Reinhart 1975:143)

The tense agreement between the main clause and the parenthetical, the backward pronominalization (obligatory in subject-oriented SCP's), and the intonation pattern ("like a direct quote followed by a parenthetical" (Reinhart 1975:143)) all make (20) subject-oriented. In (21), by contrast, the parenthetical functions like a sentence adverbial to qualify or emphasize the speaker's report about Ed and not like the tag of directly reported discourse. (These two possible explanations for a parenthetical caused the ambiguity in (13) above.)

Banfield (1978:291, fn. 4) argues that Reinhart's only justification for the underlying parenthetical is tense agreement (although Reinhart offers several other language features as support); therefore, Banfield does not find the argument for a parenthetical persuasive. However, in her own analysis of FID, Banfield says of these parenthetical clauses (1978:305): "... if any sentence by its form is the paradigm of narrative exposition, it is the parenthetical often accompanying the sentence of represented speech and thought." For Banfield, these parentheticals do not contradict the "speakerless" designation of FID because they are derived in her analysis so as to be unable to include expressive elements (the only evidence in her model for a SELF or POV). Thus a sentence (22) is not "so acceptable" because of the expressive **mistakenly** (1978:305).

22. ?He was more in love with her than she had supposed,

Emma mistakenly [thought
supposed.]

This argument is not convincing, first, because (22) does not seem particularly unacceptable, especially if it were placed in context, and second, because many sentences like (22) come to mind that are completely acceptable:

23. He_i would be late, Ed_j tactlessly said.

24. He_i wouldn't be put upon any longer, Ed cried_j angrily.

25. No, the work wasn't hard, Mary responded cheerfully.

It is somewhat more difficult to introduce evaluative words into the parentheticals of FID than it is in the tags of direct discourse, a fact which suggests once again that while these forms resemble direct discourse, they are not identical to it. More interesting, though, is the question of whose POV is represented in the evaluative words of the parenthetical. It seems that they are most often the responsibility of the reporting speaker (although not always) rather than of the parenthetical subject. However, I do not agree with Reinhart's assertion (1975:149) that only one POV, that of the speaker, is represented in the main clause of a sentence like (21). Depending on the context and organization of the main clause and the context in which it occurs, it is open to more than one POV attribution. Even in parenthetical-subject-oriented SCP's like (20), the main clauses are not as unequivocally the responsibility of the parenthetical subject as are the quoted clauses of direct discourse.

If a parenthetical **following** FID forms argues against the "speakerless" explanation, then a far more devastating attack would be involved if FID forms could be embedded, that is, preceded by a **verbum decendi** plus a

subordinating **that**. Sentence (11) above would be an example of an embedded exclamation form, as would (26) cited by McHale (1978:254) from Dos Passos' *42nd Parallel*:

26. When they came out Charley said by heck he thought he wanted to go up to Canada and enlist and go over and see the Great War.

Banfield (1973:30) does indicate that some instances of FID can be introduced by verbs of communication, but this pattern would presumably not extend to constructions, like exclamations or interjections, that cannot ordinarily be reported indirectly. The problem with the general argument of nonembeddability, which then eliminates the "speaker" of the sentence, is that what is and what is not embeddable is far from resolved. Georgia Green (1976:382-3) in discussing main clause phenomena – "certain constructions fully grammatical in main clauses, but odd or ungrammatical – in any case, much less acceptable – in embedded clauses," concludes that " ... the principles determining the embeddability of so-called MCP are pragmatic and conversational, and not formal or syntactic at all" (1976:386). Thus, for example, it is easier to embed an MCP if the speaker agrees with the proposition involved as in (27) (taken from (Green 1976:386)):

27. John says that never before have prices been so high, and I agree.

A third argument against excluding a speaker from FID involves the functions of FID – a topic too complicated to discuss in depth here. Critics generally agree that among its many functions FID can convey either ironic distance or empathy/sympathy. Certainly, writers seem to choose it over directly and indirectly reported discourse because of its subtlety of expression. To account for both irony and empathy we have to posit two POVs, or as McHale (1978:278-9) says: " ... when FID functions as vehicle of irony or empathy there are at least two sources, often difficult to distinguish: the character whose utterance is being reported and also an author/narrator who intervenes somehow, to some degree, in the report and is responsible for the irony or sympathy itself."

Thus, although certain instances of FID, constructions without the parenthetical tag on the surface that seem to be virtually nonembeddable in their manifestations of direct discourse features, encourage a "univocal" (McHale 1978:279) or "speakerless" interpretation, the discourse type itself must be seen as basically "narrated." Cohn (1966:104) explains this relationship in justifying the adaptation of the term "narrated monologue" for FID: " ... the second term ... expresses the immediacy of the inner voice we hear, whereas the first term expresses the essential fact that the narrator, not a character in the novel, relays this voice to us.... "

Finally, given the specific features of FID, the number of sentences of this type is necessarily quite small. FID is rarely used exclusively or even consis-

tently in long stretches. Rather it alternates with other more traditional forms of narration (as in 18 and 19 above). Therefore, an important objection to the label "speakerless" is that it quickly expands to become "narratorless."

IV. ARGUMENTS AGAINST "NARRATORLESS"

For Banfield and Kuroda, stories without a first-person narrator or with no signs of a narrator (expressive elements not attributable to a character) are "nonreportive" and therefore narratorless. A narrator exists only in first-person sentences or in "sentences containing judgments of which the character is ignorant" (Banfield 1978:301). All sentences of FID are narratorless, as are sentences of "pure narrative exposition" (Banfield 1978:299), such as "John sat down." Both Banfield and Kuroda relate their "narratorless" argument to that of Käte Hamburger who finds a personalized narrator only in first-person novels. Stanzel (1978:254) summarizes her explanation of "narratorless": "she refers to the source of the story in third-person novels as an impersonal 'narrative function' (*Erzählfunktion*.)"

One argument for the "narratorless" explanation is that it does away with "anthropomorphic" labels such as "omniscient," substituting instead a "narrative function" or, in cases where several POVs are represented, a label like "multi-conscious." The major problem, however, is that the position pays inadequate attention to the distinction between **who sees** and **who speaks**. A story may take a character's internal perspective, but that perspective is often presented by a narrator other than the character. Thus while the character can be, as Stanzel describes his reflector-characters (1978:260), "completely unaware of being engaged in an act of communication with an audience," communication is nevertheless taking place. As Chatman (1975:219) notes: "'John sat in a chair' might in some sense be taken as the issue of a narrator's voice since John would not ordinarily be thought of as **saying** those words to himself. In this instance he would hardly verbalize to himself what he was doing." To say that a narrator exists only when information is present in a story that no character can know is to confuse the traditional story-telling role of the narrator with a narrative personality. In doing away with the personality of the narrator, Banfield and Kuroda are also putting very drastic limitations on the "narrative function."

The problems this approach creates for the interpretation of POV in literature are reflected in separate analyses by Banfield and Fillmore of the opening paragraph of Joyce's "Eveline" (*Dubliners* 1961:36). Fillmore identifies the opening paragraph as "a descriptive portion of the story" (1974:V-15). Banfield (1978:300) sees at least part of it as "narrative exposition."

She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. She was tired. (*Dubliners*, p. 36)

Neither Fillmore nor Banfield wish to argue that these sentences are FID, although Banfield (1978:300-301) suggests that "'she was tired' can be read as represented thought, though it lacks any explicit features of the style." Yet Fillmore argues that the story is in the "narrated monologue style" – that it presents Eveline's not "somebody else's point of view, somebody who was observing Eveline at the beginning of the story" (V-15). Banfield comes to the same conclusion: "Indeed, all the sentences adopt Eveline's perspective, nothing in this exposition representing anything which could not be present in Eveline's consciousness" (301). Fillmore equates POV with "angle of vision"; Banfield cites the narrative exposition of "Eveline" as an example of narration which does not contain a "Self [POV] distinct from the character's" (301), thus making it "narratorless." These arguments are not linguistic; at best, they are pragmatic, deriving from the structure of the entire story to which the opening paragraph is attached. It may be Eveline who sees here, but it is a narrator/author who presents this information to the reader. Such a division allows an author, as Ross puts it in another context (1976:1229), "to depict a rich mental life for a virtually inarticulate character."

The same POV confusion between **mode** and **voix** attends Ross's own notion of "attribution" or "attributed narration." It may contribute to one's understanding of a story to read a certain paragraph or even the entire work from a character's "angle of vision"; but one can still acknowledge the control of a narrator/author. To say of *The Ambassadors* that "attributing the [first] paragraph (and most of the novel) to Strether as a source greatly simplifies the explanation and removes the need to search for a ghostly narrator who is sometimes external to the events and characters" (Ross 1976:1232) undermines the effects that James was seeking with his narrative technique. The difficulty lies in the term "attribute" which seems to encompass both **voix** and **mode**. We have in Strether a "reflector-character" to use Stanzel's term derived from James, but while he is primarily responsible for the perceptions and opinions in the story, he is not necessarily responsible for the language that relays that information. This separation accounts in part for Booth's "unreliable" narration (1961), because while the narrator speaks to us in a distinct (and Jamesian) voice, the perceptions (errors included) are Strether's.¹⁰ Had James wanted Strether "to talk" throughout the novel, he could have written it in the first-person without the narrative device of distancing that his limited third-person approach permits. Moreover, the narrator in the paragraph is far from "ghostly." As Ross notes (1976:1233), "the only problem with the tidy picture is the story-teller's clause, 'I have just mentioned.' While this does introduce an explicit speaker different from Strether, I question whether it is substantial or personal, or just part of the mechanics of relating the story." A narrator need not have a "substantial" existence to exercise the narrative function, and it would seem that "the mechanics of relating the story" is, in fact, a good definition of the narrative voice.

The major difficulty with a concept like "attribution" or even "speakerless" is that it oversimplifies. Thus Ross (1976:1234) says, "If a passage can

be attributed to one character it is not necessary to make claims for several voices — author, narrator, character — all somehow speaking and commenting on each other with the same set of words." Yet, as we have seen, it is very important to sort out responsibility for that set of words among competing claimants and, where responsibility cannot be clearly identified, to acknowledge that ambiguity. Rather than simplifying the issue we need an analytical strategy that will take into account the ambiguities, allow us to identify them, and sort them out when possible, keeping in mind that ambiguity of POV seems to be the norm rather than the exception in fiction, particularly modern fiction.

V. A MODEL TO ACCOUNT FOR POV IN LITERARY DISCOURSE

The best model I have found for making such distinctions is Doložel's. He starts from the position that all forms other than directly reported discourse are the narrator's responsibility. One might say that a narrative "I," not necessarily a personality, controls narrative discourse,¹¹ but the responsibility for the linguistic elements of that discourse can be ambiguous or transferred. Doložel avoids an anthropomorphic designation of narrator by setting up a structural typology of narrative types based on textual features. These features, which identify narrative modes, can also be used to distinguish among the three basic ways of rendering characters' speech — direct, narrated (indirect), and represented. His discussion of textual features is based on examples from Czech literature, but the features and the categories they explain seem to extend to fiction generally.

In Doložel's model, direct (DC) and narrated discourse (DN) represent extremes in terms of the seven textual features that explain them. (1) In terms of the system of grammatical persons, DC has a three-person system, while DN has only one — the third-person (Doložel 1973:21). (2) In DN the basic verbal tense is past; in DC "... tense expresses the reference to the individual and the shifting time position of the speaker, the speaking character" (26). (3) Deixis (time and space adverbs, **here/now**, demonstrative pronouns **this/that**) in DC is controlled "by the time and space position of its speaker-character" (28); in DN "demonstrative means ... point to some spatial or temporal centres of the narrated action ... " (29). (4) "The allocutional function [relationship to hearer] in DC is expressed by certain allocutional means, the most important of which in Czech are imperative mood, interrogative sentence and the vocative case as a means of address ... DN has no allocutional function inasmuch as it is, by definition, utterance without hearer" (30). (5) The emotive function (expressing the speaker's attitude toward his subject) is absent from DN, but interjections, exclamations, etc. are typical of DC (33). (6) Semantic features (expressing opinion or mood of the speaker other than those covered by the emotive function) are absent from DN and characteristic of DC (34). (7) Speech-level features, "verbal means reflecting the speaker's idiolect," are likewise absent from DN and characteristic of DC (39).

Represented discourse (RD) shares the textual features of DN for the first two categories and the features of DC in categories 3-7. But Doložel makes an important distinction in characterizing RD between **compact** and **diffuse** RD:

If the density of these features [3-7] is sufficiently high, a compact and unambiguous form of RD arises. If the positive features are dispersed thinly, as sporadic signals on the DN base, the result is just a 'tinge' of DN an ambiguous portion of text arises which blends positive signals with negative signals. In our frame of reference, this device could be called **diffused** RD (51).¹²

In other words, Doložel's RD covers the whole range of reported forms from McHale's "diegetic summary" (DN) to what is traditionally labeled FID (compact RD). Rather than setting up categories like McHale's based on literary representation, Doložel achieves a far more accurate and sensitive scale by adhering to "textual," linguistic, features. Furthermore, Doložel's model demonstrates how the presentation of discourse can signal the degree of narrative presence in a given expression. He diagrams the "dynamic relationship between DN and DC" as follows (53):

DN → discourse NC (diffused RD) → RD (compact RD) → DC¹³

This diagram captures the relatively close relationship of compact RD to direct discourse as well as the somewhat more distant relationship of directly and indirectly reported forms. At the same time, it shows the diminishing role of the narrator as we move away from DN.

