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# New Orleans Review

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MAN AND NATURE IN *RAN* AND *KING LEAR*

Doom, both imminent and immanent, is the image with which Akira Kurosawa begins his 1985 film, *Ran* [English title, *Chaos*]. On a treeless hilltop sit four horsemen, bearing spears and wearing armor, who face the points of the compass. They sit in a silence punctuated only by the cries of birds, dwarfed by mountains surrounding them. The figures immediately suggest the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and their stillness, a lull before the world's final storm. Within the first few seconds of his film, Kurosawa asserts that the story he is about to relate has a mythic quality, a universal significance. A landscape green, silent, and still waits to be shattered; an apparent peace is destined to be broken. Whether or not the agents of destruction are *these* warriors, they will be men, and not the headless riders and scythe-wielding skeletons of Albrecht Dürer. As Brian Parker has noted of the boar hunt which follows, visual violence committed against the setting (and, incidentally, against the boar) epitomizes the greater, ceaseless violence of human society in *Ran*.<sup>1</sup> And it points out the carelessness with which the most violent characters in the film regard their surroundings. The world is a stage: mountains are for hunting boar, valleys and plains for hunting men. Though in the mountains, these men do not see them, or see in them a larger pattern for life. Man's blindness to himself and to the world is the axle upon which the plot of *Ran* turns, and praise for Kurosawa's handling of this theme comes not simply from the subtle ways in which he illustrates it, but also from the way in which his film illuminates one of its sources, *King Lear*.<sup>2</sup>

Kurosawa often employs symbols of man's fragility: the hunters rest in a gold and black silk enclosure open to the sky, and a strong breeze

ruffles its walls. Its blatantly man-made flimsiness contrasts sharply with the permanence of the mountains. Hidetora, like Lear an old king, notes his own decay. He compares himself to the slain boar, the first of many instances in which characters in the film define themselves or others as animals; few of the creatures named are herbivorous. Hidetora calls the boar "indigestible," and asks his sons in jest, "Would you eat me?" Later in the film, the words prove prophetic: here, they remind us, if not Hidetora, that man is only another animal. Hidetora's remark shows an inconsistency in his view of the natural world; he accepts the idea of himself as an animal, but does not recognize that he and the boar share a common fate—both can be hunted and killed. Hidetora assumes that he is secure within his family, but he leaves one dilemma unresolved: why should the natural world remain indifferent to the boar's fate and care at all about him? Almost all the characters think they act independently, yet they often demand that "the heavens show more just" (3.4.36).<sup>3</sup> *Ran*'s strength and depth come from its ability to convince us that the heavens are not more, or for that matter less, just. They simply *are*.

In an essay on *King Lear*, Northrop Frye examines four levels of the natural hierarchy as it was defined in the Renaissance. Directly beneath the highest, heaven, lies a "human order of nature . . . the level in which man is intended to live."<sup>4</sup> Subordinate to that level but above the demonic world lies the "'fallen' order of physical nature, our present environment, a world seemingly indifferent to man and his concerns . . ." (106). Frye argues that reason, government, and the other trappings of civilization told the Renaissance audience "that the proper 'natural' environment for man is

<sup>1</sup>Brian Parker, "Ran and the Tragedy of History," *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities* 55.4 (1986): 412-23.

<sup>2</sup>Parker quotes an interview with Kurosawa in which the director claims "that *Ran*'s relation to *King Lear* is really secondary" (415). This may be disingenuous.

<sup>3</sup>All act, scene, and line citations refer to *An Essential Shakespeare*, ed. Russell Fraser (New York: Macmillan, 1972) 381-434.

<sup>4</sup>Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, ed. Robert Sandler (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1986) 101-21.

something different from that of animals" (106). *Ran's* chaos posits that the higher order is an impolite fiction, an insubstantial foundation for our hopes. Kurosawa stresses man's baseness, but this need not disturb our preconceptions of the *Lear* story. Even as Lear undergoes the "redemption" of madness, he continues to seek revenge, punctuating his vow with "kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill" (4.6.191). Further evidence of man's propinquity to animals may not be required to illustrate this point, but just before he dies, Lear boasts to the dead Cordelia, "I kill'd the slave that was a-hanging thee" (5.3.274). Though revenge will not restore Cordelia, Lear cannot give up the desire for it. We might call this instinct.

Hidetora has a nightmare which forces him and his sons, Taro, Jiro, and Saburo, to confront directly their places in nature's scheme. In his dream, Hidetora walked in an empty world, a place where "no one answered" his calls. He was "alone in the wide world." The dream terrifies him, for he at least subconsciously has recognized a natural kinship with the boar and its mortality.<sup>5</sup> In the dream he perceives that there is no divine order of things, no special safety net for man. Yet, upon waking, he expects his sons to be that net. Hidetora finally dismisses his dream as "such stupidity." With a willful blindness, Hidetora chooses not to accept either the concrete or the intuitive evidence before him—the fate of the boar or the dream-vision. His preferred reality, as we soon learn, is the fabricated, peaceful world created in his own mind.

The dream-vision does provoke Hidetora to act, however. Gilding the brutality of his rule, he uses trite phrases to explain his view of the world. He announces that it is time to "give free reign to peace," to "stable steeds of war," and he firmly asserts, "This is my will." Even with these grand-sounding words, Hidetora's blindness is apparent: like Lear, he has peace and fails to recognize it. Hidetora wants to impose peace, an act of will incompatible with the abdication of power he proposes.

Hidetora's youngest son, Saburo, contradicts

his father. Already disdained by his older brothers for his bluntness, Saburo insists upon forcing his father to see plainly:

What kind of world do we live in? . . . One barren of loyalty and feeling. . . . You spilled an ocean of blood. . . . You showed no mercy, no pity. . . . We too are children of this age, weaned on strife and chaos. . . . We are *your* sons, yet you count on our fidelity. . . . In my eyes that makes you a fool. . . . A senile old fool . . .

This speech is important to the story for several reasons. First, it describes the bloody, man-made state Hidetora has spent his life erecting. It is a world in which vengeance inevitably follows vengeance. Saburo is warning his father that the cycle Hidetora set in motion cannot be broken easily. A generation "weaned on strife and chaos" grows up to take ever-larger portions. But Saburo is also suggesting that nature itself may be "barren," barren at least of the kind of artificial social structures of which Hidetora dreams. Saburo senses the conflict between Hidetora's desires and the way of human beings in nature. When the father sarcastically asks, "Parents and children have no place in the world?" he misses the point. They do have a place—it is just that no one can ever say definitively where that place lies.

When Jiro expels him from the second castle, Hidetora complains, "Only the birds and the beasts live in solitude." His nightmare of loneliness is suddenly real. Although Hidetora may not yet have grasped the idea that man is not a privileged species, he is being thrust toward an emotional understanding of it. The intellectual realization will take much longer. Hidetora's process of self-discovery leads him from the mountains, which seem immutable, to the sands of the Azusa plain. He built his castles, both real and imaginary, on rocks, never thinking they may one day rest on a foundation of sand.<sup>6</sup>

Hidetora's madness, like Lear's, is the result of pride, willfulness, rejection, and despair. But in the film, Kurosawa chooses not to emphasize the storm which mirrors Lear's unsettled state. Instead, Hidetora's conflict is an interior one, the

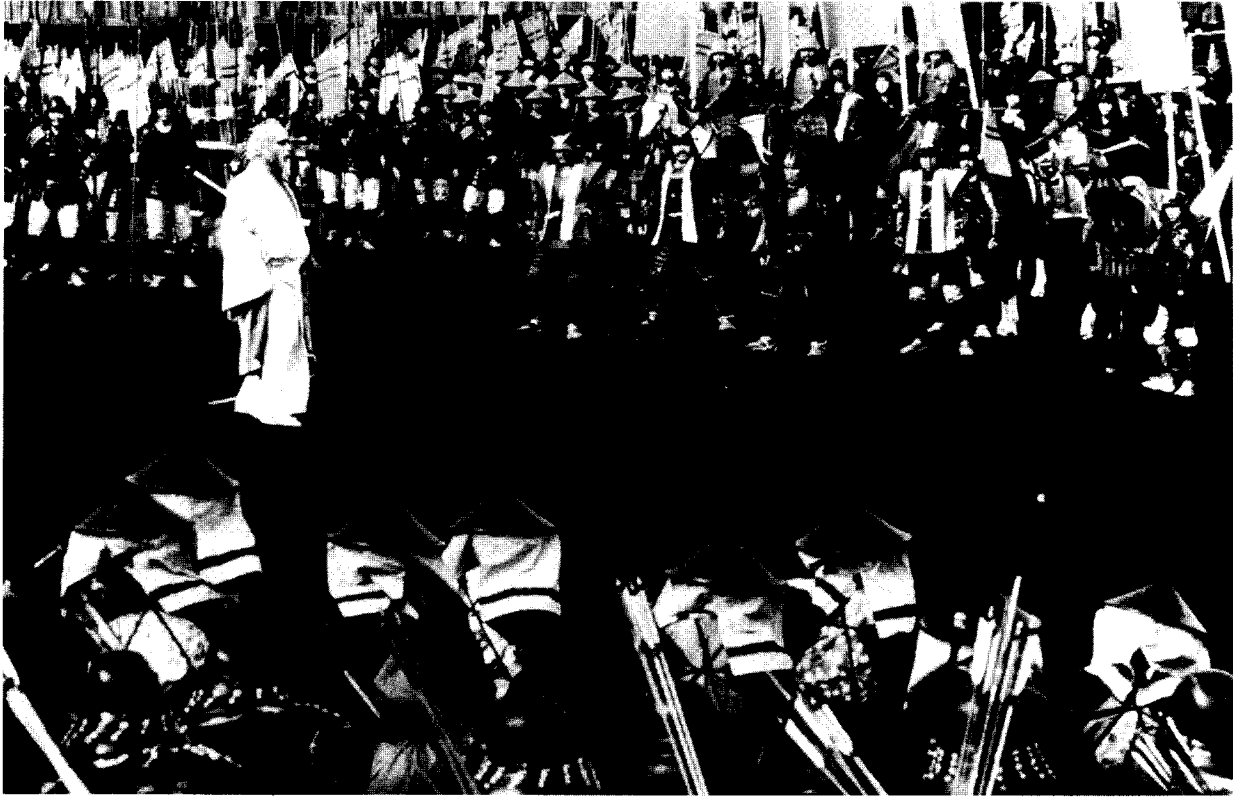
<sup>5</sup>Robert F. Willson, Jr., argues that Hidetora, "a target of rampaging vengeance," consciously recognizes his vulnerability and divides his kingdom to avoid retribution. That Hidetora acts out of such a specific fear does not seem likely to this viewer (Robert F. Willson, "*Ran and King Lear: Adaptation as Interpretation*," *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West: Jahrbuch 1987*, eds. Werner Habicht, Jorg Hasler, and Kurt Tetzeli v. Rosador [Bochum: Kamp] 114-16).

<sup>6</sup>As Parker has commented, Hidetora's three castles represent "man's power over nature and his fellow men," but the ruins of Tsurumaru's castle are "a bleak reminder of the transitoriness of power" (417). It should be noted that Hidetora is betrayed only when he visits them.

revolution of a tortured mind. He fails to recognize familiar people and objects, even on a superficial level, simply because the dazed focus of his thought is directed inward. The storm on the heath is overshadowed by a magnificently photographed father and son battle. Again, man must assume full responsibility for the mess in which he finds himself. If Lear's fool can assert that "[t]his cold night will turn us all to fools and madness," we realize that all things—cold, heat, water, or fire—can provoke madness equally well (3.4.81). No single external

soldier dies with an arrow lodged in his eye; another stares in disbelief at his severed arm. Hidetora sits, impotent, in the burning wreckage of his castle; ironically, a clothes dummy wears his armor. There is no need for thunder and lightning in this carnage. After all, Lear only asks the elements to do what they would do in any low-pressure system—storm.

In one of the most remarkable pictures in the film, Hidetora steps out of the burning castle keep. White smoke billows from the tower's roof and door, and flames glow in the upper



condition is necessary, merely an internal susceptibility.

Faced with the difficulty of translating Lear's Act III fulminations, Kurosawa interprets that portion of the play most imaginatively. The battle is filmed in silence because Hidetora's response to events is dumbfounded shock. In a world where language has been perverted, silence is sanity's last resort. Elements of *Lear's* storm remain, but are transformed into engines and symptoms of mankind's self-destruction; the wind is filled with arrows, guns replicate thunder, smoke takes the place of cloud, and blood rains on man, horse, and castle. Brief scenes of individual combatants also reflect causes and effects of Hidetora's insanity: one

windows. It is a large-scale representation of the chaos inside Hidetora's head. Man's works reproduce his mind, and nature, as manifested in the stone foundations of ruined castles, persists independently of him.

Jiro, the second son, provides an amplification of his father's faults. He learns nothing from his mistakes. United with Lady Kaede in the attraction that evil feels for evil, the two embody mankind's potential darkness in its deepest hue. They are the absence of good. Jiro is servant to his sexual desire for her, and she lives only for revenge. Together, they make an Edmund: cunning, jealous, and vengeful.

At first only directed against his father, Jiro's ruthless plotting soon widens to include others,



and he rapidly loses control of the forces he would direct. Like Edmund, he resents his brother's seniority: "Born twelve months after Taro, so all my life I must grovel at his feet. . . ." He resolves to "crack these bonds," and he means the bonds of brotherhood and family which keep him in second place. These, though, are natural ties. They cannot be undone, any more than Hidetora's bloody past can be rewritten. Jiro fails to achieve anything constructive because he has isolated himself from the immediate community of the family and from the community of which the family is a microcosm, the world. The "bonds" he rejects are really the warped product of his own inability to find security within himself, within the knowledge that he is part of a larger whole. Shoring up his misrepresentation of Edgar, Edmund says:

But that I told him, the revenging gods  
'Gainst parricides did all their thunders  
bend.

(2.1.47-48)

But the destruction of man comes from within himself. The world of *Ran*, as Saburo's example shows, leaves many opportunities for man to live independently, yet remain an important part of the family framework and thus of the world at large. Willson, accepting Edmund and Gloucester's ascription of control to the supernatural—a position Edmund may only be pretending to hold—believes that "in Kurosawa's film and Shakespeare's tragedy we cannot escape the impression that metaphysical forces have conspired to tempt the heroes with visions, only to trap and gleefully annihilate them" (114). But a stronger argument could be made for the opposite case. These characters are pawns only of their own errors and vices.

Hidetora makes unreasonable demands on human nature's ability to organize itself effectively. He expects unconditional support from his sons, while Jiro expects unconditional independence from his family. In the context of the family, neither position is flexible enough to survive a confrontation with honesty and directness. To their misfortune, both characters apply these attitudes not only to their family, but to the universe. Hidetora repeatedly demands supernatural endorsement of his rage.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>See, by way of comparison, 2.4.195, where Lear asks the heavens to "Make it your cause; send down, and take my part!"

Jiro, on the other hand, acts recklessly. Enthralled with destruction personified by Kaede, he avoids facing the probable consequences of his actions, even when they might prove deadly to himself and his troops.

Saburo attempts to reconcile the barrenness he finds in society with his desire to act on a high moral level. He sees the world and its inhabitants for what they are, and throughout the middle third of the film, he watches the action offscreen, allying himself with the theater audience. He acts in a manner contrary to the rules of the worlds he has just described, accepting what it will cost him materially and emotionally. Like Cordelia, he can be patient. Saburo's position as one of the few sensitive and perceptive characters in the film is reinforced in the opening scene's last moments. Banished by his father, he sits on the grass while his horse rests, obviously comfortable with the world and comfortable in it. Kurosawa emphasizes this comfort by placing all of Saburo's scenes out of doors. Watching him squatting, we sense that Saburo needs no artificial support. Later in the film, his troops defeat Jiro's larger army by hiding in the woods. It is not that the trees actively assist Saburo, it is just that he has imagination enough to see them in a different context, as a useful stage on which to fight. For him they are not merely ornaments in the human world, they are integral parts of it. Contrast this with his father's reaction to the nightmare of personal loneliness: bursting through the silk walls, Hidetora can barely stand. He needs both a chair and the physically demonstrated love of his children. In visually equating desire for love with a portable chair, Kurosawa prepares us for the act which drives the plot, the moment when Hidetora's chair is pulled out from under him.<sup>8</sup>

Jiro's wife, Suè, makes her husband's selfishness look worse by the example of her piety and charity. Suè is first seen in silhouette, facing the setting sun and praying. Suè is an idealist: she respects all creation, but her religion blinds her (and thus in this scene her stance is crucial) to another, uglier side of nature. Despite the degradations which she and her family have suffered—Hidetora killed most of her family and seized and burned her castle—she denies in

<sup>8</sup>Note also that the chair is provided by both Kyoami and Saburo. And when Hidetora falls from the temporal power epitomized by the castle, he lands on a grassy plain—that is, on the ground-level where Saburo usually sits.

herself the need for revenge:

Hidetora: Go on, hate me.

Suè: I don't hate you. . . . The Buddha  
embraces all things. . . .

Suè has suffered to the same horrible degree that

wants to emulate the Buddha, but if the Buddha  
embraces *all* things, He must embrace both the  
good and the evil men do. His embrace may not  
always comfort us.

Even as his bitterness turns to madness,  
Hidetora begins to see that his dream was a  
vision of reality, for he replies to her:



Kaede has, yet her response is radically  
different. She shows the shallowness of Albany's  
judgment that "Humanity must perform prey  
on itself" (4.2.49). Her character exists to  
demonstrate that there is an alternative to  
the animalistic savagery of Kaede. Suè's  
indomitable optimism does not leave her any  
less immune to disaster than Edgar's does. She

Buddha again . . . He is gone from this evil  
world. . . . His guardians are in exile, routed  
by the fury of Ashur. . . . We can't rely on  
Buddha's mercy.

Hidetora's preoccupation with his own  
predicament undoubtedly colors his response.  
But just as Jiro, Taro, and Kaede rely too heavily

upon animal nature and brute force, so Sue's will to live, the basis of her life, is too dependent upon Buddha. Her "chair" too will be pulled out from under her.

Kurosawa reminds us of *Lear's* storm indirectly; after the battle it appears to be little more than a stiff breeze. But Hidetora's madness is full-blown. The fool's speeches in *Lear* return much compressed by Kyoami, Hidetora's fool. Like his counterpart in the play, Kyoami is allied with figures who see their world more clearly, including Saburo, Tango the Kent-like guardian of Hidetora, and Kurogane, who serves Jiro but can distinguish right from wrong. Kyoami guides Hidetora through the wilderness. He begins by making a helmet of grass and flowers for the old man, and this is the beginning of Hidetora's new life in nature. During the early scenes of the film, Kyoami has interpreted Hidetora's courtly world for him in blunt terms. Jokingly, he forced the hunting party to follow his gaze into the mountains. Kyoami saw nothing extraordinary there, but his overt silliness made a sophisticated point: man is easily deluded. Just as easily he will fail to recognize and appreciate truth readily available for his apprehension.

If Hidetora is mysteriously terrified by waving blades of grass, Kyoami guesses the Great Lord is being tormented by "a phantom army" of his victims. Kyoami empathizes with Hidetora perhaps because he, too, acts madly, at least according to the rules of Kaede's court. His justification, like Shakespeare's fool's, is that "in a mad world only the mad are sane."

Northrop Frye points out that in *Lear* "one thing the storm symbolizes is that [Lear is] moving into an order of nature that's indifferent to human affairs. . . . With his abdication, whatever links there may be between the civilized world and the one above it have been severed" (108). For Hidetora, the battle and storm are the truest parts of the world; civilization has been nothing more than a veil over it.

Kurosawa does not let his characters linger on the heath. Instead, he moves them to the ruins of a castle on the Azusa plain. In choosing such a forbidding, almost lunar landscape, the director wants to emphasize that madness is not site-specific. It does not require a violent storm on an open field. Like the battle scene, this setting is silent. Kurosawa must feel that the cure for *Lear's* madness, or Hidetora's, lies not in the presence or absence of storm, but in the

emptiness of the place. *Lear* and Hidetora need to be alone in order to understand themselves and their situations clearly.

Parker sees an essential dichotomy in nature's role in the film:

Nature, in fact, is seen as both a contrast and a parallel to human behavior. Its beauty contrasts with man's savagery. . . . On the other hand, there is also considerable use of 'pathetic fallacy,' with nature reflecting human moods.

(418)

But the two forces may cancel each other out: both a sense of beauty and an acceptance of the pathetic fallacy imply a structure imposed on nature by man. Kurosawa might just be using the brief cumulations of cloud and storm to show us how easy and tempting it is to read nature. Hidetora's fate, to provoke disaster by misunderstanding his world, might be ours as well.

In the ruins Hidetora begins to talk and come to grips with his predicament. Baffled by his surroundings, he repeatedly asks Kyoami, "What is this place?" Finally, Kyoami shouts a reply: "Paradise!" The answer is central to Kurosawa's interpretation of the *Lear* story. Hidetora suffers because, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, "horror and doubt distract His troubled thoughts. . . for within him Hell He brings" (*Paradise Lost* 4.18-21). Man makes his own heaven and hell on earth; the earth itself, although affected by man, has no active role.

Hidetora finally begins his ascent from the bottom of Tsurumaru's cave to the top of its foundation, a sign of the emergence of new sanity. But up to this point, any progress Hidetora has made toward a clearer vision has come only through the prodding of others. Hidetora needs to take the last step for himself. Kurosawa gives him the opportunity by assigning to him Gloucester's leap from the cliff.

Hidetora: I'm lost.

Kyoami: Such is the human condition.

Hidetora: This path . . . I remember . . . we came this way before.

Kyoami: Men always travel the same road. If you're tired of it, jump!

He does, although Kyoami was only kidding. Gloucester's fall was short: Hidetora's is much greater. In fact, it ought to kill him. His

miraculous survival has little to do corporeal resiliency. Both Gloucester and Hidetora seize opportunities to end their lives prematurely. Neither is successful because neither realizes that man, in common with other animals, seldom has the power to choose his own end. The decision to jump precipitates a necessary understanding of powerlessness. "Ripeness is all," says Edgar, so Gloucester and Hidetora are made ripe (5.1.11).

Hidetora accepts responsibility for the carnage, but flees into the deserted plain in order to avoid a shameful confrontation with Saburo. The old man lies down among the rocks and weeds and waits for death, a sign of his desire for union with all of nature, both organic and inorganic. Saburo finds him, and Hidetora attempts to escape by digging deeper into the earth. He anticipates a less shameful welcome there. Hidetora's imagination works more creatively now. Awakened by his rescuers, he sees a vivid sky. Of course, no one else sees what he stares at, and the situation is a reversal of Kyoami's hunting party joke. Hidetora is the fool who sees what others miss, rather than the blind and foolish king condemned by Saburo earlier. In the most desolate of settings, he can find beauty. Reconciliation with his son is inevitable.

Maynard Mack complains that "[t]he siren's rock on which efforts to bring *King Lear* to the stage . . . oftenest split is the desire to motivate the bizarre actions that Shakespeare's play calls for in some 'reasonable' way."<sup>9</sup> Mack also feels that many modern productions of the play "ignore Shakespeare's clear signposts (informing us that psychological structure is not what we are to look for) . . ." (30). *Ran* manages to resist these charges successfully. It recreates a world devoid of all human structure in which men act and call themselves reasonable after the deed is done. The film begins with a fantastic dream and ends in darkness. Like *Lear*, it preaches man's ignorance:

Kent: Is this the promised end?

Edgar: Or image of that horror?

(5.3.263-64)

*Ran* does not leap to any conclusion that "we

inhabit an imbecile universe" (Mack 115); rather, in its world, we are the imbeciles, indifferent to its potential and prey to our own crude impulses.

After Saburo's murder and Hidetora's death, Kyoami and Tango sit on Azusa plain next to the two bodies. Unable to laugh at himself any longer, Kyoami despairs, Gloucester-style:

Are there no gods . . . no Buddha? If you exist, hear me! You are mischievous and cruel. Are you so bored up there you must crush us like ants? Is it such fun to see men weep?

Even the fool has a breaking point. Tango reproaches him:

Enough! Do not blaspheme! It is the gods who weep. They see us killing each other over and over since time began. They can't save us from ourselves. Don't cry! It's how the world is made. Men prefer sorrows over joy, suffering over peace. . . . Look at them in the First Castle. They revel in pain and bloodshed. They celebrate murder.

But Tango romanticizes man's propensity to do evil. The film does not end with his vision of the world because it, too, is flawed. Instead, Kurosawa returns to the theme of man's blindness, of his inability to perceive anything, be it good or evil, clearly. The last character we see is Suë's brother, Tsurumaru. Also blinded by Hidetora, Tsurumaru attempts to follow his sister's model and forgive. But he admits that he cannot do so. The instinct for revenge still controls some part of his thinking. He finds some consolation in art, specifically his flute, but he accidentally forgets it, and Suë dies trying to retrieve it. She has left him alone, clutching a paper image of the Buddha, at the uppermost edge of his former castle's ruined foundation. When his cane slips at the edge of the precipice, he drops the painting: the last comfort of his sister goes over the edge. The false securities of religion, society, and family disappear, and Hidetora's dream world becomes everyone's predicament.□

<sup>9</sup>Maynard Mack, *King Lear in Our Time* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965) 29.

Christopher J. Bannon graduated from Brown University in 1985.

Anna Rupertina Fuchsin

THE ANSWER

*Translated by Ronnie Apter*

resplendent prince:  
the hand which breaks your seal  
will no doubt shatter the favor of the princess  
which the discerning judge in silence  
but the braying rabble rush to shame

no man can escape this frenzied race  
and thus I plead, I beg myself not to be hurt  
you write me my child

my treasure

my angel

how will such titles strike a stranger's ear?

I am utterly confounded to find  
the splendor of your  
majesty shine kindly  
on my shade

Who knows

to have and hold a crown does not pluck down  
the wreath gracing  
a crushed and faded flower

married

stem to twining stem

resplendent prince,  
the rose is in your hand  
why trouble yourself with the barren bush  
you that found of princesses

the pearl

Upon my life!

my soot shall not besmirk its splendor

and where, pray, are you going with this inclination  
it cannot be forever kept from the eyes of the court  
you will

that I be the object of your quill  
and by it written down in history

No  
you say  
    far reaching  
the hand of the great  
    True  
but who  
would seal the lips of posterity  
no cord so fine  
    that never shining sun  
light on its web  
  
the blind instinct for love beclouds your mind  
    bright Jupiter  
    becomes a light-o-love  
luring my youth from the path of virtue  
Should an eagle love to marry earth?  
  
because my prince has closed his eyes  
should I sleep lapped in sweet delusions  
    of security  
I conclude  
    I must not indulge another  
    word of love  
  
my hand herewith sends back the diamond  
likeness of tears  
the oysters' children wise and white  
    It disgusts me  
ever again to look at such a rope of slavery  
that makes my name a sin  
  
the prince's likeness isn't fit for maids  
but painted to kiss  
    a royal breast  
Woe to the skiff  
    which skirts the cliff  
    where other crafts have stricken sail





## THEORY, LANGUAGE-GAMES, AND FISH

### I

In order to expose the discursive continuities in a network of cultural relationships, the typical new historicist analysis usually opens with a description of a marginal event situated in the distant past.<sup>1</sup> I would like to adopt a similar procedure in an effort to understand a more recent historical moment, one whose cultural significance would otherwise be obscured by the apparent fact of its ordinariness.

The event that I have in mind lasted about fifteen seconds on the morning of April 6, 1984. The location was a classroom on the Morningside campus of Columbia University. What actually happened was no more or less than the production of a single statement whose central feature was the word "theory." The speaker, a well known member of the literary critical profession by the name of Stanley Fish, was talking with a group of students when he posed the following question: "What kind of headway is theory going to make within the precincts of the academy and literary studies in particular?"

One might object that to use such words as "event" and "historical" to describe such a mundane moment is to exaggerate its importance in the general scheme of things. Yet such apparently unremarkable happenings are just what the new historicists find most worthy of attention because, they argue, small gestures and ordinary utterances are synecdochically related to concealed and powerful discursive formations. It follows that a statement, particularly one whose meaning is so obvious that it needs little clarification for its auditors to comprehend, is both clear and apparently simple only because it is rooted in a concealed sociolinguistic complex. Fish's question is such a statement, and the following essay attempts to

situate it within the enabling structure that provides it with currency, value, and meaning. What results is a kind of theorizing about theory, that is, an account of theory that describes the conditions that have brought it into being.

The new historicist view of things that I have invoked above displays two habits of mind which are notable because of what they reveal about the methods to be employed in what follows. The first is that refocusing of scholarship which has shifted attention from what previous generations regarded as major and central phenomena. Decanonization is one of the effects of this shift as is the inclination to find that the ordinary, when scrutinized properly, is quite extraordinary. The second habit, which displaces explanation from phenomena "in and of themselves" and redirects it to the social structures within which phenomena are embedded, accounts for the historical shift of professional attention from unitary verbal icons to differentiated networks of signification. Both habits of mind derive, in part, from the Saussurean notion of the relationship between "langue" (the general system of language conceived of as a totality) and "parole" (the individual utterance whose production and reception are possible because of the absent presence of the language system of which it is a part). Many students of culture, most notably the structuralists and the poststructuralists, have been attracted to this conception of language because of its implications for the grammatical and institutional analysis of artifacts and speech acts. I intend to follow suit, displacing conventional objective explanations of Stanley Fish's question and focusing instead on its institutional meaning. The institution under consideration will be the literary critical profession.<sup>2</sup>

### II

Michel Foucault, who is one of the more

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988) 66.

eminent heirs of Saussure, can provide us with guidance because of the work he has done on institutional structures and the practices they legitimate. His "genealogical" analyses focus on particular discursive structures and attempt to reconstruct the rules of formation that brought them into being. These rules are "grammatical" in that they govern the production of possible statements. That is, they describe parameters of propriety and measure the acceptability of a statement within a particular institutional context.<sup>3</sup> Just as the syntactical structure of sentences produced by a competent speaker of a language is limited by its grammar, the statements produced by a competent member of a profession are controlled and shaped by institutional rules of formation. Professionals internalize these rules during their years of qualification and usually can be depended upon thereafter to speak and act in accord with professional goals and standards. The rules are both powerful—in that they constrain behavior—and contingent—in that they are unstable products of historical forces. As such they promise to provide an account of the rise (and the possible demise) of theory in our profession.

Looked at from the Foucauldian perspective the profession appears as a "system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements."<sup>4</sup> As noted above, these procedures tend to govern the behavior of the people within the system; one result is that they stop looking like the autonomous actors so familiar in the humanist view of things. When people are subordinated to the control of procedures or grammars or rules of formation their activity becomes a dependent extension of the system. The famous poststructuralist dictum—"Language speaks us!"—captures this decline of the human and magnifies the importance of discourse. Statements are produced, so the

argument goes, within a complex network of social and linguistic relationships which are themselves responsible for constructing a reality and for sanctioning what can and cannot be said. Thus within the context of the profession, Stanley Fish posing a question in New York City assumes the appearance of a speaker whose utterances have been shaped and determined by a set of professional rules that may be said to possess and control him rather than the other way around.<sup>5</sup>

I believe that these rules and the system of which they are a part can be described and comprehended. Foucault moves us forward in this endeavor by providing a vision of the task, but his own analyses are, to my mind, so idiosyncratic as to leave a follower uncertain how to proceed. For this reason, the method of analysis to be used in this essay needs to be augmented with insights from another source, one that is compatible with poststructuralism yet capable of illuminating novel vistas. The later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein is the source I have in mind.

Put succinctly, my contention is that the sum total of professional activities is a Wittgensteinian language-game. Although any culturally organized system of activity can be viewed in this fashion, the profession is an especially apt instance because most of its identifying activities (interpreting, reading, writing, lecturing) are linguistic.<sup>6</sup> To participate in these activities the members of the profession (the players) must speak a professional language and by virtue of this fact are incorporated within a system that maintains playing fields, organizes contests, and rewards winning performances. Let me repeat the point in another way.

<sup>2</sup>The literary critical profession is hereafter referred to as the profession and should be understood as that demographic group whose members teach English and comparative literature at universities and colleges and belong to the Modern Language Association. Although this is not an all-inclusive definition, I believe it comprehends most of the members of the profession and is precise enough for the purposes of this essay.

<sup>3</sup>Colin Gordon, "Afterword," in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon et al., ed. Colin Gordon (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1980) 244.

<sup>4</sup>Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," *Power/Knowledge* 133.

<sup>5</sup>A profession's "possession" of its members is a recurrent theme in Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham and London: Duke Univ. Press, 1989). For example: "as a fully situated member of an interpretive community, be it literary or legal, you 'naturally' look at the objects of the community's concerns with eyes already informed by community imperatives, urgencies, and goals" (303).

<sup>6</sup>Russell Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1987) 255.

Wittgenstein recognized that language-games construct definable demographic entities and thereby generate the contingent conditions within which meaning, productive labor, and economic value are possible. And it is in this respect that Foucault and Wittgenstein converge: both are grammatical analysts of human systems and the role played by language in producing order out of whatever materials and activities are at hand.<sup>7</sup>

What is lost from view in this macroscopic picture of the profession is theory. In what respect is theory a language-game? To answer this question we have to recognize that the profession is at one and the same time a language-game as well as a federation of language-games. If we reflect on the membership of MLA the point becomes clear. On the one hand, people join because the organization supports and enables a general kind of language play. On the other hand, members play a sub-set of other games (e.g., archetypal criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist criticism, film criticism) and thus speak different professional languages whose vocabularies require considerable skill and effort to master. Witness a passage from an acclaimed study of films from the 1940s: Mary Ann Doane writes that the "analyses in this study emphasize the symptoms of ideological stress which accompany the concerted effort to engage female subjectivity within conventional narrative forms. These stress points and perturbations can then, hopefully, be activated as a kind of lever to facilitate the production of a desiring subjectivity for the woman in another cinematic practice."<sup>8</sup> The meaning of this passage is not equally accessible to all members of the profession. Doane's lexicon is at one and the same time enlightening for some and befuddling for others. That's because her use of a professional language constructs a circle of linguistic play that simultaneously includes one audience and excludes another. We should think of the MLA as a complex set of many such circles, all of which overlap just enough to produce a relative sense of unity. Theory is one

of the circles, one of the language-games, embedded within the larger structure of the profession.

There is at least one potential impediment to the unbiased consideration of the equation between language-games and professional activities. This impediment is so predictable that few expositors of the Wittgensteinian language-game omit its expression: "if linguistic activity is to be conducted in the manner of play . . . and if linguistic activity and human culture are not to be taken with complete seriousness, the human situation, it would seem, stands in danger of being trivialized" (Nieli 255). The familiar binary opposition in effect in this statement radically separates play and professional activity into two distinct and opposed compartments. Games are thereby divorced from the serious business of the world and projected into the domain of leisure time and childhood activity. Accordingly they connote the ephemeral and the frivolous and the immature. Games seem empty, appearing to do little more than fill up time with distractions for those who have nothing better to do. At the opposite pole is professional work which is purposeful, serious, culturally significant, and contributes to the general betterment of society at large. This view is, of course, the familiar humanist justification of literary studies, one which we can trace back through the likes of Eliot, Arnold, Erasmus, and Plato. Their traditional apologia claims that literary studies provide the moral instruction and the intellectual furnishings which prepare people for an enriched life and diverse kinds of active citizenship. Fundamental to this endeavor is the pursuit of truth.

As we know, the humanist link-up of professional life and the pursuit of truth has been under attack for some time. Jacques Derrida's assaults on western logocentric traditions, of which the pursuit of truth is a part, are especially notable in this respect. Writing as early as 1966 he proclaims the absence of the meaningful center (truth itself) sought by legions of humanist interpreters, and in its place he locates "free play" and the "game."<sup>9</sup> Such moves have released powerful oppositional forces, of which a recent instance is Roger

<sup>7</sup>Gordon Hunnings, *The World and Language in Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1988) 144.

<sup>8</sup>Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987) 13.

<sup>9</sup>"Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970) 268.

Kimball's diatribe *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. Kimball singles out and responds to Derrida, Bourdieu, Culler, de Man, Rorty, and other subverters of traditional humanism including Stanley Fish, who is the subject of an entire chapter. In a section titled "Learning to Play the Game," Kimball accuses Fish of "gamesmanship," thus invoking an opposition between serious inquiry and unprincipled and amoral professional activity. Fish's fault is that he is "wont to insist that teaching and writing about literature is a profession like any other, concerned more with self-perpetuation and self-aggrandizement than with the disinterested pursuit of truth."<sup>10</sup> This misreading of Fish's view of the self and its relationship to a professional community is the result of Kimball's own commitment to the language of traditional humanism and his fear of postmodern theory and its insistence on the absence of certainty. What's notable for our purposes is what Kimball perceives as the stakes—the pursuit of truth—and his reflexive invocation of a sinister alternative—the profession perceived as a game.

