New Orleans Review

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THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MURRAY KRIEGER: A SPECIAL SECTION

The *New Orleans Review* gratefully acknowledges the assistance of our Guest Editor, Richard Berg, in bringing together the essays which constitute this special section on Murray Krieger. The section consists of papers delivered by Mark Rose and Vincent Leitch at the 1981 MLA conference, together with Murray Krieger's response at that time. Richard Berg solicited longer papers by Michael Clark and Wesley Morris, and Hazard Adams has generously expanded his opening remarks from the MLA session to include reference to these papers. Following Richard Berg's interview with Murray Krieger, our section concludes with a comprehensive bibliography supplied by Eddie Yeghiayan.

These papers offer valuable perspectives on the work of a major American critic whose theories have evolved during the transition from the era of New Criticism to that of post-structuralism. They clarify the strength of a theorist who has remained faithful to a humanistic vision of the presentational powers of literature while incorporating the essential insights and challenges of those who deny the validity of that tradition.
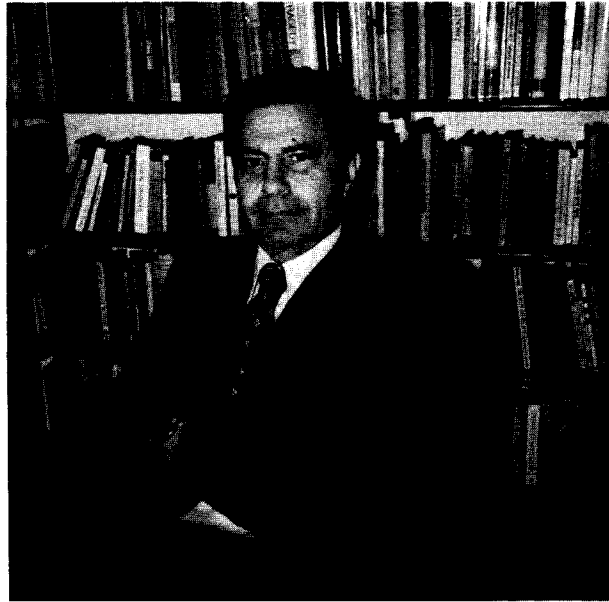
Hazard Adams

INTRODUCTION: THE GENTLE BEHEMOTH; OR, THE ILLUSIONIST OF TRUTH; OR, THE BOURGEOIS (WITH A TRACE OF EXISTENTIALISM) GENTILHOMME; OR, THE EXPERIENCED UNCLE TOBY; AND, FINALLY, PRACTICAL KRIEGERISM

This collection can be traced easily enough to the session on literary criticism at the Modern Language Association meetings in December of 1981, arranged and chaired by myself and entitled "The Criticism of Murray Krieger: The Question of Presence." However, it may take some unfamiliar readers a little longer to recognize that the true source is Murray Krieger's long, pioneering services to the enterprise of literary criticism and theory in America. Author of seven major books and numerous briefer works, Krieger has over thirty years developed a subtle literary theory in the venerable tradition of the apology for poetry and has been at the forefront of pedagogy in a field he himself has pioneered. At the MLA session, Mark Rose and Vincent B. Leitch presented the papers we have here, and Murray Krieger responded with the engaging remarks entitled "Both Sides Now." Then Bruce Henricksen of the *New Orleans Review* and Richard Berg entered the picture commissioning two more essays — by Wesley Morris and Michael Clark, both former students of Krieger — and arranging Berg's interview, which culminates in Krieger's "enough." It is a word one might read as a plaintive cry, but that interpretation belies the masterful presentation and contextualization of Krieger's position that the interview contains.

Let me return for a moment to the original scene (if I may indulge in unfashionable nostalgia: clearly for some readers these texts are radically free of their original spoken events). The MLA session honored an active theorist whose writings since his first book *The New Apologists for Poetry* (1956) constitute a major body of critical theory capable, as we see from these essays, of generating a variety of responses, sometimes in conflict, sometimes dwelling on a special aspect. (As organizer of the original scene, I had also in mind to celebrate another perhaps less obvious aspect of Krieger's career, but I shall save comment on that until the end.) Of the two original papers (both, like Krieger's reply, necessarily shorter than the later ones), that of Mark Rose is more nearly a piece of direct explication. For him, Krieger puts equal weight on the presence of the signified in the signifier and its absence, though, of course, Krieger claims that the presence is a special sort of illusion, not Jacques Derrida's absent transcendental signified. He sees Krieger as a paradoxist and notes that the presence/illusion paradox has parallels in Krieger's treatment of spatiality/temporality and closure/openness. He sees Krieger viewing man as a heroic creator of forms; his Krieger quests for an absolute authority, but is always returned (always returns) to the quarrel of existence with forms. Thus Krieger's early existentialism (most evident in *The Tragic Vision* of 1960) is organized into one half of an opposition, the other pole of which is celebration of cultural possibility and not merely the repression that concerns Wesley Morris in his essay. Rose's Krieger is a gentle Behemoth, who swallows all theory preceding him that is worth swallowing, and incorporates all he swallows into his ever expanding theory.

Vincent B. Leitch, coming from his own post-structuralist deconstructive commitment, strikes a somewhat histrionic note when he characterizes Krieger as a "believer," with which appellation he quaintly associates quaintness. There is an element of this also in Wesley Morris' more or less Marxist attitude toward aspects of Krieger's theory, which he identifies with a just post-World War II sensibility. (I detect something a little self-satisfied or perhaps Oedipal in the tone of these characterizations.) Leitch regards Krieger's "formalist way of writing" as a rhetorical trick, merely figurative at the critical points and thus, in his view, suspect. However, a good post-structuralist ought to acknowledge that his own discourse is caught in the same deceptive behavior. Leitch's main question is whether or not Krieger *really* has it both ways, or whether the equal opposition of presence and illusion is not still weighted toward presence, formalism, contextualism, and the like. For Leitch, Krieger is a theologian of humanism, an especially anxious one seeking "security and self-protection." On the other hand, he is a "stoical figure" who "worries the hedonism of his times." This remark

must be amusing to Krieger, given the recent charge of hedonism leveled against him by the anti-deconstructionist Frank Lentricchia. For Krieger, to find himself regarded in this way by the two extremes is perhaps a justification in itself. For Leitch, Krieger's alleged emphasis on presence at the expense of absence makes him produce only the illusion of truth not (as I think Krieger would have it) the truth of illusion.

Krieger's lively reply speaks for itself. It was, of course, limited to a relatively short space of time at the MLA session, and he has not expanded it, preferring to maintain the flavor of that event. It is helpful, therefore, to have also the interview with Richard Berg. The two additional essays, not restricted to a certain length, are good to have in the collection, because they deal with other aspects of Krieger's work. In a special way they reflect well on Krieger because they show how his students have developed their considerable analytical powers into independent positions. To the set of oppositions Rose mentions, Wesley Morris adds the Dionysian/Apollonian that Krieger takes from Nietzsche and dwells on Krieger's form of historicism, discussed in his own book *Toward a New Historicism* (1972). I can imagine a certain wryness in Krieger's reading of this essay if only because of the repeated references to bourgeois repression and the charge that Krieger's political sensibility has not come into the nuclear age. Morris does, however, see Krieger as having emancipated himself from the reactionary aspects of the theory of his teacher Eliseo Vivas — by rewriting it, that is, carrying it to a more acceptable position. Morris delays mentioning the question of presence until relatively late in his essay and, rightly, I think, observes that Krieger's efforts to avoid some of its implications are "too often lost on the inattentive reader." Still, Morris does not really defend Krieger here, since for him Krieger's activity is an "effort," not necessarily a success. In contrast to Rose, Morris finds only a trace today of the existential Krieger.

For Michael Clark, Krieger is Sterne's Uncle Toby with all of that character's confidence and none of his innocence. Clark remarks of Krieger's "tautological logic," which Leitch believes is no logic at all, but merely rhetoric; in the end he takes the same position. Clark imagines Krieger joining phenomenology to formalism, but he will not grant Krieger's paradoxes "theoretical consistency." Clark, like Leitch, clings to an explanatory rationalism that Krieger has, rightly in my opinion, long before gone beyond or, more accurately, *through.* Clark's essay attempts to resolve a problem he thinks is present in Krieger's work by providing a

Leviathan who will swallow Rose's gentle Behemoth — Jacques Lacan. However, I doubt that our Behemoth, definitely a land animal, is willing to desert the shore for shifting waters where lurk the jaws of psychoanalytical dispute and the effort to resolve paradox by its means. I doubt that Krieger would accept Clark's Lacanian treatment of his contained signified as the latent presence of but another signifier in the Saussurean chain. My view is that Krieger's discipline of paradox makes it more likely that he could swallow a beached Lacan than Lacan a floundering Krieger, though perhaps it is best that the two remain in their respective environments. In other words, I am skeptical about a parallel that seems too easy, though certainly cleverly presented.

The most interesting question raised by Krieger's work is not whether presence or absence is privileged. One need not assume with Leitch that when we discover Krieger in the act of emphasizing one pole of his opposition against the other this means his theory of true opposites is jeopardized. It is more appropriate to conclude that the emphasis is there because the present situation requires a restoration of the balance that the theory presents. Krieger's emphasis is a social act based on a theory, but unlike so many social acts, it remembers (at the level of theory) to bring in the opposite. This is exactly what so many acts by lesser theorists fail to do — distinguish emphasis from theory — and thus they ride the hobby horse of emphasis as if it had the perspicacity of a real theory. To observe this distinction in Krieger's work — always so carefully drawn — is to see another "both sides" and to recognize that there has been something insensitive in readings of him that claim he is aloof from history and society. Krieger speaks to this matter when he replies to Leitch's complaint of absurdity and irrationality — that is, paradoxicality — with the remark, "we are less than satisfied when we do not find it."

Krieger has said to me that every great critical theorist seems to have in his work some unresolvable contradiction and that this contradiction is the thing of greatest interest and importance in that work. It seems clear that Krieger, accepting this, has worked to tame the contradiction in his own writing by making his theory paradoxical at its very base, thus preserving his contradiction in a rational way. He is certainly not an innocent Uncle Toby. The question to be asked of his critics is: how far can one go *without* paradox, and does that distance suffice? Krieger says that it does not, and I agree with him. In his interview, Krieger begins a sentence as follows: "I confess that, even as late in my work

as *Theory of Criticism,* I am at moments divided . . . " I truncate this sentence unfairly here to point out that Krieger goes beyond such a remark to claim wholeness in division and division in wholeness. In keeping to this paradox Krieger's work belongs, from the beginning of his career, to the genre of the apology for poetry, recognizing that poetry itself passes through the logic that some of his critics want to hold *him* to. This makes Krieger not a poet but a defender of poetry's rights who recognizes finally a paradoxical relation between his and the poet's discourse.

But now I invoke the privilege of long friendship and turn to an aspect of Krieger's career mentioned by both Morris and Clark, but only in passing. This is his pioneering commitment to the teaching of the history of literary criticism and literary theory. When I first met Krieger sometime in the fifties it was immediately as if we were colleagues in an enterprise — need I say to him a conspiracy? At that time I am not sure that I knew there were more than two of us (though surely there were more) in it. We shared the notion of criticism and theory as a discipline, the history of which was a necessary ground. That doesn't seem unusual today (although the emphasis on history seems quaintly backward to deconstructionists and all settled to Marxists). At that time both the New Criticism and the old historical literary scholarship with which it fought were atheoretical, as were the various impressionistic ways of teaching. So on the one hand Krieger was theoretical and on the other historical, though his notion of the history of criticism was hardly that implied by the leading belle-lettristic anthologies. What I shall call Practical Kriegerism, which is ethical in the Kantian sense of "practical," has never abandoned the idea that every critical theorist deserves to be considered initially in terms of the situation he has found, the language bequeathed to him, and the critical problems as his age has seen them. Krieger has had as much as anyone — probably more — to do with making the history of criticism and literary theory a subject regularly taught and debated in our universities, fighting single-mindedly for it as a whole, rather than for some narrow version of it or for the detachment of it from its history. He has always insisted that his students be *informed.* I am not sure that anyone before him insisted, in the face of academic convention, that he was a professor of *criticism,* not of some literary period. Today that seems not unusual, and it is a measure of his success that it is not. I suspect, that like many pioneers he may look with a certain irritation on the spread of theory among the ahistorically or anti-historically trained and those with marginal interests in literary texts. Perhaps, however, excellent pedagogue that he is, he views such people merely as innocents who have unfortunately missed the rigors of his course in the history of criticism (including the mysteries of ekphrasis) and the famous Krieger casebook assignment, recalled now by a substantial number of former graduate students as one of the truly daunting tasks of their formal study.

Whatever he thinks, while holding staunchly to his own developing apology for poetry, he meets competing systems — historical or otherwise — as if they were part of a collegial enterprise — with open arms, and jaws. He is a practical Kriegerist, as well as a pure theorist and professor of "both sides now," but for all that he is a man of many sides, and by now (as you see) many interpretations, on the whole interesting, some belonging to Yeats' "discipline of the looking glass," and a few faintly amusing to someone who has known the practical Krieger well. □

Mark Rose

CRITICISM AS QUEST:
MURRAY KRIEGER AND THE PURSUIT OF PRESENCE

Poetic presence, as Murray Krieger conceives it, is to say the least a subtle and elusive matter. On the one hand Krieger proclaims the poem to be "utterly and ultimately present" and on the other he proclaims with equal intensity that poetic presence is merely an illusion.[1] Thus the title of his latest collection of essays, *Poetic Presence and Illusion*, which gives equal weight to both halves of the crucial equation, plenitude and poverty, fullness and emptiness.

This studied duplicity should come as no surprise to those familiar with Krieger's work, for from the start of his career he has been a paradoxist, formulating his understanding of art in terms of polarities and contradictions. Nor should the centrality of the concept of presence in his recent work come as a surprise, for, as Krieger conceives it, the relationship between presence and absence, identity and difference, incorporates many of his favorite and most long-standing themes. Thus for him the dialogue of presence and absence is a version of the dialogue of space and time in art, the continuous struggle of poetry to escape the temporality of its medium, to "freeze its dynamics of movement into a fixed presence — and a permanent present" (*TC*, p. 208). The relationship between presence and absence is also, for him, a version of the struggle between closure and openness. As Krieger understands it, the poem in the process of creation is a nearly alive creature, a "growing monster," as he calls it, that struggles to separate itself from the rest of the linguistic world, becoming an organic and self-contained form that must be understood as a special linguistic system unto itself.

Presence versus absence, spatiality versus temporality, closure versus openness — all of these oppositions can be understood as versions of the basic struggle between form and chaos that has long been prominent in Krieger's thought. The ubiquity of human form-making is, as Krieger says in the "Preface" to *Theory of Criticism*, the foundation on which he rests his intellectual machine. His con-

ception is of man as the creator of forms, the appropriator of chaos, shaping the unthinkable world that is outside him into symbolic orders "susceptible of human manipulation and human meaning" (*TC*, p. xiii), and it is this heroic figure that his work explicitly celebrates.

But "celebrates" with its heartily optimistic overtones is a poor word to capture the complex and frequently elegiac tonality of *Theory of Criticism*. For the dialogue of presence and absence, spatiality and temporality, is indeed a dialogue, and the claims of poverty are no less powerful than those of plenitude. Thus, although the poem may for a miraculous moment produce the felt sense of presence, nevertheless we ultimately return to the temporal reality that undercuts our "mythic projection of that sacramental moment of aesthetic experience" (*TC*, p. 209). Poems, as Krieger reminds us, "do not literally achieve self-enclosed perfection": the language of poetry "is not in truth discontinuous with discourse at large." And in the struggle between spatiality and temporality, between the synchronic and the diachronic principles, the diachronic, he says, "never loses" (*TC*, p. 189) in the end.

And yet to say that time never loses, as Krieger does, is not at all the same as saying that time always wins. Krieger characteristically formulates the relationship between presence and absence in such a way that neither term is allowed to dominate the other; neither is allowed to become a final resting place. Notice, for example, the way the following passage from *Theory of Criticism* enacts the paradoxes of Krieger's conception, asserting simultaneously that the miracle of poetry is believable and unbelievable, a dream and a substantial reality. The poet, Krieger says, performs verbal miracles. But words finally are only words, "so that breath drifts off into air and can have no substance. Verbal miracles dissolve into the illusions in which we can believe only by knowing of their impossibility. But the aesthetic dream of body provides the substance on which human culture as the communal dream depends. It is the dream made into our substance that provides where we live, though it is the reality as an alien substance that kills us" (*TC*,

[1]*Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 207; hereafter abbreviated as *TC* and cited in parentheses in the text.

p. 206).

For Krieger, as this last passage suggests, the "aesthetic dream" is more than illusory because it provides the substance of the world in which we live. And yet beyond the world of forms, beyond the realm of language, is another reality, an alien realm that Krieger has invoked under various names throughout his career. An existential realm of "brawling chaos," as he often refers to it, this messy world of particulars is from one point of view the realm of vitality as opposed to the clean sterility of art. But in Krieger's writing the opposite of art is not usually life but the blank void of "fact" that is sometimes explicitly associated with death. "Art does not undo fact," Krieger remarks in a representative passage, "least of all the fact of death, so that the human mastery art embodies is provisional only. But, though externality and determinateness remain, beyond the myth of a total language and unabsorbable by it, the mastery of the word helps man create for himself where he lives, and for his fellows where they live after he dies" (*TC*, p. 173). Spatiality versus temporality, closure versus openness, form versus formlessness, life versus death — here, then, is still another version of the struggle between presence and absence as it constructs itself in Krieger's imagination. But now the struggle has become an explicitly moral one, a transformation that perhaps helps to explain the sense of urgency with which he has been drawn to the subject of poetic presence in his recent work.

Krieger's language in the passage that I quoted earlier about faith in verbal miracles is characteristically religious. Krieger frequently speaks of the "sacredness" of the poetic construct in which the word magically becomes flesh. We can note, too, that his conception of the "aesthetic dream" upon which the larger "communal dream" of human culture depends is a form of the traditional religious topos of life as a dream, an insubstantial pageant that must dissolve and fade, leaving, as Prospero says, not a rack behind. For Prospero, as for Shakespeare, the dissolution of the dream reveals the transcendent spiritual substance of God. For Krieger, however, the Manichaean face of reality lying behind the veil of human forms contains, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, neither certitude nor peace nor help for pain. Like Arnold's, Krieger's is an imaginative world presided over by the disappearance of God, a phrase he often invokes. Or perhaps it may be more accurate to say that it is an imaginative world presided over by a nostalgia for the God that has departed — a nostalgia, that is to say, for some final and absolute authority.

Much of Krieger's writing can, I think, be in-terpreted as a quest for such an authority. Sometimes the existential realm, the pre-linguistic world of inarticulate particularlity, seems to function as a kind of guaranteeing authority, a test for human forms. At other times, it is man the creator of forms — another and competing version of the divine — that seems to occupy the central position in his system. The impulse to discover an adequate authority manifests itself in Krieger's concern in *Theory of Criticism* with the illustrious tradition of theorizing from Aristotle to Burckhardt that he sees as substantiating his own discourse. And obviously it informs his treatment of the miraculous incarnation of the word that results for him in the real and sacramental presence of the poem for its reader. At once subject to time and superior to time, simultaneously closed off from the world and open to it, the poem is for Krieger a special and absolutely authoritative form of discourse, one that underwrites, so to speak, all of human culture. And yet even as he asserts the idea of an authoritative presence, Krieger acknowledges that any notion of presence is merely a myth, "air after all and not body" (*TC*, p. 230). There is, as I have suggested, no final resting place in Krieger's system. The quest for authority is an endless pursuit in which the holy chalice is forever gleaming in the distance only to vanish into thin air when approached more closely.

In the final chapter of *Theory of Criticism* Krieger places himself in relation to Derrida and the post-structuralists. Arguing that in his form of presence there is absence and that in Derrida's absence there is presence, Krieger suggests that he and Derrida "represent, respectively, the positive and the negative of a photograph, both seeming to have the same reality (or unreality) but with reverse emphases, the lights of one being the darks of the other" (*TC*, p. 230). Krieger's metaphor seems to me appropriate, for his project and Derrida's are indeed antithetical. The Derridean drama is the enactment of dissolutions, the dispersal of anything that might prove a barrier to the infinities of discourse. The Kriegerean drama, on the other hand, is the repeated construction of conceptual enclosures, dwelling places for the human spirit, that once inhabited turn out to require reconstruction on a larger and more ample scale.

Largeness or amplitude or myriad-mindedness are important values for Krieger, who speaks feelingly of, for instance, Shakespeare's "capacious verbal center"[2] and Samuel Johnson's "rich, many-directed mind."[3] At one point, almost in passing, he defines "the proper end of the contemplative life" as the pursuit of "the ultimate catholicity of

Vincent B. Leitch

SAVING POETRY: MURRAY KRIEGER'S FAITH IN FORMALISM

If we share Arnold's loss of faith, we can go either of two ways: we can view poetry as a human triumph made out of darkness, as the creation of verbal meaning in a blank universe to serve as a visionary substitute for a defunct religion; or we can — in our negation — extend our faithlessness, the blankness of our universe, to our poetry. If we choose the latter alternative, then we tend . . . to reject the first, affirmative humanistic claim about poetry's unique power, seeing it as a mystification arising from our nostalgia and our metaphysical deprivation.

Stubbornly humanistic as I am, I must choose that first alternative: I want to remain responsive to the promise of the filled and centered word, a signifier replete with an inseparable signified which it has created within itself. But I am aware also that my demythologizing habit, as modern man, must make me wary of the grounds on which I dare claim verbal presence and fullness.[1]

Writing at the close of the 1970s, Murray Krieger feels caught between two sombre alternatives. Historically speaking, the moment of choice, the unfortunate onset, dates from Matthew Arnold's crisis of faith. The Arnoldian choice, now a century old, still remains a question of faith. In a sense, Krieger's own position, his course of action, hinges on faith. He believes.

The Truth of Poetry and the Heresy of Deconstruction

Murray Krieger believes that poetry is a "human triumph," a "creation of verbal meaning," a "visionary substitute for a defunct religion," a "unique power," a "filled and centered word," a "signifier replete with an inseparable signified," a "verbal presence and fullness." This theory of literature is, as Krieger tells us, "stubbornly

humanistic" and "affirmative." It comes into being against a grim cultural background where the universe is blank, religion is defunct, metaphysics is insubstantial and every belief undergoes demythologization. In such a world, affirmation requires wariness and daring. Thus Krieger's words "I want to remain responsive to the promise" exhibit a poised, characteristic care mixed with faith, while his statement "I must choose" accepts the necessity of boldness as it asserts his belief in poetry's visionary power and meaning — poetry's "verbal presence and fullness."

The alternative to Krieger's choice is to extend faithlessness and blankness, to negate poetry and cast it as mystification and nostalgia. This second way separates the signifier from the signified, renounces the belief in poetry as triumph, unique power and vision, decenters the filled and centered word, and demystifies meaning and presence. This other road is, of course, the heretical path of deconstruction — the way of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, of Roland Barthes and Harold Bloom, of J. Hillis Miller and Joseph Riddel. Krieger stages his project, from the mid 1970s onward, in opposition to deconstruction; his work emerges as an alternative to the negation and blankness of Derrideanism, a way out of the passing of humanism.[2]

On Tradition, Formalism and Faith

Krieger labels himself a *humanist*, that is, he self-consciously conceives his work as an extension and preservation of the Western cultural tradition. He also calls himself an *existentialist*, which shows up in his awareness of and anxiety about the death of god, in his perception of the nothingless and blankness of existence, and in his consciousness of death as a non-linguistic fact (p.208). And Murray Krieger presents himself as a *formalist* — an heir and revisionist of American New Criticism, a believer in the unique and superior power of poetic language and in the separate and distinctive status

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[1]Murray Krieger, *Poetic Presence and Illusion: Essays in Critical History and Theory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), p. 173. Hereafter referred to by page number in text. (This volume collects seventeen essays published between 1968 and 1979.)

[2]Krieger's first full consideration of deconstruction occurs in his *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), esp. pt. 3. See my review in *Clio I,* 7 (Summer 1978), pp. 463-66.

of the literary artifact. Against the dark backdrop of existential reality the great works of Western literature come forth as luminous and visionary creations of verbal meaning, as miraculous and centered signs, offering the fullness and presence of the word.

To keep his formalism dynamic and viable Krieger constantly refines his theory of literature. In particular, he regularly takes up deconstruction, working to introject and modify its "wisdom" for his own project. In this regard, Krieger represents an important phenomenon, for he is the only well-known American formalist to confront and absorb massively and implacably the post-structuralist challenge. This confrontation aims not at undermining Derrideanism, but rather at preserving formalism. Few, if any, current American theorists demonstrate anything comparable to Krieger's sophisticated and wily formalist poetics.

Responding to an essay that champions the Yale school of deconstructive critics, Krieger asserts about the current status of poetry:

If belief in the poet's power to find embodiment in the word is a myth, it has been, for the critical tradition in the West from its beginnings, the necessary fiction that has permitted more than two millennia of our greatest poems to speak to us. Few critical schools in our history have done more than the New Critics did to give them voice. Thanks in large part to these critics — but before them as well — the poems have been *there*, speaking as they do, as if there is a presence in them. They make their own case for presence, and it is out of no mere nostalgia that we continue to value it in them. For presence is present tense, and while we live we must not allow ourselves to be reasoned out of it.

(p. 112)

As he praises the New Critics, Krieger links them with the Western critical tradition. Formalist and humanist, he insists on the need to preserve our greatest poems and to continue our ancient traditions. He urges us "while we live" to oppose the end of humanism and the desacralization of great literature. The odd phrase "while we live" brings death into the argument, reminding us of Krieger's characteristic existential anxiety. When we are warned "we must not allow ourselves to be reasoned out of it," we understand that faith as

much as reason motivates Krieger's position. Krieger is a believer.

Murray Krieger believes that the poet possesses the power to discover "embodiment in the word," that great poems "speak to us," that formalist criticism allows poems to have such "voice," that poems are *"there,"* that they "speak" and have "presence in them." Krieger's conception of literature here depends on the linkage of voice and presence. The "verbal presence and fullness" of poetry oppose the absence and emptiness of *écriture* — of the isolated, written signifiers declaimed by the deconstructors.

Fictions and Figures

Krieger's formulations about *poetic presence* are more subtle than we have so far allowed. For he everywhere carefully modifies his assertions. He accepts that traditional belief in presence may be a "myth." He concedes that "verbal presence" holds the status of "as if." He tags his incarnational poetics a "necessary fiction" — a belief system that *"permits"* poetry to "speak." Noticeably, Krieger favors "if" (as in our two citations thus far). Still, he insists that poems "make their own case for presence" — that the poetic signifier is "replete with an inseparable signified which it has created *within itself*" (my italics).

We become curious and wonder how a poem makes its own case for presence. Surely, the language of the reader, the (meta)language of the critic, produces the effect of presence. In its simplest state, the poem seems merely ink marks within margins upon mute pages. When we activate those signs (assuming they are in a recognizable code), we set going a network of linguistic allusions, references and connections, which make our reading a cultural-personal activity. In effect, we realize the text as the creation of a reader situated within a linguistic-historical matrix of numerous and conflicting layers of signification. In its writing and in its reading, the text is an intertextual production. With connections to the poet, the reader and various historical-semiotic frames — with links to a stratified psychology and sociology of writing and reading — poems could hardly be said to "make their own case for presence." We cannot conceive poetry as "a signifier replete with an inseparable signified which it has created within itself." The "within itself," a formalist way of writing, is a figure, a rhetorical trick. Installing this "signifier replete with an inseparable signified," Krieger sup-

presses the *difference* between signifier and signified. Ultimately, he seeks to avoid the absence of the signified from the signifier; he wants to delimit any sliding of the one from the other; thus he turns away from the very possibility of language, which, as Saussure demonstrates, depends precisely on the *difference* between signifiers and signifieds. Trying to save literature, Krieger abandons language.

Of course, Krieger knows all this, but he still reserves for poetry the sacred power to create full presence. Poetry, unlike other language, is special. This formalist notion, as Krieger knows, is an illusion. Poetic presence is an illusion, a necessary fiction, an eucharistic myth for an era of demystification.

Only through tropes and figures, employed consciously and systematically, is Krieger enabled to construct his belief and justify his faith. About one rhetorical device, in particular, he is direct and informative: "So there are several major paradoxes which I find our literary experiences to suggest — paradoxes in which I can see neither side yielding" (p. 204). For example, the poem for Krieger is through *paradox* both a reader's experience *and* an aesthetic object; both a continuous part of all discourse *and* a discontinuous, separate micro-language; both a closed, totalized autonomous realm *and* an open network of linguistic elements; both, as Krieger puts it, "the verbal miracle of metaphorical indentity *and* the awareness that the miracle depends on our sense of its impossibility, leading to our knowledge that it's only our *illusion* . . . . We both learn to see *and* distrust our seeing, as we view poetic language both as breaking itself off from the normal flow of discourse to become a privileged object, worthy of idolatry, *and* as language self-deconstructed and leveled, joining the march of common *écriture*" (pp. 204-05). The formalist side of this tropological systematic stages literature, at one moment or another, as object, vision, miracle, identity and metaphor — all meriting idolatry. The "deconstructive" systematic casts literature as impossible miracle, self-created illusion, untrustworthy vision, leveled language and common writing. Krieger has it both ways, though he prefers and continuously champions the sacred poetics of formalism, reserving for the "deconstructive" formulation patches of reluctant admiration tempered by painstaking analysis and strategic incorporation. He wants to press the two sides of his tangled, "impossible" paradox together, but his faith insists on hierarchy — on higher and lower or, at least, on better and worse alternatives. He prefers the miraculous over the heretical. *Poetry*

is metaphor. (And illusion.)