Doložel's approach offers the most promising means of explaining discourse types and narrative forms. Although he does not address specifically the issue of POV within discourse types, his seven linguistic features could be applied to the identification of POV responsibility. Features signaling DC in any indirectly reported form, including FID, would point to a **de dicto** reading, or an interpretation of the form as the embedded speaker's responsibility. The more highly concentrated these features are (as in compact RD), the more we are likely to interpret the entire sentence or passage from the POV of the character rather than the narrator. Because these features would indicate POV responsibility by their **relative** concentration, they obviously leave open a large area of ambiguity where we might say that a POV seems to be more or less represented. Thus this model circumvents the rigidity of the "speaker-coherence" approaches, which fail to accommodate mixing of more than one POV within a sentence. Moreover, it posits a textual/linguistic base for POV identification which is absolutely essential if we are to avoid vague "impressionistic" determinations.

While Doložel's approach is promising, it has not as yet been tested specifically for POV analysis, and I suspect that some features will require expansion and some will be less helpful than others. For example, evidence of

a speaker's idiolect (7) will almost certainly signal that speaker's POV, although the nature of that evidence will have to be more fully specified. By contrast, semantic features (6), a category which seems to include such linguistic elements as evaluative adjectives, in and of themselves will be basically ambiguous as in many of the examples in this paper. In addition, these features need to be tested for applicability to POV analysis in language used out of the literary context. Finally, pragmatic features related to the discourse base must be added if we are to account for the disambiguation of many sentences in context.

Although POV ambiguity is often resolvable in context, the potential for it in reports of speech and thought is the norm, not the exception. It is absent only in directly reported discourse. Of the indirect forms, FID is the least likely to be ambiguous if we limit it to nonembedded forms with optional final tag or to forms with a concentration of features like those listed by Doložel. We cannot ignore the ambiguity by theorizing it away nor should we adopt POV explanations that are so vague that the ambiguity falls between the cracks. While under most circumstances it may seem undesirable, unacceptable, and even ungrammatical to mix points of view in a single sentence, the issue is more complex and variable than has been presumed. Until we distinguish between POV as perspective and POV as linguistic responsibility and set up categories that will test for that responsibility, we will have only a vague sense of what POV is and an even vaguer notion of how it relates to various discourse and narrative types.

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NOTES

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- 1 There is considerable variation in labeling this form, which will be described in detail in section III below. In French criticism it is commonly called **style indirect libre**, in German **Erlebte Rede**. McHale (1978:1-2, fn. 1) lists a number of its labels in English. I will follow McHale in using the label free indirect discourse, which identifies this as a formal method for reporting discourse, like direct and indirect, rather than characterizing it as a literary style.

- 2 I use "evaluative" following Banfield (1973:21-2): "In general, these words express the attitude of the speaker toward another person or object ... They include (a) certain prenominal adjectives which have a second, figurative meaning in this position and (b) certain proper nouns [e.g., **Daddy**]." I do not agree that these are among the **only** indicators of POV, since I think any word can express POV, although modifiers are generally more strongly marked for "opinion." Banfield's "evaluative" category parallels Reinhart's "attitudinal adjectives" (1975:130) and Doložel's "attitudinal semantics" which "employs qualifying adjectives and adverbs, carrying the speaker's evaluation of an object or action" (1973:35).
- 3 "Toutefois, la plupart des travaux théorétiques sur ce sujet (qui sont essentiellement des classifications) souffrent à mon sens d'une fâcheuse confusion entre ce que j'appelle ici **mode** et **voix**, c'est-à-dire entre la question **quel est le personnage dont le point de vue oriente la perspective narrative?** et cette question tout autre: **qui est le narrateur?** — ou, pour parler plus vite, entre la question **qui voit?** et la question **qui parle?**" (Genette 1972:203).
- 4 I use "attributable to" here in the sense of "interpreted as the responsibility of." Ross (1976:1225) uses the term "attribute" much more generally, describing the process of "attribution" as follows: "An **attributing** clause, which tells who talks or thinks, labels the activity in the predicate, and optionally tells how the activity is delivered: 'said Pauline, looking up' and 'whispering, however, with gravity.'"
- 5 My evidence is somewhat anecdotal and a systematic study of hearer responses might be helpful, although as further consideration will demonstrate, the study of indirectly reported speech out of context is not very definitive in ascertaining POV responsibility.
- 6 Throughout this essay I will limit examples to spoken discourse forms, although I think representations of thought follow a similar if sometimes more complex pattern. The distinction between speech and thought is usually blurred in FID, so sentences in FID will not have the same "spoken" quality as other examples.
- 7 See, for example Ferguson(1966:221-2); H. N. Smith(1967:121).
- 8 Banfield, Fillmore and Doložel use "represented" to refer to FID. Ross and McHale use the term in slightly different ways. Ross (1976:1223-4) asserts that in "represented discourse" "we cannot retrieve the actual words. The main job of represented discourse is to transmit or betray information about the narrator's attitude toward what he represents." McHale (1978:259) uses the term "represent" to explain "summary, less 'purely diegetic.'"

- 9 There is some confusion about the term "nonreportive," which McHale (1978:252) uses to designate any sentence in fiction that contains no report or representation of a character's speech or thought. Banfield and Kuroda use it only to refer to FID.
- 10 Booth does not distinguish between the two aspects of POV we have discussed. He says of *The Ambassadors* (1961:151): "... Stretcher in large part 'narrates' his own story, even though he is always referred to in the third person...." Stanzel (1978:261) criticizes Booth's extension of the term "narrator" to include "reflector-character."
- 11 This position on narration is roughly analogous to the performative linguistic theory that posits an "I" plus a performative verb (e.g., **assert**) in front of every utterance (Ross, 1970).
- 12 If my reading of these relationships is correct, then "a 'tinge' of DN" should read "a 'tinge' of DC" since there should be more DN where the features are thinly distributed.
- 13 NC appears to represent a blend of narrator/character's voices.

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Paul Hernadi

Why We Can't Help Genre-alizing and How Not To Go About It: Two Theses with Commentary

I will consider our seminar's topic, "Genre as Knowledge," in a context larger than literature.¹ Let me do so by first proposing two theses and then attempting to explain and justify them in a brief commentary. Here is my first thesis. **All knowledge is "genre-bound" in both senses of the word: it is tied up with and directed towards conceptual classification.** Although a bit more complex, my second thesis is an almost analytical implication of the first. It runs as follows. **The superabundance of potential knowledge and the corresponding generic overdetermination of all particulars demand polycentric rather than monolithic classifications.** And now to the commentary.

The close connection between genre and knowledge is conveniently illustrated by ordinary verbal communication. If I say about my friend Peter that he is a sloppy eater and that he reads the *New York Times* regularly, I have identified him as a member of the classes of sloppy eaters and of regular readers of the *Times*. Even if I tell you that Peter is my best friend or that he has won the world championship in heavyweight boxing, the "classes" of best friends and of world champions will be conjured up in your mind as proper frameworks for the placing of Peter. Should I tell you that he is an absolutely unique individual whose characteristics I cannot begin to describe, even then the only way for you to understand what I mean is to conceive of a class of individuals with at least two shared characteristics, which are that they are absolutely unique and that their characteristics cannot be described.

In other words, verbal predication always involves classification; and I see no reason to assume that speechless acts of cognition behave differently in this respect. After all, more or less explicitly entertained generic notions like "pig," "dog," and "chair" are necessary if you are to know which animals will breed among themselves and why the number of your dining room chairs will not increase just because you have stacked them in pairs along the wall before vacuuming the carpet or waxing the floor underneath.

My reference to the propagation of species was not intended to be entirely frivolous. "Genre," the French and English cognate of Latin *genus* and Greek

[*Centrum*, 6:1 (Spring 1978), pp. 27-31.]

genos meaning "birth," is etymologically related to kin, kind, generation, genesis, gender, gene, genital and so on. The existence of such a cluster of words reflects the impact of the genealogical classifiability of plants and animals on our approach to classification at large. Pigs are the offspring of pigs, and their progeny will remain pigs, at least in the foreseeable future. This state of affairs has for many people seemed to justify the claim that tribal societies and nation states are the only "natural" groupings of human individuals. Yet the notion that lineage yields the only privileged — "natural" or "scientific" — principle of classification ought to be challenged even as regards plants and animals. Take a rather commonplace example: a rabid dog and a rabid bat have at least as much in common as a rabid dog and a healthy dog have from the "natural" point of view of a bitten person or the "scientific" point of view of his physician. No doubt many instances of this kind could be cited; and the **cultural** contexts of the classifier and the classified play an even more conspicuous role in any supposedly **natural** classification of human beings and man-made objects. It seems therefore safe to assume that, from an epistemological point of view, no valid classification is more natural than any other valid classification.²

The crucial question is, of course, how a plurality of universal or class concepts can have the same valid relationship to the classified entities when those concepts result from different or even disparate ways of **genre**-alizing about particulars. In an attempt to answer that question, I will briefly elaborate on I. A. Richards's discussion of a related topic.

In his 1936 Bryn Mawr lectures titled **The Philosophy of Rhetoric**, Richards considered the following problem: "How do we manage, from this particular concrete thing and that particular concrete thing and the other particular concrete thing, to arrive at the general abstract anything?"³ And he offered an attractive solution which, in his words, stands the problem on its head: "We **begin** with the general abstract anything, split it, as the world makes us, into sorts and then arrive at concrete particulars by overlapping or common membership in these sorts."⁴ According to Richards — and much in Piaget's child psychology seems to point in the same direction — "perception takes whatever it perceives as a thing of a certain sort" and even "thinking, from the lowest to the highest — whatever else it may be — is sorting."⁵ Richards illustrated the resulting dialectic of the concrete and the abstract in a manner reminiscent of Hegel's: "This bit of paper here now in my hand is a concrete particular to us so far as we think of it as paperish, hereish, nowish, and in my hand; it is the more concrete as we take it as of more sorts, and the more specific as the sorts are narrower and more exclusive."⁶

Richards's remarks prompt me to draw not only his own conclusion, namely, that we should regard "all discourse — outside the technicalities of science — as over-determined, as having multiplicity of meaning."⁷ I would prefer to carry Freud's view of dream symbols as over-determined further into the area of general ontology. In so doing, I would argue that everything that

can become subject matter of perception, thinking, or discourse is over-determined simply because a theoretically unlimited number of sorting acts can be performed upon it. On this view, the sculptor's "block" out of which human knowledge is being carved is not so much the predicated extensive infinity of space and time as it is the world's intensive "generic" infinity of predictable properties. Now, two or more particulars sharing at least one property are members of a class which is definable with respect to what they have in common. Each cognitive act intending one such shared property can thus be seen as selectively stressing, from among the multiplicity of available generic categories, the one most relevant to a given cognitive purpose. Needless to say, such selective emphasis need not preclude later recourse to other classificatory principles. In every person's life as well as in human history, slight shifts in generic perspective often lead to noticeable change in the prevalent hierarchy of intersecting classifications.

I do not advocate equality among all classificatory principles and all world-views resulting from various rival classifications. But I strongly suspect that many deserve careful attention since the generic over-determination of every particular calls for pluralistic rather than monolithic approaches to knowledge. It is, of course, difficult to state the case for any kind of pluralism without beginning to sound rather monistic, if not monolithic, about it. One reason for this is eminently pertinent to our present concern. Individual words and speech acts tend to classify on an either/or basis: something is either said to be a horse, galloping, and brown, or it is not. Even the following cautious word sequence is a case in point: "This rust-colored mule will probably appear to most observers as stalking along at a rather slow pace." After all, the sentence just cited describes its referent as being and doing one thing and not some other. Through this either/or type of "classification," which was codified by classical logic into the "Law of the Excluded Middle," language breaks up the world into much neater classes than appears to be warranted by what we know, for instance, of light, atoms, inclinations, rights, and tragedies. Yet my criticism of language, clad as it had to be in the verbal garb of the preceding sentence, could not challenge the "so and not otherwise" of other verbal assertions without enveloping itself in a "so and not otherwise" of its own. As a matter of fact, even in saying that assertions cannot or should not be made about the world, you would be making a particular assertion about it. It is not surprising, therefore, that the principle of either/or, buttressed by the simplified biological paradigm of supposedly distinct species, has often been misapplied in such areas of inquiry as the study of literature.