I think it is a concern held by many and therefore should be addressed. Is it possible to be serious, purposeful, and responsible while dispensing with the notion that we as professionals are engaged in the pursuit of truth?

Despite the charges of nihilism, theorists like Fish seem to be eminently responsible to the profession, are in many respects very conservative members of it, and act very much as if truth were their interest and goal. Fish accounts for this seeming contradiction when he writes that it is "a condition of human life always to be operating as an extension of beliefs and assumptions that are historically contingent, and yet to be holding those beliefs and assumptions with an absoluteness that is the necessary consequence of the absoluteness with which they hold—inform, shape, constitute—us" (*Doing What Comes Naturally* 246). The statement may seem inconsistent until one begins to appreciate that it is possible to replace eternal truth with local truth. The latter is temporary, because history is always changing what is regarded as true, yet absolute for the duration of its temporary reign. Consequently, professionals and other people always act as

though their beliefs are true even if those beliefs change, as they always do, as time and history exert their transformative powers.

It is this paradox that Wittgenstein accounted for in his conception of the language-game. It's worth recalling the circumstances within which the conception was formed: "passing a field where a football game was in progress the thought struck him that in language we play games with words."<sup>11</sup> What impressed Wittgenstein was the way in which the rules of a football game invest acts with value and meaning, acts which would otherwise have an entirely different significance. Consider American football. Within the reality constructed by its rules, the movement of a ball across a line temporarily defined as an end zone produces a value, six points, which if accumulated in sufficient quantities results in a win. The rules governing the ball, the field, and the movements upon it are arbitrary and contingent: they are not motivated by natural or eternal necessity. Nevertheless, within the context of the game the rules are absolute even though they are temporary human fabrications which can be revised. The rules construct a field, organize and channel the movements of players, and they define what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, what is acceptable and what impossible as long as the game continues. From a similar line of reasoning Wittgenstein concluded that all cultural activities, particularly those involving language, are like games within whose temporary boundaries a set of fabricated and temporary rules operate with the force of truth.

Games are thus as serious, as valuable, as purposeful as anything that might flow from absolute and necessary truths.

As I have suggested above, the language-game view of human culture represents a convergence of Wittgensteinian thought and poststructuralist theory. An examination of this convergence will lead us to the threshold of a specific discussion of the profession and the place of theory within it.

The most striking evidence of this convergence is the way in which Wittgenstein's early and late philosophies parallel the thesis-antithesis relationship of the new criticism (the Brooks and Warren brand) and poststructuralist theory.

<sup>10</sup>*Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1990) 147.

<sup>11</sup>Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958) 65.

In his early speculations Wittgenstein extended the lines of reasoning associated with the British school of logical positivists, most notably Bertrand Russell. The *Tractatus*, the major work to emerge from this period, espouses a representational view of language: words correspond to real things that have an independent life apart from language.<sup>12</sup> This notion can be traced back to the Plato of *Gorgias* and *Cratylus* and is now, due to the critique of Derrida and others, generally recognized as a central feature of the western metaphysics. Thus the centuries old logocentric quest for perdurable essences appears in twentieth-century British philosophy, and Wittgenstein's part in it, as the search for an ideal propositional language. This language of languages was to be constructed by a special kind of logical analysis, a "tool by which, in principle, complex sentences could be resolved into their constituent simple propositions." A similar analytics, one whose procedures would disclose the essential meanings of poems, fueled the interpretive desires of new critics from Richards and Brooks to Wimsatt and Beardsley. The poststructuralist demystification of this dream is akin to Wittgenstein's eventual dismissal of "the idea that to explain a sentence is to explain its meaning in the most fundamental way possible" (Hunnings 154).

An alternative is presented in *Philosophical Investigations*, the major work of what is regarded as the second half of Wittgenstein's intellectual career.<sup>13</sup> His conversion from a fundamentalist to a conventionalist view of language and meaning crystallized in the notion that sociolinguistic activity is a game. One of Wittgenstein's expositors puts the matter this way: "in the *Tractatus* . . . the claim was that the meaning of a word is the object it denotes; here, in the *Investigations*, it is that the meaning of an expression is the use to which it can be put in one or another of the many and various language-games constituting language."<sup>14</sup> By invoking language "use" Wittgenstein dislocates

meaning from the fixed relationships between words and things and situates it within the variable contexts of history and human culture. This contextualization of meaning, which removes it from the realm of the eternal and the essential, parallels the deconstructive moves of poststructuralism, so it's not too surprising to find a poststructuralist employing game imagery to make a similar point. Thus an expositor of Derrida writes that "it is Derridean free play which has given us the notion of textual indeterminacy and that free play stands in opposition to representation, to language representing a world and the world as representing itself in language."<sup>15</sup> Derridean free play, the now famous absence of presence or the decentered center, finds its correlative in the Wittgensteinian notion of a meaning which is a temporary and alterable feature of the game. Derrida makes the point explicit when he equates the denial of fundamental meaning with an embrasure of the "concept of the game" (267).

In the absence of eternal truths or context, independent meanings that anchor texts and interpretive activities, the game (i.e., language) generates a provisional order which is explicable within the human realm of history and culture. Thus an attempt to understand the production of an utterance—in this case, Stanley's Fish's question about theory—must look to the human institution (i.e., the profession) within which the statement made sense and achieved value.

### III

Any single instance of a language-game (e.g., a professional conversation or a published article) involves competition so that the total sum of games played at any given time produces a vertical hierarchy within which specific players and specific games are distributed. In other words, the inevitability of better and worse performances results in judgments that distinguish between the active players' levels of ability. This tendency toward hierarchy affects all the relationships within the circle of a language-game and thus provides an appropriate opening for an analysis of the profession.

At the base of this hierarchical structure is the distinction between student and professor. The

<sup>12</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, eds. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

<sup>13</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

<sup>14</sup>A. C. Grayling, *Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988) 73.

<sup>15</sup>Joseph Natoli, "Tracing a Beginning through Past Theory Voices," *Tracing Literary Theory*, ed. Joseph Natoli (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987) 19.



relationship may be equated to that of the amateur and the professional player. First, the professor has achieved a level of ability which is high enough to produce a livelihood whereas the student is either an aspirant to that condition or has a commitment which is temporary or secondary to other career interests. Second, the student, whose skill and knowledge are exceeded by the professor's, emulates the professor as a means to an improved game. As a consequence, students are situated in a subordinate social and economic position that produces the economic wherewithal for a wide range of professional games.

The undergraduate English courses in general education are a case in point. They are usually a compulsory part of the curriculum and as such enroll students whose allegiance to English is a temporary and practical means to the end of graduation. The sheer number of these students is sufficient, however, to provide the economic base of the profession. This is particularly the case in large state universities or those without well-endowed professorships. In such universities the general education English courses are taught by low paid part-time professionals and aspiring amateurs (graduate students) and thereby generate a surplus of resources. The surplus makes it possible for a limited number of tenured professors to have light teaching loads, advanced students, travel funds, and retirement benefits. These resources translate into the focus and the free time required to compete at the higher levels of the game as a fully qualified professional.

Upper division and graduate courses also make substantial economic contributions to the maintenance of professional language-games but are additionally significant. The familiar academic panoply of class discussions, directed readings, research papers, seminars, theses, dissertations, and degree awarding mechanisms provides opportunities for a variety of amateur competitions which are subject to professional evaluation and serve to cultivate and recruit new players. Course work develops the student player's ability to produce language in accordance with professional standards which are then invoked to distribute the students into a hierarchy of grades. This evaluative system assiduously identifies and encourages conformity to certain standards of performance, and those students who are deemed the best performers are rewarded first with the best grades and then with money prizes, letters of recommen-

dation, fellowships, grants, and teaching assistantships. All of these inducements encourage successively higher levels of performance and channel the amateurs toward professional arenas, thereby replenishing the human resources that are at the necessary center of the game.

In the later stages of this process the competition reaches its maximum intensity as the aspirants to professional status start playing for long term economic stakes in the form of a university tenure track position. As the competition increases so does its correlative, the intensity of evaluation and professional scrutiny. The final move from amateur to professional status requires a rite of passage in which the aspirant's record of previous performances qualifies him/her for a series of games played with professionals during job interviews and subsequent campus visits. There are definite winners and losers in this process as some players are disqualified even before the round of interviews begins while others are drafted by prestige schools noted for a high level of play and the resources made available to that end.

As for the actual gaming skills required of a player, the fundamentals can be divided into two: one relates to the development and competent use of a professional lexicon; the other relates to what Noam Chomsky called the creative aspect of language, that is, a speaker's ability to produce a potentially infinite number of correct statements based upon a limited knowledge of a language's grammar.

The professional lexicon—the ability to recognize certain words, names of writers, and titles of publications—is a function of memory. At the amateur levels of the game, a player may not command much more than lists of professionally sanctioned words. At the higher levels the use of the same words implies large networks of information about relevant literary, critical, and philosophical matters. One gross measure of a player's lexicon is the index to a professional publication. Consider, for example, the index to Stanley Fish's recent book. A representative set of the names included therein—Abrams, Bakhtin, Barthes, Bleich, Booth, Brooks, Burke, Culler, Eagleton, Habermas, Iser, Kenner, Lacan, Montrose, Rorty, Said, Spivak, Tompkins, and Wimsatt—is deeply meaningful for the active theory player who reads them as signs of a critical movement with its own history, intellectual positions, momentous print

performances, and celebrated players. To reference any of these in a game is both a test of a player's lexicon as well as the necessary means by which the game can play itself out. The same point may be made about the other constituents of the lexicon: energy laden words like authority, contingency, context, deconstruction, ideology, hegemony, and power. The ability to use and recognize such officially sanctioned words positions the user within the stream of current discourse and translates into significant professional consequences of the sort to be discussed below. Perfect competence of the lexicon, a professional ideal, would require complete knowledge of every concept, every position, every player in the game.

Although lexical competence is a necessary feature of professional ability, it is of a lesser order than the second skill (the creative aspect) required of a player. In and of itself the mnemonic power associated with a well-stocked lexicon will move a player only so high on the hierarchy of the profession. Extreme lexical competence is the attribute of bibliographers and the compilers of indices, professionals whose labors enable a profession that generally withholds its highest rewards for others. Since it is a function of memory, the lexicon represents the conventional knowledge of the game, its history, and its recorded moves, all of which a competent player must know.

But the best players go beyond the lexicon. They extend the language-game and take it into areas of performance previously unexplored. The ability to do so, the Chomskian creative aspect, is what enables "persons to produce speech that is appropriate to situations though perhaps quite novel, and to understand when others do so."<sup>16</sup> Chomsky's definition refers to normal everyday speech activity which, by extension, we can apply to professional language-games. His point is that humans are endowed with the ability to generalize from a limited knowledge of their grammar. Having experienced a finite set of grammatically correct statements, the creative aspect has the power to thereafter generate an infinite set of properly conformed, though different, statements. In similar fashion, the creative aspect of professional language use enables a player to innovate without breaking the boundaries of convention.

A higher order of professional language production therefore requires advanced players who not only command a relevant lexicon but are able to extend and modify the linguistic moves they have learned in other games. This ability goes beyond mere recognition and rote repetition by producing rule governed innovations (e.g., new interpretations and new readings) that conform to their enabling premises yet are perceived as novel. Good examples of the creative aspect at work can be found wherever a player invents a strategy that answers or resolves longstanding questions and problems. Usually the strategy becomes associated with a single word or short phrase. Perhaps the most memorable instance of such a powerful invention in recent years is that associated with Derridean deconstruction.

A similar innovation, one of a lesser order, is Stanley Fish's term "interpretive community," which appeared in a 1980 collection of his essays.<sup>17</sup> Poised against positivist accounts of interpretation, the notion of an interpretive community emerged at a time when theory players were competing to answer certain questions about the source of interpretive authority. The major questions were: Are there right and wrong interpretations, and how can we distinguish between them? Various eminent players had worked out arguments organized in terms of the seemingly unavoidable opposition between the objective and the subjective. Within the linguistic constraints of this particular game, interpretations looked as though they had to be based on either the fixed and controlling structure of the text or the free will of the reader. There seemed to be no other alternatives available in the field until Fish constructed an argument that combined both subjective and objective in a new configuration. His strategy, the classic synthesis of thesis and antithesis, produced the concept of the interpretive community, an organization whose constituents (readers) are both subjective—in that their interpretations are contingent and subject to change—and objective—in that the same interpretations, unstable though they may be, are held with the force of conviction and truth. Although the phrase "interpretive community" isn't heard much these days, it had considerable power when it first appeared. This power continues to manifest itself indirectly in that the

<sup>16</sup>Noam Chomsky, *Rules and Representations* (N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980) 77.

<sup>17</sup>*Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980).

name of the phrase's inventor (Stanley Fish) is itself a piece of the professional lexicon and confers a certain value upon those who can use it in the proper professional context.

The exercise of such lexical and creative skills takes place in professional arenas which are either provisional or permanent. The former require no more or less than two players engaged in a professional discussion. The latter are fixed and resource intensive institutional structures like a journal or an annual conference. The great majority of games are oral and the arenas provisional because there are many more opportunities for them and they can be conducted at little cost to the players or the profession. These take many forms: a conversation over lunch, a departmental discussion of new courses, a meeting at a conference cocktail party, a job interview. A good deal might be said about these games. They provide opportunities for various kinds of information to be disseminated through the profession. They may be cooperative so that two colleagues caught up in a discussion of, say, Bakhtin's polyphonic text may be compared to the participants in a game of frisbee whose intent is to exercise their skill in a pleasant and stress free social interaction. It's also just as likely that every professional game, no matter how informal, has some kind of stakes because professional players are equipped with an evaluative apparatus that can never be set aside. Thus in every professional encounter there is a risk that the reputation of a given player will rise or fall to some degree. This is because every player is also a judge whose judgments may be called upon in various professional contexts to advance or not advance, to reward or not reward, a particular player. I am thinking of such judicial and regulatory functions as tenure and promotion committees, salary committees, grant committees and the like, whose purpose is to scrutinize a player's skills and make decisions that move a player up or down the professional hierarchy.

Although the overwhelming number of professional games are oral and take place within provisional arenas, the arenas that are accorded the highest status display written performances. These are scholarly articles and books, and the arenas in which they appear are journals and university presses, relatively expensive mechanisms for the refereed qualification of the best players and for the distribution of their performances to well-

established and expectant audiences.

The professional writer/player is in a couple of respects like a chess player engaged in a long distance game whose moves are leisurely communicated by mail.<sup>18</sup> In both games a player must develop a knowledge of the rules of performance. The chess player accumulates this knowledge as a result of participation in actual chess games. The writer's game knowledge is constructed in a less direct way through the reading of earlier recorded games (articles and books). For all effects and purposes, he/she is playing a long distance game with these writer/players when he/she reacts to them in his/her own publications. Their moves, possibly made years earlier, determine the shape of his/her subsequent responses just as a chess player's reactions take their form from the shape of an opponent's preceding actions. However, written language-games differ from chess in one vital respect. By writing within the contingent constraints of a predetermined context, the writer enters a game which (unlike chess) is actually a chain of interconnected games whose rules (like those of language) are constantly changing in response to the creative performances of players past and present.

Yet the writer is also playing with what may be a wholly different set of players—the imagined readers for his/her publication. They too have done the reading required to know the rules of the game; otherwise they would be unable to judge and appreciate a given performance. The writer in his/her production of responsive language must make a finite number of decisions which are based on the anticipated responses of these imagined reader/players. These decisions must be made continuously and affect the strategic presentation of information, use of terms, references to other players, and creative reactions to the current shape of the field. In principle one would have to do a word by word analysis of a scholarly publication in order to exemplify fully this argument. But a brief case can be made with reference to the strategy of an article Fish published in 1970. "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" was played within the field structured by the new criticism in general and the Wimsatt/Beardsley formulation

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<sup>18</sup>Nieli notes that chess and football are "the two games which seem to have had the most influence on Wittgenstein's formation of the language-game concept" (253).

of the "affective fallacy" in particular.<sup>19</sup> As we know, the new criticism's pursuit of formal interpretations effectively blocked considerations of a reader's affective responses, which were considered to be too impressionistic. Thus conventional players in the game of new criticism maintained the game by writing articles that neatly connected a poem's formal features to its unitary meaning. They claimed that the meaning arrived at by a reader at the end of the poem was what really mattered. Fish's responding move was creative, oppositional, and pushed aside the blocks set in place by Wimsatt and Beardsley. Fish argued that meaning is much more than a static unitary message received at the end of a poem. To the contrary, meaning is what happens moment by moment as a reader negotiates his/her way through the words and lines of a text. Of course, Fish was not the only writer to extend similar lines of response. He had himself started down this road with the publication several years earlier of *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (London, 1967), and in retrospect we can see that he and players like David Bleich, Norman Holland, and Wolfgang Iser were collectively reforming the game of literary criticism. The new criticism was being displaced as a source of rules for the formation of scholarly articles, and new movements (new games) like reader-response criticism and theory were slowly taking over the field of play.

The strategy of "Literature in the Reader" and the larger critical revolution of which it was a part represent the kinds of circular relationships brought into being by the production and distribution of language, the activities that lie at the heart of the profession. Since these activities take the shape of a cycle there is no definitive point from which an analysis should proceed. The moment an article is submitted for publication will suffice as well as any other.

This is a very competitive moment because the article will always be evaluated in relation to others seeking distribution. (*American Quarterly*, a representative journal, reports that 9% of its submissions reach publication.)<sup>20</sup> The good have to be separated from the bad and the editorial

staff and related readers, all of whom are equipped with an internalized knowledge of the current state of the professional field, render judgment. I want to emphasize currency because the state of the field and the rules of the game are always subject to change. Thus winning or losing, that is, having an article accepted or rejected, will depend on the particular rules in force at that moment. My point is that the perceived value of an article does not exist in and of itself; nor does an evaluation rendered by its readers. Rather both are a function of unstable norms of acceptability. Let's imagine, for example, that "Literature in the Reader" had been submitted to the Leavisite journal *Criterion* in 1955. The article's likely fate would have been rejection because the rules of play in force at the time could not assign value to a performance so anathema to the new criticism. The obverse is equally true. Should someone submit a brilliant new critical analysis to *American Literary History* we can be sure it will be viewed as anachronistic and of little value to the journal's audience.

The referees who make such editorial judgments are quite powerful in one sense because their decisions determine the future character of the profession. Yet to think of these decisions as issuing from their personal preferences is a mistake. Referees are constrained by all of the qualifying procedures that have shaped their professional lives and delivered them to positions in the professional hierarchy. Having internalized the rules of the game, a referee's ways of thinking and judging are extensions of those authorized by previous generations of writers and editors. Both present and past generations are embedded in the cycle of production and distribution: their standards, which have been formed by those that have preceded them, will form those that follow. In this fashion the professional game regulates itself and maintains continuity and a certain degree of stability that serves the referees, the players, and the audience.

The latter is somewhat unique in that it consists of other players whose attention is motivated, in part, by the desire to repeat what they learn from a written performance. By contrast, an audience for a football game has little interest in reproducing the moves observed on the field; the sole object is the pleasure derived from an appreciation of the performance. The audience of a professional language-game derives a similar sort of pleasure from its ability to appreciate a writer's game

<sup>19</sup>"Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," *NLH* 2.1 (Autumn 1970): 123-62.

<sup>20</sup>Nancy Cott, Lawrence Levine, Cecilia Tichi, "Report of Committee Reviewing *American Quarterly*," *American Studies Association Newsletter* 13.2 (June 1990): 6.

moves, but this pleasure is not an end in itself. It is linked to a more important professional function—emulation. Having observed Fish's interaction with the new critics, and having evaluated the degree to which it creatively extended and altered the current rules of the game, the professional audience of reader-response critics thereafter conformed the structure of the games they played in the classroom, in informal meetings with colleagues, in conferences, and in other written productions.

This conformation serves the immediate needs of the individual professional as well as the profession at large. The individual is empowered in future games by the currency of the moves and the terms learned in an arena and thereby maintains and/or establishes his/her position in the professional hierarchy and assures a certain level of respect on the part of other players. The respect is gratifying in and of itself but it also confers upon the individual the power to influence and control events in various areas of professional life. As with the power of an editor or a referee, this influence and control might more accurately be described as the possession of the profession rather than of the professional. The game is, after all, a self-reproducing mechanism that requires conformity to the standards and rules that assure continuation of the whole. The whole process works through individuals who carry information from the arenas into their home territories and thereby do the work necessary to assure the profession another generation of professionals.

From an economic point of view, this perpetuation is one consequence of the production of value that takes place within the circle of the game. A particular language performance, like the movement of an oblong ball across a goal line, has no value in and of itself. Its value is contingent upon the particular rules in force at a given moment in the game's contingent history. If a performance manages simultaneously to innovate while conforming to the rules (as in the examples described above), the profession will assign a high value to the performance and very tangible consequences will follow. The value is materialized first by the appearance of a performance in print and then by various kinds of reproduction in the oral and written games of other members of the profession. The assigned value also results in the construction of a professional hierarchy which ranks players and their performances. In a game

like football this ranking is done in a very systematic fashion since there is a direct correlation between quantifiable performances and wins and losses. Numbers of yards gained and passes received usually translate into numbers of winning games. Matters are much less well defined in professional language-game hierarchies. Nevertheless the assigning of value happens and manifests itself in terms of salary, promotion, job mobility, and the university where a professional is situated. If we could freeze the profession at any moment in its history, the resulting sample would display a hierarchical structure that reflects prevailing values and distributes schools, people, and publications into a determinate vertical order.

Once again, we can turn to Stanley Fish as our prime example to see how the value assigned to performance translates into a position in the hierarchy. Fish received his Ph.D. from Yale in 1962, a sign of a very successful conformation to the rules of the profession, and was subsequently hired by a distinguished English program at the University of California at Berkeley. He published three books by 1972, two of them met by professional acclaim, and was rewarded in 1974 with a professorial position at another distinguished institution, The Johns Hopkins University. In 1978 he was placed in an endowed chair at the same institution and was then hired by Duke University, which had set out to create a first-class English Department. We can be sure that all of these moves correspond to considerable increments in salary, light teaching loads, travel funds, extensive time available for research and for professional networking, and opportunities to receive honoraria for presentations at other universities.

This exemplary career is the convergence of one player's natural talents and the profession's tendency to maintain and reproduce itself. To clarify this contention, we have to consider the fact that professional qualification is actually an ongoing process that demands a continual updating of one's professional lexicon. To supply this demand for information about the changing shape of the current language-games in vogue, the profession organizes journals, university presses, and conferences. All of these arenas are part of an interconnected apparatus for the production and distribution of information. This apparatus needs to be supplied with eminently qualified players whose performances will assist other professionals in their efforts to stay current.

Fish, who is a prolific writer, a polished rhetorician, and a skillful tactician, is one of a limited number of such eminently qualified players. The profession rewards him, and his kind, because the profession needs him to keep itself going.

I'd like to invoke Wittgenstein one more time to confirm the point. Like the profession, the National Football League is mandated to provide its audience with performances. As the football audience increased in size in the 1950s, its demand for better games set off a fierce rivalry for the recruitment of better players. One result is a complex hierarchy that has its roots in the nation's high schools and rises through institutions of higher learning before terminating in the NFL. The structure channels the best players into those arenas where they will be most appreciated and appropriately rewarded for their services. It seems to me that the academic profession works in much the same way, assuring itself of a steady supply of the best performances for its audiences through a social, intellectual, and economic system organized along hierarchical lines: in other words, a language-game.

I realize at this point in my argument that by citing Stanley Fish so often I have produced an effect which is opposite to the one I hoped to create and thus needs to be corrected. That is, one major goal of this essay is to argue that the professional language-game is so all-encompassing, so complex, so powerful that the individuals within its circle are something like particles whose behavior is shaped by their material environment. By emphasizing the achievements of Fish, by highlighting his individual performances, I have endowed him with a position of importance and implied a measure of autonomy that is contrary to the notion that a speaker speaking, or a player playing, is an agent whose actions flow from the social and linguistic conditions that structure any and all the options in the field.

#### IV

With this notion in mind I would now like to return to my point of departure—the theory statement uttered by Stanley Fish—so that we can consider how the profession constructed the conditions of acceptability which brought that statement into being. What's called for is a brief history of theory.

The year 1948 marks an important early stage

in the rise of theory, a stage at which the word "theory" is just beginning to manifest its professional power. In the preface to the first edition of the influential *Theory of Literature* René Wellek and Austin Warren indicate their uncertainty about the rules governing the formation of this unusual title when they note that the "naming of this book has been more than ordinarily difficult," in part because the work "lacks any close parallel" in the Anglophonic tradition.<sup>21</sup> The only notable precedent they can think of (one which anticipates the strong links between theory and European thought) is Tomashevsky's Russian formalist work on *Literary Theory*. Even that title is something of a misnomer, according to Wellek and Warren, because they equate literary theory with poetics.

The *Theory of Literature*, which went through three editions by 1956, clearly inflated the value of theory. One strong and definite sign that players in the field were gravitating toward the Wellek and Warren game is the 1960 volume of the *MLA International Bibliography*. The table of contents in that volume is significantly different from previous ones in that the section once devoted to "Aesthetics and Literary Criticism" is altered to read "Aesthetics, Literary Criticism, and Literary Theory." Theory and its practitioners had obviously mustered the professional power required to change the material practices of the MLA bibliographers. After 1960 it's easy to trace the further expansion of theory interests as the number of theory entries rises from an initial 21 to 140 plus in 1970 and over 400 in 1980. The number has remained constant ever since, and in 1981 one more sign of growth appeared as the literary theory category was subdivided into 18 sections ranging from "Deconstructionist Literary Theory" to "Structuralist Literary Theory."

It's within this context that I'd like to place Stanley Fish's 1984 question about theory: "What kind of headway is theory going to make within the precincts of the academy and literary studies in particular?" Uttered in a classroom, it presupposes the existence of the kind of widespread linguistic activity whose material presence is documented above. That is, the statement was called into being by a professional language-game whose success in attracting players had made it desirable,

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<sup>21</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd ed. (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956) 7.



perhaps even necessary, to talk about theory. Moreover, Fish's question points to the emergence of theory as a sign of signs. In the previous discussion of the professional lexicon, all of its constituents were treated as virtual equals. The fact is, however, that various words are always being singled out for positions of special importance at the top of their own hierarchies. Theory has had the potential to do this from the start of its career because of its generality, and the multiple categories under theory in the MLA bibliography show how the successful expansion of a language-game results in the subdivision of a dominating sign. That is, in a very real sense theory has been able to replicate itself in different forms, each governing its own piece of professional territory while maintaining an identity and allegiance subordinate to theory.

How far will this expansion go? Is it possible that theory will totalize the professional playing field, that is, appropriate all literary critical activities under its sign? The publication of *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, an anthology of essays designed to introduce students to theory terms, indicates that the movement is well afoot and has the power of the publishing apparatus behind it. In contrast to Wellek and Warren's halting uncertainty about the proper use of theory in 1948, Tom McLaughlin, the editor of *Critical Terms*, is prepared to announce the victory of theory: "Literary theory has permeated our thinking to the point that it has defined for our times how discourse about literature, as well as about culture in general, shall proceed. Literary theory has arrived, and no student of literature can afford not to come to terms with it."<sup>22</sup> The implied threat with which he concludes is indicative of an advanced stage of the expansion of theory: it seems to have acquired the disciplinary power needed to produce conformity to its norms.

This threat is one of a variety of expansive moves signaling the progressive rise of theory. Ronald Kronik writing an introduction to a PMLA issue exclusively devoted to "The Politics of Critical Language" displays another totalizing move (appropriation) when he constructs a brief review of theory writing in PMLA from 1986 to the present. The texts he assembles to serve this end are retrospectively organized into a neatly

defined field of theory antecedents. It's notable, however, that the word theory appears in only one of the titles surveyed and few of them claim to be theoretical. I do not mean to suggest that they aren't theoretical. In fact I'm convinced by the force of Kronik's argument. But at the same time I must hasten to add that it is the rise of theory itself, and the rules of interpretation which it now imposes, that has made such a perception possible. One consequence of the new vision enabled by this interpretive mindset is the fact that everybody sees 1970 as a crucial year. Kronik, who is typical in this respect, writes that after 1970 "essays of a clearly theoretical bent multiply in the pages of PMLA." He believes that this multiplication may well be leading to a professional reformation from whose perspective "PMLA as a document of its time will note the 1970s and 1980s (and the 1990s?) as an age of theory."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, his strategy as a proponent of theory is to make such statements which tend to call into being the very condition they claim to describe.

When we consider that the statements of McLaughlin and Kronik issue from positions of power and authority within the profession, we can see that the professional apparatus—that material system responsible for the production and distribution of sanctioned language—is being appropriated to serve the ends of theory.

With this fact in mind I've been especially attentive to the contents of my mailbox for the past week. It has its own function as a delivery point within the apparatus noted above. As such, the contents of my mailbox are an index of the rules of speech formation governing the profession at any given time. Consider, therefore, that in the past week I have received subscription solicitations for two theoretical journals (*Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* and *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*); two calls for papers (one from the Oklahoma Project for Discourse and Theory and the other for a conference on "The Role of Theory in the Undergraduate Literature Classroom"; and in the MLA Newsletter I noticed a classified ad calling for papers on "Literary Theory in the Classroom" to be published by Locust Hill.

Now let me pose Fish's question one last time and update it to 1990: "What kind of headway is theory going to make within the precincts of the academy and literary studies in particular?" A

<sup>22</sup>"Introduction," *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago and London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990) 1.

<sup>23</sup>"Editor's Column," *PMLA* 105.3 (May 1990): 389.

cliché provides what may well be the best answer—only time will tell. Theory is so deeply implicated in the profession and its reproductive apparatus that before long we may all be calling ourselves theoreticians. On the other hand, it's just as possible that a reaction will set in, that players will see that opposing theory will provide just as many opportunities for interesting games. In either case, the profession

and theory are now so engaged that their ties will necessarily produce a variety of language-games whose forms we are as yet unable to imagine.□

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Debra Bruce

## BREAKFAST IN WYOMING

My brother slid his snakeboots on and said the place is mine till noon. Rolling deep in the springs of a rancher's hundred-year-old bed, my husband's sleeping late but I can't wait to stretch in sun in Wyoming, though my hips still hurt from last night's truck-ride, bumping up the mountain at dusk. I'd wanted to go that way—a windblown woman jumping up there to ride like a rancher, straddling a stump in the back of a pickup crushing through horsemint, a rush of sage scattering as we climbed, raw barks of antelope over the slopes.

But the truck lurched—I yelped and banged the window and begged to be inside the cab, slumped between brother and husband, descending toward the hundred-year-old bed, this freezer where I stare at wild meat, stacked, steaming. My dreaming husband might find me here—his windburned woman wolfing elk and eggs. Behind the meat, a folded hide. . . . A crisp coyote, sheathed in frost! The lid drops from my fingers, slamming shut. I twitch toward the woodstove, stub my toe. Oh, I guess I'll skip to lunch. I leave the kitchen, hurry past a row of rifles propped beside the door, and slip outside where all seven of my brother's slow-lipped bulls stop hauling their shadows, turn and stare at me, then lower their heads, tear up the earth, eat.

## ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND THE DEVIANT AUDIENCE

*Most directors "will not put themselves in the place of the audience."*

—Alfred Hitchcock to Ernest Lehman, 1973<sup>1</sup>

In the years since his death in 1981, we have learned a great deal about the personal life of that master of the macabre, filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock. Donald Spoto's tell-all biography, *The Dark Side of Genius*, has pinpointed Hitchcock's Victorian peculiarities, particularly the simultaneous desire for and abhorrence of sexuality evident in his obsession for beautiful stars like Ingrid Bergman, Grace Kelly, Kim Novak, and 'Tippi' Hedren. For one who fears actual physical contact, voyeurism is a logical quirk, and Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon II* recounts a Hollywood legend: that Grace Kelly once agreed to strip in front of her open window so that her director might watch and appreciate her charms from a safe and sanitary distance.<sup>2</sup>

Given what we have learned of Hitchcock's private life, and the relationship one often finds between an artist's personality and his work, it shouldn't be surprising that Spoto's thesis—that Hitchcock's obsessions account for the unorthodox and even unsavory nature of his films—has been widely accepted. Scholars have also recognized that Hitchcock was not content to remain alone in his deviance; one of the unsettling aspects of his movies throughout his fifty-year career is that they not only show us the unusual and unsavory, they constantly force

the audience into identification with those impulses that may exist within us all.

Perhaps the most-discussed aberration in Hitchcock's canon is voyeurism, emblemized by the director's fascination with the theatre, that safe environment where one may watch the intimate behavior of others from the darkened impunity of the audience. The opening sequences of both *Stage Fright* (1950) and *Rear Window* (1954) show the curtain going up on the world of the film, while in the ending of *Murder!* (1930), the camera draws back to reveal to us that the scene we have been watching under the impression that it is "real" has actually been part of a play featuring the lead characters. This link with the theatrical or with watching appears in many of his films—in *The Ring* (1927), a boxing picture; in the concert scene in both versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934/1956); in "Scottie" Ferguson's (James Stewart) visual recreation of the woman he loved in *Vertigo* (1958).

The most elaborate treatment of voyeurism in the Hitchcock canon, however, is *Rear Window*, a film in which the audience shares the viewpoint of its main character in almost every scene. Critics have analyzed the film strictly from the standpoint of equating the audience with Jeff Jeffries (James Stewart), who, laid up with a broken leg, passes the time by observing his Greenwich Village neighbors.<sup>3</sup> This critical approach implicates the audience for obvious reasons; like Jeffries, we sit in a darkened room, watching the affairs of others without having

<sup>1</sup>Emphasis supplied in the original. This and all subsequent unattributed quotations are drawn from the Ernest Lehman Collection housed in the Harry Ransom Humanities Center, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>2</sup>*Hollywood Babylon II* (London: Arrow, 1986); *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ballantine, 1983). Spoto, to his credit, does not repeat this story in his biography. However, as Lehman's files indicate, Spoto did sometimes spare feelings by leaving out verifiable material; Spoto was content to say that "Grace Kelly was the answer to his [Hitchcock's] professional fancy and personal fantasy" (372). Take that as you will.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films* (1965, updated in 1989 as *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press]); and Roberta Pearson and Robert Stam, "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*: Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism," *Enclitic* 7 (1983): 136-45, rpt. *A Hitchcock Reader*, eds. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1986) 193-206.

the power to affect them. Although, as with any Hitchcock film, ambiguities abound, Hitchcock himself described Jeffries explicitly as "a real Peeping Tom," and asked, "[w]hat's so horrible about that? Sure, he's a snooper, but aren't we all?"<sup>4</sup>

And, of course, we are. Hitchcock's films are not just about voyeurs; they create voyeurs by forcing the audience into sharing the filmmaker's obsession, by, as V. F. Perkins writes, "making the spectator an accomplice, and not merely a witness."<sup>5</sup> Sometimes this is done through identification, as in *Rear Window* and *Psycho* (1960). In a pivotal scene of the latter film we see Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) peeping at Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) through a hole in the wall; we see his eye, in close up, and then we see what he sees, one of the simplest (if most effective) ways of forcing identification: showing us the scene from a character's point of view.<sup>6</sup> R. Barton Palmer points out, "Norman's subjective vision of Marion reminds us that we too have made her the object of our look and desire, that Norman's perverse pleasure is merely a variant of our own."<sup>7</sup> We know Hitchcock, in planning his films, equated the subjective, point-of-view camera angle with the audience whose vision he would be controlling. In one of his sessions with screenwriter Ernest Lehman, he had the following exchange in discussing a scene for his final film, *Family Plot* (1976):

H: I think we ought to put the audience . . . into the congregation.

L: You mean the point of view of the audience?

H: Yes.

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<sup>4</sup>François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, rev. ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1984) 216.

<sup>5</sup>*Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1972) 142.

<sup>6</sup>Robin Wood argues that the process of creating identification in Hitchcock's films is often more complicated than simple view-for-view correspondence, and while we shall see that this is certainly correct, Hitchcock was not above using a device that worked just because it was simple. See *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* 304-10 for Wood's complete argument.

<sup>7</sup>"The Metafictional Hitchcock: The Experience of Viewing and the Viewing of Experience in *Rear Window* and *Psycho*," *Cinema Journal* 25.2 (1986): 14.

The subjective shot, then, was one of Hitchcock's techniques for involving his audience in the acts he depicted onscreen.

