

New Orleans Review

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 12 NUMBER 4/\$7.00



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New Orleans Review

Winter 1985

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The *New Orleans Review* is published in February, May, August and November. Annual Subscription Rate: Institutions \$30.00, Individuals \$25.00, Foreign Subscribers \$35.00. Contents listed in the PMLA Bibliography and the Index of American Periodical Verse.

US ISSN 0028-6400

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The *New Orleans Review* is planning a special issue on the politics of the ocular image in film, literature, literary theory, and philosophy.

Papers are sought on such topics as how power is enacted in the gaze, the visualization of the other, metaphors of enunciation, the ocular representation of reason and unreason, and the genderization of discourse.

There are no specific requirements as to length. Papers should be prepared in accordance with the *new* MLA standards, and submitted by August 1986.

This issue is planned for the Spring of 1987.

Papers dealing primarily with film should be sent to the film editor, John Mosier; all others to Bruce Henricksen, the theory and criticism editor. The mailing address in both cases is Box 50, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118.

John Mosier

SEXUAL POLITICS

Of the more interesting films in competition at the 1985 Cannes Film Festival, one sizeable group emphasized the close relationship between sexual and political behavior. This linkage was the most obvious in Hector Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and Kusturica's *When Father Was Away on a Business Trip*. In the former a radical journalist and a lonely homosexual meet in jail: the journalist experiences homosexual love, and the homosexual becomes involved in the journalist's cause. In the latter, it is the treacheries of sex that send the hero to prison, and it is through sex that he gets his revenge. But subtle variations on the central idea can be seen in *Mishima*, *Colonel Redl*, and even in Puenzo's *The Official History*.

So disparate are the treatments that it might be better to call these films mediations on the idea that sexual and political behavior are linked. Collectively the films show us what that linkage is and how it operates in society. As mediations they are intriguing in yet another way, because there really was an Alfred Redl and a Mishima Yukio, and their historical predicaments are as problematic—one might almost say cinematic—as any artist might wish.

Nowhere is this more true than in the case of Istvan Szabo's *Colonel Redl*. Alfred Redl was a colonel in the army of the Hapsburgs. From 1900 to 1905 he was in charge of the counter-espionage and espionage department based in Vienna. From 1905 on he was chief of staff of VIII Corps, based in Prague. He committed suicide on 25 May 1913, after having been caught passing military secrets to the Russians. The exact nature of the affair was shrouded in secrecy. In the 1920s the Prague journalist Egon Kisch investigated the affair at length and concluded that Redl, a homosexual, was being blackmailed by the Russian military attaché into spying.¹

¹Two brief and authoritative perspectives on the Redl affair are: Norman Stone, "Austria-Hungary" 43, and William C. Fuller, Jr., "The Russian Empire" 115, in *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars*, ed. Ernest R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). Szabo's own comments (in the Press Kit supplied by Hungarofilm) speak of his conscious decision to violate the historical truth of the situation.

The Redl affair is the archetype for modern society's distrust of homosexuals: their attempts to lead double lives make them targets for blackmailers, and they are easily led into betraying their allegiance. Kisch and subsequent writers saw in Redl a more general problem: the tension between the sensitive homosexual and the oppressive heterosexual world in which he lives. Alfred Redl was an exemplary officer and a sympathetic man, so the Redl affair is also the archetype for more enlightened accounts such as John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* and the recent play *Another Country*.

Szabo's interpretation rejects both the purely homosexual theories and the literal facts. He makes Redl's life the focal point of Imperial hopes: Redl's sexual preferences have little to do with his demise. Although Alfred Redl as Brandauer plays him is too given to contradictions, he comes across as a dedicated patriot. We see how from the first his patriotism, manifested in a childish poem read in school, gets him preferment to a military academy. As a potential officer he is introduced to the better things in life, and he becomes wholly indoctrinated with Imperial views.

For Szabo the Redl affair is the archetype of the decline and fall of the Empire. A poor Ruthenian lad whose intelligence and devotion to the Emperor propel him through military school, he befriends an aristocratic Hungarian cadet, Christopher Kubinyi, and drags him along in his meteoric rise through the officer corps. He marries Kubinyi's sister, and, as head of the intelligence department, becomes entangled in Franz Ferdinand's clique, which by this time constituted a virtual shadow cabinet.

Brandauer plays Redl as a mercurial and unstable fellow. But he still comes across as an outstanding officer and an attractive man, and would be more so if Szabo were more interested in Redl's profession and Brandauer less enamored of histrionics. The real villain is Franz Ferdinand, who uses Redl as a scapegoat, turning his friends against him, isolating him, and setting him up with a young homosexual. Redl perceives that he has been set up, and that he has become the very person that Franz Ferdinand wanted him

to find. He understands that he has been thoroughly betrayed, and that he is supposed to kill himself—not because of his sexual inclinations, but because of his abilities. He is to be made a scapegoat, and his sexuality is simply a convenient way of nailing him.

Szabo's point seems to be that in a society as generally permissive as the Empire's, Redl is correct to see that he is doomed. Redl's efficiency, energy, and allegiance to the Emperor should make him the symbol of the Empire's ability to use the upward social mobility of its ethnic minorities as the great symbol of its stability. But his fall, caused by the intrigue of the court, prefigures the collapse of the Empire. An edifice so morally rotten does not deserve to flourish. Szabo is at his best in sketching these things in; as in *Mephisto*, he sketches rather than details. The idea that the successful officer is a gentle, almost feminine character, is a neat stroke, and an original one. Nothing else is, but the film does a clever job of melding the strands together.

Disappointingly—given his abilities—his interpretation of Imperial politics follows along well-trodden and conventional paths. That the Army was the center holding the Empire together, that Franz Ferdinand was the Imperial bogey man, and that the Empire came to the War in a frenzy of prophecy, with all and sundry seeing the collapse of the old order, is virtually a textbook platitude. Much if not all of this derives from Josef Roth's 1932 novel, *The Radetzky March*, and Szabo's use of Strauss' famous piece in his film is probably not simply a coincidence. It is Roth's novel, even more than Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, that delineates a chokingly stratified society ripped apart by ethnic discords, presided over by an octogenarian whose eminent death was regarded as a signal for a general catastrophe.

The Empire was also thought to be vulnerable to any sort of severe shock. At the first sound of the guns, it would collapse into a morass of ethnic nationalists. It was, after all, a ludicrous construct: the empire that, as Musil observed, perished for want of a name. Although this widely held view sounds good, it doesn't square with the facts. The Army which Alfred Redl loyally serves, like the Empire it helped hold together, was not so creaky as all that. It was small, underequipped, and underpaid, consuming a fraction of the national wealth when compared with France and Russia, not to mention Wilhelmine Germany.² That it was can as easily be seen as a testimonial to the essentially peaceful

nature of the Empire as a sign of moral deficiency. And for all of that, it fought well enough. The Army did not collapse until the end of war was clear enough to all, and when it did, it was holding almost all of the Imperial territory it held in 1914, which can scarcely be said for the French or the Italians.

Most people thought that the Empire, or some form of it, would survive the War (as it had survived earlier defeats). Most of the evidence to the contrary is hindsight, whether it is Musil looking back with sympathy or the intellectuals of the Czech Republic trying to mythologize their national chauvinism.

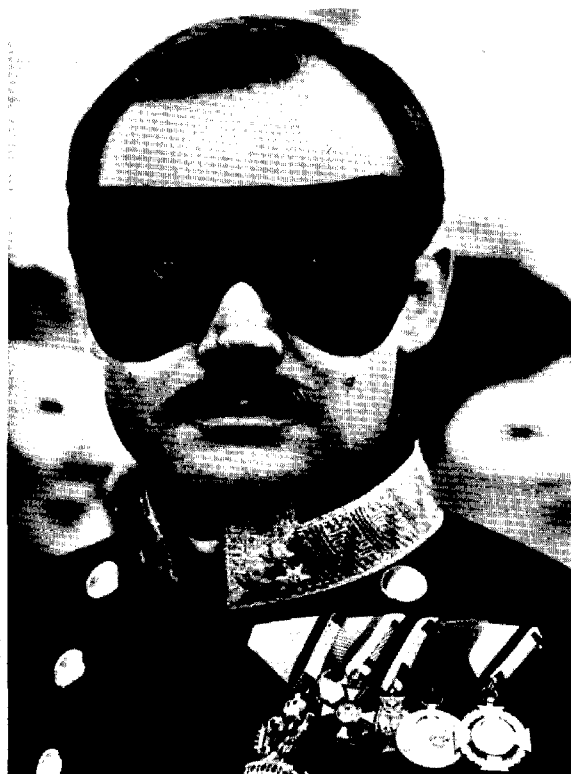


Franz Ferdinand being intimidating. Colonel Redl.