Even critics rejecting ontogenetic notions of the actual birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death of certain kinds of literature would on occasion endorse a phylogenetic parallel between the history of literary genres and the evolution of animal species. More or less consciously, such critics seem to believe in a fierce "struggle for life" among, say, epic poems, romances, and novels — a struggle that predictably ends with the "survival of the fittest kind" in the generic jungle. I must confess that I have very little sympathy

with this genealogical genre of genre criticism. As I have attempted to show elsewhere,⁸ different types of similarity noticed among literary works justifiably result in different types of literary classification; and while generic distinctions based on different types of similarity need not be mutually exclusive, they should not be forced into the Procrustean bed of a single hierarchy. In both theory and practice, Aristotle's **co-ordinated** distinctions according to the means, objects, and manner of mimesis seem to me preferable to summary divisions of all literature into such further subdividable categories as poetry, fiction, and drama. Just one example in terms of my own earlier attempt to proceed beyond "genre" in the limited (and limiting) sense of the word: We need not try to pigeonhole such larger birds as Chekhov's *Seagull* or Ibsen's *Wild Duck* into the sub-class "tragicomedy" of the class "drama" or into the sub-class "drama" of the class "tragicomic literature." Instead, we should explore each play's predominantly dramatic mode of verbal evocation and its implied reader's or spectator's predominantly tragicomic mood within a polycentric framework which, in this case, would involve **two co-ordinated systems** of generic classification.

Now, my second thesis simply transfers to the general problem of cognition the literary critic's task to co-ordinate largely independent classificatory perspectives. Let me reiterate the thesis: "The superabundance of potential knowledge and the corresponding generic overdetermination of all particulars demand polycentric rather than monolithic classifications." Consider the alternative, the monolithic assumption that something like a family tree runs through the entire universe from a single, most inclusive, "highest class" of entities (**summum genus**) to each and every "lowest class" (**infima species**) and vice versa. If such a quasi-genealogical view were correct, a single classificatory hierarchy would give us the X-ray picture, so to speak, of the skeleton of the world. I, for one, prefer a very different metaphor and will conclude these remarks with it: Through our varied ways of **genre-alizing**, the world's moving body projects its play of shadows on the vibrating screens of human consciousness.

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NOTES

- 1 This paper was first presented at the 1977 MLA meeting as an opening statement of the Special Session "Genre as Knowledge: The Epistemological Status of Generic Distinctions."
- 2 Cf. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p.421f; and Nelson Goodman, "Words, Works, Worlds," *Erkenntnis*, 9 (1975), pp. 62-64.

- 3 I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 31.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid., p. 30.
- 6 Ibid., p. 31.
- 7 Ibid., p. 39.
- 8 Paul Hernadi, *Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1972).

Jonathan Arac

The Criticism of Harold Bloom: Judgment and History

I

Of our critics who have defined their identities in the postwar years, Harold Bloom is one of the most useful. I have learned much from Bloom about reading the poems of the last two hundred years, but such individual readings only extend New Criticism, which Bloom has helped in other ways to bring us beyond. Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism made the totality of literature, rather than the individual poem, the unit of effective wholeness, but Bloom challenges both Frye and New Criticism in opening for exploration a middle range, a human scale: individual poets rather than single poems or all poetry. For understanding the dynamics of literary careers, his work and Edward Said's have been the most useful to me, and for thinking about literary history as made by writers' responses to earlier writers, Bloom and Reuben Brower have offered me the most concrete instances. Bloom's work, however, still lacks any single achievement comparable to *The Mirror and the Lamp*, *Anatomy of Criticism*, *John Keats* by W. J. Bate, and *Wordsworth's Poetry* by Geoffrey Hartman. Bloom's work is hard to grasp because it is not systematized. After discovering through Blake how to read all literature, Northrop Frye produced a series of exploratory essays, publishing *Anatomy of Criticism* ten years after *Fearful Symmetry*. Bloom similarly found through Yeats his fundamental insight into the revisionary process, but the result has been a flurry of books, each both amplifying and revising what came before.

I hope to locate Bloom's concerns and gestures in the continuing contests of literary criticism, extending from the current scene and the recent past a long way back. By looking at Bloom's early work for his starting-points and by relating these points to the larger history of criticism, I hope to show of Bloom what he has shown of Shelley: the irrelevance of the esoteric. Like Blake, like Frye, Bloom scorns mystery. To place him in his own tradition, as he did Yeats and Frye did Blake, will help us both to use and to judge Bloom. I therefore avoid the intricate schemes and terms of the recent work, and I rejoice to note that the six revisionary ratios, after being Kabbalistically elaborated, appear in *Wallace Stevens* as transformations of the classical rhetorical "places." The way now lies open for Bloom to prove his "mappings" no more outlandish than the Renaissance studies of Rosemund Tuve or Louis Martz.

To point to a possible absurdity, or self-contradiction, and walk away smiling and wiping one's hands, is the privilege of the press consultant. Once works have appeared and had an impact, it seems necessary to suggest their appeal, their use, and their growing-points. The typical attraction of Bloom's writing is assertiveness, the powerful phrase that makes him so fine a writer of introductions as well as of polemics. Let me offer not a slogan but the summary interpretation of Blake's *London* as "a Jonah's desperation at knowing he is not an Ezekiel."¹ Following analysis of the poem's figures and movement in relation to a passage from Ezekiel, this phrase moves out from the poem to a sense of a man and of a history, the history not only of prophetic poetry but also of the English 1790s, when the French Revolution awakened both apocalyptic hopes and the repression that made it worth a person's life to voice those hopes. Blake abandoned voice for the silence and cunning of his art, but at a cost that he felt and that long kept his work from any place in the public life of English poetry. Here I run ahead both of Bloom and my exposition, because Bloom does make you run ahead. I will return to these issues at the end in looking towards a possible future course for Bloom.

Bloom is a fine reader of poems, but does not grind them into bits; rather he finds just the right passage to persuade you of the excellence of a writer or work. Bloom's power of quotation suggests that he is haunted by phrases from his reading and keeps trying to make a context that will give them the full weight he feels they contain. Thus in *Fearful Symmetry*, Frye mentions Lucretian *clinamen* to characterize the fall of Los, which swerves into creation.² Years later this term appears as the cornerstone of revisionism. Sometimes, however, the assimilation is less complete and yields dismal pastiche: a full paragraph about Bloom's changed views on Keats wears the language of Wordsworth's *Elegiac Stanzas*.³ It's like *Play it Again, Sam*: the greatest success is suddenly to be in the position to repeat words you have long hallowed. For a critic, such abdication is costly, but I suspect that thinking about his own need to do this aided Bloom's perceptions about influence.

Such compositional problems, like the boulders from Freud or Nietzsche that often necessitate detours, all suggest a great virtue: Bloom's "brooding." He is a rethinker. He will not rest with achieved positions, but is always ready to return upon himself. I find admirable energy in Bloom's reformulations in response to others. He shows no sign of closing off before intelligent criticism.

One fascinating movement in Bloom is the drama of reduction, as a Shelleyan skepticism drives him to question, and abandon, his cherished earlier positions. How much can you give up and still have something? Bloom has given up the imagination; from the apocalyptic autonomy of Blake, it becomes an effect of repression or an illusion, Hobbesian "decaying sense."⁴ So Blake, prophet of the future, yields as the father of modern poetry to Wordsworth, with his Freudian sense of the past. Bloom once found in Keats and Stevens a naturalistic acceptance of death, but now has lost this consolation. Death is all we have, immortality all we want, and this split is our life.

Finally Bloom has also given up the idea that a poem can fulfill an earlier poem or tradition; it can only revise it.⁵ Therefore, poetry always declines. Only this cost could buy assurance of poetry's continuation. Culminations exhaust poetic lines, but while falling, one can keep swerving.

What does Bloom keep? In exchange for his losses, Bloom grasps the self. Revisionism has brought "the man who suffers" back into relation with the poem, from which Eliot and Frye alike barred him. Despite many qualifications ("to be a poet is to be an inter-poet"),⁶ this notion remains fundamental. The self, the natural embodied person, once Blake's Spectre of Urthona, is now our only defense against two sets of enemies: spiritualists, whose totalized view of tradition would murder all desire by showing a culture complete without us into which we nonetheless mysteriously fit; mechanists, who would disintegrate us into shards of language. Bloom's second possession, held even longer, is Abrams's "heterocosm," the assurance that literature enjoys autonomy as a world elsewhere.⁷ These two premises keep Bloom in touch with humanistic traditions and account for much of his appeal. I wonder whether he can maintain them against the Nietzschean and Freudian challenges to the self and against the growing necessity to link literature to history.

II

From this overview, I turn to the historical situation. Bloom enjoys a privileged place in the major critical event of the postwar period: the revival of Romanticism and displacement of New Criticism, a process encapsulated in the books I've cited by Frye, Abrams, Bate, and Hartman. Bloom studied with Abrams at Cornell; has worked with Hartman at Yale; was among the first reviewers of Frye's *Anatomy*; and has carried on in print a continuing dialogue with Bate. Bloom had also to reach terms with New Haven formalism, most formidably embodied in W. K. Wimsatt, and this necessity may account for Bloom's attention to individual poems in his first three books. The effectiveness of these books as teacherly commentary established the goodwill and authority that made Bloom's voice heard when he launched the revisionary series.

How did Bloom see the critical situation when he began? It was an "odd and unnatural ... time": "A formidable array of minor poets-turned-critics convinced the academies that twentieth-century verse had somehow repudiated its immediate heritage, and mysteriously found its true parentage in the seventeenth century." Only Yvor Winters had the "descriptive accuracy" to recognize that "almost all poetry written in English since the age of sensibility ... was inescapably Romantic," but Winters saw only to condemn.⁸

Bloom's earliest significant collected essay engages at once with this condition. In "Lawrence, Eliot, Blackmur, and the Tortoise" (1958), Bloom sets Frye against the principles and judgments of New Criticism. Through the

Anatomy's critique of literary evaluation, Bloom exposes the "social ... dialectic" informing Blackmur's dismissal of Lawrence.⁹ That dialectic systematically excludes the "Protestant, romantic, radical" (Frye's inversion of Eliot).¹⁰ Frye offered a new tradition to oppose that established by the New Critics: prophecy and romance against wit. Bloom could thereby rescue Yeats and Stevens from New Critical standards and join them to the Romantic tradition.

Three further issues of continuing importance emerge, the first of which is evaluation. From Frye's position, Bloom could scorn Blackmur as "a judicial critic" who "approximates the Arnold of our day" and "ranks poets" into a "new scriptural canon."¹¹ The need for a canon, for rank and exclusion, motivates Bloom's later break with Frye, after which Bloom calls Frye "the Arnold of our day."¹² Our second issue, then, is "Why Arnold?" which also means "What about the touchstones?" The third issue comes in a question, asked rhetorically, which still awaits Bloom's real answer: "Why should the order of institutions be more valid for poetry than the order of a gifted individual?"¹³ At the time of asking, the answer was, it should not be and is not. By now for Bloom the "gifted individual" is involved with other individuals, but the question remains how institutions operate in the canon-formation at which his theory increasingly aims.

I begin, however, with Arnold. To define his significance as a bogey will clarify some of Bloom's premises about literary history. Arnold, I suspect, clearly manifests for Bloom a process that began with Coleridge and runs through Eliot and Blackmur: defeated poets propounding a view of literature that stifles the radical extremities of Romanticism, the individuality of Protestantism. Arnold's career moves in three phases that mark a retreat first from Romantic poetry, then from any poetry. His 1853 "Preface" tries to correct the **practice** of poetry. A poet speaking to poets and reviewers polemically sacrifices his major work and calls upon his fellows to join him in preferring their art to themselves. Such sacrifice brings only further retrenchment in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864). Arnold speaks as a critic who by sacrificing the practice of poetry altogether, hopes to establish the preconditions for a future poetry written not out of romantic, individual ignorance but from common knowledge. In "The Study of Poetry" (1880) the writing of poetry disappears. The "future" of poetry is immense, but only as **read**. The notorious touchstones will free the reader from personal or historical bias by showing the perfect adequacy of Shakespeare and Milton. Arnold shows that to give up Romanticism is to give up the self is to give up any future writing of poetry.

Arnold repeats Coleridge's idolatry of the great dead and his turn to public cultivation. The great lost word for Bloom is Shelley's; his *Defence* is "the most profound discourse on poetry in the language."¹⁴ Strikingly, Bloom's scattered references to the *Defence* bear on time, the future, the process of **history**, not "platonian" immutability. Shelley offers, indeed, a basis for the

"catastrophe theory of creativity" that Bloom now seeks.¹⁵ Poetry in Shelley entails recreative discontinuity: we build our "paradise ... out of the wrecks of Eden." There is no creation, only transformative re-perception. The poet always comes *after*; we compose only when the breeze has already departed, the coal is fading. If Dante forms a "bridge" between ancient and modern poetry, the crossing is strangely discontinuous, for he is also a "Lucifer" whose every "burning atom" bears an even more disruptive "lightning." Shelley hopes for a progressive poetic history, in which all poets contribute to one "great poem," but he fears that the first poem already contains all that poetry offers. Only the endless unveilings of interpretation will make it differ from itself over time.¹⁶ From this aspect of Shelley's theory, which follows from the impossibility of creation, Earl Wasserman concluded, as has Bloom, that poetry is only possible if every poem is a criticism of a previous poem.

In contrast to Shelley, Frye lacks *bite*. There is no negative moment in his understanding of literature. Poetry, like dreams, works through the dialectic of desire and repugnance, but the repugnance is inessential. It only produces the displacements which criticism must undo to reveal the total form of literature as fulfilling desire. Frye is like the early Freud who found no "no" in the unconscious, only an erotic will to union. But Freud's later instinctual dualism makes aggression as fundamental as eros and thus explains competition and exclusion, the world of Bloom's later work.