Another method, closely related to inserting the audience into the film via subjective shots, was staging shots so that, if not subjective, the audience still felt that they were privy to the action. In *Blackmail* (1929), for example, Alice (Anny Ondra) changes clothes to pose for artist Crewe (Cyril Ritchard). Hitchcock might have staged the shot so that Alice remained behind the screen which separates her from the artist; there is in fact no dramatic reason to have her disrobe on camera, since Crewe is not only on the opposite side of the screen but has his back to her. The scene only makes sense in one way, which Tania Modleski notes: Alice is presented "pornographically for the sole delectation of the spectator."<sup>8</sup>

In other movies, Hitchcock again titillates us by making the audience not only observers but participants in acts taking place onscreen. Cary Grant is the lucky beneficiary of many of these scenes, making love to, in different films, Ingrid Bergman, Grace Kelly, and Eva Marie Saint. The prolonged kissing scenes featuring Grant and Bergman in *Notorious* (1946) were difficult to film and made the stars themselves uncomfortable, but served Hitchcock's purpose:

I conceived that scene in terms of the participants' desire not to interrupt the romantic moment. . . . I also felt that the public, represented by the camera, was the third party to this embrace. The public was being given the great privilege of embracing Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman together.

(Truffaut 261)

A *ménage à trois* with gorgeous movie stars as they kiss and fondle each other is one thing, and watching them, even close up, makes us less uncomfortable than perhaps it ought to. The dark side of this practice, though, is revealed when Hitchcock invites us to observe something other than Grace Kelly or Ingrid Bergman up close, placing us in an unsavory scene such as the strangling which opens *Rope* (1948). An even more unsettling use of this claustrophobic staging is the potato-truck scene in *Frenzy* (1972), the greatest film of the master's last

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<sup>8</sup>*The Women Who Knew Too Much* (New York: Methuen, 1988) 22.

years. At first glance, we might expect the scene to be disturbing only for its subject matter, sex murderer Bob Rusk (Barry Foster) climbing into the back of a truck to retrieve an object on the body of his latest victim which might incriminate him. However, being shut into the back of the truck with Rusk, a corpse, and a ton of dusty potatoes quickly becomes almost unbearable. We cannot stand to watch, and yet we do. Part of our involvement comes from the identification that Hitchcock has skillfully constructed with Rusk, particularly our misplaced sympathy at his being forced into this grisly situation (and us along with him). The scene, as Jeanne Thomas Allen observes, manipulates the audience into rooting for the villain in the same way as the scene from *Psycho* where Norman Bates anxiously cleans up after the shower murder.<sup>9</sup>

Identifying with the villain is far from unusual in Hitchcock's films, though. *Rope* and *Strangers on a Train* (1951) are other films where we sympathize with the psychopaths we have watched so closely. Hitchcock prided himself on his ability to force the audience into identification with even his unwholesome characters; when Lehman, in making notes for *Family Plot*, asked if the audience would "root for the villains," the surprised director replied, "Of course! Certainly!" Likewise, while discussing *Psycho* with François Truffaut, he agreed with Truffaut's assessment of the continually-shifting allegiance of the audience in the film, adding, using the same description he had applied to Jeff Jeffries, "This brings us back to the emotions of the Peeping Tom audiences" (272).

Even after we understand some of the techniques he used, the power of Hitchcock's films to manipulate viewers remains impressive. Perhaps he was so successful because it was such a central concern for him. In a conversation with scriptwriter Lehman about *North by Northwest* (1958), Hitchcock said:

Ernie, do you realize what we're doing in this picture? The audience is like a giant accordion that you and I are playing. . . . And someday we won't even have to make a movie—there'll be electrodes implanted in their brains, and we'll just press different buttons and they'll go 'ooooh' and

<sup>9</sup>"The Representation of Violence to Women: Hitchcock's *Frenzy*," *Film Quarterly* 38.3 (1985): 32.

'aaaah' . . . Won't that be wonderful?

(Spoto 440)

Ernest Lehman worked with Hitchcock on five film concepts between 1957 and 1978. Three of those concepts went far enough into pre-production to reach screenplay form, and the planning for all of these projects (*North by Northwest*, *Family Plot*, and *The Short Night*, which would have been the director's last film) reveals a continuous concern for what the audience would think, what they would feel, and with whom they would identify.<sup>10</sup>

This last may have been most important to Hitchcock. In the very early planning stages for *North by Northwest*, for example, before Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) was much more than a name, at a time when Hitchcock and Lehman thought the film would end in Pt. Barrow, Alaska, instead of Mt. Rushmore, Lehman's notes from 15 August 1957 record Hitchcock's question: how should they pull the story down from the "fantasy level of Cloak and Dagger spy stuff" to a level where the audience could find "something to identify with."<sup>11</sup> Unlike the James Bond series of films, which François Truffaut calls "a rough caricature" of *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock did not want a character that the audience would idolize or fantasize over; he wanted a leading character with whom they would identify (20).<sup>12</sup>

Why did Hitchcock force his deepest feelings and fears on those who viewed his films? Was he, as Truffaut suggests, simply a neurotic imposing his neuroses on others (346)? Or could there be another reason, as some (Robin Wood,

<sup>10</sup>Lehman seems to have recognized Hitchcock's interest as well, for often his suggestions for script changes are phrased in terms of audience: "I think the audience wants and desires . . ." or "I felt cheated. I fear most audiences will too." Perhaps he believed this type of appeal would be most likely to sway Hitchcock.

<sup>11</sup>This early stage in the planning found Roger Thornhill married (in the film, he is, of course, twice-divorced), and the two had no idea what he did or who he was. Yet they knew they wanted the audience to be viscerally involved with him, and that was the challenge they set for themselves.

<sup>12</sup>The audience was always on Hitchcock's mind. When executives at Metro Goldwyn Mayer, for whom Hitchcock made *North by Northwest*, worried about the length of the film and pressed for cuts, Hitchcock wanted to wait for previews, arguing that the "audience [will] tell us what else to cut" (Leonard J. Leff, "Hitchcock at Metro," *A Hitchcock Reader* 56).



for example) argue, a truly moral one underlying all the seeming amorality? For comparison, let us look at another work that shows us the attractiveness of evil and the allure of a brazen sinner. Like John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, Hitchcock shows us the lure of the forbidden; he asked us to walk alongside sin, to identify with it, to admire it, to partake of it vicariously. But, as Stanley Fish has noted about Milton's epic, a moral purpose is involved: *Paradise Lost* makes us aware of our complicity, and often points out when we have fallen too far into Satan's wiles.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in *Rear Window*, Hitchcock's most-developed examination of deviance onscreen and in the audience, the filmmaker never allows us to get comfortable. He reminds us that "We've become a nation of

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<sup>13</sup>*Surprised by Sin* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1971).

voyeurs"; since he does not present moral issues in simple black and white, our decisions are not based on clear-cut articulations of good and evil in the film. The hero's behavior is morally ambiguous, the villain pitiable, and his reasons for killing his wife almost reasonable. Because the film does not give us easy answers, we must continually question our own behavior, and this is unsettling for those who go to the theater expecting only a little entertainment. But for those willing to accept the challenge, Hitchcock's films represent some of our century's greatest moral works, safely disguised as works of popular film.□

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William Virgil Davis

WATERCOLOR

Light, steady rain and mist all morning.  
Even the three trees smudge in the sky  
as we walk slowly up the small hill,

in single file, without speaking,

the only sounds the soft suck of our boots  
pulling free from the earth with each  
step, our breath, faint huffs, which hang

in the air as we walk through them.

This is the long silence we have waited for,  
these the moments we have made memories  
before they happen. Like watercolors,

they are committed quickly: the paint

and palette ready, the paper placed  
hastily on the board, the color applied,  
then left to bleed in slowly, invisibly,

through the minute pores of the paper.

## Bruce Henricksen

### YOU SHOULD NOT EXPECT A POEM

**a**nthology similar to the one you hold in your hand, but with crucial differences. As you read, try to determine as many of these differences as you can.

The Wings of Lepidoptera  
by Bruce Hendrickson

(Based on an article in *Science News*,  
June 16, 1990)

It was in the misty cascades of Iguassú Falls, where in an afternoon the experienced adventurer can wander from Paraguay to Argentina to Brazil and back again, that Kjell first saw and photographed the 89—the highest number in the Lepidopteran numerical system and consequently a number of mystical significance. Kjell had long since completed his alphabet collection, and the lettered butterflies had been more than passively cooperative, often alighting on his hand and spreading delicate and majestic wings that seemed like fragments of ancient illuminated manuscripts bearing blue or scarlet or golden letters. But with their numbered counterparts it was different—Lepidoptera mathematicus exhibited not its numbers but rather a protective jealousy, much more than mere shyness, as though under the threat of an injunction or taboo. Numbered butterflies were always turning and rising in shimmering gyres, or vanishing behind trees and over hills like Hindu women keeping purdah.

And in fact for some time prior to photographing successfully the 89—a picture taken with a telephoto lens as he was perched precariously on a limb of a tree above the falls, a limb upon which he had waited, patient and motionless, for two hours—for nearly four years before this dangerous and climactic moment, he had known that it was not only the behavior of Lepidoptera mathematicus that made its image so difficult to capture on film. No. It was everything. All of the events of Kjell's life, events of the sort that many people would attribute simply to "chance" or the "normal"

contingencies and vicissitudes of existence, were aspects of a grand design to keep him from completing his study of the Lepidopteran numbering system.

Examples? Well, take for instance the circumstances of his departure from Romania years ago. He had been an underground jazz musician, for which one could pay with one's life. But what's important? Music was then, and he played fearlessly wherever he could—to whoever would listen. When he wasn't woodshedding, this artist of the beautiful, he was learning to fly, hooking huge homemade wings over a wire extended from the roof of his apartment building. He would flap down from the roof to the bottom of a tree where the wire connected, dreaming that one day the hook would rise, if ever so slightly and briefly, from the wire.

Actually, Kjell's music had a certain following among the less conventional leaders of the Party in Romania, which probably kept him from the firing squad. The conservatives had to resort to indirect methods. Kjell had been composing a piece (to be performed years later by Art Tatum) called "Blues in B Flat," but one morning Kjell awoke to find that all the B-flat chords in Romania had disappeared. Swiped. Rounded up. Deconstructed. Try as he might, he could not find a B-flat chord in his piano—or hear one anywhere else. A note hammered to his door, tat-a-rat-rat, said, "Syncopation goes next—when you least expect it." Two days later he was over the border. Got his young ass *out* of there! (Thank God, cuz now you can hear his tune on "Art Tatum: The Complete Pablo Group Masterpieces." You gotta buy all six compact disks, but it's worth it.)

The point? The point, which only dawned on him years later, is that the female Romanian Lepidoptera, and only the female Romanian Lepidoptera, carries the Greek letter pi concealed in the inner folds of her gorgeous bronze wing, symbol of the transcendental number famous among seventh grade boys and girls swinging their lunch buckets everywhere: little French lunch buckets in France with little

pictures of Bart Simpson, little Ugandan lunch buckets in Uganda—same Little Dude, only black. And what of the male Romanian Lepidoptera? He hides for all the world not to see, the italicized *i*—the impossible number of dreams, the square root of negative 1. Clearly the B-flat chords had been confiscated to drive Kjell away from this discovery, years before he had ever touched a camera or cared a damn about a butterfly. Clearly his attempt to escape once and for all the sadness of politics and nations and to pursue instead, careless of all borders, his dream of a Lepidopteran Anthology, a book of pure and individual discovery and delight, had been anticipated and frustrated before it even *was* "his" dream.

You're not a reasonable customer if you expect more examples of this conspiracy to impede his quest. But what about the Eurasian girl in the hotel in Amsterdam, and all that ensued when he charmed her with his impression of an American truck driver, saying, "You don't sweat much for a big ole fat girl"? You don't think she just happened to be there—admiring the Rembrandts, maybe? Gimme a break. Or what about that problem with the donkey, the doorman named Stein, and the stick of butter in Buenos Aires, a problem that allowed the Lepidoptera of the Rio de la Plata ample time to hustle their numbered members off to God knows (only it isn't God) where before Kjell's jeep had even blown its first tire? And remember last August in Arizona, when the Hopis cordoned off the kiva and refused him participation in the Butterfly Dance? So don't talk to me about more examples. Don't talk to me at all. It's my story.

And for days before photographing the 89 he had allowed himself to bask in sensual pleasures, pleasures placed in his way to lure him from the numerical scent—mangos and jasmine, aromatic oils, liquors defying description (I could describe them if they didn't in fact defy description, so just shut up), soft fingers of almond-eyed houris everywhere, and gentle music—variations by 2 Live Crew on "Love Duet" from *Madame Butterfly*. The whole 9 yards. All the while the flutter of Lepidoptera alphabeticus alighting on the windowsill, their wings of desire spelling encouragement—"YES," flutter flutter, "MORE"—or arranging themselves like notes on a staff—play me, play me—or sometimes spelling haikus or ruby-throated sonnets of love and delight, which I can't remember right now. So shut up.

At the very instant that the camera clicked, when light that had hauled butt from the sun in just eight minutes bounced itself off the butterfly poised on a rock digging the waterfall and made a beeline (the light, not the butterfly—*damn!* just when this sentence was startin to roll) toward the camera lens, in the infinitesimal space of that duration, as the light touched with the play and magic of particular, wavering fingers the surface of the film in the dark inner sanctum of the camera, the world changed keys. B minor. Kjell knew he would pay. God, would he pay. Oh ---, would he pay. Yikes!

Have you ever been alone in a forest, following a path you've never walked but know will lead you home, when you turn and there, standing before you in a tangle of branches, is your true home, your own corpse? Me neither. Kjell neither. But finding his way back to his jeep was marked by uncanny presentiments. Later that night, in what was scarcely a room in what was hardly a village—a gasping, wheezing village a few dilopeters from The Shrine of the Very Old Man with Enormous Wings (and how many nights, Viki, have I lain beneath rain on strange roofs, dreaming of home and flight)—it came to him that if one magnified the letters on the wings of Lepidoptera alphabeticus one would find that each letter is merely the outer form of another microscopic inscription, that what to the naked eye is a "B" might in fact be the entire text of the Bhagavad-Gita, that one "N" might contain the complete works of Vladimir Nabokov, another the poems of Russ Nystrom, and that in all of the billions of butterflies in the world all that had ever been written and ever would be written, for the Lepidoptera know nothing of past or future, is inscribed. In the butterfly resides the elusive link between the genetic and literary codes, long sought by biologists and semioticians worldwide, and in the yearly Lepidopteran migration from Canada to South American, from Helsinki to Kuala Lumpur, the world is aflutter with signification. That's the good part.

And what of Lepidoptera mathematicus? Why is the very fabric of history and reality a veil concealing the secrets of the numbered wing, and from what power comes this interdiction? From what darkness fly dese gaudy messengers? Are all our diasporas lonely shadows of their winged dance? And to the tyranny of what undreamed of denouement—to what finale in B-flat—do dem wings be flutterin an aflappin? And why is all that we dreamed

was random and all we knew with such deep certainty to be “our” freedom, our lives, our tears and gigs and jollies encoded already in dusty folds and scales? And who donne it?

How should I know, Dear Reader? Writers don’t know it all, and even if I told you it maybe wouldn’t be true any more—things have been unhappening lately. So this is the part the clientele makes up.\* (Anyway, what do you think I’m getting paid? Fiddly-war-diddly. Before taxes.) But please, my friend, do not forget that there are tiny tales you must not tell, little stories you must not think or write (we talkin some s--- they no wanna hear f’sure, cher). What I know, and you may say, is that lying in bed that night Kjell heard the distant, syncopated beat of wind and wings—numbers beating Order, Order. And in anguished ears the Violin Trees bowed, their broken strings lashing the mud—their wind-grieved lashes lost. Then, during the desperate hour we know so well (Oh Viki, My Love, My Hope, so far from all kingdoms even poor words might build), the ancient Gikuyu prophesy glided down the tangled trails and gullies of memory: “there shall come a people with clothes like butterflies.” And he knew again that time had taken a turn. He knew that the Butterflies were outraged; the Master of Myths and Moths was miffed, and a New Dispensation was now at hand. A Second Coming was yet again at hand. Kjell knew, further, that to cling to this knowledge was madness, that madness was truth, and sanity, like a flame in the night bearing death, was a lie.

His clothing lay in a crumpled heap by the bed in the darkened room. Wrinkled magazine photos of butterflies took flight from his floor, paper and ink becoming again what they had feigned to be. The door found a new rhythm, banging aslant in the wind—first a dilapidated shutter on its last ancient hinge, then a broken wing bearing the letter “K.” He ran naked toward the forest and the distant Iguassú Falls that stretched like a film dividing Paraguay from Argentina. Great wings rushed beneath the cataract of the moon.

*\*Editor’s Note:* Some researchers have sought to assist our author at this point, arguing that Kjell had actually stumbled into the testing ground of the mechanical bats of Senator Onésimo Snatchez of Costaguana. After the brief and abortive independence of the Occidental Republic, the reunified Costaguana experienced

a series of fascist dictatorships, each in turn propped up by the American-based United Fruit and Guano, Inc. The last of these, a particularly repressive regime headed by Julio Kawolski, was overthrown in 1964 by communist-backed insurgents. There followed a time known as the Traditional Revolution, in which children calling themselves the Guanista Guards ruled with complete caprice, after which came the usual, agreed upon period of posturing and counter-posturing between the United States and the Grownups. Ultimately an election was held, reviving the hopes of United Fruit and Guano, which had in the meantime relocated much of its operation in the Persian Gulf.

In hopes of convincing the peasants that the ancient guano trade could be revived, and that only in this way could Costaguana’s economy ever hope to compete with the Cartels of its modernized neighbors, the newly elected Senator Snatchez purchased (with the backing of U.S. investors) the now hollowed-out Mount Higuerota. This mountain, which had separated the Occidental Republic from Costaguana during the succession, had once been home to the lucrative Gould Silver Mine. In the tunnels and caverns of the old mine, Snatchez built a giant assembly line for the production of radio controlled, mechanical bats. During the Senator’s re-election campaign, in which the Modernization Issue could not be avoided, the bats were trucked around the country and released from behind hills or other convenient obstructions at climactic moments in the Senator’s speeches. “I have tasted modernity,” the Senator would declare, lifting his eyes to the heavens and thus directing the gaze of the rabble to skies now filled with radio-controlled bats, “and I prefer guano.” The Senator spoke only at twilight.

The political demise of Senator Onésimo Snatchez is often traced to a drunken employee who crashed an entire flock in a crowd of peasants, injuring a duenna and her urchin. The political system allowed each candidate a generous quota of deceptions, lies, and slanders—and Snatchez, always prudent, had purchased additional villainy vouchers from his opponent (a system similar to that by which American industries may fill the air with poison and then purchase an even greater allowance from companies willing to sell their pollution rights). Nonetheless the rabble, unwilling to accept such civilized premises and unduly influenced by newspaper photos of an urchin

with a bat lodged in his skull, voted the Senator out. Subsequently the Costaguanarians adopted the policy of placing warning labels on all elected officials.

Many Marxist/Deconstructionists, agreeing that the episode of the bats is an unwritten ghost scene in "The Wings of Lepidoptera," feel that Henricksen's text (despite the hero's desire to flee the political) calls attention to the absent presence of this politically unconscious subtext at precisely the point at which it alludes to the author's own financial exploitation, thus revealing the inevitable structures of power underlying even the most banal bourgeois fantasy literature. Others feel that the guano trade is alluded to at the point where the text, employing the familiar typographical convention of dashes, both does and does not say "shit." But still others argue that Henricksen cannot escape his obligation to deal explicitly with the problematics of power and oppression by making facile gestures toward buyer-response theory.

A large body of feminist criticism has concerned Samwichsun's supposed preoccupation with "fat girls," although at least one prominent feminist has conspicuously defended the sexual politics of his work: see Susan Sueman's seminal *Bats and Butterflies: Deconstructing Sexual Difference in the Fiction of Bruce Herlicksin*. Another line of critical inquiry has sought to determine whether the elaborate intertextuality of Hemwicksin's work is socially symbolic, a form of *jouissance*, or merely a shameless raid on the articulateness of others. See especially Peter Pindle's note on this Editor's note in *Notes on Footnotes*, XXIV, 2 (Spring, 1998): 172-73. Semiotician Umberto Calvino finds in "the positing of the butterfly as nature's floppy disk" an "imagined deconstruction of the opposition between natural and cultural theories of signification."

Commenting upon the earlier portion of this Editor's note, many critics of the sort nearing retirement age feel it is highly unlikely that a trained photographer would confuse a mechanical bat with a living butterfly, and they further point out that the Iguassú Falls is nowhere near Mount Higuerota. Student reaction to Hebrickton's work falls along predictable lines. Typical of graduate students doing stylistic analysis is the observation that "just when Himlickson gets on a roll, he screws it up—give me a break." Undergraduates, who speak from within a critical paradigm that privileges the

fiscal and libidinal power of the reader, feel that this text and the wealth of metacommentary it has engendered suck.

Hendrickson has remained reticent about the intentions of this story, although he was once overheard to say, while nibbling a chocolate donut, that it could be converted to a play simply by reading it on a stage or anywhere else in the dark with a flashlight held under the chin. It is not known whether the Editor's note would be read by a second actor.

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#### Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think of a story containing words like "ass," "butt," and "fiddly-war-diddly"? Would you discuss this story with your parents or church group in a bar? Why or why not?
2. Note the many misspellings of the author's name. Is there a place in serious fiction for such juvenile antics? Why not?
3. Vladimir Nabokov, the famous American writer, developed a new system of classifying butterflies by counting the scales on their wings? Did you know that? Why?
4. Who is Viki?

#### Writing Topics:

1. Determine the number of letters in the complete works of Vladimir Nabokov. How small would each letter have to be to fit the complete works within an "N" on a butterfly's wing? What do your conclusions tell you about the relationship between literature and science?

2. Using your library skills, locate the agent handling 2 Live Crew. Write to the agent with a proposal to prepare a "Rap Suite" based on Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. Include samples, but do not complete the suite until you have a contract. Be "street-smart."

**Practical Application:**

Build a mechanical bat. Use it to exploit the

ignorant in your community.

\* \* \* \* \*

In our next chapter we turn to the study of poetry. Perhaps the best way to begin to appreciate poetry is not to allow yourself to be intimidated by it. You probably don't absorb everything that's happening in a song by 2 Live Crew on the first listening, similarly you should not expect a poem that is well□

Kevin Hearle

TO GO HOME

Yossarian, Yossarian,  
you and I we never met, Yossarian.  
I am the son of the granddaughter  
of the crazy woman whose tree you must have circled—  
shadow in training 1942  
in Santa Ana, in California,  
before you knew insanity was real  
and institutional. I don't believe  
in Christ or God, and so I pray to you,  
the raucous shape of fiction, circling  
not the barn, leaning into old age, suspended  
among wisteria, but navigating  
upon the thirty-six foot trunk, and the branches  
bent to earth by their own weight and age.  
Yossarian, imaginary bombs,  
oracular and silent, fall from your eyes  
burning the clouds of feral blue wisteria,  
dismembering the Greenleaf family tree,  
a massive California pepper,  
and flattening the groves  
of orange, walnut, and persimmon.  
Oh bombardier, such was your practice run;  
your wings they cast the hours upon our land.  
Too many pilots, too many bombardiers;  
it was all gone before I could be born;  
no shade from which my grandmother  
first saw her grandmother—only legends,  
old words without direction running around  
lost in the subdivisions—no apple tree  
the neighbor's horse would run to when loose,  
no irrigation ditches fringed with the weeds  
Aunt Franny sowed, no nothing,  
nothing to bear them witness, and no place,  
no, no place left, for them to plant their sorrow.  
Yossarian, you must be crazy to go home.



Yves Thériault

## THE PORTUGUESE

*Translated by M. G. Hesse*

After Jasmin's death she had stayed really because of the black soil. She hadn't discovered this fact immediately, but when she gradually came to admit it, she understood that the black soil was the cause and the reason, and that it probably went back to the day she had arrived and moved into the long low house after her marriage to Jasmin.

And then he had died, and she readily stated her intention to anyone who showed commiseration.

Marceau, from the village, was the first.

"You aren't going to keep the farm?"

"I'm staying."

"But why? All alone here?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"The soil is black. . . . It'd take too long to explain. I just know."

Nothing surprising in that; Gervaise had never been talkative. When Jasmin had taken his wife in "foreign country," so to speak, or two counties and twenty villages from there, they wondered who possibly could have wanted him, the way they knew him. The answer quickly spread from house to house. He had unearthed a solitary woman, a silent woman, *a still water*, as they repeated wonderingly. Obviously she hadn't questioned Jasmin and hadn't made any inquiries.

It took less than the first month, if that much, to reveal Jasmin's true nature. It was, of course, rather late to make inquiries: here she was married to a thief, a liar, a miser, a drunkard, a violent man. Not one girl in the region would have taken Jasmin for a short time or for life.

Gervaise herself had accepted that, since he had come late into her life, when she was almost thirty and ready to respond to any call. So it took her less than a month to be unhappy.

Then Jasmin died, which didn't make her cry, of course. She was breathing again, felt all the better for it, and studied the black soil.

It was a strange, almost sinister, country.

Especially the section on Jasmin's farm where the trees were black, stubby evergreens, defying the winters, accepting the summers, too, silently. (Gervaise had formerly lived in country with big, supple branches that the wind could fill with noise. She wasn't used to the silent evergreens that were too thick, too stiff, motionless in the wind.) There was also low brushwood, dense grass, and this black soil on graded slopes, and over there blocking the horizon, a high, severe-looking forest as far as the eye can see, running on into the countryside and stretching right into Maine in the neighbouring country. (Yes, a place in Quebec, like others, on the borders far from the big centres; almost unknown or else misunderstood, which comes to the same thing.)

A kind of strange anxiety was experienced by those who lived there. A discord between people and nature: as if people just didn't know too well how to work this rough vegetation, these dark colours, this kind of perpetual mourning apparent everywhere.

And yet Gervaise cherished this country.

"I went with the village postman," she had told the widow Breton, "I went away, further down, to other regions. I came back home by train. I saw my past again. I couldn't live where the soil is bleached."

It couldn't be put more clearly.

"There's a good harvest, in your parts," said the widow. "Surely it's prosperous. Better than here."

Gervaise shrugged her shoulders and didn't add anything. And so it continued: she stayed on the property, free at last, more close-mouthed than ever, except that it was apparent that she was breathing easier; also amply; deeply. The gift of the new freedom. Jasmin was dead; Jasmin was buried; Jasmin was forgotten: in the village just as in the far-off house. Only the dawn over the harsh hills, only the sunsets turning the black soil red and making them bloody, so to speak, frightening. Gervaise finds her comfort there—

the village is surprised, but only for a while.

Then everything goes on.

For weeks? For months? They already ask each other—to recall the date of Jasmin's death. Even Gervaise can't manage to get it out in one and the same breath. She must think for a second. Did he die in May? In June?

A man arrived on the scene, made a few inquiries, made his intentions known to the blacksmith, the merchant, here and there, to each and everyone, and ended up buying land on the second road which was next to the one where Gervaise lived. But those properties were quite alike at opposite ends: Gervaise's was close to the road which goes from the village to the country down below, and the newcomer's land right at the end of the road where it ends in the woods. Enough so that they might never know each other.

The man was small, with a broad back, dark-skinned, and hair like a ram's coat, also black. He's Portuguese, they said, a recent immigrant. He speaks French, enough to understand, enough to be understood. At first, he had come with a woman who had soon left. Later on they learned that she was his sister who had come along only for the move. Afterward the man lived by himself. They knew his name: Jaò. A name different from a normal Christian's, but they quickly forgot about that. He stayed Jaò for all.

A miracle worker toiling the black soil. It didn't take more than a year before people already left the village on Sundays to go and see, as if they were out on a walk, apparently not looking for anything, to the end of the second road. The most beautiful beets, the most beautiful carrots, heads of lettuce as big as cabbages and cabbages as big as pumpkins. And everything arranged as beautifully as on a farm calendar. The land was really taken in hand, not an inch lost, and straight fences, endless rows as straight as city roads.

All alone, the poor man, as busy as an ant; the only animal, a horse, a plough, harrows, and courage. The poor black earth that nobody wanted to cultivate readily gave and gave so that there was an immediate abundance.

What else is there to say, what else to discuss, except the unbelievable? Just one really quite small man, who labours from dawn to dusk, who never rests and harvests from the black earth that has been held in contempt up to now enough to arouse the envy of the producers around Montreal and elsewhere.

Did Gervaise hear about this? How are we to know? Quite likely she did.

She had neglected the fields. Her only wealth, a henhouse, three hundred hens, and perhaps half the sorry-looking kitchen garden beside the house. In the pastures a dozen sheep and in the pigsty a more or less swollen sow. Nothing like a rich farm woman, but just enough to live on from one day to the next. Apparently happy with her chosen fate, she is almost never seen in the village and if she does come, it's practically without speaking to anybody, except for a short greeting and what must be said to get what she needs. In short, nothing. No sooner had she come than she had gone.

To one single person, almost by chance, in a single outburst of a few words, she had revealed her thoughts. To the Breton widow, at the store, while she waited for dried peas and brown sugar to be weighed out.

"I've got peace, you know. That's what I always wanted; now I've got it." To think that it made up for everything, the peace she had found again after Jasmin's meanness.

"But all alone down there!" the widow had said. "That's unnatural."

Gervaise had smiled.

"I don't ask for more," Gervaise had said.

Was Jaò, the Portuguese, told about this lone woman who loved the black earth and chose to live apart, almost miserably? It's not unlikely that they talked about her while he was there. Since his bounty had been ready for harvesting, the Portuguese had cleared the fields and sold the crops wholesale to the city merchants who were eager to put their hands on such fine produce. When that was done, there was a respite for the immigrant, time for a bit of relaxation, a bit of leisure. (Soon, before the cold weather, he would, of course, have to ready the land again, plough here, harrow there, fertilize, so many other things of all kinds, all kinds of concerns.)

Was it therefore quite a spontaneous move, or a trip prompted by a specific goal? They could well have asked themselves in the village. Jaò made his way to the other black fields we had talked about—not the only ones since they are quite common down there—but precisely those belonging to Gervaise. Some wandering about that looked like mere idling, a slow walk, while sniffing the air, sniffing the freshly ploughed fields, and exploring, it seemed. And then at the end of this road, Gervaise's farm.

There wasn't a more disparate couple on earth.

More diametrically opposed to each other. Had it been deliberately planned, it couldn't have turned out better.

Gervaise was tall and thin, and among her people for a long time she was said to be very beautiful. Especially her eyes—deep, but passionate, and an expressive mouth which was a bit wide, and a lively step.

As far as Jaò is concerned, he's been described as small, stocky, and swarthy. It must be added that everything seemed in harmony. And hands as strong as a bat, a quick walk, a bit lopsided like a crab's. In short, all this said little about the man's bearing whose gentle eyes only could be praised.

Also, Jaò had this talent that nobody in the village forgot, this talent for growing on soil that was dried out and reputed to be practically lifeless, first-class produce which must certainly have been in great demand in the city.

Face to face, therefore.

Without bothering about introductions or the bowing and scraping customary in the cities. Well! Could it really be any other way for people of the same stripe and the same earthy smells? The same hardships of physical labour apparently confer a kind of brotherhood.

"Hello, Ma'am." With his special accent, which can't be imitated in ordinary accounts, a bit heavy, also singing, in a fine, full voice.

And Gervaise, taken aback a bit, observes this stranger in her surroundings.

"Hello, Sir."

Jaò looks about inquisitively. He sees the broken-down henhouse and the skinny hens.

Then he moves forward and quickly grabs a hen which squawks terror-stricken.

Then he examines her, scowls, and lets her go. In front of the kitchen garden he stands still for a moment, appearing thoughtful, and, turning to Gervaise, he looks at her full of pity. "I don't know you, Sir," said Gervaise. (She certainly suspects who her visitor is, but she doesn't know why he is there.)

"You have a lot of land," said Jaò, who sized it up as he looked at it. Gervaise nods.

"Yes."

He nods slightly a few times, examines the big grey house with the rickety roof that rests poorly on shaky rafters. Does he see the woman? Gervaise couldn't have said so, but she hasn't always followed the man's eyes who looked at her sometimes without her noticing it, glancing, looking as fast as lightning and immediately turning away again.

And then Jaò said abruptly as he gestured with his sinewy arms:

"That's it."

He seems to embrace everything, the sky, the horizon, the black earth, the buildings, the woman.

And always that charming accent.

"A farm, that's it. The land, the house, the woman."

He makes a kind gesture which surprises Gervaise.

"Love much. Everything."

He wears a dark, old, black hat that is oddly perched on top of his little round head. He takes it off and greets Gervaise, then goes away. With his small, quick and decisive, lopsided walk.

Gervaise remains behind alone and tries to find reasons for smiling. Well, so far everything is still commonplace and those who've heard the story are already eager to anticipate the outcome. Is it really bound to happen? There are few profound actions in people's lives. From one to the other, from man to woman, and through all lines of descendants, few major acts which are binding and permanent. Their list would be quickly completed. Moreover, very often they lead to strangely predictable results. But the motives? No, anyway, what can be said about the personal motivation of acts? Who indeed could know, instinctively and every time, which note of this endless keyboard is to be touched and what its possible harmonies are?

There are those who unimaginatively look for a marriage of convenience, there are others dreaming of a handsome white knight, and there are those whose heart overflows with exceptional affection. That's the plot of every novel, every lyric ode, every familiar story.

Now, look at beautiful Gervaise, and look at Jaò, who is for his part almost puny. So what happened?

Gervaise took some time to fall asleep that night. The unexpected visit, Jaò's passing-by as quick as lightning on the farm left her pensive. More taken aback than pensive perhaps. Almost ill-at-ease. His coming had been intentional, he wasn't just passing by, for instead of continuing on his walk, he had quite simply returned the way he had come. So he had come as far as her place with a specific purpose?

And what was it that he had said?

"Love much. Everything."

In the village Gervaise asked Marceau the next day:

"A Portuguese, what is he?"

Marceau, with twelve years of schooling and a television fanatic, knew more.

"The Portuguese, apparently they've been coming to the Grand Banks off Newfoundland for centuries. Longer than we can tell. And Portugal is a country in Europe, near Spain. It isn't a big country."

"The Portuguese, they're good?"

"Like others, some are good, some are bad; it all depends."

Not a word about Jaò, but the man is implied in every sentence.

"They are hard-working," said Marceau.

Gervaise remained silent for a moment, then left without further comment. (Later Marceau was to remember this short dialogue. Almost nothing, but a kind of uneasiness deep down in Gervaise's eyes. A patient questioning. As if she were facing an ambiguous situation.)

In short, it takes very little. Jaò doesn't return to Gervaise's place in the next few days, and it was the widow Breton who quite unintentionally advanced the affair. She went to Gervaise one afternoon to ask if she couldn't let her have some raw wool she needed. Gervaise had some.

"Thank you very much, Gervaise."

"I'd like to have more to sell you, but that's all that's left from the spring shearing."

The widow hesitated.

"The Portuguese, you know him?"

"Yes."

"He's talking about you."

"Ah? "

"Especially about the farm."

"What's he saying?"

"He says it's a shame there is so much black earth lying fallow in our district. He says it's even worse on your place."

"Why on my place?"

"It took me a while to understand. He finds it difficult to say anything. Finally I realized that it's worse here, because of you. He talked about the land, about you, and made gestures. He put you together, you might say. . . ."

Jaò had declared, as best he could: "The land, the woman, they must give . . . they must be ploughed, sowed. . . ."

Gervaise turned red, and showed almost anger.

"A man I don't know! What business of his is it?"

And in a scornful tone:

"Men, besides, all men! . . . I've got peace."

As if she defended herself.

"I've earned it, this peace."

To which the widow Breton, commiserating,

answered:

"Having been married to Jasmin wasn't easy."

"Exactly," said Gervaise. "What I got, I deserve. Let him talk, the Portuguese. Me, I'll do with my land what I want to do with it."

"And with yourself too," said the widow, nodding forcefully. "You have a right to it more than ever."

You have no idea how it turns and churns in a person's head when he begins to want something. Nobody was too sure about what Jaò was really looking for. They certainly had some idea; but if it's easy to judge a man's actions when that man is from the same area, it's more difficult if he is a stranger who's come from a faraway country, about whom you know nothing and whose language you don't even understand.

So he was the one who showed his hand in the end. With a strange gesture, or at least an unexpected one.

He shows up one Sunday, the last beautiful Sunday in the middle of October. The sun shines brightly, the breeze is just fresh enough and cold, a fine sensuous warmth that let's you forget tomorrow's winter.

Again with his crab-like walk, a kind of smile on his sunburnt face, dressed up in his Sunday best, and—it's almost unbelievable—a flower in his buttonhole. Jaò, the enterprising. . .

And under his arm an enormous magnificent cabbage, a vegetable fit for an exhibition and likely to win all prize ribbons.

Gervaise, near the henhouse, idle but serene, enjoying the peace and silence of the golden day, doesn't believe her eyes. Jaò is there before her, hardly bigger than the cabbage under his arm. The man is smiling and his eyes are shining. He takes Gervaise's arm with his free hand and pulls her along before she can protest.