Strategy in the Service of Saving Poetry

Rather like a theologian trying to explain and justify the Incarnation, Krieger burnishes his expositions with paradoxes wound around a founding metaphor. Just as the theologian's god is in the man, so Krieger's poetic signified is in the signifier. Thus miraculous and material realms meet in a figure. Trying to set the fracture of the sign, the *difference* between the signifier and signified, Krieger does not, like the monk, abandon or renounce language; rather he accelerates its figural powers, producing chains of tropes to minister to a fundamental metaphor (the poem as *identity*). Unlike the older American formalists, Krieger celebrates ambiguity, tension, irony and particularly paradox not only in individual poems, but in his overall theory of poetry and in his own work of critical discourse. In its most intense moments, Krieger's criticism is "poetic" and his commentary is "literary": his strongest language is finely figured. A bit like Rome's Tridentine liturgies, his most ornate texts seek to instill faith in an age of reformation and disbelief. In heeding reformers, Krieger ends up compromised — something of an "Anglican" amid a rabble of fundamentalists and other insistent radicals. His seems an "Elizabethan solution" manifested picturesquely in a baroque style studded with strained conceits designed to unify a cracking sensibility. More like a Donne than a Hooker, Krieger sees that all is in doubt. He fashions a particular and special faith in paradox to withstand the splittings of the era of *difference.*

Murray Krieger neither deplores nor rejects deconstruction. He incorporates and contains its "truth." This seems less a neutralization than an appropriation. On occasion he discusses his overall strategy, as when he candidly observes:

> . . . more than most theorists, I have worked in accordance with what counter-positions (to mine) in the history of theory and in the work of my contemporaries have forced me to take account of, but *to co-opt them, to incorporate them* without undoing my own construct, (if I may be dangerously candid) to see how much of them I could swallow without giving myself indigestion.
>
> (p. 202; my italics)

An important purpose of the strategy, we surmise, is to satisfy a pressing need for security and self-

protection. Overcoming the "other" establishes invulnerability. To counter the "counterpositions," "forced" upon him, Krieger must "swallow," must "co-opt" and "incorporate," his forebears as well as his contemporaries. Below the surface lies a strong desire to create a durable monument, to build a solid edifice or "construct" — which drives Krieger to consume and absorb a host of "positions" that threaten his "undoing." As a theorist, Krieger is motivated by the desire to erect a master theory safe from the substance and potency of his rivals. There is an inevitable connection between saving poetry and salvaging the formalist system. When Krieger puts his own self-interest and desire in parentheses, as he does twice here, he casts graphic lines of protection around himself, which he seeks also to set around his theory. In effect he wants to repress or bury his own longing and to work as a pure disinterested intellect. The bind he gets into, a priestly fix requiring humble self-sacrifice and heroic self-assertion, makes him a stoical figure, a conservative man of faith who worries the hedonism of his times while proselytizing the profits and the pleasures of an old faith.

The paradoxes of Krieger's position assert themselves almost continuously in his recent theoretical discourse. Not surprisingly, paradox emerges as his distinguishing stylistic trait and his main speculative instrument. About this figure Krieger observes: "Paradox may well be less acceptable in critical discourse than it is in poetry, but in my defense I can say only that I can do no better and can do no less if I am to do justice to what I find our literature requiring of its critic" (p. 203). Though normally limited to poetic discourse, paradox is here allowed to migrate to the critical text. An account of literature demands a literary treatment. Paradox produces paradox. One text touches another. The borderline between poem and critical work is transgressed. To "defend" this not quite "acceptable" procedure, Krieger invokes "justice." He is "required," as a faithful servant of "literature," to borrow the resources of literature. Here we isolate and focus on the work of paradox because it is the master trope that powers Krieger's theory, style and strategy. The general structure of paradox — of systematic contradiction — underlies his poetics and hermeneutics, serving to found and secure an ambitious theoretical enterprise.

Although he is wary of the grounds on which he dares to claim verbal presence and fullness for poetry, Murray Krieger does forcefully issue this claim. He tempers his fervor and faith by proclaiming his truths to be illusions and fictions. He insists on the necessity of paradoxes and on their strategic value in our present situation. His fictions, figures, illusions and paradoxes are all marshalled and deployed to save poetry — to keep the play of the signifier in check and to insure the fullness and presence of the word.

Articles of Faith

Heir to the Arnoldian legacy and faced with the challenge of contemporary deconstruction, Krieger, as humanist, constructs a complex theory of literature and criticism out of the rich materials provided by the Western tradition from the Greeks to the present time. Few leading American theorists have been as widely learned and eclectic as Krieger, and only a handful have been so single-minded and thorough in building a rich and coherent system. However, no American, as far as I know, has deliberately based an entire theory on a foundation of contradictions turned into a systematics.

Though eclectic, Krieger is not finally interested in grand synthesis. He seeks rather to establish a multifaceted *formalism*. Counterpositions are absorbed as much as possible but short of undoing the work of coherent system-building.[3] While Krieger permits and favors all manner of tension and paradox, he does express preferences for certain contending elements within his system. That poets can create filled and centered words is more important and valuable, even as an illusion, than that their words can be empty and nostalgic mystifications. For Krieger the idea that the poetic word is actually both full and empty turns out, ultimately, to be less important as an issue of truth and more revealing as a matter of faith. In other words, the truth of the paradox "empty-full" is superseded by the preferences of a faith: the fullness of the word is a stunning miracle worth proclaiming, whereas its emptiness is a dreary reality to account for. While the paradoxical truth is admitted rigorously, the faith in fullness is proclaimed sometimes lyrically. Thus the assessment of Krieger's poetics forces us beyond questions of truth to analyses of tones. The question — "what does Krieger believe?"

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[3]In his study of Krieger's criticism, Frank Lentricchia argues that Krieger, in fact, fails to incorporate deconstruction and thus finds himself engulfed — "his career-long tactic of swallowing his opposition fails him, and he is swallowed up by the theoreticians of deliberate triviality." — *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 242. See also Grant Webster, "Murray Krieger: The Unrevolutionized Critic," *The Republic of Letters: A History of Postwar American Literary Opinion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 190-202.

— becomes "what does this man of faith value most?" and not "what is true for this theorist?" To seek the truth is to collect paradoxes. To inquiry after values is to uncover motivating articles of faith.

For Krieger the poem remains the origin and center of critical activity. Though traditionally a secondary art, criticism in our time threatens to substitute its own text for the central poetic work, but such centrifugal "play," such "criticism," must not re-place the poem.[4] The language of literature, superior to critical discourse, should at least moderate the presumption and arrogance of our critical will-to-power over poems. In the role of moralist, Krieger pleads with us to remain servants of the text. The tone grows more urgent in recent works.

Krieger believes that a literary work shapes and orders experience. As such, the work is an artifact or special object possessing potent forms of aesthetic closure. These distinctive features elevate the poem, giving it a place different from and above other types of discourse. With its fundamental and characteristic drive toward closure, the work exhibits an internal purposiveness and coherence, both separating it in kind from ordinary language and justifying its status as sacred object. Despite its connections with an author, a group of readers, a cultural tradition and a historical language, the poem maintains its essential integrity, refusing to dissolve or erode under any such extrinsic and fragmenting force or entity.[5]

The contemporary assaults on formalist articles of faith by reader-response criticism, Marxist hermeneutics, semiotics and particularly deconstruction threaten, but do not ruin, the inherent integrity of the sacred literary artifact. Thus the idolatry of art, a long-standing feature of Western formalism, lives on for Krieger, who, in spite of and by virtue of his compromises and concessions, his paradoxes and illusions, remains steadfastly committed to the old faith. Krieger is a believer — first and last. Ultimately, his faith has little to do with "truth"; he implicitly confers on it the status of "necessary fiction." This modernist strategy aims to counter the undoings and deconstructions of the postmodern era.

The Brotherhood and Critical Reading

Implicit in Krieger's system is a pattern of cultural and social ideas that now and then come into view. The poem is an elite object fit for a few. The role of the critic is to read, explain and evaluate such works for the culture. The brotherhood of critics, sharing a similar high regard for the stability and integrity of each text, settles disputes by reference to the work. In this way the great tradition undergoes constant sifting and preservation in the present for the future. Only through restraint can the brotherhood persist and high culture continue.

Sensing that this hierophantic economy is coming undone, Krieger in recent books and articles tends toward measured urgency and zeal in keeping with his overall stoicism and sense of existential loss as well as with his commitment to the great tradition and his faith in formalist poetics. Since catastrophe seems imminent, warning and persuasion are called for. Answering the call, Krieger accepts with some reluctance the role of moralist and doomsayer. He joins a whole community composed of distinguished elder statesmen of American literary criticism, but, unlike his brothers, often nay-sayers given to blanket condemnations, he works toward absorption and incorporation of the threat. In this endeavor, he broadens and enriches his own system while remaining faithful to the tradition. An obvious and unavoidable irony of this situation is that Krieger rises to the upper ranks of the brotherhood: there is high profit in incorporating contemporary philosophies of loss.

With Krieger the critical reading of literary texts is a controlled practice dependent on a set of articles of faith. When Krieger reads, he "finds" internal purposiveness and cohesion — closure and form. As artifact, the poem appears unique and miraculous, a human triumph. The fullness of the poetic word, its presence, elevates it to a special and sacred place. The reader becomes a worshipper. In our godless age, the text serves as a substitute for religious experience. Poetic language embodies the richness and promise of man's most noble and holy self. The centered word speaks to us. This entire systematic, a poetic-hermeneutic machine, which can produce a certain kind of subtle and scrupulous reading, depends on a complex and uniform dogmatics of formalism, as we have seen. Krieger, we know, is a believer. While he willingly calls his articles of faith necessary fictions and illusions, he avoids conferring upon his actual readings any such dubious status. His readings retain an innocence.

Krieger, following Harold Bloom, admits that

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[4]Murray Krieger, *Arts on the Level: The Fall of the Elite Object* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1981), pp. 27-48. For a compact version of this article of faith about the "proper place" of criticism, see Krieger's "Criticism as a Secondary Art," *What is Criticism?*, ed. Paul Hernadi (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 280-95.

[5]*Arts on the Level: The Fall of the Elite Object*, pp. 51-71.

critics misread poems on account of their strong self-interest and their inherent will-to-power over texts. Although he accepts the psychology of misreading, he discounts its linguistics. The frail signifier, as differential element, figural substitute and intertextual nexus, disappears under a weighty incarnational poetics of voice and a ministerial practice of formalist interpretation. Not surprisingly, Krieger's readings by contemporary standards seem relatively blithe and untroubled, neat and symmetrical. In his treatment, poetic texts do not disseminate — unless a critic foregoes restraint and indulges himself. In such a case, human willfulness triumphs — not language as such.

The signifier as linguistic moll and vagrant does not appear for Krieger; it is shy of an ethics of heroic will and wary of a faith in the sacred presence of the poetic voice. Seeking to save the richness of the poetic word, Krieger often ends up reducing it to a linguistic simple — an undifferentiated and eternal here and now, available for use. Yet the signifier shamelessly shows its stuff in Krieger's own writing as paradoxes go down on metaphors and signifieds slide away in intense moments of slippage. As a theorist and a reader, Krieger appears a most faithful believer in traditional poetics. But as a writer, he emerges as perhaps the most unfaithful member yet of the brotherhood of American formalists. ☐

Murray Krieger

BOTH SIDES NOW

However we address "the question of presence" today, there is at least no question about my own presence on this occasion. Indeed, in view of the position I maintain in contemporary theory, it would be inconsistent for me not to present myself, instead of remaining absent, only a ghostly trace inadequately made present (re-presented) in the words we have heard. So here I am, however inadequate myself, but a transcendental signified nonetheless — except that, of course, it is not I but my critical works, my inscribed words, that are at issue; and we know these days that signifieds can consist only of other words and not extra-verbal beings. Still, here I am.[1]

I now understand, from the inside and deep down, Northrop Frye's opening words of lamentation, years ago, when responding to a group of essays I organized about him for the English Institute: "Reading critiques of oneself is normally a distressing pastime, ranking even below the rereading of one's own works." This is true for me now, despite the narcissism induced by the occasion and my feeling flattered by the attention being given my work — so flattered that I'll try to resist whatever crankiness is induced by the distress Frye spoke of, and not spend this small time with specific complaints or happier reactions to the commentaries we have just heard.

I will content myself with saying what is to be expected: that I prefer Mark Rose's representation of my position to Vincent Leitch's. . . if I were to say Leitch's misrepresentation, how could he — with his deconstructionist view of language — distinguish representation from misrepresentation and claim that his is the one rather than the other? But let be. I was saying that I prefer Rose's version of Krieger over Leitch's because Leitch is less ready to see the continuing doubleness of my claim for an illusionary presence than is Rose, who — I think accurately — suggests that I formulate "the relationship between presence and absence in such a way that neither term is allowed to dominate the other; neither is allowed to become a final resting place." Leitch rather insists that I am less evenhanded, that — while I acknowledge the illusionary, "as if" character of poetic presence — I privilege that presence and only grudgingly concede the negative reality that stands outside its pretensions and undercuts them. So, unlike Rose, who emphasizes an unyielding system of polar tension in my work, Leitch sees only my one-sided fidelity to a hidden god masquerading as a Manicheism in order to protect itself from the deconstructionist's attack. He sees me fostering one side, secretly suppressing the other, while claiming an unstable duplicity (which seems to have persuaded at least Rose of its authenticity). But I would join Rose in insisting that it is, for me, not a matter of compromise between presence and absence, in which I urge one while being forced to permit the negative participation of the other. It is, rather, a sustained tensional polarity: both sides, each defined by the other, always paradoxically there, at once sustaining and negating one another.

That brings me, by way of answer, to the plea of my title today, "Both Sides Now," as I turn from this brief general response to these two commentaries on my work to make my own statement in their wake.

So, coming out of that plea for readers to resist identifying me with the ontology of a verbal presence uncritically proclaimed by the New Criticism — the plea to retain my claim for a doubleness without "resting place" — let me begin again: "Both Sides Now." This time my text is the dissemination of another text: my title is taken from the title of a popular song of a number of years ago by the singer-composer Joni Mitchell. With your indulgence I recall the opening lines to reinforce my borrowing:

> Rows and flows of angel hair
> And ice cream castles in the air
> And feather canyons everywhere
> I've looked at clouds that way.

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[1] Even as I originally wrote these opening words for my oral performance upon the occasion of the MLA meeting, I anticipated how they would mock me when I read them (as you are now) as already written some time ago. For that very moment, during which, when speaking them myself, I was asserting my presence in them, is now well past, with only their ghostly reminder of their now absent author and his belated occasion left to contradict this cocky assertion of his presence. What more impressive testimony could I muster of the illusionary nature of the assurances given us by *parole* as it fades into *ecriture*? But illusion, after all, is what my poetics is all about.

But now they only block the sun
They rain and snow on everyone
So many things I would have done
But clouds got in my way.

I've looked at clouds from both sides now
From up and down, and still somehow
It's cloud illusions I recall.
I really don't know clouds . . . at all.

What seems to be a choice between the airy freedom of metaphor and the inescapable blockage of earthy reality turns out to be only a choice between two ways of seeing, two illusions, with reality something other than her language can say or she can know.

In my work I have persistently emphasized both sides now, and both at once — both now — as I have pressed my own notion of illusion. The notion is perhaps best represented in the emblem, with its companion riddle, created by Joan Krieger for my recent book, *Poetic Presence and Illusion.*

This creature fabricated
multiplies itself, but moves not;
sees itself, or sees not;
exists twice, and is not.

— *Joan Krieger*

In it two identical and opposed mythical creatures, in multiple images, are invariably twinned in their mutual relations: they look, open-eyed, at one another or are turned, eyes closed, away; and they are together too in sharing the blackness of type or the black-enclosed outlines of blank space. In this book I seek to tie this twinned mutuality to the behavior of the participants in the Prisoner's Dilemma game traced in its infinite variations by contemporary social scientists. In the game model, each of two partners in crime, being interrogated separately, is dependent on — but cut off from — the other's testimony. Each must decide either to cooperate with the police by turning against the other out of fear of the other's confession or to remain a faithful confederate in hopes that his partner re-

mains equally true to him. So the choice between plea-bargaining or holding out with a claim of innocence is tied to the interpretation by either of the partner's likely choice, which is similarly dependent on a reading of *his*. Each of the partners, then, must define himself through his speculative interpretation of the other as he moves through a process of at once differentiating his own interest and being forced to identify it with the other's interest. He is both a separate individual and a twin, one that can serve his individuality only by discovering another's precisely like his own. His sense of himself as real is riveted to his illusionary sense of the other, and yet he is aware that in the companion interrogation cell it is all being reversed, that the other turns his back to convert the first criminal into a similar illusion that confounds separateness and identity. Like the creatures in the above emblem which I described earlier, they see each other, or see not. Or should I view them as a single, divided creature rather than as two, doubly bound creatures and say (as the accompanying riddle does) that *it* "sees itself, or sees not"? This is just the archetypal duplicity long recorded about what it is to be identical twins, born of one egg. So, projected out of this model, presence can be defined only by its illusionary double, by its own vision of its illusionary other, at once absorbed into the self and rejected as an other.

For the prisoner trapped in his dilemma, in the silence of his isolated cell confronting himself and his mate (confronting himself *as* his mate), the question of which is the signifier and which the signified in his interpretive problem is one that shifts on him as he ponders it. I press this semiotic doubleness or controlled instability to characterize the relation between the two elements of poetic metaphor, conceived in the broadest sense; or, indeed, to characterize the relation between presence and illusion themselves, which I find similarly twinned. As with the prisoners, or the creatures in the emblem, the signifier and signified — like the tenor and vehicle in metaphor — *both* look at each other in mutual mimesis, and turn away in separateness — though in this act too they remain twinned and mimetic.

But I do not believe that the apparent paradox of presence and illusion, as it arises out of the way in which poems have functioned within our cultural tradition, is as difficult or obscure or irrational as Vincent Leitch suggests. As we examine the complex of our responses to the literary fiction, we find in it, I suggest, just such an apparently contradictory combination of presence and the awareness of illusionary emptiness or unsubstantiality, of identity and distinctness, of self-enclosure and openness. Further, I suggest that we are less than satisfied

when we do not find it. Far from rare or obscure, it is a rather commonplace reponse. It is what happens when, as an audience, we must come to terms with the actors and their actions on the stage — or are they to be viewed as dramatic characters? or as lifelike (if not real) people and happenings being "imitated"? Our concern with their fate as if it was real, together with our role in constituting the illusion that helps it keep its distance from us, creates the strangely duplicitous terms for our aesthetic contemplation. Given our complicity, once we are in the theater, with dramatic illusion, surely the "reality" we bestow upon them is of a radically paradoxical sort: the flesh-and-blood actor and the actual things we witness him doing, the character and his doings in the text which we say the actor represents (or counterfeits), and the supposedly substantial person and deed — in the world, shall we say?— which the text is presumably telling us *about*. The actor, live but make-believe, is related to the textual character, and the textual character related to the presumed lifelike person behind him, in a way that compounds realities and their illusionary would-be equivalents. In either case the first is to be taken as a representation of the second, as a signifier of a transcendental signified: we need this mythic assumption to allow the drama to do its work.

And how can we have any but an ambiguous ontological sense of what is enfolding before us? What is the reality of a King Lear, who suffers and dies every night (though perhaps played each time by the same actor) and yet is still there because his make-believe death is not as ours is to be, even though we must also think of his death as absolute (like ours) if we are to take the dramatic illusion seriously, as we do. We suffer for him while knowing our reality must not intrude upon his. These several simultaneous realities to which we respond, at once reflective of ours and somehow free of it, at once tied to the world and locked in a discontinuous realm of make-believe, obviously have paradoxical relations to one another. Yet our age-old habit of aesthetic attentiveness on such occasions has no difficulty sustaining the multiple and conflicting awarenesses, affirming the presence of what is before us without altogether succumbing to it, so that it is also affirming that presence only as illusion, which is to admit that it's not — in another sense — present at all.

There is, among these potential "realities" we sense, no firm ground on which to stand in order to privilege any one of them and from which to deny competing claims since, as in the Prisoner's Dilemma, all claims about relations between reality

and illusion can be reversed, and are reversed, as we oscillate between one perspective and its opposite, or somehow, paradoxically, manage to hold both at once. Drama, with its peculiar conjunctions of reality and make-believe, works to remind us of the unstable relation between presence and illusion in all signifier-signified relations — especially within the fictional realm. Drama also leaves us with thematic implications about the illusionary, role-playing nature (the "dramatistics") of all symbols of our presumed realities or, conversely, the apparently realistic consequences of our illusionary realms of make-believe. So, with each stage both affirming and denying its own "real" reality or having it denied by another stage, we move into the infinite regress of illusions within illusions, or presence within presence — as the distinction between presence and illusion blurs before us. And we can move out from drama to discover our similar responses to the other poetic genres, as we observe the power given words to close together *as if* holding a presence within them: indeed, we can observe this about words or any other formal element that is pressed into service as a medium of aesthetic presentation in the struggle to bring to presentation what otherwise seemed to function as no more than self-effacing materials of *re*presentation.

It is this tension of polarities that are overlapping or even interchanging which leads me to reject the charge that I privilege one side (the metaphorical) over the other, or that I accept the other, however unhappily, as unavoidable "reality"; which leads me, instead, to insist on "Both Sides Now" — always now. So I argue for an illusion of presence that, because it can refer — if to nothing else — to its own fictional status, can point to its own empty, insubstantial character — in short, to its character *as* illusion. This affirmation of a self-questioning presence can be similarly made on behalf of an identity (as opposed to difference) and a closure (as opposed to openness) that also question and undercut their own natures. It is self-reference which permits us to ascribe a self-conscious fictionality to the poem which can open us to that from which it may be seen as seeking to cut us off. It is the extra-systematic thrust that authorizes the system and yet denies it authority. The poem, as art — mere artifice — betrays, through self-reference, a consciousness about its fictional self that reminds us of the illusionary nature of the aesthetic "reality" which seeks to enclose us. By negative implication, this reminder implicity points to the world which the poem explicitly excludes in order to affirm its own closure. The world outside may be reduced to the stage in front of us, but so long

as we are aware that it is only the stage in front of us, that world outside threatens to break in. Thus the work of art, as its own metaphorical substitution for the world of experience beyond, is a metaphor that at once affirms its own integrity and yet, by negative implication, denies itself, secretly acknowledging that it is but an artful evasion of the world. This claim to duplicity permits the work to celebrate its own ways and the ways of its language unencumbered, using the negative residue of its language to point us to the language of the world it self-consciously evades.

Of course, both the affirmation of closure and the self-reference that leads us to find the opening in it are consequences of our habits of perception as readers trained in the Western literary canon. The poem is seen as a single entity created through the complicity of the reader who, sharing the author's habit of seeking closure, allows the work — even as he does his share in creating it — to lead him toward the act of sealing it off within the aesthetic or fictional frame that his perceptual training leads him to impose. The metaphorical habits he has learned — from childhood, from religion, from previous traffic with the arts — lead him to seek an eschatology, an end to history, in the work as he seeks in it to bring chronological time to a stop. Such has been the human use of myth — the quest for the myths we need — in the Western aesthetic since Aristotle formulated the distinction between history and poetry as each relates in its different way to time and to beginnings, middles, and ends. In thus emphasizing the poem as a will-o'-the-wisp, I have meant to reintroduce the temporal element, the element of process and of human experience, into our understanding of the literary work as it is created by the poet and created complicitously by us out of what he gives us. While we see the work as functioning within the metaphorical apocalypse we allow it to create for us, it remains also a piece of language running back into the past and forward into the future. And this is all it would be were it *not* for us as aesthetically conscious readers. In serving both sides, I must look for evidence of this self-conscious double awareness in the work as I come upon it and as I, in effect, ask it to function both ways.

On the one side, the pressure for closure is strong enough in the Western tradition. Our propensity to find closure may largely account for the role of the story — like that of the picture frame or the proscenium arch — in the history of our culture. The tendency of our narrative structures reveals a responsiveness to what Frank Kermode has called our "sense of an ending." The satisfying ending is one that fulfills internally aroused expectations, that realizes immanent purposes. From Aristotle's concept of denouement to the formal finality called for by Kant, and in the formalistic tradition that is indebted to both, we find the imposition of a mythic ending, a structural apocalypse, which cuts off fiction from empirical happenings. As we have seen, it acts, in effect, as an intrusion of the spatial imagination on the radical temporality of pure sequence, shaping time into the separateness of fiction. Linear sequence is suspended, transformed into circularity.

But there is something in literature that also keeps it open to the world, to language at large, and to the reader. As we contemplate the verbal object through our culturally imposed habits of perceiving what is presented to us as aesthetic, we must deal with the two-sided nature of its words, now that they have, in spite of their one-dimensional tendencies, been shaped into a poetic medium weighted with body: they try to work their way into a self-sufficient presence, and yet they remain transient and empty signifiers. This is the paradoxical nature of language as aesthetic medium, and both sides must be exploited. Language is able to create itself into a self-justified fiction, but, because it is also no more than language — just words after all — it is able to display a self-consciousness about its illusionary character. Language seems in our best poetry to be both full of itself and empty, both totally here as itself and pointing elsewhere, away from itself. It permits its reader at once to cherish its creation as a closed system, one that comes to terms with itself, and to recognize its necessarily incomplete nature in its dependence on us as its readers, on its literary precursors, on the general language system, and on the way of the world.

Not, I remind you, that I am claiming these special characteristics to be *in* literary works so much as they are products of our aesthetic habits of perception — when dealing with such works — which seek to find them there. And our aesthetic habit of dealing with fiction leads us to respond to its self-consciousness about the occasion that sponsors it. In other words, the literary work persuades us of itself as a special object even as we retain an awareness of the rather extraordinary activity we are performing in contributing to our own persuasion. It is not fetishism when we recognize the tentative conditions that encourage the closure we celebrate, and when we accept the openness that surrounds the moment of our commitment to the closed object — and, in effect, authenticates it.

But I do not suggest that through these workings the aesthetic becomes a game of now you see it, now

you don't. Rather I see the work as touching and unlocking in us the anthropological quest for that which marks and defines every moment of a culture's way of seeing, as well as its inner skepticism that undoes its visionary reality with a supposedly "real" reality which turns out to be no less illusionary. The making and unmaking of our metaphors, our mythic equations, in experience as in art only reveal the primacy of the operation of the aesthetic in us all — and perhaps explain the extent to which our drive for art is accompanied by a cognitive itch which even the experience of art itself never quite eases, so that the need to experience more art happily remains.

Since the ascendancy of Structuralism more than a decade ago, critics in this country have had to come to terms with the Saussurean notion of verbal signs as arbitrary and as based upon the principle of differentiation. Thus what used to seem to be the simple matter of representation in language — the presence of a fixed signified in the signifier — is converted into a problematic. Signifiers come to be seen as operating in a dynamic field of differentiation and have only arbitrary relations with their presumed signifieds. A culture's confidence in the ontology of verbal meanings, rather than its confrontation of their differentiation and arbitrariness, only testifies to its self-mystifications as it falls prey to the metaphysical habit of logocentrism. Its wistful imposition of identity, accompanied by the ontological claim of presence, upon relations between signifiers and signifieds, is now to be undone by a shrewder philosophy of language that reminds us of the field of absence upon which the system of differences plays. Hence we have the rejection of metaphor for metonymy.

I grant that the conception of metaphor, with its illusion of identity, may well be a secular conversion of the religious myth of transubstantiation, so that we may be quick to reduce it at once to nostalgic mystification. And we may then see it operating whenever we spatialize verbal relations in order to bring linguistic temporality to a stop in an attempt to redeem time. By confessing the illusionary nature of this metaphorical operation we help perform on ourselves, I am suggesting a sophisticated use of a language that knows of its metonymic condition and yet generates among its elements an internal play which appears to create a metaphorical identity existing in the teeth of the principle of difference. It is an identity that knows and has come through the world of difference, a metaphor that has known metonymy, a spatial vision that sustains itself only through the acknowledgment that all may finally be nothing but

time. If it functions as what I have elsewhere called a "miracle," it is because it proclaims itself as miracle only while acknowledging that it cannot occur. Yet the differential principle, in its eventual questioning of the representational character of words, reminds us that a world of language founded on difference is not a residual reality, but is only an alternative illusion, however *un*miraculous.

Nothing that deconstruction reveals about the mystifications that sponsor claims to verbal presence should distract us altogether from an interest in how poems have functioned and can function within their cultural tradition, whatever the motives buried in nostalgia or political power that we can find beneath that function. And the metaphorical visions enclosed in the poem open us to ways of cultural seeing that have their anthropological validity, whatever the language myths that guided them. So long as poems have served their culture as if they had an objective aesthetic character, their function must be accounted for, though we may find that, through self-reference, the best of them carry their own criticism of the mythic assumptions that sustain that function. The myth of presence, of transcendental signifieds immanent in words, that operates as an assumption in all a culture's language uses, is self-consciously indulged in poetry by a language freely allowed to go it on its own.

Mark Rose, subjecting my criticism to a perceptive narratological analysis, finds it to be a version of the quest romance.[2] In a recent essay I myself suggest a utopian dimension when I admit that the drive for aesthetic closure expresses the dream of a microcosm of satisfied ends. The dream of unity, of formal repetitions that are seen as the temporal equivalent of juxtapositions, that convert the temporal into the spatial through the miracle of simultaneity — this dream persists, reinforced by every aesthetic illusion which we help create and to which we succumb. We cultivate the mode of identity, the realm of metaphor, within an aesthetic frame that acknowledges its character as momentary construct and thereby its frailty as illusion. But it allows us a glimpse of our own capacity for vision before the bifurcations of language have struck. The

[2]I must seize this opportunity to remark, with special pleasure, Rose's perceptive observation about my use of "planet" rather than "sun" for the critic-satellite to revolve around. In searching my original composition notes, I find the word "sun" written but crossed out, and the word "planet" written over it and used. Next to it I find my scribbled comment to myself, "remember — this is no heliocentric theory!" So Rose's claim is utterly sensitive to my point. One cannot often expect so shrewdly sympathetic a commentator and must be grateful when he happens along.

dream of unity may be entertained tentatively and is hardly to be granted cognitive power, except for the secret life-without-language or life-before-language which it suggests, the very life which the language of difference precludes (as the poem-as-dream knows and shows us it knows). In poetry we grasp at the momentary possibility that this can be a life-*in*-language. This would be a utopia indeed, one well worth the quest.