Now why do touchstones continue to worry Bloom so? In one of the latest essays in his first collection he cites several passages beside some lines from Ammons but warns that this is "not to play at touchstones, in the manner of Arnold or of Blackmur."¹⁷ Finally, however, Bloom has self-consciously given in. To illustrate Stevens's greatness as a poet of sublimity, he offers some "Arnoldian or Blackmurian touchstones."¹⁸ Why the fuss? This issue marks Bloom's break with Frye and Frye's optimistic view of human nature. Arnold took his touchstones from the *paragoni* of Italian Renaissance criticism, set pieces of comparison that readily became rivalry (*paragone*, from Gr. *parakone*, touchstone, confused with *agon*, struggle, competition). Touchstones set poetry against poetry rather than like Frye integrating poetry with poetry. Furthermore, citation of short passages out of context *fragments* the unity of a work, violating principles on which Wimsatt and Frye could both agree with Aristotle.

The locus classicus of literature as fragmentary and competitive is Longinus's *On the Sublime*. Longinus helped extricate the Romantics from the *dilemmas* of eighteenth-century poetry and is crucial to Bloom's new Romantic criticism. Longinus is extravagant and difficult, and since Bloom rarely cites him, many readers do not appreciate his place in Bloom's work. The sublime is disjunctive, a power that "scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt," in a moment. This power derives from the grandeur of the human mind, "the echo of a great soul," and is freed from any natural mimesis. It offers a theory of inspiration that goes back to no divinity. Men become gods to one another, as the "effluences" of past greatness fill the young writer. To achieve

full power, however, one must leave such passivity and emulatively combat one's predecessor, as Plato did Homer, "entering the lists like a young champion matched against the man whom all admire." Thus Bloom's agonistic metaphors join a tradition of discourse. Likewise another of Bloom's important, apparently idiosyncratic, notions: the Scene of Instruction. To achieve the sublime, one may conjure up the great past writers as judges and exemplars; the "ordeal" of this ghostly "tribunal" will yield us the power to immortalize ourselves, or will quell us if our spirits are inadequate.¹⁹

For Longinus the eternity of literature is not dead monuments, empty pyramids that testify to the vain hunger of the imagination; it is human encounter, both pedagogic and competitive, that mysteriously bridges time. Bloom finds the sublime an archaic mode that is nonetheless "always available to us again, provided a survivor of the old line comes to us."²⁰ Thus the sublime is associated not only with demonization, repression, and hyperbole, but also with the final position in Bloom's map: return of the dead and transumption. This context defines one of Bloom's most provocative undertakings. His analysis of "transumptive allusion" attempts a precise rhetorical explanation of the eternity effect of great literature, since classical times a puzzle more invoked than explored. The Romantic theory of the symbol, and its New Critical inheritors, could only explain this effect metaphysically, through the participation of a temporal part in an eternal whole. Transumption, however, "murders time" only "figuratively." It is only "troping on a trope" and enforces a "state of rhetoricity" at the expense of the "presentness of the present," in contrast to the presence necessary to the symbol.²¹ The rhetoric of sublimity allows Bloom to evade the critical line from Coleridge to Blackmur, from which his thought takes its oppositional beginning.²²

III

From this large view, I turn to Bloom's own career. Read now, *Shelley's Mythmaking* proves astonishingly at one with revisionism in its concerns, though not in its positions. The basis from which Bloom defines and analyzes Shelley's myths, the Buberian personalism of "I-Thou" confrontation, continues to inform the dialectical, "subject-centered ... person to person" relations of influence, defending against both linguistic reduction (it-it) and the oppressions of tradition (I-it). The work already emphasizes the "corrective competition" between Shelley and Milton, and Bloom hears the uncanny echoing between *The Witch of Atlas* and Yeats's "Byzantium" years before the ratio of **apophrades** could account for it.

Even problems of method in reading emerge reflectively. Yeats's observations on Demogorgon suggest that the "misunderstandings of one great poet by another" are valuable; Wilson Knight exemplifies the danger that criticism may become "independent vision," an "individual and inferior poetry."²³ The term "misreading" occurs often in *Shelley's Mythmaking*, always negatively.²⁴

The Visionary Company, however, begins Bloom's self-revision toward "the necessity of misreading." Robert Graves is "the most persuasive of modern misreaders," "more imaginative" than other critics on Keats's "La Belle Dame."²⁵ Bloom's first three books maintain his initial loyalty to Frye, but his break begins late in *Blake's Apocalypse*: "I don't believe that Blake's reading of the Bible was as imaginatively liberated as Frye takes it to have been."²⁶ Since Frye had begun our whole current attention to "reading" by defining the key to Blake as his reading of the Bible,²⁷ this disagreement is fundamental. Bloom cannot accept Blake's Christian understanding of the New Testament as purifying and completing the Old Testament. From this will follow the general impossibility of "fulfillment" in literary tradition, the recognition that fulfillment involves invidious judgments, that Frye's criticism depends upon decisively evaluating the relation of the two testaments. Thus Frye is a canonizer, another Matthew Arnold.

Yeats, which occupied Bloom for most of the sixties, marks his crisis. He had to recognize his own activity in making the canons of literature. He too was ranking, making judgments, invoking a tradition in order to diminish Yeats by it. His earlier work could be seen as wholly positive (though it has its polemic), offering only descriptive appreciation of misunderstood works. But now like any Leavis — or Arnold — he was engaged in "scrutinoid" reevaluation,²⁸ performing acts not only of love but of aggression toward poetry, undoing much of Yeats in order to clear our view of the Romantics. Revisionism is the means to comprehend and justify the double process by which Bloom discovered what Yeats has done to Blake and Shelley and what he himself was doing to Yeats. Reflection upon this experience would suggest literary history as an activity simultaneously individual and exclusive, competitive and delusive. Elaborating these qualities would produce the apparatus of precursor and canon, Freudian psychology and Nietzschean rhetoric.

Leaving Coleridgean formalism and the archetypes of Frye, Bloom turned source-study "inside out,"²⁹ humanizing it as Frye's Blake had nature. The "organic analogue" yields to the "human analogue": "To say that a poem is about itself is killing, but to say it is about another poem is to go out into the world where we live."³⁰ My last pages pursue this "world" and question its relation to history, exclusion, power.

No sooner does Bloom offer engagement with the world than he retracts it: "Mature creation, for a poet, rises directly from an error about poetry rather than ... about life."³¹ Some indirect process might be crucial and interesting, but not to Bloom. So far is poetry from the world that it "transcend[s] mimesis." Poets confront "not the universe, but the precursors."³² I await Bloom's promised "literary history as canon-formation,"³³ but his positions erode this goal: "There is no literary history ... only biography," individual "defensive misreadings."³⁴ No dialectic of "art and society" but only of "art and art" fuels the process of poetry.³⁵

Such unwillingness to come to disciplined terms with the world produces the extreme variation of Bloom's claims for the applicability of his theory. At first it was scrupulously limited to post-Enlightenment poetry. So Shakespeare was exempt by living in "the giant age before the flood."³⁶ But such dualism is obviously mythical, not historical. Discovering the dialectics of influence in earlier contexts forces the alternative, equally unhistorical, assertion of universality.³⁷ Only precise attention to the place of poetry in society — the opportunities offered for voice, script, and instruction, by whom, to whom and for what purposes — will allow the nuance, detail, and differentiation that make a history, and set proper limits to a theory.

Bloom, however, denies himself the means needed for his end. He has abandoned many idealizations but still maintains that "canon-formation is not an arbitrary process" and therefore "not, for more than a generation or two, socially or politically determined."³⁸ This is still faith in the mystic agency of Shelley's "redeemer and mediator, Time." To assert that "poets survive because of inherent strength" is to neglect the subordination of the Old Testament to the New, the centuries-long suppression of the Gnostics and Kabbalists, Blake's lament, "I am hid." Against such political, social, ideological repression, Bloom insists upon the psychological: "A strong reading is the only poetic fact, the only revenge against time that endures."³⁹ But what of the material basis of such facts? How do I enforce my reading? Such questions fall outside Bloom's thought: "The idea of a 'finished' poem ... depends upon the absurd, hidden notion that reifies poems from relationships into entities."⁴⁰ But what if we replace "finished" with "published"? Isn't such reification exactly what publication performs and what we value it for? Replace "finished" with "censored"; the purity of relationship is compromised by the material vulnerability of the poem's existence. Replace "finished" with "vanished." If its reified traces disappear, we have no relationship at all, except in a Blakean imagination that lets no act of humanity perish.

Bloom knows the kind of thing I'm talking about, and in *A Map of Misreading* his remarks on the current role of American teachers began to work with them, but to no consequence as yet. Bloom's position lacks any imaginative form for organizing what he knows about poetry in the world. For psychology he has Freud as precursor, Lacan as transatlantic contemporary, and Geoffrey Hartman as colleague; for rhetoric, Nietzsche as precursor, Derrida as transatlantic contemporary, and Paul de Man as colleague; for history, Marx and Foucault would make a start. To take on one more reduction, to give up at last the heterocosmic autonomy of literature, will enrich and complicate the story Bloom has to tell and join it fully to the world where we live.

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NOTES

I wish to thank Patricia Harkin Sosonski, who invited me to prepare this essay for discussion at the meeting of the Society for Critical Exchange, held in Minneapolis, November 1978 at the Convention of the Midwest MLA.

- 1 Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), p. 44.
- 2 Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947; rptd. Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 257. Bloom later credits Coleridge with inaugurating the concept for criticism.
- 3 Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, p. 115.
- 4 Cf. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 66.
- 5 Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, pp. 88, 95.
- 6 Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p.114.
- 7 See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 272-84.
- 8 Harold Bloom, "The Central Man: Emerson, Whitman, Wallace Stevens" (1965), in *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 219. Note, however, that Bloom's revisionism finds the true parentage of the Romantics in the seventeenth century (Milton) rather than in their immediate heritage from the eighteenth century.
- 9 Bloom, *Ringers*, p. 198.
- 10 Ibid., p. 204; cf. Northrop Frye, "Blake After Two Centuries" (1957), rptd. in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 149.
- 11 Bloom, *Ringers*, p. 197.
- 12 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 31.
- 13 Bloom, *Ringers*, p. 198.

- 14 Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), p. 334.
- 15 Harold Bloom, "Freud and the Poetic Sublime," *Antaeus*, No. 30-31 (Spring, 1978), p. 355.
- 16 Quotations from *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 493-500.
- 17 Bloom, "A. R. Ammons: 'When You Consider the Radiance'" (1970), in *Ringers*, p. 280.
- 18 Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, p. 282.
- 19 Longinus, *On the Sublime*, ed. D. A. Russell, 1.4, 9.2, 13.2, 13.4, 14.2. Quotations from translation by W. R. Roberts (1899), rptd. in Hazard Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 77, 81, 85-86.
- 20 Harold Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: Seabury, 1976), p. 246.
- 21 Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, pp. 138, 142.
- 22 The neo-Longinian *Conjectures on Original Composition* by Edward Young (1759) offer precedent for other Bloomisms. On the trope of self-begetting: "As Tacitus says of Curtius Rufus, an original author is born of himself, is his own progenitor." On metaleptic reversal in temporality: "Suppose you was to change place in time with Homer; then, if you write naturally, you might as well charge Homer with an imitation of you." On the modern poet as satanic: Young laments the "fall" from Homer to Pope, but claims of Pope that "in his fall, he is still great,

Nor appears
 Less than archangel ruin'd, and the excess
 Of glory obscur'd" [*PL*, 1, 592-94].

This last point may remind us how completely Bloom neglects Pope, who nonetheless seems crucial for any thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in English poetry since Milton.

For quotations from Young see *Literary Criticism in England: 1660-1800*, ed. Gerald Wester Chapman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), pp. 370, 362, 367-68.

- 23 Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (1959; rptd. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 123,196.
- 24 Note the conclusion to Earl Wasserman's review of *Shelley's Mythmaking*. Bloom has "repeatedly misread" and has damaged his case by insisting that his misreadings "are the **opus ipsum**" and "disclaiming that he is offering **creative** interpretations." See *Yale Review*, 48 (1959): 611.
- 25 Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (1961; rptd. Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), p. 403.
- 26 Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, p. 392.
- 27 Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 11.
- 28 Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, p. 125.
- 29 Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p. 9.
- 30 Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, p. 198.
- 31 Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination*, p. 175.
- 32 Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, p. 82.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 35 Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 99.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 11. The phrase comes from a passage in Dryden's "To Mr. Congreve" (1694) used as epigraph to the first chapter of W. J. Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*.
- 37 See Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, p. 77.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 39 Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, p. 6.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Wlad Godzich

Harold Bloom as Rhetorician

In the past, a distant past, preceding even the pre-Enlightenment which is Bloom's substratum, there prevailed the belief among rhetoricians and theoreticians of style that every subject called for an appropriate style or rhetorical posture. Something of this creed survives to our own day, and it would be easy to match activities or modes of behavior with their corresponding style. What is more difficult is to understand and articulate explicitly the reasons for a specific match. Walter Benjamin observes that "a bearer of news of death appears to himself as very important." This stylistic match, he speculates, stems from the fact that "his feeling — even against all reason — makes him a messenger from the realm of the dead. For the community of all the dead is so immense that even he who reports death is aware of it. *Ad plures ire* [to go to the numerous] was the Latins' expression of dying."¹

What Benjamin's example suggests is the need for an archeology of stylistic ornament and rhetorical posturing. This paper is an attempt to test such an approach on the recent work of Harold Bloom and the reception it has been accorded.