At the very beginning of the fields that stretch out as far as the eye can reach along the hillsides, the land is barren.

Barren and so black, this country's strange earth with its smell of decay, which can burn for months if it's set on fire.

Jaò puts the cabbage on the dark soil. Its head straight up and firmly placed as if it had grown there.

Then Jaò straightens up, goes back a few steps, goes to stand at Gervaise's side, and with his arm points to the picture before them. "Like this," he says. "The land. . ."

He touches the muscles of his arms.

"Working hard."

He takes Gervaise's arm.  
 "The land gives, the woman. The two. Look. . . ."  
 He points with his finger to the cabbage and, continuing the gesture, points to the woman.  
 "A man," he declares, smiling broadly. "A good man. He makes everything give."  
 And suddenly he touches Gervaise's cheek solemnly but tenderly.  
 "The woman, never cry again."  
 He makes the gesture of tears running down.  
 Then he turns on his heels and goes away, leaving the cabbage on the barren soil. For a long time after he has left, Gervaise looks at the extraordinary product of a land that has never given that much.  
 And in the woman's head there still echoes this phrase: "The land, the woman, the two . . ."  
 How can Gervaise's agitation all that day, all that night, and all the following days be described? Never before had she seen a man with such a gentle look, such kind gestures, and besides a man who knew how to take care of the earth that everybody said was bad and without a future and who grew there such astonishing produce. For a long time she had been learning in the village about Jaò's success in cultivating the black soil, but she hadn't believed half of it. Before her, suddenly, both the man and the fruit of his labour: a miracle, perhaps. . . . Gervaise had to go through six days of torture. Hadn't she tasted the dregs with this warped and monstrous Jasmin? Jaò, similarly, wasn't at all handsome. No woman would have experienced because of him the gentle, female emotion the male with conquering charms can arouse. Why did the picture of this stunted, stocky, quite dark little man stay with Gervaise like an ache in her soul? A painful longing, but she didn't want to admit to herself such a feeling.  
 Day after day, for six days, alternating between refusal and acceptance. And yet he hadn't said anything, or very little. Why had he come here? Every morning brought for Gervaise the renewed wonder of this simple cabbage, the astonishing success of a man whose steadfastness and courage in working could no longer be denied by anyone.  
 Gervaise had visions of lush, black hillsides where countless wonders like this cabbage grew and which suddenly fulfilled her most secret hopes.  
 "I used to be sure," she caught herself saying out loud, while walking about aimlessly in the big kitchen which suddenly looked more deserted than ever.

Two plates on the table, busy days, the continuing act of living, of surviving.  
 Gradually Gervaise recalled youthful dreams. Hadn't she always wanted to reign over such fertile lands? To have a burning fire in the stove, and simmering meals? Always supporting a good man who'd know how to love her and whom she'd love in turn? Nothing in those dreams that was fantasy, nothing exotic either, only the cautious, logical ambition of a farm woman who couldn't deny her roots.  
 But, after she had seen the years pass by and having met one day Jasmin with his fine words, she had believed for a maddening moment that he would finally bring about the realization of her dream and noticed too late and such a short time after their marriage the true character of the man who had brought her here.  
 Then, with all hope vanished, and Jasmin dead, she had finally gained a kind of dull peace. And suddenly out of nowhere came Jaò, the Portuguese, with a face like a baked apple, sparkling eyes, gentle gestures and his knowledge of the black soil on which Gervaise had spent all her cares.  
 It was asking for a lot of willpower from a woman.  
 It meant revoking yesterday's resolutions and resolves.  
 The seventh day, another Sunday, but in an icy rain that harassed her the whole way, Gervaise took the road to the farm where Jaò lived.  
 At two o'clock she knocked on the door.  
 And again more through gestures than words, she told the man who calmly welcomed her as if he had always known that she'd be coming: "The land . . . and the woman . . . they must give. . . ."  
 This was even more than she needed to say.  
 The story is true. No detail has been omitted. There really isn't anything else to tell, and nothing less happened.  
 Today, at the far end of the county that borders on the state of Maine, a region of Quebec that's hardly known, where people live practically isolated and survive only with difficulty, there are two stretches of black land which provide every year harvests of fabulous vegetables, and a woman who now has three little ones, her own gift, her fellowship with the land close-by.  
 This is simply and truly the happy ending of a story that is probably strange and perhaps eternal.□

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Eugenio de Andrade

JACARANDAS

*Translated by Alexis Levitin*

Around the middle of June, the jacarandas of Lisbon are in bloom, their light cleaves one's pupil and caresses the shadow's back. It is then that—who knows if for the last time—innocence comes back into my life again. My eyes, hands, soul, all is new—I begin again to spend joy lavishly, a joy that doesn't search out words, for its kingdom isn't that of expression. Let's say that this new experience, which I do not want to name, is not concerned with questioning, perhaps because there is no longer time for doubts, or else because those ultimate truths are no longer of concern, are blind as knives.

It isn't a poem of obedience that I propose in these lines; it's a question of something else: to lift to the fresh mouth of the air the heat of burning sands. But without words, without words.

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## Patrick Murphy

### PRESERVATIONS OF THE MOON

It hadn't happened yet. Rickey stood on the shore near the thin, crusted ice and waited. Only a few days a year, at sundown, did it occur. He had heard that the growth at the bottom of the lake, the conversion of kelp and seaweed to methane gas, caused the sudden eerie fire. He didn't care. The waiting was enough.

The wind was still, lying heavy over the frozen lake. The ice was grey now. The sun was setting behind the dark trees drawn like a circle around him. The sky was clear and empty, blue before, but now so dark it seemed there was nothing there, simply the sun a red disk just above the trees and then emptiness.

His feet were cold, but he didn't move. He hoped, if he stood quietly enough, if he became a part of the snow and the ice, he would never hear the bell his mother rang. He wanted to stay outside. In the past, he had spent entire nights roaming the woods in secret, watching the collected snow fall in small avalanches from the forks of trees. He had seen the frozen immobility of snowshoe rabbits and the occasional cold-eyed lynx. But it was the Christmas season now and the house was filled with relatives.

"Aren't you going to be polite?" his mother had asked, hoping he would stay inside with Barbara. "Why don't you stay and play?" she had asked.

Play. He hadn't played in years. His mother just didn't understand. All she seemed to know were the rooms of the house and the food she served.

The sun had vanished, leaving only a haloed light behind the trees. The sky had grown more yellow, as if readying itself. It should happen now, Rickey thought, lighting the fire in his mind. Today, it should happen.

He waited, then heard the bell, the clear notes repeated too quickly. The first call and already his mother sounded impatient. "Darn it," Rickey muttered. "Darn it all."

The living room was crowded. Relatives sat on the sofa and chairs and on the floor. There was a fire going and the heat hit Rickey,

flushing his face. Barbara met him at the door.

"Hi," she said, smiling.

She was a year younger than he, but on this visit she suddenly seemed older, as if she had aged two or three years for his one. She had shoulder-length brunette hair and a face his parents called "pretty." The last time they had met she had been just another distant cousin. Now, her height, the softness she had developed, disturbed him.

"I wish you had taken me with you," she said. She seemed hesitant, as if frightened by her boldness.

"Why?" he asked. He knew she wasn't the outdoors type. She had never liked the snow or the cold.

She hesitated. "I'd like to see what you're seeing," she said quietly.

Rickey's heart raced, but he couldn't explain why.

His parents were in the kitchen. His mother stood at the table near the punch bowl. She had a cup in one hand and the ladle in the other. His father stood behind her, pressed against her back. One hand of his was around her waist. His lips were on her neck.

His mother smiled at what she felt. "It's about time you got back," she said, but her words were softened by low laughter.

"Rickey!" his father shouted without changing his position, merely lifting his lips.

His father was a little drunk. His dark hair was mussed and fell across his forehead. He smiled broadly.

"I'm back," Rickey said. "I'm here."

"And Barbara!"

She had followed Rickey in and stood beside him in the kitchen. Rickey looked at her and then at his father and mother. They stood there, the four of them, for a few seconds. Then his father laughed, a deep and violent sound. Rickey wanted to defend himself. He had done nothing wrong, and yet he felt he had been caught at something shameful. He spun and ran out of the room.

Barbara sat next to him at the table while they

ate and again on the sofa in the guest room. Relatives drifted by and smiled, as if there were a conspiracy they all had somehow joined. Rickey wanted to tell Barbara to go away and leave him alone, but he never managed to do that. His situation filled him with confusion.

"Tell me about the lake," she said, touching him as if by accident with her hip and leg. "Tell me all about it."

"Well," he said, searching for words to match the beauty of it, the sense of it happening only for him. He wanted to describe the chill splendor, the glory of standing alone on the bank as the ice fired.

"I'll bet it's cold," she said.

He looked at her. It's what he should have expected, he thought. "You wouldn't understand," he said. "You're just a girl."

He woke while it was still dark. In the room around him, the others slept. A nephew's body was pressed against his in the bed. Two young boys nestled in a sleeping bag on the floor. Rickey rose carefully, choosing his steps around the shadowed forms. He dressed quietly, then walked through the house. Soft mutters, like barnyard restlessness, filled the dark, warm rooms he passed.

The cold jolted him, feeling for a moment harsh and threatening. Then the shock was gone. His skin felt tight. He ran and left the house behind.

The stars were still out, but faded. The moon was a dim crescent overhead. There was a breeze, driven by the coming sun. The air moved between the trees, but seemed not to touch the dark needles of the pines, the bare elegant branches of the oak. The snow lay deep and untouched on either side of the path and vanished in deepening shades of blue among the trees.

He went to his place, an abandoned shack against the side of the hill. The slope was steep. He walked quickly, feeling the strain against his legs, the weight of the snow on his boots. His breath steamed in front of him.

The sun was almost up by the time he arrived. In the summer, the empty window and the weathered boards of the shack seemed lonely, but in the winter the roof was deep in snow and icicles hung like pennants from the edges. The walls were thick with ice, the wood beneath only vaguely visible, transformed. Inside, there stood an old chair and a broken table. Blown snow covered the floor and the top of the table and the window sill. Rickey sat in the chair and

waited, watching.

There were thin clouds on the horizon. Rickey felt the suspense. The sun climbed the clouds, until suddenly it cleared and light burst through the door. It streamed into the window and bounced from the ice on the walls and the snow on the floor. It was as if the light were trapped and filled the room, growing brighter and brighter. Rickey felt as if he were inside a large, clear marble held against the sun. He laughed, then heard her voice.

"Rickey!" Barbara shouted from below.

He went to the door and looked down. She stood at the foot of the hill in a green coat and hat. Her hair hung to her shoulders beneath the hat and blew in the breeze. She waved.

By the time she had climbed the hill, the sun had risen, the light had gone. "It's nice," she said.

He was irritated. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

They stood in the center of the room.

"I followed you," she said quietly. "I heard you leaving the house and I wanted to go, too."

"You could have gotten lost," he said. He imagined her body frozen in the green coat, her skin the color of ice. "We might never have found you," he said.

"I followed your footprints in the snow. They led me right here." She smiled and threw him into confusion.

They spent the morning in the woods, walking the paths between the trees. After an hour, they came to a small creek, running swiftly between boulders and mounds of snow. The water was clear and bright. A fallen tree bridged the banks. Rickey helped Barbara across, holding her hand. She jumped into the new snow on the far side and laughed. He looked at her gloved fingers still in his. He felt drawn into something he couldn't explain. The small hand seemed to obligate him, to drag him into a world he didn't want. He tried to release her, but she held on, refusing to let go.

They walked back to the house hand in hand. Rickey felt strange, filled with emotions he couldn't name. Barbara felt like a dare he was taking.

It was warm in the house and crowded. They ate lunch, then played parcheesi. An uncle walked by and tousled his hair. Barbara sat across from him.

"I'm winning," she said, laughing. "I'm destroying you."

Rickey looked at the pieces on the board and



knew she was right. "You aren't so smart," he said, then stopped, not knowing what should come next.

"Tell me about the lake," she said later.

Rickey looked up. The curtained, fogged window behind Barbara's shoulder had dimmed with the coming evening. "There's not much to tell," he said. He saw the lake in his mind, the fire and the ice, but it seemed so much further away now and he knew words would never bring it closer.

"Tell me," she demanded.

Rickey jumped up and grabbed his jacket.

"Where are you going?" Barbara asked, surprise in her voice. Her expression seemed stern, her voice authoritative.

Rickey ran out, but she followed him. He tried to lose her in the woods, and for awhile he left her behind the trees. He stopped. Everything seemed different, knowing she was there, somewhere. He looked back the way he had come.

"I'm sorry," she said, panting as she caught up.

"What for?" he asked.

She didn't answer, but stood near him, looking at his eyes.

They stood on the shore of the lake, on the stones like broken fragments of glass. It seemed darker to Rickey than the night before. The sky was jumbled with clouds torn by the wind. It was going to happen, Rickey knew, amazed.

The sun had already set behind the trees and the light failed quickly. The ice seemed like ancient glass streaked with age, older than a winter. The forest gathered, the trees blurring to one dark, continuous presence.

It began slowly, a faint blue glimmer at the far end of the lake.

"Do you see it?" he asked.

"I think so."

They waited as it spread. At first, there was merely a pulsing as the sky darkened, then the

blue light flared beneath the ice. It moved, brightening and growing as it went. There were scattered patches now of blue fire, drifting circles of cold flame. Long streamers coiled, then merged with brighter masses. Single pockets slid beneath the ice, joining, collecting at the center of the lake in a deeper, brighter fire.

Rickey had seen this only twice before and had waited for it impatiently, but now that it was happening, all he could think of was Barbara beside him. She had moved away.

"It's wonderful," she whispered.

They watched for awhile, then Rickey saw her shiver. Her hair blew around her face. Her arms were crossed in front of her. Small spasms moved across her back.

"You're cold," he said.

She glanced at him and smiled. "It's okay," she said, and then watched the fire. It grew brighter as the darkness settled. The wind freshened off the ice.

She shouldn't be cold, Rickey thought. It was wrong, somehow. He wanted to warm her. He wanted to flush her skin with heat. The thought filled him with a strange ecstasy. "We should go," he said. "You're freezing." He looked at her face and felt a rush of tenderness.

Her shaking grew worse. He stood closer and tried to shelter her from the wind. She turned. He felt her lips touch his and the trembling of her body. When she stepped back, the night seemed colder.

The fire began to fade. The ice darkened. They turned and left.

Things were so strange, Rickey thought, walking hand in hand to the house. He felt happy, but a little guilty, as if he had misplaced something of value or had already forgotten something important. Once, he stopped and looked behind him. The fire was nearly gone, only a faint glow between the darkness of the trees. Barbara waited for a moment, then tugged on his arm, pulling him forward. □

VICISSITUDES OF A PUBLIC LITERARY REPUTATION:  
ORWELL ON THE TELESCREEN

I

*Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have sold more than forty million copies, more than any other pair of books by a postwar author. Their wide circulation has done much to establish Orwell as a "public" author, one whose name and work are known far more widely than merely among readers of his *oeuvre*.<sup>1</sup> Millions of people not normally interested in literature have read Orwell's books, sometimes including the essays, in schoolrooms or for pleasure. And Orwell is not read exclusively, or perhaps even primarily, as an ideological writer: he also has a passionate personal following. As with Hemingway and Mailer, there has been intense interest in the man's life and personality apart from his work, so much so that his name and even his face are recognizable to many people who haven't read a line of him.

But Orwell's posthumous status as a public author cannot be explained solely by the sales volume of his last two books and their canonization in school curricula. An even more important—and usually overlooked—factor in building his reputation has been film and television treatments of his life and work during the last three decades. Even before the release of the new film of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in late 1984, 21 percent of Britons and 10 percent of Americans claimed in a Gallup poll to have seen a televised or movie version of the book.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it has gone unnoticed that the sales explosions of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* occurred only *after* both books were

adapted for film and television in the mid-1950s.<sup>3</sup> Not until these screen productions did Orwell's nightmare vision of a totalitarian future fully penetrate the public consciousness: they made his neologisms and catchwords—"1984," "Big Brother," "doublethink," "thoughtcrime," "Newspeak," "memory hole," "War Is Peace," "Some are more equal than others"—part of the Anglo-American cultural lexicon within just a few years of his death. By the early 1960s, the first five of these had been formally institutionalized in Webster's. By the 1970s, familiarity with them was so widely assumed that it had become a measure of cultural literacy. The coinages could be cited in the media (even in one exchange on the nation's top-rated

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<sup>1</sup>I discuss the rise in British sales of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in the aftermath of the 1954 BBC adaptation, on p. 57. The exact effect on book sales of the *Animal Farm* film and the other adaptations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are harder to measure. Fred Warburg, Orwell's British publisher, has discussed the sales history of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in some detail in his autobiography, *All Authors Are Equal* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973) 54-56, 114-15. But Warburg does not provide year-by-year breakdowns. I have also not been able to obtain such breakdowns from Orwell's publishers. It would appear, however, that the 1953 NBC-TV and 1956 Columbia adaptations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had at least an indirect impact on sales. For instance, by Warburg's figures, American sales of the New American Library paperback doubled in the decade following the Columbia *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, from 1,210,000 between 1950-57 to 2,052,000 between 1958-65.

Other evidence relating to Orwell's public reputation is more impressionistic yet probably no less significant a factor in its growth. When I taught the *Animal Farm* film to Philadelphia high school students in the 1970s, I found that it was one of the most frequently-requested films, usually shown more than 50 times per year. Certainly it is likely that there is a dialectical relationship between literary and media reputation: Orwell's prior literary reputation probably prompted media adaptations of his books. The adaptations, in turn, reach large audiences, and this in time broadens the base of Orwell's book sales—and the same interaction continues over time. Even the opening credit line and voice-over in the *Animal Farm* adaptation ("And now, George Orwell's *Animal Farm*") points to such a relationship between literary and media reputation.

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<sup>2</sup>For an extended discussion of the "public" writer, see John Raeburn, *Fame Because of Him: Hemingway As a Public Writer* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup>"Few Predictions True Despite Orwell's Grim Visions," Fayetteville (N.C.) *Observer* 9 Feb. 1984: 9. The Gallup Poll also reported that 27 percent of Americans had (or claimed to have) read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Sept. 1983, even before the book rocketed to Number 1 on the *New York Times* fiction list in Jan. 1984.



television series, a 1977 episode of Norman Lear's *All in the Family* in which the Meathead protests Archie's police state mentality) without reference to their author or source.

The screen adaptations of Orwell's books and the documentaries of his life have helped shape his posthumous reputation, particularly his standing outside literary and academic circles. Anglo-American screen treatments of Orwell have clustered in three periods: the mid-1950s, the mid- to late 1960s, and 1983-84. This broadcast material not only illumines the politics of Orwell's reputation; it also offers insight into a literary man's public image in formation, a glimpse of how a "serious" writer gets known beyond intellectual circles to the wider public. In a process that reveals some key aspects of the making of literary reputations in the 1990s, we can appreciate how one big media "event" transformed Orwell into a public figure in the 1950s and how subsequent events consolidated this image even as they reshaped it. Reception evidence from "obscure" or "marginal" readers (e.g., letters to the editor) punctures the illusion of a single "intellectual" reception audience and illustrates how the public image of a writer can alter—sometimes almost beyond recognition—as his name and work radiate beyond the sphere of the serious literary community into the wider public. Finally, we can see how the reputation of a public writer like Orwell, one who continues to

speak to readers long after his death, evolves in response to changes in the political and cultural climate.

## II

### *The Fifties: Cultural Politics and the Cold War*

By far the most significant period for our attention is the mid-1950s, during which Orwell's image was transformed dramatically and he assumed the status of a public writer. Even after the publication of *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Orwell was chiefly known within the London and New York intelligentsia, not to the public at-large. In Britain, his work was more widely circulated in radio adaptations of *Animal Farm* (1947, 1952) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1950) for the Third Programme, the BBC cultural channel run by Orwell's friend Rayner Heppenstall. But it was not until four adaptations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* reached the screen between 1953 and 1956 that "Orwellian" and "Big Brother" began to appear regularly in news headlines.

**The NBC *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.** In September 1953, NBC'S Studio One opened its fall season with the first screen adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Hailed by television critics as "masterly" and "stunning," the one-hour play



starred Eddie Albert as Winston, Norma Craine as Julia, and Lorne Greene as O'Brien. It reached a viewing audience of 8.7 million homes (a 53 percent share of the market), making it the highest-rated Studio One program for 1953. It also did well with the critics. "I cannot recall seeing another television drama so imaginatively and effectively presented," wrote the *New Yorker* reviewer. "The new television season has come alive," said the *New York Times* critic, who praised the play for depicting "with power, poignancy, and terrifying beauty the destruction of the human soul."<sup>4</sup>

NBC's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* made no explicit reference to the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin, who had died just months before, but with the Cold War and McCarthyism dominating the news, it was no doubt inevitable that the play would get enmeshed in Cold War politics. As they had done with the novel, Henry Luce's magazines boosted the adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an anti-Communist tract. *Life* devoted a two-page picture spread to the TV play about "Big Brother and the terrifying totalitarian state." The anti-Communist implication was clear. The drawings of Oceania

and Winston Smith which had appeared in a special issue of *Life* in 1949 were by 1953 gracing paperback covers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Increasingly, Orwell was being taken in some quarters of the popular press as an exponent of Luce's conservative, anti-socialist politics.<sup>5</sup>

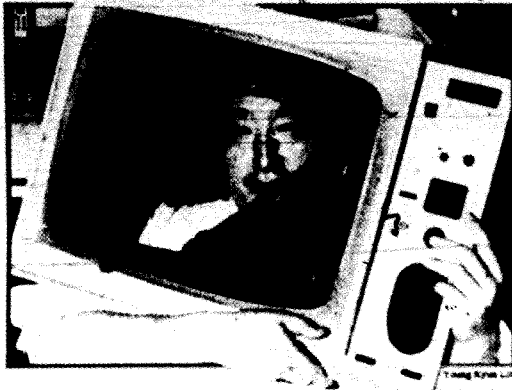
**The BBC *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.** Much more controversial and politicized, however, was BBC-TV's adaptation of the novel the following year. It is probably unusual that one can point to a single moment when a writer's popular reputation is "launched." But in Orwell's case the date is clear: Sunday, 12 December 1954. Directed by Nigel Keale, the two-hour evening program appeared during prime time, on what was then Britain's only television channel. It starred Peter Cushing and Yvonne Mitchell, the small screen's two most popular actors.

Most reviewers hailed the teleplay as an intelligent adaptation and praised the BBC's courage in presenting it. Thousands of viewers, however, protested that the show was "sadistic" and "horrific," characterizations which the tabloid press bannered on Monday morning, 13 December. A debate over the "propriety" of the telecast quickly took shape and soon escalated into a classic confrontation concerning the

<sup>4</sup>The quotations are from Jack Gould, "TV in Review: Orwell's 1984," *New York Times* 23 Sept. 1953: 31; and Philip Hamburger, "Nineteen Eighty-Four," *New Yorker* 3 Oct. 1953: 84. The viewing statistics are from a telephone interview with the Department of Audience Measurements, National Broadcasting Company, 19 Dec. 1985.

<sup>5</sup>"Hour of Gloom," *Time* 5 Oct. 1953: 71; "A 1984 Spectre on 1953 Screens," *Life* 5 Oct. 1953: 115-16. See also "The Strange World of 1984," *Life* 4 July 1949: 78-82.

## A Video Artist Disputes Orwell's '1984' Vision of TV



Nam June Paik's live international special is on public TV today at noon.

proper function of art in the state and, more particularly, on the role that the emergent medium of television should assume in British society. Conservatives intent on limiting the presumed "adventurism" of the state-supported BBC, allied with parents who were outraged over the graphic depiction of violence on an "entertainment" medium, were ranged against socialists preaching free speech and literary men defending the production's naturalism and fidelity to Orwell's book. Within the space of a single week, the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* telecast became what the *New York Times* called "the subject of the sharpest controversy in the annals of British television."<sup>6</sup> Some observers compared the BBC row to the furor in America over Orson Welles' 1938 radio hoax, *War of the Worlds*.<sup>7</sup> When it was telecast again the following Thursday, 16 December, the second showing of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* attracted the largest audience in BBC-TV history to that date. Editorialized the *London Times* at the week's close: "The term 'Big Brother,' which the day before yesterday meant nothing to 99 percent of the population, has become a household

<sup>6</sup>"BBC Repeats 1984 Despite Objections," *New York Times* 17 Sept. 1954: 35.

<sup>7</sup>"Terror on Television," *Newsweek* 27 Dec. 1954: 28.

phrase."<sup>8</sup>

BBC announcements before and during the program had made clear that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* would not be "light entertainment." Viewers were warned that it was "unsuitable for children or those with weak nerves." The violence was mild by present-day BBC standards, and even by American standards of 1954—a major reason why the BBC production aroused so much more argument than the NBC show. Still, the British stage had traditionally reflected and observed social proprieties, and the British public in 1954 was quite unprepared for graphic on-stage violence. Most objectionable to some viewers were the torture scenes in which Peter Cushing, his face streaked with blood and his body reduced to a shell, was brainwashed in a coffin with electric shocks and then, in Room 101, confronted with a cage of ravenous rats. One Sunday night viewer collapsed of a heart attack after the torture scenes. On Monday the *Daily Express* ran this story ("1984: WIFE DIES AS SHE WATCHES") on its front page:

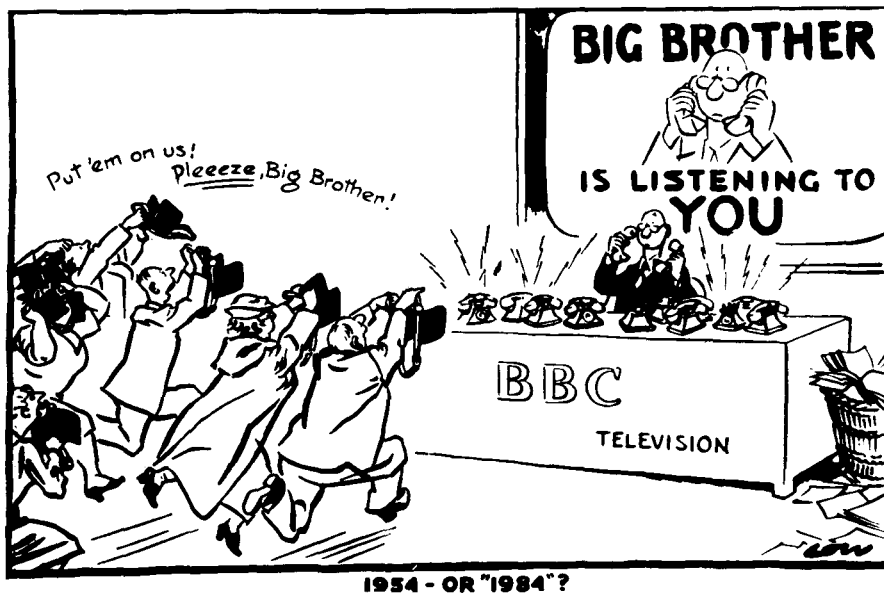
A forty-year-old mother of two children collapsed and died while watching the TV horror play *1984*, it was disclosed last night. She was Mrs. Berry Kathleen Mirfin. Mrs. Mirfin, a local beauty queen of 1936, was watching the play on Sunday night at her home in Carlton-Hill, Herne Bay. With her was her husband, who is a real estate agent, and two friends. In the early part of George Orwell's nightmarish fantasy of a Police State Future, Mrs. Mirfin collapsed. A doctor who was called at once: 'Was she watching the TV play?'

The *News Chronicle's* front-page story ("1984 SHOCKS VIEWERS") gives more fully the flavor of the tabloid press coverage of the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* controversy:

Hundreds of angry viewers telephoned the BBC and newspaper offices last night after the TV presentation of George Orwell's *1984*—the story of a nightmare era.

<sup>8</sup>"1984," *The Times* (London) 15 Dec. 1954: 5.

<sup>9</sup>Qtd. in John Sutherland, "The Drama Caused by the Camera in Room 101," *The Times Educational Supplement* (London) 30 Dec. 1983: 8.



1954 - OR "1984"?

All complained that it was too ghastly for television. Not one caller praised the play. The BBC view: 'We televised 1984 as a masterpiece of our time.'

Mrs. Edna Burgess of Holborn rang the *News Chronicle* to say: 'I trembled with fear as I watched; it was not fit for ordinary decent-minded human beings. It was nothing but unoriginal bits of horror put together.'

Mrs. Vivienne van Kampen of Muswell Hill demanded an immediate campaign to prevent the BBC from repeating the play—due to be shown again on Thursday. 'Some of the scenes are the most ghastly things I've ever seen,' she said.

It was not only women viewers who were upset. Mr. Frederick Poate of Woking was looking in with Canadian friends. 'None of us is particularly squeamish, but we found the torture scene . . . more than we could stand,' he said. Callers told the BBC that the play was worse than horror comics and not fit for public viewing.

(Sutherland 8)

So began the tumult. By Monday afternoon, the chairwoman of the British Housewives League was condemning the play as "sadistic and horrible."<sup>10</sup> Later that day Malcolm Muggeridge, an old friend of Orwell's and at that time editor of *Punch*, joined the head of the

BBC drama division on the BBC-TV program *Panorama* to defend the telecast on literary grounds against a Tunbridge Wells alderman. The alderman predicted "a tremendous increase in crime" if more telecasts like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were shown ("BBC Defies Horror" 3). His claim of a firm link between television violence and criminal behavior may well mark one of the earliest appearances of the argument in public debate.

By Wednesday the fracas had reached the floor of Parliament. Cultural Conservatives upset with the BBC's depiction of violence (deemed especially deplorable on a Sunday) faced off against libertarian Conservatives and Labourites insisting on viewers' freedom of choice and on the value of the drama as a thunderous warning against totalitarianism. Five Conservative MPs first sponsored a motion decrying "the tendency evident in recent BBC programmes, notably on Sunday evening, to pander to sexual and sadistic tastes." Labour contented with an amendment lamenting "the tendencies of honourable Members to attack the courage and enterprise of the BBC in presenting plays and programmes capable of appreciation by adult minds." One Conservative sympathetic to the Labour motion added a clever amendment expressing thanks to Winston Churchill's government for preserving that "freedom of the individual [that] still permits viewers to switch off." Finally, a counter-amendment proposed by more Conservatives pointed out that "many of the practices depicted [in the telecast] are already in common use

<sup>10</sup>"BBC Defies Horror Play Critics," *The Times* (London) 14 Dec. 1954: 3.



under totalitarian regimes" and applauded "the sincere attempts of the BBC to bring home to the British people the logical and soul-destroying consequences of the surrender of their freedom."<sup>11</sup>

The Thursday repeat provoked yet another round of breast-beating—and of sensational headlines. "MORE PROTESTS OVER 'H' PLAY," shouted *The Daily Mirror*. Again viewers wrote and phoned:

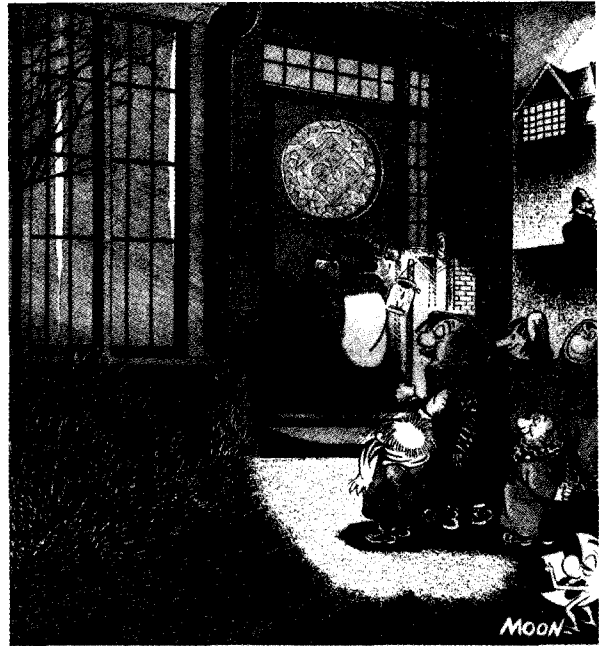
I NEVER WANT TO SEE IT AGAIN . . .  
says Betty Tay. 'I had a basinful of TV's Big Brother last night—and if that's the sort of thing the BBC is going to give us as entertainment they can keep my license for one.'

(Sutherland 8)

My husband and I watched 1984 and were appalled. 'Horror comics' could be no more damaging in their influence on many people. The sadism and sordidness of the play certainly would not be helpful to the youth of today, who have quite a struggle to discover the true values of life among the things they see and hear around them.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>See "Commons Split Over 'Sunday Sadism,'" *Daily Mail* 15 Dec. 1954: 3. No mention is made here or elsewhere in the British press as to whether any of the motions carried.

<sup>12</sup>Letter to the editor, *Daily Telegraph* 16 Dec. 1954: 13.



TRY SHOUTING 'BIG BROTHER IS WATCHIN' YER,' THAT'LL MAKE 'EM ANSWER

In succeeding weeks the posthumous Orwell was, predictably, dragged into the controversy. Complicating the British response—again unlike the situation in 1953 America—was the still palpable presence of Orwell felt by British intellectuals. As a result of extravagant testimonials by his influential literacy acquaintances (Muggeridge, Bertrand Russell, Herbert Read, V. S. Pritchett, Arthur Koestler),<sup>13</sup> Orwell had ascended to legendary status among British intellectuals, especially to the younger generation of angry young writers associated with "the Movement" like Kingsley Amis and John Wain.<sup>14</sup>

And yet his legacy was ambiguous. His socialism was unorthodox and dissenting; the Center and even the Right competed for his mantle. Newspapers on the Right hailed the BBC production as a welcome Cold War salvo. Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, a Conservative organ, began serializing a severely abridged *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, explaining that the Express version "will keep a vital argument

<sup>13</sup>The first three lauded Orwell in the memorial issue devoted to him by London's *World Review* 16 (June 1950). Pritchett's *New Statesman* obituary appeared 28 Jan. 1950. Koestler's *Observer* obituary appeared 29 Jan.

<sup>14</sup>For the influence of Orwell on "the Movement," see Blake Morrison, *The Movement* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980) 3-23.

going in every home where love and truth and honour are cherished."<sup>15</sup> The right-wing *Daily Mail* devoted two front-page editorials to a defense of the BBC play, praising it for exposing "the beastliness of Communism—... something that we must fight with all our strength of mind and will."<sup>16</sup> One *Daily Mail* columnist even spoke of Orwell's "saintliness," provoking a Labour M.P. to accuse the Tories of "stealing" Orwell.<sup>17</sup> The long history of snatching St. George's body had begun.<sup>18</sup>

The television audience, like contemporary literary critics, found it impossible to discuss Orwell the man apart from his work. Sonia Orwell, Orwell's publisher Fred Warburg, and several of Orwell's friends explained his politics in press interviews, arguing that he remained a socialist until his death (Black 4). But many viewers simply believed that O'Brien was Orwell's mouthpiece in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. People who had seen only the BBC telecast or read no other books by Orwell saw him as a prophet of despair, not as a desperate dissenter against totalitarianism. "Orwell was accused in letter after letter," wrote a BBC official in 1955, "of having a diseased and depraved mind."<sup>19</sup> As "Orwellian" became shorthand in the press for "totalitarian" and "nightmarish," Orwell's reputation underwent a curious split. Even as readers familiar with his life were exalting him as a "saint" and the "conscience of his generation," the telecast was inadvertently blackening his reputation among the public at large.<sup>20</sup> A kind of silhouette image of Orwell



■ CAREFUL, GEORGE, YOUR LEFT BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU."

thus developed. Alongside St. George, the intellectuals' heroic truth-teller, stood Jeremiah, the tabloids' anti-Communist prophet and the public's gloomy visionary.

Viewers did not mince words with the BBC:

The BBC cannot acquit itself by warnings to children and old ladies. As a front-line soldier throughout the war with no regrets, I do not think I can be charged with squeamishness, and I suggest there is a limit, and that Orwell has overstepped it here. . . . [It was] horrible filth, which suits the taste of only the sadistic type of viewer.<sup>21</sup>

You [the BBC and Orwell] have endeavoured to open the gates of Hell to millions of people only just recovering from two diabolical wars and who are painfully seeking a tranquil mind with which to inspire the coming generation.

(Sylvester 37)

Other viewers simply found Orwell's warning exaggerated or unsuitable for "ordinary everyday folk."

Perhaps for a select intellectual audience

<sup>15</sup>"1984," *Daily Express* 15 Dec. 1954: 14.