Let me suggest that I pursue my quest on horse-back — in Tristram Shandy's sense, on "hobby-horseback." In Sterne's novel, which is a superb example of my theme of "Both Sides Now," it is each character's hobby-horse that carries him into his transformed realm, a private world of figuration which encloses his verbal reality, his hobby-horsical reality. The hobby-horse is just the creature to carry each of us off into these tropistic privacies. But in Sterne the hobby-horse is no less a horse than is an actual horse, whether Uncle Toby's or Trim's or Death's, which is treated just as metaphorically, as itself a hobby-horse. Again we have not an illusion set against reality, but competing varieties of illusion, of hobby-horses. Mine has been carrying me for more than a couple of decades now, growing — or aging — and with age spreading, though retaining a firm sense of its nature. It is a friendly creature, one, like Tristram's, which I cannot altogether forsake. Let me borrow Tristram's words:

> What a rate have I gone on at, curvetting and frisking it away, two up and two down for four volumes together [actually rather more], without looking once behind, or even on one side of me, to see whom I trod upon! — I'll tread upon no one, — quoth I to myself when I mounted — I'll take a good rattling gallop, but I'll not hurt the poorest jack-ass upon the road — So off I set — up one lane — down another, through this turn-pike — over that, as if the arch-jockey of jockeys had got behind me.
>
> (vol. 4, chap. 20)

After such a ride, shall I dismount? What other horse would you have me ride? For there's not a pedestrian among us. □

Wesley Morris

MURRAY KRIEGER: A DEPARTURE INTO DIACHRONY

*The existential realm is, from the standpoint of prop-
ositional structure, a raging chaos.*

*The veil that the practical will must place between us and
an infinitely varied mass of unique phenomena . . . turns
out to be another veil as well: the veil of universal
principles that our anti-existential need for moral order,
for sanity, must place between our judgment or decision
and the contradictory mass of raging and resistant
particulars that make up the raw edges of our moral
experience . . . . This is the veil . . . man in his social
dimension . . . must hold before his vision if he is to
permit himself to function, to believe in the legitimacy
of his functioning. He must stalwartly stare at the veil
and keep from looking beyond it — as if it constituted
reality, all of reality.*

*Poetry breaks through because it alone dares construct
itself in freedom from the equally false, equally
comforting, veils of the stock forms of language.*

*The critic must follow in a similar spirit, disdaining the
ideological adaptation, the propositional use of
poems . . . . A not-quite-poet who also has been given
the charter for the freedom of his imagination by the
poem, the critic . . . is never again the same . . . .*

(*The Play and Place of Criticism*, pp. 247-251)

Ibelieve we can find in these four passages the
central concerns of Murray Krieger's remarkably
productive career as a theorist. They are relatively
straightforward, although endlessly rewritten and
readapted to meet new challenges. As a con-
sequence, I find these basic concerns endlessly
suggestive.

From these four quotes, and with some antici-
pation of more recent versions, we can outline a
fundamental schema. 1) The ground of poetic ac-
tivity is the existential realm — a reality of chaotic
particularity similar to what Sartre termed *de trop.*
2) The milieu of poetic expression or performance
is the realm of social activity with its veils of ethical
and moral ideology. The suggestion is that this is
a world of bourgeois values and reductive logic, a
world of cultural bankruptcy. Because poetry is a
linguistic enterprise, this realm is what we today

call that of ordinary language, what the early
Krieger associated with prose or propositional ex-
pression and the more recent Krieger defines as a
langue seen as "generic expectations" or as a "system
of minimal cues to produce the stereotyped response
in us."[1] *Langue* thus becomes the structure of that
coherent reality that bourgeois society takes as
"given." 3) The poem is its own realm, an in-
violable, organic object in the early theory, a new
Word miraculously transubstantiated, incarnated
from old words, or more recently and less onto-
theologically, a *parole* which has violated its *langue*
to the extent that it "appears to have become its own
langue" or "*micro-langue.*"[2] 4) Lastly, and

[1]Murray Krieger, *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and its
System* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), p. 187.

[2]*Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and its System*, p. 188.

"secondarily," the act of the critic, which must keep its place without yielding the pleasure and freedom of its near-poetic play, touches the realms of poem and existential reality but also has its own special and indispensable commerce with the prosaic realm of propositional and philosophical expression.

It is this latter function that I wish to explore in this essay, for in it I find Krieger's most persistent struggle to break free from narrow formalism and articulate a powerful argument for the importance of poetry — or what we should call "the literary" — in contemporary society. Yet this is not to forget that these four realms are inextricably woven together, and that makes an approach to any one of them cumbersome and inevitably distorting.

And there are further complications to acknowledge before I begin. Krieger's strategy as a theorist has always been to confront and appropriate as many opposing theories as he could. The result is a constantly shifting terminology, or perhaps an expansive, parallel terminology, that betokens meaningful alterations in the basic schema. The schema is frequently rewritten; and while the significant relationships between the four realms remain consistent throughout, the theoretical implications shift with each successive version. Krieger's theory grows as he makes the critical tradition serve his goals. It is a monumental task (most fully illustrated in *Theory of Criticism* but operative from his earliest publications), and it makes difficult any assessment of his position. Not unlike T.S. Eliot, whose works are often vast composites of quotations and allusions, Krieger's assertions are couched in a closely reasoned and philosophically sophisticated rereading of the history of Western critical theory. By this I do not wish to be understood as arguing that Krieger's work is fragmented or discontinuous; it is, in fact, remarkably consistent, insistent on its origins being included in the most recent adaptation. This process of appropriation and rewriting seems to me to epitomize Krieger's idea of the critical function, and I wish to keep that focus before us even though we must begin far away from that issue, at the basic ground of his philosophy: existentialism.

I

Even at this familiar level the theory is problematical. In and of itself, Krieger's existentialism defines a vague anxiety focused on a terrifying reality characterized by contingency, by a chaos of particularity. It is not always clear whether this reality is merely the flow of raw sense data im-

pinging on the brain or a metaphysical locus of evil, although there is a way to settle this confusion — somewhat. One of Krieger's representations of the existential realm is borrowed from Nietzsche. Here the chaotic reality is equivalent to Nietzsche's subversive nightmare of Dionysian revels. But Nietzsche insists, and Krieger agrees, that this Dionysian principle is irrevocably bonded to its opposite, the Apollonian dream of harmony. Krieger adapts this paradoxical model of order-in-disorder to describe the function of the poem. This is not the same as the function of poetry, or of the poetic tradition; these latter are matters of the critical tradition, culture, and history. They are important concepts; nevertheless, Krieger here is bent on rewriting the old New Critical problematic of the form/content dichotomy. Every true poem is marked by the aesthetic harmony of Apollonian order but not at the expense of failing to reflect the Dionysian chaos of existential reality. This paradox is necessary if the poem is to manifest itself in society's propositional, ideological realm of moral and ethical judgments, within the sane reality of society's repressive structure, in ordinary language, and yet touch the deeply schismatic existential realm of raging chaos.

The importance of this paradox is that it allows the poem to function "critically."[3] This is a term that Krieger would not likely use in this context, but the issue is an important one. The poem is critical in two ways. First, in its Heideggerian instability, its waivering between life and death, being and nonbeing. Second, in a Kierkegaardian sense, in its social functioning as skeptical of moral universals, covert metaphysical assertions, or easy propositional truths.[4] In this way it destabilizes that reductive, static, bourgeois complacency that marks a culturally repressive social order. Although its medium is language, the poem is not, for Krieger, merely rhetorical. Its destabilizing function arises from its resistance to conceptualization. It offers itself as language, in language, masking as ordinary communication within the context of familiar meanings and values; but the harder we try to fix it according to one proposition or another, the more it slips away. Because it consists wholly of the language of the familiar, ethically stable world, this resistance is disturbingly subversive. The inevitable

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[3] I do not mean by this what Krieger usually terms the poem's "self-critical" structure, at least I do not intend only this. My point is not simply that the poem contains contradictions but that the contradictions are representations of social forces.

[4] Murray Krieger, *The Tragic Vision* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 11-12.

result is critical interpretation — after the fact — arising from our contemplation of the poem's paradoxical functioning and extending beyond the poem's immediate context into social meanings and values. The poem itself may make no statement, espouse no philosophy, yet it is the occasion for many philosophical statements.

The discussion has led us quickly toward the major issue of the critical tradition in Krieger, but what of the existential reality we began considering? It is still difficult to know what that is. One of Krieger's favorite expressions for it is the "Manichaean face" of reality. Thus what we perceive or experience is only a mask, and Manichaeanism is hardly a raging chaos. It is more nearly a psychical state of neutralization, the incessant counterpoise of antagonistic impulses. In this sense Krieger's poem is itself Manichaean, and the real reality behind the mask remains, in good Kantian fashion, unknowable. What is behind the Manichaean face, however, is important precisely because it is unknowable, meaningless, and I suspect that we should not even call it a raging chaos lest we step into the same trap that Robbe-Grillet snapped on Sartre for calling reality nauseatingly "absurd." "Chaos" and "absurd" are value-freighted, and in a bourgeois context function ideologically. "Chaos," for example, simply means the other, dark side of "proper" social order — the taboo, with all the suggestions of sin and punishment that accompany the thinking of the unthinkable.

Krieger's existentialism, a projection of a World War II *Weltanschauung*, argues that the poem in some sense imitates existential reality, but we must recognize that it is the poem's own Manichaean vision that establishes the mask that it is said to imitate. This circularity is not vicious; it merely argues that Krieger's existentialism is not a metaphysical assumption. The Manichaean face is always already within bourgeois society, and there is no simplistic nature/culture division proposed here. Beyond society with its veils and its subversive anti-veils is the world's body, implacably there.

I think the major objection to Krieger's theory today is that this existential vision is out of date. This is a historical judgment which need not result in a rejection of Krieger's general theoretical position but rather would seek to rewrite it. And it does not mean that we are today without anxiety — just that the Manichaean vision of disorder strikes a contemporary reader as abstract and perhaps too deeply a private vision. Our anxiety is global: the threat of nuclear holocaust. It may be only an appropriate terror as we approach a millennial transition, but it has concrete referents

and is prophetic of the extinction of humankind — ironically suicidal since the means of our disappearance from the universe is in the hands of our own ignorant armies.[5] It is a vision more terrifying and more incomprehensible than the remembered mad horrors of World War II. This fear is with us in our everyday lives, in the everpresent details of political gamesmanship contested on an international playing field.

What is most important here is that international politics, with its apocalyptic potential, is dispersed heterogeneously, situating diverse societies and special interest groups within any single social unit, whereas the existentialist vision is homologous, emphasizing an abstraction: the human condition. Existentialism, therefore, subsumes the pluralism, difference, heterogeneity of collective political interaction through a radical reduction of concerns to those of the individual (hence, representative) human in a struggle for personal authenticity.[6]

This is the struggle that Krieger's poem teaches us, and it can do so only by totally resisting commitment to political or collective action — sanctioning only a commitment to the abstract ideal of a recurrent assertion of individual freedom within an equally abstract vision of deadening, repressive bourgeois society.[7] We have grown suspicious of this private inner freedom, for it fails to address the concrete issues of outer, social life. Herbert Marcuse argued as far back as 1936 that when this ideal of inner freedom becomes the fixed center of an ideology "it is not difficult to accommodate the fact that the external sphere [is] primarily a realm of servitude and unfreedom, for this [does] not, after all, affect 'actual' [inner] freedom."[8]

Clearly Krieger has no such consequence in mind, but these questions arise more insistently now than

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[5]Krieger is aware of this new *Weltanschauung* calling it a "skeptical" "post-Romantic" vision that demands an "arrogant humanism." *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and its System,* p. 190.

[6]See Herbert Marcuse on "Sartre's Existentialism" in *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (trans.) Joris De Bres (London, NLB, 1972), particularly p. 188.

[7]I have used the phrase "bourgeois society" in this essay even though Krieger does not partly because I find it difficult to avoid reading Krieger's existentialism outside the context of Sartre's. Krieger here is talking about what we would call bad taste, but it is so generally distributed throughout society, as Krieger describes it, that a broader and more political term seemed called for. Krieger might resist politicizing his theory this way, but with due acknowledgement of this resistance, I am taking a different approach.

[8]*Studies in Critical Philosophy,* p. 128.

they did in the years immediately following World War II. So it is that Krieger's poem, subversive of those veils of cognitive distortion, contemptuous of the practical world of human functioning based on a too easy, familiar, propositional truth, "critical" as it is in its assertion of its own irreducible (almost unthinkable), impractical, non-propositional structure, can only help us understand ourselves in our world a little better; but its unrelenting Manichaean vision blocks all social/political action or commitment, for it equalizes, balances, flattens out ideological decision-making and judgment.

II

But should we ask the poem to function more immediately in the realm of political action? Is such functioning totally incompatible with Krieger's aims? Neither of these questions is easily answered, and I hope here merely to outline an approach to the basic issues involved. To do that I propose that we look at another phase of Krieger's theory, his appropriation of historicism. To this end let us again begin with quotations.

> There can be . . . no question about history getting into literature; it is the very stuff of literature which, after all, cannot be created *ex nihilo*. But this history that enters literature as its raw material is the living, felt, pulsing history of breathing men and not the static formulae of ideology.
>
> From the front end of history, our vantage point, the poet's activity may indeed look like the imitation of what has already been formulated elsewhere in culture; but to the extent that he has imitated truly existential and preconceptual forces, one cannot know what was being imitated until after the poet has made it perceptible — which is to say, after he has created it to show what it was he imitated.[9]

The admission of history to the formula for the poem's functioning in society can be seen as perfectly consistent with the existential theory outlined in section I. Nevertheless, the use of the term "history" is problematical, for there are two histories here just as there are two "realities" to

Krieger's existentialism. First, history is the "stuff" of the poem insofar as it is lived. Second, history is the "static formulae of ideology." The distinction is that of living beyond the veil in the Manichaean density of experience and living as functioning within the practical world of moral order and propositional truth. It is questionable whether or not "history" is the proper term for the former, but we can refer to it as existential history. Thus following the existentialist paradigm, existential history as imitated by the poem is a subversive anti-history within the realm of proper bourgeois social history.

What seems merely to be a principle of poetic anarchy here must be viewed in the larger context of Krieger's historicism — a "new historicism" as he designates it. This interlude in his theoretical career is rarely discussed by others, perhaps because the very idea of history has been so roundly attacked by the deconstructionists, but it is both interesting and important. It is, surprisingly, a step toward Krieger's later effort to appropriate Derrida, although in its earliest model, that taken from Eliseo Vivas, it represents, I think, a false step.

Krieger draws from the theories of Leo Spitzer, Eric Auerbach, and Sigurd Burckhardt to formulate his new historicism, yet it is Vivas' tripartite definition of the poem's "object" as "subsistent," "insistent," and "existent" that provides him with a foundation formula (p.59). Vivas claimed the poem could be said to have meanings and values which subsisted in society prior to the poem's composition. These meanings and values were only half-formed, waiting to be brought into poetic life by an act of visionary midwifery.[10] The poem expresses these meanings and values in completed form, and as such they are insistent, contextualized within the inviolable structure of that poem. Finally, through a process of reductive abstraction, these insistent meanings and values are conceptualized for society's use and are then said to be existent. It is clear, even though Krieger always avoids political terms, that these existent meanings and values function on the same level as the moral and ethical propositions of that bourgeois society that Krieger's existentialism seems ever to have in mind; and because of this, as we shall see, there are troublesome implications for the theory of historicist criticism.

That the poem builds on other meanings, even half-formed ones, is an important move away from

[9]Murray Krieger, *A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare's "Sonnets" and Modern Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 59 and 64-65. Hereafter referred to by page number in text.

[10]Eliseo Vivas, *Creation and Discovery* (New York: Gateway edition, 1965), p. 87.

the New Criticism through a radical historicizing of the formalist definition of creativity as a transformation of old words into a new Word.[11] Vivas' subsistent realm, however, is metaphysical, and Krieger rewrites the model in order to embed the subsistent meanings and values in the realm of social functioning.[12] Here they are not half-formed concepts nor the institutionalized ideas of a reductive abstraction but are "forces" for change that history recognizes after the fact as having been there. The poem, therefore, projects its own object of imitation, and seems also to reflect moments of social revolution — almost as if these forces were at work in the author's social and political unconscious. Yet as we look backward from history's vantage point, we recognize the "great" poems as those that contained and discovered the meanings and values that have since become functioning, reductive propositions.

> For "subsistence" let us think of the indefinable subterranean forces at work in the Renaissance. Some of these find their way into every facet of the complex structure that is Marlowe's *Faust*. Here, and only here, this special grouping of them achieves absolute "insistence" . . . But the cultural interest in ideology can abstract from the complex of forces in the play and come up with the notion of "Faustian Man" which it can use anywhere, in an endless variety of contexts. The forces can thus achieve Vivas' "existence" . . .
>
> (p. 60)

This is indeed a radical departure from formalism if we see the critical historicist's interest focusing on the history of the social "uses" of *Faust*. For Vivas and Krieger, however, these uses are merely reductive appropriations by a pragmatic and culturally bankrupt society. Their interest is in the gap between these bourgeois appropriations and the subversive, resistant, authentic poem. Even this, of course, is a historical interest, a critical placing of the work (as prophetic of change) in its historical context (as evidence of the prophecy fulfilled). The work's greatness is measured, one might argue, by its appropriation, the fact of its having been made "proper" (reductive as this may be). The critical his-

toricist tradition would, therefore, canonize only those works whose reflections of subterranean forces have successfully entered into the functioning of society, for only then would it "look like the imitation of what has already been formulated elsewhere." To this extent the canon established by historicist criticism "looks like" a mere confirmation of society's official history, and the historicist critic could do no more than assert the subservience (rather than the subversiveness) of the poem to propositional social order.

Vivas' tripartite theory plunges Krieger's historicism into a reactionary stance that the existentialist idea of the subversive poem contradicts. The poem, apparently a harbinger of change, is from history's perspective, that textualized and functional perspective that is all we have of history, little more than an affirmation of bourgeois society's enormously appropriative powers. We certainly can make distinctions between the uses of a work and the work itself, either with or without a formalist aesthetics; the problem arises when we define the work in terms of its imitation of meanings and values that can be known only after the fact of having been translated into propositions of use value. We must measure the work's authenticity, consequently, according to the degree of its divergence from the inauthenticity of bourgeois appropriations of it. That is, we determine authenticity through an Idealist projection, what Krieger calls an "as if" assumption, by reading backward from society's misinterpretations and misreadings. Perfectly consistent with existentialist thinking, this yields a wholly negative poetics which fails to take full notice of the richly meaningful "misreadings" (uses) of the text that reflect the functioning of society's ideological machinery. Moreover, Vivas' model argues for no serious departure from society's institutionalized meanings and values; the function of all poems is to realize what is already on the way to realization, to better facilitate society's misappropriations. This is a circularity that is, at the least, politically vicious.

The borrowings from Vivas are significantly muted in Krieger's more recent work, and from the beginning Vivas' existent object gave Krieger some trouble — although it was hardly perceived to be as insidious as I have suggested. It is, I think, this aspect of the model that needs to be rewritten, and we can do so in terms of Krieger's earlier theory: specifically his conception of the "tragic vision-

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[11]*Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and its System*, p. 202.

[12]*Creation and Discovery*, p. xv.

[13]*The Tragic Vision*; see also *The Classic Vision*, (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), where the terminology of the earlier work is refined.

ary."[13] Krieger's move into genre theory here defines an existential tragedy (parallel to the existential reality and history we have already discussed). In this genre there is a crucial division of functions assigned to the tragic visionary and the tragic existent — a twinning of the traditional figure of the tragic hero. Both of these characters are necessary to the presentation of a critical vision that subverts the complacency of bourgeois society with its static and repressive official history.

Krieger's "ideal archetype" of this tragic genre is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and I believe that his discussion of this story says more to us today than it did at the time of its first appearance.[14] It anticipates his new historicism and his more recent theory which goes beyond the Vivas model. In Conrad's story Kurtz and Marlow, respectively the tragic existent and tragic visionary, depict also the man of action and the man of representation. The division between experience and language is sharply drawn; a skeptical nominalism questions the very act of writing about the world beyond the veil, the world that Krieger sees Kurtz daring to confront directly. Kurtz is Krieger's Manichaean, both the representative of static, bourgeois propriety and pagan violations of social taboos. Kurtz is the self-righteousness of moralistic imperialism taken to its own logical extreme in mad, amoral brutality. He is the civilized and the uncivilized, the cultured man and the natural man, joined so completely that we cannot sift out a propositional statement of his essential character.

Marlow, on the other hand, is wholly civilized, a man of the ethical sphere of social functioning, although as tragic visionary he wanders to the very edges of stable, sane bourgeois society. It is Marlow who must translate into words (through his "interminable" tales, as the unnamed companion among his listeners calls them — a crucial statement that Krieger does not discuss) the experience of Kurtz's plunge into extremity. Marlow is Krieger's poet, or perhaps it is better to say that Marlow is the tensional equivalent of the poem. He must function within the boundaries of ethical society yet undercut its bourgeois thinking with his critical tale of Manichaean experience. It is a formidable task, and not surprizing that it is interminable — focused as it is on the voracious inclusiveness of Manichaean projections which defy closure.

However we interpret Kurtz's role in Conrad's story — as tragic existent to Marlow's tragic visionary or as a representation of the brutal immorality of late nineteenth-century bourgeois imperialism — narratively Kurtz functions as a name without a referent. Conrad withholds Kurtz from the plot as an act of mystification, allowing Marlow to patch together from scraps of second-hand conversation and fragments of Kurtz's writing a character that is completely enigmatic. Marlow's interminable story, therefore, is an elaborate interpretation of other texts, all of which are couched in the ideology of turn-of-the-century European imperialism and racism. As Edward Said remarks, "the heart of the matter — Kurtz's experience — is posited outside Marlow's discourse, which leaves us to investigate, if we can, the speaker's authority."[15] Kurtz is the dread chaos within the society of order and stability. He cannot be dismissed as merely mad (cast out of society to be ignored, forgotten, repressed) because he is so purely a representation of that society. Marlow (Conrad?) has built his poem solely out of the materials of ethical society itself, and thus we realize that Kurtz's existential reality is not only unknowable, as Krieger would argue, but ultimately inarticulate (as the existential inadequacy of Kurtz's famous speech, "the horror, the horror," demonstrates). It is Marlow's monologue that adds profundity to Kurtz and to Kurtz's words, that establishes an alien mystery within the familiar. But his very mystification, the tragic visionary's "drawing back," as Krieger describes it, tells us more about Marlow's (and Conrad's) motives than any of the information we possess regarding Kurtz can tell us of his. Kurtz is Marlow's (and Conrad's) projection for the purpose of defining and closing the boundaries of bourgeois society. Kurtz, after all, dies as a kind of scapegoat to prove ethical order is what keeps the savage beast from our door. Even Marlow's disgust with the imperialism of his ethically pure society early in the tale seems to have been forgotten at the end.

But in projecting the mystifying Kurtz as Manichaean principle logically extended from society's highest goals, Marlow has indeed dared more than his companions (who charge him to keep a "civil" tongue). Conrad's poet/poem, Marlow, is critical even though the story's power lies not in the conflict between the extremes of the tragic existent and the complacency of bourgeois society, a conflict mediated by the Manichaean tragic vision of Marlow, but rather in the conflict between the awareness of society's repressive values accompanied by a desire to unmask them and a fear of doing so lest the foundations of civilization crumble thereby

[14]*The Tragic Vision*, p. 155.

[15]Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 84.

casting all into unthinkable chaos — hence, the necessity of the mystified Kurtz, himself cast out only to be brought back to affirm society's transcendent stability with his dying breath. For this conflict there is no mediation. What, then, of imperialist exploitation and racism? Clearly these issues must be raised, and Marlow's waivering critical position forces them on us. Marlow's interminable interpretation merely sets off a series of such interpretations, each encompassing and rejecting/rewriting/appropriating (as I have done here with Said and Krieger) those that went before. The poem's critical status, its power to embody contradictions that are unrealized, repressed, in society's institutional structure, frees critical interpretation for a truly historical analysis that not only considers the critical tradition of the work, the history of the uses of the text, but continues the interminable task of critically placing the text in its social context as it simultaneously establishes a social context to receive the text.

Have I departed too far from Krieger, employing much of his terminology to distort his theory? This will have to be answered by others. At this juncture I want to suggest that Krieger has always been concerned with the critical tradition and the function of criticism within society. If I have played down his concept of the poem as expressive of an existential reality and invaded his concept of the inviolable poem with the function of criticism, it is because criticism, with its complex ties to society, has become the central issue of our thinking about the idea of "the literary" — an occurrence in no small part due to Krieger's own efforts.

And this raises another point: why is the study of the critical tradition so important? Perhaps it is because the critic and poet (like the tragic visionary and tragic existent) combine their efforts to work within society against a tendency toward complacency and moral/ethical blindness. The critical poem and critical interpretation are in this way truly "deconstructive," an idea that Krieger comes to as a result of his reading of Derrida. Is there not, then, a range of actions combining poets and critics stretching between and within the extremes of anarchic rebellion and dogmatic affirmation? If so, this would provide Krieger with a break from Vivas' existent object which could only function to serve the ends of bourgeois repression. The critical tradition (poem and interpretation) dwells within bourgeois society's own contradictions, is a product of society but need not serve the same ends.

It is understandable, therefore, why Krieger's career has been so consistently devoted to the promotion of the history of critical theory, and his

success here has been remarkable. It is a heavy burden he places on criticism, a sense of importance that can be traced directly to his interest in the literature of the eighteenth century. A significant portion of his published work is devoted to writers of that era, and Dr. Johnson emerges in Krieger's reading of the critical tradition as a heroic figure. A great critic caught in the transition between neoclassic and romantic philosophies, as Krieger interprets him, Johnson is a contradictory figure, a critic in crisis; so he too represents those subterranean forces struggling to emerge, and that makes him something of a poet-critic even when he was not writing verse.[16] It is Johnson's dictum that great poetry is measured by its continuance of esteem that initiates the very concept of a history of criticism which Krieger seeks to preserve and advance. Johnson's idea that the poem lasts because of its "general nature," of course, seems contrary to Krieger's faith in the poem's unique individuality; but from the perspective of the history of criticism it is the poem's individual, irreducible (to local meanings and values) character that *is* its general nature — that which measures the continuity of culture within and ever-sensitive to the endless changes of society's history. The very tone of Krieger's concern for the critical tradition is more typical of the eighteenth century than of the Romantic era which gave such support to his formalism. The aim of criticism is the improvement of taste through education. Every critic in Krieger's tradition is a scholar/teacher whose goals beyond mere *explication de texte* are to put us (critically) in touch with the history of our Western culture.

III

This concern with cultural history demands a poetics sensitive to the conditions of literary production. As an illustration let us one last time begin with quotations.

> In other words, Pope's own times are beneath heroic stature and cannot have heroic treatment applied to them except as parody of more properly heroic times. Still, the Augustan comparison — a fiction which the period deeply felt — does hold, and it en-

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[16] *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and its System*, pp. 50-51. See also *Poetic Presence and Illusion: Essays in Critical History and Theory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1979).

[17] *Poetic Presence and Illusion: Essays in Critical History and Theory*, p. 87.

hances the period's sense of itself. At the same time, the Augustan myth, generously indulged, is countered by the anti-myth of mock-Augustanism; and the strategy of the mock-heroic rests upon the mock-Augustan basis that authenticates it — or rather inauthenticates Augustanism. So mock-Augustanism, the demythification of the period's controlling fiction, can be viewed as the basis for its most brilliantly representative poetic device, the mock-heroic: the duplicity of the one leads to the duplicity of the other.[17]

. . . in the end, the diachronic never loses.[18]

It is not a distortion to argue that Krieger is as interested in the critical tradition as he is in the poem itself. *Theory of Criticism* is an elaborate and self-conscious rewriting of the critical tradition since Aristotle in order to discover the poem as defined by the great critics, and from this tradition we establish the foundation of our literary canon. It is a tradition, as Krieger sees it, which describes the poem as an enduring, self-defining, articulate text asserting its presence as a privileged moment of performance in the span of cultural history. Yet it suffers, necessarily, from Heideggerian fragility, for insofar as the poem endures so too does it risk fixity and transcendence with a resultant emptiness of meaning. It must, therefore, be self-critical of its privileged status, and as such it is a presence engaged in struggle for survival — a struggle with its historical moment that the poem will inevitably lose.

To this point I have avoided using the term "presence" in this essay because it is, I feel, less than useful in the climate of today's theoretical debates. In its most radical, ontotheological implications it marks a dead end in poetics, and Krieger's efforts to avoid these implications are too often lost on inattentive readers anxious to espouse the American deconstructionist dogma. The least we can say of presence is that it is problematical; the most we can say is that it embodies a mythical projection. Krieger works out of the latter position. He employs the term in the context of a rather unexpected conjunction of the formalist doctrine of aesthetic distance with the Saussurian/deconstructionist obsession with the division between signifiers and signifieds.[19] As a result he formalizes the deconstuctionist hobby-horse of the freeplay of signifiers,

rewriting it as his own concept of the illusion of poetic fiction. It is noteworthy that this conjunction accidentally calls attention to the similarities between deconstructionist theory and classical formalist theory; Krieger's appropriation of this American version of post-structuralism is easier than its advocates might wish. But for Krieger the primary aim is to argue that the poetic work represents the freeplay of humanistic fiction-making engaged in a struggle with the grander, inhuman freeplay of that differential structure of signifiers Saussure called *langue*. The freeplay of *langue* is appropriated by the poem's freeplay as *micro-langue*; freeplay is turned on itself to produce the poem.

Moreover, *langue* for Krieger (as the quote above on Augustan mock-heroic illustrates) is not the freeplay of empty signifiers. It is historical in the sense of defining what we used to call a period, a unified structure of meaningfulness defined by the history of ideas, and which we now have learned to designate under a more descriptive terminology as mythology, base structure, or *episteme*. Here the signified enters again, not as a "Real" which stabilizes language as referentiality but as a reality fully textualized. This signified is no more than a system of signifiers which produces a culture's knowledge, that which society takes as "given." As myth it is unconscious in Lévi-Strauss' sense. As the discursive practices defined by Foucault it eventuates in ideology. It is, of course, another version of that world of bourgeois abstractions, the "language of our evasions," that Krieger's early theory condemned, but here it is so much richer and more complex as the conscious and unconscious meaningfulness which anchors our social existence.[20] *Langue* is historicized (in a more Derridean manner than the ahistorical deconstructionists are willing to recognize), and the struggle between *langue* and *micro-langue* becomes truly critical and deconstructive. Presence, consequently, is a name we give to the point of contact between critical poem and cultural myth; it is recognized only through the historical perspective of critical reading.

But what of the Johnsonian tradition, the work that endures and pleases many? Clearly such a poem must now be seen in its critical functioning, threatening a deconstructive practice that not only verges on its own self-destruction but which acts as an agent of deconstruction for the cultural mythology that is the *langue* of such a poem's *parole*. This is not simply a negative definition, for as an expression of cultural myth the poem also pre-

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[18]*Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and its System*, p. 189.

[19]*Poetic Presence and Illusion: Essays in Critical History and Theory*, p. 145.