It has become fashionable to sneer, albeit politely, at Harold Bloom. When his name is mentioned, it has become de rigueur to shake one's head in wonderment, and it is no longer shameful to admit that one may not have read all of his books. After all, the man writes so much: two books a year, five — or is it six — books in three or four years. And never mind that this indeed astonishing rate of production may well be due to the specific circumstances which surround the De Vane Professorship at Yale, which requires its holder to give a formal lecture every week.

Grafted onto this first isotopy of overabundant production, is a second one of a proliferation gone wild. Bloom starts out with a scholarly, lucid, and almost touchingly pedagogic, presentation of a six element terminology, but rapidly demands of his reader that he master a taxonomy drawn simultaneously from three or four different language systems, that of esoteric Greek philosophy (*clinamen*, *tessera*), ancient Athenian customs (*apophrades*), Freudian psychology (anxiety, repression), the *Kabbalah* (*tikkun*, *Zimzum*, etc.), and classical rhetoric (synecdoche, hyperbole, metalepsis). Even a well

[*Centrum*, 6:1 (Spring 1978), pp. 43-49.]

disposed critic and Yale colleague like J. Hillis Miller feels compelled to ask "what outrageous demands are being made on [the reader]? Can he adopt such a wildly eclectic vocabulary? *Tikkun*? *Zimzum*? *Clinamen*? *Transumption*? *Nachträglichkeit*? *Sefirot*? Can he really be expected to make practical use of such terms?"²

Miller, who, because of his genuine admiration and friendship for Bloom, cannot be accused of malevolence, nevertheless succumbs to the requirements of Bloomian rhetoric — by which I mean a rhetoric for Harold Bloom — and articulates its third term: the wild machine of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*: "The cogs and levers in Bloom's 'machine for criticism' proliferate inexhaustibly, six terms becoming twenty four, the six original ratios becoming in his most recent work doubled again in twelve *topoi* or crossings."³ From overabundant production to mindless proliferation to automatized mechanical reproduction, all too reminiscent of the comedian carried on a flood of soap suds, such is the back-drop to the rhetorical posturing which takes place at the mention of Bloom's name.

Why?

Such a question could serve as the starting point for a full-scale indictment of academic readers and for a requisitory against the American critical scene. I shall not attempt these for two reasons: one is that, in their differing ways, but with what appears to me to be a singular lack of success, two of Harold Bloom's Yale colleagues, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller, have already done so. The second reason is, I think, more substantive and does have to do with Bloom himself. I am thus forced to ask: what is there about Bloom's work that elicits mirth, disdain, and even ridicule? My answer is in my title: it is Bloom as rhetorician. I shall now attempt to justify it.

Bloom in his avatar as theoretician of "influence poetics" was not initially concerned with rhetoric. The word hardly appears in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), and the subject is never broached. Yet, as soon as *A Map of Misreading*, written shortly thereafter (1975), rhetoric not only appears but in fact literally takes center stage: in the chapter entitled "The Map of Misprision"; the table representing the Map reserves the central column for the rubric "Rhetorical Trope" and organizes around its axis the "dialectic of revisionism, images in the poem, psychic defenses, (and) revisionary ratios" (p. 84). This rather dramatic shift of focus from the concerns of *The Anxiety of Influence* seems to have escaped most of Bloom's readers, and to a curious extent, Bloom himself. Yet it is easy to document it, and, in fact, trace its cause.

"Nietzsche and Freud are, so far as I can tell, the prime influences upon the theory of influence presented in this book," Bloom writes on page 8 in *The Anxiety of Influence*, and this influence is easily perceptible to any reader: the valorization of strength, the elevation of the will, the description of the relations between writers as strife, and the importation of "family

romance" model, etc., all testify to it. Yet, every reader of the essay has the feeling that these elements remain superficial. If not, they hardly seem to justify the lengthy elaborations given to each of the revisionary ratios.

Moreover, the reader is further disappointed to find that, in spite of Bloom's assertion that he is trying "to provide a poetics that will foster a more practical criticism," the individual chapters devoted to each of the revisionary ratios contain virtually no practical criticism: there is abundant quotation from a group of privileged poets but hardly any detailed reading. Perhaps even more annoyingly, the argument of each chapter proceeds in such fashion that it assumes agreement upon the particular — and certainly not obvious — interpretation of the quotations offered, frequently through allusion not only to their context but to the writer's work as a whole. } 7e

The conjunction of these two features (triteness of reference in Nietzsche and Freud, and apparent arbitrariness in the manner of the argument), caused some reviewers to accuse Bloom of arrogance, and most readers to experience considerable annoyance. Yet, a reader familiar with Bloom's earlier work, his dazzling interpretations, his minutely detailed readings, the vastness of his erudition, could not help feeling that *The Anxiety of Influence* was somehow being misread, and perhaps not least by Bloom himself. And since the essay not only authorized misreadings, but legitimized them, in fact, asserted their inevitability, it was only to be expected that a powerful misreading of *The Anxiety of Influence* would come along which would fulfill it by illustrating in its own unfolding each of the revisionary ratios, and, in the process achieve that particular apophradic moment where the Bloom of *The Anxiety of Influence* would speak in the fullness of his voice. It is Paul de Man who supplied this reading in a review written for *Comparative Literature*.⁴

It is possible to show how de Man's brief review in fact illustrates clinamen, tessera, askesis, daemonization, kenosis, and apophrades, and I will do so to some extent. But it is more important to analyze de Man's strategy and tactics for it is their play which will give birth to Harold Bloom the rhetorician. In the process, de Man, in Bloom's terminology, will have produced a strong misreading which, paradoxically, will illustrate the very theory it modifies and recasts.

The movement of de Man's thrust is not easy to describe for it is woven by the master rhetorician who has been able to point out that everybody else's insight is the result of a blindness, and who, by limiting himself to such a modest corrective role, has been able to escape the snares of the very structure he unveiled. In the review of Bloom's book, de Man shows that the revisionary ratios which Bloom has described are couched in the paths of temporality and psychological relations, so much so that the very pathetic aspect of their description interferes with their apprehension. De Man proposes to rescue them from such a fate by describing them as a "tight linguistic model" (p. 274), in which each of the ratios stands for a rhetorical structure, already well known and categorized as trope. Here is the beginning of those

future tables of equivalences which Bloom will reproduce from book to book. But before we look at the important conclusions which de Man reaches in this way, we ought to examine the way in which he establishes the equivalence of the ratios with tropes.

Recall that de Man's thrust is to free Bloom from the pathos of temporality and psychological strife. Yet the very first step de Man makes is to historicize Bloom himself so as to bring him into conflict with himself. Observing the discrepancies in tone, breadth of reference, and minuteness of analysis, between *The Anxiety of Influence* and Bloom's previous work, de Man first asserts that this essay can be understood only by reference to the earlier work, but that the reference itself has to be obtained by the way of a **via negativa**. De Man thus plunges *The Anxiety of Influence* into Bloom's corpus in order to pit it against it. Having thus historicized the work, he then proceeds to ironize Bloom through the bold assertion that "the precursor who worries him perhaps most of all is...Bloom himself" (p. 270).

This master stroke, rendered possible only by the illusion of movement characteristic of ironic parabasis, at once shatters Bloom's essay and obtains his, and our, assent. By lifting the problematics of anxiety of influence from Bloom's formulation of the stance of the ephebe toward his precursor and collapsing the two consciousnesses locked in apparent specular contemplation into a single interiorization, de Man not only frees Bloom from some of the pathetic dimension of the Oedipal complex, but, more importantly, insures that Bloom's model does not fall prey to the nefarious workings of Hegelian dialectic. For, indeed, the problematics of stance — Bloom's word for describing the relation of latecomer to precursor — are all too easily collapsible into the workings of Hegelian **Setzung** insofar as it "sets up" the **Aufhebung**: the position of the other — the precursor, in this case — amounts for the subject to set himself up as other in order to ultimately return to one's self and reappropriate one's self in the fullness of one's infinite determination. This is a possible reading of the model in *The Anxiety of Influence*, a somewhat impoverished one to be sure, and de Man means to exorcise the possibility. By forcing Bloom to interiorize the strife opposing ephebe to precursor, de Man de-substantializes these terms and gives them a purely relational, and therefore functional, signification. From there, it is only a short step — and one well prepared by the historicization of *The Anxiety of Influence*, to abandon all pretense of temporality and replace precursor and latecomer by two texts put into relation with each other.

De Man thus forces Bloom through the clinamen, or ironic swerve, of his own theory by forcing him to internalize the anxiety of influence structure. He then proceeds, through tessera, to complete the meaning intended by Bloom. But this can be done only by emptying Bloom of himself, through kenosis, and daemonizing *The Anxiety of Influence* in such a way that the essential originality of Bloom's early work will appear. That originality, through askesis, is now freed, by de Man, of its pathos, and can, in the

majestic apophrades, unveil itself fully in the revelation of the fundamental rhetorical structure which binds reader to text, and text to text, so that **influence** itself turns out to be a "metaphor that dramatizes linguistic structure into a diachronic narrative" (p. 275).

The gain is great: Bloom was on the verge of major insight into the workings of poetic language but had been blinded by a "relapse into a psychological naturalism" (p. 272). The blindfold is removed and the insight is preserved. We are convinced, and so is Bloom, who henceforth, recognizes the danger of slipping into the language of referentiality and, in a sort of curious penance, makes rhetoric the axis of his model. The "Map of Misprision" thus takes the form of a table of equivalent terms, written in columns which match terms so that, e.g., limitation, in the dialectic of revisionism, is equivalent to sublimation in Freudian discourse, or askesis as revisionary ratio, or Zimzum in the Lurianic *Kabbalah*; it manifests itself through inside and outside images in the poem, the table tells us, and it has been known to rhetoric as metaphor.

There is considerable insight in such a table: it basically tells us that, provided we mutually inter-define our terms, any given set of them will do as descriptive tools for textual relations, or indeed as the instruments of any sort of criticism. We may decide to proliferate them ad infinitum, borrow them from whatever source we wish. The internal syntax of a semiotic code and its matching operations with other semiotic codes insure that signification is produced. There is no privileged code, not even the rhetorical code since there is no proper code but only conventionalized arbitrariness. This is what provokes the mirth, the ridicule, or merely the suspicion on the part of Bloom's readers.

As practicing literary critics, it is difficult for us to admit that the entire repertory of critical terminology is in fact bereft of any sanctity, that any first comer may legitimately erect an entire taxonomic edifice which will stand no more and no less than time sanctioned structures. For the heirs of the pedagogical concerns of the Enlightenment, committed as we are to progress through education, this lesson is unacceptable. And so we react with laughter. It is the same laughter which closes Rabelais's quest: we recognize that we have been put in the presence of the truth, and that it is ineffable. But it is not ineffable because words have or will have failed us, because there are no words to express it, but, on the contrary, any and all words will do. Such is the lesson of Bloom the rhetorician, and we must laugh at him in order not to succumb to his power.

I have answered the question I started out with, and I could close this essay into the archeology of rhetorical posturing, except that there remains another question. I have described the process whereby a strong reading — and therefore a misreading — of Bloom by de Man has been followed by a sort of weak reading of de Man by Bloom, whereby Bloom the rhetorician is born.

This moment, by the way, can be clearly identified in de Man's text: it is anagrammatized in such a way that the true Bloom emerges out of his own pathos: "We are governed by linguistic rather than by natural or psychological models: one can always substitute one word for another but one cannot, by a mere act of the will, substitute night for day or bliss for gloom" (p. 274). Out of the slide (*glisser*) of bliss for gloom, emerges the linguistic, rhetorical Bloom.

But de Man does more than ironize Bloom and then call forth Bloom the rhetorician. As befits the master rhetorician, he also ironizes his own reading: "However, the very ease with which the linguistic substitution or trope, can be carried out hides the fact that it is epistemologically unreliable. It remains something of a mystery how rhetorical figures have been so minutely described and classified over the centuries with relatively little attention paid to their mischievous powers over the truth and falsehood of statements" (p. 274). What is the truth-value status of de Man's ironic strong reading of *The Anxiety of Influence*? Given the intricate rhetorical network of ironies, the very status of the question is in doubt. But I would like nevertheless to sketch the elements of an answer.

De Man rescues Bloom from the naivety of psychological naturalism, and from the Hegelian dialectics of the self implied in the problematics of stance. We assent to, and applaud, such a gesture for we sense in *The Anxiety of Influence* an incompleteness, a heterogeneity. Several books later, we are still puzzled, not only by the rhetorical proliferation of Bloom's machine, but also by the apparently inconclusive and unsatisfactory character of Bloom's detailed readings.

Several times during the course of his reflection, Bloom applies the term **severe** to his undertaking. It is a term at glaring variance with our perception of his rhetoric and it requires some investigation. The term, borrowed from Stevens in an almost existential context, first occurs in *The Anxiety of Influence* in the following passage: "A theory of poetry that presents itself as a severe poem, reliant upon aphorism, apothegm, and a quite personal (though thoroughly traditional) mythic pattern, still may be judged, and may ask to be judged, as argument. Everything that makes up this book — parables, definitions, the working-through of the revisionary ratios as mechanisms of defense — intends to be part of a unified meditation on the melancholy of the creative mind's desperate insistence upon priority" (p.13).