<sup>16</sup>"'1984' and All That," *Daily Mail* 14 Dec. 1954: 1; "The Lesson of '1984,'" *Daily Mail* 18 Dec 1954: 1. The quotation is from the second editorial.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Black, "Honest Orwell Did Not Write to Horrify, In Love with Freedom He Wanted to Warn," *Daily Mail* 14 Dec. 1954: 4.

<sup>18</sup>For a summary of this history, see John Rodden, "My Orwell, Right or Left," *Canadian Journal of History* 22 (1988): 1-20.

<sup>19</sup>David Sylvester, "Orwell on the Screen," *Encounter* Mar. 1955: 36.

<sup>20</sup>V. S. Pritchett, "George Orwell," *New Statesman* 28 Jan. 1950: 96.

<sup>21</sup>Letter to the editor, *Daily Telegraph* 15 Dec. 1954: 13.



some subtleties may have emerged from the plot, but I feel sure that for the countless millions of ordinary folk it is not suitable for them to be confronted with the frightening possibility of the loss of all human dignity and I find it quite immoral that we should be left at the end of the play by the fact that evil has triumphed over good.

(Sylvester 37)

The play is an overstatement of the case, and as it proceeded I found myself believing in its possibilities . . . less and less. . . . In Orwell's grim conception, the spirit of man has no reality, and instead of glowing from an eternal source it can be snuffed out like the flame of a candle. That surely is just not true.<sup>22</sup>

The BBC suspected that many of the hundreds of protest letters which it received were "a put-up job" by the British Communist Party (BCP)—perhaps worded similarly to this last letter.<sup>23</sup> If so, it would come as little surprise. Ever since *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), ridiculed by Chairman Harry Pollitt in *The Daily Worker* as the work of a "late imperial policeman," the BCP and Orwell had been mutual antagonists.<sup>24</sup> Subsequent *Daily Worker* reviews of Orwell's books were, with few exceptions, undisguised attempts to taint his reputation, with frequent insinuations about his self-compromising Etonian education and police work and about the popularity of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in "capitalist" America.<sup>25</sup> Two identifiable Party letters in 1954 and 1955 responding to the BBC telecast came from BCP Vice-Chairman R. Palme Dutt, an old enemy of Orwell's. Rather than denounce the BBC program directly, Dutt deplored "the philosophy of Orwell" that "violence, lies and torture can enslave humanity."<sup>26</sup> Dutt's first

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<sup>22</sup>Letter to the editor, *Daily Telegraph* 26 Dec. 1954: 14.

<sup>23</sup>"Cries of Brutality and Horror Raised over 1984 on British TV," *New York Times* 14 Dec. 1954: 50.

<sup>24</sup>Harry Pollitt, review of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Daily Worker* 17 March 1937: 21.

<sup>25</sup>See, for example, Thomas Spencer, "Prisoner of Hatred," *Daily Worker* 3 Nov. 1950: 3.

letter in *The Manchester Guardian* set off a letter campaign from defenders of Orwell which lasted almost three weeks.

Like the telephone calls already quoted, the letters to the BBC and press prove interesting not only in themselves but also for what they suggest about Orwell's reputation among "ordinary folk." As did his "intellectual" reception audiences in London and New York, many of the viewers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* misjudged Orwell to be a cynical defeatist; but others with some familiarity with his life or other works recognized him as a cautionary, anti-totalitarian prophet. The letters in the *Guardian*, which has traditionally attracted a more liberal readership than most British dailies, also indicate that Orwell's reputation among "the wider public" was not monolithic: some people saw him as a fearful Jeremiah, others (including most of the *Guardian* letter writers) saw him as a brilliant polemicist and visionary. Finally, these letters in the daily press underline the fact that, in the mid-50s, Orwell's reputation as a "public" writer extended not only to readers but also viewers.

Furthermore, the editorials and letters raised for the first time in Britain numerous issues of social policy, some of which continue to be debated to this day. Should television be exclusively an entertainment medium or also a vehicle for social criticism? Should television portray graphic violence (and sex)? Does television have a special responsibility, particularly to youth, to furnish "family" programming at prime time? Or should viewers simply be entrusted—and expected—to "switch off"? Parliament resolved some of these decisions in opting for diversity: in 1955 the "serious" BBC-2 and the "light" ITV were born. Although parliamentary legislation for the new channels had already been passed by the time of the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* controversy, the national uproar had made clear the need for more variety in British programming. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had demonstrated, noted *The Times* of London, "the tremendous possibilities of television."<sup>27</sup> Henceforth it would be acceptable on British telecasts to "arouse" audiences in the

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<sup>26</sup>R. Palme Dutt, "Image in the Home," *Manchester Guardian* 5 Jan. 1955: 5.

<sup>27</sup>"Understanding the Lesson," *The Times* (London) 3 Jan. 1955: 2.

service of artistic ends or a good cause. But whatever its liberating effect on BBC policy, the production's legacy, like Orwell's, was not without its conservative implications. Programmers made one prime-time concession to traditional mores: no more would Britons' Sunday evenings be disturbed by "BBC sadism."

Perhaps the most tangible effect of the BBC telecast was its immediate and enormous impact on sales of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. By mid-1954, sales of the Secker & Warburg hardback edition had slowed to just 150 copies per week. A new Penguin paperback edition had just been published. During the week following the first telecast, 1,000 hardback and 18,000 paperback copies were sold (Sutherland 8). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was catapulted into what the book industry has since dubbed "supersellerdom." Equally significant, the sale of Orwell's entire *oeuvre* was permanently boosted. It is hardly an exaggeration to pinpoint December 1954 as the moment when the language of Orwell's novel entered the popular imagination and when the book became, as Isaac Deutscher characterized it after the telecast, "an ideological superweapon" in the Cold War of words.<sup>28</sup> The period marks the firm establishment of Orwell's status as a "public" writer. Thereafter his life and work were the subject of enduring, if intermittent and variable, interest to the press.

**Halas and Batcheler's *Animal Farm*.** Although the BBC-TV ruckus soon left the news, Orwell did not. The 1954 Christmas season brought to the screen an animated cartoon version of *Animal Farm*. The cinema posters warned: "Pig Brother Is Watching You." To celebrate the event, the *Illustrated London News* began serializing an unabridged version of *Animal Farm*.

Created by the British husband-and-wife team of John Halas and Joy Batcheler, *Animal Farm* was the first non-American feature-length film and the first non-American animated cartoon of a "serious" work of art. Halas and Batcheler were touted as cinematic pioneers. One critic wrote a book about the film's production;<sup>29</sup> the film also received an award at the 1955 Berlin Film Festival. But *Animal Farm* was not

technically innovative, little more in fact than derivative Disney. Nevertheless some educators praised it highly and millions of schoolchildren have seen it in the last thirty years.<sup>30</sup> Despite its weaknesses, I found it a helpful pedagogical aid when I used it in a tenth-grade high school class in the 1970s.

Although no public outcry over *Animal Farm* occurred to match the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* controversy, the sudden shift of opinion against Joseph McCarthy in December 1954 made the politics of the film a subject of heated discussion in intellectual organs, particularly in America. During thirty-five days of televised hearings in April-June 1954, Senator McCarthy aired largely groundless charges that the U.S. Army "coddled Communists." McCarthy's fall from grace was as meteoric as his ascension: on December 2 he was condemned by the Senate. For many, the "spectre" of "McCarthyism" had been a great fear; now the media branded McCarthy's formerly popular anti-Communist crusade a "witchhunt."

The public's ambivalent attitude toward McCarthyism was reflected in the confused reception of *Animal Farm*. Perhaps because it portrayed Orwell's story as a general fable about the evils of power and lifted it clean from its historical context, the adaptation was assaulted in political organs from one end of the ideological spectrum to the other. On the far left, the *Nation* used the film as an occasion to reopen the attack on Orwell and judged it a crude anti-Communist polemic. Conservative critics, perhaps still caught up in McCarthy's accusations about Communist control of Hollywood, implied that the British directors harbored Communist sympathies.<sup>31</sup> One reviewer suspected that Halas (an anti-Nazi war refugee from Poland) and Batcheler, who had together made numerous anti-Nazi propaganda films for the British government during the war, had engaged in leftist subversion of Orwell's message and deliberately redirected the fable's satire away from the Bolshevik Revolution. Noting the lack of any clear historical correspondences in the film to Russia under Lenin and Stalin, the critic asked, "Has truth become a luxury no longer available to liberals?"

<sup>28</sup>See Isaac Deutscher, "The Mysticism of Cruelty," *Heretics and Renegades* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1957) 244.

<sup>29</sup>Roger Manville, *The Animated Film* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954).

<sup>30</sup>See, for example, "Animal Farm," *Senior Scholastic* 12 Jan. 1955: 30.

<sup>31</sup>See Robert Hatch's review of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in *The Nation* 22 Jan. 1955: 85.

Delmore Schwartz observed in *The New Republic*: "To a Rip Van Winkle or a Martian Man, the film may seem to be on the British Labour Party." Another critic did in fact describe the film as "a bitter satire on the Welfare State."<sup>32</sup>

Admittedly, Halas and Batcheler made no attempt to remind viewers of the special relevance of Orwell's fable to Soviet history. One pig clearly resembled recently-deceased Labour leader Ernest Bevin. In promotional ads, a fat-bellied pig wearing a string tie and smoking a cigar was clearly a caricature of a U.S. political boss, apparently a southern Senator cut in the mold of Huey Long. Old Major was given the voice and face of Winston Churchill, and a pig with bushy eyebrows and a rude scowl resembled Joseph McCarthy. There was also a porcupine Hermann Goering, prompting at least one critic, in apparent ignorance of the book, to write that *Animal Farm* was a direct attack on fascism (Brown 160).

Other cinematic decisions by Halas and Batcheler were also read as ideologically motivated, and found questionable. Only the pigs talked, giving ammunition again to the Communist charge that *Animal Farm* (and Orwell) consider "the People" mere "dumb beasts" (Hatch 85). Widely deplored was the film's happy ending, implying that popular revolutions can succeed. The film closes with Benjamin leading animal revolutionaries from the far reaches of the globe in a triumphant march to oust the pigs from power. But I found that when Benjamin and the other animals join hands in the final frame, the film inadvertently evokes memories of the opening scenes and the solidarity of the first Animal Revolution led by the pigs—thus reawakening, rather than refuting, Orwell's doubts about the inevitable course of violent revolution.

Whatever the political motives of Halas and Batcheler, their adaptation served to confuse

people further about Orwell's politics. *Animal Farm* was obviously a commercial film meant to cater to children. In effect the directors transformed Orwell's book from a political allegory to an ahistorical fantasy. For instance, the elimination of Frederick and Pilkington completely effaced the fable's origins in the events leading up to World War II and obscured its biting lampooning of the Nazi-Soviet pact and other of Soviet communism's "accommodations" with capitalism. The omission of certain minor characters like Clover, the mare who remains loyal to the Revolution even after Boxer's death, and Mollie, the pretty dray-horse who deserts the Revolution for lump-sugar and ribbons, further robbed the fable of its historical moorings and its complexity. Politics aside, in light of the cuts and inverted ending, one could with justice resent what one reviewer called "the transformation of the prophet Orwell into the profit Orwell."<sup>33</sup>

**The Columbia 1984.** The commercial "transformation"—or castration—of Orwell culminated in the 1956 Columbia Pictures *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Advertised (in something of an understatement) as "freely adapted" from the novel, the film was a slapdash mix of science fiction and horror film—typical of the sci-fi genre of the period. One critic in 1955 had deplored the earlier adaptations of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "into forms for which they were never intended," but the Columbia *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a far worse film and illustrates well how media "translation" of a literary work of art often entails commercial (rather than ideological) distortion.<sup>34</sup>

The American-financed, British-made production starred two Americans, a miscast Edmond O'Brien as Winston and a nondescript Jan Sterling as Julia. Columbia Pictures tried to

<sup>32</sup>The first two and fourth quotations are referred to in Spencer Brown, "Strange Doings at *Animal Farm*," *Commentary* Feb. 1955: 157. See also Delmore Schwartz, review of *Animal Farm*, *New Republic* 17 Jan. 1955: 23. Schwartz added that there was "too much of a reliance upon literal transposition and [on] Orwell's text, just as there is certainly too little effort to respond to the animated strip as a playground for the visual imagination" (23).

Meanwhile, Luce's magazines responded to the film with reflexive anti-Communism. Wrote the *Time* critic: "... the audience is asked to look at the Soviet horror square in the eye. ... [The film] is about as remote from Mickey Mouse as Moscow is from Hollywood" ("The New Pictures," *Time* 17 Jan. 1955: 74).

<sup>33</sup>Gerald Weales, "Film from Overseas," *Quarterly Journal of Film, Radio and TV* 10.1 (Fall 1955): 13.

<sup>34</sup>Ian Willison, "Orwell's Bad Good Books," *Twentieth Century* 157 (Apr. 1955): 354.

There was not much "profit Orwell" in either the *Animal Farm* or Columbia films, however. Neither film was listed during 1955-57 by *Variety*, which computes the box-office sales of all films which gross above \$1 million. A spokesman for the Motion Picture Association of America in New York called Columbia's production "just a bomb" and attributed *Animal Farm*'s failure to poor distribution. "It was a serious cartoon, and the distributors didn't know what to do with it" (Telephone interview, 19 Dec. 1985).

puff up the film into a romantic tragedy. The love angle and the torture scenes were played up; the politics was all but dropped. O'Brien and Sterling, whose accents clashed with those of the English cast, were reportedly included to "get the American audience," since the British producer feared that, after the hubbub over the BBC *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Columbia's production might receive an "X" (over 16 only) rating in Britain. (It did.) The BBC-TV flap also prompted Columbia to shoot two endings, one faithful to the novel and the other more hopeful.<sup>35</sup> The American version followed the novel. The defiant British version (originally intended for the American market and switched over the director's protests) showed the lovers overwhelming their brainwashing and dying, clutching for each other, in a hail of Thought Police bullets as Winston-shouts, "Down with

Producer Peter Rathvon defended his ending as "more logical," one which Orwell himself "would have written" if he hadn't been dying during the novel's composition. Sonia Orwell publicly castigated the film as a desecration of her husband's intentions ("Orwell That Ends Well" 7).<sup>36</sup> Concluded *The Times* of London:

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<sup>36</sup>See also Edward Goring, "Happy 1984 Film Shocks Mrs. Orwell," *Daily Mail* 27 Feb. 1956: 14. Mrs. Orwell complained that Columbia Pictures "did not understand the book at all. I did make strenuous efforts to have the script altered, but I am afraid I am not used to dealing with movie people." She was so angered that she decided to withdraw all of the 1950's adaptations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from circulation when the rights expired in the mid-1970s (twenty years after their original release date). The adaptations became what the *London Times* called "unfilms." See "Ministry of Unfilms," *The Times* (London) 15 Nov. 1983: 12.

My own experience with the "unfilms" bears out *The*



Big Brother!!" ("Orwell That Ends Well" 7). Once again arguments about Orwell's life and politics dominated the film's reception.

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<sup>35</sup>Stephen Watts, "Shaping the World of 1984 to the Screen," *New York Times* 24 July 1955: 5.

On the alternative endings, see Stephen Watts, "Orwell That Ends Well," *The Times* (London) 10 Mar. 1956: 7.

*Times* tag. Both CBS and the BBC refused permission to see their adaptations of 1984; I happened to see a pirated version of the Columbia *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (American ending) in 1982.

Indeed, the restrictions may continue indefinitely. Marvin Rosenblum, the executive producer of the 1984 Virgin Films adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, told me in 1983 that one condition of his contract with Mrs. Orwell was that the old films would not be available.

"Those moguls with their finger on the pulse of [the] public . . . are convinced that we cannot take the truth twice. . . . What kind of a people do they think we are?" ("Orwell That Ends Well" 9).<sup>37</sup>

### III

#### "Halfway to 1984": New Interest in Orwell's Life

Orwell disappeared from the screen for almost a decade. But as social critics began comparing the British Welfare State of the 1960s with Orwell's Oceania, BBC-2 responded in 1965 with a documentary of Orwell's life and three dramatizations of his works. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was revised by Nigel Keale. But this time it provoked little interest; British television programming had travelled far in a decade, and most British intellectuals were no longer involved in the public hysteria and fevered ideological battles of the Cold War. Indeed, the new *Nineteen Eighty-Four* left some viewers "amazed" that an adaptation of the novel could ever have "caused so much fuss" in 1954.<sup>38</sup> *The Times* of London pointed out that the intervening decade had "done little to support Orwell's prophecy," so that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seemed to refer less to a possibly terrifying near-future than to a rather hazy past.<sup>39</sup> The show now seemed "insignificantly theatrical," little more than "commonplace science fiction." American reviewers agreed that the play was "curiously lacking in suspense."<sup>40</sup> In truth, however, the production was little changed from 1954. What had changed was history: Keale could no longer rely, as he had in the aftermath of World War II, on a frightening world offstage to give viewers a vivid sense of

Oceania's horrors. History had outrun *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as prediction; fears about totalitarianism seemed in 1965 primarily a topic of historical interest.

The decision by BBC-2 to present a documentary of Orwell's life and adapt two of his minor novels (*Keep the Aspidochelone* and *Coming Up for Air*) also reflected the new turn in his reputation.<sup>41</sup> Falling interest in the writer's totalitarian vision was balanced by heightened interest in the man's life. Now Orwell himself was becoming a subject suitable for popular historical treatment. Telecast in November 1965 and narrated by Malcolm Muggeridge, the BBC-2 documentary was a frank contribution to a cult. Featuring recollections of Orwell by his wife Sonia, his sister Avril Blair, and old schoolmate Cyril Connolly, the show's reverential tone reflected Orwell's growing stature among intellectuals, even on the far Left. For almost a decade leaders of the British New Left had been touting Orwell as an exemplary culture critic and an intellectual model for the younger generation. Connolly and Muggeridge added to what friends were calling "the Orwell legend" by comparing him to John the Baptist and Don Quixote. "My hope," wrote Muggeridge on the evening of the telecast, "is that . . . the authentic lineaments of this loveable, contradictory, pig-headed, imaginative, and almost incredibly perceptive dyed-in-the-wool Englishman, this Knight of the Woeful Countenance and true hero of our time, clearly emerge."<sup>42</sup>

At least in one sense Muggeridge succeeded magnificently. By 1970 Melvyn Bragg, echoing Pritchett two decades earlier, was speaking of Orwell as a "saint." "I'm sick to death of these saint artists on television," producer Bragg declared in his Orwell documentary, "—though Orwell, as it happens, is nearer a saint than most."<sup>43</sup> Bragg's program constituted a more comprehensive attempt to chronicle Orwell's life. It also established Orwell's new status in the

<sup>37</sup>In a letter to the editor, Richard Rees expressed similar outrage at the adaptation's undermining of Orwell's intentions. See *The Times* (London) 2 Mar. 1956: 9.

<sup>38</sup>Philip Purser, "1984 in 1965," *New Statesman* 3 Dec. 1965: 900.

<sup>39</sup>"1984," *The Times* (London) 14 Dec. 1965: 12.

<sup>40</sup>Stuart Hood, "Orwelliana," *Spectator* 19 Nov. 1965: 659-60. The American response is from George Gent, "TV: Big Brother Takes a Look at Channel 13," *New York Times* 20 Apr. 1968: 67.

<sup>41</sup>On *KAF*, see Robin Chapman, "Rebel Poet's Decline and Fall," *The Times* (London) 8 Nov. 1965: 9. On *CUA*, see "Repeat of Orwell Well Worthwhile," *The Times* (London) 19 Sept. 1966: 6. Some critics approached these dramatizations autobiographically, again reflecting the increased interest in Orwell himself. See, for example, Hood's review, which discussed Gordon Comstock as if he were George Orwell.

<sup>42</sup>Malcolm Muggeridge, "Orwell and His Times," *Radio Times* 18 Nov. 1965: 19.

60s as, in Muggeridge's phrase, "a hero of our time." New Left intellectual celebrities who had never even met Orwell were canvassed for their opinions of him. Noam Chomsky praised Orwell's "honesty, decency, and concern for the facts," implying that the Spanish militiaman who had fought against Franco would have opposed American imperialism in Vietnam. Norman Mailer, often credited with having helped give birth to the existential wing of the American New Left, thanked Orwell for his empathic understanding of the plight of the poor and "for having given me more charity and compassion than I might have had myself." The televised hagiography ended with Richard Rees paying tribute to his friend's "crystal spirit" (actually a phrase from an early Orwell poem, already in circulation in intellectual circles as a result of George Woodcock's 1966 critical study of Orwell, *The Crystal Spirit*).<sup>44</sup>

#### IV

##### "Countdown to 1984": The Public Writer

Numerous documentaries, adaptations, skits, and spinoffs were produced during the "countdown to 1984."<sup>45</sup> Orwell seemed to dominate British television during late 1983 and early 1984, and many of these programs were subsequently aired in the United States. BBC-2 ran a six-part documentary of Orwell's life (*The Crystal Spirit*), a two-part exchange about Orwell among literary critics, and a two-hour TV drama (starring Ronald Pickup) about Orwell's years on Jura. Granada Television broadcast a five-part show, *The Road to 1984*, which reenacted the pilgrimage of Orwell's life as the camera travelled with old Orwell friends down a Wigan mine and across a Catalonia battlefield. Thames Television of Schools sponsored four

dramatizations in which young writers spun contemporary tales off the names of Oceania's ministries, "Truth," "Peace," "Plenty," and "Love." ("Peace" turned out to be a case for disarmament; "Plenty" satirized modern anxieties about consumerism.) Most of the programs, like the two-hour CBS special hosted by Walter Cronkite, *1984 Revisited*, consisted of interviews with scientists, critics, and acquaintances of Orwell, who compared the worlds of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and 1984.<sup>46</sup> The approach of *1984 Revisited* reflected the continued inflation of Orwell's reputation as a literary figure. "Inflation" is precisely the word: the camera presented Orwell's poster-sized face next to blown-up photographs of Stalin, Hitler, Churchill, and other world leaders of the first half of the century, treating him as if he had been a leading player on the world stage during his life. As in 1965 and 1970, most of the interviewees were open admirers of Orwell.

The main event on the big screen was a new *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Facing financial difficulties, Virgin Films, the independent British company underwriting the project, delayed its London release until September 1984. But the timing proved fortunate, ensuring that the film would get proper critical attention in Britain and not be lost amid the media barrage and ephemera of the previous twelve months.

Like the adaptations of the 1950s, the production reflected the times. Winston and Julia were cast as sexual revolutionaries, and one Party meeting concerned new advances toward the elimination of the orgasm. Yet unlike earlier adaptations, the new celluloid *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was an intelligent interpretation of Orwell's book. John Hurt played a consumptive Winston, and Richard Burton, in his last screen performance before his death, played a convincingly diabolical O'Brien. Rather than conjure a vague fantasy world of the future, Director Michael Radford presented Oceania in grittily naturalistic terms, treating it as a satire on wartime London. (The Two-Minute Hate even included footage from a frightening anti-Nazi propaganda film scripted by Dylan Thomas.) Most effective was Radford's use of the telescreen as an all-pervasive "evil eye," always watching Party members. The only weakness of the film was the single major concession it made to commercialism. Running

<sup>44</sup>Bragg's remark is quoted in David Pryce-Jones, "Orwell's Reputation," *The World of George Orwell*, ed. Miriam Gross (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971) 150.

<sup>45</sup>The full transcript of Bragg's program, *The Road to the Left*, is in the Orwell Archive, London University.

<sup>46</sup>For example, the BBC-TV series *1990*, begun in 1977, was an updated rehash of *Nineteen Eighty-four*. An all-powerful bureaucracy, the "Department of Public Control," rules England and supervises all aspects of citizens' lives. Only those with "privilege cards" are free, one of whom is a rebellious journalist who attempts to outwit the system.

<sup>46</sup>See John Corry, "TV: 1984 Revisited," *New York Times* 7 June 1983: 53.

over its projected budget, Virgin Films decided the movie needed to appeal to the youth market. And so the Eurythmics, a popular British rock group, were hired (at a cost of \$600,000 for a slipshod, one-week jam on a Caribbean island) to do the musical score, which turned out to be a strangely psychedelic sound much better suited to Columbia's futuristic *Nineteen Eighty-Four* than to Radford's postwar England. Unfortunately, some of the fears about movie audiences expressed in the 1950s proved all too true: despite the Eurythmics, Virgin Films found its *Nineteen Eighty-Four* hard to sell to American distributors, who explained that the bleak ending was "too depressing."<sup>47</sup>

Disappointingly, no television or film program pegged to Orwell or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* tackled the question of Orwell's political legacy or the difference of opinion on the Right and Left as to Orwell's intentions in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Whereas the Orwell of the 1950s had been held up as a Jeremiah warning against the dangers of collectivism, in the 1980s journalists and entertainers hailed Orwell as a "media prophet." "The first media prophet," one newspaper said of Orwell, praising him for envisioning the abuses of mass communication "when the technology was mostly theory." *TV Guide* went even further, predicting that Orwell, who "believed in the common sense of common humanity," would have considered "the populist nature of television" a "bulwark against statism. . . . George Orwell would have loved *Cheers*."<sup>48</sup>

Not everyone in the television industry agreed. While acknowledging Orwell as "the

first media prophet and philosophizer," a sort of English Marshall McLuhan, the producer of the New Year special *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* criticized Orwell for stressing the "negative" aspects of the mass media. His tribute to Orwell (which featured the McLuhanesque cast of Laurie Anderson, Robert Rauschenberg, and Allen Ginsberg) aimed to stress the "liberating" power of television.<sup>49</sup>

The media overkill of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a prophecy of the present, with Orwell treated as if he were a modern Nostradamus, led mostly to burlesques of the novel and puns of Orwell's coinages. Although many of the jokes had long been worn out by the new year, what was surprising and significant was that television writers assumed the public's familiarity with the language, plot, and themes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. For example, a bizarre spoof of Oceania's telescreen exercise sessions appeared on *The New Show*, a CBS comedy hour. It turned Studio 54 into the "Ministry of Fun," with a hip disc jockey shrieking, "Fellow Citizens, Do the Pony!!" But most of the skit's jokes fell flat.<sup>50</sup> Already by January 1984, with "Orwellian" vengeance, the televising of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had come full circle: from a 1950's "horror comic" to an "insignificantly theatrical" stage play in the 1960s to a parody of itself in 1984. Four numbers that had once made audiences shudder had become a cliché. Perhaps ironically, as Orwell continued to enjoy virtually unanimous acclaim in the broadcast media as a public writer and literary figure, the book that had established his public reputation had reached a cultural saturation point.

## V

The treatment of Orwell's life and work by the broadcast media points to much larger questions than Orwell himself, ultimately taking us to the line where literary history and the history of publicity start to blur. In doing so it raises the enormous and fascinating question of how the modern electronic media, especially television, have altered the basic conditions in which literary reputations are formed. In 1983-84, Orwell moved a step beyond "literary figure" and "public author" to, briefly, the status of "celebrity."

<sup>47</sup>Misfortunes seem to trail adaptations of 1984. Radford spent more than twice his allotted \$2.5 million budget, and (shades of 1956!) two different sound tracks—the Eurythmics' "synthetic" music and a classical score by Dominic Muldowney—were run. Radford claimed that Virgin's producers "foisted" the Eurythmics' "crass rubbish" on him after he had already opened the film in Britain with the Muldowney sound track. An "authorized" version first tried to mix some Eurythmics pieces with a few Muldowney ones. The Eurythmics protested, and after three weeks of public showings in Britain, Virgin Films agreed to use the complete Eurythmics sound track. See Cathy Booth, "Controversy and anger erupt over Eurythmics score for 1984," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 5 Dec. 1984: 3.

For information about the financial and distribution problems experienced by Virgin Films, see James Park, "Orwell on Screen," *World Press Review* May 1984: 58.

<sup>48</sup>James Morrow, "Big Brother Isn't Watching—Yet," *TV Guide* 28 Jan. 1984: 37.

<sup>49</sup>"Newsbriefs," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 30 Dec. 1983: 17.

<sup>50</sup>See "Mining Familiar Territory," *Time* 16 Jan. 1984: 81.

Celebrity is a modern notion, no older than a few decades. The film critic Richard Schickel has argued in his stimulating book about celebrity, *Intimate Strangers*, that the concept of fame began to change only in the 1920s and '30s with the beginnings of film, and that it did not alter fundamentally until the 1950s, with the introduction of nationwide network television. Until then, fame was still chiefly the byproduct of concrete achievement. The "famous" person was someone of significant accomplishment in a certain field. But with the rise of "image technology"—especially television at mid-century—"celebrity-hood" was born. The West entered a new age of the person "known for being known," characterized by the media's creation of the isolated image, the celebrity divorced from achievement and even history.<sup>51</sup> It is noteworthy that the rise of "the Orwell myth"

and the popular success of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* occurred just at the moment when this age was dawning. For as this case history suggests, it is most doubtful that the rapid international circulation of words like "Orwellian," "Big Brother," and "doublethink" could have occurred without the TV plays of the 1950s—before, that is, the era of the telescreen.□

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<sup>51</sup>Richard Schickel, *Intimate Strangers* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985) 15-87, 286-99. See also Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini: How He Became a Culture-God and Helped Create a New Audience for Old Music* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987) 1-42, 399-442.

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Eugenio de Andrade

SHORT SUBJECT

*Translated by Alexis Levitin*

In the firelight, images rush forward effortlessly: it's a question of making a cat real, a cat that entered me through sleep. It is winter, he came with the rain. He approached the fire without even looking at me, shook off a few drops of water, curled up on the warm tiles, and fell into sleep like a stone into a well. I gazed upon that lusterless, trembling ball of yarn with envy—he had fallen asleep so easily. He also dreamed, and in his dream was a sunny day, sparrows on the threshing floor, stacks of hay. He stretched himself, his body arched over all four feet. He was black, painted by Manet. I should have kept him, black cats bring good luck, even if they are somewhat wild. I didn't take my eyes off him, and I began to consider him a companion. Casual, light, uncommitted. A brushing touch of the flesh rather than entanglements of the spirit. Suddenly, that little companion of a few hours gave a start, leaped upon a small sparrow that escaped from between his paws, ran after it, didn't stop running, went out again into the rain. And I, in the firelight.

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Marty Roth

## "YES, MY DARLING DAUGHTER": GENDER, MISCEGENATION, AND GENERATION IN JOHN FORD'S *THE SEARCHERS*

*How evident that in strict speech there can be no biography  
of an Indian-hater par excellence, any more than one of a  
sword-fish, or other deep-sea denizens; or, which is still less  
imaginable, one of a dead man.*

—Melville, *The Confidence Man*

*I like fresh air, the wide open spaces, the mountains, the  
desert . . . Sex, obscenity and degeneration don't interest  
me.*

—John Ford, quoted in Andrew Sinclair

*As I lay on my buffalo robe and looked at the swell of  
Sunshine's pregnant belly, all I could think of was how  
Olga might at this very moment be carrying the seed of  
that savage in her. She was forever soiled. I could leave my  
lodge at any time, go back to civilization, take a bath, and  
be white again. Not her. The Cheyenne was inside her.*

—Berger, *Little Big Man*

*The Searchers* (1956) makes a startling diversion in John Ford's career. From 1946 to 1950, he directed a series of chaste, comfortably ethnocentric westerns—*My Darling Clementine*, *Fort Apache*, *Three Godfathers*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, *Rio Grande*, *Wagonmaster*. Six years later, *The Searchers* burst out of the canon, out of a sequence of films that in no apparent way prepared for or explained it. Ford slowly returned to his center by way of a "miscegenation" trilogy that also included *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) and *Two Rode Together* (1961).<sup>1</sup> *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) mark a full return to the innocence of the earlier westerns.

*The Searchers* was dismissed when it first appeared precisely as a diversion that was so radical it could not be integrated into any sense of Ford's work. It was dismissed in the name of common sense by one of Ford's early champions, the British filmmaker Lindsay Anderson: Ethan's "search for his little niece seems, indeed, to be inspired less by love or

honor than by the obsessive desire to do her to death, as a contaminated creature. Now what is Ford, of all directors, to do with a hero like this?"<sup>2</sup> But *The Searchers* makes sense within the context of the Ford canon, the genre of the western, and American culture: it is as if, at this point in his career, Ford could no longer avoid the repressed economies of that western mythology, and so he produced a series of films devoted to racial and sexual fantasies, fantasies of miscegenation that variously "pollute" the white daughter and kill the white mother.<sup>3</sup>

Despite its circuit of 300 miles and 5 years, *The Searchers* is very much a family drama: it is about two men who search relentlessly to find a girl, Debbie Edwards, who is related to them as "sister" and "daughter." One, Martin Pawley

<sup>2</sup>Lindsay Anderson, "The Searchers," [1956], in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) 75.

<sup>3</sup>The Hollywood Production Code "was revised in 1956 to rescind the prohibition against the use of . . . miscegenation" as a film subject (Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet* [New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981] 118).

<sup>1</sup>See Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington, *John Ford* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1974) 159.

[Jeffrey Hunter], seeks to bring her back to her community of friends and neighbors; the other, Ethan Edwards [John Wayne], seeks to kill her.

Why does Ethan want Debbie dead? One reviewer of the film punned an answer when he said that the two searchers were "as determined as mail carriers."<sup>4</sup> The most obvious ground for Ethan's rage is a miscegenative fantasy—that Debbie [Natalie Wood] has been irredeemably contaminated by contact with Indians. In this film, the misconstruction of sexuality as miscegenation follows from the misconstruction of sexuality as incest. If the destiny of most of the white settlers in *The Searchers* is to be convulsed by an outside horror of sexuality, that is because sexuality was perversely constructed as an inside horror to begin with.

It is a commonplace that John Ford elides sexuality in his films. He usually behaves like the bashful cowboy of the tradition he did so much to sustain, and Ford's bashfulness follows him even into *The Searchers*. When Laurie [Vera Miles] douses Marty in his bath, she throws cold water on the possibility of sexuality. Marty and Laurie collaborate to suppress signs of affection in support of a casual, unspoken commitment—as if sexuality belonged only to an Indian at the sight of a white woman, or, what is even more frightening, the reverse.

Laurie and Marty have an elusive courtship: "You might at least have said that you loved me. You might have asked me to wait for you—at least that'd have been something." "But I always loved you. I thought you knew that without me having to say it." In a contrary figure that adds up to the same thing, the couple can "go steady" from the age of three without Marty ever knowing they were engaged. In this case it was Laurie that didn't say it: "You know Laurie, I—I was just thinking that maybe it's about time that you and me started going steady." "Well, Martin Pawley, you and me been going steady since we was three years old." "We have?" "About time you found out about it."<sup>5</sup>

If Marty didn't know that he and Laurie had been engaged since they were three, the second

time around he doesn't know that he and Look [Beulah Archuleta], his Indian wife, have just been married. The point of that relationship is also to show Marty's aversion to sexuality: when he sees that Look is planning to sleep in a bedroll next to his, he draws back his legs and sends her spinning down the hill. In a later scene in a Mexican cantina, a girl with castanets (named Carmen) dances behind Marty. She moves toward him seductively as he eats, but he only notices *mamacita* who stands at the fire over food. The dancer is offended, so she picks up his bread, tears off a hunk with her teeth, and goes off in a huff, but returns with a plate and a bottle and sits down to eat beside him.

There is a third love that exists "without having to say it"—an intense and idealized passion between Ethan and Martha [Dorothy Jordan], his brother's wife. It occupies a sensitive interlude early in the film when Sam Clayton [Ward Bond] notices Martha's hand slowly smoothing Ethan's folded coat before she brings it to him—"nothing on earth would ever force this man to reveal what he had seen." And Andrew Sarris goes on to say: "there is a deep, subtle chivalry at work here, and in most of Ford's films."<sup>6</sup>

Love and its shame will be played out in the next generation: women will shrink to daughters. As the ranger party rides off to chase the Indians, Ethan who follows at some distance is photographed from behind, from the house. Martha moves into the lower right corner of the frame to look after him—this is the last of the visual inflections that will bind them together in love. Debbie then passes behind Martha, and she reaches out an arm to pull the girl in beside her. It is at this moment that we see Debbie bound into the configuration of desire, that we see Martha displaced. This image links the quest plot, which is just about to begin, with the secret love structure which is just ending.

Just before the closeted scene that both presented and protected the secret of Martha's love for Ethan, there is a counter-moment in which another secret love is only exposed: it is a parody love scene between Brad [Harry Carey, Jr.] and Lucy [Pippa Scott], and it is also framed by a door. Ben suddenly opens the front door of the house to show Brad and Lucy necking; Ben and Debbie name them and taunt them, chanting "Brad and Lucy, Lucy and Brad" over

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<sup>4</sup>Philip T. Hartung, "Looking, Looking Everywhere," *Commonweal* 64 (1956): 274.

<sup>5</sup>See William Luhr and Peter Lehman, *Authorship and Narrative in the Cinema* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1977) 92. Luhr and Lehman's chapter on *The Searchers* is quite thorough, and a number of the topics that I treat are broached by them.