But Szabo's film stops with Redl's death in 1913. The war and its catastrophe were still in the future. We all know what happened, and we don't need to hear Redl agonizing about it. What is needed is more concern about the world

²Probably the best proof of this is that the Imperial Army was smaller in 1914 than it had been in 1866 even though the population had doubled, but this is not to say that it was feeble (Stone 52). Given the resources available to it, the General Staff was unable to solve the problem of a two-front war, because the Army was outnumbered by the Russian and Serbian forces. The Imperial leadership was dangerously weak, perhaps incompetent, but their plans for conducting the war were scarcely more bizarre than those of the Germans (who proposed to lick Russia by invading France via Belgium) or the French (who managed to lose an equally high proportion of their army in a series of senseless attacks against the German left as the war started). See also Josef Roth, *The Radetzky March*, trans. Eva Tucker (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1974; 1st German ed. 1932); Gunther E. Rothenburg, *The Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Press, 1976). A good readable introduction to Imperial culture is Frederic Morton, *A Nervous Splendor* (London: Penguin, 1980).

around Alfred Redl. In the final analysis, this is a film about the military, and the military parts of the film are the weakest, as though the director really doesn't relish his subject. Consequently, the actual details themselves are weak because Szabo doesn't take the time to build them up. Brandauer doesn't help, either. Too much of the time Redl looks like a dreamy misfit caught up in a machine.



Colonel Alfred Redl in disguise

Szabo doesn't spend any real energy on the military aspects of Redl's life and times. More peculiarly (given his work in *Mephisto*), he doesn't spend any time on the extraordinary artistic and intellectual energy of the era either. Although one still hears references to the political repressions of the late Empire, it produced an amazing amount of talent: Mahler, Freud, Schnitzler, Klimt, Kokoschka, the list is virtually endless and varied. Kafka and Rilke grew up there, along with many other men of great genius. Herzl learned to be a Zionist and Adolf Hitler learned to be a fascist, while Tito learned the craft of running a polyglot society, and did so with reasonable success. A society that manages to nurture psychoanalysis, fascism, and city planning cannot be so simply dismissed. *Colonel Redl* would be a much better film if Szabo gave us a glimpse of that instead of restricting his canvas

so markedly. As it stands, however, it is both a good film and a sophisticated one whose subtlety is all the more impressive when one considers the cartoon nature of most of its competition.

Szabo's analysis of sexual behavior is perhaps too subtle: it goes directly to the heart of the problem, but it does so with such delicacy that the final result for some viewers may unfortunately be that the problem has never been illuminated at all. The two protagonists of Hector Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* represent more conventional attitudes. John Hurt plays Molina, a homosexual who has been thrown into jail for attempting to molest an adolescent. He plays the character well enough for us to see him as a complex individual. The complexities of character unfortunately rest on a set of stereotypes: he accosted the teenager because he was alienated and lonely; he worships his mother, and lives with her; he fantasizes a campy WWII movie with a languid *femme fatale* (played by Sonia Braga) who is desperately attracted to a sinister-looking German officer. Molina is unashamedly feminine in his behavior. Hurt takes these clichés and builds a powerful performance on them.

But the plot rests on Molina's attempts to compromise Raul Julia, who plays the politically committed journalist Valentin. The film is set in an unnamed South American country, and Babenco does a great job of keeping his film general without it being vague. He doesn't make any attempt to disguise his shots of São Paulo, but the specifics of the location don't scream out at you. Similarly, his police (and their prison) are suitably nasty but universal. He never backs himself into a situation where the particulars of one country, or one historical moment, are of any importance. It's a generally unappreciated skill which is surprisingly hard to do.

Valentin and Molina have been thrown into the same cell because the police want Molina to insinuate himself into Valentin's confidence and get information out of him. Molina plays along with them but complicates matters by falling in love with Valentin. His love for the journalist turns him into his political accomplice. Freed from prison, he goes towards a fateful rendezvous with Valentin's revolutionary friends, only to be cut down from both sides. So Molina is gunned down and Valentin is beaten to death. Both deaths are brutal and senseless, which establishes a nice proportionality in a film where everything is improbable.

Babenco is successful at making this preposterous story believable enough to be

emotionally demanding: the motivations of the police are never spelled out, although their belief that the homosexual Molina will be able to worm his way into Valentin's confidence is exceedingly curious. Where he is much less successful is in the cinematic parts of Puig's novel. The imprisoned Molina whiles the time away by narrating the plots of imaginary movies. In his earlier novel *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* Puig intermingled the fantasy of the screen with the lives of his characters. Their own lives were so banal, their reality so oppressive, he suggested, that they turned to the movies as an escape. But the cinema became considerably more than that. Puig's characters became influenced by what they saw, and their behavior came to be a function of what they had seen on the screen. The movies were thus both an escape and a teacher, and the two combined with deadly consequences.

This linkage is even more important in *Kiss of*



Molina (left) and Valentin. *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

the Spider Woman: the characters behave as they do because they are influenced by movies, in which characters combine and scheme for improbable reasons. Babenco's earlier films make it clear he could do this. But here he seems overpowered by the combination of Leonard Schrader, Hurt, and Julia.³ Schrader's script reads as though he's afraid if he translates the complexities of the novel onto the screen he'll lose his audience. But the only audience interested in, and open enough, to see a film centering around the development of a homosexual love affair is a

³Babenco's travails in raising the funds for his film are sympathetically recounted by Steven Watson in *The Washington Post* 11 August 1985: H1. The *Variety* reviewer was sympathetic as well, although correctly tagging the film a "partially successful screen adaptation" (15 May 1985: 14). The *Screen International* Jury at Cannes was much less impressed; their score of 17 is a relatively low mark.

sophisticated audience. Hurt and Julia seem so obsessed with making a completely different audience accept the inevitability of their love that everything else gets shoved into the background.

The result is that the imaginary movie sequences, which should be the primary way in which we come to understand the characters and their behavior, degenerate into a series of entertaining but irrelevant vignettes. The major "film" in the film is a story about a French singer who falls in love with a German officer. This "film" muddles the action rather than explicating it: the German officer is portrayed more as a good guy, the resistance fighters as bad guys. Braga, in her love for him, betrays her country, but can't help it.

It's possible that the problems of Schrader's script were a function of the problems of the other script he worked on, his brother Paul's film on the life of Yukio Mishima. Both scripts deal with homosexuality, and both rely on films-within-films to provide us with insights into the central character. There are other, more curious, parallels. Molina's chief "film" is disturbingly fascist, his male hero a brutal looking nazi in a sinister black uniform and boots. Mishima's political ideas, and his paramilitary organization, also have a fascist tinge to them, although in his case the term has to be qualified: Mishima was a Japanese intellectual, not a Western one, and so it can be argued that his beliefs are not really fascist in the sense we use the term.⁴

Whether or not this is a valid distinction is what makes Mishima so interesting. He sometimes looks like the "part genius, part crack-pot, and goof-ball" that Francis Ford Coppola has described him to be.⁵ His novels are obsessed with ritual suicide, self-sacrifice, humiliation, sadomasochism, homosexuality, and gore. Maybe, as Coppola says, that is the combination of qualities that makes him human. Of course world literature is full of masterpieces written by people whose view of the world seems

⁴In *The Moon in the Water* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), Gwenn Boardman Petersen tries to elucidate Mishima's complexities, and to argue against a simplistic treatment of him as a fascist or militarist (206-207). See also the sympathetic treatment by Henry Scott Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1974).