A meditation upon the melancholy of the creative mind's desperate insistence upon priority: this is Bloom's own description of his endeavor, his severe endeavor, and one which seems at considerable variance with everyone else's, including de Man's, reading of it. What I see Bloom as saying here is that he is in fact quite well aware of the pathos which he will have to bring to the fore. The creative mind's insistence upon priority refers not only to the hierarchical ranking of the poets but also to the question of the origin of

poetic language. The revisionary dialectic of precursor and latecomer, reposing as it does upon the structure of repetition, must perforce confront the notion of firstness. De Man displaces that question by casting Bloom over to the side of rhetoric. De Man knows that this indeed partakes of the problematics of loss, which Bloom is concerned with, in fact he recognizes that kenosis, as Bloom uses it, is a figure of a figure in which the one deconstructs the universe produced by the other. Kenosis thus comes to embody the process of both rhetorical functioning and rhetorical analysis, which, at its best, certainly as practiced by de Man, recognizes the fact that rhetoric can only enunciate itself in its own possibility since it always finds itself repetitive and/or repeated, a rhetoric of rhetoric, a metaphor of metaphor.

But I think that Bloom was, in a sense, after an even more perilous catch. The insistence on priority which he ascribes to the creative mind is his version of the discovery that the individual creative act, which in poetry means the emergence of a new poem, depends upon the fact that the poet, in the encounter with his own tradition — whatever his knowledge of it — will inevitably come upon a line, itself divided, where the rhetorical determination of the text he is concerned with (that of his predecessor) will have encountered its own possibility, its differentiability, its re-doubling. This very possibility, because it is the outer limit of that rhetoric, cannot be understood within its totality, yet it is sufficiently of it so that it does not dominate it. It is this very possibility of rhetoric rather than the movement of a rhetoric of rhetoric which, I believe, Bloom was after in *The Anxiety of Influence*, and which he has tried to circumscribe in his detailed readings. The question which arises is whether rhetoric is capable of apprehending its own possibility or whether what is called for is a text economics, which could think and formulate text production processes. Are Bloom's revisionary ratios the sketches of such processes? Is this the meaning of the severe poem? What we need from Bloom now is his own strong reading of his own work.

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NOTES

- 1 *Reflections. Aphorisms, Essays, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 90.
- 2 "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as a Cure, II," *Georgia Review*, 30 (1976), 339.
- 3 Miller, p. 339.
- 4 *Comparative Literature*, 26 (1974), 269-275.

Fredric V. Bogel

Deconstructive Criticism: The Logic of Derrida's Différance

At the center of Jacques Derrida's prolonged assault on "presence," on determinate textual meaning, and on the very concept of an entity — this thing **and not** that thing — is "la différence." **Différance** (with an "a") is a Derridian neologism whose point is, to a great extent, its exemplary lack of perspicuity, of ready intelligibility. Drawing together the notions of differing and deferring, requiring — as a conceptual oddity and a typographical coinage — to be translated by means of a series of explanatory terms and yet resisting that translation, **différance** wittily exemplifies what for Derrida is the true nature of the linguistic sign: a mark, standing for something absent, and promising the forever deferred recovery of that something. As Derrida says, the name **différance** "is not a name,... is not a pure nominal unity, and continually breaks up in a chain of different substitutions."¹ It indicates, as M. H. Abrams puts it, "the endless play of generated significances, in which the reference is interminably postponed."² As a result, "the thing itself always escapes."³

Neither active nor passive, neither word nor concept, yet still, somehow, "the juncture ... of what has been most decisively inscribed in the thought of what is conveniently called our 'epoch,'" the notion of **différance** is a key element in the conception of the linguistic sign that Derrida develops in his critical study of Husserl and in later writings, and for which he repeatedly claims the authority of Ferdinand de Saussure.⁴ This conception of the sign, I want to suggest, is not only counter-intuitive, as Derrida would be the first to admit, but also beset by serious logical difficulties. In the first place, it derives from a reading of Saussure that is "highly specialized and elaborated," in Abrams's polite phrase, and indeed quite partial and misleading.⁵ In the second, and far more important than the question of fidelity to Saussure, Derrida's account of the sign rests upon a critique of the concept of intrinsic meaning that is fatally incomplete, and this incompleteness threatens to undermine his argument at every stage. As a result, the notion of **différance** is marked by confusion so fundamental that only a theory as Alexandrian as Derrida's could even hope to accommodate it. (From this point of view, Derrida's prose style is far from being the baroque affectation that some of

[*Centrum*, 6:1 (Spring 1978), pp. 50-60.]

his critics have claimed it to be. It is a faithful embodiment, and a necessary casualty, of the theory of language that it articulates.)

I

Derrida's principal borrowing from Saussure is the latter's observation that each of the elements of the linguistic sign, the signifier and the signified, is defined not positively by its content but negatively by its relations with the other terms of the system.⁶ "Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system."⁷ Thus, "in language there are only differences **without positive terms.**"⁸ From this, Derrida concludes that "each element that is said to be 'present,' appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace ... constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not."⁹ Or as Edward W. Said puts it, "the meaning of a word, of a sign, is diacritical, is not intrinsic to it, but is rather the quality of its **différance from another word.**"¹⁰ The endless play of these terms — each itself only by virtue of what it is not, each not really itself at all but pervaded by "traces" of all that it is not and thus never fully present — this is **différance** (*SP*, p. 140). Beyond this, as the quotation from Said makes clear, Derrida believes that Saussure's principle of differential relations "affects the **whole sign**, that is, both the signified and the signifying aspects. The signified aspect is the concept, the ideal sense. The signifying aspect is what Saussure calls the material or physical (e.g., acoustical) 'image.' We do not here have to enter into all the problems these definitions pose. Let us only cite Saussure where it interests us" (*SP*, pp. 139-40).

One interesting passage to cite occurs a bit further down the page of the *Course* from which Derrida has already quoted: "But the statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately; **when we consider the sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class...** Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact."¹¹ Derrida, in short, extends what Saussure says of each element of the sign to the sign as a whole, and he is followed in this extension — against which Saussure explicitly warns¹² — by virtually every one of his commentators, including Said and Jonathan Culler. "If meaning," Culler says, "is a function of differences between terms and **every term is but a node of differential relations**, then each term refers us to other terms from which it differs and to which it is in some kind of relation."¹³ Here is the heart of the matter, for by this thoroughly non-Saussurian move, Derrida reduces words, phrases, poems, the contents of whole libraries, to a system of differential relations in which each term is as ideally vacuous as the elements of a simple accentual prosody.

Saussure's conception of the sign — and indeed, the very notion of a "sign" — is itself not without difficulties,¹⁴ but the immediate point is that Derrida's strategy of quotation, what the current jargon might term his aleatory intertextuality, forces us to question the legitimacy of his invocation of Saussure. If Derrida means that the system of differential relations which Saussure identifies at the level of the elements of a sign therefore makes its way into the sign conceived as a totality, then his argument — whatever its other merits — is plainly genetic. If, on the other hand, he means that the system of differential relations is merely a **condition for the possibility** of meaning, of there being a sign at all, then we can agree without also finding that the sign itself is caught up in a dance of absence and presence, of **différance**. "What makes writing possible," says Newton Garver in his preface to *Speech and Phenomena*, "is nothing having to do with the meaning of the spoken signs; what makes it possible is rather the pattern of vocalizations, the phonemics of the language" (*SP*, p. xxiv). If this is true, it is true only in a trivial sense, and it can hardly be what Derrida claims to mean. For whatever happens at the levels of the signified or the signifier, taken in isolation, it is far from obvious that we should assume it to happen also at the level of the sign in its totality. Thus when Derrida writes, "As the condition for signification, this principle of difference affects the **whole sign**, that is, both the signified and the signifying aspects," he would do better to replace "the **whole sign**" with "each aspect of the sign" (*SP*, p. 139).

This is a point worth pausing over, for it is extremely troublesome to contemporary theorists. In his recent study of Saussure, for example, as in *Structuralist Poetics*, Culler wavers between two positions. In some places, he asserts that "once we have identified the relations and oppositions which delimit signifiers on the one hand, and signifieds on the other, we have things we may speak of as positive entities, linguistic signs."¹⁵ Elsewhere, he claims that the sign "is arbitrary ... a purely relational entity."¹⁶ The problem is, in part, terminological. It is natural, at least since Saussure, to speak of language as a system of signs, and if we accept his account of the purely relational identity of each element of the sign, it is almost as natural to call the sign itself a "relational entity." But it is not quite accurate to do either. In the first place, it is each element of the sign, not the sign as a whole, that is constituted differentially; signs differ from each other not diacritically, but positively. The sign, moreover, is not "arbitrary." What is arbitrary is the association of a certain signified with a certain signifier. In the second place, it is not sufficiently clear what we are asserting when we say that language is a system of signs, for "language" translates two of Saussure's key terms, **langue** and **parole**.

La parole is, if not a system, at least a vast reservoir of signs. About this, I think, there is little disagreement. But the fact is that in the **system** of language — in **la langue** — there are, strictly speaking, no signs at all. There are only two systems of differential relations (one governing signifieds, the other signifiers) and the possibility — and only the possibility — of linking elements

of these two systems. The sign, a positive entity, is a feature of **la parole** only. There are no signs in the system of language just as there are no animals or plants in the system of heredity; there are only elements that may be combined and possibilities of combination. **La langue** is not, therefore, a system of signs but a system governing the production of signs, and there is no reason to assume that the rules governing that system also govern the domain of **la parole**, the domain of those constituted entities we call linguistic signs. This terminological and conceptual looseness, rare in Culler's work, does little harm to his accounts of Saussure and of structuralist poetics, largely because it remains peripheral to his central arguments. In the work of theorists like Derrida or Julia Kristeva, however, where such unexamined genetic thinking is central, its consequences are pervasive and devastating.

Other equally grave problems surround the notion of **différance**. Neither active nor passive, present nor absent, word nor concept, to what does it owe its extraordinary ontological status? Consider this passage from Derrida's essay on **différance**:

Saussure had only to remind us that the play of difference was the functional condition, the condition of possibility, for every sign; and it is itself silent. The difference between two phonemes, which enables them to exist and to operate, is inaudible. The inaudible opens the two present phonemes to hearing, as they present themselves.... The difference that brings out phonemes and lets them be heard and understood itself remains inaudible. (*SP*, p. 133)

This is an extraordinary passage. Its insistent paradoxes gesture toward that shadowy realm, at once beyond and constitutive of the traditional oppositions of Western thought, in which Derrida would have us believe. In this sense, the passage is paradigmatic of the entire Derridian enterprise. But does it make sense at all? "The difference between two phonemes, which enables them to exist and to operate," says Derrida, "is inaudible." The paradoxes, the incantatory repetitions, suggest that we are to be astonished by this revelation. But until we consciously apply an external scale of some sort in relation to which difference might be registered, this difference is not only inaudible, and not only not a sonic phenomenon, but purely and simply nonexistent. For it is not "in" the phonemes, nor, as we commonly say, "between" them. It is a purely relational concept that makes sense — that begins to exist — only when we have applied an external scale according to which one or more kinds of difference might be established. Derrida, it appears, abstracts a concept ("difference") and reprojects it onto the phenomenon itself. He then stands back in wonder at its allegedly primordial instability, its tendency to perform an ontological disappearing act. He seems to think that if Tom, who is five feet tall, enters an ideally empty room accompanied by Ted, who is six feet tall, then there are really three entities **in the room**: Tom, Ted, and The Difference. Such reified abstractions are of course wholly unstable, since their very existence depends on the thoroughness with which we manage to forget

that they are not “out there” at all, but our own creations; and a system like Derrida’s, which depends on them to a considerable degree, ought to be precisely as difficult to pin down conceptually as his system in fact is.

Yet Derrida everywhere privileges his key concepts and insists that they outrun, or transcend, or are more fundamental than thought itself. **Différance**, he says, is not “simply a concept but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general” (*SP*, p. 140). But even if the last part of this sentence were true, why should the concept of the possibility of conceptuality be thus privileged? It is as if we were to say, “Parents are not people, but the very possibility of a person.”¹⁷ Or consider this more sustained meditation on **différance**:

Within a language, within the **system** of language, there are only differences.... But, on the one hand, these differences **play a role** in language, in speech as well, and in the exchange between language and speech. On the other hand, these differences are themselves **effects**. They have not fallen from the sky ready made.... What we note as **différance** will thus be the movement of play that “produces” (and not by something that is simply an activity) these differences.... **Différance** is the nonfull, nonsimple “origin”; it is the structured and differing origin of differences. (*SP*, pp. 140-41)

Once we see these differences as effects, then certainly we must discover (or posit) a cause. But such a cause cannot be sought **within** the system of language, any more than causes can be found within the system of geometry. Rules, relations, logical derivations, but not causes. Thus once we have asked the question, “What makes possible the differences between signifieds, and between signifiers?”¹⁸ and asked it of the system of language itself, the answer is bound to be a bit shadowy and metaphoric, for this is to ask an historical or diachronic question and, in Derrida’s case, to give a logical or synchronic answer to it. Small wonder that such an answer vibrates with uncertainty, threatens continually to efface itself.