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<sup>6</sup>Andrew Sarris, *The John Ford Movie Mystery* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976) 58.

and over.<sup>7</sup>

The markers of a love that is noble because it is buried also point in the direction of a love that is buried because it is forbidden. Martha is Ethan's sister-in-law: this is such an easy figure with which to forbid the film to be about sexuality and yet automatically invoke incest. In the breakfast scene, Sam asks Ethan, "You wanted for a crime?" and Martha gasps and calls for coffee. For Marty, the mother is Aunt Martha, so she pairs off much more neatly with that other man whom he calls Uncle Ethan.

The relationship of Marty and Laurie is also worked out in terms of incest notations. Laurie occupies the place of the "sister" by opposing herself to Debbie—"it's either me or her, if you go after her, I won't be waiting for you . . . don't you count on finding me here when you get back." And then Ford reverses and repeats this structure by putting Marty in the place of Laurie's brother who should live with her in unconscious innocence. Laurie tells him that even his bashfulness is excessive and guilty: "I'm a woman. We women wash and mend your dirty clothes all your lives. When you're little we even wash you. How you can ever make out to be bashful in front of a woman I'll never know"; and "How could you mind me walking in when you're naked in the bath, haven't I done it dozens of times to my brother?"

The "other" woman, Look, is as central to the incest as to the miscegenative structure of the film: this Indian woman is renamed for specularly itself as she takes on the pressure of Marty's persistent address—"Hey, look, coffee," "Oh, look," "Look, I changed my mind, uh look, you don't understand" (and other characters—"Look everybody, look Mama, look who's here"). She thus becomes an emblem for the woman within western culture—appropriately so in a film that frames women as the dead objects of an agonized but fascinated regard in a sequence of terminal "primal scenes." These scenes include Martha in a burned outbuilding after an Indian attack; Lucy dead in a foothill gulch; Look herself in a tent, the victim of a cavalry massacre; a white girl casualty at the fort; and Debbie, living as an Indian, but registered as dead by Ethan's gaze. Only Ethan can look, only he can scope the dead women of his family, and he forcibly prevents the sons

from looking.

Before the raid on Scar's village, Sam asks Ethan, "How many you figure?" And Ethan answers, "About a dozen each, enough to go round." Ethan (and Ford) are in a long line of Indian haters that includes Mark Twain, and, if not Herman Melville, then his Colonel Morelock who lectures on the metaphysics of Indian-hating in *The Confidence-Man*. The Colonel claims that it is a property of all whites who live in the west. Indians are different from whites in many ways, as audiences who have watched westerns know. Among other things, they drop to the ground whenever shots are fired, as opposed to whites, who are rarely hit by bullets or arrows coming the other way.

By contrast, Ford's Mexicans are friendly and benign and very well treated. They are privileged by Ford as persons of color, so much so that when Ford makes his apology in *Cheyenne Autumn* for his racist treatment of the Indian, almost all of the featured Indians are played by Mexicans. This favoritism is anticipated in *The Searchers*: the first shot inside Scar's tent is dominated by Emilio Figueroa's big white sombrero. When Figueroa [Antonio Moreno] lays it down, his gesture opens up the space in which Scar [Henry Brandon] sits.

*The Searchers* has been praised for the realism and authenticity of its portrayal of Indians, and it is true that there is much more visual anthropology here, more exposure to Indian images than in any of Ford's earlier films. But it is a wonderful irony that the film in which Ford's racism surges up is also read as the film in which Ford is atoning for the simple-minded racism of his earlier films. Much of the presentation of Indians in *The Searchers* is phantasmal—the opening image of Scar exposed like a painted horror, for example; he first appears symbolically, as a shadow that rises up to darken or taint Debbie and the grandmother's tombstone. The pressure of the Indian dominates the film, but in an Expressionist way: their presence is announced by absence, music, an intense red evening light, a howl, a bird call; the white world is besieged by a shadowy and ubiquitous enemy that it can feel but cannot see. Ford here reinvokes the invisible Arabs of *The Lost Patrol* of 1934.

The line on Ford is that as he began to devote psychological space to his white protagonists and documentary space to his Indians, from *Fort Apache* on, he atoned for his earlier thoughtless racism—"I've killed more Indians than Custer,

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<sup>7</sup>The third scene in this sequence has Ethan exposing the marriage of Marty and Look and subjecting it to savage ridicule.

Beecher and Chivington put together"; and this coexists with another line of argument that has Ford unimplicated in the racism he depicts: "Since Ford's pictures deal obsessively with themes of race, ideology, and class, it was easy for well-meaning observers to mistake the man himself for a racist and a reactionary."<sup>8</sup> A third paradigm, the one that governs this paper, is that Ford's films replicate the racism of the United States, both in the direct force and the ambiguous evasions with which it informs the dominant society. Ford "represents" American racism with the same confusing but true blend of typecasting and historical accident as he did when he rode with the Ku Klux Klan in Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (Gallagher 114).

Tag Gallagher's argument is that the racism is there but doesn't really belong to anyone. This is the project of *Donovan's Reef* (1963): in this film the desiccated Boston WASPs are racist snobs; the whites who live on the South Sea island are not. The ideal community becomes apprehensive when it hears about the forthcoming visit of the doctor's Boston daughter, Amelia: everyone believes that she will be horrified to discover that she has a mixed-race half-brother and sister, so they move the children out of the house and merge them with the general population of the island. As a consequence, the "good" whites are allowed to express much anger and outrage at the racism of some people. It turns out, however, that Amelia doesn't seem to care—she's no racist either—in fact she is delighted to be given a new family. Amelia's racism is imposed on the film as a narrative structure and everyone in the film is caught up in its coils. It is then dismissed (peeled off as if it left no trace behind); and no one takes it back, no one acknowledges the history that lies behind the reconstituted family.

Ethan's Indian-hating appears to be a natural formation, like one of the buttes in Monument Valley, and, like the butte, his racism carries a natural authority. Nevertheless, it has the same history as racism elsewhere: it is built on a reservoir of sexual repression. *The Searchers* is divided into two acts devoted respectively to incest and miscegenation, sexuality at home and abroad—but always sexuality seen as horror and an occasion for disgust. Why does Ethan want Debbie dead? The quest portion of *The Searchers* is most adequately read from the

perspective of gender and race: Ethan is trying "to exorcise the Indian taint" on Debbie, trying to ensure that she does not bear "mongrel" kin.<sup>9</sup> He is trying to complete Chief Scar's massacre of the Edwards family.

A "mountain of evidence has accumulated," Joel Kovel writes in *White Racism*, "to document the basically sexualized nature of racist psychology."<sup>10</sup> Transgression, taint, pollution, miscegenation—these are Ford's obsessive themes in the westerns he directed from 1956 to 1961, as well as the obsessive themes of the civilization inside and outside the films (see McBride 158).<sup>11</sup> Ethan is not the solitary hero that he is insistently made out to be. He is an exponent of his society, and his values are also those of the families that Ford extols. Ethan's revulsion against "blood mixing" is shared by Sam and Laurie, and Laurie feels about Debbie exactly as Ethan does—"it's too dangerous. She's a woman growed now." And only Laurie can utter Debbie's racist doom: "Fetch *what* home? The leavings of a Comanche buck sold time and again to the highest bidder."

Ford's last film, *Seven Women* (1966), represents a return to the theme of miscegenation: the final image in a long and brilliant career of filmmaking shows a "white" woman and a "yellow" man lying dead together as a substitute for making love.<sup>12</sup> The woman

<sup>9</sup>J. A. Place, *The Western Films of John Ford* (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1974) 164.

<sup>10</sup>Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1970) 67. See also Calvin C. Hernton, *Sex and Racism in America* (N.Y.: Grove Press, 1965) xi.

<sup>11</sup>With the exception of McBride and a few others, these themes have been largely elided in the commentary. A recurrent pattern of response to *The Searchers* was to claim to be baffled by its dark psychological moves, to find the film unreadable, as if the notion of sexual racism was outside the rhetoric of culture; for example, "Ethan's motives by the end of the search are, in fact, so mixed that psychology rather runs away with things. Will he shoot the girl? Does he love or loathe her?" (Isabel Quigley, in Edward Buscombe, "Critics and 'The Searchers,'" *Screen Education* 17 [Autumn 1975]: 45).

<sup>12</sup>Miscegenation subtly marks Ford's "first" western, *Stagecoach* (1939), when a pistol slowly enters the closeup frame of Lucy Mallory praying against the certainty of rape or death at the hands of ravaging Indians. This image is an American icon that circulates back through the western work of Griffith and David Belasco (Raymond William Stedman, *Shadows of the Indian* [Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1982] 108).

<sup>8</sup>Tag Gallagher, *John Ford: The Man and His Films* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986) 430, 341.

doctor had offered herself to Tunga Khan in exchange for the release of the missionaries and their charges, but, rather than submit to a Mongolian caress, she had chosen to join him only in death. Miscegenation is such an obsession that in *Sergeant Rutledge* Ford puts his most beloved character, a loyal first sergeant, on trial for rape and murder. Like *Donovan's Reef*, *Sergeant Rutledge* is "mistaken" about its miscegenation; the sergeant was innocent and the criminal was actually white. In a Ford film, an African American man would never do it to a white daughter—although an Indian would.

There are differences between the two races: for Ford (and Twain) African Americans are generally infantilized and domesticated; they are a kind of household pet in contrast to the alien and lustful Indian. How this opposition came to be is not clear; in most studies of American racism the configuration is reversed: the African American is sexually aggressive, the Indian is cold, aloof, and sexually tepid.<sup>13</sup> Not only do Indian men not lust after white women, they have internalized a horror of miscegenation—that is, the heavy hand of repression has struck the literary Indian at least twice. In Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824), "the titular figure, a stereotypical good Indian, is accused of loving a white girl, Mary Conant. . . . 'He had looked upon her with reverence, which almost amounted to adoration. If any dregs of human feelings were mingled with these sentiments, he at least was not aware of it; and now that the idea was forced upon him, he rejected it, as a kind of blasphemy'" (Barnett 95). This contradiction in our cultural fantasy of the Indian can be illustrated by James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), a forest romance devoted to the aggressions of a vengeful and lustful Indian, Magua, and the fantasy of miscegenation. But Cooper also has his hero, Natty Bumppo, say, "he who thinks that even a Mingo would ill-treat a woman, unless it be to tomahawk her, knows nothing of Indian natur', or the laws of the wood."<sup>14</sup>

The symbolic function of white women on the

frontier was to preserve the purity of the civilization, but purity was conceived sexually and sexuality was precariously conceived within a fantasy of dirt.<sup>15</sup> The Reverend Silas Pendrake of Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* puts the matter graphically: "Woman is a vessel, and it is within man's power to make that vessel a gold chalice or a slop bucket" (91). In *Two Rode Together*, Elena bitterly exclaims, "my touch would have to be washed off like filth, because I was touched by a Comanche." Sexual contact with the Indian dirtied the family, the community, and ultimately the civilization as a whole because the Indian was not merely an enemy and an inferior but the introjected Other. Contact that debases the white woman, however, elevates the white male: under the title of the "Higher Masculine Sentimentality," Leslie Fiedler has discussed the male fantasy of living with the Indians, embracing their culture, and being adopted into their tribe.<sup>16</sup>

The "real" fear in the miscegenation fantasy is not that Indians will lust after white women but that the women will become aroused. Also in the beginning of *The Searchers*, Debbie's brother Ben introduces the topic of sexuality and accuses the woman of desire, as if that were a crime—"She's got a fella, kisses him too." The other side of this is the imposition of fictions of violent sexuality upon Debbie by Ethan, the white Texas society, and many of the film's critics; but all that we see is Debbie quietly incorporated into Indian domestic culture.

In this welter of fantasy and delusion, miscegenation is a fate worse than death. The narrative logic of the captive women episode in *The Searchers* is that living with Indians drives white women mad through some unbearable combination of rape and self-loathing—and all that the authoritarian white male can do is look on helplessly and fix his face even harder for revenge (Luhr 88, 91). Miscegenation is

<sup>14</sup>James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (New York: New American Library, 1962) 255.

<sup>13</sup>Louise K. Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975) passim; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968) 161-62. Richard Slotkin—*Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1973)—is the one exception I have come across: "Mather and his cohorts saw the Indian as insatiably lustful, a being of overbearing sexual power" (202-03).

<sup>15</sup>Carol J. Deming, "Miscegenation in Popular Western History and Fiction," in *Women and Western American Literature*, eds. Helen Winter Stauffer and Susan J. Rosowski (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Publishing Company, 1982) 90-97. See also Jordan 255 and Kovel 84.

<sup>16</sup>Leslie Fiedler, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (N.Y.: Stein and Day, 1968) 94.

irresistibly appalling, and if it does not madden the women then it will madden the men: in John Huston's *The Unforgiven* (1960), a young girl who has lived in a family since infancy is accused of being part Indian by a demented old man who resembles a Southern colonel, and a brother instantly moves out, repudiating his family and aligning himself with a suddenly hostile community. As with Lucy Dabney in *Sergeant Rutledge*, Lucy Edwards' rape is also made to be an act of murder, telling us clearly that miscegenation is also murder.

Ford includes a reversal of the miscegenation plot to offset the strain, the courtship of Marty and Look, whose name is so close to Lucy. It is the obverse of the plot that so enrages Ethan, and the viewer who may not know how he feels about Ethan's feelings about Debbie and the Indians knows that when it's an Indian woman and a white man it's just funny (McBride 162; Place 168). The laugh is a long one: we laugh with Ethan, with Lars [John Qualen], and with Charlie [Ken Curtis].

And yet it is also not funny to Charlie, who, with his incredible accent—"Ah'll thaynk yew tuh unhayend mah fayancee"—acts out a version of Southern white purity: "What right have you got to be talking marriage to any decent woman." Charlie's amnesia here does make a point: that bashfulness and propriety with the white woman is bought at the price of sexuality with the woman of color—"I'll bet she ain't the first squaw—"

*The Searchers* is a significant western because it works through the daughter rather than the son. Set at the intersection of race and sexuality, it brings Indian-hating into conjunction with miscegenation—and daughters carry that theme. Cooper's role as a progenitor of the western is not clear from a consideration of event and treatment, but what was undoubtedly influential was his insistence in *The Last of the Mohicans* that the only story one could tell in a western or a wild setting was the racist story of the purity or mixture of blood; and *The Searchers* tells us clearly that what is at stake in the genre is female purity. After reading Robert Warshow's classic essay on the genre and seeing young Gary Cooper, Henry Fonda, and John Wayne, one might think that it is all a matter of male purity; as if in compensation, *The Searchers* demonstrates, in the performance of John Wayne, how correspondingly impure it will allow the male hero to become.

Miscegenation is a concern of more than the

western genre: in the flapper cycles of the 20s and 30s, in films with titles like *Our Dancing Daughters*, the daughter is generally framed by a fiction of miscegenation and unmediated female desire. In these films, the middle-class daughters move as if by magnetism into the arms and the beds of Italians, Spaniards, Jews (precisely the people that they were brought up to despise), and they act as if they find at the wild parties and night clubs the vitality that is lacking in their own milieu. What is despicable about Hollywood gangsters is not that they are criminals, but that they are ethnically marginal; gangster is a code word for the ethnically marginal individual.

*The Searchers* is an important western also because it identifies the protagonist of the genre as a man who has devoted his life to hating and revenge: in it, John Wayne plays a sadistic bully. Ethan's virtue in the film is his capacity to remain inflexible and to dominate others; he describes himself as a "critter [that]'ll just keep comin' on." He lives in a world of contestation: "only one way you can stop me . . . and that's kill me." Sam says that Ethan has never surrendered to the Union army and Ethan confirms it: "don't believe in surrenders."

The camera legitimizes his sullenness and anger. The camera follows him and lingers over his surliness. Yet a kind of criminalization is fastened on Ethan in one of the more curious episodes of the film—an episode in which Ethan performs a slow and delicious act of sadism, not against Indians but against a member of his own race. Ethan lures a trader, Jacob Futterman, into sneaking up on what he believes to be a sleeping pair of travellers, while Ethan lies awake waiting to blow him away. He shoots Futterman in the back, and a warrant for murder is later circulated against him. Sam's execution of the warrant is interrupted by the opportunity to finally annihilate Scar and his village; and the matter of the crime, arrest, and trial is left suspended at the end of the film. Futterman is a stock object of animus in Ford, the renegade trader of *Fort Apache*. Immediately after the scene of homicide, however, Ethan and Marty outfit themselves as Indian traders, although no connection is made with "the late Mr. Futterman."

Ethan is tough and closed in regard to his own desires. His dialogue is curious: he never explains, never expresses wants, he only denies, refuses—he only talks in curt negatives. He has no social energy; he sets himself at odds with all

groups: "Now you stay outta this, all of yuh. I don't want you with me. I don't need yuh for what I gotta do." The film opens with the restoration of a family, but Ethan is touchy and confrontative; he bristles at stray remarks by a brother he hasn't seen for years. In response to Aaron's invocation of family obligations, Ethan answers that "he expects to pay his way."

Ethan found Marty after an Indian raid, but he dismisses any value in that connection: "it just happened to be me, no need to make more of it."<sup>17</sup> He spends a lot of time and energy undermining Marty's desires to be connected, to belong to a family. He says to Marty—"Don't call me uncle, I ain't your uncle." When the doctor at the fort asks the searchers, "What's this girl to you?" they both answer at once, but Ethan's answer cuts off Marty's, only Ethan has a name for the relationship—"She's my niece." Ethan tries to prevent Marty from uttering kinship terms, and offers him instead only the following: "She's your nothing. She's no kin to you at all" (Luhr 89). By the end of the film, however, Marty is released from his linguistic spell and is able to identify himself to Debbie as "your brother Marty." On the other hand, Ethan loves to celebrate what he considers to be the obscene relationship between Marty and Look by repeatedly calling her "Mrs. Pawley."

Sam Clayton, however, restores relationship. When another son, Lt. Greenfield, denies kinship and calls his father Colonel, Sam challenges him:

"Hold on son, who is this Colonel Greenfield you're talkin' about?"

"Why, Colonel Greenfield is Colonel Greenfield sir, commanding officer of the Fifth—"

"And who are you?"

"I'm Lieutenant Greenfield sir."

"Mm hm, what is it your pa wants tuh know—"

Sam calls everyone sister or brother—except Ethan.

Talking of the vagueness of wanted posters, Sam tells Ethan, "you fit a lot of descriptions." Along with Kirby York of *Rio Grande* and Old Man Clanton of *My Darling Clementine*, Ethan

certainly fits the type of the implacable Ford patriarch. He wants Debbie dead not only for the sake of the family and the culture, but for the sake of his own masculinity and the western genre itself. Killing Debbie is an act aimed at protecting himself as a hero of manliness. Ethan must destroy Debbie because she is another generation and generation undermines and exposes the myth of the self-reliant manly hero: he gets old, he dies, others replace him, he is not unique.<sup>18</sup> In *Stagecoach*, a young John Wayne acts surprised when Claire Trevor comes out with a new-born baby as if he didn't know how we come to be. In *The Horse Soldiers*, William Holden confronts a sadistic John Wayne and tells him, "come off it Colonel, even you were born."

Generation says that things will change, and Ethan as the patriarchal American hero cannot allow that. Even Sam performs a symptomatic denial of generation in his first response to Ethan, by punning, "well, the prodigal brother." Ethan repudiates generation with Marty: "No need to call me sir, either, ner grandpa, ner Methuselah." And his refrain, "that'll be the day," is a denial of the future. But generation mumbles in the background despite Ethan's fury. At the funeral we hear the lines "man who is born of woman." A grandma is buried out beyond the house where Lucy and Debbie are sent to play the "sleep" game. At the Jorgensen house, Futterman's letter is fetched from another grandma's chest. In the opening of the film, Ethan tried to return after ten years without comment, as if nothing that had happened in the intervening time were worth taking account of. But Debbie immediately introduced the theme of change which is forbidden in the western where, by definition, problems get solved but nobody has to change. Ethan opens the film by saying, "Lucy, you ain't much bigger than when I last saw you," and the girl answers, "I'm Debbie." The film opens with time and change, the girls ten years older and Ethan unable to recognize them.

Daughters carry oppositional weight in this film, while the sons are respectful and obedient. Sons are brought in at the end in a rush; they come to mess things up and be mocked by Ethan

<sup>17</sup>In the book the name of the older searcher is Amos. Ethan is the name of Marty's dead father (Alan LeMay, *The Searchers* [New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1954] 146).

<sup>18</sup>Ethan threatens to shoot Debbie when she comes to warn the searchers outside Scar's camp, but Marty puts his body in front of hers. They stand together, in the background of the shot, looking like a single small figure with a large Ethan in the left foreground poised to kill all generation.



and Sam. The sons may not be all that innocent, however, for Sam is accidentally stabbed by Lt. Greenfield, who is played by Pat Wayne. This young officer is the son of an authoritarian father, a third patriarch/governor entitled to the status of Ethan or Sam. And the sabre that stabs Sam in the ass may be regarded as the "return" of the sabre that Ethan gave to Ben as his reluctant bequest and Ben's inheritance.

Ethan and Marty are the most obvious case of generational conflict in the film. Their opposition is a reprise of that of the two families in *My Darling Clementine*, headed by a father and by a brother: one is primordial, savage, and sociopathic; the other is soft-spoken and law-abiding. Ethan is very competitive with Marty: "I could whup you to a frazzle"; his relationship to Marty is one of deprivation—taking drinks away from him and pulling him away from his food. His message to Marty is very clear: "Yeah, I know what you want me to know, that I got no kin, I got no money, no horses—all I got here's a bunch of dead man's clothes to wear." On the other hand, during the performance for Futterman, Ethan treats Marty like a loving parent concerned about his welfare, covering him with a blanket and tucking him in.

Yet the film insists on giving Ethan credit for Debbie's recovery in an ending that simply dismisses Marty—an act of gross injustice considering Marty's devotion and heroism on Debbie's behalf. The ending also simply erases the threat of miscegenation. We expect this of Hollywood endings and perhaps should not question it too closely. But if the ending is a gesture that relates only scandalously to the rest of the film, the ending also contains a gesture that erases political conviction: Jean-Luc Godard writes, "How can I hate John Wayne upholding Goldwater and yet love him tenderly when abruptly he takes Natalie Wood into his arms in the last reel?" (qtd. in McBride 148). Godard refers to a moment when Ethan advances murderously toward a cringing Debbie and then suddenly lifts her up in a swinging arc.<sup>19</sup>

It is very hard to argue with the fact that this is an extreme instance of narrative rupture—that we have been jammed into a happy ending in spite of narrative logic, psychological consistency, and the larger truths of the culture that were receiving remarkable elucidation in the film. This gesture, however, may not be entirely innocent either. Toward the end of *Drums along the Mohawk*, Lana Martin gives birth to her child and the father, Gilbert, picks it up

and holds it high. As she looks on beaming, Gilbert pivots; the camera follows him and cuts the mother out of the frame completely, leaving an image of the father and child as the only inhabitants of that visual universe. One of the family functions that Ford's films perform is to take the child from the mother for the father (which also means separating the viewers as children from the mother, from the soft warmth, the phantasmagoria of color and pleasure and re-attaching them to the father as ideology in the guise of law).<sup>20</sup> In *Three Godfathers*, a new-born child is formally transferred from a dying mother to a series of fathers. *Rio Grande* provides a limit case: there the father, Kirby Yorke [also played by John Wayne], is closed and sadistic and the mother [Maureen O'Hara] is devoted and loving. Trooper Jeff Yorke [Claude Jarmon, Jr.] has run away from his mother's care, joined the cavalry, and volunteered for the frontier to be near his father, the commanding officer, who abandoned him in the past and who refuses to acknowledge him in the present. In a scene that is understood to be delicious, Yorke has his son stand stiffly at attention before him while the mother looks on in pain. He tells the son that he

<sup>19</sup>This is a reprise of another moment at the beginning of the film when Ethan holds a much smaller Debbie up to the rafters.

This final gesture is also in the book, but there it is wonderfully right: Amos rides at someone he believes is Debbie:

Mart yelled, "Amos—no!" He fired wild at Amos' back, missing from a distance at which he never missed. Then, unexpectedly, Amos raised his pistol without firing, and shifted it to his rein hand. He reached down to grab the girl as if to lift her onto his saddle.

The girl turned upon the rider, and Mart saw the broad brown face of a young Comanche woman, who could never possibly have been Debbie. Her teeth showed as she fired upward at Amos, the muzzle of her pistol almost against his jacket. He fell heavily; his body crumpled as it hit, and rolled over once, as shot game rolls, before it lay still.

(LeMay 264-65)

Another odd scene in the book helps to develop the uncanny suggestion that all the women who have governed the search are imposters: on their second to last return, they stop at the old Edwards place and find squatters living there—"a malarial woman" frying jack rabbit is wearing a dress of Martha's that hangs loose on her frame, and some of her five children are wearing Debbie's clothes.

<sup>20</sup>This is also a major project of film melodrama, as in King Vidor's *Stella Dallas* (1937).

cannot expect any favoritism, even any recognition, from him. But the trope of repudiation is turned and the rejection is given to the son who barks at Kirby Yorke, "I didn't come to this post to call you father, sir!" We read this scene by opposites, of course; we read in it a transcendently fierce connection between

father and child that neither years of absence nor the love of a mother can diminish.□

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Adélia Prado

LOVE SONG

*Translated by Ellen Watson*

First came cancer of the liver, then came the man  
leaping from bed to floor and crawling around  
on all fours, shouting: "Leave me alone, all of you,  
just leave me be," such was his pain without remission.  
Then came death and, in that zero hour, the shirt missing a  
button.

I'll sew it on, I promise,  
but wait, let me cry first.  
"Ah," said Martha and Mary, "if You had been here,  
our brother would not have died." "Wait," said Jesus,  
"let me cry first."  
So it's okay to cry? I can cry too?  
If they asked me now about life's joy,  
I would have only the memory of a tiny flower.  
Or maybe more, I'm very sad today:  
what I say, I unsay. But God's Word  
is the truth. That's why this song has the name it has.

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FROM BAKHTIN TO GRAMSCI:  
INTERTEXTUALITY, PRAXIS, HEGEMONY

In Borges' exemplary fable "The Garden of Forking Paths," one will recall how the German spy Dr. Yu Tsun, a Chinese teacher of English formerly at the Tsingtao Hochschule, by a contrived happenstance, encountered his ancestor, Ts'ui Pen, the novelist of *The Garden of Forking Paths*, when he is about to kill his victim, the Sinologist Dr. Stephen Albert. Viewed retrospectively, the form of the narrative itself serves as context and symbol of the art-work discovered by this spy linking two nationalities/cultures. We can consider the narrative, the killer's testimony before his execution, as a poignant meditation on time, freedom, and necessity, even as we decipher it as a warning on the hazardous quest of identity: we join our fated protagonist in mapping the labyrinth on the way to self-discovery. But what we discover ultimately is that the lines of representation and death coincide: recognition by the Other (Yu Tsun's Chief, Dr. Albert) signifies death. This fatal identity, subtly dispersed in the interstices of a duplicitous text mediated by other topographers (editor, implied historian), claims at one point a racial motivation: "I carried out my plan because I felt the Chief had some fear of those of my race, of those uncountable forebears whose culmination lies in me. I wished to prove to him that a yellow man could save his armies."<sup>1</sup> In terms of rhetoric, it was metonymy, not syllogism, that saved Yu Tsun's "face" only to push him into that vertigo of *différance* (pace Derrida) which he calls "infinite penitence and sickness of heart."

From another perspective, what Borges has staged is less an existential allegory than a variant of the imperial theme of the East/Asia unable to represent itself, thus finding its essence only through the mediation of the West. It may seem that we are a long way from Hegel's judgment (delivered in 1830-31) on the character of the Chinese people: "Its distinguishing feature is, that everything which

belongs to Spirit—unconstrained morality in practice and theory, Heart, inward Religion, Science and Art properly so-called—is alien to it."<sup>2</sup> But in a textbook like *Introduction to Comparative Literature*, François Jost improves on Hegel by predicating a self-contained and xenophobic essence on entire hybrid populations: "All the wisdom of Confucius did not enable the Chinese to discover the pineapple of the Caribbees or the girls of Baghdad. . . . In Asia, exoticism affected literature only to a very limited extent, for it did not correspond to an inner need either on the part of the public or of the poet—one further proof of the basically introverted character of Eastern peoples."<sup>3</sup>

In discussing literary exoticism as a trend, Jost documents the mutations of style from Montesquieu and Voltaire to Flaubert and Durrell. He cites Paul Valéry's explanation for the mirage of the Orient: "For this noun to produce in the mind its full and entire effect, it is necessary above everything else not to have been in the hazy region that it designates" (125). This is, to be sure, just one approach to the invention of what Edward Said calls "Orientalism," a complex strategy of discourse and institutional practices that may in the end perhaps produce that chaos, that mixture of races, which Nietzsche's Zarathustra needs "to give birth to a dancing star." The crisis of First World/Western humanities, of which Orientalism (vis-à-vis Third World critiques) is a symptom, has surfaced through what we now know as the interrogation of the self-identical Cartesian subject and its claim to truth and knowledge. Decentering that self-contained subject of Reason and History, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud (according to the current orthodoxy) exposed the presumptive basis of its power and

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover, 1956) 138.

<sup>3</sup>*Introduction to Comparative Literature* (Ind.: Pegasus, 1974) 112-13.

<sup>1</sup>Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (New York: Grove, 1962) 91.

authority. But has this liberated the Other—women, colonized Asians or Africans, other sub-alterns—from its perdurable effects?

In the crisis of Western hermeneutics and epistemology, the guardians of the liberal marketplace of ideas have sought to remedy the discontent of their clientele and entrepreneurs (professors, students) by a re-appropriation of the margins (the barbarians at the gates) and their accommodation into the center. Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud are domesticated to revitalize old New Critical maxims and reinforce the Kantian dualism of ends and means implicit in pragmatism and positivistic-technological culture in general. In this process of reconstituting the hegemony of idealist aesthetics, the work of Bakhtin construed in ahistorical fashion has been phenomenally instrumental. For example, Wayne Booth, in his well-known article "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism," deploys the key notions of polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia to argue for a new, more all-encompassing pluralism that would even expose the androcentrism, that egregious flaw, in Bakhtin's book on Rabelais in accord with current feminist thinking. The term "ideology," which before would be terribly offensive to neoAristotelian sensibilities, now becomes an honorific marker when Bakhtin's statements are invoked: "Human consciousness does not come into contact with existence directly, but through the medium of the surrounding ideological world. . . . In fact, the individual consciousness can only become consciousness by being realized in the forms of the ideological environment proper to it. . . ." The novel becomes the model genre because it is heteroglotic, that is, "it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, . . . between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form." In spite of Bakhtin's blindness to his male-centered discourse, Booth believes that Bakhtin's "version of dialectical thinking" is peculiarly useful,

<sup>4</sup>Qtd. in Wayne Booth, "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* Sept. 1982: 52. The source is P. N. Medvedev/Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978) 14. On the polyphonic novel, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Mich.: Ardis, 1973) 3-37.

although in the end he calls on the thoroughgoing skepticism of David Hume to account for the eternal differences between men and women, old and young, etc. Nonetheless the perspectivism of Bakhtin is congenial in that it demonstrates our freedom to take in (as Booth puts it) "the many voices we have inherited and discovering, in our inescapably choral performance, which voices must be cast out of our choir." Thus is the "chaotic" politics of interpretation prevented from disturbing the polite conversation of predominantly white males in the elite academies of the Empire.

From another angle, the British critic David Lodge finds Bakhtin's alternative to Saussurean linguistics heuristic and catalyzing. He cites Bakhtin's definition of the word as a "two-sided act. . . . It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. . . . A word is territory *shared* by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker *and* his interlocutor."<sup>5</sup> Lodge values Bakhtin's placing the novel at the center of poetics and approaching it "via the typology of discourse rather than via the Aristotelian categories of plot and character, or the Romantic concept of 'style as the man.'"<sup>6</sup> He prizes above all Bakhtin's belief that the privileged quality of the novel is its open-ended or unfinished nature: "the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and always will be in the future"—such is the message at the end of Dostoevsky's novels. What grounds this conception of novelistic utopianism, heteroglossia, value-laden discourse, etc., is of course Bakhtin's understanding that whereas the mathematical and natural sciences aim for mastery of "reified objects," the epistemology of the human sciences (aesthetics, literature) facilitates the production of knowledge by interpreting the discourse of others. The critic or literary scholar "is forced to engage in talk not only about discourse but with discourse in order to penetrate its ideological meaning, which is attainable only by a form of dialogical understanding that includes evaluation and response."<sup>7</sup> The object of inquiry of the humanistic disciplines is the text, or humans as producers of texts ("the immediate reality" of thought and experience); "the real

<sup>5</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin/V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Academic Press, 1973) 85-86.

<sup>6</sup>"After Bakhtin," *The Linguistics of Writing*, eds. Nigel Fabb et al. (New York: Methuen, 1987) 92.

object is social man speaking and expressing himself through other means." By "text," Bakhtin refers to utterance or discourse as language in its "concrete and living totality," a "concrete socio-linguistic horizon" whose theme or meaning can only be apprehended by an "active" or dialogical understanding which is "always historical and personal." The person understanding poses a question to the knowable seeking not accuracy but depth of insight: "The object of the human sciences is *expressive* and *speaking being*. Such a being never coincides with itself, that is why it is inexhaustible in its meaning and significance" (Todorov 23-24).

All utterance then is grounded in the social environment, in semantic intersubjectivity, in a community which is not homogeneous but heterogeneous, a differentiated unity (to use Gramsci's phrase). In *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, Bakhtin formulates his controlling principle: "Human personality becomes historically real and culturally productive only insofar as it is part of a social whole, in its class and through its class. . . . Only such a social and historical localization makes man real, and determines the content of his personal and cultural creation."<sup>8</sup> Thus both the internal and external expressions of the speaking subject are "wholly the product of social interrelations."

That observation may sound like a routine recapitulation of Marx's fundamental insight that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual," Feuerbach's error, but "[i]n its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" (No. 6 of "Theses on Feuerbach"). The mainstream expounders of Bakhtin's dialogism almost never allude to the possible influence of Marxist texts on Bakhtin, such as, for example, Marx's insight developed in *The German Ideology* concerning the imbrication of consciousness in praxis:

. . . man also possesses 'consciousness', but, even so, not inherent, not 'pure' consciousness. From the start the "spirit" is afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of

air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men. Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me: the animal does not enter into 'relations' with anything, it does not enter into any relation at all. For the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all.<sup>9</sup>

The social contextualization of discourse elaborated by Bakhtin can then be derived from the historical-materialist axiom that all utterance or praxis is grounded in concrete, specific histories.

In his central statement "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry" (1926), Bakhtin redefines utterance as verbal communication dependent on extra-verbal contexts: the common spatial horizon of the interlocutors, their knowledge and understanding of the situation, and their common evaluation of that situation. Discourse is always oriented to the other person: "'I' can actualize itself in discourse only by relying upon 'we.'" In this way every quotidian utterance appears as an objective and social enthymeme.<sup>10</sup> Hence the fundamental reality of language is verbal interaction, an exchange of utterances cognized as a social act of communication; the theme of an utterance, for

<sup>9</sup>*The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) 158. However, Volosinov's work cited above illustrates a Marxist project of theorizing the dialectics of language and social relations; a fruitful comparison can be made with Ferruccio-Rossi Landi, *Language As Work and Trade* (Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1983). For the outline of a Marxist theory of communication, see Yves de la Haye, "Introduction," *Marx and Engels on the Means of Communication* (New York: International General, 1979) 9-55. A resourceful use of Bakhtin can be found in Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (New York: Methuen, 1979) 75-92.

<sup>8</sup>Qtd. in Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984) 16.

<sup>9</sup>V. N. Volosinov, *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, trans. I. R. Titunik (New York: Academic Press, 1976) 31.

<sup>10</sup>"Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art," *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* 100. See Bakhtin's essay on speech genres in M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986) 60-102. See also Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984) 63-94.

Bakhtin, is always "the concrete historical situation that engendered the utterance." "Intonation" is the term Bakhtin gives to the gestic expression or embodiment of values, the axiological or ideological horizon, in which the verbal and nonverbal boundaries intersect. In his book *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Todorov emphasizes the three-role drama in Bakhtin's notion of discourse: its orientation to the speaker, the addressee or listener, and the "hero" or the topic, the third decisive participant. In this model of communication, the relations between speaker and listener are always in a process of transformation. Unlike the structuralist model, there is no ready message to be transmitted but one which is constructed in the process of interaction or communication. What is meaning then but "the answers to the questions" posed by the process characterized by heteroglossia or diversity of voices. In effect all discourses are intertextual, that is, they enter into semantic relations with other texts, a transaction enabled by the sociality of all human activity.