⁵From the biography of Coppola included in the Press Kit of the film. Ironically, Coppola seems to have a better understanding of Mishima than any of the people who actually made the film. Kurtz and Willard are probably closer to the real Mishima than Schrader's film is.

uncongenial, and whose behavior is atrocious, yet we go on deriving pleasure and edification from their art. But the problem here is more complex. The real-life Mishima gained entrance to a Japanese self-defense force base on 25 November 1970. He held its commanding officer prisoner in his own office, made a speech to the assembled garrison, and then committed suicide in the usual fashion. His speech—and much of his writing—was directed against the postwar constitutional government, which he believed had undone the traditional Japanese way of life.

So Mishima's life and art were more than usually concerned with the course of political events. He recruited and trained an organization of young men difficult to characterize in any way other than as being militaristic. Even though Mishima's apologists argue that this is a misleading term, it is difficult to see what other term could be used: the "Shield Society" wore uniforms and participated in military style exercises, which is why it was so easy for Mishima to gain entrance to the military base on the last day of his life.

His art is much less easy to decipher, although the clues are disturbing ones. For example there is the recurrence of the date 26 February in Mishima's writings.⁶ As is perhaps not widely known, there is a tradition regarding abortive military coups in Japan. On 15 May 1932 a mixed group of naval, military, and civilians attempted a curious coup. They killed the prime minister and attacked installations in Tokyo. Hugh Byas, the *New York Times* correspondent who first researched their story, found the motivation for the attempt to be "appallingly simple," as well as "crude, silly, and inadequate."⁷ They felt that wicked financiers had taken over control of the country and were weakening its morale: "The Japanese delegates to the London Naval Conference were influenced by financiers and therefore they failed. . . . The political parties are the tools of the financiers, the nation was asleep and Japan failed because of the lack of united

force. . . . The condition of the country could not be improved unless blood was shed" (Howarth 177). There was a good deal of sympathy on the part of the Japanese naval and military officers towards these conspirators, who were essentially let off with token terms. But the result of the 15 May attempt was the effective end of a constitutional monarchy in Japan. The military were now in control, and Japan was well launched on the way to war.

But there was another coup—on 26 February 1936. Unlike the first, which involved less than fifty people, this one involved nearly fifteen hundred. The British ambassador characterized them as "budding totalitarians who were too impatient to wait for time to do their work for them" (Howarth 204). The attempt was put down by the army; the ringleaders were tried and shot. Whatever the defects of the Japanese government of 1936, uncertainty was not one of them. Unfortunately, it is this coup that Mishima seems most concerned with, both in his novel *Runaway Horses* and in his short story "Patriotism" (later made into the movie *Rite of Love and Death*, in which he played the young officer who kills himself).

Any attempt to deal with the complexities of Mishima is going to have problems. In the wealth of seemingly contradictory ideas and the brilliance of his prose, he invites commentaries that verge on incoherence, while his treatment of controversial ideas such as homosexuality, sadomasochism, militarism, and fascism invites a righteous simple-mindedness or condemnation. Although Leonard Schrader and many of the other people who worked on the film have a wealth of knowledge about Japan, they haven't managed to avoid either problem. *Mishima* is a woolly compound of both approaches, and a simple-minded muddle.

Schrader relies on the same structural techniques used in Babenco's film, a combination of flashbacks and "films within films," these last taken from three of Mishima's fictions. But both films mangle their internal sequences in similar ways. Molina's film never really explains things, although it's an entertaining enough story, provided the fascism doesn't throw you off. And although the three scenes from Mishima's fictions are beautifully done, they don't tell us much about their author either. The sets, designed by Eiko Ishioka, are stunning and peculiarly suited to an artist who seems deeply, even bizarrely, visual as well as engrossed in color. But the incidents are stunted. The third film segment is

⁶The "Runaway Horses" segment in the film is based on the 26 February coup. The summary given in the Press Book gives a highly misleading idea about the situation in the original novel (22). See the remarks in Petersen about the significance of the 26 February date for Mishima (229).

⁷Quotes from Stephen Howarth's *The Fighting Ships of the Rising Sun* (New York: Atheneum, 1983) 176-177, 203-204. Despite its lurid title, this is a good recent account of Japan's military and their relationship to the successive coups. Howarth had access to much new material, although his text has no footnotes.



The Runaway Horses Sequence from *Mishima*.

based on a lesser-known short story, "Kyoko's House." But the other two scenes are from fairly well-known works—*Runaway Horses* (part of *The Sea of Fertility* tetralogy) and *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*—and neither film sequence is particularly intriguing. The one from *Runaway Horses* does particular violence to the novel.

Or, perhaps worse, the sequences tell us something very simple. If we are to interpret the story of Leni Lamaison literally, it tells us that Molina sees himself as a gorgeous and passive woman who is fatally attracted to a sinister male for whom sex and death are closely related. Equivalently, Mishima's three stories reveal a man riven by the struggles with his homosexuality who is eager to bring his life to a close by committing ritualistic suicide in the most painful way possible. Since there are numerous Japanese precedents for what Mishima did at the end of his life, one would suppose that a sympathetic interpretation of the artist would explicate Mishima's awareness of, and relationship to, this tradition. Those historical precedents have a direct bearing on Mishima's life, and since Schrader's film centers around his last day, it is crucial to an understanding of the film biography as well. Although the film does make us see Mishima's concern with

repurification, and his virtual obsession with sacrifice, it never makes clear that he was responding to historical precedent. Nor does it suggest whether the internal debate culminating in the original incident is still a part of Japanese life, or whether he represents an anachronism.

This is not purely because the sequences from the three novels fail to illuminate Mishima's character at more than a superficial level. The problem is partly that Schrader apparently could not resist the temptation to construct the film along the same lines as Griffith attempted in *Intolerance*. The present (25 November 1970, Mishima's last day) is metered out to us in small doses that are intercut with the scenes from the novels. All four narrative lines converge towards an ending of death and destruction. But since all four endings take place almost simultaneously on the screen, their ability to explain Mishima himself is handicapped.

The other problem is that Schrader, like Godard, seems wrapped up in his own cleverness. The film is full of incongruous thuds. The novelistic scenes, gorgeously done on highly artificial sets, aim to persuade us that Mishima was a man of great taste and refinement, and they certainly succeed. But when we see Mishima starting off on his last day, a different picture

emerges, one that is often unintentionally comic. He drinks out of a cup that looks like it came from a Japanese dime store, puts on an ill-fitting uniform that seems purloined from a local band director, and climbs into a shabby, four-door sedan. The four occupants of the sedan, with their dung-colored band uniforms, white gloves, and other accoutrements, are jammed into the tiny car.

The result is at best distracting. Such problems are typical of the film. By the end, they drown the action entirely. When Mishima goes out on the roof to address the garrison, it is impossible to figure out what is supposed to be going on. The military personnel assembled are an unruly lot. They pay little attention to him, and when they do, they shout back. This is historically what really happened. But most audiences don't know that, and there isn't any context in which to put their unexpected behavior. All through the film we have seen the Japanese as deeply serious, formalistic, and obsessed with rituals. But here are the real Japanese acting like indignant fishwives. From the audience perspective you



Mishima exhorting the Japanese.

can't tell whether Mishima expected this or not, and the fact that it's an authentic recreation of the scene doesn't help. After three meticulously crafted scenes exalting the Japanese devotion to ritual, beauty, and poise, the Japanese reality is devastating, because the Schraders haven't prepared the audience for it in any way.

One could argue that this wretched dualism is typical of Mishima the man. It is no more difficult to reconcile the beauty of the three novel scenes

with their author's Toyota than it is to reconcile his prose with his photography.⁸ Mishima's fascism, his homosexuality, and his wretched taste in matters visual have to be squared against his mastery of prose. The problem is the sort of elementary character analysis that every director must face. But the Schraders simply dodge all of these complexities: their Mishima is as integrated and together as the old Hollywood hero-artists of the 1930s, and the use of a voice-over narration contributes significantly to this. It's the same technique Coppola used in *Apocalypse Now*: Willard knows what's going to happen because he's been up the river. Mishima hasn't.