[20]*Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and its System*, p. 195.

serves as it criticizes. We must wonder, then, is this too far from the New Critical concept of old words into a new word (now unfrocked of its ontotheological raiments)? And is not what lies within/beyond bourgeois culture's mythology, its given reality, a raging chaos quite in the existentialist mode? Finally, is it not the case that works assert a critical difference with their cultural mythology to a greater or lesser degree? Presence, then, is rewritten as critical performance, and we understand such criticism as being capable of both affirmation (however uncomfortable) and revolution. The critical nature of poetry operates within the same spectrum which encompasses Krieger's classic and tragic visions, ranging from ethical retreat to radical (tragic) denial. This spectrum is the focus of our interest in the author's confrontation with his reality, and his fear of what Said poignantly terms "molestation . . . , a consciousness of one's duplicity, one's confinement to a fictive, scriptive realm, whether one is a character or a novelist. And molestation occurs when novelists and critics traditionally remind themselves of how the novel is always subject to a comparison with reality and thereby found to be illusion."[21]

Said doubles the idea of misreading that we evolved in section II from Krieger's use of Vivas; here misreading describes both the author's critical appropriation of his culture's reality in his fiction and society's (the critical tradition's) misreading of that fiction in the name of its stable, sane reality. Said's terms, the "duplicity" of the "fiction," its "illusory" nature, are the same terms Krieger repeatedly uses throughout his theory with similar implications. Krieger places duplicity in the structure of the work as its illusory presence which allows us (momentarily) to see the work free of the molesting threat of reality, *langue*, or cultural myth. Said is not so hopeful, feeling molestation as a strong presence in the author's consciousness that invests the structure of the work, a part of the undercurrent of undecidables that represents a political unconscious. Yet as both read Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* their theories converge on the character of Kurtz as the embodiment of contradictory cultural forces. Said's concerns approach that point from a perspective on Conrad and his culture, the author and reality behind Marlow's struggle for authority in his tale, and Krieger's interest in Kurtz, the bourgeois imperialist and savage, comes from his concern with the duplicitous

structure of the work as it strives to express the contradictory extremes of the tragic vision. Unquestionably, both of these approaches are necessary and complementary.

Such complementary motions also help Krieger undo the confusions surrounding the idea of presence as he attempts to accommodate Derrida to his version of the critical tradition. He observes, "it is surely odd that the device of the pun, which for Burckhardt was the dominating, indeed enabling, act of presence, is for Derrida the instrument to undo any such notion as presence."[22] Krieger sees these two positions as negative and positive poles, but I would suggest that they are not opposed but merely different and complementary. Derrida's concerns are with the structure of discourse and the inevitable return of the duplicitous text to the anonymity of *langue*. Burckhardt describes the focus of discursive practice, the speech act, or performance, that is historical. Like a principle of indeterminacy one cannot espouse both perspectives at the same time, but both are unconditionally subsumed within the differential structure of language. The pun of deconstruction is rewritten as the poem of critical practice, as the situating of the author as teller of tales in culture and history. Perhaps this explains why Krieger in *The Tragic Vision*, and its companion volume *The Classic Vision*, was so often led to works which contained tellers of tales, like Marlow, engaged in the struggle of authority and molestation. And perhaps we can speculate that history for Krieger inevitably becomes an anthropology or archaeology because the critic, still in Dr. Johnson's image, is something of an archivist, a curator arranging and displaying the monuments of man's literary performances that comprise his cultural past — all the misreadings by an institutionalizing society as well as the misreadings of that society through fictional appropriations. It is the only means we have of knowing our past, as wholly textualized, intertextual.

We need not, therefore, see presence as miraculous, although Krieger continues to use this terminology with full awareness of its nostalgic implications. Presence, however, is recognition by the critical tradition, something more and less than the Idealist "as if" commitment to the poem's objective status. Presence is the mark of discursive practice that grounds our sense of history as well as issues in the formation of a literary canon, in the definition of "the literary." Krieger's theory, now only faintly existential, nevertheless locates that existentialist disorder-in-order within society itself — so clearly

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[21]*Beginnings: Intention and Method*, p. 84.

[22]*Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and its System*, p. 229.

manifest in a literary character like Kurtz who functions both as a Lévi-Straussian unmediated contradiction within late nineteenth-century bourgeois mythology and as a Derridean undecidable in the texture of the work. The battle between *langue* and *micro-langue* is a Hegelian/ Lacanian struggle to death. It is continuous, repetitious, structurally consistent, psychologically enabling/disabling, and endless. As such it is historical and social, a fiction that must always admit that in the final analysis (critique) the diachronic never loses. □

Michael Clark

THE LURE OF THE TEXT, OR
UNCLE TOBY'S REVENGE

the phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire

— *Jacques Lacan*

My uncle Toby never understood what my father meant; nor will I presume to extract more from [his proverb] than a condemnation of an error which the bulk of the world lie under — but the French, *every one of em' to a man, who believe in it, almost as much as the REAL PRESENCE, "That talking of love, is making it."*

— *Tristram Shandy*[1]

I

At the end of "Poetic Presence and Illusion II: Formalist Theory and the Duplicity of Metaphor," Murray Krieger recounts the episode near the end of *Tristram Shandy* in which Widow Wadman is desperately trying to find out if Uncle Toby has recovered from the wound he received at his celebrated battle of Flanders. Since her first husband suffered from sciatica, she is intent on discovering the exact extent of Toby's wound, "how far from the hip to the groin; and how far she was likely to suffer more or less in her feelings, in the one case than in the other." After a series of what she considers indirect questions — "Was it more tolerable in bed? Could he lie on both sides alike with it? Was he able to mount a horse? Was motion bad for it?" — she finally just comes out with it: "And whereabouts, dear Sir . . . did you receive this sad blow?" "In asking this question," Tristram continues, "Mrs. *Wadman* gave a slight glance towards the waistband of my uncle *Toby's* red plush breeches, expecting naturally, as the shortest reply to it, that my uncle *Toby* would lay his forefinger upon the place." He has, of course, promised to do just that, and he is as good as his word. Having been wounded in front of the gate of *St. Nicolas*, Uncle Toby pulls out his map of Namur, measures off

thirty toises with the widow's scissors, "and with such a virgin modesty laid her finger upon the place, that the goddess of Decency, if then in being . . . shook her head, and with a finger wavering across her eyes — forbid her to explain the mistake. Unhappy Mrs. *Wadman*" (TS 488-90).

Much of the controversy over Krieger's recent proclamations of poetic presence in the face of Derridean absence resembles this exchange. Sooner or later, the discussion inevitably returns to this topic, and Krieger promises to show us the very place where he has healed the wound left by the Derridean shot. After a quick account of the skirmish, he pulls out an exemplary verse, and with a triumphant flourish declares, "There!," directing our eyes to . . . the *illusion* of presence, "an illusory world which at once takes itself seriously *as if* it were reality, and yet shows us its awareness of its make-believe nature by being conscious of its artifice"; we must grasp "both the poem as object *and* the poem as *intentional* object," Krieger tells us, "mystification *and* demystification in the work's workings upon us . . . both fiction as reality *and* fiction as a delusive evasion of reality." With this, Krieger concludes — retaining all of Toby's confidence and none of his innocence — "I move . . . to my now-you-see-it-now-you-don't notion of 'the presence of the poem.'"[2]

The "systematic duplicity" of this series of

paradoxes is an inevitable consequence of what Krieger calls "the crucial phenomenological qualification which reduces the art object from ontology to illusion" (PPI 200, 176). Necessitated by the epistemological skepticism of our post-Kantian world, that qualification forces us to admit that literary works "exist as individuals for us only as a result of our illusionary act of reification out of our radically temporal experience" (PPI 190), and that illusion rests solely on the fact that "there is the special kind of experience we intend as we confront this object, and we intend it because we intend this object as one having the discriminable features that sustain such intentionality" (PPI 191). It is easy to see how such an argument could present the poem to us as an *intentional* object, but the tautological logic of this syntactic shell game seems to have slipped the pea under the table: "The responsible critic is always tempted to posit 'out there' an object that, formally sovereign, draws him to it, resisting his tendency to draw it to the contours of his own personality . . . .We must try to know when the filling-in follows the lead of indications plotted in the poem and when it is only our own arbitrary act . . . .We must try to know this, but theoretically, of course, we cannot."[3]

Like Mrs. Wadman, many of Krieger's readers have been frustrated by such gestures. Unrestrained by any guardian goddess, Frank Lentricchia has attacked Krieger's latest work as "the criticism of the ever-diminishing claim" that opens the door to "all-out relativism and all-out trivialization of literature and the critical effort." Despite Krieger's protestations that we must "try" to know the poem as object, Lentricchia argues, he "has, after all, come out epistemologically for a flat-out subjectivism."[4] Not only can he not know that the poem is "out there," Lentricchia says, Krieger cannot even know that the world is out there before us and beyond the poem because our access to that world is through the poem — the same poem, that is, that we cannot know is there. So, Krieger argues, the Manichaean face of reality against which the poem stands "derives from literary works and a critical method adequate to them, not from a philosophic analysis of the nature of reality . . . this critical approach . . . can suggest no more than an *apparent* Manichaeism . . . .This suggestion would not speak at all to the ontological question about

the ultimate nature of reality." Pointing to such passages, Lentricchia concludes that Krieger has been "swallowed up by the theoreticians of deliberate triviality" and the existential urgency of his work subsumed by an "uncompromising nominalism" and, ultimately, the "last-ditch hedonism" of escapist aestheticism.[5]

Lentricchia's argument is, in its general perspective, a familiar objection to the neo-Kantian epistemology that underlies so much modernist aesthetics as well as Krieger's poetics. In *Theory of Criticism* Krieger anticipated such objections to some extent by shifting his emphasis from the possibility of *knowing* reality through the figures of the poem to the phenomenological *experience* of reality as an "outside" beyond the limits of the poem's formal closure. So Krieger claims that Wallace Stevens, the "ultimate modernist," is able to avoid the "metaphysical gluttony of an all-inclusive monism" because "the presence of the world outside metaphor is suggested by the self-referential reminders of the poem's fiction built into the metaphor itself" (TC 205). Drawing on Jakobson's designation of the metaphoric and metonymic functions of language, Krieger describes those "self-referential reminders" as a combination of the metonymic reduction of the world to the word and the metaphoric celebration of that word as world. "By capturing and domesticating what is outside itself," Krieger claims, the poem "reduces to its order all that is thereby acknowledged to be beyond its dimensions." Yet, "poem-as-metaphor, defined in this way, has to be a metonym as well . . . there remains, beyond the aesthetic and thus unabsorbed, a motley and undefined welter of experience." So, Krieger concludes, "though locked inside those reduced, metonymic terms, those very terms — with their self-referential awareness of their own artifice — remind us of what is outside as well" (TC 195-6). Although the poem appears to occupy the "normally nondiscursive metaphorical stage," it is actually a "metonymic metaphor," a "sophisticate, a beyond-metonymy, rather than a before-metonymy, discourse" (TC 196, PPI 184-5).

Krieger's emphasis on the metonymic source of the terms that constitute the metaphor explains how that domesticated reality could gape within the poem's closure like the yawn of a caged tiger, reminding us of what that capture cost. But to measure metonymy as a reduction requires some sense of the world against which the reduction may

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[3]*Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 39, 41. Abbreviated as TC.

[4]*After the New Criticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 241, 253.

[5]*After the New Criticism*, pp. 240, 242, 247, 249. Krieger's comment is from a *A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare's Sonnets and Modern Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 19n; quoted in Lentricchia, p. 239.

be gauged, and Krieger's increasingly careful epistemology led him in "Poetic Presence and Illusion II" to modify his earlier account of poetic language and do away with the apodictic sense of external reality that established the priority of metonymy two years earlier. In this later account metonymy is merely an effect of metaphor, and whereas before we allowed the poem to work its illusory reduction of reality into metaphor, we now must permit the metaphor to bring about the fiction of reality:

> The illusion is all . . . there is no independently available reality against which the image can be seen as distorted or false, as a delusion. Whatever hangover awareness we may skeptically retain of the fact that our aesthetic indulgence . . . is a "fiction," we yet permit the fictional to become the lens through which reality comes to us as reality. Thus we become provisionally persuaded of the presence of the poem as our present world, whatever the lingering suspicion we have about it as an intended presence only, as a mere substitute behind which is a real reality which would make it vanish as no more than a delusive appearance.
>
> Within our qualified sense of its presence, then, the poem remains as a reduction of the world . . . a human metaphor that is supposed to "stand for" extra-human reality except that, by way of the illusion which is as much of reality as we intend, the metaphor is the formal expression of all that reality has become . . . . Using the old-fashioned meaning of "metonym" considered as a figure of speech, we could say that it functions metonymically — except that, as in the case of metaphor itself, we cannot firmly say or point to the larger term (or entity) behind the miniature image to which it has supposedly been reduced . . . .
>
> The poem, then, is a signifier which must carry its authenticity within itself, since no external signified is accessible to us.
>
> (PPI 143)

This description of the self-sufficiency of metaphor would seem to leave no exit from the confinement of its illusory enclosure and appears as gluttonous as the most supreme of Stevens' fictions. Nevertheless, like the traveler whose peaceful vision from the train window is suddenly clouded by the image of the passport that he left sitting on his dresser at home, our celebration in the discourse of metaphoric identity is plagued with that "lingering suspicion" that we left something behind when we entered the world of its word. Lacking a sure measure of metonymic reduction, Krieger accounts for the persistence of that feeling by transposing the metonymic effect of distance between the work and the world into a metaphoric effect of what might be called an "interior distance" between the two parts of a metaphor that suddenly splits in an apparently spontaneous mitosis:

> close study of the signifier discloses its constantly enlarging capacity to be its own signified and provide an ever-increasing sense of its semiological richness . . . . The poem's trick of being at once self-authenticating and self-abnegating enables it to proclaim an identity between itself as metaphor and its reality, a collapsing of the binary oppositions between signifier and signified, and yet enables it at the same time to undercut its pretensions by reasserting its distance from an excluded "real world." It is this acknowledged distance which seems to make the difference between signifier and signified impossible to bridge, since the signifier can find its formal nature only in the irreparable absence of the signified.
>
> (PPI 144)

This "trick" that produces the signified as a mitotic offspring of the signifier certainly explains how the metaphor could collapse the binary opposition between the two. It also explains why we are able to view the poem "as a *micro-langue,* a *parole* that has developed its own language system by apparently setting up its own operational rules to govern how meanings are generated" (PPI 149), since they are generated by an operational distinction between signifier and signified similar to that which occurs within the metaphor itself here. Even more importantly, as creator of both its word and its world, Krieger says that "the signifier, which is seen as struggling against its nature to create the signified it contains, seems to have forced its god into itself and thus to have become fully substantiated" (PPI 151), a shimmering mirage of the Incarnate Word towards which our nostalgic longing for metaphysical presence gazes across the Derridean discourse of absence and disbelief. So, Krieger argues, "the worship of objects within the museum or within our poetic anthologies . . . has the characteristic of religious worship in that it satisfies those teleological demands of the mind that religion used to satisfy before disbelief intervened."[6]

If we share that disbelief, we can go either of two ways: "We can view poetry as a human triumph made out of our darkness, as the creation of verbal meaning in a blank universe" or "we can — in our negation — extend our faithlessness, the blankness of our universe, to our poetry" (PPI 173). Caught thus between Scylla and the shore, Krieger's dilemma is easily resolved: "Stubbornly humanistic as I am, I must choose that first alternative: I want to remain responsive to the promise of the filled and centered word" (PPI 173).

Krieger also attributes the "illusory doubleness" of the metaphoric fold that creates a signified within the signifier to the "primitive sense of metaphor" that we inherit from the "earlier ages of literal belief in the magical power of words," though of course he protects the poem from becoming a totemic fetish by insisting that our belief in the autosubstantiation of metaphor is possible only within the tradition of aesthetic fiction and so is "provisional and limited by the self-consciousness with which we address the nature of illusion" (PPI 163-4). This qualification keeps his need to remain responsive to the word from lapsing into an indulgent mysticism, but its relation to the self-sufficiency of the poem's metaphor is puzzling. While we can easily understand why the signifier's division into its own signified would make the difference between them only "seem" impossible to bridge, it is not clear why the same stroke with which the signifier divides in two and marks its mitotic double with difference would necessarily reassert that difference as the poem's distance from an "excluded 'real world'," regardless of whatever qualifications may be implied in Krieger's quotation marks.

Krieger addresses this problem obliquely by associating the phenomenological property of "self-consciousness" with the formalist property of the poem's self-reference. "Thanks to self-reference," Krieger says, "that self-consciousness which illusion reveals about what it is and is not — the totality of self-assertion for the sake of illusion is to be matched by the totality of self-immolation before an unyielding if unenclosable reality" (PPI 195-6). Whereas the New Critics were committed to "an aesthetic closure that substitutes the work for the existential world," Krieger claims "that the apparently self-conscious character of this closure . . . leads it also and at the same time to deny itself, thus opening itself outward to the existential world which it would exclude but now, by negation, must include" (PPI 206).

Through his association of self-reference with the work's "self-consciousness," Krieger establishes the poem's relation to the world as a phenomenological sense of the "otherness" of a reality that resists the forms in which the poem would constrain it. This is also the way that the critic comes to a sense of something other than the solipsistic subjectivity of his or her own consciousness:

> Though the work seems to exist for us only as our categories permit it to be defined . . . still there must be something in the work as it must exist . . . on its own, outside our categorical structures and symbols. This something can force our structures and symbols to work radical transformations upon themselves, in response to their own commands, as it were, though prompted from beyond their autonomous realm. What more persuasive indication can we have that there is something out there?
>
> (PPI 321-2)

So just as the world is perceived by the poem as that which resists and undercuts the autonomy of the word, the poem undercuts the autonomy of the critic's categories of perception, and the "thematic double relation between words-as-aesthetic work and their object" becomes an exact "existential reflection" of the phenomenological character of "the aesthetic double relation between us as reader-interpreters and the words as *our* object" (TC 242). The captured deity that we perceived in the poem as the juncture between the word and the world of metaphor thus comes to resemble nothing so much as our own sense of our selves as readers reading language in the world, and our self-consciousness of that language as illusion appears before us as the poem's consciousness of itself as fiction: "The work functions for us as a myth that — if we watch it closely enough — knows itself to be one. This characteristic is an inevitable accompaniment to our sense of it as a fiction, emanating from the work as an inner skepticism about itself and its peculiar status in being" (PPI 191-2).

The attribution of consciousness to the work thus serves a crucial double function in Krieger's aesthetics: it establishes the distance between the work and the world and so limits the power of the work to illusion, and it establishes the work as "other" to the critic's own consciousness, thereby rescuing criticism from a relativistic subjectivism. Further, as Krieger shows in a remarkable recapitulation of his argument in *Theory of Criticism*, it is only *as* consciousness that the work takes on the

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⁶*Arts on the Level: The Fall of the Elite Object* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), p. 68.

force that constitutes it both as the illusion of the presence of a world in its word and as the presence of that illusion as a word in the world beyond the epistemological limits of our perception:

> This poem before me — as an alien "other," outside me and my consciousness — imposes upon me to make it no longer "other." My habitual willingness to indulge the myth of total interpretability makes me a willing subject for an experience that, restricted to appearance only, is properly termed "aesthetic." This experience would convert the object from "other" to part of myself. . . . If I am successfully responsive . . . I willingly reject my prior norms and follow the deviations to the new center, the new fiction, the new master metaphor of vision to which these point. Then the poem as "other" has become a form of consciousness that can alter my own.
>
> (TC 203-4)

And, Krieger says, "if, in this outside reality which persists, there is an objective embodiment of human consciousness within a humanly created form, then it will be humanity itself that persists" (TC 64).[7]

The embodiment of consciousness in the poetic object is the principal component in what Krieger calls "aesthetic intentionality," and it serves as the hinge with which he joins formalism and phenomenology.[8] In "Poetic Presence and Illusion II," Krieger claims that the "broad formalist" will treat the poem as the convergence of three different intentionalities: that of the poet, who "intended a form as his object"; that of the reader who similarly intends a form as the object of his attention; and that of the poem, whose (and the personal pronoun is important) "moving verbal structure appears . . .

to have intended its own form as an object and, as a formal object, appears to intend itself as an enclosed vision of the objects of a world, the world now having become its own world" (PPI 142). The poem thus becomes an "object of consciousness" in the double sense of being the object of the poet's and reader's intentional consciousnesses and being an object made out of intentional consciousness. As an intending object, the poem thus sits squarely between the formalist's object and the phenomenologist's consciousness in the place Krieger established for it ten years ago in "Mediation, Language, and Vision." There Krieger argued that "a poem's language works to make the poem an *object* . . . and in need of more than subjective observation," while at the same time objecting to Poulet because he "too easily disposes of all formal matters by ranging them on the side of the 'objective' features of the work" (PPI 289, 288).

In the poem, Krieger says, "the subjective flow of the self's awareness of its experience must somehow be preserved, even while being preserved in a fixed object" (PPI 290), and this fusion of consciousness and the object is possible in the poem because, as he noted in an earlier essay, "poetry is the only object, fixed in a final form, that does not objectify and destroy — that embodies to preserve — the object as universal subject."[9] How does this embodiment of consciousness in the object — indeed, the object as subject — come about? Through a very special relationship between the poem and its reader that turns the poem from an object into the object of desire. Just as the poet "explores his freedom in his affectionate toying, his love-play with the world's body," Krieger argues, "the critic must follow in a similar spirit." He must play with poems "as converted objects of *his* love that deserve no less than his unwillful, sportive resting among them . . . .After all, as the poet, confronting the world, must transform it into an object that has become his subject, so that critic, confronting the poem, must create *it* as an object that has become *his* subject."[10]

Desire is thus the means with which the critic experiences the poem as consciousness, attributing subjectivity to the object and thereby establishing the object as other to himself and the world. Desire appears frequently in Krieger's descriptions of the poem as a "beckoning structure" (PPI 203) that can

[7]The attribution of consciousness to the poem is quite common in phenomenological criticism. See Georges Poulet, "The Phenomenology of Reading," *New Literary History* 1 (1969), and Jean-Paul Sartre, "Pourquoi écrire?" in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948; rpt. 1965). Krieger departs from this conventional gesture by insisting on the presence of the object as object rather than as consciousness.

[8]In a review of *Theory of Criticism* (*MLN* 91 [1976]: 1634-38), Paul Miers said that "vestigal elements of New Criticism remain as excess baggage in Krieger's thought," and that "lacking concepts of intentionality and dialectic, he is constantly forced to pose his questions in either/or terms" (p. 1636). I believe these remarks are generally accurate, and I read Krieger's most recent works as an effort to overcome this problem. However, as I suggest below, it will take more than a theory of intentionality to reconcile Krieger's emphasis on the poem as *object* with the increasingly phenomenological character of his poetics. Cf. Krieger's remarks on Miers' review in PPI, pp. 201-2.

[9]"The Existential Basis of Contextual Criticism," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 8, no. 4 (Fall, 1966), rpt. Hazard Adams, ed., *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 1229.

[10]*Critical Theory Since Plato*, pp. 1230-31.

"seduce us toward the willfulness of an indulged illusion" (TC 161), an "enrapturing aesthetic object" (TC 17) that draws the critic to it in an idolatrous worship that grants the poem its capacity to "entrance us" into complicity with its illusory vision (PPI 149).[11] And in *Theory of Criticism* the very formal closure that we perceive as the "aesthetic intentionality" in the work is attributed to an attitude that recalls the melancholy realization of all long-suffering lovers that the perfection of the loved one is more the product of their desire than its source:

> All any of us has, then, is our subjective experience of the object, an experience that is *never* as good as we would like it and would want to demand it to be, so that we atone for our lapses by acknowledging the object to be potentially better than we find it to be . . . . But it is not only the imperfections of our experience in time that we seek to overcome; it is also the imperfections of the poem itself. As we try to compensate for the inadequacies in our actual response by an act of "objective" criticism, we may tend also to make the object better than it is as we seek to put it in control of the experience we wish we had.
>
> (TC 40-41)

Yet despite the importance of desire to Krieger's account of the experience of aesthetic intentionality in the poem, it nevertheless functions in his work more as a metaphorical motif than as a theoretical concept, and he usually mentions it as part of an impressionistic description of the poem's effect rather than as a property of the poem's linguistic form. So the aesthetic experience fragments into a self-contradictory state in which "we remain conscious of the common-sense view of language . . . and yet we permit the poem to seduce us into a magical view of language as creator and container, creator of what it contains, collapsing all . . . into an identity within itself" (PPI 157-158). Krieger's aesthetics thus splits between the aesthetic permission of illusion and the self-conscious proscription of its limit, and his efforts to insist on their connection through the "systematic duplicity" of his both-and paradoxes suggest not so much an explanation of that connection as Krieger's stubborn fidelity to the experience of the poem at the expense of theoretical consistency.

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[11] Cf. the "teasing elusiveness" of the poem (TC 3), our "devotion" to works "which stand out there so nobly as objects to be admired" (TC 16), our "idolatrous" attitude toward the poem (TC 42) as a "beckoning entity" (TC 46) and seductive, "enrapturing" aesthetic object (PPI 157; TC 17), etc.

II

The connection between desire and language that Jacques Lacan describes makes an interesting gloss on this point in Krieger's account of the aesthetic experience. Like Krieger, Lacan associates the poetic effect of language with metaphor, which he also claims stems from the apparent collapse of signifier and signified in a creative spark. Lacan also argues that the metaphoric effect produces the impression of an "Other" that we perceive across the Symbolic order of language as one who dominates not only the words we read but our entire being as well — what Krieger calls a "universal subject" in the poem. The convergence of these two accounts of our experience of metaphor is striking, coming to that experience as they do from the very different perspectives of neo-Freudian psychoanalysis and humanist aesthetics. But they differ significantly in their explanations of the cause of that effect.

Krieger suggests that our ability to indulge the illusionary sense of presence in the poem despite the Platonic proscription of belief in that presence may simply be a habitual indulgence made possible by our acculturation to the tradition of *aesthesis*, which grants to the world of appearance an affective power that does not need the prop of metaphysics.[12] He also speculates that the persistence of that tradition "probably derives from human need as well as habit" and attributes that need to "our cultural nostalgia over the myths of presence which earlier ages could uncritically maintain but which growing skepticism has been draining away" (PPI 153). Lacan, however, ascribes our awareness of an Other across the domain of language directly to the semiotic properties of metaphor and metonymy as they mimic an originary juncture of proscription and permission that constitutes us as subjects in culture through the path of our desire.

The place of the Other, Lacan says, is that other scene (*ein andere Schauplatz*) that Freud called the

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[12] In "Literature *versus Ecriture*: Constructions and Deconstructions in Recent Critical Theory," Krieger says that he is "wary of the grounds on which I dare claim verbal presence and fullness. And I am grateful for my recollection that the aesthetic domain — the domain of *aesthesis*, of *Schein* — has been, from Plato onward, acknowledged to be the world of appearance, of illusion, so that verbal power, under the conditions of the aesthetic, need not rely upon a metaphysical sanction to assert its moving presence" (PPI 173; see also *Arts on the Level*, pp. 68-9). He adds in the same essay, "in the greatest literary works . . . those which, in other words, constitute the literary canon in the Western tradition, the illusion of an autonomous, self-generating reflexivity in language persists for those trained to read them appropriately (that is, in ways appropriate to our conventions for reading our elite literary works)" (PPI 180).

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Unconscious, and Lacan associates the juncture through which we gain access to this Unconscious or "the discourse of the Other" with both the moment of Oedipal castration and the confluence of pleasure and death that Freud describes in his later work. But in the laws that govern this scene, Lacan adds, we discover neither the "truth" of infantile sexuality nor some "culturist" relation between man and language as social phenomena; rather, "it is a question of rediscovering in the laws that govern that other scene . . . the effects that are discovered at the level of the chain of materially unstable elements that constitutes language: effects determined by the double play of combination and substitution in the signifier, according to the two aspects that generate the signified, metonymy and metaphor; determining effects for the institution of the subject" (E 285). The argument supporting this claim is complex and turns on the analysis of clinical evidence within a psychoanalytic context far beyond the scope of this essay. But approaching this scene through the more limited topic of Lacan's analysis of the tropic operation of language does provide an explanation for the persistence of the motif of desire in Krieger's work, and even more importantly it suggests how that motif can serve as a coherent theoretical bridge between the two poles of Krieger's paradoxical claims, which correspond to what Lacan calls the Imaginary order of illusion and the Symbolic order of discourse and Law.

Echoing Krieger's description of the self-sufficient metaphor in "Poetic Presence and Illusion II," Lacan attributes the formal properties of the signifier to an "irreparable" exclusion of the signified from the signifier, which then establishes our relation to the excluded world of signifieds as it "conditions them by its presence as a signifier" (E 285).[13] He credits our awareness of this separation to Saussure, who he says inaugurated modern linguistics in his "primordial placement of the signifier and the signified as being distinct orders separated initially by a barrier resisting signification."[14] Drawing on Jakobson as Krieger does, Lacan goes on to characterize the semiotic properties of language as an interaction of metaphor and metonymy. The isolation of the signifier from the signified, Lacan says, generates a combinative sequence of signifiers which pursues the missing signified in a metonymic series that "always anticipates on meaning by unfolding its dimension before it" (IL 110). But since the exclusion of the signified was the origin of the signifier, this pursuit can only result in a constant "sliding" of the signified under the order of signifiers, which suggests that all the "enigmas which desire seems to pose . . . its frenzy mocking the abyss of the infinite . . . amount to nothing more than that derangement of the instincts that comes from being caught on the rails — eternally stretching forth towards the desire for something else — of metonymy" (IL 127).

In addition to the serial order of this chain, Lacan adds, there is a paradigmatic "articulation of relevant context suspended 'vertically' " from each point (IL 112). This context is established by the metaphoric substitution of one signifier for another, which is then suppressed from the chain of signifiers but remains latent in the operation of suppression.[15] Lacan expresses this metaphoric operation as an algebraic function, $f\left(\frac{S'}{S}\right) S \cong S(+)s$, which means that the metaphoric suppression of one signifier S by another S' within the signifying chain is "congruent" to the crossing of the bar between S and s in Saussure's formula $\frac{S}{s}$; this "crossing" is represented by the vertical stroke in the $+$. The parallel between Saussure's formula for signification — $\frac{S}{s}$ — and Lacan's formula for metaphorical suppression of one signifier by another — $\frac{S'}{S}$ — expresses what Lacan calls "an effect of signification . . . which is creative or poetic" in the metaphoric function and that results from the illusion of a "leap over the line" separating signifier from signified (see IL 124). It is only an effect, of course, because it takes place between two signifiers or, in other words, only within the domain of language, and this point helps explain why Krieger's metaphor seemed to provide its own signified: rather than truly creating a signified, the metaphoric signifier functions through its relation to another signifier. There is indeed a binary opposition between them, but it is not an ontological opposition, and since the second signifier can function in the chain only through its position above the bar over the first, its very existence presupposes the latent

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[13] The importance of Freud's discovery of the Oedipal struggle, Lacan says, is not that it revealed the truth of infantile sexuality or the existence of the unconscious but that it "gives to the signifier/signified opposition the full extent of its implications: namely, that the signifier has an active function in determining certain effects in which the signifiable appears as submitting to its mark, by becoming through that passion the signified" (E 284).