Underlying this theory of the utterance is Bakhtin's philosophical premise that knowledge of one's self can only be obtained through the mediation of the other. Alterity and exotopy ("an elsewhere beyond integration or reduction") inform the possibility of self-knowledge:

It is only in another human being that I find an aesthetically (and ethically) convincing experience of human finitude, of a marked-off empirical objectivity. . . . Only another human being can give me the appearance of being consubstantial with the external world. . . . I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help. The most important acts, constitutive of self-consciousness, are determined by their relation to another consciousness (a "thou"). Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for loss of self. . . . It turns out that every internal experience occurs on the border, it comes across another, and this essence resides in this intense encounter. . . . The very being of man (both internal and external) is a *profound communication*. To be means to *communicate*. . . . To be means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself.

Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he looks *in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other*. . . .

(The Dialogical Principle 95-96)

This principle of radical alterity which can paradoxically generate knowledge of selves is translated by Bakhtin's Western expounders as infinite relativity, perspectivism, a horizon of plural consciousness. It is an unfinished, open-ended colloquy. On this point, Paul de Man judges Bakhtin's exotopy (otherness/outsideness) as less a hermeneutic than a metaphysical theorem, an ontological thesis.<sup>11</sup> We have thus entered the forbidden realm of the undecidable, of indeterminacy. Overshadowing his affirmation of the populist, subversive carnival of Rabelais, Bakhtin's praise of Dostoevsky's novels as one where "we have a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights, each with its own world, combining in the unity of an event but nonetheless without fusing," becomes itself the authoritative guarantee of tolerance and individual freedoms.

To test Bakhtin's usefulness for literary interpretation and judgment, suppose we ask the consequences of applying dialogism to a reading of, for example, Leroi Jones's celebrated play *Dutchman*? You will perhaps recall the explosive climax of that confrontation between Lula, the white woman who functions as the seductive provocateur here, and Clay, the middle-class suburban black youth, in the labyrinth of the New York subway. Lula has been taunting him for being "just a dirty white man," and tempting him to break out, calling him "Ol Thomas Woolly-Head" who "Let the white man hump his ol' mama, and he jes' shuffle off in the woods and hide his gentle gray head." What would Bakhtin say of Clay's discourse—monologic, heterologal? Here is part of it:

Don't you tell me anything! If I'm a middle-class fake white man . . . let me be. And let me be in the way I want. [*Through his teeth*]

I'll rip your lousy breasts off! Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there

<sup>11</sup>See *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986) 109-10.

for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart. You don't ever know that. And I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats. I mean wantonly. You great liberated whore! You f[---] some black man, and right away you're an expert on black people. What a lotta s[---] that is. The only thing you know is that you come if he bangs you hard enough. And that's all. The belly rub? You wanted to do the belly rub? S[---], you don't even know how. You don't know how. That ol' dipty-dip s[---] you do, rolling your ass like an elephant. That's not my kind of belly rub. Belly rub is not Queens. Belly rub is dark places, with big hats and overcoats held up with one arm. Belly rub hates you. Old bald-headed four-eyed ofays popping their fingers . . . and don't know yet what they're doing. They say, "I love Bessie Smith." And don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, "Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass." Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she's saying, and very plainly, "Kiss my black ass." And if you don't know that, it's you that's doing the kissing. xxxx xxxx xxxx [*Suddenly weary*]

Ahhh. S[---]. But who needs it? I'd rather be a fool. Insane. Safe with my words, and no deaths, and clean, hard thoughts, urging me to new conquests. My people's madness. Hah! That's a laugh. My people. They don't need me to claim them. They got legs and arms of their own. Personal insanities. Mirrors. They don't need all those words. They don't need any defense. But listen, though, one more thing. And you tell this to your father who's probably the kind of man who needs to know at once. So he can plan ahead. Tell him not to preach so much rationalism and cold logic to these niggers. Let them alone. Let them sing curses at you in code and see your filth as simple lack of style. Don't make the mistake, through some irresponsible surge of Christian charity, of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or maybe they'll begin to listen. And then, maybe one day, you'll find they actually do understand exactly what you are talking about, all these fantasy people. All these blues people. And on that day, as sure as s[---], when you really

believe you can "accept" them into your fold, as half-white trustees late of the subject peoples. With no more blues, except the very old ones, and not a watermelon in sight, the great missionary heart will have triumphed, and all of those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious and sane, and they'll murder you. They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations. Very much like your own. They'll cut your throats, and drag you out to the edge of your cities so the flesh can fall away from your bones, in sanitary isolation.<sup>12</sup>

Here we confront the intensity of logomachia, utterance as the battleground or site of racial war, corresponding to what Bakhtin says: "Each word is a little arena for the clash of and crisscrossing of differently oriented social accents." Take the locutionary force of expressions like "belly rub," "Uncle Tom," "I love Bessie Smith . . .," whose libidinal charge or import conveyed by their intonation exposes from its dark recess in the country's archives the whole blood-soaked history of black-white relations since the days of slavery. For Bakhtin, intonation or tonality configures the interface between the life-situation (the unsaid, the absent context) and the signifiers themselves, so that it condenses the element of struggle, the political, even as the whole speech is pervaded by historicity. One can ask, in this spirit, "Whose words are those Clay is hurling around, and for whom are they meant?"

Following the cardinal axioms of Bakhtin's "The Architectonics of Answerability" in which one's personal life is conceived as an action suffused with ethical responsibility, Clay's utterance signifies as a threatening prophecy of what would happen if blacks lose their otherness and become "stand-up Western men." We know that the play's denouement answers this with Lula's violent murder of Clay. Initially Clay's utterance reflects back Lula's image or phantasm of blacks, a condensation of white

<sup>12</sup>*Dutchman and The Slave* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1964) 34-36. Aside from the explicit allusion to the legend of the "Flying Dutchman," Jones may also be evoking the other sense of "dutchman" as "a wedge or block of wood used to fill a space made by a poorly constructed joint or by the removal of broken or defective material." For the historical context of the play, see the synoptic account by Howard Zinn, *The Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper, 1980) 146-70.



pathology vis-à-vis blacks. His response also defines Lula who is here less an individual than an allegorical rendering of the racist and sexist ethos of the dominant society. It is Lula's or the Other's image of the black male that Clay recuperates, inflects, articulates. So far this aligns with Bakhtin's rhetoric of answerability: I exist only insofar as the Other listens or speaks to me, and vice versa. It presumes a principle of cooperation, as prescribed by speech-act theory. But what I want to point out is that for all its suspicion of psychologism the Bakhtinian approach tends to stress the unique existential depth of the speaker's personality (Holquist and Clark correctly equate Bakhtin's paradigm of the speech genre with Lacan's mirror-stage of the Imaginary) so that addressivity, polyphony, and heteroglossia all conspire to fabricate autonomous selves resisting authoritarian, monologic, official discourse. Whereas, I submit, Jones's project is to invent the collective speech of the black petit-bourgeois faction in a moment of crisis. Jones's theater enacts the black man's ordeal of attaining self-consciousness via the mediation of the popular memory and its tradition of revolt. In addressing both the oppressor who manipulates a coercive, disciplinary code and the libidinally invested black bodies whose awakening still lies in the future, Jones refuses a resolution like the unfinalized polyphony of Dostoevsky's novels by aiming for what Bakhtin calls a naive, "objectivized, finalizing form," even a programmatic manifesto (like Yu Tsun's testament) that eventually spells the truth and therefore the protagonist's death.

Although boundless contexts and communities in gestation are also presupposed in Bakhtin's staging of the utterance, the ideal thrust of the dialogic scenario is toward self-knowledge even though in principle the self can never coincide with itself. (One must qualify here that on the evidence of biographical accounts Bakhtin's shifting focus on either the process or product of the speech-situation is predicated on the vicissitudes of his career, even though one can hypothesize a recurrent obsession. This may partly explain why Raymond Williams' appreciation of Bakhtin's insight into the multiaccentual physiognomy of the sign is equally as justifiable as Todorov's and Kristeva's emphasis on intertextuality, etc.)

It is notable that for all of Bakhtin's emphasis on the sociological context or background, he never consistently provides the concrete

multiple determinations that would circumscribe the specific locations or historical positions of his speech-performers (except in his discussion of grotesque realism and the carnivalesque in Rabelais). Mary Russo, an American feminist critic, reminds us that Bakhtin "fails to acknowledge or incorporate the social relations of gender in his semiotic model of the body politic, and thus his notion of the Female Grotesque remains, in all directions, repressed and undeveloped."<sup>13</sup> History for Bakhtin seems like an enigmatic constraint devoid of answerability. He still suffers in part from the paralyzing antinomies of Kantian dualism.

What is chiefly lacking in Bakhtin's theory of the utterance is precisely what we find in the critical reflections of Lukács or Gramsci, namely, the concept of the totality or structural determinations that render any utterance or aesthetic form significant and intelligible. Lukács, for example, would connect *Dutchman* to the social-moral collisions, the over-determined racial conflicts in U.S. society in the fifties and early sixties, which are represented in direct, immediate "typicality" by Clay and Lula. Aesthetic forms (including speech genres contained in them) like the drama and novel are defined by their function in reflecting the particular historical stage in the development of society. And for Lukács, the most crucial factor that catalyzed the metamorphosis of the modern novel from epic and drama is the growing complexity of the division of labor in the transition from feudalism to capitalism which has generated the opposition between public and private, a process of division that heralds the advent of the decentered, schizoid speaking subject in modernist culture. I might add here that this alienation of labor entails the divorce of civil society (family, sexuality) and the state (politics). Lukács cites Marx's analysis of the dichotomy between "the personal individual" and "the class individual" engendered by competition in the marketplace (where the selling and alienation of labor-power as

<sup>13</sup>"Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986) 219. A Foucauldian supplement to or qualification of Bakhtin may be found in Edward Said, "The Text, The World, The Critic," *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979) 188: "Texts are a system of forces institutionalized at some expense by the reigning culture, not an ideal cosmos of ideally equal poems."

commodity, in bourgeois society, defines freedom) which then produces "the accidental character" of individual lives: "Hence, in imagination the individuals under the rule of the bourgeoisie are freer than before, because their conditions of life are more accidental for them; in reality, they are naturally more unfree, because much more subsumed under material power."<sup>14</sup> Seen from this perspective, the novel's function, for Lukács, is to represent how the direction of a social tendency, i.e., social-historical necessity, manifests itself "in the small, imperceptible capillary movements of individual life," whereas in drama, the social contradictions are crystallized in "world-historical individuals" or types in whose personalities "the essential social-moral determinants" are concentrated. Historical praxis of individuals as types instead of the act of communication between individuals occupies center stage in Lukács' thought. From this perspective, we can describe Jones's play as the "typifying" expression of the racial contradictions (overdetermined by class and gender) in American society at a specific conjuncture, conflicts that energize Lula's and Clay's utterances. This is a thematizing strategy that is itself confirmed by the playwright's confession in his autobiography: "Drama proliferates during periods of social upsurge, because it makes real live people the fuel of ideas. . . . During this period, . . . I was struggling to be born, to break out from the shell I could instinctively sense surrounded my own dash for freedom. I was in a frenzy, trying to get my feet solidly on the ground, of reality."<sup>15</sup> Jones here anticipates what Gramsci calls Ibsen's "theater of ideas" with its particular effect of an anti-Aristotelian (but pre-Brechtian) catharsis.

While Lukács does not mainly concern himself with linguistic particularities, Gramsci considers language a fundamental element in the constitution of subjects, of humans as "intellectuals" or self-aware individuals.

<sup>14</sup>Georg Lukács, "Approximation to Life in the Novel and the Play," *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, eds. Elizabeth and Tom Burns (London: Penguin, 1973) 289, 291.

<sup>15</sup>*The Autobiography of Leroi Jones* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984) 187, 194. This autobiography is peculiarly dialogic, multivoiced in a way that approximates Bakhtin's ideal. For another view of the play, see Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *The Black Aesthetics*, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (New York: Anchor, 1972) 264-65.

Gramsci defines language as "a totality of determined notions and concepts and not simply and solely of words grammatically void of content. Every level of language or utterance is permeated with definite concepts of the world; in every person one finds a bundle of contradictory notions, what is called 'common sense,' notions imposed mechanically by various social groups."<sup>16</sup> Here, unlike Bakhtin's triad of speaker-context-addressee, the whole speech situation and its constituents are already articulated as elements of a world-view. Communication is then grasped as the conflict of ideologies which are temporarily stabilized in a hegemonic process. For Bakhtin, however, the ideal speech situation consists of the free play of plural voices: "The authentic environment of an utterance . . . is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance."<sup>17</sup>

One cannot help but sense an aestheticist tendency in Bakhtin to valorize dialogue for its own sake, to fetishize utterance. Gramsci, for his part, opposes any mystification of praxis, of speech or action. The question for Gramsci is how the project of freedom—that is, of forging one's conception of the world "critically and consciously"—can be realized in the face of the compulsive pressures toward mass conformity in class-divided societies. In other words, how can the individual become free in the process of making himself through participation in changing society? Speaking is, for Gramsci, a constituent of praxis; discourse can only be authentically conceived as transformative action. The act of criticizing the multiplicity of voices/languages that interpellate the individual from outside implies also, for Gramsci, criticizing multiple conceptions of the

<sup>16</sup>Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince* (New York: International Publishers, 1957) 58-59. The sociality of the speech-situation, for Gramsci, also characterizes the production and reception of folklore; on this topic, cf. Alberto Maria Cirese, "Gramsci's Observations on Folklore," *Approaches to Gramsci*, ed. Anne Showstack Sassoon (London: Writers and Readers, 1982) 212-47. For the application of Gramscian concepts, see the contributions of Cornel West and Stuart Hall in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988) 17-29, 35-57.

<sup>17</sup>*The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981) 272.

world so as "to make [them] coherent and unified," to criticize those layers or imprints inscribed by social determinants: "The beginning of the critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, that is, a 'know thyself' as the product of the historical process which has left you an infinity of traces gathered together without the advantage of an inventory."<sup>18</sup> The self here is a locus of converging manifold forces, not a static essence or interiority endowed with spiritual plenitude.

Following this line of thinking, one can read Clay's acts of enunciation which I quoted earlier as a passionate attempt to compile and critique this inventory, to transvalue it by means of parody and selective valorization. It is also a struggle to negate by sublimating the voices of the oppressor (internal and external) so as to generate an exorcism of the Dutchman's (or, on second thought, the Dutchwoman's?) curse. We can interpret this curse suggested by the title as Clay's unreflecting obedience to the former slave-master's ideal of rationality which, if pushed to its logical conclusion, spells murder, even destruction of that order which paradoxically identifies him as human under erasure, that is, subject to racist dehumanization. What Clay's speech enacts is therefore not just a reproduction, an echoing of multiple voices drawn from the archive of his race. What his utterance performs in the drama is the criticism and hierarchical ordering of that inventory Gramsci refers to so that his life as object can metamorphose into a conscious, acting subject. The praxis of communication is thus invested with an emancipatory force. In effect Clay's dramatic utterance seeks to mobilize the will to act and change the world.

It becomes clear then that the basic disparity between Bakhtin and Gramsci involves the problematization of speech acts. Bakhtin privileges the performance as value-producing. For Gramsci, the understanding of any cultural text cannot begin from an undue privileging of the speech-situation in its unique unrepeatability, as Bakhtin tends to do, because then the complex relation between the speakers' changing positions and the fluid socio-cultural contexts would be preempted by some a priori

assumption of a sovereign consciousness in control, an idealist element of a homogeneous, unified subject. A proper theorization of ideology (manifested in varied cultural forms of expression, texts) vis-à-vis social life, the drawing up of a research strategy studying the intertextuality of utterances, for Gramsci, would begin with mapping a specific milieu in which the subject finds him or herself inserted. "Languages are social products, the cultural expression of a given people," Gramsci writes; but that does not imply a homogeneous linguistic community because a common language reflects sociohistorical differences, class divisions, etc. Each social group or class produces its specific ways of thinking, feeling, linguistic usages, that is, elements of a world-view that can enter into the construction of a dominant or hegemonic culture. Language stratification prevails with the co-existence of cosmopolitan, "national-popular," provincial or folkloric, religious languages, etc. Language then is a microcosm of social reality as well as an isomorphic image of the larger formation.<sup>19</sup>

Since Gramsci's project is the cultural emancipation of the masses through their transformation into creative, conscious agents of history, the linguistic question—the struggle for a national-popular literature, for example—enters into the shaping of a "socio-cultural unity where dispersed aims and wills can be unified by a single purpose, a common world view." For Bakhtin, this would mean a progression toward imposing an authoritarian discourse, dogmatism *tout court*. But for Gramsci the producers of utterances can only be grasped within the category of a totalizing world-view:

Language also means culture and philosophy (although at the level of common sense) and, therefore, 'language' as a fact is actually a multiplicity of more or less organically coherent and coordinated facts. . . . Every cultural expression, every moral and intellectual activity, has its historically specific language: this language is also called 'technique' and 'structure'. . . . The work of art, though, also contains other 'historical' elements besides its specific

<sup>18</sup>*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 324. On Gramsci's idea of culture as a creative process, see Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980) 23-26.

<sup>19</sup>Gramsci's reflections on language are collected in *Selections from Cultural Writings*, eds. David Forgacs and G. Nowell Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986) 164-87. See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977) 35-42.

emotional and cultural world. These pertain to language meant not only as a purely verbal expression that can be grammatically photographed in a given time and place, but also a sum total of images and modes of expression that are not included in grammar.<sup>20</sup>

Here Gramsci avoids the structuralist trap of synchronicity, the closed circuit of signifier-signified, by an implied semiotics of language use: "'Literary' language is strictly tied to the life of a nation's masses and is only developed slowly and molecularly" (596). Clay's language, from Gramsci's viewpoint, participates in intersecting world-views: those of the white middle class, the black petite bourgeoisie, the folkloric or popular masses, the black proletariat, etc. What the play reveals particularly in the idioms, mannerisms, syncopated or stylized rhythms, and rhetorical figurations is the dialectic of hegemonic and counterhegemonic impulses coexisting in a historic bloc. "Bloc" denotes the moment of a multi-layered struggle of forces when economic infrastructure and cultural superstructure organically coalesce. The sexual and erotic innuendoes are charged with the racial *agon*. It is easy to detect how Clay's speech (like spirituals, minstrel plays, other signifying rituals of the black people) exploits hegemonic style and ideas to create a counterhegemonic articulation of the subaltern race, using his hortatory eloquence, invective, scatological imagery, coded messages, as the mode/site of an overdetermined struggle.<sup>21</sup>

Now, for Gramsci, *Dutchman* would be considered an artistic reflection of the dynamic ensemble of contradictions and discordant elements in U.S. society; the ideology of the dramatic form is not dialogic but a critical,

didactic expression of an emergent philosophy locked in struggle against the dominant one. The qualitative leap of Clay from the position of passive recipient/object to one who initiates a symbolic verbal action may be described as the staging of a transformative or conversion process labeled by Gramsci as "catharsis." He elaborates this key concept in this passage:

The term "catharsis" can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men. This also means the passage from "objective to subjective" and "from necessity to freedom." Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. To establish the "cathartic" moment becomes therefore, it seems to me, the starting-point for all the philosophy of praxis, and the cathartic process coincides with the chain of syntheses which have resulted from the evolution of the dialectic.

(Selections 366-67)

Whereas for Bakhtin this moment of catharsis is either initially assumed to be given in each of the subjects participating in the act of communication, or it is posited as the cumulative result of the act itself, for Gramsci it is a collective action where each individual metamorphoses into a conscious historic agent. This process unfolds within the totality of the class struggle operating in multiple levels or dimensions (political, economic, ideological) of a historic formation. Jones's play registers one moment of this process.

Within this framework, art or literature can be understood as ideological forms of collective consciousness that forfeit their neutrality when they function as effective organizers of human masses, creating "the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle," in specific historical situations ultimately circumscribed by the state. Thus speech acts and utterances are both acting and acted upon, mediated by social practices and institutions (political, economic, ideological). While Bakhtin feels that utterances (unlike the

<sup>20</sup>Qtd. in William Boelhower, "Antonio Gramsci's Sociology of Literature," *Contemporary Literature* 22.4 (1981): 595. For a critique of speech act theories, see Mary Louise Pratt, "Ideology and Speech Act Theory," *Poetics Today* 7 (1986): 59-72. On the hegemonic process and its bearing on critical theory, see Robert Dombroski, *Antonio Gramsci* (Boston: Twayne, 1989) 122-32; and Robert Bocock, *Hegemony* (London: Tavistock, 1986) 33-37.

<sup>21</sup>For a survey of this cultural practice of "signifying," see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The blackness of blackness: a critique of the sign and the Signifying Monkey," *Black Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1984) 285-322.

natural or physical sciences) cannot alter or change the material situation, Gramsci assigns to intellectuals (in the large sense of the articulators of consensus or class mentalities) the task of actively intervening in the ideological class struggle. They serve the classes or groups to which they are attached by mobilizing literature and other cultural expressions to accomplish the project of winning hegemony. For the intellectual committed to socialism, hegemony implies freedom of the national-popular bloc from bourgeois domination and the determinisms of class society attendant to it.

Compared to Gramsci's theory of language use, his dialogism appears limited in its formalism and tendency to essentialist closure. While Bakhtin's theory of answerability and heteroglossia, evolved within the repressive atmosphere of the Stalinist period, may be able to release us from the paralyzing strictures of post-structuralist nihilism and assorted opportunist pragmatisms I have alluded to earlier, it lacks the synthesizing power found in Gramsci's concepts of "catharsis" and "hegemony" which can concretize a hermeneutics of utterances, speech-acts, texts within the "untranscendable horizon of history."

The last phrase is used by Fredric Jameson, one of the few innovative American thinkers, who has ventured to initiate a contentious dialogue with Third World activists. In an essay entitled "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Jameson composes a metacommentary on texts by Chinese writer Lu Hsun and Senegalese novelist Ousmane Sembene with the purpose of demonstrating that all Third World writing necessarily assumes the form of national allegories: "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society."<sup>22</sup> He takes as his point of departure that same pivotal stage that Lukács alluded to in tracking the mutation of the epic into the modern novel: the separation of public and private spheres in capitalist society. In Third World formations, however, the fragmentation of life has not reached the stage experienced in the colonizing metropolis. In Third World societies there prevails a basically

uneven, heterogeneous conjuncture which conflates both the residual precapitalist modes of production/reproduction and emergent capitalist forms.

One can extend this observation to the heterogeneous milieu, the sociohistorical matrix, of Jones's play, for instance. In the politicization of sexuality and the realm of fantasy or the unconscious in *Dutchman*, Jones identifies himself as a partisan Third World artist who refuses to accept the schizoid predicament of the writer in commodity/mass consumer societies of late capitalism. The New York subway train—and by extension the urban metropolis—becomes simultaneously the womb of insurgent popular consciousness and the tomb of bourgeois aspirations for integration/assimilation.

What is at stake in juxtaposing Jameson's approach to those of Bakhtin and Gramsci? I opened this essay by addressing the problem of an egalitarian or even ecumenical dialogue between cultures in the context of the persisting hegemony of the colonizing West and the resistance of non-Western subalterns. The ambiguous position of Borges epitomizes a predicament to which others—Fanon, Che Guevara, Cabral, etc.—have proposed protean solutions. Gramsci's theory of positionality can help clarify and resolve particularly complex artistic practices such as Jones's text instanced above. Cognizant of the risks entailed, Jameson's intervention is one attempt to mediate the asymmetrical positions of Western critic (like Jost or Valery) and Third World artist. In a somewhat utopian gesture, Jameson perceives the position of the Third World intellectual as enviable insofar as it is organically linked to a responsive popular audience, and also at the same time attuned to modernist forms of experience in the industrialized capitalist sectors. Informed by a historical-materialist positioning of art in a global totality, Jameson's reflections on Third World cultural practices demonstrate the synthesizing power of a Marxist critique compared to recent Anglo American appropriations of Bakhtin. While Jameson's intervention, unmediated by the local indigenous traditions of China or Senegal, may be better appraised as a lucid, cogent projection of the dilemma of an American intellectual in search of a community and compensating for its lack by solidarity with revolutionary victims/subalterns of the Empire, it could also serve as an example of a non-exploitative

<sup>22</sup>"Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 69. See the response of Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory," *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987): 3-25; and Jameson's reply in the same issue, 26-27.

discourse which can be contraposed to Borges' fable and Jost's remarks quoted earlier,<sup>23</sup> or to commentaries such as Karl Jaspers on Lao-tzu in his volume *The Great Philosophers*. Faintly echoing Hegel, Jaspers faults the Chinese for never having developed an art of tragedy: ". . . great as their vision and experience of evil have been, the tragic has remained inaccessible to them." Jaspers concludes that Lao-tzu, and for that matter Chinese civilization as a whole, "lacks this self-clarification [of the West], this dialogue with oneself, this eternal process of dispelling the self-deceptions and mystifications and distortions which never cease to beset us."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Lu Hsun's "allegory" actually draws its cogency from the vigorous popular-realist art forms of China, a situation sketched by Fei-ling in her monograph *Proletarian Culture in China* (London: Association for Radical East Asian Studies, 1974) 37-58.

Positing a Western essence, Jaspers establishes a hierarchical differentiation of the Other. Compared to this anxious, nostalgic, self-congratulatory Orientalism, how far and how remote indeed Bakhtin has travelled, via the French (Rabelais) and the German (Goethe) detours, taking what inscrutable and unpredictable turns down the garden of forking paths. . . .□

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<sup>24</sup>*Anaximander Heraclitus Parmenides* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1966) 113-14. For an authentically dialogical response to China, see Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," *Brecht on Theater* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 91-99.

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## WHAT MAKES A MAN TO WANDER? ETHAN EDWARDS OF JOHN FORD'S *THE SEARCHERS*

Of the 54 westerns that John Ford made during his long and distinguished career, one stands out as the most complex and profound statement of Ford's western vision. That film is *The Searchers*. When it first came out, most critics were puzzled by its circuitous, meandering structure; by its multi-textured themes; and by its enigmatic, tortured hero—Ethan Edwards. Today, of course, Ford critics see *The Searchers*, not as an aberration in the Ford canon, but rather as the consummate dramatization of the mature Ford's western mythology.<sup>1</sup> Central to that mythology is the role of the western hero. Throughout Ford's western career, the cowboy hero has provided an index to the growth and development of Ford's view of the west. In creating Ethan Edwards, Ford combined the traits of earlier heroes, and he added elements that made Edwards unique among western heroes in his paradoxical nature. My purpose in the following discussion is to provide an analysis of Ethan Edwards by comparing him to some earlier Ford heroes. I hope to show that an understanding of Ethan Edwards is concomitantly an understanding of Ford's last attempt to forge the heroic resolution.

### II

I should like to begin my analysis—paradoxically—with the last scene of the film, in particular with the key incident in understanding the character of Ethan Edwards. In the film's final shot, the camera peers out upon Ethan from inside the Jorgensen house, a repetition of the film's opening shot. Ethan stands back as the others enter the open door of the Jorgensen home, but Ethan remains outside. He then waits for a moment, crosses his left arm over his chest, holding on to his right arm, turns and walks off into the distance, reversing his

movement in the opening scene. Tag Gallagher in his book *John Ford: The Man and His Films* asks: "Why did Ethan not enter?" Gallagher goes on to state: "Many explanations are plausible, from ones traditional to the western (distant horizons beckon; new duties call; the task is done: the hero belongs to the wilderness), to ones particular to *The Searchers* (Ethan is doomed to wander; happiness is for the simple; his new moral awareness excludes him from the older order.)" Gallagher then submits that "Ethan walks away for the most commonplace of reasons," and that is because people live separately, not in communes (337-38). On this point, Gallagher's answer to the question of why Ethan does not enter is unsatisfactory. In addition, Gallagher interprets Edwards holding his arm as Ford's way of paying tribute to Harry Carey, whose arm gesture was a "signal gesture" and who often walked away at the end of pictures (338).<sup>2</sup> But I believe this gesture has a symbolic meaning in the film, for it helps to explain Ethan's remaining apart from the group.

### III

I have written elsewhere of John Ford's employment of place and space in his westerns, and I should like now to turn to these concepts as they are manifested in *Stagecoach* and *My Darling Clementine* to see if these films help provide an answer as to why Ethan does not enter the Jorgensen home.<sup>3</sup> Several Ford critics, Peter Stowell and Tag Gallagher in particular, have commented upon Ford's essential mythologizing. In one sense, western films in general have dealt with the mythical dimensions of

<sup>1</sup>For insightful discussions of Ford's mythologizing, see, in particular, Tag Gallagher, *John Ford: The Man and His Films* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986); Peter Stowell, *John Ford* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>John Wayne has also claimed that it was *he* who initiated this little tribute to Harry Carey. Whether it was Ford or Wayne, the fact that the arm gesture is included in the mise-en-scène opens the gesture to interpretation that goes beyond mere intertextuality.

<sup>3</sup>"Space and Place in John Ford's *Stagecoach* and *My Darling Clementine*," *New Orleans Review* 14.2 (Summer 1987): 87-91.

space and place in American culture by establishing a dialectic between town and range, fort and frontier, eastern cities and western plains. Stated schematically, the dialectic is between the thesis of the American West as Eden and the American hero as a kind of prelapsarian Adam, and the antithesis, which posits the west as a part of the fallen, sinful world and the hero as partaking of that fallen world and as therefore limited by place and by time. Of all western filmmakers, Ford is perhaps the most conscious and deliberate of mythmakers. In Ford's mythology the Edenic thesis is essentially a pastoral one: the frontier's unlimited space represents freedom, growth, change, and, most importantly, renewal and regeneration.

In this light *Stagecoach* is Ford's classic pastoral. Ford repudiates the corrupting civilization of the film's two towns, Tonto and Lordsburg, for it is only when Doc Boone, Dallas, and Ringo are free of the corruption of the towns that they can regenerate themselves in the freedom of the frontier. The Ringo Kid, in particular, is Ford's purest Adamic hero. We first see him in the mythical, achronological plains of Monument Valley, and it is this space that most clearly defines him. Even his revenge killing of the Plummer brothers on the streets of Lordsburg has a cleansing, cathartic effect that makes possible his escape, with Dallas, into a new Eden. Ringo's offer to Dallas is perhaps the quintessential statement of the pastoral ideal: "I still got a ranch across the border. It's a nice place, a real nice place. Trees, and grass, water. There's a cabin half-built. A man could live there and a woman. Will you go?"

Ford's pastoral vision in *Stagecoach* would, however, undergo a transformation in the violence and destruction of WWII<sup>4</sup> during which he was wounded during his duty as chief of the Field Photographic Branch of the OSS.<sup>5</sup> Ford came away from the war with a realization of the fragility of civilization and of the need for human community, manifested in towns and families, especially families. Joseph McBride claims that Ford viewed the family as "the purest form of society," and provides this anecdote. A French interviewer asked why the theme of family was so important to Ford's

work. In a typical reply, Ford answered one question with another: "You have a mother, don't you?"<sup>6</sup> We can see how much Ford's western vision changed if we compare Ringo to *My Darling Clementine's* Wyatt Earp. Both the Ringo Kidd and Wyatt Earp have lost brothers to outlaws, but Ringo is bent on extracting justice outside the system of law. Wyatt, on the other hand, dedicates himself to the rule of law by pledging himself to law and justice at the grave of his slain brother James: "Maybe when we leave this country, young kids like you will be able to grow up and live safe." Instead of killing the Clantons to revenge James' death, Wyatt and his brother become lawmen and work to rid the town of Tombstone of the lawless element within it. In many ways, Wyatt's commitment to law and justice in Tombstone is a commitment to place instead of space. In Ford's earlier film, *Stagecoach*, space always held promise for a better life for Ringo and Dallas, for the hope of a Utopia. But Wyatt's commitment to place demands an acceptance of limitations, of imperfect social justice, of death.

Ford's use of the camera underscores the dialectic of space and place in *Stagecoach* and *My Darling Clementine*. In *Stagecoach*, the camera is centered upon the coach and passengers as they travel through the plains of Monument Valley. The famous panorama shot of the Indians and the stagecoach and the equally noteworthy chase scene across the salt flats are typical of the locus of the camera in the space of Monument Valley. In *My Darling Clementine*, however, Ford's camera seems anchored to certain spots in order to show the effects of time and circumstances on a particular place. Three key scenes are shown from the same angle in the long porch at the corner of Tombstone, a point noted by critic Michael Budd, who points out the camera's "extensive exploration of the long porch, the meeting point between shelter and wilderness."<sup>7</sup>

#### IV

What can these observations on Ford's earlier heroes and his photographic aesthetic tell us

<sup>4</sup>Andrew Sinclair, *John Ford* (New York: The Dial Press, 1979) 126.

<sup>5</sup>Ephraim Kate, *The Film Encyclopedia* (New York: Perigee Books of G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1979) 435.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington, *John Ford* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1975) 21.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Lyons, ed., *My Darling Clementine: John Ford, Director* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1984) 164-65.



about *The Searchers* and its enigmatic hero, Ethan Edwards? Let us first examine Ethan Edwards as a western hero. The most salient characteristic of Edwards, one that reveals a great deal about Ford's western mythologizing at this point in his career, is that the major conflict of the hero is a psychological one. Ford's critics have followed the filmmaker's lead here, for Ford himself called *The Searchers*, "A kind of psychological epic" (McBride 153). Stowell says that Ethan "is more psychologically motivated than Ringo" and that the film is "more psychologically complex [than *Stagecoach*]" (135, 131). McBride sees the film as reflecting "all the fears, obsessions, and contradictions which had been boiling up under the surface of Ford's works since his return from World War II" (148). Lindsay Anderson, who became disillusioned with Ford's work during and after *The Searchers*, finds Ethan "an unmistakable neurotic" (McBride 152).

It is true that Ethan Edwards seems more psychologically motivated than Ford's earlier heroes, but to infer from this that Edwards is somehow solipsistic, that his search is purely an internal one, is a mistake. The title of the film itself tells us that the major plot focus is a quest, but a quest for what? Yes, it is a search for revenge, and this connects Ethan to both Ringo and Wyatt. In the pastoral vision of *Stagecoach*, Ringo and Dallas act for themselves in the name of a new community; in *My Darling Clementine*, Wyatt and his brother act for the community in the name of new selves. In this sense, Ethan is closer to Wyatt than he is to Ringo. As I noted above, Ford sees the family as the "purest form of society"; to Ethan the family is the bedrock of society. Late in the film, when Ethan and Martin return from their first search for Debbie, Ethan tries to persuade Martin to quit the search and stay at the Jorgensens:

Martin: I started out looking for Debbie and I intend to keep on.

Ethan: Why?

Martin: Why well, because she's my . . .

Ethan: She's your nothin': She's no kin to you at all

Martin: Well, I always kinda thought she was. The way her folks took me in; raised me.

Ethan: That don't make you no kin. You're no kin.

Ethan's concept of kin helps to explain both

his tenacity in the long search for Debbie, who is his only living connection to the Edwards family, and his initial antipathy to Martin Pauley, who is a foundling and part Cherokee. Ethan's heroic stature depends to a great extent upon his role as protector of the family. It is he who realizes the potential danger to the family at the beginning of the film, when he substitutes himself for his brother Aaron as a deputy on the search party, led by the Rev./Capt. Clayton. It is he who realizes that the Commanche raid is actually a murder raid; it is he who discovers the massacred Edwards family and protects Martin from the heinous sight; it is he who discovers the body of Lucy and buries it, again protecting both Martin and Brad, Lucy's fiancé. Late in the film, after Ethan and Martin have been searching for Debbie for five years and are on the verge of finding her, Ethan makes Martin the recipient of his will, thus symbolically adopting him as his son, and thus kin. This action is foreshadowed at the very beginning of the film when we find that Ethan has been instrumental in saving Martin's life:

Aaron [Ethan's brother]: It was Ethan found you squallin' under a sage clump after your folks had been massacred.

Ethan: It just happened to be me—no need to make more of it.

The relationship between Martin and Ethan is a key one in the film. Stowell is perhaps the most perspicacious critic on the relationship between Martin and Ethan, who function, Stowell claims, as "dual heroes whose mythic function is that of twin or dioscuric mediators. . . . Martin is the sane part-Cherokee accepted by white society, while Ethan is the obsessed white man more in tune with the Indian, Scar." Although provocative, Stowell has, I believe, overlooked an important aspect of the connection between Martin and Ethan. Martin, in addition to being the other half of a hero, is also an emanation, in a Blakean sense, of Ethan himself, or to be less esoteric, a foil or reflection of the duality of Ethan's character. The Edenic part of Ethan, his most essential self, is represented by Martin Pauley's parentless state: a foundling discovered "squallin' under a sage clump," a true product of Monument Valley. The fact that Martin is part Cherokee reinforces this identification with the frontier. On the other hand, though, Martin has also become an

adopted son of the Edwards family, and thus occupies a position in the family perhaps more central than the "prodigal brother," as Rev./Capt. Clayton calls Ethan. Thus Martin represents both the frontier spaces that beckon Ethan, that he knows as intimately as any Cherokee or "Commanche," and the home-fire places of the Edwards and the Jorgensens, places essentially alien to Ethan, but places nonetheless that also call to him, most significantly in the form of Martha Edwards, whose unrequited love Ethan grieves for throughout the film and whose daughter, Debbie, represents Ethan's last hope for the comfort of place in his old age, the equivalent, in one sense, of Mose Harper, another quester, and his search for a rocking chair next to the fire.