So Schrader leaves his audience totally in the lurch. Whatever Mishima intended, and whatever the actual result of his death, it remains completely obscured. Although one can fault Szabo's sketchiness in treating Redl, his abilities to unfold a complex plot are tremendous. Moreover, both he and Babenco have a sure sense of the extent to which a man can see when his sexual life and his political life relate to one another. Molina knows that he's going to get killed in his attempt to help Valentin, but Babenco makes us see what he sees, which is that the attempt is both a sign of his love for Valentin and the ennobling of what has been a wasted and sordid life. He also has left Valentin a great gift—his fantasy world—and it is into that world that Valentin sinks at the end of the film as he lies in a hospital room at the edge of life. What Schrader leaves us with is the feeling that we've seen some tremendous sets. Despite the lavish production values, the result looks suspiciously like a mediocre documentary for network television.

Babenco restricted himself to an adaptation of a well-known Argentine writer, but his Argentine colleagues in recent years have used a variety of sources for scripts. Argentine cinema has been in the doldrums for many years, with only an occasional flash to liven it up. As a result, there is a paradoxical tendency to overvalue the few films that surface. Probably the most successful has been Hector Olivera's *Funny Dirty Little War*, based on the novel *No habra mas penas ni olvido* by Osvaldo Soriano. Olivera's film (which has won the top prize at virtually every festival in which

⁸Compare Stanley Reynolds' remarks in "Homoshima," *Punch* (31 July 1985: 53): "Something else ought to be said of Mishima's photographs. They are absolutely ridiculous." It is difficult, as Reynolds points out, to correlate Mishima's defense of the traditional sense of Japanese life with his pose before his motorcycle wearing nothing but swimming trunks, boots, an aviator cap, and sunglasses.

it has been screened) is definitely not overrated, and a few brief comments on it establish a useful perspective for other, more recent Argentine films.

Unlike Schrader, Olivera follows the novel's sequence of events quite closely, and although there are differences in tone, there are no drastic changes. It is 1974, and the place is a small and imaginary town in the province of Buenos Aires. The *delegado* of the town, Ignacio Fuentes, is to be removed from his post, and the rumor is spread that this is because he is a Marxist. Fuentes, like the men who want to get rid of him, is a dedicated Peronist. He gets the message quickly enough—it is being broadcast over a loudspeaker all over town—and so he goes home, gets his guns, and returns to his office. He



Ignacio Fuentes with gun and friend. *Funny Dirty Little War*.

barricades himself inside, coerces his clerks and a reluctant policeman into his service, and proceeds to defend the center of the municipal government against his enemies.

The conflict rapidly escalates. After the police are driven off, Fuentes' opponents call for their own reinforcements: a group of nasty thugs. There follows an escalating round of terror and violence. Fuentes is taken, mercilessly tortured, and finally shot. But he has allies. There is the town drunk and his eccentric crop-duster friend. Together they spray the town, first with insecticide dust and then with excrement. While other people are being killed and tortured, they are playing. They have some contact with the other group of allies—the students—who are also playing, but with more deadly weapons. Typically, all of this happens too late to be of

much use to Fuentes, but the students do finally launch a technically impressive counteroffensive. They kidnap the local police chief and then kill him. The grammar school where Fuentes is being held is partially blown up, as is the jail. The net achievement of all of this (besides some bodies) is the rescue of the disconsolate policeman who was forced to side with Fuentes and help defend his office.

Although the cast of characters is small, Olivera manages to show both the insanity of the war and the fact that it is, quite simply, a civil war. It is one made all the more senseless by the fact that all sides shout "Peron" as their war cry. In one bizarre scene both the killer and his defiant victim shout it almost simultaneously. And, at the end of the film, when the town is in ruins and most of the principals have been killed, the two survivors to whom we are supposed to be the most sympathetic (the town drunk and the policeman) still have their essential faith in Peron unshaken. *Funny Dirty Little War* is both much more and much less than an analysis of Peronism and its relationship to Argentina's problems. It is much less, because Soriano's novel gives us the extremely restricted view of the country revealed in this brief summary. But it is much more, because Olivera shows us that the real roots of the problem lie in the characters' reflexive violence.

The problem is not politics and corruption. Every society has those. The problem is the way the quarrels are conducted. Politics does not alone explain the passion, he argues, and offers examples like the one just mentioned, where people who are on the exact same side turn on one another. When Fuentes discovers that he is under attack, he goes home and gets his shotgun. At the end of the movie, when Guglielmini, the party sub-chieftain, tells his local henchman that he will be getting the blame for this mess, the henchman runs over him with a truck. The characters in this film are addicted to violence just like some films show people addicted to drugs. As Pogo once said, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

This background dampens one's enthusiasm for Puenzo's *The Official History* and Maria Luisa Bemberg's *Camila*. Both are good, but they lack the remove that makes Olivera's film such a pungent commentary (they also aren't technically as good a cinema, either, for reasons discussed below). This is particularly the case with *Camila*, whose director's previous films have all been contemporary melodramas like *Momentos*. So is *Camila*, except that it's an historical one. The

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story, a tragic love affair between a young aristocratic woman and a handsome young priest, is a true one. But the truth is largely irrelevant, as Luso-Hispanic literature is rich in similar stories. Eca de Queiroz' *The Sin of Father Amaro* and Juan Valera's *Pepita Jimenez* are but two of the best.

It is also claimed, more pertinently, that this project is one of the most venerable and controversial possible for an Argentine filmmaker.⁹ Latin American filmmakers usually do their worst work when they embark on such projects, so it is good to be able to say that her treatment of the theme is completely new. Part of the charm lies in the fact that she does the film from a woman's point of view. The central character, Camila O'Gorman, is a strong-willed and independent woman. She is old enough to know her mind and observant enough to see that both she and her country are repressed. As a woman she is stifled by the patriarchy, hatefully played by her father and his friends. But Camila perceives that her young male friends have precious little freedom either. As played by Susu Pecoraro, she comes across as just the right mixture of person. She is not the hapless victim of male lust, but a curious and controlling adult, and she is quite the best part of the film.

The young priest, Ladislao Gutierrez, is at once a more complex and a less intriguing character. He is handsome enough, and politically heterodox enough, for us to see why there should be an attraction between the two of them, and the two actors certainly bring this off. The feverish attraction they feel, a sort of unconscious lust that gradually boils to the surface, is perfect. And Bemberg handles the elopement with a fine eye for the management of domestic detail. It is the sort of observation that the great novelists of the last century had, whether male or female, so there is nothing particularly sexual about it, but it is hard to find a male artist nowadays who has it in any measure at all.

Bemberg also doesn't have any trouble making painfully overt what all of the previous (male) directors discussed have been unwilling or unable to do, which is to point out that sexual activity threatens the basis of any repressive state and it reacts accordingly. This is the foundation which Schrader's scripts ignore, and it is the missing subtext from Szabo's film. The time is towards the end of the Rosas regime. Whatever

his original virtues for Argentines, by the end of the 1840s he had degenerated into a deeply repressive dictator who was increasingly threatened by exiled politicians or patriots. The elopement challenges public morality, that same morality which is used to throttle freedom of speech and keep the citizenry terrified. The state and the church therefore unite in urging that the lovers be persecuted. Although they try to escape and start a new life, they are finally caught. Even though Camila is pregnant, she is shot alongside her husband.