[14] "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious," trans. Jan Miel, in *Structuralism*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., Anchor Books, 1970), p. 105; abbreviated as IL. Cf. the translation by Alan Sheridan in *Ecrits*, "The Agency of the Letter . . . ."

[15] "The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the conjunction of two images, that is of two signifiers equally actualized. It springs from two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the hidden signifier then remaining present through its (metonymic) relation to the rest of the chain" (IL 115).

presence of that first signifier as that-which-is-suppressed or, in Krieger's terms, "its" signified.

Lacan therefore describes metaphor as an "expression of the condition of passage of the signifier into the signified" and claims that this passage is "provisionally" confused with the place of the subject as the link between world and word (IL 124). Lacan then asks the same question that was raised — but not asked — by Krieger: what is our relation to that illusion of subjectivity in the work? Or, in Lacan's terms, "the place that I occupy as the subject of a signifier: is it, in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified, concentric or ex-centric? — that is the question" (IL 125). Lacan's answer integrates the semiotic properties of language with his psychoanalytic understanding of the nature of the subject. Metaphor raises the question of subjectivity, Lacan says, because it "reproduces the mythic event in terms of which Freud reconstructed the progress, in the individual unconscious, of the mystery of the father" (IL 116). That is, the formal structure of metaphor repeats, in language, the moment at which the child escapes the Oedipal trap of wanting to *be* the object of the mother's desire (i.e., the father or, in Lacan's lexicon, the phallus) through the *"nom du père,"* which is Lacan's term for the totemic ruler of Freud's *Totem and Taboo,* an absent but omniscient locus of proscription that is also the source of discourse, cultural forms, symbolic order, and social power. Lacan associates this position with the domain of the Symbolic as it is constituted through the general imposition of cultural interdictions (especially though not exclusively those against incest), and he claims that this "paternal metaphor" effects a symbolic castration of the child by introjecting a lack into the illusory harmony of the Imaginary couple. It is only through this experience of castration, however, that the child can accede to the authenticity of a "language of his desire" and redirect that desire through the system of cultural rules that Lacan calls the Symbolic or, more generally, language.[16]

The connection between the Oedipal struggle as Freud described it and our access to the world of culture or the Symbolic lies in Lacan's emphasis on what he calls the "phallus." Lacan claims that traditional psychoanalytic readings of Freud forget that "between the mother and the child, Freud introduced a third term, an Imaginary element, whose signifying role is a major one: the phallus"

(LS 186). He calls the phallus an "Imaginary" element here because he reads Freud's description of the Oedipal stage as the culmination of the period in the child's development in which the infant comes to an awareness of its self as an integrated, coherent whole — a "self" or ego — through its identification with an "image" of totality in its environment. This moment is represented most dramatically in the "mirror-stage," where the child recognizes its reflection as an "other" self "out there" in the world, but it also pertains to the earlier and more general recognition of objects as being simply out there, apart from the self and somehow dominant over it through their very otherness. The most prominent "other" in the child's experience is of course the mother's breast or, more generally, the mother; and this association imbues the child's recognition of its self with the characteristic of desire. This desire originally takes shape as a desire for the (m)other or, more specifically, a desire to be recognized by the other, which Lacan describes as our desire for love. This desire is experienced as a "desire for the desire of the other," which yields the Oedipal dilemma of the child's desire to be the *object* of the desire of the other. So, Lacan claims, this form of experience quickly becomes "crystallized in the conflictual tension internal to the subject which determines the awakening of his desire for the object of the desire of the other. Here the primordial coming together is precipitated into an aggressive concurrence, and it is from this concurrence that there is formed the triad of the other, the moi, and the object" (LS 173). The phallus thus emerges from the binary relationship between the child and mother, ego and other, as the Imaginary object of desire.

The emergence of the phallus brings with it the fourth element of the Oedipal relation, the father. In his role of he-who-has-the-phallus, the father introduces a lack into the child's effort to identify with the object of the other's desire. This moment is the source of the castration complex because it constitutes the phallus as that which the child is not, that which belongs to the "Other," or, in short, a *"manque à être,"* a "lack which is brought into being" (LS 188). The phallus thereby comes to represent that which is barred from experience by the *nom du père* (which may be read here as Foucault rewrites it: le *"non" du père,* the Father's No), and in this capacity the phallus establishes the child's place as related to — and defined by — the material embodiment of Law, language. This is why in their *Oedipe Africain* Marie-Cécile and Edmond Ortigues describe the phallus as "symbolically situated at the intersection of the body image and the words which

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[16]See Anthony Wilden, *The Language of the Self* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), p. 168. Abbreviated as LS.

name and recognize. This is what psychoanalysis designates as the specific function of the phallus. What is mythically designated in this way is only designated by its place — between the image and the name, between the lost object and the promised object, at the frontier of the unnameable."[17]

Lacan's "return to Freud" thus consists in his recasting Freud's sexual etiology of cultural forms into a semiotics. The phallus, Lacan argues, "is not a phantasy . . . nor is it as such an object . . . in the sense that this term tends to accentuate the reality pertaining in a relation. It is even less the organ, penis, or clitoris, that it symbolizes" (E 285). In fact, Lacan says, the phallus is a signifier, the "signifier of signifiers," the "ultimate significative object": "the phallus represents . . . what cannot enter the domain of the signifier without being *barred* from it, that is to say, covered over by castration" (LS 187).[18] Through castration, then, the child recognizes the phallus as the bar between the signifier and the signified and so is able to name his desire and renounce it. "His true desire and the multiple phantasmatic forms it took are pushed back into the unconscious. This is the primal repression which determines accession to language and which subsitutes a symbol and a Law for the Real of existence."[19] This primal repression is the gesture through which "the subject — or, to be more precise, he who will by this act constitute himself as 'subject' — withdraws from the immediacy of a lived experience by giving it a substitute which it is not . . . and which will constitute the real as the real, the symbolic as autonomous and the subject as subjectivity."[20]

Because the phallus is always the property of an Other, i.e., the Symbolic Father, this subjectivity is always constituted as radically "excentric" to

itself: it is split into two places — that of the Other, recognized through the Symbolic, and that of what Lacan calls the "barred subject" that exists only as a "fading" before the Imaginary object as that object is recognized as the phallus. By re-enacting this moment, metaphor simulates the presence of subjectivity in language as the desire of the Other — Krieger's "beckoning structure," soliciting our indulgence — named and renounced as our own through the primal repression that distinguished the Real from the Symbolic. The perception of a "subject" in language is therefore intimately related to the separation of the signifier and the signified as that separation maps our desire in the discourse of the Other. For this reason Lacan calls the phallus the "signifier of desire" (LS 187), the "privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire" (E 287).

Which brings us back to . . . . widow Wadman.

III

It takes little insight to imagine the relevance of Lacan's emphasis on the symbolic role of castration to a story told by a man whose own amours were cut short early in life by a loose window and a careless maid who, as Tristram tells us, "did not consider that nothing was well-hung in our family" (TS 284). Indeed, the "Amours" of Uncle Toby that take up so much of the narrative literally proceed through the widow's desire for exactly that "place" that stands out so prominently in Lacan's account of metaphor. And since Krieger returns to the exchange between Widow Wadman and Uncle Toby as an allegory of the metaphorical process he describes in "Poetic Presence and Illusion II," the function of her character in *Tristram Shandy* makes an interesting point of comparison between Krieger's aesthetic theory of metaphor and the psychoanalytic properties of the trope as described by Lacan.

The widow, whose title inscribes her lack within her name, first enters the novel as the very embodiment of desire, its perfect signifier. The story of Uncle Toby has been proceeding as smoothly as anything does in Tristram's narrative when it hits a snag on its crucial term: "All I contend for is, that I am not *obliged* to set out with a definition of what love is; and so long as I can go on with my story intelligibly, with the help of the word itself, without any other idea to it, than what I have in common with the rest of the world, why should I differ from it a moment before the time? . . . At present, I hope I shall be sufficiently understood, in telling the reader, my uncle *Toby fell in love*" (TS 356). But

[17](Paris: Librairie Plon, 1966); quoted in LS, p. 304. For Foucault's revision of the "Name of the Father" see "Le 'non' du père," *Critique* 178 (1962); translated in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), esp. pp. 80-2.

[18]As I explain below, Lacan claims that the phallus is the signifier of the very *Aufhebung* by which objects are raised to the function of signifiers: "That is why the demon of Aiows *(Scham*, shame) arises at the very moment when, in the ancient mysteries, the phallus is unveiled . . . . It then becomes the bar which, at the hands of this demon, strikes the signified, marking it as the bastard offspring of this signifying concatenation" (E 288).

[19]Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan.* (Belgium: Charles Denart, 1970); trans. David Macey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 87.

[20]A. de Waelhens, quoted in Lemaire, p. 85.

Tristram immediately finds himself lost in what he calls "this mystick labyrinth" of the word: "To say a man is *fallen* in love, — or that he is *deeply* in love, — or up to the ears in love, — and sometimes even *over head and ears in it*, — carries an idiomatical kind of implication, that love is a thing *below* a man: — this is recurring again to *Plato's* opinion, which with all his divinityship, — I hold to be damnable and heretical; — and so much for that. Let love therefore be what it will, — my uncle *Toby* fell into it." The gap in the signifying chain through which Toby has fallen is widow Wadman, "and possibly, gentle reader, with such a temptation — so wouldst thou: For never did thy eyes behold, or thy concupiscence covet any thing in this world, more concupiscible than widow *Wadman*."

Clearly, the signifier "love" is not up to this most concupiscible of signifieds. Tristram must differ from it absolutely in order to present the full meaning of the word to the reader. So, just as he brought the endless slide through the field of the signifier to a stop on the snag of heresy with the anchor of his faith, he sets out to anchor his narrative on the reader's desire by providing the very image of desire itself:

> To conceive this right, — call for pen and ink — here's paper ready to your hand [i.e., a blank page]. — Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind — as like your mistress as you can — as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you — 'tis all one to me — please but your own fancy in it.

> — Was ever any thing in Nature so sweet! — so exquisite! — Then, dear Sir, how could my uncle *Toby* resist it?
>
> (TS 356-8)

Of course, we have already seen how Toby resists it: he draws a map of Namur in the space provided by the ambiguity of the widow's words, and then lovingly directs her finger to the very mark he has created as their signified. By leaving the blank, however, Tristram claims he has protected himself against any such misreading at this most delicate point: "Thrice happy book! thou wilt have one page, at least, within thy covers, which MALICE will not blacken, and which IGNORANCE cannot misrepresent" (TS 358). Secure in the significance of this gesture, Tristram proceeds with Uncle Toby's story "in a tolerable straight line" (TS 359).

That security appears paradoxical, since it is founded on the absence of any signifiers. But Lacan says that this is exactly the mode in which the signifier of signifiers appears. Operating under the cover of castration, the phallus "can only play its role when veiled, which is to say as itself a sign of the latency with which any signifiable is struck, when it is raised (aufgehoben) . . . to the function of the signifier." In fact, Lacan says, "the phallus is the signifier of this *Aufhebung* itself, which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance" (E 288).

So the widow — who here achieves the Oedipal dream of really being the object of her desire — is able to suspend Tristram's wandering in the etymological maze of the word "love" because her presence as the signifier of desire recapitulates that "mythic moment" in which the Symbolic and the Real were distinguished as desire passed into the metonymic chain of discourse or, in this case, narrative. Tristram's strategy of pinning down the slippery signifier of love with the reader's desire corresponds to Lacan's own designation of desire as the means by which the "signifier stops the otherwise endless movement (glissement) of signification" (E 303). Because desire marks the birth of language in an originary separation of the signified from the signifier, Lacan claims that its persistence in language forms a *"point de capiton"* or "anchoring point" that orients the metonymic flow of language toward the real without making the impossible jump over the barrier behind which the real ultimately resists signification. And since the suspension of the metonymic combination of signifiers in the *glissement* of signification is the property of metaphor, Lacan therefore describes these two "slopes" of the signifier as "the active edge which splits my desire between a refusal of meaning or a lack of being," anchoring the metonymic displacement of signifier after signifier in the metaphoric vector of that desire: "It is the connection between signifier and signifier which permits the elision in which the signifier inserts the lack of being into the object relation, using the reverberating character of meaning to invest it with the desire aimed at the very lack it supports" (IL 123).[21]

Krieger's interest in the relationship between the widow and Uncle Toby stems from his broader interest in *Tristram Shandy* as one of the works in the literary canon "which recapitulate these teasing powers of metaphor and thereby become allegories of the metaphorical process itself" (PPI 164). Earlier,

[21]"C'est la connexion du signifiant au signifiant, qui permet l'élision par quoi le signifiant installe le manque de l'être dans la relation d'objet, en se servant de la valeur de renvoi de la signification pour l'investir du désire vivant ce manque qu'il supporte" (*Ecrits* I [Editions du Seuil, 1966, abridged edition], p. 274).

in *The Classic Vision*, Krieger proposed the novel as an allegory for his general poetics because like the self-conscious poem, Tristram is able to combine within himself" a transcendent awareness that can indulge the hobby-horse [of illusion] without losing sight of the deadly actual."[22] Despite his fascination with the linguistic miracles of his narrative, Tristram proceeds with what Krieger has called the poem's "grudging acknowledgement of its limitations, of that world beyond in which the non-linguistic fact of death withstands all metaphorical reductions and transformations" (PPI 208). The illusion of Tristram's narrative is all-consuming, Krieger says, but in the end death "unmasks the miracle for what it is" (TC 244): "All of Tristram's metaphors are undone — Tristram the supreme hobby-horse rider — as he is pursued on horseback by Death, in a metaphor that signals the end of metaphor, that threatens to empty all metaphor into the common refuse heap of factual, time-ridden history" (TC 61). Like Lacan's concept of the phallus, here death is the "signifier of signifiers," whose eruption into the work demetaphorizes its world and anchors it in the real to that nonlinguistic fact the miracle would bar forever but inevitably raises to our vision.[23]

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[22]*The Classic Vision: The Retreat from Extremity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), pp. 285, 283.

[23]Lacan repeatedly associates death with the phallus, and frequently returns to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a key text for the connection among death, language, and desire. He calls the phallus the third term in the binary Imaginary relation between self and other, and he also says that accession to the Symbolic is possible "only if a third term is supposed to be present in the Imaginary relationship itself: mortal reality, the death instinct" (*Ecrits*, p. 348; trans. LS 146). So "when we wish to attain in the subject what was before the serial articulations of speech, and what is primordial to the birth of symbols, we find it in death" (*Ecrits*, 16; trans. Lemaire, p. 16). Compare the place of the phallus described by the Ortigues above to the place of death as described by Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire in their Lacanian essay on the unconscious:

> The death-drive is that radical force, usually fixed and fixating, which surfaces in a catastrophic or ecstatic instant, at the point where the organic coherence of the subject in his body appears for what it is, unnamable or inexpressible, swoon or ecstasy, shouting its appeal for a word to veil and sustain it.
>   Thus the death-drive surfaces without ever being seen. But we already perceive . . . that it constitutes the "bedrock," the foundation of the castration complex, . . . [and] it imperiously gives rise to the development and structuring of language.

"L'inconscient, une étude psychanalytique," in Laplanche and Leclaire, *L'inconscient*, VI Colloque de Bonneval (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1966); trans. Patrick Coleman, *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*, YFS 48 (1972), pp. 143-4.

It is all the more surprising, then, when in "Poetic Presence and Illusion II" Krieger relinquishes this negative connection between the word and the world and concludes "we watch all the hobby horses . . . while we are probably mounted up on our own. Tristram acknowledges as much when he shows us himself mounted up on his and riding, that is, writing this book. Or is he, as he suggests in Volume VII, *literally* riding as he flees through the continent, trying to escape that 'arch-jockey of jockeys' who he feels is mounted up behind him and is in pursuit? But of course in this form death itself becomes just another metaphor, another hobby horse and hobby-horse rider. There are, then, no horses but hobby horses, though man is never anything but a jockey." Here Krieger seems to have been caught up in the same "mystick labyrinth" that confounded Tristram earlier: "Where is the metaphor and where is reality in this discourse?" Krieger asks. "Looking for reality, where can we find its 'place' in this novel in which . . . nothing holds its 'place'?"

> The novel constantly turns away from such substantial signifieds as presumably real towns and real genitalia (only "presumably real" since the novel does no more than note their absence) to let us dwell among those newly substantiated signifiers — the maps and make-believe replicas which turn into linguistic realities . . . it is the language which is the reality, creating instantaneities of metaphor which collapse all the varied versions of reality into its own single identity of the word.

Krieger acknowledges this confusion, of course, as merely the "fallacy of verbal reification," and claims that "our sympathy for the seriousness of the illusions of the characters is cut short . . . . Sterne encourages our hold-out, antiverbal skepticism by stimulating our sense of absurdity." But as we saw above, the explanation of metaphor that Krieger offers earlier in this essay cannot really account for the "lingering skepticism" that would cut short our absorption in these illusions, so Krieger's predicament comes to resemble that of Uncle Toby who, as Krieger says, "lives, on hobby-horseback, in mimesis of the one act in his life which has meaning, confounding ambiguous signifiers and signifieds in all-out sacrifice to the symbolic reality of his wound, the sole isolated fact":

> Sterne's many-leveled language, which would appear to be our only reality, is the one sure

presence in a world where everything resists our touch and points us to a verbal map. Where signifieds and signifiers reverse and re-reverse their roles, what, besides the poet's language, is "here"? Where is the body of this reality before us and how does it relate to the body of words, if Sterne has persuaded us to grant his words body? . . . What, then, is the book *about*? Where is its object of imitation? How can we touch the wound with which it has left us? We discover how difficult it is to answer precisely when, like Uncle Toby and the widow Wadman, we try to put our finger on the very place.[24]

Like Uncle Toby, here Krieger seems to have lost his bearings because he has no means of distinguishing in the text between the "sole isolated fact" of the *symbolic* reality of Toby's wound — its role in the story of Namur — and the "non-linguistic fact of death" whose mark Toby carries beneath the waistband of his red plush breeches. The widow, of course, has no such problem, guided as she is by her desire. Yet it is just that desire that Krieger's theory renders invisible to him: "Clearly," he says, "the issue between the not-quite-lovers is semiological and hermeneutic, revolving about words like 'whereabouts' and 'place' . . . . There are four 'wheres' and 'places' to which Uncle Toby may have been referring" (PPI 165). True, but only one that the widow is interested in; and from her perspective, the issue is hardly semiotic. But ignoring that fact as completely as Krieger, Toby is able to seize the widow's words and map her desire onto the symbolic site of his wound to tell the tale of Namur one more time, just as Tristram's own story of Uncle Toby's amours proceeds before the veil of the perfect signifier of desire. But just as Tristram knew that only desire could protect that one signifier in his narrative from the endless drift of the signifying chain, so do we find at the end of his narrative that the absurdity of Uncle Toby's obsession with his maps and models can be measured securely only against the anchor of the widow's desire. When that desire finally erupts in a virtual orgy of revelation in Volume IX — we are told that Toby finally finds out what the widow really wants from Corporal Trim, who got it from Susannah who heard it from Mrs. Bridget who learned it from Tristram's mother, to whom the widow had confided her plight, and that Susannah had "instantly imparted it by signs" to Jonathan,

who told the cook who told the postillion, who told the dairy maid . . . (TS 494) — Uncle Toby's illusions, the story of Toby's amours, and the novel quickly come to an end.

IV

The difficulty Krieger experiences in trying to put his finger on the place where the word confronts the world in *Tristram Shandy* recalls the dilemma he described in *Theory of Criticism*, where the critic "vainly seeks to capture in his language the object whose language has captured him" (TC 39). Although it is the critic who constitutes the poem as an object of desire by "putting the soliciting power out there" in it as an "idol that serves his needs," the position of the master in this relation is never secure. Confronting us as Other, the poem "resists being reduced to the determinances of the perceiving self" and "would seem to define [the critic] rather than he it"; the enrapturing beauty of the poem turns it into a lure, a "bait" or "entrapping structure" that appears before us "formally sovereign," seeking "to enclose the reader within its symbolic world" (TC 63, 43, 40, n.2, 44; PPI 121; TC 39, 18). "We may be uncertain of the extent to which we have been hypnotized by it or merely self-hypnotized," Krieger says, but in our struggle with the poem we inevitably experience it as "something out there, beckoning us, soliciting our willful subjugation to its power" (PPI 180, 322). So while the poem serves as "the total organized complex of multiple dimensions that . . . beckons to free" the critic from the "motions, false starts, unhappy interruptions . . . that victimize him" — to deliver us, in short, from "the imperfections of our experience in time" — as we succumb to this seductive lure we recognize that "the alienating quality of the force and its forcefulness are beyond question" (TC 40, 41; PPI 322), its power promising us a freedom only through our submission to the sovereignty of desire.

The experience traced through Krieger's texts in these metaphorical terms closely resembles Lacan's account of the specular capture that threatens to trap the subject in the Imaginary. Lacan describes the reflected image of the mirror-stage as a "lure of spatial identification" that promises a coherent vision of the self in contrast to "the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him" (E 4, 2), but like Krieger he also warns that this "capture by the imago of the human form" "situates the agency of the ego . . . in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible" and induces an "erotic relationship in which the human in-

[24]All of these quotations are from the conclusion to the essay, PPI 166-8.

dividual fixes upon himself an image which alienates him from himself" (E 2; LS 173). Should the individual's passage to and through the Oedipal stage be interrupted by a rejection or "foreclosure" of castration, the seductive trap of the Imaginary snaps shut. The operations of consciousness by which the other comes into being are obscured, and the subject becomes "riveted to the imaginary, which is taken for real, to non-distinction between signifier and signified."[25] Foreclosed as such, the phallus enters into "the play of the signifiers only in the mode of death" (E 196), and the result parallels Krieger's reading of Sterne's novel:

> The Imaginary object will either repeat itself indefinitely, remaining identical to itself — in which case consciousness clouds over and sinks into the automatism of repetition — or it will submit to a discontinuity of aspect through continuous qualitative changes — in this sense imagination really is our faculty of creation. Each image is, however, a blind alley in which subjective intention drowns in its own creation, collapsing into its object and failing to keep its distance from its own internal vision.
>
> (Lemaire 60)

Laplanche and Pontalis have described the Lacanian Imaginary as a "type of understanding in which factors such as resemblance and homeomorphism play a determining role, attesting to a kind of coalescence of the signifier and the signified."[26] This is, of course, exactly how Krieger describes the state of aesthetic intentionality, which "would see the poem as a mode of discourse in which the signifier has swallowed its signified" (PPI 153). Yet Krieger's poetic illusion is not a neurotic regression to Imaginary delusion, for it functions only within the boundaries of the tradition of aesthesis that constitutes the illusion as illusion under the succinct rule of the Platonic "No": "One cannot appreciate the verisimilar without being aware that it is not the thing itself," Krieger says (PPI 147).[27] "If we choose the illusion, we must play in full knowledge of what it is: that is, in effect, a knowledge of the reality that resists being embraced by our play with an ultimate language. The language of the poem, in providing its own limits,

provides this knowledge as well" (TC 173). So, Krieger tells us, the critic must struggle against the lure of the text and "claim to uncover and open to our inspection those features in the object which seek to enclose the reader within its symbolic world, preventing his escape" (TC 17-18).

But as Lacan shows, the knowledge by which the poem would dislose the illusion of its mirage comes to us only through the language of desire. If we cannot name that desire, we cannot situate the imaginary object of our love-play within the law of the Symbolic, and our account of the luxuriant fold of those two orders within the poem's illusion cuts that fold in the very gesture with which we would open it to inspection. Suspended between our appreciation of the poem as what it is and our knowledge of what it is not, the knot of desire that joins pleasure and knowledge in illusion has therefore remained resistant to Krieger's aesthetics, an object "we must try to know but theoretically, of course, we cannot," its presence marked only by the theoretical paradoxes with which he has recorded the strands of logic that twist in its coils.

In one of the many moments of exquisite sensitivity and hard-nosed honesty that pervade his work, Krieger noted the inevitability of that resistance several years ago at the end of an essay introduced by these lines from Sir Thomas Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt":

> Yet may I by no means my wearied mind
> Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore
> Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,
> Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.

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[25]Lemaire, 86; cf. p. 246: "The absence of transcendence of the Oedipus places the subject under the regime of foreclosure or non-distinction between the symbol and the real."

[26]*Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: P.U.F., 1967); trans. Peter Kussell and Jeffrey Mehlman, *French Freud*, p. 192.

[27]At the end of "Literature versus Ecriture: Constructions and Deconstructions in Recent Critical Theory" (1979; rpt. PPI 169-87), Krieger mentions Geoffrey Hartman's effort to suggest a linguistic correlative for Lacan's specular image in the "specular name" that emerges through literature's unique "nominating" capacity (see Hartman, "Psychoanalysis: The French Connection," in *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text: Selected Essays from the English Institute, 1976-7*, ed. G. Hartman [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978]), and he associates it with the function of the mirror in Shakespeare's sonnets as he described it in *Window to Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964): "The image in the mirror, as our double, seems to match our reality with its own, except that, as an illusion, it is without substance and not ourselves at all" (PPI 186). But when in the next sentence he goes on to describe the necessary move from the mirror-stage of the poem to the "window" on the world that the poem must become, Krieger's theoretical language once again comes up short: "Further, I saw *the magical nature of glass* as permitting the unsubstantiality of the mirror image to open outward — through the mirror become window — onto a separate reality of its own" (PPI 186, my italics).

Comparing his plight as a critic to that of the weary hunter/lover in Wyatt's poem, Krieger claims that the "apparently self-contradictory" propositions of his paradoxical argument deny themselves, and

> in denying themselves, deny their appropriateness as defining tools for this object of definition. I have tried to speak firmly, definitively, about the will-o'-the-wisp literature, whose very being undoes this mode of dealing with it . . . . I feel like the lover in my epigraph from Wyatt, who cannot find the equipment appropriate to his beloved quarry, and finally retires, exhausted . . . . But as I do, I remind myself that the elusive deer in Wyatt's sonnet was very likely — as poetry is for me — his mistress and a queen.
>
> (PPI 196)

In such passages, desire does emerge in Krieger's work, but only as the residue of the critical act, a testament to its failure and a witness to his defiant will to remain responsive to a promise he cannot name. Yet Lacan teaches us that desire joins discourse through the same gesture in which the Imaginary object falls before the law of the Symbolic, so it can serve as the bond that ties the lover's illusion to the proscription of its limit. If Krieger had examined the quarry in Wyatt's poem a little more closely, he would have discovered that lesson. For there, immediately after the lines Krieger quotes as his epigraph, the poet tells us that the elusive object of his pursuit bears upon it the interdictory mark that names it as the desire of the Other and so submits it to Law while putting it forever out of reach:

> Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
> As well as I, may spend his time in vain.
> And graven with diamonds in letters plain
> There is written, her fair neck round about,
> *"Noli me tangere*, for Caesar's I am,
> And wild for to hold, though I seem tame."[28] □

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[28]The note to this poem in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (Fourth Edition, ed. M.H. Abrams, *et al.* [New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1979]) is instructive: "An adaptation of Petrarach, *Rime 190*, perhaps influenced by commentators on Petrarch, who said that *Noli me tangere quia Caesaris sum* ("Touch me not, for I am Caesar's") was inscribed on the collars of Caesar's hinds which were then set free and were presumably safe from hunters. Wyatt's sonnet is usually supposed to refer to Anne Boleyn, in whom Henry VIII became interested in 1526" (I, p. 466).

A MATTER OF DISTINCTION:
AN INTERVIEW WITH MURRAY KRIEGER

Conducted by Richard Berg

I'd like to begin with two monumental questions: first, how did American literary theory get where it is today from where it was twenty-five years ago; secondly, where is it?

When you say twenty-five years ago, I must assume you are speaking of the heyday of the New Criticism, just about the time from which we begin to trace the decline of its dominance. 1957 was the year of the publication of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism,* which was, I suppose, the first major post-New-Critical, which is to say anti-New-Critical, statement. It was also just one year after the publication of my book, *The New Apologists for Poetry,* which sought to sum up the theoretical consequences — as well as the deficiencies — of the New Criticism. I suppose, in retrospect — or at least friends of mine have told me — that the statement that book made played its role in burying the New Criticism, or at least led us to look beyond that movement and in other theoretical directions.

As I look back to the several candidates since Frye to succeed the New Criticism as our dominant movement, I am struck by the extent to which they seem to function as corrective reactions to the various excesses of New-Critical orthodoxy. In reaction against the over-ardent suppression of biography and authorial intention, there sprung up a new interest in what we might call consciousness criticism on the one hand or visionary criticism on the other. We associate the first with the Geneva School and the name of Georges Poulet and the second with followers of Northrop Frye, perhaps most impressively in the early work of Harold Bloom (that is, the pre-anxiety Bloom of *The Visionary Company*). This emphasis was accompanied by the urgent rediscovery of Romanticism — that period much maligned by the New Criticism — which, since the late fifties, returned with a vengeance and, has not again been removed from the center of critical interest and authority. I suspect it was the revival of interest in authorial consciousness, intentionality, or vision that largely accounts for the (then) new centrality of the one

literary period in which authors are most explicitly invested in their works. On the other side, the excessive neglect by the New Criticism (through its concentration on a normative, unyielding object) of the role of the audience and of social forces in helping to make the work mean what it does for the reader has in part sponsored a number of antagonistic responses, whether arising out of speech-act theory, information theory, German reception aesthetic, or neo-Marxism. Finally, the new Criticism's excessive concentration on a discrete poetic object, seen as a unique discursive entity cut off from the generic language system, has helped justify the antithetical response of structuralism and post-structuralism: the deconstruction of the isolated work is accompanied by the deconstruction of the very notion of literature itself into an indivisible realm of *écriture,* of undifferentiated textuality, in which — however paradoxically — the principle of difference reigns monolithically supreme.

Obviously I have taken on far too much in trying to give your question an answer that is already much too long, but how was I even to suggest a thumbnail history of criticism of the last two and a half decades, especially when this history has been so complex and many-sided? It is also rather unjust to the facts, as well as self-serving, to suggest — as I have — that all movements in the last twenty-five years receive their impetus from a desire to reverse some of the tendencies of the New Criticism. Clearly, many of them — especially those from abroad — have purposes and functions historically unrelated to the New Criticism; indeed, a good number, alas, seem hardly to be aware of the New Criticism. Yet I do believe that, within the context of American academic criticism, we find an antithetical relationship between the New Criticism and subsequent movements, perhaps growing out of the need to overthrow the austerity of parental dogma and to restore to critical interest the place of works and of kind of works long neglected.