If, however, we choose to ask the systematic or synchronic version of the question, and seek a comparable answer, we shall arrive, I fear, at something like this: What “makes possible” the differences between signifieds, and between signifiers, is the fact that — in terms of the scale we are applying — they are different, that we can tell them apart. Derrida himself, of course, warns that we miss the point of **différance** if we “object to it ... by opposing some generative point of view to a structuralist-taxonomic point of view, or conversely. These oppositions do not pertain in the least to **différance**; and this, no doubt, is what makes thinking about it difficult and uncomfortable” (*SP*, p. 142). But these oppositions do pertain to it; in fact, both terms pertain equally since Derrida asks a question in terms of one point of view and answers it in terms of another. The logical impurity that results is not a “neither,” miraculously free of both categories, but that “difficult and uncomfortable” hybrid, a conceptual obliquity.

Indeed, how can something be "no more static than genetic, no more structural than historical. Nor ... any less so" (*SP*, p. 142)? To speak of a something that escapes such oppositions is to speak either of a thing with no interesting relation to these categories at all, or of a willingness on our part to undermine the "categoricity" of our categories. The latter, in itself, may be an interesting exercise, but to undertake it is not the same as to discover a real phenomenon that is nonmystical, that participates in these categories, and that nevertheless transcends or eludes them. From this point of view, Derrida's work, which claims just such a discovery, is a late development in that effort to encounter the "wholly other" that is traditionally termed the sublime. Let us recall that there is really no such thing as an "historical phenomenon" or a "systematic phenomenon." As Wittgenstein said, "We predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it."¹⁹ There are only efforts to see whatever it is we are looking at in terms of an historical or a systematic framework or explanatory system, or -- as in Derrida's case -- in terms of neither. But in this last case we shall see very little. As a feature of the linguistic system itself, of language, **différance** does not exist. Nor is a special mode of nonexistence to be attributed to it by crossing out (the **sous rature**) or other forms of typographical sport. It exists only as the node on which a number of illogical operations converge.

II

Derrida's account of **différance** is, in a certain sense, an exemplary piece of business, a demonstration of the kind of argument that results from his persistent refusal to acknowledge the role played by an interpretive consciousness in the constitution of meaning, and from the incomplete critique of the concept of the intrinsic that pervades his writings. His theory rests on what James M. Edie calls "the ultimate truth of structuralism," that "there is a **meaning in the text** which not only transcends the rules and elements of linguistic usage,... but also transcends the psychological and deliberate intentions of the authors themselves."²⁰ It is that fatal qualifying phrase, "**in the text**," which spells the difference between an adequate and an inadequate theory of meaning. The "trace," for example, which brings about a "sedimentation" of meanings or unlimited chain of significations, must be posited as long as we deny to a text the possibility of unity and thus of a delimited assignment of meaning. For Derrida, unity and coherence are either unexamined metaphysical concepts or they are simply nonexistent; a text is either conditioned by an **arche** or **telos** (metaphysical souvenirs) or it is given over to the nihilistic dance of freeplay. Such a position is the critical counterpart of the former seminarian's atheism. The absoluteness of the terms remains, but the other term is embraced.

But unity need not be either intrinsic or quasi-theological. It may simply be what we must ascribe to a text in order to view it and interpret it, in order that there may be an "it" at all. It is what allows Derrida to devote the second part of his *Grammatology*, for example, to what he calls the text of

"Rousseau," or *Speech and Phenomena* to the collection of writings he designates as the work of "Husserl." This is merely the sort of unity that is required to isolate an object for inspection, the unity that keeps most of us signing our checks with the same name. Unity in this sense, then, is not a positive assertion of coherence or value (aesthetic, metaphysical, etc.) but a negative definition of a space in which coherence may or may not reside, and a stipulation that whatever coherence or incoherence is discovered will be of this text or object and not another. The determination of this kind of unity, then, is not a critical but a precritical act, much as the acceptance by psychiatrist A of patient B is not an analytic act but the determination of a locus of analysis. Nothing metaphysical is being claimed by such a determination, nothing about the necessary structure of reality or about the shapeliness of artistic wholes or human psyches. All that is asserted is the critic's right to disengage something from everything, and to take responsibility for doing so. Once he does so, of course, he will also have begun to arrest the infinite play of traces (let us call it the possible meanings of each element). Or rather, he will have begun a process of interpretation which, in assigning meaning of various kinds to a text, will thereby create a system of relationships designed, in part, to inhibit each element from meaning all that it might in isolation. This is not an intrinsic delimiting, performed by the text itself or by the system of language, nor should we expect it to be; it is the critic's doing. More precisely, it is an individual employment of the conventions of criticism or reading. But it is not metaphysical, and it is not nothing.

If the critic clings to the notion that unity, or meaning, must either be demonstrably intrinsic to a work or nonexistent, and if he allows the skepticism that such a position inevitably generates to encounter his intuitive awareness that, somehow, texts may still be assigned more or less adequate meanings and are still distinguishable from each other (the texts of "Rousseau," of "Husserl"), then he will certainly be let to posit something like the "trace." But such a gesture, since it runs precisely counter to the more radical (and adequate) theory it seeks to render workable, will require Ptolemaic efforts of accommodation, and will in any case exhibit the instability of a concept existing at the meeting-point of logical incompatibles. Derrida's enterprise, which resembles at times a curiously neo-scholastic effort to conserve a privileged concept in the face of contrary evidence, cannot admit that the concept itself may have to go. Rejecting a theory of presence that entails a theory of intrinsic meaning, Derrida seeks to jettison presence but retain the intrinsic, to sink the boat yet keep on rowing. This extraordinary move requires that the intrinsic — and meaning itself — be deformed and attenuated to a point just this side of annihilation. What Derrida will not do, however, is surrender the notion that meaning (or such ghosts of departed meaning as still haunt his system) is intrinsic to texts and admit that it is the product of an interpretive activity neither metaphysical nor simple, neither performed by the text itself nor random, neither a divine inscription nor an interminable linguistic Rube Goldberg machine.

I insist on what seem to me some logical difficulties of Derrida's conception of textual meaning because this is an area not much touched on by either his admirers or his critics. The former tend to apply or elaborate Derridian notions without inquiring as to their intelligibility or logical status, and the latter too often content themselves with hostility and neo-humanist mutterings about the impoverishment of literature or language or culture that Derrida's ideas seem to them to portend. Thus Harold Bloom remarks that "one need not be religious in any sense or intention, or inclined to any degree of theosophy or occult speculation, still to conclude that meaning, whether of poems or of dreams, of any text, is excessively impoverished by a Nietzsche-inspired deconstruction, however scrupulous."²¹ This is not a refutation but a refusal, the intellectual equivalent of humming a few bars of "They Can't Take That Away From Me." Certainly deconstructive analysis is often reductive and impoverishing, perhaps the more so as it is faithful to its theoretical assumptions. If those assumptions were sound, however, and their implications inescapable, then our only choice would be to confront that newfound poverty honestly, or to construct an alternative theory equally sound and more adequate to our sense of textual richness. It will not do to say that we like the idea of phlogiston, that it is too interesting to be abandoned. As I have tried to suggest, however, it is far from clear that such a choice is required of us.

III

The effort to "disperse" or "deconstruct" or dissolve what used to be called "the literary object" is a distinguishing feature of the present critical moment. Far from being confined to those critics who are avowedly of a deconstructivist bent, like Derrida or J. Hillis Miller, it appears in the work of writers who seem passionately concerned to counter structuralist and post-structuralist dispersals of poem and poet, and who insist that literature is above all a matter of intending consciousnesses. Thus while Bloom deplores deconstruction as textually and culturally impoverishing, he nevertheless mounts an attack from another quarter, that of neo-Freudian author psychology, that is no less destructive (in theory) of the idea of a text than is Derrida's grammatological dismantling. "Influence, as I conceive it," writes Bloom, "means that there are **no** texts, but only relationships **between** texts."²² This assertion of the interrelatedness of nonentities is a close counterpart of Derrida's insistence that a given utterance in some sense is all that it is not. In each case, once the formalist dream of an absolutely impermeable and self-delimiting text proves untenable, the very idea of a text is promptly surrendered, whether to free play and drift, or to the alleged war of poet with poet, or to some other substitute for literary interpretation. The hold of absolutes, of the desire for absolutes, is strong, and so is its nihilistic obverse. As Geoffrey Hartman remarks, "There is no absolute knowledge but rather a textual infinite, an interminable web of texts or interpretations; and the fact that we discern periods or sentences or genres or individual outlines or unities of various kinds is somewhat like computing time."²³ Absolute knowledge or an interminable web; the One or the Many; divine coherence or the chaos of

damned souls. Shades of Henry Adams! Yet is this really the only choice? The notions of absolute knowledge and of a theologically self-circumscribing text, and the contrary notions of critical nescience and an indeterminate text, derive equally from the assumption of intrinsic, authenticating meaning. Either God is in the textual machine, lending it meaning and unity, or he is not, and there is no meaning and no text.

Two kinds of response seem appropriate. First, Hartman's comparison between the discernment of textual entities and the imposition of a chronological schema on an undifferentiated continuum is apt, to a point, but only to a point. Such textual discernment is also like our ability to disengage familiar individuals from the web of people that surrounds us in daily life, and to distinguish among them. The divisions, in real life, are perhaps not so clear as the days of Creation in Genesis, but neither are they usually so thoroughly fictive as hours and minutes or lines of latitude and longitude. In terms of literary criticism, this means that some discerned entities, some imposed borders, some attributed meanings will seem more appropriate and "real" than others. They will not be theologically sanctioned, but they will make better sense than the others. Second, the source and test of such distinctions, and of textual meaning itself, is not the text but the interpreter's consciousness and the institution of criticism as a whole, and an interpreter conceived in this way is inescapably responsible to the texts he confronts and to the discipline in which he works. We expect him to avoid such contradictions as simultaneously claiming to interpret a text and arguing that interpretation is impossible, and we expect him to resist the temptation to construct unfalsifiable systems or arguments that soar above evidence, as when Derrida's more enthusiastic followers tell us that it is useless to seek a thesis or position in the Derridian oeuvre since "aux thèses, Derrida substitue l'inscription qui déjoue toute position."²⁴ This is to say that in assuming his role as the constructor not of literary texts but of textual meaning, the critic also assumes the pertinence of the rules of evidence, the logic of inquiry, and the authority — neither divine nor nonexistent — of human thought.²⁵

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NOTES

- 1 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), p. 159. This volume includes a translation of the essay on "la différance."
- 2 M. H. Abrams, "The Deconstructive Angel," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1977), 430-31.

- 3 Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 104. It may be worth asking what "thing" it is that escapes. Did we ever "have" it? Are we likelier to "have" it without language than by means of language?
- 4 See Abrams, p. 430.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 117.
- 7 Ibid., p. 120. Derrida cites this passage in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 68.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 142-43 (hereafter cited as *SP*). The profusion of physical metaphors in this passage, by the way, is thoroughly characteristic of Derrida's account of the linguistic sign.
- 10 Edward W. Said, "ABECEDARIUM CULTURAE: Structuralism, Absence, Writing," in *Modern French Criticism*, ed. John K. Simon (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 383.
- 11 Saussure, p. 120, my emphasis.
- 12 Ibid., p. 121.
- 13 Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 245, my emphasis. Cf. pp. 10-11.
- 14 See Hazard Adams, "Contemporary Ideas of Literature: Terrible Beauty or Rough Beast?" *Contemporary Literature*, 17 (1976), 349-77.
- 15 Jonathan Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 42; also cf. p. 27.
- 16 Ibid., p. 28. And see Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Part I, chaps. 1-2.
- 17 Derrida's "simply," of course, suggests that **différance** may be a concept **as well as** "the possibility of conceptuality." But in several places, among them the next sentence, he says explicitly that **différance** is not a concept.
- 18 See Saussure, *Course*, p. 112.

- 19 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), § 104.
- 20 James M. Edie, *Speaking and Meaning: The Phenomenology of Language* (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), p. 149.
- 21 Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 85. See also p. 60, where Bloom speaks of "the humanistic loss we sustain if we yield up the authority of oral tradition to the partisans of **writing**."
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 23 Geoffrey Hartman, "Crossing Over: Literary Commentary as Literature," *Comparative Literature*, 28 (1976), p. 266.
- 24 Sarah Kofman in Lucette Finas, Sara Kofman, Roger Laporte, Jean-Michel Rey, *Écart: Quatre Essais à propos de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Fayard, 1973), p. 130.
- 25 For a discussion of some other logical difficulties in Derrida, see John R. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," in *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies*, 1 (1977), pp. 198-208.

REVIEW

Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture*. Cornell Univ. Press. 1977. Pp. 352. \$17.50.