That the state would have no qualms about violating its own regulations is a grisly touch, and Bemberg makes sure that we understand that it was against the law to kill a female criminal who was pregnant, the theological reasons being obvious. It is a final touch that establishes a keen insight: such states, whether Argentina in the last century or Germany or the Soviet Union in this one, are essentially lawless. As Milovan Djilas has remarked, people drive on the correct side of the street, but in the deeper sense these societies are lawless.¹⁰

Considered in this light, *Camila* is a very good film, but its thematic virtues are offset by technical problems. The first of these has to do with the dramatic crux of the film. As we might imagine, the two lovers had no trouble in running away and starting a new life. South America was a big place. And even if they were found (as they are), there would be plenty of people (anarchists, free-thinkers, anti-clerics, or individualists) sympathetic to their plight. Bemberg is certainly aware of this, and in her film the local military commander gives them a chance to escape after their new identities are discovered. Ladislao decides to surrender, because he feels that he has led Camila into sin and that he must atone for his violation of his vows. The problem is that it is here that his character becomes crucial, and neither Imanol Arias or Bemberg can make this, the difficult part of their relationship, work. As it is, the film comes dangerously close to saying that Camila gets the short end of the stick: women love men, men love ideas. Or, from a more feminist perspective, women stick to their vows, men don't. This comes too close to turning a great romantic tragedy into a case of bad judgment, a fine political and sexual statement into a woman's melodrama.

The second problem is that although

⁹There is a good summary of the historical situation in the *Variety* review of the film (13 June 1984: 20).

¹⁰This formulation about lawlessness comes from Milovan Djilas, as quoted by G. R. Urban in *Stalinism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982) 279.

Camila is so radically different from Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *The Priest and the Girl*, an excellent film obviously on a similar subject. But well have been a monster, but Hector Alterio turns him into a real maniac. Virtue and vice are so rarely portioned out in such a fashion, and as a result *Camila* seems uncomfortably like a feminist tract. That may very well be what audiences want, but it lessens the film. Olivera, on the other hand, seems keenly aware that the story he is telling is the sort of machistic action story that is the opposite of women's melodrama. His characters aren't, but as director he makes the audience realize that this ultimate masculine world is in reality a world of grotesque bestiality and revenge.

The other problem is that Bemberg didn't have the resources at her disposal to make the lavish historical epic that her somewhat literal treatment of the subject demanded. It doesn't seem like Latin American directors have ever been able to make historical films of the sort that their European or North American counterparts have. They have the history, and increasingly they have the actors. What they don't have is the industrial infrastructure in the cinema that can turn out sets, costumes, and thousands of disciplined extras. Twenty years ago some of this concern was obviated by the quality of the cameras being used: in the final print the resolution wasn't good enough for the audience to notice the imperfections.

But as the reproductive qualities of the cinema camera have improved, and as this equipment has become increasingly available, new problems arise. You can't make an acceptable historical film by running off a few costumes and centering the action on a few old buildings. When you do the result is just that: the audience sees a bunch of people in costumes running around an old building. In *Camila* problems of that sort are always nagging at one's consciousness. They detract from the story and deflate the melodrama. And Bemberg's attitude isn't much help. She uses the same approach that she's used in her contemporary films. The effect is somewhat disconcerting: it's as though we're watching contemporary actors caught in a time warp.

What all this means is that Maria Luisa Bemberg has a lot to learn about the creative dodging that enables her colleagues to solve these problems, which means that she has to see their films. Unfortunately, Latin American directors rarely watch films made by other Latin Americans. In this sense it really is refreshing that

Joaquim Pedro's film is enough of a classic that it is fair to expect it would have some influence on Bemberg, and it's the kind of film that suggests how a director can handle the problems of filmmaking when deprived of the lavish resources of Hollywood. But it hasn't. Unfortunately, a big part of the charm of Maria Luisa Bemberg's work is that she seems bent on rediscovering the wheel. Her principal strength is thus her principal weakness, which suggests a kind of endless circle.

An understanding of the vicious circle problem is a necessary prelude to *The Official History*. Technically it's a better film than *Camila*, although less imaginative. The plot is this: Alicia is a typical representative of the Argentine upper middle class. She is wealthy enough, but no longer young. She and her husband Roberto have adopted a little girl, and to a not unreasonable extent their life revolves around the child. Slowly (too slowly perhaps) as the film unfolds, Alicia becomes obsessed with the identity of the child. Who were its parents? Where did it come from?—again, the standard plot of a soap opera.

But this is contemporary Argentina; and it becomes painfully clear where the child came from. She is the relic of a pair of *desaparecidos*. Her parents were murdered by some death squad, and their child was laundered through the hospital like a bundle of tainted pesos. It's a grim enough story, and Alicia doggedly pursues it. At first she drills through all of the jury-rigged systems that the relatives of the disappeared have set up in their attempts to try to locate their loved ones. We know what the reality is, but Alicia is completely oblivious. Everything in Argentina might just as well have been set up to help her find out her child's history, as far as she's concerned. So Alicia starts out blind and indifferent. Like Molina, she's interested only in her personal problems. But gradually she does begin to see: the sufferings of these other women—grandmothers, aunts, mothers-in-law—make her see it. It is a ghastly metaphor of the extent to which the system devours its victims, and Alicia moves from innocence to knowledge as she realizes that her gain has been the direct result of the loss of these other women.

She begins to see, as well, the extent to which her husband is a cog in the social machine. He is just as guilty as the people who actually did all this. His friends, his business contacts, all point to some sort of exploitation of the system. Towards the end, when we see him racing out to the airport with his business associates, we can't

Bemberg's and her male act a caricature.

tell the difference between the merchants and the shot, because the film is trying to tell on everyone and simulates so

If Puenzo is a good one, he's gotten it. But the film is brutal, perhaps with her husband as his. When "rightful" r



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Bemberg's analysis of society is incisive enough, her male actors make the actual social organism a caricature. In real life, Mr. O'Gorman may very tell the difference between this convoy of merchants and a convoy of hit men. It's a great shot, because it pulls everything together that the film is trying to say; unfortunately, it will be lost on everyone who hasn't seen the reality which it simulates so closely.

If Puenzo were a great director, instead of a good one, he would end his film there, because he's gotten the audience where he wants them. But the film goes on to die off miserably on a brutal, perhaps overly brutal note. As Alicia's knowledge (and guilt) increases, her relations with her husband deteriorate. He wants the child as his. When he fears she has returned it to its "rightful" relatives, he mauls her. It's a terrible



Alicia discovers the truth about Roberto. *The Official History*.

and effective scene, and it drives the point home.

Too much so, because the film already suffers from the great curse of Argentine cinema, which is that neither the director nor the characters can modulate their use of melodrama sufficiently enough to keep us entranced with the action. Norma Aleandro, who plays Alicia, manages this, but the other actors don't, and there is too much of a hit or miss quality in their work. Puenzo also has the same problem that Bemberg has, which is that he is working from a script that gives him too few people. The women are great, but the men are too motiveless. There isn't anything endearing about her husband—and there isn't supposed to be—but there isn't anything about him that indicates why they ever got married, or what is really going on in his mind. Like Ladislao, he is more or less a necessary prop, and his behavior is regulated accordingly. It doesn't work, and it lessens the film.

But what some people saw as the film's weakness is actually a perceptive observation.¹¹ It seems difficult to believe that Alicia would have such finely developed tunnel vision. Ironically, although she teaches history, she doesn't seem to have any knowledge about the recent history of her country. When one of her students, who is being deliberately rebellious, hints that his country's history is problematic, Alicia's reaction is ingenuous. What on earth was she doing when all of these people were being killed, one wonders. And as Olivera's film reminds us, the violence goes far back. That a woman of Alicia's intellect and affluence would have her naiveté about her country is in good measure the problem: it's what Olivera demonstrates at the end of his film when the two survivors walk off into the countryside fantasizing about how proud of them Peron would be. Alicia's innocence about everything that has been going on in her country for the last ten years is unfortunately a deeply realistic and telling observation.

She's like the heroine of the 1890s segment of Humberto Solas' *Lucia*, who manages to ignore the rebellion around her. But Puenzo, unlike Solas, doesn't manage to make these things convincing. When you see *Lucia*, you realize that there is a struggle going on, and you see just how and why Lucia and her friends have managed to shut it out. It's not that they don't see it; it's that they are oblivious to it. It has no notional impact on their lives. But Puenzo can't seem to deal with this problem directly. He gives us the bits and pieces of Alicia's life, but he can't use those bits to paint in the picture.