The several criticisms I have named seem to me, then, to represent the variety of theoretical movements which have sought to hold sway these last two and a half decades: criticism after Frye or

Poulet, criticism responding to various theories of audience or society, and the several kinds of criticism thought of as structuralist and post-structuralist. Criticism and critical theory have doubtless always been products of current fashion, but it is certainly the case that, in recent years, the pursuit of what is fashionable — together with the attempt to discover what at each moment *is* fashionable — has dominated the realm of criticism far more completely than we were used to expect. Indeed, of the movements I have named, surely the first group — those critics concerned primarily with authorial consciousness, intentionality, or vision — is pretty well out of it now, being about as much out of fashion as the New Criticism itself. These approaches were doomed to be set aside as part of the general rejection of anything that could be related to the "myth of origins." What origin could be more obviously vulnerable to textualist attack than the quaint notion of the author himself, the speaking presence which such critics confidently found reflected in the words spoken or written? Of the others mentioned, structuralism itself has been superseded by any of the several post-structuralisms, with the "post" itself guaranteeing obsolescence.

I would say that the main contest at this moment is between post-structuralist proponents of an infinite textuality (or rather we should probably say intertextuality) and those who would move beyond the world of texts to search out the extra-linguistic role of naked power which those texts reflect or disguise. The interpretation of the world *as* text is thus confronted by the interpretation of a world hidden or suppressed *in* texts and thereby revealed *through* texts. In one the text is the world, while in the other the text is the verbal manipulation *by* the world, through which the world-as-power (whether Marx's, Nietzsche's, or Freud's) creates its authority and control.

There are, of course, several camps within each of these two sides, both of them in their varieties seeking to dominate the world of critical fashion and to demonstrate that domination by forcing upon it a hegemony of special language. As a result of my experience for five years as director of The School of Criticism and Theory, during which time I examined many hundreds of applications from our brightest younger theorists, I have some sense about the sway of fashion and indeed even thought of having some sort of stock market index recording the relative popularity of our several competing schools. I would guess that, just about now, Derridean deconstruction, still very widely followed, may be losing just a bit, with Marxism-cum-Foucault moving up. But that was as of about a year ago. Perhaps we should check with Geoffrey Hartman, who read the applications for the School this year. Sometimes a year can make a big difference in such matters, if — as too many do — one tailors his theoretical allegiance to keep it fashionable.

Forgive me for being such a long time about your "monumental" opening questions; I'll keep my other answers shorter if you can keep your questions less ambitious.

Do you see this movement in theory as a continuum or as some radical break with the past?

Of course, as with most such questions, you probably expect my answer to insist that in some sense it is both. And I won't disappoint you. First, as my earlier answer indicates, I would insist on saying "movements" rather than "movement." But even if, collapsing all the recent movements, we were to speak of a common tendency, then I would find myself beginning by describing it as a radical break which, upon closer observation, betrays many elements of continuity — even if the continuity is reflected in a rebellion against the predecessor's authority at the same time as that rebellion exhibits many of the varied characteristics being superseded. Much of my answer to your first question was framed in accordance with this suggestion. It is probably most true of deconstruction that, as it has become domesticated by the American academic tradition, its revolutionary tendencies seem to have been tamed by the critical habits common to it and to its antithetical precursor. It has certainly become common, in recent days, for socially oriented critics to complain that the deconstructionist movement is vitiated by the varied formalistic objectives of the earlier formalisms which it would deconstruct.

Is "deconstruction" then the "telos" of certain tendencies in earlier Anglo-American theory?

I look at your last question as followed by this one, and I can easily deduct that it is your own conviction that deconstruction is *the* movement to which the recent history of theory has arrived. As you know, I am less sure about this monolithic claim. Similarly I would hesitate to privilege its historical role by projecting anything like a "telos" upon it. If you are asking whether in any sense some deconstructionist notions are implicit — if hardly ever realized or understood as such — within certain New Critical practices, then I suppose I feel that

they are. But of course the two movements for the most part shout their differences to one another. Still the problem of telos bothers me more in your historical model. Since I feel that in some ways American criticism is already showing signs of moving beyond deconstruction, the application of anything like teleology (that is, of an Aristotelian final cause) to it is hardly appropriate.

How does your earlier work relate to this unfolding movement? Would you say that it acted as a vanguard for these present developments; didn't you help open the door for these once new French fashions?

You are again using the word "movement" as you did before, clearly betraying your conviction that deconstruction is the only movement, the one to which presumably you expected me to lead us in my first answer. But let me proceed with this answer, using deconstruction as the movement which interests you. It is, as a matter of fact, the movement among current ones to which I would relate my own earlier work, both positively and negatively. In the spirit of my work, as well as in some of the precise moves it makes, I am convinced there are a number of curious foreshadowings of strategies which deconstructionists have now made familiar to us. And I am speaking of some of my very early work, although clearly I did not have in mind many of the important consequences which deconstructionists have laid out for us.

If you look at the footnotes to the final chapter of my book, *Theory of Criticism* — the chapter in which I seek to engage deconstruction in dialogue — you will see in many of them my attempt to propose passages in my earlier work which anticipated, though with a difference, many of the deconstructionist moves. These go as far back as the passage, in *The New Apologists for Poetry* (1956), which deals with Donne's undoing of his own metaphorical construct in "The Canonizaton." My notion of the metaphor that at once encloses the work and, by denying itself, opens it up — this notion persists, from my earliest work right through to my claim in *The Classic Vision* (1971) that "all poems must covertly contain their anti-poems." Indeed in that book I argue in several places for the need for "systematic duplicity." My dear colleague and theoretical cohort at Iowa, the late Rosalie Colie — though well outside the French theoretical tradition — provided brilliantly for what becomes in Paul de Man the poem's self-deconstructive tendencies, when she traces the moves by which the metaphor "unmetaphors" itself. Her essay on

Marvell's "The Garden," perhaps the best chapter in her splendid book on Marvell, is developed by means of the device of "unmetaphoring" within the assumed totality of metaphorical composition. This is another version of my own claim, which is as old as my book on Shakespeare's Sonnets (*A Window to Criticism*, 1964), that the metaphor functions as a miracle, though it is most like a miracle in its counter-movement which negates itself: for a miracle can function only in conjunction with our rational foreknowledge that it cannot exist at all.

The issue here ought not to be reduced to a fight for priority, to a claim for my earlier-ness. But you have framed your questions in so historical a way that I could not resist — especially when the relationship between an Anglo-American theorist like me and the new (but not so new) deconstructionist tradition in our academy (though mainly borrowed from France) is at issue in your questioning. I know that Gerald Graff, in a recent article, has charged me with being in part responsible for the deconstructionist mode. He sees me as helping to open the way for its rejection of the simple referential function of words, for its concentration upon the internal entanglements of the text which allows for a play of signifiers, thereby depriving us of the sure stay of signifieds which should pre-exist them and control them. And in my early concern with systematic duplicity, as in Colie's dual commitment to the unmetaphoring as well as the metaphoring impulse, I suppose precedents can be found for more recent movements. But they clearly have gone well beyond any precedents which one might find in my work when, making no distinction between fiction or poetry and other writing, they appear to resort to a monolithic method of analyzing the textual (and intertextual) play of signifiers. Nor, I might add, is their notion of the free play of "undecidables" to be confused with my own notion of a controlled doubleness. I seem to hold out much more hope (perhaps an old-fashioned hope) for the possibility — and the desirability — of consensus among readers confronted by the same text, however qualified or downright skeptical my epistemological concessions.

It could be argued, I think, that your earlier work, prior to The Play and Place of Criticism, *not only helped establish criticism as an academic discipline, but also set the style and mode of the argument within the critical debate. After all, you laid the New Critics to rest in* The New Apologists for Poetry *because of their lack of philosophical rigor. Now that you have somewhat changed your style, has this earlier mode come home to haunt you?*

Would it be off the mark to say that even though your style has changed, your work still shows a continued commitment to this project, that literary theory and criticism should be firmly grounded in philosophical rigor even if that means abandoning the sureness of that ground?

No, I don't think it is off the mark. In fact, I think this last of yours is a fair statement. I think that I have always searched out the systematic assumptions beneath the critical statements of others and have tried to worry about my own. Nor do I believe that my more recent work marks a significant break with that project. What *has* happened, though, as you suggest, is that the ground — and my style with it — has lost its sureness, if it hasn't slipped away altogether. I now find myself more sensitive to the need — and the need to yield to the need — for counter-logical moves that force me to acknowledge the paradoxical; even, I suppose, to welcome paradox into the would-be logical precincts of theory.

Nevertheless, this change should not be seen as a resignation from system-hunting, nor should I be seen as substituting for system-hunting a search for the aberrant, the stray moment of discourse, which has its own decentered authority apart from any systematic context. I recognize, in other words, that my continuing project of theoretical analysis presupposes now, as it has all along, an argumentative discourse which seeks to center itself about a principled closure. In other words, I hang onto a notion of argument that is clearly pre-deconstructionist. At the same time, I see the logic of system subverting itself, working to undo the very assumptions which allow it to function. But the discursive habit of submitting terms and propositions to a logical closure still, for me, creates the assumptions behind my reading of other critics and of myself, even where such assumptions are undercut in the very act of seeming to be assumed. So you can see how some of what I say may appear similar in feel and temper to the work of some post-structuralists, even while it undoubtedly springs from a more old-fashioned devotion to the notion of theoretical system than they could allow. I just do not believe that the theorist has to give up the notion of discursive system in order to account for the anti-systematic in discourse.

This welcoming of paradox would then also account for what Frank Lentricchia in After the New Criticism *sees as the retreat of your later work.*

You are probably right: I suppose Lentricchia does find himself disturbed by my resorting to the "both/and" and the "even-as," thereby retreating (in his eyes) from straight assertion to self-denying assertion. With his interest in the historically and socially "real," he finds this practice a retreat to the equivocal and hence the politically paralytic, a retreat whose only possible justification, he claims, is hedonistic. So he would find in my more recent work an aesthetic resignation that has given up its commitment to the existentially real (as seen in *The Tragic Vision*) for the fictional being pursued for its own sake. I think he gives less attention than he should both to the equivocal character of the existential as it appears in my earlier work and to the cultural impact of the fictional in my later work. The difference is less severe than your question — and perhaps Lentricchia's chapter — suggest.

Lentricchia's attack on what he calls my hedonism is central to his attack in his chapter on my work. The enemy for him is what he thinks of as the hedonistic fictionalism of Wallace Stevens, who, curiously, was one of the heroes of Lentricchia's first book, *The Gaiety of Language* (1968), the title itself a quotation from Stevens. It is, I think, this insistence on reducing me to Stevens that leads him to ignore my interest in the cultural function of literature. Thus in the book of mine which he treats in great and knowing detail, *Theory of Criticism*, he overlooks what was for me its most important chapter, Chapter 7: "The Aesthetic as the Anthropological: The Breath of the Word and the Weight of the World." In it I make my fullest argument yet for the process by which the double movement in the literary work's master metaphor unlocks for us not only a culture's momentary grasp of its visioned reality, but also what it represses in the excluded realm that the metaphor evades.

I find in Lentricchia's antagonism toward what he claims to be my hedonism a strange echo of Yvor Winters' violent attack on what he claimed to be John Crowe Ransom's hedonism. And that in turn suggests a relationship I don't enjoy contemplating between Lentricchia and Gerald Graff, who has never fully recovered (who does?) from his apprenticeship to Winters' dedication to the real. Both are disturbed, as Winters was, by those critics who would trap us inside texts, within a world as fiction, thus putting in question the very existence of a world beyond fiction, beyond its involute language. I don't mean to suggest any literal indebtedness to Winters by Lentricchia, or any real kinship to Graff, but there *are* similarities in this protection of the extra-linguistically real and, consequently, the antagonistic obsession with the hedonistic, a label that is being too freely passed around.

As, according to him, I have retreated from logic in my own theory and from a vision of the existential in poetry to a paradoxical play of criticism that seeks to focus upon an internal fictional play in poetry, I have — as Stevens did before me — joined the ranks of the "theoreticians of deliberate triviality." And we know which theoreticians he means by these. He sees me swallowed up by that deconstructionist gang, as my tactic of seeking to swallow them up has been turned inside out. And he sees my cultivation of the paradoxical in theory as leading to a self-destructive system that is no more useful to expose reality and its social determinants than is the "nondiscursive symbolist poem" which I apparently mean my theoretical work to resemble. So much, then, for my anthropological quest and for the distinctions I would place between myself and a hedonistic aesthetic and between myself and the deconstructionists. Needless to say, what Lentricchia sees as a retreat I would claim to be an advance in my self-awareness. And I worry whether it is not his movement, back to Winters or — moving from right to left — back to social reality, that is the retreat from what these past decades have taught us.

Wasn't "After the New Criticism" a title you once gave to a paper? Isn't Lentricchia's use of it a surprising comment on his own work?

Yes, I published an essay with that title in the *Massachusetts Review* in 1962. It was, as a matter of fact, an ambitious essay, and I think it was pretty widely known — even was translated. I know Lentricchia knew of it and has acknowledged it, and I find the suggestion of his acknowledgment of it at one point in his preface. Of course, my own essay, now twenty years old, had a quite different set of after-New Critics in mind, although chief among them was Northrop Frye, who is also the first post-New Critic considered by Lentricchia's book. As I suggested in my answer to your first question, it is with Frye that post-New Criticism begins. My *New Apologists for Poetry*, which — some have suggested — at once put the New Critics in their place and buried them, appeared in 1956, and — quite obligingly — Frye published his *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957: beginning of the new dispensation — after the New Criticism. I think Lentricchia sees it this way, and in his preface he generously gives the *New Apologists* pretty much this role. Hence Lentricchia's *After the New Criticism* begins, as he tells us in the preface, in 1957 (presumably with Frye's book), in effect, after *The New Apologists for Poetry*.

If I work at it, I can come up with a number of curious speculations about the significance of Lentricchia's title, especially the extent to which there is a ghostly trace of my own earlier essay's title in it. Lentricchia is seeking to create a new — his own — *After the New Criticism*, turning upon mine and taking it back — also, to a great extent, taking back his own earlier self which was to some extent tied up with that earlier "After the New Criticism." As I pointed out in my answer to your last question, Lentricchia's early work found its source in the kind of post-New Critical suggestions I was making in the late fifties and early sixties. So my earlier post-New Criticism (After the New Criticism) then was to a great extent his. Seen this way, his recent *After the New Criticism* indeed does come *after*, after his own, now rejected, version of New Criticism. In this sense, Lentricchia's title — and the *after* in it — is autobiographical in relation to his own project and his own development. Seen in relation to my own earlier work, his book means to function for this historical moment much as my own *New Apologists* functioned in the late fifties. It is, then, an *After the New Apologists*, although the *after* here again means not only coming later but also coming in response to, in reaction against. This double sense of "after" is familiar to us, thanks to the work of Harold Bloom, who couples the debts of chronology with the resentment of the debtor against the creditor. Something of this sort of historical succession I think moves Lentricchia to his own new *after* in its relation to his own earlier work and mine. In turning against his earlier self, he must make his former ally the now rejected hedonist that he sees himself as having been. For he is also coming after his own earlier version of Steven's romanticism.

So perhaps, finally, we see yet another sense of "after." We have had not only "after" as coming later, and "after" as the reaction against, which turns out to be the obligation of those who come later; but, despite that rejection, we also have not merely *après* but *d'après* in the French manner of citing the adaptation of an earlier by a later version, the sense in English of "after" as "according to" or "in the manner of." In his desire to fulfill a function for this historical moment in a manner that echoes the way that function was fulfilled for another earlier moment, Lentricchia may be seen — in his repetition of my exact title — as writing his *After the New Criticism après* and *d'après* mine. But all this is extravagant speculation on my part. I have so used his title as to turn it (and his work) into an allusive, intertextual, and antithetical criticism all at once. As I relate his title to mine, I have found

his work to be in the genre of *after*, that is, to be an after after, a *d'après après, d'après* "After the New Criticism." No wonder his chapter on me must take on so antithetical a character, since it is my "after" that he comes after, my "after" that must be wiped out by his — which perhaps is why there is no explicit reference to it. But for me the twenty years between the two "afters" call for no such negation as his, but permit a greater sense of theoretical continuity. Perhaps that's because it was I who wrote the earlier "After the New Criticism."

Probably all this is not only an extravagant speculation, but an immodest, even an egocentric one as well. That is the danger of interviews, I fear, in the free range they give to the responding self. Feeling thus self-chastened, I suggest we go on.

Let's turn to Lentricchia's critique of your work. He is trying you for the anti-logical tendency of your recent work, the advance of self-awareness, and not the argument itself. He finds that it has become a theory of contradictions; then he goes on to discover more contradictions. Yet doesn't each discovery give your argument more density, complexity, and substance?

I would of course enjoy agreeing with you. Actually I have anticipated what you are asking of me in what I've already said about my struggles with the ambiguities of systematics in theorizing. But I think it is true that Lentricchia tries to have it both ways: he says that I seek a theory that self-consciously nurtures contradictions (in effect, "Both Sides Now") *and* that I can be found out as contradicting myself in spite of my most proper theoretical intentions. He is unhappy about the first of these because he fears it makes me consciously forgo proper theory-writing to indulge a false poetry, and then he finds me veiling my theory and muddying its system by stumbling into contradiction, apparently against my will. Yet even in the latter case he usually concedes that I am aware of, and acknowledge, the particular contradiction without struggling against it. As you suggest, then, he seems uncertain about the status of statement, of logical discourse, in my theorizing, so that he does not seem to me to strike home either when he claims to prefer another sort of discourse than mine or when, claiming a foul, he finds my discourse erring by doing what it confesses it has to do.

Lentricchia seems, then, to be showing a decided nostalgia for an earlier Krieger, one less poetic and more logical.

I am pretty much in agreement with what you are suggesting. Again I would like to remind you that, while I do not completely deny that there are significant changes between those of my writings influenced by existentialism and the later ones which are consciously addressing the post-structuralist challenge, I would prefer to stress the extent to which, in my earlier work, the equivocal was already undermining any momentary attraction which the "real," as an ontological element, held for me. In that earlier work I suspect that I was not always as constant as my later theoretical context reminded me I would have to be, and that my wording sometimes slipped; but the evasiveness which annoys Lentricchia was there, I fear, much earlier than he seems to allow.

My first theoretically self-conscious projection of it appears as early as *The Classic Vision* in 1971, in the anti-Hegelian diagram which I originally invented in order to explain certain thematic duplicities that characterize what I was calling the tragic and the classic visions. I resurrected that diagram more recently, in my second "Poetic Presence and Illusion" essay in the book of that title, when I discovered how effectively its terms and relations characterized what I wanted to say about the operation of literary metaphor generally. The diagram is intended to indicate a pattern in accordance with which apparent polarities, for all the exclusiveness of their opposition to each other, criss-cross, even turn into one another, so that difference is at once sustained and converted to identity. This double relation between convertible poles, in which their distinctness ends by being confounded, I have more recently expressed in the model of the prisoner's dilemma game, which frames my notion of *Poetic Presence and Illusion.* My MLA rejoinder, "Both Sides Now," pursues this extension into the prisoner's dilemma. All this is indeed the paradoxical play upon logic that I find at the heart of poetic metaphor and that any theory seeking to account for literary discourse must confront with its own subversive self-consciousness. I suspect that, whatever slips one may find in the language of my early work, the counter-logical subversion — with its threat to the logic of a self-consistent theory — is a consistent tendency (perhaps the only consistency) within all my work.

Yet, for me, this intratextual play, which seems to cut the work off from an extratextual reality, has strong cultural implications, and hence references to historical realities, after all — so much so that I wonder whether, if he was aware of them, Lentricchia could still make the charges of mandarinism and isolationism which he does. I find that

the enclosing, totalizing pretension of the poem as metaphor seeks to impose itself through the power of exclusion, that which would repress whatever threatens to explode it (which is just about everything outside itself). And the shrewd, self-deconstructing poem reminds us of this repression by its subtle, barely sensed, smuggling-in of the repressed.

Just think of my old, too often used example, "The Rape of the Lock." Here the bloody world of biological reality is forcibly excluded from the drawing-room cosmetic world that constitutes the poem's master metaphor and all its language; and yet that biological world manages to assert itself *as* excluded through the secondary meanings which the words, almost by oversight, appear to admit in spite of themselves. Now all this is enormously telling about this cultural moment, what its vision, its politics, admits or represses: the permissibilities of its words, what they see or are blind to, what their hearers are to hear or allow to be wasted on the air. And it is of enormous historical import and gives the poet an indispensable role in allowing us to see what society's language hides as well as reveals — reveals by hiding as well as by saying. Here indeed is formalism moving — as Geoffrey Hartman has claimed — beyond formalism. But I can get to this "beyond" only by way of the paradoxical relations between closure and openness, identity and difference, such as my diagram was created to represent.

Lentricchia then has failed to grant your work the benefit of history, for instead of granting you a changing self-consciousness, he has saddled your recent work with the language and positions of earlier writings, as if time and various theoretical debates had not produced some sea-change in the problematic.

It is true that the realm of the theoretical dialogue has altered its character significantly during the course of my writings, and of course my own language and my framing of problems have continually altered to meet (or perhaps even to help create) the changing dialectic over the years. Yet Lentricchia does at times juxtapose quotations widely separated in time and intellectual context without always taking account of differing circumstances to which they are addressed — a lapse not to be expected from a theorist as careful as he is and as devoted as he is to historicity.

The major development, as I have said earlier, is a gradual change in my emphasis, moving from an existentialist interest that acknowledges the realm of deadly fact — of facticity — beyond our words

and their creations to a neo-Kantian interest that allows nothing that is not constituted by language. I must confess that, even as late in my work as *Theory of Criticism*, I am at moments divided between being responsive to the sovereignty of death, the one deadly fact that licenses all others and undoes the pretensions of our words, and being responsive to a universal domain of linguistic fictions that even subjugate our notion of death to a verbal invention. Death, as the ultimate problematic, from time to time unsettles from the outside my confidence in the creative world of language, though the latter invariably returns to have the final word by reminding me that I have not experienced death except as a verbal entity. Assigning dominance to one or another of these has great consequences for any decision to be made about the independent availability of a reality that precedes the shapings of human symbolic systems. And the development of my own career, in being responsive to the changing emphases in this historical dialectic, has, I admit, revealed a certain unsteadiness as I succumbed to one or the other emphasis. But I like to think that, beneath the ontology of a temporality created by an awareness of the fact of death, I meant — even in my earlier writings — to suggest the projection of the human construct, so that the dominating element is, after all, an *awareness* of death rather than the (as yet) unreachable fact itself.

This admission about your present relation to your existentialist roots forces me to ask not only about your present relationship to your earlier texts, but also about your relation to such notions as "contextualism." Where do you stand today vis-à-vis earlier work and this early concept? For some believe, I imagine, that "contextualism" remains in your theory unchanged by the ravages of the theoretical debate. Would you still wish to associate yourself with it or other notions like "the poetic object," "the unique and particular," or even an unqualified "organicism"? As I read your work none of these notions are ahistorical, despite charges that they are.

All these notions achieve another sort of formulation since, say, *Theory of Criticism* in 1976. Instead of what seemed to be the unqualified closure and totalization of what I originally termed "contextualism," I have come to emphasize the poem's capacity — through the duplicity I described to you earlier — to suggest the self-conscious fictionality of that closure and thus, by negative implication, the still beckoning world to which it secretly opens.

(What I am saying, by the way, can be applied as a corrective to the notion of "organicism" as well.) Further, the apparent claim of an ontologically secure "poetic object" has given way to the acknowledgment that we can speak only of an intentional object, phenomenologically dependent on the perceptual and aesthetic habits and codes of poet and audience. We are, I have come to stress, dependent on the functions and expectations which our culture imposes upon our perceptual intentionalities, so that such phrases as "poetic object" must be taken within the phenomenological qualifications that allow a culture to project what it then sees as its "objects."

From the way I have described these correctives through an enlargement of theoretical perspective, it is evident that I believe, not that my earlier claims — next to my more recent ones — were ontologically naive, so much as that they knew better than they seemed to say, but fell into the language of an earlier idiom without being sufficiently sensitive to it or critical of it. After all, it was as far back as my study of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in the mid-sixties that I defended the metaphor as miracle, but only by insisting that our sense of it as miracle rests on our knowing that it is impossible for it to occur. Thus I saw the metaphor affirming its power of figurational closure only while denying that it is more than a verbal illusion, subject to being undone by the linguistic realm beyond its circular grasp. So historical change certainly is telling in my use of these terms, and they function now with a differing force of qualification as the problematic urgency shifts; but I think — if one reads the work generously and with care — there may be more of a change in the delicacy and self-consciousness of my language than a substantive change in my claims. Which suggests that perhaps there is something transhistorical in them as well. But I don't believe they are — or even were — ahistorical, for the anthropological interest I've mentioned has always been central to my work.

But isn't "contextualism" still open and vulnerable to charges of aesthetic isolationism and elitism?

I do not believe that, as contextualism now functions in my work, it is any longer (if it ever was) open to the antagonistic charge that it has divorced itself from culture or from the immediate cultural function of literature. It is surely true that my work has rested to a great extent on a separation of the special powers of poetic discourse from the less glorious ways in which we allow our language to operate, and this is an assumption which distresses

Lentricchia and supports his charge of aesthetic isolationism, which leads to the distinction between poets and other users of language. But I am willing to let that assumption remain and expect that it will be attested to by those, like most of us through the history of our culture, who bother to read with any sensitivity. Still, I would instantly add that what the poet has done with his extraordinary product is to allow the rest of us to use it in a way that brings him into the midst of us, thanks to his having taught us to attune our language to his. In this service he would appear to be far more communal than isolated.

Lentricchia seems, in these charges, to be giving us his version of the common charge, made by radical critics against formalist criticism (even in its most socially conscious varieties), that it is arrogantly elitist. The suggestion is that there is something anti-democratic in the notion that the best of our poems should be accorded a "privileged" status in comparison to less specialized uses of language. But how can we not so privilege them when we see them making their case for privilege with their every word? It strikes me as a strange, and unfortunate, political analogy (attested to by the use of terms like "privilege" or "elite") for critics to treat relationships among texts — or, for that matter, among artifacts in general — as if they were comparable to relationships among citizens within a political-economic order. The ground for privilege in one is hardly like the ground for privilege in the other, and surely the acknowledgment of the better made or more significantly made artifact hardly has anti-democratic, or for that matter mandarin, implications.

In your recent work you show more of an awareness of and a concern for the even as element of your style. While your critics invest a great deal of energy in finding fault with the poles of the contradictions, you seem to be moving toward attending to the point of the fulcrum. Is this attention to the dual quality of your style a new direction in your theory?

This "dual quality" becomes explicit in my work with the title and the emblem, as well as the interest in the prisoner's dilemma, which shape my volume, *Poetic Presence and Illusion,* published in 1979. (Of course, some of the key essays in that volume were written somewhat earlier.) But, as I have suggested, that dual quality had asserted itself far earlier, and I suspect that I completed my move to what you call the point of the fulcrum with the invention of the diagram to which I have referred, which reveals

only movement and constant inversion rather than any points or resting places. This is precisely the reason I followed up the diagram, in *Poetic Presence and Illusion,* with another diagram in which I find polarities spinning around the circle, continually rotating, even passing, and appearing to change place with, one another. The tension exerted upon the poles drives them only into further motion without rest, since there are no points on the circle. So the model of polarity as a polarity that yet becomes converted to identity places my theory only at a fulcrum (in *your* metaphor), which controls nothing but motion, which opposes identity to polarity but opposes also that opposition.

Would you accept the critique of your work that argues that you are wrestling not with an inherited problematic but with an inherited language of Neo-Kantian aesthetics, a language that is invested with a spatial terminology, and that this is your prisoner's dilemma?

I would think that all issues that are central to a particular theory, present or past, turn out — upon analysis — to be, not problems created by the inherited language of the theoretical tradition in which they function. Still, no matter how linguistically trapped we end up being, this is not to deny that our theoretical drive is set in motion by a desire to solve what seems like a real problem, one that we resent having reduced to a verbal one. So we wrestle stubbornly, somehow affecting our experience in a world beyond our language even as we recognize the prisonhouse. This paradox hasn't really changed much since critical philosophy first began its struggles with the egocentric predicament in the eighteenth century — though of course it must be recognized that this way of putting the predicament is also the necessary projection of *its* inherited language. Still, my work is no more exempt from these circular frustrations than any others, so that it need not shrink from the force of your question. There is a choice to be made, certainly, from among the inherited languages, and mine may well be neo-Kantian in some respects; but I'm not sure that another theoretical context escapes its language to come any closer to solving the problem.

Frankly, you give the game away when you call it an "inherited problematic." Exactly: what is inherited is a problematic disguising itself as a problem. That is, it is a meta-problem that sets those complex and self-defeating conditions which preclude us from treating it as a mere problem to be solved. But, within such modest objectives, I find

the neo-Kantian terms more useful than others because they permit a theory that is well suited to the kinds of literary art (or, for that matter, the kinds of the arts in general) which I am most concerned with accounting for. For the major Western canon through the mid-twentieth century seems responsive to that inherited verbal network of assumptions.

Let me also comment on your play upon the phrase "prisoner's dilemma," which you force into becoming an extension of the metaphor about "The Prison-House of Language." This is hardly the sense in which I have used the phrase. I have used it in "Both Sides Now," as I did in the volume, *Poetic Presence and Illusion,* in accordance with its technical manipulations by game theorists among our social scientists. The word "dilemma" is meant with technical precision: it refers to the captured criminal (one of a pair), who cannot know whether his confederate will confess and implicate him or will deny all, leaving him untouchable by the law; and who, consequently, cannot himself decide to confess or to deny since he could lose in either case, inasmuch as his decision is linked to one which he cannot know and over which he has no control. Further, he knows that his confederate faces the same dilemma and must make his own separate, but linked, decision. So the first prisoner must try, vicariously, to be his confederate as well as himself.

I review the prisoner's dilemma model briefly here, because in some peculiar way I find it relevant to your question after all — though not in the way you intended. If I am trapped by a spatial terminology, which presumably creates a mystification about my subject, then there is the suggestion that a de-spatialized terminology (temporal?) would disabuse us. But terminology is inevitably spatial — even that which struggles to free itself for "pure" temporality. Time is no less a human category than space, as Kant reminds us. Perhaps the only freedom for a theorist comes from the desperate attempt to escape from language and its fixity by writing a word and then drawing a line through it to cancel it, in the manner of Heideggerian post-structuralists; it's their equivalent, I suppose, to my own annoying habit of the "even-as." In effect, then, I am imprisoned by the spatial and am matched by a twin theorist (shall I call him Paul de Man?) whose devotion to the temporal is not liberating but only fashions a companion cell to mine. Yet I must try to think through him as he must try to through me: so we both have to indulge the even-as, to self-deconstruct or, perhaps, self-destruct. But in so doing each anticipates — imaginatively becomes — the other.