The word is in trouble. It's not bad enough that Jacques Derrida believes the spoken word is the abstraction of some prior act of signification and that speech cannot stand as reality, but concrete poets like Augusto de Campos and Max Bense have abstracted the written word from speech, preferring to emphasize the visual relationships of letters with parades of typefaces, rows of i's, w's, and e's, and arrangements of letters that can be read vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. Abstracted from abstraction by abstraction, the printed word is a null set; or, at best, it's a linguistic photonegative requiring special chemicals and lighting to connect it with reality. But, Walter J. Ong to the rescue — more or less. In examining the history of the word — spoken and written — Ong has tried to restore meaning and presence to the word by increasing our sensitivity to its oral vestiges and its potential for rejuvenation. In several collections of essays since *The Presence of the Word*, Ong has expanded and developed his ideas about the change from ancient oral-aural modes of thought and expression to modern visual-verbal modes, and he has studied the effects of this change on the development of Western consciousness. *Interfaces of the Word* is his most recent collection of essays, and his argument is still much the same.

Primary oral cultures — cultures which have never known print — are much more coherent and integrative than modern print cultures. Since spoken knowledge is extremely transitory, vanishing as soon as it is uttered, oral cultures must find effective ways to disseminate and preserve their cultural knowledge. The solution, of course, is standardized repetition: epithets, proverbs, themes, stereotyped characters, and myths preserve cultural knowledge because they are relatively easy to remember and are constantly repeated so the culture's store of knowledge is not lost. Since epithets are opprobatory or depreciatory as well as descriptive, and since stereotyped characters — the noble chief, the hated foe — are explicitly judged as they are named, the audience's response to the object is evoked simultaneously upon hearing the object or character named. Thus the audience proceeds through

each story — and life — in an emotional and intellectual lockstep. But, while this communally shared life has its virtues, it thwarted change or development in abstract thought. Oral cultures could not adapt to new experiences or create new modes of thought and were doomed to repeat the old ways.

With the development of chirographic (handwriting) and print cultures, a distance widened between the knower and the external universe, and even between the knower and himself. Because writing is exterior to the knower and frozen into script or print, it is not tied to the movement of life in the flow of time. Because writing is perceived through the eye — a distancing, fragmenting, dissecting sense — it lacks the aggregative or unifying quality of oral-aural discourse. Thus, for Ong, writing has gradually split the original unity of human consciousness and has alienated people from themselves and their original lifeworld. This alienation, as Ong repeatedly reminds us, is not entirely bad; science and any kind of analytical thought would be impossible without it, and whatever advantages present society has over ancient cultures would have never happened. So much for Ong's general theory.

Ong divides his essays into four sections: the first is a general introductory chapter; the second discusses how the decay of participatory oral-aural understanding distances an audience and relegates knowledge exclusively to an alienating and fragmenting vision; the next group of essays examines how closed economies of thought and utterance encouraged by print affect the techniques and assumptions of Shakespeare, Milton, New Criticism, and Romantic poetics; the last section, containing a single, long chapter, sketches the countering effect of open systems — especially ecology and television — on the closed-system mind-set created by writing and print.

The most serious weakness in Ong's book appears in the first section in his distinction between the spoken and written word. Though he is acutely aware of the virtues of print culture, Ong still has a certain nostalgia for the unitive, integrative nature of oral culture, and he finds it necessary to value certain of its features over visual-verbal cultures. Unfortunately, in order to value the oral over the written word, he misconceives the nature of referents or signifieds. He distinguishes between the spoken word, which he calls the "real word," and the written word, which he says is "a mark on a surface, where a real word cannot exist at all":

... the spoken word, in a profound sense is of itself bound to ongoing, lived human experience, and thus is of itself aggregative, or unitive, the opposite of diaeretic or disjunctive or analytic, despite the fact that without the word the disjunction necessary for abstract thinking cannot be achieved. The spoken word, however abstract its signification or however static the object it may represent, is of its very nature a sound, tied to the movement of life itself in the flow of time. Sound exists only when it is going out of existence: in uttering the word "existence," by the time I get to the "-tence," the "exis-" is gone and has to be gone. A spoken word, even

when it refers to a statically modeled "thing," is itself never a thing or even a "sign" ("sign" refers primarily to something seen and thus, however subtly, reduces the aural to the visual and static). No real word can be present all at once as the letters in a written "word" are. The real word, the spoken word, is always an event, whatever its codified associations with concepts, thought of as immobile objectifications. In this sense, the spoken word is an action, an ongoing part of ongoing existence.

The first problem here is with phrases like "however static the object it may represent" and "thought of as immobile objectifications." Ong still believes — in the face of Saussurean linguistics — that signifieds or "concepts" or "codified associations" are static, isolated, objectified things. This is not true. All meaning is relational; no spoken sound's or written mark's referent is a thing or essence. To understand "orality," I must know what "writing," "hearing," "speaking," "sound," "space," "time," and a number of other concepts are. As Saussure puts it, "The ultimate law of language is, dare we say, that nothing can ever reside in a single term." Or Jonathan Culler: "meaning or the signified is not an entity so much as a bundle of differential values, a space in a system of differences." A written mark's referent is no more a thing or essence than an oral sound's referent. A further fault is Ong's tendency to identify the mode of existence of a signifier with that of its signified. Thus, since the spoken word is a sound and "bound to ongoing, lived human existence, and thus is of itself aggregative, or unitive," he believes the spoken sound's abstract signified must also be aggregative or unitive, while the written mark's signified — because the mark is a static, objectified thing — must then be static, analytic, and objectified. Neither is this true. All signifieds are networks of relations, regardless of the mode of existence of their signifiers. Written signifieds are just as "aggregative" or "unitive" as oral signifieds, because they cannot mean without their relations to other contrasting signifieds. Finally, Ong equivocates on "sign." Advertisers and billboard companies may believe a "'sign' refers primarily to something seen," but in linguistics a sign is an abstraction, a concept or signified existing as a network of relationships in our minds.

In his enthusiasm to make oral cultures less alienated and more unified, more "bound to ongoing, lived human existence," Ong occasionally forgets that, however participatory the spoken word may be, oral cultures are more ignorant, reductive, and closed to the world than writing cultures. Oral cultures, after all, perceive their world through a relatively narrow range of epithets, themes, and stereotyped characters. They are not closer to their human life world; they are only in more thorough agreement about their formulae or reductions of reality. They may be less alienated from each other, but they are more insulated intellectually from their world.

Later in the book, Ong occasionally complains of the "hypervisualism" of print cultures, and he's right. As Charles Altieri suggests in an essay in the Spring 1979 *Critical Inquiry*, critics like Jacques Derrida are deafened by print — deafened to the rhetorical function of a text, to its role in a human

situation, to its authorial intention, to its relation with an audience. But Ong himself succumbs occasionally to "hyperorality." He is so caught up in his idea of the oneness of oral sound, its referent, and human existence, that he is blinded by orality and fails to distinguish between oral signifiers and their signifieds; hence, when he moves to print cultures, he misapplies the concreteness, the *Dinglichkeit* of written marks to their signifieds.

Once Ong stops trying to value oral-aural modes of expression over visual-verbal modes, his essays become more rewarding. One essay in the audience section, "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," published in *PMLA* in 1975, is especially good because Ong can usefully contrast audience-author relationships of oral and written literature. The audience at an oral presentation influences the speaker by their responses, encouraging him to expand or contract the story, much as one person influences another with nods, gestures, and facial expressions in a conversation. After discussing the relationship between an oral narrator and his live audience, Ong examines the authorial mask and the roles in which writers from Chaucer to Hemingway cast their audiences. Some writers, like Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*, cast their readers in a single role — as close companions — while others, like Thomas Nashe's readers in *The Unfortunate Traveler*, adopt numerous roles: "whoever takes on Nashe's story must become a listener bending his ear to political orations, a participant in scholastic disputations, a hanger-on at goliardic woodstocks, a camp follower fascinated by merry tales, a simpering reader of Italian revenge stories and sixteenth-century true confessions, a fellow conspirator in a world of picaresque cheats, and much more." At the end of the essay, Ong can't resist valuing oral over written communication. Though he freely admits that all speakers and writers mask themselves, he finds oral communication more authentic and direct, possessing a "momentum that works for the removal of masks."

A second essay in the audience section, "African Talking Drums and Oral Noetics," compares drumming narration with oral narration to deepen our knowledge of oral composing processes. While the essay presents no new information about oral composition, the explanation of drum construction, rhythms, disambiguation and naming is fascinating. Some drummers, for example, name an individual after an ancestor: thus John F. Carrington, professor of botany at the Kisangani campus of the National University of Zaire, was named in drum talk, "The European, son of the European Whom the Villagers Laughed at when he Leaped in the Air," because his father had been a member of a group of folk dancers in England. Other drummers name individuals after an historical fact in their lives: another name for Carrington was, "The White Man Who Travels with the Man with Heavy Eyebrows."

Several of the essays in the next section are equally rewarding. In "Typographic Rhapsody: Ravisius Textor, Zwinger, and Shakespeare," Ong examines two of the early commonplace collectors and their subject headings — persons killed or dismembered by horses, persons struck by lightning, persons cast off precipices, various types of haircuts, various kinds of worms,

men who smelled bad, various kinds of excrement, brute animals to which statues were erected, etc. — to discover their role in the evolution of human consciousness between oral-aural and print cultures. Because the commonplace collectors emerged between the oral-aural and visual-verbal worlds, their ways of processing knowledge exerted certain pressures on consciousness and began important changes in our ways of thinking. Oral culture depended on commonplaces and formulae to store and pass on knowledge, so oral poets had to learn and remember as many formulae as possible. But with the rise of print, these commonplaces could be accumulated and stored in books, supplanting the role of the poet as custodian of cultural knowledge. With the advent of these enormous commonplace collections (one of which ran “to over 5,000 double-column folio pages of small type by the posthumous 1604 edition”), the commonplaces were arranged alphabetically and spatially and not, as before, only integrated temporally into a narrative. Evanescent sayings became bits of texts or inert facts which were stored, arranged, and retrieved by the eye, not the ear. Then too, as cultures became more literate and collections of stock materials became more accessible, these formulae and commonplaces became devalued and even spurned as clichés, and eventually creativity became a significant literary value.

In “The Poem as a Closed Field: The Once New Criticism and the Nature of Literature,” Ong pursues the role of creativity in the evolving visual-verbal mind-set. For Ong, New Criticism was a result of, among other things, the Romantic emphasis on creativity which weakened the old oral-aural rhetoric because it cut the author off from his audience. Ong says the audience of the Romantic poet was not an interlocutor but a spectator. Audiences of oral poets were more active because oral poets had to compete with each other and be judged by the audience, and because the audience could influence the oral poet by their reaction — or lack of reaction — to his stories. But the New Critics saw the poem as a verbal icon — an object fixed in the eye and on the page by chirographic or typographic convention — because they were influenced by the Romantic emphasis on creativity, which set the author apart from his audience to create a text in isolation, a text that was no longer a riposte or dialog or exchange, but a product or object or overheard monologue. This object was then to be examined on its own grounds for the unity of its diversities, paradoxes, ironies, and tensions. Though Ong’s generalizations about the isolation of the Romantic poets appear accurate, they would be more credible if they were qualified a little. He presents Mill’s remark, “eloquence is heard; poetry is overheard,” and John Martin’s painting, *The Bard* (which is reproduced on the hard cover dustjacket and soft cover of M. H. Abrams’ *Natural Supernaturalism*), to buttress his argument that Romantic poets are isolated. But Ong ignores that Coleridge wrote “To William Wordsworth” as a direct response to Wordsworth’s reading of *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth repeatedly addressed Coleridge as “Friend.” Other poems of Coleridge’s, like “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” addressed to Charles Lamb, or Wordsworth’s poems, like “Tintern Abbey,” addressed to his sister, clearly show the poets have a specific audience in mind and are even responding to that audience, though, to be sure, the audience is absent.

One important omission in *Interfaces of the Word* is its failure to discuss the "neo-oral cast of contemporary literature," which Ong refers to. A number of contemporary poets are fascinated with oral composition and thought. Alan Ginsberg writes, "The only poetic tradition is the Voice out of the burning bush," and his obscenities, long lines, and insistence on the breath measure are not only attacks on conventions of traditional verse but on typography itself. Charles Olson is an even more obvious subject. In "Letter 5" of *The Maximus Poems*, he complains of "The habit of newsprint," and in his well known essay, "Projective Verse," he says, "For the ear, which once had the burden of memory to quicken it (rime & regular cadence were its aids and have merely lived on in print after the oral necessities were ended) can now again, that the poet has his means, be the threshold of projective verse." Still another subject might be Robert Creeley, who is also acutely aware of the distancing effect of the printed word and wants to close the gap through a more oral poetry. Ong is the best qualified critic in America to write on the neo-oralism of contemporary poetry and how this new orality is conditioned by print and visual-verbal conventions, yet he doesn't seem to know that these writers exist.

All of these criticisms, however, are not to say that Ong's book is without its rewards. Despite the aforementioned problems, despite spots of sketchiness, despite considerable repetition (understandable in a collection of separately published essays), and despite a tendency for non-stop self-promotion (24 references to *The Presence of the Word*, not to mention dozens of references to his other books and articles), Ong's book is very worthwhile: in showing us how and what the letter kills, Ong fosters in us a new awareness of our oral roots and tempers our vision with resonance.

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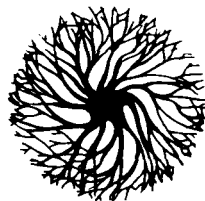
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