As a result, what Puenzo probably sees as a flaw in his countrymen (or in this class of his countrymen) too easily becomes a flaw in the film. The real sticking point of his film is his quiet assertion that the upper classes didn't want to know, didn't really care, and don't want to be bothered. They want to get on with the essentials of life, which for both Olivera and Puenzo looks suspiciously like looting whatever portions of the national economy they can get their hands on. It's an unflattering picture, and it's hard to swallow. The fact that it may be the truth doesn't make it any easier.

But if it is, it is too controversial and hard an

¹¹These reservations explain why the *Screen International* Jury gave the film the relatively low rating of 21. Judging from their comments, they were impressed by the director's treatment of the subject, but were mildly put off by the melodrama and the insularity of the characters. For a contrasting view, see the *Variety* review (24 April 1985: 23).

insight to be slid by the audience in this fashion, and in this one way Bemberg and Puenzo have something in common. What could have been a masterful statement about Argentina reaching the end of its first dictatorship ends up being simply a pathetic love story; what could have been a film about a responsible middle-aged woman who really sees what a mess her country is in ends up being simply a pathetic story of misplaced maternal love and a failed marriage. The rush to make a cinema of innocent victims doesn't take us any closer to Argentina than the attempt to claim—at the peak of the dirty war—that there were no innocent victims. It is Olivera's genius to be able to make us realize that while everybody was guilty, some people are guiltier than others.

All of this might seem far afield from the idea of sexual politics. Camila and Ladislao, like Valentin and Molina, represent a sexual possibility that the state is not prepared to accept and will go to almost any lengths to destroy. In those two films, the linkage is clear. What Puenzo gives us is a different and grimmer perspective. Alicia, as a woman, comes to see the situation more clearly: she learns about it through other women. The horror of it comes through to her because it preys upon an instinct that she has that Roberto doesn't have. At the end it is clear that in this society to be male means to be a torturer, a victimizer, and a killer. To be a woman means to be tortured and abused, to be the victim. So when they fight—and he really does hurt her—it establishes the final linkage. He may not have done any of the things that were done, but he certainly has the potential to do them. His rage at his wife brings out something in him that establishes his fundamental solidarity with the torturers of his society, and it makes the equation all too clear.

The problem is, once again, that reality is rarely so neat. One of the numerous virtues of Kusturica's film was that its director managed to show just how jumbled and confused all of these things get. There was a distinct glint in Milos Forman's eye when he announced that *When Father Was Away on a Business Trip* was the unanimous choice of the Jury for best film. It's not a great film, but it has the sort of economy and elegance that the other films lacked. The narrative center is a young boy, who lives with his young mother, little brother, and grandfather, after his father is sent to jail. This is the period in Yugoslavian history after the break with Stalin and the Soviet Union. The Yugoslavians were as

relentless in jailing Stalinist sympathizers as Stalin has been in incarcerating everyone else.

Given the situation, obviously some of these people were guilty. But some of them, like the boy's father, weren't guilty of anything except a casual remark. Kusturica learned his filmmaking at FAMU in Prague in the glory days when Kundera was there, and there's more than a passing similarity with Kundera's *The Joke*. So although Malik is the little hero of the film, which is ostensibly concerned with what he sees around him, and how he learns to accept life early on as a result of the hardships his family endures without his father, there is an adult plot as well. Kusturica has a fine eye for details, and so he can center on the children's world and show you the adult one just behind it. Of all the younger



Family members and other traitors.
When Father Was Away on a Business Trip.

Yugoslavian filmmakers, he's the one who can take this sort of situation—domestic village life—and invest it with the sort of narrative energy that it should have. Similarly, he takes what's basically a horrific story and keeps whittling away at the comic aspects of it. It's easy to see why Forman would be well disposed to him: they both have the same sort of irreverent and perceptive eye.

But it's a very conservative eye. Kusturica's satiric bent is grounded in a strong sense of social decorum. He doesn't point things out just to shake things up, but to demonstrate that in this society the fundamental moral order of things has been violated, and there's nothing to take its place. What Malik sees, and what we see, is being shown to us by a man who realizes the absurdity of life, but who is incensed that it comes down to this. Malik's father isn't put in jail just by accident; he's put in jail because he's the victim of a sexual intrigue. And perhaps the worst thing that happens to him is the separation from his

attractive young wife. She's totally innocent, so her suffering really is pathetic.

When the two of them get the chance to be together—briefly—Malik in his excitement can't sleep, and so he interrupts their lovemaking. It's as though all of the ties and allegiances these people should naturally have for one another have been set at odds and are furiously competing. It's a surprisingly optimistic film, but a sobering one. Djilas has observed that there really is a great difference between fascism and socialism, because the "basic Communist message has always been libertarian, humanitarian, and transnational, and in this vital respect Communism has always been at variance with Nazism" (Djilas 208). But after two hours of Kusturica's film, that seems much less certain. This socialist society is just as jealous of sexual expression as Bemberg's nineteenth-century one, and for the same reasons. But it's typical of the way Kusturica operates to go past such simple

linkages: oppressive societies don't want sexual freedom, and sexual behavior can be subversive. But it can also be the basis for other kinds of behavior. It's a complicated dialectic, and the film manages to explore all of the complications. Considered from this point of view, it's by far the most sophisticated film of the group, and the most neatly done. One could make a better film, or a greater film, or whatever, but it would be virtually impossible to improve on Kusturica's handling of the subject.□

This is the second of three articles on the 1985 festival.

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Terri Brint Joseph

MURRAY KRIEGER AS PRE- AND POST-DECONSTRUCTIONIST

And if this would deny to poetry the claim of being a special form of discourse and to the aesthetic the claim of being a special mode of experience, I suppose I would simply have to face up to the loss of my precious illusions in the greater name of simple common sense.

—Murray Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry* (1956)

So I suggest we respond critically to the enterprise, currently so common among us, that would undermine the poem's differentness from other discourse. What this enterprise has been seeking to accomplish is a deconstruction of the metaphysical assumptions behind the traditional aesthetic and its resulting claim about the poem's ontology. . . .

—Murray Krieger, "Apology for Poetics" (1981)

Anyone who has followed the theoretical dicta of Murray Krieger over the last two decades will be aware of how he has incorporated some of the best insights of structuralism and post-structuralism, especially their necessary—if sometimes disorienting—attempts to demystify our theories of language and literature. The grace, precision, and careful thought that are the hallmarks of Krieger's accommodations are no less impressive than his insistence on holding fast to several tenets of contextualism, one of the most systematic branches of New Criticism, which he formulated almost thirty years ago in *The New Apologists for Poetry*.

Those who have not read the more recent Krieger may not realize how far he has come since New Criticism, while those who have read only his work published since the early seventies may overestimate the nature of his concessions to structuralism and post-structuralism, especially deconstruction. If this dual misunderstanding of Krieger seems paradoxical, perhaps it is appropriate to a theorist whose dialectical thought and appreciation of complexity have made paradox one of his most familiar territories, yet it is distorting too: one of the burdens of this piece will be to show that Krieger's journey from New Criticism, while it required feats of fine balance, careful timing, and breathtaking risks, was not quite as lengthy as it seems. Much of his apparent acceptance of structural and post-

structural edicts has consisted of making more explicit positions that had been his all along. In several crucial respects, then, he simply focused on and solidified concepts that had been part of his theory since the beginning. In other ways, he made major concessions, such as limiting himself to the claim of potential, rather than actual, presence, which were carefully measured and strategic withdrawals to regroup his forces for more important battles. And in yet other ways, and these are the most interesting, he actually has strengthened his position, even in the teeth of the most glamorous and authoritative opposition.