Yet, as a final word, let me remind you that I see

one way for us to press language to overcome its fixity, to flow around the contradictions of the spatial and the temporal: since my essay of 1967, I have seen it in the poetic manipulation of the "ekphrastic principle." And I feel confident that my attempt to trace the operation of this principle — which is growing into my next book — moves me beyond the spatial confines that concern you.

Throughout your career, one problematic remains constant, the distinction between poetry and other forms of language. Do you still understand this difference in language to be one of kind and not degree? Would you still argue for an essential difference as opposed to one, say, established by history, as a cultural classification or category?

In recent years I have tried in a number of places to clarify the specially qualified sense in which I have intended a distinction between poems and other discourse. What is at stake is the old Russian Formalist doctrine of poems as systems of deviations from discursive norms. Now deviationist theory seems to require the assumption that there *is* a normal discourse. But post-structuralist concern with the narratological and figurational character of all writing has reminded us that no discourse is normal or neutral but is already troped as it is written. From this perspective any distinction between poetry and nonpoetry would appear specious. Yet, given my anthropological perspective, I retain an interest in the distinctions that our culture has made among its discursive modes, even the apparently common sense distinction (based largely on intention) between fiction and reference, even though the post-structuralist critique would seem to preclude it. So I see the concept of a poetic mode of discourse as one that is attendant on our learned response to — and our resulting projection upon — a culturally imposed aesthetic occasion. Of course, the poet, similarly enculturated, supplies the coded stimulus which arouses and cooperates with that response. Some of these stimuli work far more effectively than others, and critics try to tell us which they are, turning them into exemplary poems.

So I am hardly claiming "an essential difference" (to use your phrase) but see that difference as culture-bound — though that's enough, I should think, since the books we read are themselves totally culture-bound. This qualification means that we are dealing only with differences in degree rather than in kind in the uses of language. Nevertheless, under the aegis of the aesthetic occasion, partly self-induced (though with the help of the object), we treat the poem as if, as a unique discourse, it represented a difference in kind. And as for "normal discourse," it is a fiction invented by us in binary opposition to our self-consciously developed illusion of a discourse to which we respond as aesthetic; for what we are persuaded is poetic depends on the fiction that there is a normal discourse from which it deviates. In effect, we create the norms by inferring them out of the supposed deviations *from* them, reading backwards from the existing poem to what must have been the pre-poetic, neutral elements from which it arose. But these latter fictions, the norms of discourse, are only our postulates required by our respect for what seems so extraordinary in the poem we have helped to constitute. It is, then, only in this highly skeptical and hence qualified sense that I argue for the differentness of poems — and for that from which they differ.

Like others before you, you have used the word "poetry" generically, signifying all literary discourse. I think it could be argued that this apparently innocent and harmless word has in some sense determined much of your discourse about the difference within language. After all, the difference between poetry and prose often rests on the apparent and the obvious, but the difference between two forms of prose is less so and has always been one of your major concerns.

I have meant by "poetry" not verse, of course, but Aristotle's *poesis,* which refers to making, the fiction which he opposes to history. Again, as with poetry and the norms in the previous question, the specially constructed is differentiated from the neutrally given. Thus the "poetry" of the poetry-prose distinction should not be relevant to this use. At the same time, it may be as you suggest, that, whatever I may intend by "poetry," when I seek to make it work for me it carries some of the weight that the word takes on as prose's opposite. I admit that at many moments my theory seems to concentrate on the role of purely verbal manipulations (presumably in verse) in constituting poetic form. But it is the manipulation of the aesthetic medium that concerns me and, though words and their relations with one another frequently are central to my study, I have on several occasions insisted that there are elements besides language that can be viewed and treated as poetic media. Especially as we move from lyric to narrative and dramatic modes, we find a number of other media besides words themselves: for example, the staged presence — at once real and unreal — in drama, the point of view in narrative, or the great variety of received

conventions — fictional, generic, stylistic or prosodic, topological, and tropological — in all the genres. The medium, then, is anything which the poet can convert into his performance space within his fiction, within his radical of presentation, within his language. Under his manipulation it becomes the space within which he performs his reflexive play and persuades us to join him in it. With this extension beyond the narrow consideration of language as medium, I would hope that I could keep "poetry" well beyond verse and restore its range to the breadth that Aristotle intended. But, unless we create an aesthetic occasion for it (in which case it is seen as poetry), that other, "non-poetic" prose narrative to which your question refers (philosophy, criticism, or whatever) is not related by us to a medium in a way that permits me to bring it into my inquiry.

Earlier you accounted for changes in theoretical tastes, but how would you account for the change in the taste for critical theory? How do you explain the boom in the theory market, if there is one?

I suppose there is a boom in theory, if I can judge from the popularity of the School of Criticism and Theory among young scholars who feel they'd *better* worry about theory as well as those who really do worry about it. And there is evidence too in the increasing number of literature departments offering theory and seeking to have some of its members engage in the theoretical debates. We have moved in the years since the School of Criticism and Theory had its first session (in 1976) from having only a small minority who were initiated into the mysteries of recent theory to having so many initiates, and so widely spread, that we are in danger of having the mystery dissolved. That's a boom, with an enlarging supply of younger people and an increased retooling of older ones.

To account for this boom in theory I think I'd have to return to my answer to your first question and speak about the sense of excess left us by the New Criticism. For years there was an endless number of increasingly refined explications of every member of the poetic canon: readings and reconsiderations and re-reconsiderations, often dwelling on smaller and smaller points of disagreement. Critics were just working too close to their objects (treating them "as objects" and hence as "essentially fixed and dead," in the words of Coleridge). So by reaction there was an inclination to back off and talk in larger, more abstract terms. That's probably one cause, and a major one. A second might be the growing imperialism of the recent science of lin-

guistics. Yet a third might be the failure of the newer versions of the social sciences and of philosophy to engage many of those who would have been the constituency of an older social science or an older philosophy, so that many of these drifted into literary study without the intense literary sensibility and calling of the older literary scholar. And these would very likely be attracted by theory more than they would by the analysis of texts, before which they might well feel impatient. A fourth likely cause can be traced to the intellectual spirit of the times and the growing interest in theory across the academic board, with literature belatedly seeking a methodological self-respect parallel to what has swept from the sciences to the social sciences and has now caught up with history as well. The newly acquired theoretical habit, in its exaggerated form, may, perhaps, reflect a somewhat anti-humanistic impetus; but in the criticism of some theorists we still find soundly humanistic motives for the recent obsession with theorizing. (Guess whose work I would cite as an example.)

Regardless of the motive, this *is* a time for self-consciousness, for a critical view of our methods, in all the sciences and the arts; and the development of critical theory is our contribution to this tendency.

I'm afraid that questions about cause, like this one, always provoke such off-the-top-of-the-head speculations as these, and yours, no doubt, would be about as useful as mine.

Is this move to embrace theory a healthy one for departments of literature? I mean, while various theories may not be healthy for certain notions of literature, is the trend toward theory a hope for a profession which is liable to be reduced, as some suggest, to either service departments or departments of classics?

Certainly I feel that the growth of theory in departments of literature was, some time back, a healthy development for a discipline that did not examine its varied enterprise with a sufficiently critical, self-conscious eye. The study of literature for generations had rested on assumptions and on the development and treatment of a canon based on those assumptions, none of which had ever been put in question. So insofar as it is good for the seeker of wisdom to question his manner of seeking, the awakening of theoretical awareness is of course healthy.

Now we must ask about the complaints we often hear around us about the excesses of this concern for theory and the harm it has done the study of

literature, at best by neglecting it and at worst by precluding it. But we must understand that the kind of theory in the ascendancy in recent years does not merely take a new position on the old canon but must undermine the canon since it radically reconceives the total operation of language in a way that must de-privilege literature. Therefore, this is no innocent theoretical claim like others before it, since it demands, if we take it seriously, nothing less than the disestablishment of our disciplinary institutions as we have known them. Not a course syllabus, not a program curriculum, and not a department limited by a sense of its discipline would be left standing. So your suggestion that the move to theory "may not be healthy for certain notions of literature" is an understatement, so long as by theory we mean recent theory of the sort we have been discussing. Consequently, to the extent that the departments of literature are going to have any devotion to and responsibility for transmitting our literary heritage — that is, to the extent that they are to remain departments of literature — it cannot be altogether healthy for them to nurture just the sort of theoretical interest that would undo them.

I must admit thinking back, not altogether with disapproval (though marveling at the naiveté), to the days when criticism assumed for itself the crucial role of mediating between literary works and the culture, and of ruling as the arbiter of taste. Unless one is ready to welcome a revolution in academic organizations that would remove the critical-scholarly mission from them (as I am not), we may still have to urge some such role, even if we are no longer so confident that we can justify it in theory. My simple affection for our culture's most remarkable verbal accomplishments, and my need to attend to their mysteries, call forth from me a fealty which I cannot altogether yield up. Either we accept the logical consequences which some theories would urge upon us and remake our institutional structures and their objectives, or, perhaps not always consistently, we must at once allow theory to flourish in order to keep literary study honest *and* subject theory to the very academic structure (the department devoted to literary study) which it would subvert.

It may well be that we *will* have to take the more radical alternative and reconstruct (after having deconstructed) our institutional organizations if, as you see others suggesting, we are not to be transformed into service departments or classics departments. But, since I am addressing here questions of what practices I find preferable and not questions of practical academic salesmanship, I rather suggest we resist.

I understand the new rage for critical theory as a response to, as well as a symptom of, the crises in the profession, but does it go deeper than that?

Besides the several causes I proposed a couple of answers back, I can suggest one that seems more deeply rooted in philosophical issues. In pre-theoretical days, the conventional scholarly procedures which were applied to literary study all assumed a theory of language as a direct and uncomplicated representational process. Today we have become accustomed to worrying about "the problematic of representation" in the study of language itself, and since the introduction of that awareness, we have had to concern ourselves with theoretical issues before we could begin to think about what — on these new semiotic grounds — it was now possible to say about the verbal arts. Our conception of the history of poetry and of criticism has, from this time, to be reformulated by what theory will permit.

But of course the questioning of the representational dimension of language — more precisely, of language as it functions within the poetic occasion — began well before the current mass break-out of such questions. Its revolutionary phase has been with us at least since Nietzsche and Bergson, and — thanks in part to the mediation of T.E. Hulme — it stimulated the early, theoretical efforts of the New Critics, for whom (as followers of I.A. Richards), poetic discourse begins with the intramural play of words that blocks normal reference.

Later, however, more general semiotic claims, deriving from a more self-conscious concern with verbal representation, have moved these questions well beyond the limited practical objective of the analysis of poems, such as we had in the New Criticism. Consequently, much of our theory that has recently been calling most attention to itself has ranged widely — beyond literature, narrowly conceived — throughout the realm of writing, pressing its doubts about the representational mission which we used to take for granted. It can now trace its case back through Descartes to Plato, and it boasts many modern heroes. So perhaps, in the spirit of someone like Richard Rorty *(Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* 1979), we can claim a prior need for theory simply to define what our subject is, or whether we have a subject. Such thinking, of course, would establish an absolute priority for theory before any criticism or interpretation could begin, hence calling for and justifying what you have referred to as "the new rage for critical theory."

*But isn't this upheaval in theory affecting pedagogy?
And couldn't the opposition to many of the new
theories be seen as one rooted in the practice of the
classroom? After all, New Criticism was always
more a pedagogy than a theory.*

Your claim about the New Criticism is correct. It
may have disrupted the peace within departments
of literature almost four decades ago, but, whatever
its unwelcome theoretical intrusions and the unease
produced by them, it did produce healthy and un-
precedented innovations in the teaching of litera-
ture. And that did turn out to be its value for those
who finally welcomed it, whether expectantly or
grudgingly. In the end it conquered departments be-
cause it conquered the classroom, from the fresh-
man introduction to literature to the graduate
seminar. Thus the contribution of the New Criticism
is often viewed more in the realm of applied
criticism than in the realm of theory.

Perhaps it is this fact that has led literary scholars
to expect from newer theories a similar immediacy
of classroom application. To the extent that they
do, they have been largely disappointed — mainly
because these theories, for the most part, spring
from assumptions that would preclude an older
pedagogy characterized by the analysis of canonical
literary texts. These theories and their new permissi-
bilities come first, as already written, and as
reconditioning readers about all that is already
written in whatever they read, in whatever — that
is — they have already interpreted. And the concept
of literary texts, as out there waiting to be in-
terpreted, is, as a result, dissolved in advance.
Simultaneously dissolved with it is the conventional
pedagogical situation, together with the mission
that created it. This is why I suggested, in my
previous answer, that the programmatic and insti-
tutional consequences of taking most recent theories
seriously are profoundly destructive of most of
what we have taken for granted.

As if to turn aside from these more apocalyptic
projections of tendencies in recent theory, a number
of American deconstructionists (one thinks
especially of the Yale School) seeks to allow his
theory to accommodate the classroom situation. In
the hands of some of them, even the most extreme
notions are applied to the analysis of literary texts,
part of the same secure canon known in pre-
structuralist days. It may be that the American
pedagogical tradition, brought to so intense a level
by the New Criticism, has imposed itself upon such
radical theorizing and has in these cases domes-
ticated it. In them we can look at the newer theory
as really not so subversive continuations of the New

Criticism, even if under strenuously anti-New
Critical theoretical guises. The one continuing
difference would be the indulgence of wayward re-
sponses to "undecidables" and hence the greater
laxity in prescribing interpretive rigor for the
students. For, obviously, if the representational
operation of language is seen as a myth fostered by
logocentric assumptions, then the critic's language
cannot be subjected to the transcendental authority
of the poem as a privileged text. Thus liberated for
its own free play, the work of interpretation be-
comes its own primary text, involved through in-
tertextuality with others but free of the obligation
of secondary reference to them. And this is hardly
the critic-to-poem relationship that we, as proper
pedagogues, used to urge upon student readers —
which may be why many continental-style decon-
structors are impatient, if not altogether unhappy,
with what they feel to be infidelity on the part of
some American theorists.

So, in what is radical and original about recent
theory, the conventional pedagogical task would be
violently transformed and, if we restrict that task
to the exploration and glorification of the canon,
subverted. On the other side, in what turns out, in
recent theory, to be not so different after all in its
application, we may wonder whether new theory
is being faithfully served or is itself being subverted,
thanks to unsubdued conservative instincts.

*How about the teaching of the history of critical
theory? How important do you think the history
of theory is and what is its role in refining for us
both the theoretical problematic and our capacity
to delineate it?*

I think it is unfortunate that, despite the greatly
increased interest in critical theory these days, there
may well be, on the part of many of our recent
theorists, less interest than there used to be in the
history of theory. This lack of interest leads, in
younger theorists, to a lack of knowledge; and with
some of them, alas, the ignorance is all too evident
and has seriously unfortunate effects on their
theorizing. So I would strongly urge the study of
historical documents and perspectives and the de-
velopment of a historical consciousness upon those
who would theorize on their own and who would
comment on the theorists these days by doctrines
that, by their very nature, militate against any
respectful study of the history of theory.

There are a couple of obvious advantages to the
study of the history of theory, and a couple that
are less obvious. It is hardly novel, or — I hope
— debatable, to maintain that a knowledge of the
efforts of our forebears may teach us how to avoid

repeating some of their errors, and it should prevent us from presenting as our own new answers to problems those which have been tried previously —. and perhaps refuted previously. There *are* standard positions and refutations which one is well off knowing, if only to avoid embarrassment, but also — if enough of one's fellows are ignorant — to avoid the waste of time and energies in seeking to advance a discipline that has already struggled through a number of noble and truly original attempts to solve its problems. It is surprising these days to see some theoretical proposals being set forth as if for the first time when history is littered by the debates set off by these proposals long ago.

But there are more subtle advantages to be conferred by the knowledge of the history of criticism. Primarily I see us learning from it a capacity for self-criticism, for distancing ourselves from our own positions, as we witness the sequence of hard-won and hard-held positions, each finally collapsing as history's anti-provincialism went to work on them. But perhaps the most instructive lesson provided by our studying older texts comes from their introducing us to the self-contradictory character of their best examples. I have more than once commented on what I have called the "consistent inconsistency" of our most effective literary theory, the extent to which the critic-theorist allows his theoretical commitments to be undercut by the experience of the poem by the reading self. The conflict between the developing theoretical construct and the ongoing literary experience, each of which seems to permit the other or to deny the other, creates a dialectic which the undogmatic and sensitive theorist encourages, even though it may lead him to those soft spots into which his structure seems to be slipping away. So perhaps the most instructive lesson taught us by the history of theory concerns the fragility of the very possibility of theory, so long as we limit theory to that which displays systematic consistency.

Is this notion similar to de Man's suggestion of "blindness and insight" as guides for our reading of key theoretical texts?

I see why you make the connection you do. We both deal with the self-undercutting tendency in the theoretical text, and we both seem to expend our analytical energies upon — and most appreciate — those moments in the text where such self-undercutting occurs. Both of us see what might otherwise pass for systematic weakness emerge as that which, while breaking open the system, brings to its text a far greater interest than a mere adherence to

system might have earned.

But beneath these apparent similarities are differences which are highly significant and which, for me, point again to the special value of the study of historical texts. For the coincidence of blindness and insight which de Man probes for so perceptively is for him an inevitable accompaniment to writing as written. It is what happens to texts as they take on the consequences of textuality, the would-be construct unmaking itself in its very verbal formulation.

Unlike his, my own concern arises out of a systematic interest, an interest in the possible coherence among terms and propositions, even though this coherence is overcome by the desire of the verbal system to find outside itself an object to which it can correspond with adequacy. The nature of the text may belie its ambition to find an outside object to which it can be true, an object over which it stumbles because it will not evade it. So, while de Man's theorist struggles as he does as a consequence of the internal verbal maneuvers of his text, just by virtue of its being a text, mine has his difficulties as a consequence of his sporadic but recurrent referential obligation — his sense that the ongoing facts of literary creation and literary experiencing must somehow be accounted for in his own theorizing. It is the difference, in textual self-undoing, between an inescapable problem inherent in textuality itself and a problem that arises in a text that tries, even if at times half-heartedly, to make itself a subservient accounting for another — an outside — text, perhaps another sort of text.

System is unsystematized for me, then, not through the unavoidable workings of the systematic language alone but through the challenge to that language by the individual historical acts for which theory is called to account. This difference in attitude, between de Man and me, toward the possibility of systematic constructs and the relation of these constructs to particular human experiences reveals profound differences in attitudes toward the theorist's obligations, and the critic's, as well as to the role of history in the thinking of both of them, whether they exist in two persons or in one.

Finally, what does the critic want?

Here is a question large enough to demand as much space as all that we have used until now. And I fear it's too late for that. Still, I can say a few things in answer to your question as we close this session. First, which critic do you want me to speak for? After all, there is less consensus among critics these days than at any time I can remember. I can try

to tell you what this critic wants. This critic, as a dedicated, self-conscious reader, is obliged to want to be left alone by the theorist — and by the theorist in himself; but he can't be. He wants *not* to resist his own interiority; and he doesn't. Rather he wants to yield to it; and he must. So he wants theory to relax its hold and allow him to function as critic; yet he wants to comprehend its pressures so that, under its tutelage, he is made to question himself and his subject. For in recent years it is that questioning which has enlarged his subject and expanded it beyond literature, so that, as critic, he can treat a broader array of writings which share characteristics he used to think of as exclusively literary. This is but one way in which the critic seeks to free himself from theory in order to confront his verbal object with an unimpeded directness and honesty, and yet subjects himself, if barely half-consciously, to its constraints.

But, really, shouldn't your question ask, what ought the critic to want? Or would not that way of putting it invite theory seriously to impinge upon his freedom, a freedom to pursue what he feels to be *his* primary discourse. Yet I want the critic to want to produce commentary on another, prior, and — yes — more significant text than his own, a text next to which his appears to be secondary, after all. Even so, the critic is aware, through epistemological skepticism, of the extent to which he is projecting — in response to his needs — the object he treats as primary. Thus I want the critic to be free to function within an ambiguous secondariness. Without at least this, I fear he forgoes his role as critic.

Finally, as critic I want — and I think ought to want — my studies, no matter how close to their object I am working, to move from the metaphorical habit of words to the metaphorical habit of the culture that produced them. In speaking of metaphor before, I discussed — at its center — the illusion of inclusive totalization which it sponsored and we cherish; but the underside, turned away from us but implicitly there by negation, hides all that is excluded, though often pressing for admittance. And the critic should not resist looking for the meanings and the causes of these repressions as the inverse side of these cherishings — hidden causes lurking in the desires of private will or of social force. I suppose this is to confess that there is a life beyond language, full of dreams and drives that manipulate language *even as* (there it is again!) they are manipulated by language — indeed often seem to be created *by* the manipulations of language. And the critic, greedy as he is, wants it all, the world in language and the world beyond, finding them both finally there in what is written or hidden, repressed, though intruding a forbidden presence in the spaces of the written page.

All of which says little more than that the critic wants, and ought to want, to be trapped in language and to wallow in its play while responding with play of his own — so much so that he is not too keenly aware which language is which, the language within blurring into the language without. If this sounds too much like love play, we should remember that it's all still only words, after all. But the critic, aware of his weakness, before words, should also remember this, should seek restlessly to break through to the world beyond *even as* (one last time) he wants to assure himself that really (!) the words are enough.

Speaking of enough, so is this. □

A CHECKLIST OF WRITINGS BY AND ABOUT MURRAY KRIEGER

Compiled by
Eddie Yeghiayan

A. WRITINGS BY MURRAY KRIEGER

1949

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William Sharpe

URBAN THEORY AND CRITICAL BLIGHT:
ACCOMMODATING THE UNREAL CITY

I. O City city

At a crucial moment in *Oedipus Rex*, fearing the loss of self-possession and the kingship of Thebes, Oedipus suddenly identifies his personal misfortunes with those of the town he rules, crying out in anguish, "O city, city" (1. 630). More than two thousand years after Sophocles, T.S. Eliot repeats the phrase in *The Waste Land*, summing up his own passionate involvement with the "Unreal city" of modern life (1. 259). From Biblical and Homeric times to the present day, the city has exerted an abiding influence on man's imagination, providing its most potent image of human community and potential, of collective accomplishment and power. Yet the cautionary shadow of destroyed or destructive cities — Troy, Carthage, Sodom and Gomorrah — has proved a no less fascinating and persistent feature of Western culture, a stern warning about the futility of human aspiration for which Babel has become the archetype. Does the city promise life or death, the radiant, bejewelled New Jerusalem of Revelation, or the corrosive, debilitating Manhattan of Melville's *Pierre*? Certainly the image of the city that has dominated the literature of recent times appears less stable, coherent, and positive than ever before.

If in the eighteenth century most educated men and women thought of "the town" in Athenian terms, as the logical center of civilization and government, manners and style, the metropolis of the next age was variously and pejoratively termed a "monstrous anthill" (Wordsworth), a "mighty Babylon" (Byron), a "dry and flat Sahara" (Whitman), a "brazen prison" (Arnold), or, most popularly, an Infernal City (Blake, Dickens, Baudelaire, Thomson, *et al.*).[1] The reasons for the change — and the culturally transmitted antipathy towards the city that continues today in the wake

of almost two centuries of urbanization — are complex. But foremost among them must certainly be the violation of expectation about what a city is or should stand for. Whether we speak of actual cities or of their artistic representation, man's "rage to order," in Wallace Stevens' phrase, serves as an underlying principle, a moral value turned architectural blueprint. The first cities built by men, according to Mircea Eliade, had as their deepest mythic intent the production of an order out of chaos, a ritual reenactment of the deity's original creationary gesture. Modeled on the heavenly city of the gods, the earthly city would exclude disorder and foster a perfect community free from destruction and change.[2] Thus from ancient Egypt to Enlightenment Paris, the city seemed, in Voltaire's words, "blest indeed" as the arena where men's talents could freely shape an ideal state of civic and cultural harmony.[3]

But the city's tremendous growth in population and size in the first half of the nineteenth century severely weakened the actual and conceptual urban structure that had stood for centuries. Indiscriminate building and demolition, the destruction of age-old patterns of work and leisure, industrial pollution of the air, earth, and water, the radical incisions made by railway lines into the ancient fabric of streets and houses — all seemed to reinvite chaos, dismantling the image of the Heavenly City in order to imitate an Infernal one. Blake's "dark Satanic Mills" appeared to have triumphed over the impulse to "buil[d] Jerusalem / In England's green & pleasant Land."[4]

Yet "infernal city" implies perhaps too Dantesque a hell for a century rapidly losing its faith in divine urban planning. The terrible breakdown of community and physical continuity emerges pointedly

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[1]See, respectively, Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850), VII, 149; Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24), Canto XI, St. 23; Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* (1871); Arnold's "A Summer Night" (1852); and, *passim*, Blake's *Milton* (1808), Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837), Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris* (1864), James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874).

[2]*Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harper, 1959), pp. 10-18.

[3]See Carl Schorske, "The Idea of the City in European Thought: Voltaire to Spengler," in *The Historian and the City*, ed. Oscar Handlin and John Burchard (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963), pp. 96-97.

in Lewis Mumford's famous denomination of the industrial town's organization. He calls it simply "the non-plan of the non-city," thereby illuminating the problem facing all writers, critical and creative, about the modern city: the old vocabularies no longer serve.[5] The "non-city" can only be approximated by other negations; it is order*less*, *un*communal, *im*personal, *de*humanized. Moreover, language betrays the gap between word and thing evident even in such great achievements as *Bleak House*, *Ulysses*, or *The Bridge*, a chaos surging beneath the brilliant organizing symbols, almost aggressively eroding the literary architecture. Of all modern poets, William Carlos Williams perhaps best described the challenge and risk of writing about the city when he called his *Paterson* — town and poem together — "that complex / atom, always breaking down."[6]

Nonetheless, in their efforts to capture the city linguistically in order to control it conceptually, poets and novelists have frequently tried to contain urban entirety in a single word or phrase: a "mighty heart" beats in London's breast for Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt, and William Ernest Henley; Baudelaire speaks of dreams that flow "like sap" through the veins of a colossus; the Decadent poet Alfred Douglas imagines London's West End forming the "broad live bosom" of a naked giantess; and the Glaswegian Alexander Smith claims a filial intimacy with the streets of his city: "From terrace proud to alley base / I know thee as my mother's face."[7] Inorganic but scarcely less animate symbols of the city, such as Dickens' fogs, prisons, and dustheaps, or a more abstract metaphor like the "mathematical dot" of Andre Biely's St. Petersburg, also attempt to define in a single image what the city is really like.

Recently, two new books have sought to enlarge

our critical vocabulary about the city by proposing their own definitions of the city. In *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, Burton Pike constructs broad categories to elucidate his immense topic: the city as image, the static city, the city in flux, "nowhere" cities versus utopian ones. On the other hand, as the tautology of its title suggests, *Literature and the Urban Experience: Essays on the City in Literature*, edited by Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts, intends to reflect a range of viewpoints, offering twenty-one essays by such well-known critics and writers as Helen Vendler, Joyce Carol Oates, Alfred Kazin, and Stephen Spender. Despite their differing approaches, both books pose a single, sweeping conclusion about the intricate relationship between literature and the city. According to Jaye and Watts, writers about the modern city display "an ambiguous attitude towards the city . . . an unresolvable ambivalence" (LUE,xv).[8] In fact, Pike claims, "the image of the city stands as the great reification of ambivalence" (IC,8).[9] And not only is this "ambivalence" or "ambiguity" representative of the city, Jaye and Watts argue, but we ought to recognize it "as modern, as ourselves" (LUE,xv). As a defining label for the city, "ambivalence," too, inevitably suffers the fate of Williams' "complex atom"; nevertheless, these two studies provide a valuable opportunity to reexamine many of our most basic assumptions about the nature of city experience and literature.

II. Under a Brown Fog

In *The Image of the City*, Burton Pike's sense of ambivalence derives in part from the continual tension he perceives between spatial and temporal representations of the city. The advent of the modern industrial city in the early nineteenth century brought about an "important shift in emphasis," a "movement from stasis to flux" (IC,27):

if in earlier times the city had been

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[4]*Milton*, opening lyric. For a lucid overview of such urban archetypes, see John Rosenberg, "Varieties of Infernal Experience," *Hudson Review*, 23 (Autumn, 1970), 454-480. Blake's treatment of the theme is examined in detail by Kenneth Johnston, "Blake's Cities: Romantic Forms of Urban Renewal," in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, ed. D.V. Erdman and J.E. Grant (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 413-442.

[5]*The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1953), p. 183.

[6]Book IV of *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 178.

[7]See, respectively, Wordsworth's "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802" (discussed below); Leigh Hunt's "London" (1851); William Ernest Henley's *London Voluntaries* (1892); Baudelaire's "Les Sept Vieillards" (1859; also discussed below); Douglas' "Impression de Nuit" (1894); and Smith's "Glasgow" (1857).

[8]*Literature and the Urban Experience* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1981). Page references noted parenthetically. The book is based on papers given at the Conference on Literature and the Urban Experience, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey, April 17-19, 1980. Throughout, the emphasis is almost entirely on American city literature.

[9]*The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981). Page references noted parenthetically. Although I occasionally shorten the title for convenience's sake, Pike's book should not be confused with Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), a classic in the urban studies field.

predominantly an image of fixed relationships and fixed elements, during the nineteenth century it became a primary image of flux, of dislocation rather than location.

(IC,17)

Fractured time instead of mappable space now "organizes" the modern metropolis. "As a result of this changed orientation," Pike continues, "the city in literature became fragmented and transparent rather than tangible and coherent . . . it came to stand under the sign of discontinuity and dissociation rather than community" (IC,72). Represented by the movement from stasis to flux, this "paradoxical" violation of the city's "irreducible core" as "social image" (IC,14) prompts Pike's thesis that "the city as a paved solitude is the modern expression" of a constant attitude in Western culture towards the city: "ambivalence, the inability of strong negative and positive impulses towards a totemic object to resolve themselves" (IC,xii). In order to study this phenomenon, Pike devotes more than half of his book to chapters on "The Static City" and "The City in Flux."[10] An examination of these categories will reveal, I think, how Pike's penchant for classification, and the constricting polarities which his definition of "ambivalence" suggests, force him to slight what one would most like to celebrate, the stimulating multiplicity of city life and writing.