Ford visually underscores the bond between Ethan and Martin early in the film by photographing them from similar angles and by utilizing *mise-en-scène* to suggest the bond between Ethan and Martin as questors for place. The famous opening shot features Ford's camera established within the Edwards homestead, looking out on the plains of Monument Valley, where the viewer sees a tiny figure approaching. Critics have made much of this opening shot, and rightly so; for it establishes immediately the controlling point of view: the black frame partly opens on the vast expanses of the frontier, Ford suggesting the limitations of human existence (the blackness) set against the vast expanses of nature. The viewer feels restricted by this very limited view, and I believe this is Ford's point, for the Edwards family will very quickly and brutally be hurled into the blackness and blankness of death. This opening shot is reinforced later in the film by a statement Mrs. Jorgensen makes to Ethan and her husband, Lars, after Ethan has claimed responsibility for her son Brad's death during the first search.

Lars: It's this country killed my boy!

Mrs. Jorgensen: Now, Lars, it just so happens we be Texicans; a Texican is nothin' but a human man way out on a limb, this year, and next and maybe for a hundred more. But I don't think it will be forever. Someday this country's going to be a fine good place to be. Maybe it needs our bones in the ground before that time can come.

Mrs. Jorgensen's statement sounds very much

like Wyatt's at the grave of his brother James. In this manner, Ford's camera placement functions as a constant reminder of the ever-present danger of extinction at the same time as it suggests the need for human community in the face of such danger. Martin, too, seeks such community, and we first see him as we first saw Ethan, from the same camera angle, placement, and *mise-en-scène*. Later in this opening sequence, we see Martin sitting on the steps of the Edwards home and getting up to go inside. Shortly thereafter, we see Ethan on the same steps from the same angle, looking wistfully inside at the domestic bliss of Aaron and Martha, as they enter their bedroom and close the door. This repetition establishes a visual pattern that binds together Ethan and Martin.

At this point, I should like to turn to a sequence that is crucial to understanding the Ethan/Martin symbiosis and that begins to answer the question I posited at the beginning of this paper. This sequence, I believe, has been overlooked by commentators on the film, and I should like therefore to rescue it from critical oblivion. The sequence takes place as Ethan and Martin finally find Debbie living as one of Scar's wives, and she has come to them in the desert, down a huge sand dune, ironically seeking them after they have sought her for so long. Ford skillfully places his camera so that we see Debbie before Ethan and Martin do. Before he can harm Debbie, Ethan is wounded by an Indian arrow and helped to safety by Martin. Debbie escapes back to the Commanches. The part of this sequence I am most interested in occurs after Ethan and Martin have driven off Scar and his Commanche band. The scene opens with a medium shot of Martin gathering water from a stream pouring down the rocks of a cave. We cut to an exterior shot of sharp vertical slabs of stone as the camera tilts down revealing the exterior of the cave. In long shot, Martin is revealed leaving the cave and approaching a badly wounded Ethan, whose left arm is bandaged and in a sling. Martin gives Ethan the mountain stream water to drink, and the following conversation ensues:

Martin: Well, looks as how I'm gonna to have to open that shoulder again, get the poison out. Sure beats me, Ethan, how you could stay alive so long. [putting knife into fire]

Ethan: [handing Martin some paper]: I want you to read this.

Martin: I, Ethan Edwards, being of a sound mind and without any blood kin [pause] do hereby be . . . be . . .

Ethan: Bequeath, means leave.

Martin: . . . bequeath all my property of any kind to Martin Pauley. What do you mean you don't have any blood kin? Well, Debbie's your blood kin!

Ethan: Not no more, she ain't.

Martin: Well, you can keep your will [throws it at Ethan]. I don't want any of your property and besides, I ain't forgettin' you was getting all set to shoot her yourself. What kind of man are you, any way.

Ethan: She's been livin' with a buck. She's nothin' but a . . .

Martin: [Martin pulls knife out of the fire and threatens Ethan with it.] Shut your dirty mouth! I hope you die!

Ethan: That'll be the day!

I view this scene as the climax of the film. Ethan's wound is symbolic not only of the ever-present reality of death (like Ford's WWII wound), but also of the "poison" of revenge which has crazed Ethan and has led him to seek vengeance against his own family. Martin Pauley has now grown enough in stature, by taking on Ethan's bravery, skill, and determination, that he is able to protect Debbie from Ethan and more importantly cut out the poison from Ethan's wound and prevent him from dying and perhaps more significantly from betraying his own heroic code, which has been twisted by the shock of seeing most of his family massacred. As a representative of place, Martin must intercede on behalf of the *raison d'être* of space—the family—by preventing Ethan from killing his niece and Martin's adopted sister. As a representative of space, Martin renews Ethan's heroic qualities by providing water from the pure stream flowing out of the desert rocks.

The final resolution has now been prepared for. In the third and final search it is not Ethan but Martin who kills Scar; Ethan performs the symbolic scalping, which satisfies his need to revenge his family and his honor. Cured of the poison of revenge, Ethan can now "save" Debbie, lifting her high in the air, just as he did many years before when he first met Debbie in the Edwards household. Ethan, Martin, and Debbie are now a new family, one made up of

the blood relatives of uncle and niece, and an added symbolic son and brother in the person of Martin.

We can now, I think, begin to answer my initial question, but not before we put into a larger perspective the dialectic of frontier and family discussed earlier. At its most basic, the western dialectic is between the unfettered self and the community of selves. In essence, the value of the community is that it is an attempt to extend its being through time. Hence it asks of its members a subordination of the needs of the self to the requirements of the community. The greatest values of the community are those that would help to preserve the group: conformity, obedience, and peace; the community's greatest threats are rampant individualism, rebellion, and violence. The unfettered self, on the other hand, exists in the here and now, or in the purely subjective, timeless realm, where the self is the primary reality. Its highest values are assertions and projection of the self, frequently through courageous and violent actions. The greatest threat to the self is absorption into the group, with the resultant loss of individual identity. The focus of reality for the community is the town or the pioneer settlement; the focus of reality for the self is the frontier. The character of Ethan represents the cystallization of the conflict between self and selves. In rescuing Debbie, he has helped to forge a new family. In transmitting his skill and durability to Martin, he has aided him in becoming what Ethan could never be—a husband and perhaps father—a truly functioning community member (for remember, Martin has staked his life on Debbie's survival). The paradox of Ethan is that he has sacrificed himself, in a sense, for a family that he cannot ever really be a part of, for Ethan's truest self exists in the plains of Monument Valley, to which he turns in the last shot of the film, after he has watched Martin and Laurie and the Jorgensens enter into a new community. Ethan pulls his left arm up and holds on to his right in a symbolic reenactment of the wounded, helpless arm he suffered from the Indian arrow and of the bitter realization of the inevitability of death. His task is complete, and he must now continue to search for a role in a west that will soon no longer recognize him, or he it. Eight years later, Ford would continue Ethan's story in the sad tale of Tom Doniphon in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, a film about the loss of the heroic ideal.

I should like to conclude with an incident,

described by Joseph McBride, about Ford's last public appearance: on May 28, Memorial Day, at Ford's beloved Motion Picture Country Home, where he had come to give his annual address and to pay his last respects to Donald Crisp, who had recently passed away. Sensing it was the last time they would see him, many of Ford's friends and co-workers were there. McBride says:

It was an emotional, tearful reunion and it

had a classic Fordian ending. While the reception was still in progress Ford walked out of the door on the arm of his chauffeur, nobody noticing that he had gone, like Ethan Edwards walking away from his family at the end of *The Searchers*.

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## BINARY OPPOSITION: SOFTWARE FOR A PROGRESSIVE FRICTION

*An interdisciplinary study of a naturally artificial construct*

Postmodern theory acknowledges that the world was generated out of chaos, but ignores the fact that nature employs chaos to produce genuinely stable, complex order. Order and chaos are not mutually exclusive. Ironically, the fate of Derridian deconstruction is an example of the emergence of "order" in the unlikeliest of places; a theory which starts with the premise that theories, premises, and all conceptual frameworks should and can be undermined has produced a discernible paradigm complete with buzz words which systematizes information and a ruler for measuring value—all the more insidious for their slippery nature.

In 1884, a Shakespearean scholar named Edwin Abbott, who enjoyed experimenting with higher mathematics "for fun," wrote a charming little allegory called *Flatland*.<sup>1</sup> In *Flatland* the entire populace is composed of geometric figures; their world is described for us—prosaically but in great detail—by a practical Square, a respectable member of the bourgeoisie within the rigid hierarchy of that country. His entire perspective on the nature of existence is modified through an encounter with the third dimension—an experience which proves to be both terrifying and invigorating. The story itself is a parable of the recalcitrance of the human mind in the presence of imaginative constructs which offer to expand our access to knowledge. It demonstrates the deeply entrenched conservatism most humans experience in the face of such knowledge due to the implicit threat it poses to older and dearly cherished paradigms. An inverted form of this tendency underlies one particular approach to the Western dialectic currently espoused and practiced by a large number of philosophers and literary critics in the academic community. Deconstruction is a "strategy," developed

within and in response to the Western philosophical discourse, that seeks to lay waste to the entire legacy from which it emerges—brilliantly crafting an Emperor from the body parts of older metaphysicians, approaching him with a razor-sharp quill, and after the ink dries, smugly taunting, "He has no clothes!" A demonstration of masterful scholarship provides the deconstructionist with the needed authority to fulfill such an agenda; evidence of the arduous attendance to the task of ingesting the false wisdom of his precursor arms him with the means both to win the respect of and overwhelm his readers. The average human being might find this a tad ridiculous—devoting one's energy to absorbing that in which one desires to, and indeed must, find fault if one's own process is to be affirmed; nevertheless, it is an activity which has found much support. In spite of my own discomfort with the results of deconstruction and desire to deflate some of Derrida's presuppositions, I recognize in his laborious efforts the recapitulation of every great thinker's struggle to make an original contribution to the conversation. For this reason, I believe that the undertaking itself merits some affirmation as part of the very system it attempts to undermine. I am also willing to concede the Hegelian legacy embedded in such a statement.

As a matter of fact, in order to affirm Derrida's general impulse while toppling several of his specific presuppositions I would like to begin by focusing on one aspect of Hegelian thought which has given Derrida and other Post-Structuralists so much indigestion. I would like to resuscitate Hegel's notion of reason in history and invest it with new integrity. In order to accomplish the latter I will utilize the findings of Douglas Hofstadter in the field of Artificial Intelligence and the linguistic research of Susanne Langer and Lakoff and Johnson. The concept upon which I would like to focus is, for lack of a richer term, binary opposition: what it is exactly and how it

<sup>1</sup>Edwin Abbott, *Flatland*, 6th ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952).

functions in the acquisition of knowledge.

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In search of metaphors to assist in clarifying my assertions, I turn first to the hard sciences. Even at its most primitive and slippery level—the level of quantum physics—existence seems to be defined by “two-ness.” The notion of a “bare particle” is an utterly hypothetical construct.<sup>2</sup> Oppositely charged particles function, if they function at all, in tandem. As Marvin Minsky states in his work on the structure of mind, “In order to appear opposed, two things must serve related goods—or otherwise engage the self-same agencies.”<sup>3</sup> This may seem to imply that being opposed means competing for the same space, but it also means that without this conflictual relationship, neither has any meaning. We must expand our understanding of the relationship between opposites to allow for synthesis, not only because it sounds comforting but because it is the way the universe works; conflict perpetuates and engenders motion, i.e., progress. “Conflict” in this context should be understood as the friction generated within an integrative level of nature. And, as J. T. Fraser’s evolutionary model of time reveals, this kind of existential, seemingly paradoxical conflict is perceived as irresolvable “only when, in abstract language-thinking, the hierarchical character of experiential unity is neglected.”<sup>4</sup> Our task is to fortify this claim by roughly tracing the directly proportional model of opposites as found in nature up to the level of language and the human mind. Even Derrida admits that “the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself,” and he bestows on the stoic deconstructionist the job of perpetually subverting this process.<sup>5</sup> But why has his project failed to penetrate the intellectual on any but the

most abstract, extrinsic level? Why does Derrida’s portrait of Western logocentric metaphysical inquiry ring false? In light of the recurrent manifestations of paradox which resolves itself at a higher level of organization found in twentieth-century science, psychology, and human culture in general, it seems grossly simplistic to understand binary opposition as an either-or proposition. The natural world (which includes the realm of the human mind) cannot be characterized as a zero-sum game where every choice exacts payment by way of the elimination of its opposite. If the universe achieved thermodynamic equilibrium, that is, a perfectly balanced ledger between matter and anti-matter, motion would be impossible and it would cease to exist. Physical existence presupposes conflictual interaction.

In every complex system, such as the human mind, “opposites” are deeply integrated, complementary components which serve as structuring tools. In the English alphabet, for example, “a” and “z” are understood less as polar ends of a spectrum than as relational parts in a conceptual whole; they provide markers, a means for learning. As they operate within the fluid system of language “z” can just as easily begin a word as “a” can end one. This possibility does not annihilate our understanding of their positions in terms of the simple system known as the alphabet. Instead, this level of understanding is preserved even as it is subsumed within the more flexible and complex level wherein letters function as parts of words.

At this point, I would like to address the Hegelian concept in question, then proceed to Derrida’s criticism of it, and conclude with a rebuttal formulated from Hofstadter’s playful and provocative findings.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hegel, even among his enthusiasts, has inspired a great deal of contention. A vast number of groups, from Marxists to National Socialists, have used his thought to say all kinds of contradictory things. As I perceive it, the internal friction in Hegel’s work is the struggle between a conservative form and a rather revolutionary content. It is also my feeling that this friction is precisely what makes his model interesting and dynamic. This stylistic friction, or nonclosure, is in Hegel’s ideas as well. This is why I find it odd that many—detractors and supporters alike—would attribute to Hegel such

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<sup>2</sup>Douglas Hofstadter, *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980) 142.

<sup>3</sup>*The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) 37.

<sup>4</sup>*Time as Conflict* (Basel and Stuttgart: Birkhauser Verlag, 1978) 203.

<sup>5</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981) 42.

monolithic authority when his most monumental work, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, by its very form would belie a rigid, conclusive application/interpretation. (The "lectures" are literally that, published posthumously and culled largely from students' notes.) There is no denying the fact that Hegel's work exhibits a romantic desire for cosmic unity. His definition of History as the progress of Freedom seems remarkably idealistic at first glance. But to Hegel, "History" is not synonymous with everything that happens. He was no Dr. Pangloss claiming, "All is for the best in this best of all possible worlds." Historical events are only a subset of events in general and they are marked by "a certain kind of human making."<sup>6</sup> Relying on the existence of a deity is therefore unnecessary. Although his language is often metaphysical Hegel does not take recourse to God as a means for picking up the slack in his paradigm. Humans are seen as the designers of history, not God; this is why it is perfectly imaginable that some discernible reason—regardless of how perverse or ill-informed—is embedded in historical events. Alexandre Kojève employs a useful metaphor to assist in clarifying this point. Hegel's particular notion of universal history is like the construction of an edifice; but not only are the architects and masons humans, so are the clients and the materials (O'Brien 98). History is conceived of and made by, of, and for humanity.

George Dennis O'Brien equates these four levels of description with Aristotle's four causes. I find this grafting inadequate; structurally, the goal of history—attaining greater reason—is an evolving, not an essential, one. Aristotle's representation of a final cause and Hegel's description of history as a creation—a construct—which generates its own consciousness are as unequal as the equation: {Hegel's History = All random events}. Hegel writes: "The history of the world is the progress in the consciousness of freedom . . . the final cause of the world [is] the consciousness by Spirit of its freedom and the . . . realization of its freedom."<sup>7</sup> Although Hegel actually uses the

term "final cause," it signifies a nonstatic condition, a "process," which is quite different from what Aristotle had in mind when he used similar words. Hegel is describing the self-reflexivity which is unique to human beings.

On another count, O'Brien is accurate if perhaps for the wrong reason when he emphasizes that "for Hegel history is an *artificial* creation" (105). This is indeed the case if we understand "artificial" as that which is created naturally, i.e., as a result of the natural human compulsion to alter the environment in hopes of increasing survivability. His model, understood thus, is certainly teleological, but it allows for and recognizes the importance and inevitability of both tragedy and tragic wastefulness—two distinct phenomena. Ascribing a teleology to history provides a mechanism for developing self-awareness—self-reflexivity—a mechanism which is encoded in the very fabric of existence. History, on the path to greater Freedom, is fueled and developed by Spirit which is abstract in its universality but concrete in the particular. The death and subsequent transfiguration of the latter reinforces the former. Therefore, Spirit as a whole is experiencing this perpetual redefinition on a larger and slower scale. Spirit is not preexisting—just as with a poem: although a poet begins with an idea or image, it is not preconceived in its entirety; Spirit, like the poem, evolves through the active work of creation.

For Hegel, the State is a necessary entity for nurturing Spirit in that it provides boundaries. The State, which should be understood as a "cultural individual," what Fraser terms "sociotemporality," is informed by and fosters Reason. Reason is what reveals the divine to man. Reason (not to be confused with sterile, literal language per se) is the language of the dialectical process which is cultivated through communal living. This does not mean that reason is simply "socialized behavior." Hegel clearly acknowledges the necessity of passion in this process: "nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion" (*Vernunft* 85). Passion is the energy, the drive which prompts us "to collapse a wave function," to borrow a metaphor from quantum physics—i.e., make a choice, sacrificing other options in order to focus, in hopes of attaining greater freedom and a higher probability of survival.<sup>8</sup>

In discussing Hegel's concept of "the State," again I think it is important to avoid a literal interpretation of terms. Although there are

<sup>6</sup>George Dennis O'Brien, *Hegel on Reason and History: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975) 106.

<sup>7</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, trans. G. D. O'Brien, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1955) 63.

numerous examples in his work of references to specific states and specific hopes for actual, future states, it is more apt (and useful) to understand the State (note the capital "S"), as the concept of communal organization in general, not just as a political sphere but as that which encompasses all aspects of human culture.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, the constraints of society are what enable the idea of Freedom to manifest itself in a tangible, rational form (*Reason* 54). It is the philosopher's job to recognize and identify this divine idea of Freedom at work in the world (*Reason* 47). The job of the State is to allow for mutability as its citizens engage in the process of reasoning with nature, i.e., as they continuously ask questions about the nature of existence. In the words of Ilya Prigogine, this can be understood as a nondichotomized "dialogue with nature," as we are a part of nature ourselves.<sup>10</sup> The role of the State will alter as knowledge changes and expands, gradually becoming more complex and more global in its concerns over time.

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Derrida's deconstruction of Hegelianism in "The Pit and the Pyramid" begins with the assertion that signs are used to make a bridge between "sites of conceptual inscription" and presence. When signs are taken up by other systems they are no longer what they (perhaps) were. Tracing all the points of reappropriation—the "unevennesses, their inequalities of development, the complex figures of their inclusions, implications, exclusions"—is useful *not* because it will return us to the original, pure concept, but because it will undermine the

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<sup>9</sup>When I use the term "survival," I do not wish to imply a reductive "survival of the fittest" notion. I wish to convey something far more complex, i.e., entities which not only endure but lend depth to the existing environment and enlarge their own, and as a consequence, temporal experience in general. Genuine survival entails value and requires successful feedback among at least three variables: 1) respect for tradition and a sense of history (heredity); 2) creative potential (mutation); and 3) free will + the capacity for sacrifice (selection).

<sup>10</sup>*Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Robert Hartman (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953) 52.

<sup>11</sup>Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984) xxviii.

"reassuring myth" that a "transcendental signified" is ever possible.<sup>11</sup>

Derrida objects to the Hegelian position as I described it above, for he finds it a false representation of history as meaningful and linear, because it presupposes a homogeneous, interior playing field which by definition makes all that is excluded due to its incompatibility with the model or "difference" implicitly less real (*Positions* 57). Derrida expends a great deal of linguistic energy renaming difference as "différance," a concept which is by his own assertion meaningless (*Margins* 22). (Yet Richard Rorty artfully demonstrates how "différance" evolved from misspelling to term to the bedrock of an academic culture.)<sup>12</sup> "Différance" is only meaningful as a trace of "precisely the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian relevé [of binary oppositions of classical idealism] wherever it operates" (*Positions* 40). Rescuing difference from what Derrida sees as death by neutralization (as a result of a Hegelian synthesis or "Aufhebung") involves embracing a "double writing" which is both "dislodged and dislodging" (*Positions* 41). This is the syntax of deconstruction. Derrida is interested in working from a system without a center (because centers not only cannot hold but are not real) in order to decenter metaphysical systems which invariably engulf difference by creating a spurious similarity between irreconcilable elements.<sup>13</sup> Genuine difference implies unbridgeable space between things (*Margins* 8). But how can one enter the playing field to perform this dislodging if serviceable bridges are inconceivable? How can a system be decentered if centers are mere hallucinations? How can one deconstruct that which has no reality? And even if one could, as Derridian écriture attempts, could the result be anything other than trivial?

Derrida's gorilla tactics of destabilization lead one to question one's claim to know anything. But eventual recovery finds one positing, "So

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<sup>11</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982) 72.

<sup>12</sup>"Deconstruction and Circumvention," *Critical Inquiry* 11.1 (Sept. 1984): 18.

<sup>13</sup>Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975) 245.



what is the point?" At a remove from Derrida's convoluted, labyrinthine prose it is easy to recognize the worthlessness of any paradigm which does not provide the means for making distinctions of value, whose only ruler is an eraser. He claims that "in language there are only differences without positive terms . . . language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system" (*Margins* 11). The first half of this assertion is the result of a failure to make a level distinction between language as a tool and language in practice; to the second, one should be inclined to ask for the biological and anthropological evidence which would support it. The kind of organism which is indistinguishable from its environment is a dead one. A flat system whose component parts are connected in a chain with only difference joining them—and only joining them spatially—would be incapable of communication or generating any new elements.

Let's examine the facts: people do, quite frequently, understand each other; many ideas and texts are roughly translatable from one language to another; metaphors exist in all languages; we can identify the phenomenon of "dead languages" because most languages are living, i.e., nonstatic, unremittingly receptive to neologisms, cross-language infiltrations, word play, etc. If meaning were purely relational this would not be the case. But, obviously, dictionaries—seemingly the most relational linguistic tools around (words are defined by other words)—work. As Wittgenstein urges, "Don't think, but look";<sup>14</sup> *because of language* we do manage to communicate and continuously create new things—both abstract and concrete. And "[i]f language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may be) in judgments" (Wittgenstein 88). Granted, relationships between entities are somewhat contextually determined, but this is only possible when a means is available, a meta-level from which to prioritize. Perhaps there is a very good reason why "the question of the concept and of meaning" are continually reappropriated by metaphysical discourse (*Positions* 58); perhaps one might call it human nature. What is

most questionable about Derrida's position is that he perceives systems such as Hegel's as totalizing by definition. How can a system which has engendered so many contradictory interpretations and applications be construed as totalizing?

Derrida believes (although he would, most likely, vehemently deny that he "believes" in anything which can be encapsulated in pat phrases) that the dualism inherent in every unified system creates a "violent hierarchy" which engulfs difference. Derrida's mission is to rescue difference from the hands of Hegelians who would reduce it to mere contradiction (*Positions* 41, 44).

It would seem to me that the options for us as well as for Hegel are/were not between essential, utterly quantifiable knowledge and eternal abdication of truth, i.e., perpetual confusion and ennui. Derrida can only reasonably assert the necessity of the latter by making Hegel's world the equivalent of Abbott's Flatland. The entire culture of Flatland is built upon a notion of rigid either-or's—this is what makes it funny, even absurd. Flatland resists change with a vengeance; an envoy from the third dimension had come on a mission of edification one hundred years before the Square's encounter, but he was as ineffectual at opening eyes as the Square is in this epoch. Once the Square has been exposed to an alternative way of seeing, he recognizes that the kind of model he had complacently accepted is impoverished, lacks poignancy and, therefore, the potential to inspire any genuine progress and creativity. Hopefully, Derrida will experience a similar revelation.

Although one may easily rattle off a list of actual political states which could be equated with the Flatland model (e.g., Stalin's Soviet Union, Hitler's Third Reich), it is not a definition of the universe, or even our planet and our culture. While these larger systems may resist definition as a closed economy, this does not mean they are devoid of order and discernible patterns. At every turn, we find empirical evidence of, and optimistic, rational faith in, progress and truth. Hegel was neither the first nor the last to identify this phenomenon. "[T]ruth matters to us because it has survival value and allows us to function in our world."<sup>15</sup> Derrida's project could be highly effective in

<sup>14</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1958) 31.

<sup>15</sup>George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980) 160.

Flatland for reinforcing the status quo, but it has little use-value here.

I would like to suggest that a more productive agenda for insuring an "irreducible and genuine multiplicity" (*Positions* 45) in our culture would be one which accepts our obsession with duality as "a symptom of how we acquire various pairs of words that each divide some aspect of the world into opposing roles" (Minsky 117). Very few people, except those which populate the pages of weekday comic strips, actually see the world as "black or white."

The brain operates because billions of neurons are always firing like mad and, more often than not, maintaining communication between the central nervous system and all the other parts of our bodies. The activity of a single neuron is utterly meaningless. It is true that one may understand a neuron as occupying only one of two possible states at a time, namely, "on" or "off." However, Hofstadter points out that this description does not carry upwards to groups of neurons, i.e., a symbol—the "hardware realization of concepts" (371, 350). A neuron in isolation may be a pure example of binary opposition, but what is a neuron in isolation? Binary opposition, or existential conflict, is always resolvable at some higher level. Neurons, the hardware level of the brain, together create "a simple tangle"; symbols, the software level of mind, form a "tangled hierarchy" wherein the inside-outside (or "on/off") distinction is blurred (Hofstadter 691). This system of increasing complexity through the networking of often conflicting components is replicated on each new level. The continual emergence of meta-levels prevents the conflictual parts which are generated in the act of self-replication from cancelling themselves out. Hofstadter explains how this process works, how it defers from a circular system, with the concept of "bottoming-out." In a recursive, self-replicating system, some part of the definition which it uses to create itself escapes self-reference, and an infinite regress circumvented (133).

Hofstadter cites a phrase coined by Albert Lehninger which describes the self-replicating systems in nature as "the molecular logic of the living state" (504). In fact, this sounds glaringly Hegelian. Nature does seem to possess an overwhelmingly beautiful and perpetually mysterious sense of logic. Is this oxymoronic? I think not if one understands "logic" in this context as the evolution toward greater

organization in spite of (or perhaps because of) the second law of thermodynamics (entropy, or the increased disorder through dispersed energy) found in the universe as a whole. It is difficult to cull an abstract visual metaphor for this natural "logic" because the structures do not sit still; they are often indistinguishable from the processes they are performing, thus: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" One relatively tangible manifestation of this "logic" is the dynamic system of the DNA molecule.

Philosopher J. T. Fraser criticizes the common representations of DNA found in museum displays and scientific journals for being invariably static. Computer-generated images and wire models are deceiving for DNA "continuously wiggles, vibrates, and oscillates, moving as if it were breathing. Its rates of vibrations span the electromagnetic spectrum from radio waves to infrared. Groups of oscillating patterns . . . wander around the molecule looking for a place to settle but they never do."<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that DNA, like a particle, is not self-sufficient; in order to self-replicate, thereby producing a living organism, it requires a "sufficiently strong support system" of some proteins and some ribosomes (Hofstadter 530). DNA contains—programmed within itself—enzymes which cause its two strands to separate, then the "copy and move" program kicks in; the processes of peeling and then reproducing itself occur in virtual simultaneity. But the new "copy" is actually an inverted mirror, the complement, or opposite, if you will, of the original. Rearranging Hofstadter's own analogy a little, when DNA is "treated as a mere sequence of chemicals to be copied," it is like a template and "when DNA is dictating what operations shall be carried out," it is like a program (531). But we are still dealing with the *same* original source, the very nature of DNA creates the illusion of a dichotomy in order to trick itself into working, it creates its own partner to struggle with in order to create more of itself. This is consonant with what the concept of binary opposition does for us in language—that is, provides a means for creating more knowledge—only for the most myopic and sloth-like, or the deconstructionist in search of a straw dog, does it reduce knowledge to simplistic either-or's. This is also the conservative/progressive opposition which

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<sup>16</sup>J. T. Fraser, *Time: The Familiar Stranger* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1987) 143.

describes the Hegelian paradigm, as I posited earlier.

As DNA's process of self-replication continues, tangled hierarchies, which eventually begin to look like a heterarchy, emerge. A lower, inviolate substrate, where rules are articulated, resolves the conflicts which arise in the tangle (689). The rules of the hardware provide a means for negotiation as conflicts arise within the software, but these rules, as we see in DNA, are not essential (as in "essence")—they do not provide conclusive insight into the entirety—they just make an entirety of greater complexity possible as a result of the germ of self-referentiality embedded in the system.

If the age-old First Cause argument is applied to the human mind, just as it is often applied to Artificial Intelligence, an irresolvable, infinite regress seems to ensue. But rules do exist—or at least one—and that is sufficient to set the whole process in motion. Moreover, "there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases" (Wittgenstein 81). "Being" is conflict, resolved by an inviolate level below or above (depending on whether Hofstadter or Hegel wrote the book) where rules are agreed upon. This level is no less real because it happens to be flexible and defined by self-referentiality. Derrida would have us believe that binary oppositions mask this inviolate level; he refuses to recognize that we, or at least DNA molecules, agree on rules without coercion. Even for deconstruction to work, on any level, its practitioners must share presuppositions, however elusive and inconsistent they might be. Likewise, as Hofstadter points out, the decision to glorify randomness in art still establishes a rule, a preference, defines a system of operation (one which is in the end, perhaps, *more* totalizing), however incomprehensible to the uninitiated and unsuspecting observer/audience member. Also, it is hard to deny that we experience a "self," a guiding principle about a being which continues to exist in time until death with some degree of consistency. This Self is defined by irresolvable conflict between endogenous and exogenous information; this input is organized by a process we all share—self-reference. Our brains create convenient dualisms which work against each other and together, through self-recursion, to create a more complex identity for ourselves (Hofstadter 696).

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In moving to a higher, and hopefully more consequential, level of description, I would like to offer the notion of "metaphor" as a convenient way to understand opposition as a mutually inclusive phenomenon essential to generating understanding at any level of description. Susanne Langer in her work entitled *Philosophy in a New Key* credits an obscure philosopher named Philip Wegener with explaining that our literal language is a virtual repository of "faded metaphors."<sup>17</sup> Metaphor is the soil out of which literal language has sprung. She elaborates a respectful, lucid, and stimulating attack, remarkably interdisciplinary for its day, on the logical positivists' linguistic program. Although her book was written almost forty years before Lakoff and Johnson collaborated to produce *Metaphors We Live By*, a study of the intrinsically metaphorical nature of language, it is basically grounded on similar notions of the "experiential synthesis" in language (186). Langer extends this premise by establishing the need for symbolization as the fundamental difference between man and other animals: it is that which

actuates all his apparently unzoological aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value, his utterly impractical enthusiasms, and his awareness of a 'Beyond' tilled with holiness. Despite the fact that this need gives rise to almost everything that we commonly assign to the 'higher' life, it is not itself a 'higher' form of some 'lower' need; it is quite essential, impervious, and general, and may be called 'high' only in the sense that it belongs exclusively to a very complex and perhaps recent genus. It may be satisfied in crude, primitive ways or in conscious and refined ways, so it has its own hierarchy of 'higher' and 'lower,' elementary and derivative forms.

(32)

Langer goes on to cite the work of several anthropologists to support the thesis that a more concrete (that is visual) method of symbol-making may have acted as one evolutionary pressure on man to generate verbal language. I would use this proposition to suggest that the making of metaphors is *not* exclusively a human activity, that it preceded men. In a sense, every

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<sup>17</sup>*Philosophy in A New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (New York: Penguin Books, 1942) 114.

adaptation made by an entity to accommodate a change in environment or promote complexification constitutes a metaphoric act, e.g., the innovation of sexual reproduction (via the eukaryotic cell) which provides for greater variability was, initially, a substitution for asexual reproduction in a pinch. Once the inventive, seemingly artificial, and certainly problematic substitution has proved successful, it becomes part of the natural "language" of that entity. In order to allow for metaphor-making—adaptation in the interest of a fecund survival—language must contain an element of ambiguity—not because it is defined solely by self-dislocating difference as Derrida believes (*Margins* 12). The ability to interpret metaphor in language is an epiphenomenon of language itself. Language is an emergent feature which generates growth within and beyond the complex system of symbolization which produced it to begin with. It is perhaps the most efficient feedback system in the universe and accounts for the exceedingly rapid (in terms of the cosmic picture) evolution of *Homo sapiens*.

Toward the beginning of this essay I used a brief analogy using our alphabet to assist in making a point about level distinctions. Language is one of the richest examples of a complex system with lower level (relatively inviolate) rules which at the higher, functional level is capable of generating self-referentiality. Metaphor is like Hegel's Spirit, that which carries the Idea of Freedom—i.e., greater truth and understanding—to fruition. It is, as Lakoff and Johnson claim, the union between reason and imagination (186). It is also that which demonstrates that reason and imagination cannot be distilled out of one another; they always cohabitate, although at times the presence of the other is harder to discern. (Figurative language is as difficult but not impossible to cite in a medical journal as logical constructs are in purely "self-expressive" poetry.) Again, I would like to cite Lakoff and Johnson:

Since the categories of our everyday thought are largely metaphorical entailments and inferences, ordinary

rationality is therefore imaginative by its very nature. Given our understanding of poetic metaphor in terms of metaphorical entailments and inferences, we can see that the products of the poetic imagination are, for the same reason, partially rational in nature.

(193)

Binary oppositions are useful, mutually dependent conceptual tools which are programmed to work against and off of one another. They are "carried across" to higher levels by metaphors—of either the faded or fresh variety—where they are resolved.

In concluding, I feel compelled to cite what appears to be a self-reflexive statement on the part of Hofstadter. He writes:

If one uses Godel's Theorem as a metaphor, as a source of inspiration, rather than trying to translate it literally into the language of psychology or of any other discipline, then perhaps it can suggest new truths in psychology or other areas. But it is quite unjustifiable to translate it directly into a statement of another discipline and take that as equally valid.

(696)

Metaphor is a bridge and a bridge cannot exist without two banks; however, forming a connection between the two does not annihilate their autonomy. Ironically, this annihilation is exactly what Derrida's metaphor of language-as-a-chain does to abstract reasoning—it deprives the links in the chain of the possibility of obtaining a unique identity. Binary oppositions are artificial constructs but then so are works of art, architecture, History, Knowledge, human beings, self-awareness, and, ultimately, subatomic particles and self-replicating DNA. They are artfully constructed to provide the friction which perpetuates an evolving universe. And if friction be the fuel of life, fray on. . . .□

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## FEATURED ARTISTS

**Eugenio de Andrade** is Portugal's best known living poet; he has published twenty-five volumes of poetry and has been translated into over twenty languages.

**Ronnie Susan Apter**, an assistant professor of English at Central Michigan University, is the author of a study of Ezra Pound's influence on the translation of poetry, *Digging for the Treasure* (New York: 1984; reprint New York: Paragon, 1987). She translates poetry, both modern and medieval, and also translates opera for performance in English.

**Debra Bruce's** second book of poetry, *Sudden Hunger*, is available from The University of Arkansas Press. She lives in Chicago where she teaches at Northeastern Illinois University.

**William Virgil Davis** is Professor of English and Writer-in-Residence at Baylor University. He spent the 1990-91 academic year on a Fulbright at the University of Vienna.

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**Alexis Levitin's** most recent translation is of Clarice Lispector's *Soulstorm*, published by New Directions in 1989. His translations of Eugenio de Andrade have appeared in over fifty literary magazines.

**Carlo Marcucci** studied painting with Nona Trythall and sculpture with Peter Rockwell. He has paintings in private collections in Europe and the United States.

**Patrick Murphy's** stories have appeared most recently in *West Branch* and *Expression*.

**Adélia Prado** is one of Brazil's best known contemporary poets. She has published five books of poems and three books of prose.

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**Ellen Watson** received a 1984 National Endowment for the Arts to translate the work of Adélia Prado.