By looking at examples of all three Kriegerian procedures, I hope to make clear why I believe that he anticipated contemporary theory at least as much as he has responded to it, and I have chosen my title to emphasize his role as both forerunner and survivor of post-structuralism. In the same way that the work of René Wellek in an earlier generation helped establish literary criticism as not only a respectable but a necessary concern in literature departments of American universities, Murray Krieger's thought runs historically parallel to and exemplifies the growing disciplinary importance of critical theory, much of it nurtured through his own efforts. If I am correct in predicting that Krieger's thought will outlast the latest theoretical claims that deny meaning to literature, writing, and language itself, perhaps we can take heart that

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recognizable forms of humanistic approaches to literature can survive as well. In 1976, Krieger himself said of five distinguished critics working in opposition to structuralism, "... Time is on their side," a remark that accurately foretold structuralism's dimming star.¹ His comment could apply with equal force to the growing concern over the implications of deconstruction that prompts a theorist like Geoffrey Hartman to select *Saving the Text* as the title of a recent discussion of Derrida's *Glas*. Time is on Krieger's side too, and he is using it to create a concept of poetry which can be used as a "center" from which to make larger claims.

Murray Krieger has benefited most, I believe, from structural and post-structural attacks on granting poetic language privileges which set it apart from—above—ordinary discourse. These attacks have helped him clarify his views, so that while never losing sight of his original pessimism about the ontological claims of ordinary language, the words that die on the air as they are spoken, the traces of ink on the perishable page, he insists more strongly now than ever that poetic language does differ from normal, everyday discourse. Poetic language, and I am using "poetic," "poetry," and "poem" in Krieger's sense, as synonyms for imaginative literature including fiction and drama as well as poetry, differs precisely because it is able to achieve the appearance—at the very least—of presence. Whether or not he goes on to suggest that poetic language achieves more than the illusion of presence is a point we shall return to.

For now, we will note that, while conceding that ordinary language works on a principle of differentiation as part of a system of arbitrary, no matter how conventional, signs (up to this point, his position would be acceptable to structuralists and post-structuralists), Krieger goes on to insist, even more firmly than he did at the beginning of his career, that poetic language operates on a principle of identity, not differentiation; and it is here, of course, that he parts company with many contemporary theorists. Rather than reducing his original claims for poetic language (elevated because it and its effects are unique), Krieger, on

the basis of both his own experience as a trained reader of poetry and on theoretical and philosophical considerations, insists now that poetic language moves us in the way that it does because it operates, unlike normal language, on a principle of similarity that overwhelms, though it does not altogether eradicate, the principle of differentiation. And not content with waving this red flag in the face of an influential group of contemporary theorists, he goes on to say that poetic language, by overcoming, at least ostensibly, the emptiness of the signifier, the absence of the signified, becomes not an instance of *parole*, like any other form of discourse, but through its potential presence, a *micro-langue* in itself.

With all of the insights, many of them painful, we have gained into the workings of language since Saussure, with the "new orthodoxy" of critical thought from the continent, we may well gasp at the boldness, the sheer provocation, of Krieger's response to the steady attack on granting poetry a privileged, elite status. We can certainly understand why he has been characterized by Frank Lentricchia as "an important hold-out in the contemporary critical scene. . . ."²

Those unsympathetic to Krieger's position may claim that he has borrowed certain concepts and terms from structuralism and deconstruction (differentiation, binary oppositions, absence, presence, mystification, mythification), in effect co-opting these movements to deck out his contextualism in new finery from France, but I think they may have been guilty of misreading, or perhaps more exactly, not reading, both the pre- and post-deconstructionist Krieger. They may be quite surprised to discover how little in fact he has borrowed from their own critical perspectives, how radically he anticipated them, and how seriously he has critiqued their own enterprise.

Some admirers of the earlier Krieger, however, those who have grown to count on him as one of the few sane voices left in the wilderness of the contemporary critical debate, may have felt betrayed by his newest pronouncements, afraid that he has gone over to the enemy, joining too readily in the current attacks on humanistic literary studies and values. Their fears, as I hope to show, are exaggerated; far from "dismantling logocentric western metaphysics," as chic

¹Murray Krieger, "Introduction: A Scorecard for the Critics," *Directions for Criticism*, eds. Murray Krieger and L. S. Dembo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977) 35. Krieger is using "time" in a double sense here, referring to an awareness of history and historical process as well as to the passage of time. The five noted critics are Edward Said, Hazard Adams, Hayden White, René Girard, and Ralph Freedman.

²Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 227.

parlance would have it, he is as staunch an apologist for poetry as he ever was and, in most of the important ways, he has clarified, not altered, the theoretical stances that have made him an able spokesman for several generations of literary scholars, critics, and theorists. Even the most nostalgic New Critic knows that structuralism and post-structuralism cannot be wished away. They happened, they made contributions valuable enough to excuse many of their excesses, and we ignore their insights at our peril. Krieger knows this as well as anyone, and he is making perhaps the strongest claims for poetry and poetic language that can be made with any hope of their acceptance in today's critical milieu. Lover of poetry still, perhaps more ardent now that its status is being so seriously questioned, Krieger inhabits yet another characteristic paradox: he has kept faith by incorporating the changes that the logic of his original position, his intellectual honesty in the face of new speculations about the nature of literature, and his sense of the seriousness of the critical battles being fought now have required.

To remind ourselves of how much critical theory itself has changed of late, let us begin with a passage from *The New Apologists for Poetry*, Krieger's first solely authored critical work, and compare it with some comments from *Poetic Presence and Illusion*, his most recent book on literary criticism.³ In the earlier passage, Krieger asserts his now familiar insistence that the poem is special, set apart from ordinary language and experience. In doing so, he attempts to confront a related theoretical problem that many New Critics preferred to skirt: since the literary work is self-contained in its own autonomy, using language in a highly concentrated way with very different results than those of ordinary discourse, and since the aesthetic response it creates in an informed, educated reader is different from, and superior to, ordinary experience, how does it allow the reader to penetrate its closed work? This question is related in turn to the larger one of how the poem achieves meaning:

On the face of it, it seems rather absurd to try to maintain the self-containedness of the linguistic interrelations within a poem when clearly symbols can not function unless they mean; and as soon as meaning enters the

picture so does the outside world to which the words in the poem must have some reference. After all, I am trying to formulate a theory for poetry and not for nonsense.⁴

Those of us who have worked with literature for some time may sigh at certain assumptions, explicit and implicit, that shape this passage. We, too, can remember those consoling "certainties": the poem *means* and, despite its isolating autonomy, is connected to the experiential world; though discontinuous from normal language and experience, it is finally accessible to the reader; the critic formulates theories of meaning, not of nonsense. At the time that Krieger wrote this passage, few could have anticipated that the capacity of the poem to mean and the connection between its linguistic elements and their referents would come under question. Fewer still could have foreseen that major critical positions would come to be based on a concept of imaginative literature as "nonsense," in that the perceived gap between signifier and signified, between word and reality, would keep us firmly on the wrong side of the "abyss" that is believed by an increasing number of post-structural critics to make meaning impossible. Without the old certainties of which Krieger spoke in *New Apologists*, we seem to be left with empty counters, which we apparently must use to spell out ironically or attempt to conceal the absence at the heart of language and consciousness.

Yet far from being discouraged by these current theoretical questionings of the status of poetry, Krieger has used them to sharpen his sense of how poetic language achieves its ends. In *Poetic Presence and Illusion*, he says of poetry that its

... medium is such that words can both exploit their meanings exhaustively and remake them utterly. . . . The poem's trick of being at once self-authenticating and self-abnegating enables it to proclaim an identity between itself as metaphor and its reality, a collapsing of the binary oppositions between signifier and signified, and yet enables it at the same time to undercut its pretensions by reasserting its distance from an excluded "real world."⁵

The poem in Krieger's view, then, is still set apart,

³Krieger's first published book, *The Problems of Aesthetics*, was a text which he and Eliseo Vivas, with whom he worked, edited together in 1953 (New York: Rinehart and Company).

⁴Murray Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956) 21. Unless otherwise noted, emphases within quotations are Krieger's own; ellipses, however, are mine.

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both by its "self-authenticating" qualities and by its ability to "collapse" the oppositions between signifier and signified; and it is for these very reasons that we turn to it for the particular consolation and pleasure that only it can bring us, or, as he puts it in another context, for fulfilling "the needs of our consciousness to see metaphorically," that is, with vision based on the principle of identity, "and not just differentially" (*Poetic Presence* 164).