For many writers of the nineteenth century, Pike claims, the city was still "conceptualized as a collection of discrete and detailed objects fixed in space" and that even when these "fixed relationships" are "stretched into fantasy" they are "still spatially oriented" (IC,33). In "The Static City," perhaps the most fascinating section of his book, Pike describes how the poet or novelist's fixed viewpoint allows three possible perspectives: the city seen from above, from street level, or from below. Pike's "elevated observer" (Rastignac at the end of *Père Goriot*, the narrator of Baudelaire's "Paysage" or of Hawthorne's "Sights from a Steeple") possesses an enabling detachment, a momentary sense of safety and escape that permits him to collect his thoughts, get a grip on his identity, and objectify his relationship with the metropolis that seems ready at any moment to swallow him up.

On the other hand, works that deal with the city at street level emphasize precisely this vulnerability: the urban labyrinth that may be imaginatively traced with impunity from above quickly becomes for the narrator a structureless mesh of dangerously shifting obstacles and desires. While Pike is right to indicate the labyrinthine aspect of street-level experience, the category turns out to be his weakest, tied as it is to his concept of the "static city." It is hard to see how, for example, Baudelaire's "The Seven Old Men" begins "with the fixed relationship of streets and people" or how its title (referring to seven successive apparitions) "indicates [its] spatial orientation" (IC,48), as Pike asserts. The first few lines of the poem read as follows:

> Fourmillante cité, cité plein de rêves,
> Où le spectre, en plein jour, raccroche le
>   passant!
> Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
> Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.[11]

If the hallucinative stanza itself were not sufficient to dispel notions of "fixed relationships," the fact that the lines are best known to readers in English as Eliot's source for the "Unreal city" section of *The Waste Land* should give the categorizing critic some pause.

With certain novels, though, Pike's schematic reading provides genuine insight. His "city seen from below" division, for example, works well with Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, where the cathedral's foundations seem to offer an infinite regress of subterranean chambers and tunnels. Indeed, the "architectonic" structure of Hugo's novel, paralleling that of the cathedral's caverns, aisles, and towers, nicely illustrates the "sky-surface-underground" (IC,53) grid Pike wants to impose on all representations of the "static city." Even more suited to his purpose is a well-known scene from *Our Mutual Friend.* Jenny Wren, the crippled dolls' dressmaker, and her friend Lizzie Hexam have withdrawn for a rest to the roof of the house owned by Fascination Fledgeby, a City usurer. Jenny has invited Fledgeby's employee, the old Jew, Riah, to leave the working world below for a moment and "come up and be dead!" (Book II, Ch. 5). Pike's commentary demonstrates that, when it works, his structured reading of the text can tell us something new about how certain key passages function and how Dickens' London reenacts and revitalizes the archetypal themes of Heavenly and Infernal cities:

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[10]In the rest of his book Pike discusses "the city as locus of the alienated individual and the undifferentiated masses" and the "spatial disorientation" prominent in much twentieth-century city literature (IC,xiii).

[11]"O swarming city full of dreams, where the ghost accosts the passer-by in broad daylight! Mysteries flow everywhere like sap in the veins of this mighty giant." Text and prose translation of "Les Sept Vieillards" cited from *Baudelaire,* ed. and trans. by Francis Scarfe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 193.

On a purely physical level, then, this episode is built around a vertical scale of street, rooftop, and sky. But the curious effect of the scene depends on the displacement between this descriptive physical level and the emblematic scale of the moral drama in which Jenny appears as an angel from above, Fledgeby as a quasi-devil from below (the level on which the unconsidered life equals death, also an old idea in Western culture), and Riah, although a Jew, is the soul who is redeemed in this Christian minidrama, ascending from the underground into the sky.

(IC,65)[12]

Yet the problem remains, as Pike himself admits, that different works of the same author may be static or "in flux," and that while one might like to point to a general motion in the direction of more "fluidity" as the nineteenth century progresses, there are plenty of instances where such changes "overlap chronologically as well" (IC,27). The "static" *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) is Dickens' last completed novel, but the famous description of Todgers's in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4), which Pike doesn't mention, not only emphasizes the street-level disorientation of the traveler who attempts to penetrate this labyrinthine neighborhood, but also insists that the rooftop view from the roominghouse itself would provide no clearer grasp of its spatial relation to the rest of the city. Instead of helping the observer to fix his position physically or psychologically, "inanimate" objects, in true Dickensian fashion, behave so energetically that they lead him to the brink of insanity or suicide:

> Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once.
>
> After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the spectator would or no . . . . Yet even while the looker-on felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled into a roar; the hosts of objects seemed to thicken and

expand a hundredfold; and after gazing round him quite scared, he turned into Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told M. Todgers that if he hadn't done so, he would have certainly come into the street by the shortest cut: that is to say, head foremost.

(Ch. 9)

All this; and yet "the grand mystery of Todgers's was the cellarage." Dickens' early Victorian roominghouse appears to subvert all three — roof, street, and underground — of Pike's static perspectives on the city.

Given this kind of irrepressible fluidity, Pike's chapter on "The City in Flux" might well be expanded to take in a great deal more of modern city literature than Pike implies. For instance, he cites Wordsworth's "Composed on Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802" as his opening proof that "static rather than dynamic" views of the city predominate at the start of the nineteenth century (IC,28-30). Certainly Wordsworth's familiar sonnet, with the breathless, hushed exclamation of its concluding lines — "Dear God! the very houses seem asleep; / And all that mighty heart lying still" — is a perfect choice to illustrate a static view of the city, poised silently on the edge of another tumultuous working day. But as Pike himself indicates, the poem's power derives precisely from that tension between the London uproar poet and reader know so well and the beautiful pastoralization of it that this dawn moment provides. As a crucial phrase, "smoke*less* air," suggests (my italics), all the commonplaces of London life and literature emphasize its motion and hubbub, and Wordsworth's poem strikes us exactly because it opposes the sociolectical view (the city as dynamic) that Pike wishes it to stand for. Considering Wordsworth's general prejudices towards the city and his bucolicization of it in this poem, his use of the city as "static, perceptually fixed image" (IC,27) becomes here a questionable metonymy for the general trend of early nineteenth-century city literature.[13]

Whether one thinks of Blake's prophetic "London" (1793) or Wordsworth's disorienting visit to Bartholomew Fair in Book VII of *The Prelude* (1805), or almost any of the city views of Dickens, Baudelaire, or Whitman, fluidity and flux, the resistance of city experience to spatial and temporal categorization, appear to be among its most decisive characteristics. Modern city literature continually defies such classification as well as the apparent

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[12]As Pike acknowledges, in his examination of how certain major nineteenth-century novelists write about the city he has been anticipated by Donald Fanger's seminal study, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965). But Fanger's approach is much less formal, describing the "urban world" of each novelist as a field in which the mimetic and fantastic elements of his art collide.

[13]In my reading of this poem I am indebted to Prof. Michael Riffaterre of Columbia University.

"ambivalence" that the opposition of static and fluid may suggest (IC,xiii). A poem like *The Waste Land* cannot be compacted into two paragraphs in a chapter entitled "Individual and Mass" (IC,103) any more than one can argue that "the word-city is inherently a spatial image" (IC,120). As Eliot's poem demonstrates, the city's persistent power in Western thought has been continually predicated, and not just in the last two centuries, on its no less considerable pull in the direction of the spectral, the ahistorical, and the apocalyptic:

Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal.

Early in *The Image of the City* there are some troubling sentences that indicate the underlying nature of Pike's project and his views about literature. According to Pike, modern man's ambivalence towards the city results from its containing contradictory semes of community and alienation, of which the stasis-flux tension is one of the most important expressions (IC,14-17). The richness of meaning the word "city" bears is indisputable. But to reduce to an overall uncertainty the many powerful, disparate emotions writers may have felt towards the city at different times, in different works, or even different paragraphs, seems too insensitive and imprecise a method of reading. Thus Pike's first example of the city as "image of ambivalence" in modern literature fails to show the "strong negative and positive impulses" he claims for all such ambivalences (IC,xii). I quote his analysis in full:

This [ambivalence] emerges, for instance, in the peculiar opening pages of *Moby-Dick,* in which Ishmael and the city dwellers of Manhattan are drawn magnetically to the edge of the water, yearning outward from their city existence — which itself is presented in strongly negative terms. *Moby-Dick* is not a "city novel," and yet it begins with the image of the city. This opening passage, which arouses resonances in the characters and the reader, stands in a long tradition of the city as a figure for ambivalence in literature.
(IC,8-9)

Revealingly, ambivalence rather one-sidedly equals "negative" for Pike, and the "resonances" aroused are not supported by the text. Instead they derive from the popular prejudice which is auto-matically suspicious of the city, a habit of thought which customarily identifies with those "yearning outward from their city existence." In a chapter devoted to the universal attraction bodies of water have for men, whether in country *or* city, only one sentence of Melville's could be construed as "negative" towards the city. Yet it reiterates Ishmael's distinction between landlubbers and sailors, not between city and non-city: "But these are all landsmen; of weekdays pent up in lath and plaster — tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks." The reader learns elsewhere in the chapter that the desk over which Ishmael himself had been bent was in fact in the *country,* where he was a schoolmaster. Pike's conviction that Ishmael desires to flee the city *per se* is instructive, not because it helps us see Melville's New York as "a figure for ambivalence," but because it shows the strength of our anti-urban bias.

Two final quotations from *The Image of the City* will suggest a further reason why this kind of reading of city texts is so common. "The basic *problem"* facing the writer about the city, Pike says, "is how to *reduce* a *cacophony* of impressions to some kind of *harmony."* Since "literature is an *ordering* of life," he continues, one may use "patterns" or "types" to "provide the *necessary reduction* and *simplification* by subtly *imposing* a preliminary *ordering* on the reader's perception of the word-city" (IC,9-10; my italics). What is wrong, the modern reader would like to ask, with a "cacophony of impressions"; why the need to reduce, to order, to simplify? The quotations tell us something basic about Pike's own perception of the city and literature, which clearly proceeds from an implicit privileging of order over disorder, literature over life ("literature is an ordering of life"), critical category over individual text. Our literary/critical heritage has for so long been based on a valuing of "harmony" for its own sake that it ubiquitously colors our entire approach to the city, which is necessarily a disorder, a cacophony, a fractured discourse. The mythic quest for order we impute to the earliest city-builders ought not to be the unexamined principle by which we analyze the literature of the modern metropolis. For almost two hundred years writers like Blake, Dickens, and Joyce have been trying to confront the teeming city's contradictions without reducing their individual impact, without muffling the threatening or antithetical elements under a brown fog of critical convenience and regimentation. Melville, Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Eliot, and the rest have at times seen the city in "positive," "negative" or disjunctive ways, but overall "ambivalence" and order remain

a projection of the reader, not the message of the individual text or the essence of the Unreal City.

Literature and the Urban Experience opens with a similar brand of anti-urbanism, a back-to-pastoral poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti which, the editors explain, "provides introduction and epigraph" to their collection "because it rehearses a history of modern poetry (city poetry)" (LUE,x). Yet the poem, "Modern Poetry is Prose (But it is Saying Plenty)," brackets only a limited appreciation of poetry's recent technical and topical innovations. Like Pike's reading of *Moby-Dick*, the claim Jaye and Watts make for the representiveness of Ferlinghetti's poem only imperfectly disguises the negative bias of their own urban sensibility. The title of the poem itself indicates a devaluing of the poet's genre, which he follows up with a pre-Whitmanian request for appropriate (non-urban) subject matter and genuine "poetic feeling":

> Most modern poetry is prose because
> it has no *duende*
> no soul of dark song
> no passion musick
>
> (LUE,4)

The list of writers whose "prose wastes" Ferlinghetti goes on to attack — Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, Charles Olson, *et al.* — reads like a Who's Who of modern American poetry, culminating in a parodic attack on the evil genius he discovers behind them:

> I had not known prose
> had done-in so many
> Lost in the city waste lands of T.S. Eliot
> in the prose masturbations of J. Alfred Prufrock
> in the *Four Quartets* that can't be played
> on any instrument
> and yet is the most beautiful prose of our age.
>
> (LUE,5)

Like the editors, Ferlinghetti clearly equates modern poetry with city poetry, if only because he feels that urban contamination has made "true poetry" impossible. "Most modern poetry is prose," Ferlinghetti complains," because / it walks across the page / like an old man in a city park" (LUE,4). Thus he goes on to condemn another great poet of the city: "Lost . . . in the inner city speech / of William Carlos Williams / in the flat-out speech of his *Paterson*" (LUE,6). Indeed the entire poem strikes one as an oddly one-sided "epigraph" with which to begin an anthology purporting to show "an intense concern for human life in the city" (LUE,x):

> Most modern poetry is prose
> but it is saying plenty
> about how the soul has gone out
> of our cities.
>
> (LUE,8)

The pastoral nostalgia one senses behind Ferlinghetti's poem and its prominent position in the anthology reveals itself fully in the last lines of the poem, with their Keatsian cliché about the true meaning of life:

> And so wails today a still wild voice
> inside of us
> a still insurgent voice
> lost among machines and insane nationalisms
> still longing to break out
> still longing for that distant nightingale
> *   *   *   *   *   *   *
> It is the bird singing that makes us happy.
>
> (LUE,9)

Since they unhesitatingly endorse this conclusion as a "hopeful lament" for the American urban condition, one can only conclude that the editors share Ferlinghetti's essential discomfort with the city. And if this poem does indeed illustrate the "ambiguity" of urban response which Jaye and Watts say "defines our present cultural assumptions towards the city" (LUE,xv), then this "ambiguity," like Pike's "ambivalence," must in fact be basically negative.[14] Their suggestion that "cautious hope" often accompanies "the writers' condemnation of modern cities," makes the anti-urban undertones of their stance evident. In any case, to conclude that the city is ambiguous because it has "no clear emerging direction" (LUE,xv) wrongly permits the desire for order to cloud the clear critical perspectives that the stimulating variety of city literature demands — and which it receives from some of the other contributors to the book.

For the editors' remarks and Ferlinghetti's "epigraph" should not deflect the reader from the truly urban mélange of subject and viewpoint which *Literature and the Urban Experience* encompasses. A number of essays in the volume, particularly those by Toni Morrison, Leo Marx, and Ihab Hassan, grapple far more vigorously with the joys and terrors of urban existence.[15] In "City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of Neighborhood in Black Fiction," Toni Morrison argues that

> the Black artist's literary view of the city and

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[14]In the present volume Leslie Fiedler makes a strong case for what he calls a pervasive urban "dis-ease" which makes the city "oddly resistant to any mythic images except for certain negative, dark, infernal ones" ("Mythicizing the City," LUE,113-121).

his concept of its opposite, the village or country, is more telling than the predictable and rather obvious response of mainstream American writers to post-industrial decay, dehumanization and the curtailing of individualism . . . .

(LUE,37)

White writers, she contends, appear to be anti-urban because they see the city as constricting the personal freedom, individualism, and purity of self so highly cherished in American culture. Blacks, on the other hand, have a special affection for the village within the city and its community values: "When a character defies a village law . . . it may be seen as a triumph to white readers, while Blacks may see it as an outrage" (LUE,38). When the black writer questions or rejects the city as a place to live, what he seeks most is not personal freedom or Nature, but "the ancestor" who embodies continuity and "racial connection, racial memory over individual fulfillment" (LUE,43). Citing a wide range of black writers from James Baldwin to Stevie Wonder, Morrison makes a strong case for the black as the quintessential urbanite. Uprooted, disenfranchised, largely powerless to effect social reform and yet keenly aware of how the modern city has broken with the communal values of the past, the black man inhabiting white cities images the sundered ties and broken villages of his ancestors.

Morrison's suggestive thesis finds corroboration in Leo Marx's essay on "The Puzzle of Anti-Urbanism." What we have mistaken for disapproval of the modern city, Marx says, "is better understood as an expression of something else": from Cooper's Natty Bumppo to Hemingway's Nick Adams, the characters of American fiction have been enacting "the ideal life of the American self journeying away from the established order of things into an unexplored territory we tend to think of as Nature" (LUE,64 & 74). We are dissatisfied with the city, not in itself, but because of the dominant cultural ideologies it represents, and the turn to the pastoral is always more of a turning *away* than a turning to. "That anti-urbanism is largely beside the point," Marx concludes, is shown by the fact that "the pastoral impulse in these typical American fictions seldom is rewarded with success" (LUE,75). As

[15]*Literature and the Urban Experience* is divided into two sections, the first of which, on city literature, is my concern here. Part II relates the city to history, politics, education and autobiography. Of special interest is Bruno Bettelheim's essay, "The Child's Perception of the City," which describes how American primary education impresses "on the child that he can have an enjoyable life only in a non-urban setting" (LUE,229). Bettelheim's findings offer further evidence of a widespread tendency towards anti-urbanism in American culture.

Morrison and many others have commented, the ideas of city and community are almost inherently un(white)-American, because they are perceived to conflict so elementally with ingrained ideas about the sanctity and privilege of individual freedom. But Marx takes a bold further step in declaring that our anti-urban literature and even the recent exodus from the cities "has little or nothing to do with the intrinsic character of cities" (LUE,79).

While there is much to applaud in Marx's essay, his much-needed revisionary reading of American literary classics provokes further thought about the American response to the city. Just as Marx elaborates Morrison, Ihab Hassan problematizes Marx's emphasis on the non-mimetic thrust of city writing. Building his remarks around "the novelist's freedom from verisimilitude" (LUE, 103), Hassan writes in "Cities of Mind, Urban Words" about the city as social, psychological and symbolic construct:

the city acts as mediator between the human and natural orders, as a changing network of social relations, as a flux of production and consumption, as a shadowy financial empire, as an arena of violence, play, desire, as a labyrinth of solitudes, as a system of covert controls, semiotic exchanges, perpetual barter, and, withal, as an incipient force of planetization. In short, at once fluid and formal, the city apprehends us in its vital grid.

(LUE,95)

This intriguing summary of urban forces raises questions about "the intrinsic character of cities" that Marx never considers. If the city embodies, as Hassan says, a "network of social relations" or "a shadowy financial empire" then the urban expressions of ourselves which the heroes of our fiction spend so much time fleeing may well be more strongly rooted in steel and stone, flesh and blood, than Marx lets on. Where does the city end and the self begin in American literature? How are Americans defined as a people except in opposition to an archetypal, "undemocratic," European city-society that continues to bear down on us wherever we go, even in a Virgin Land? The city may well be as firmly entrenched in the American psyche as Nature, and if, as Marx suggests, neither satisfies us, perhaps it is because "this old complicity of language, knowledge, and artifice," this "happy Babel" (LUE,107 & 109) about which Hassan writes so magically, signifies too much of a broken dream for us ever to forgive fully, too much of an originary quest ever to relinquish completely. Symbolizing both the frustration and confirmation of our social values and personal desires, the city insists on re-

maining "the place we live now," never the final home demanded by our deepest cultural instincts and yearnings.

III. A Moment's Surrender

What one objects to, then, in *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* and *Literature and the Urban Experience*, and what each of the books in its best moments overcomes, is the readiness to categorize, to furnish a convenient critical gloss with which one can accommodate and defuse the city text, rather than take the chance of tangling specifically with the messy and unsettling contradictions of city art, city life. With their vague connotations of artistic and critical *ennui*, such words as "ambivalence" and "ambiguity" diminish the accomplishment of both city literature in particular and Modernism — which as Ferlinghetti rightly divines is intensely urban in spirit and form — in general. We cannot so confidently obscure the vitality and emotion of the many urban writers who have felt towards the city an irresistible "attraction of repulsion," as Dickens explained his feeling towards London.[16] For above all else the literature of the modern city concerns itself with the continual, contradictory shocks undergone by "the quickened, multiplied consciousness" which Walter Pater saw as the inevitable product of city life.[17] Neither the fogginess of ambiguity nor the tired dichotomies of ambivalence sufficiently convey the radical conjunction of chance, motion, hallucination, alienation and involvement, shock and delight, that characterizes city literature from *Tableaux parisiens* to *Paterson*. In response I wish to suggest another approach, by which we can perhaps more sympathetically explore the literature that the modern city has engendered.

Near the end of *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot speaks of "the awful daring of a moment's surrender." The phrase points towards one of the most typical impulses of city writing, the "surrender" of the writer to the shock experience at the heart of city life and literature. In the crowd, wrote Wordsworth,

> all the ballast of familiar life,
> The present, and the past; hope, fear, all stays,
> All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man
> Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.
>   (*The Prelude*, VII, 603-606)

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[16]See F. S. Schwarzbach, *Dickens and the City* (London: Athlone Press of Univ. of London, 1979), pp. 26-27.

[17]See Schorske, p. 110.

The city assaults every sense, but in literature at least the shock is primarily visual. Sight is not only the chief sense enabling us to function in the city, but also the one most capable of upsetting our self-possession and personal equilibrium. Citing George Simmel's observation that "the interpersonal relationships of people in big cities are characterized by a markedly greater emphasis on the use of eyes" than on that of the other senses, Walter Benjamin comments, "that the eye of the city dweller is overburdened with protective functions is obvious" (IL,191).[18]

The ability to produce compelling city literature appears to depend heavily on the writer's willingness to resist the security offered by his "protective eye." Instead he must risk the impact of confronting without evasion the tortured lives and disconcerting events happening all around him. For Eliot it is the difference between the benumbed crowd that flows over London Bridge ("And each man fixed his eyes before his feet"), and the vulnerable seer of the Unreal City: "There I saw one I knew, and stopped him crying . . . . " Direct visual contact brings out the awful truth of human community: "You! hypocrite lecteur! — mon semblable, — mon frère!" The recent Indian novel *Midnight's Children*, by Salman Rushdie, provides an even more pronounced illustration of this urban shock experience. Early in the novel, the narrator's mother ventures into the oldest part of Delhi, seeking a fortune teller:

> . . . as she enters these causeways where poverty eats away at the tarmac like a drought, where people lead their invisible lives . . . something new begins to assail her under the pressure of these streets, which are growing narrower by the minute, more crowded by the inch, she has lost her "city eyes." When you have city eyes you cannot see the invisible people, the men with elephantiasis of the balls and the beggars in boxcars don't impinge on you . . . . My mother lost her city eyes and the newness of what she was seeing made her flush, newness like a hailstorm pricking her cheeks. Look, my God . . . . [19]

When one loses "city eyes," Rushdie shows, a certain, surer sense of self, defined in absence of the

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[19](New York: Avon, 1980), pp. 91-92.

[18]"On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 191. Page references noted parenthetically. For a relation of Benjamin's theories of city vision to Joseph Conrad, see Jonathan Arac., "Romanticism, the Self, and the City: *The Secret Agent* in Literary History," *Boundary 2*, 9 (Fall 1980), pp. 75-90.

Other, is also lost. Puncturing habitual defenses, the shock experience liberates a new and distressing receptiveness of vision. In the suspension of customary modes of perception and response, writer and reader regard those around them as if for the first time, with the paradoxical sense of distance and proximity that the compression of the crowd produces.[20]

In his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Walter Benjamin locates the traumatic encounter with the stranger in the crowd at the center of Baudelaire's urban vision. In *Tableaux parisiens*, he says, the poet sacrifices his emotional stability in order to fling himself into the path of this ever-renewing assault on the self. Baudelaire had written of the quiet "heroism of modern life," and in "A une passante" ("To a Woman Passing By") his opening line describes the situation in which it is most typically demanded: "La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait" — "The deafening street was howling all around me." The poet's disorientation in the street turns into a shock of discovery, recognition, and loss that the encounter with the stranger triggers. "Un éclair — puis la nuit!" exclaims Baudelaire of his sudden meeting with an unknown woman in the street: "a lightening flash, then darkness" (IL,160-169).

The poet's sacrifice in writing such poems, Benjamin says, comes from his refusal to separate the psychic damage of his encounters from the self that must painfully reexperience them in the writing of the poem. He distinguishes between two types of experience, the first, *Erlebnis*, a defense mechanism that turns a deeply disturbing occurrence "into a moment that has been lived," one that the subject can safely view as a closed episode of his life, an emotion that he can control. However, the second response to the shock experience, *Erfahrung*, demands that the emotional wound be kept open for inspection, as part of the continuity of mental and physical life. The first response insulates one against the shock, accommodates it, while the second continually reenacts it (IL,163).

The most striking city literature clearly feeds on experiences of the second kind, volatile encounters made possible by the author's brave disdain for strategies of seeing and representation that would lessen the impact of his experience. But this vulnerable stance by no means forms the most common approach to the semiotic riot of the urban

landscape. Much of Wordsworth's poetry, for example, like the aesthetic distancing of the 'Nineties poets, strives for a detachment from and a control over those moments that threaten the poet's identity.[21] In *Criticism in the Wilderness*, Geoffrey Hartman identifies a "shock experience" in such poems as "The Solitary Reaper" and "The Daffodils" (CW,28).[22] But Wordsworth typically overcomes the disturbing power of these events by afterwards taming them or turning them to his own uses: "The music in my heart I bore, / Long after it was heard no more," he concludes in "The Solitary Reaper." The poet carries the fruits of his experience with him comfortably, like a cherished photo — "And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils."

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth is quite explicit about his dismay in the confusion of London streets, and he often reaches for the underlying sense of unity he finds in nature as a way of buffering himself against the city and shoring up a precarious sense of self. He is seeking the closure of Benjamin's *Erlebnis*, the clear, untroubled vistas of Pike's static city. Safely escaped from London in Book VIII, he thanks his Genius for the detachment and country education that have enabled him to keep his mental bearings in the metropolis:

> blessèd be the God
> Of Nature and of Man that this was so;
> That men did first present themselves
> Before my untaught eyes thus purified,
> Removed, and at a distance that was fit.
> (1805: VIII, 436-440)

It is precisely this "fit distance" that underlies what may be his most famous view of the city, "Composed on Westminster Bridge," mentioned earlier for its imposition of stillness upon the sooty bedlam of the town.

Yet when the poet is later (in time of composition) "smitten with the view" of a blind beggar in a London crowd, one can only imagine that the beggar's silent "admonishment" of him represents Wordsworth's self-rebuke for attempting so many other times to master the object before him, to re-

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[20]For a systematic analysis of how receptiveness of vision is essential to the development of many classics of French literature, see Jean Rousset, *Les Yeux Se Rencontrèrent: La Scène de première vue dans le roman* (Paris: Librarie José Corti, 1981).

[21]There is a similar recoiling from the city in many novels. George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879), for example, illustrates the uneasy attitudes of most Victorians towards the city. "In London," Sir Willoughby Patterne finds, "you lose your identity . . . you are nobody . . . a week of London literally drives me home to discover the individual where I left him" (Ch. 11).

[22](New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). Page references noted parenthetically.

duce its mystery to a formula of his own understanding. He must have seen here a glimpse of the unnameable power he had suppressed:

> And once, far travell'd in such mood, beyond
> The reach of common indications, lost
> Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance
> Abruptly to be smitten with the view
> Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face
> Stood, propp'd against a Wall, upon his Chest
> Wearing a written paper, to explain
> The story of the Man, and who he was.
> My mind did at this spectacle turn round
> As with the might of waters, and it seem'd
> To me that in this Label was a type,
> Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,
> Both of ourselves and of the universe;
> And, on the shape of the unmoving man,
> His fixèd face and sightless eyes, I look'd
> As if admonish'd from another world.
> (*The Prelude*, 1805: VII, 607-622)

The beggar *is* another world, and he admonishes us when we try to diminish the impact of his strangeness. The passage provides an especially valuable example of urban revelation because it shows the startled poet in the process of rejecting an appropriative vision of the city, one seeking to impose an imaginative order and confinement on the city. In this rare Wordsworthian instance of unmastered shock, the Blind Beggar insists on the autonomy of the unknowable Other, the frightening independence of each member of the urban community.

Thus it seems wrong for Geoffrey Hartman to want to place Wordsworth's carefully contained "Daffodils" on the same level of experience as Baudelaire's "A une passante." This misses the point of Benjamin's definition of urban modernism and of the Blind Beggar passage he could easily have used to illustrate it. For when Hartman complains that "what Benjamin shows . . . is not the way shock is linked to a particular set of socio-economic conditions, but *shock itself* in or under multitudinous forms of representation" (CW,67), he is attempting to empty out the poem historically, ignoring the conditions of writing and the forces of the city that produce the text. The city itself is a text which Baudelaire "reads" into his poem, and the shock experience it generates rises to confront the consciousness so directly because of the social situation, the unceasing pressure of the crowd around the poet as a modern man. As Raymond Williams remarks in *The Country and the City*, "the sense of isolation in the cities can be seen as bearing

a profound relation to the kinds of social competition and alienation which just such a system [modern industrial capitalism] promotes."[23]

Hartman himself comes close to this realization when, in arguing for the "universality" of his sense of shock, he comments that Dante and Beatrice had had their sudden moment of truth in a metropolitan environment: "Florence too was a city, *although not in the era of capitalism*" (CW,68; my italics). This is just the point, that in the nineteenth century a quantitative difference in the size of the city and the number of people on the streets became a qualitative one. The constant flow of crowds, strangers, bits of information, words, ads, traffic, sudden intimate glimpses into others' lives — all this keeps the shock modern, urban, and unfulfilled in the conventional sense. In this city one cannot easily recapture a moment or relocate a lost lover. City vision can never be totalized, for language itself insures that the image will be at best only a fragment of an unattainable completeness. The strongest modern city literature, such as Apollinaire's "Zone" or Williams' *Paterson*, acknowledges and preserves this fragmentation, insisting on its irreducibility, its inherent resistance to a cumulative pictorializing of a "readable whole."

It is just this sense of urban literature as open, cacophonous, and continually shocking that seems imperilled by the theoretical commitment to a familiarizing, accommodating discourse of "ambivalence" or "ambiguity." Such views indicate a premature closure, displaying their own protective *Erlebnis* towards the tidal shock of the streaming masses, the joyful terrors of Baudelaire's "bathing in the crowd," the hallucinatory ecstasy and pain of being lost and found and lost again when touched by the electric glance of a passing stranger.[24] Modern city literature at its best, from Wordsworth to Joyce to Williams, keeps the danger of that recurring shock alive and unmastered. If to be open to and receptive of that shock is to allow one's aura, one's self-defining sense of distance from others, to be broken down, then the city poem or novel recovers, resurrects, and even re-presents that aura in the moment of its violation, at the moment of its greatest attraction. It is a simultaneous penetration and preservation, a violence in and out of language, that keeps the crucial city moment ever modern and its image worth having. The true literature of the modern city keeps the stranger strange. □

[23](New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 295.

[24]"Les Foules," *Petits Poèmes en Prose (le Spleen de Paris)* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. 61.

Contributor Notes

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Correction: *Ruth Feldman is the co-editor of* Italian Poetry Today *(New Rivers Press).*
Rina Ferrarelli's chapbook of translations, The Morning Air, *is forthcoming from Porch Publications.*