Although as astute a thinker as J. Hillis Miller stated flatly in 1972, "A critic must choose either the tradition of presence or the tradition of 'difference,' for their assumptions about language, about literature, about history, and about the mind cannot be made compatible," Krieger has not found it necessary to make this choice.⁶ It is his refusal to do so that gives his work particular interest now to both adherents of and opponents to post-structuralism. His ability to be simultaneously a critic of presence and a critic of absence rests on the way in which he views the linguistic nature of imaginative work, which he sees as operating, like the metaphors it may contain, on principles of similarity and identity. The paradoxical trope of metaphor, which begins with "difference," the distinction between vehicle and tenor, but ends with "identity," the fusion of its two terms, becomes for Krieger a metaphor itself for the poetic process, which creates identity from apparent difference.

Characterizing the quality in poetry that begins as "an arbitrary system of sounds," the recent Krieger points out how it ends by making poetic language a distinct world of discourse in which ordinarily empty signifiers fill with the presence of the ordinarily absent signifieds, thus converting poetic language to a form of *langue* rather than *parole*:

What begins in the poem as an arbitrary system of sounds, arising out of an "aesthetic surface" which we normally expect to find only in sensible media but which convention has permitted us to find in verse, appears to develop into an utterly new system of meanings such as only this verbal system

⁶Murray Krieger, *Poetic Presence and Illusion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 144.

⁷J. Hillis Miller, "Georges Poulet's 'Criticism of Identification,'" *The Quest for Imagination*, ed. O. B. Hardison, Jr. (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971) 216.

(with its compound of sound and meaning structures) can sustain as it creates it for our learned response. It is in this sense that I would argue for our viewing the poem as a *micro-langue*, a *parole* that has developed into its own language system by apparently setting up its own operational rules to govern how meanings are generated.

(*Poetic Presence* 148-49)

Krieger thus argues for both the tradition of absence and that of presence and is only too well aware of the limits of ordinary language. This awareness has shaped his sense of how extraordinary poetry is in the way that it performs the "miracle" (a telling and persistent word in his lexicon) of linking signifier with signified and with the experiential world or, as he puts it in *Poetic Presence*,

Though obviously the poem is but a *parole*, a speech act made in accordance with what the *langue*, as the general system of discourse, permits, it rises as a *parole* to become its own *langue* with its own set of licenses—within the intentionality of aesthetic experience and through the recognizable devices which encourage us to find a bodily presence in it.

(149)

We note how the spatial orientation of this passage (the poem "rises" from the low estate of *parole* to ascend into the kingdom of *langue*) is perfectly consistent with his career-long championing of poetry as a privileged form of discourse. This insistence of Krieger is not only necessary to his theory but reflects his genuine reverence for literature. In *New Apologists*, for example, he states quite clearly that the critic should measure—always—theory against actual poetry and actual experiences of reading it. If a choice must be made between poetry and theory, a theory inadequate to explaining the full range of poetic power must yield to the richness and complexity of the reading experience: ". . . Theoretical statements about poetics, if [the critic] is to appreciate them as relevant to his interests, must have immediate reference to the facts of his experience with poetry." This poetic experience is, Krieger reminds us, "the inescapable starting point of all theorizing; [the critic] clings to it. . . . This constitutes his act of faith" (11). And this "act of faith" requires jettisoning the theory itself if it results in limiting, changing, failing to account

for, or denying the actual experience of reading literature:

... The theoretical problem requires [the critic] to search out a poetics which will account with consistency for what he finds it can do. His primary criterion for a proposed theory is the consolingly operational one: will it allow him to make sense of poetry's value to him? Or, to put it more crudely, will it allow him to go on reading poetry as he does? For he must not give up the experiential fact of poetry, at any theoretical cost.

(*New Apologists* 11-12)

Although the concept that criticism is a secondary art, one whose proper place is as handmaiden, not competitor, of literature, has become suspect these days, the entire corpus of Krieger's work reflects his sharp sense of the distinction between his own "fallen" language as a critic and the "miraculous" language of poetry. He explicitly rejects the claims that, with the leveling of all forms of writing into the valley of *écriture*, criticism becomes the peer, if not the superior, of literature. Speaking candidly in *New Apologists* of poetry's value to him, and this was before the concept of literary value had become problematic in the Anglo-American critical tradition, he said: "I prefer to reject the theory rather than the most valued and most intimate phases of my psychological history" (20-21). This statement of theoretical modesty and poetic appreciation, considered in terms of present critical debates, poses not so much the cynical question of how many theorists would choose poetry over theory, but the bleaker one of how many contemporary theorists, especially those recently trained, are able to read poetry in such a way that it can become one of the "most valued," "most intimate" elements in their lives. Some two decades later, in *Theory of Criticism*, Krieger insists again on poetic value as he discusses even a theorist's resistance to theory while engaged in the "intimate encounter" of reading:

The immediacy and subjectivity of the experience of one engaged in the intimate encounter with the arts hardly require—indeed rather, reject—the intruding presence of a mediating theory. ... The aesthetic impulse that moves us toward the poem seeks to preserve the sanctity of the private moment it celebrates, to keep it

inviolate.⁷

In keeping with his original desire to measure theory against actual reading experience, the more recent Krieger extends his earlier demand that theory accommodate one's previous reading to the proviso that it also must be able to provide norms for one's future reading as well, obviously a very stringent requirement:

A theory must be flexible enough to accommodate the assault of the next poetic experience, and yet it must be tight enough to provide norms by means of which that new experience can be perceived and sustained.

(*Theory* 7)

What, then, are the norms which Krieger attempts to establish in his recent theory? As we have seen, they rest on tenets that were central to his position from the beginning: poetry is an elevated, privileged form of discourse that derives its effects and value from its capacity to transform ordinary discourse into what the earlier Krieger calls the "miracle" of the imaginative work or into what the later Krieger calls *micro-language*. Since poetry creates what is in effect a separate linguistic system, it differs from, and is superior to, criticism, which is a form of *parole*. Krieger chides for their *hubris* those theorists who pretend to have appropriated for criticism the unique quality of poetry's language and effects. To put these critics in their proper place, he points out in *Arts on the Level* how the error of confusing one's criticism with the art form that is the object of one's attention besets only the literary critic, whose medium is ostensibly the same as that of the art form which he or she studies:

It is obvious for critics of the arts other than literature (like the plastic arts) that the language of their criticism is utterly different from the language (if we call it that) of the object that gives rise to criticism. Literary critics may be seduced, perhaps by their arrogance, into being less aware of the great difference between their criticism and its object.⁸

⁷Murray Krieger, *Theory of Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 5.

⁸Murray Krieger, *Arts on the Level* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981) 20.

Recalling the long and often honorable tradition of critics who, until the last decade or so, have worked with the assumption that the poem is the "master text," the text that is "the ground and the very reason for their own," Krieger assesses the results of structuralism and post-structuralism (*Arts* 27). Although he approves the gains in intellectual honesty that have accrued from the new pressure on "traditional critics" to confront the "radical subjectivity that underlies their sincerest efforts at disinterested analysis and appraisal," he is not yet ready to believe that criticism is merely "a rewriting of the [literary] object in the critics' own terms, and thus in effect the creation of a new object, or rather of a projection that the critic then treats as if it were the discovered object" (*Arts* 33). Concerned that critics who believe themselves freed from what they see as traditional criticism's "myth of responsibility to an original object" can now "indulge the misreadings authorized by their irresponsibility," he enunciates his own *credo*:

... I am assuming that there are primary works—utterly primary despite their inevitably intertextual character—that deserve not to be abandoned, that historically have stimulated experience we have found uniquely valuable, experiences that testify to the power of a self-consciously manipulated fiction in a self-consciously manipulated language.

(*Arts* 41)

Despite the temptations—and they are heady ones—of attempting to justify theoretically the view that criticism is itself as fully and self-consciously literary as are the works that it studies, Krieger insists that it is a "secondary art":

... I must still write in defense of the more modest—if less heroic—conception of criticism as a secondary art. It is an art, surely, and it may seem to share some of its secondary attributes with poetry in their commonly intertextual nature; but it is a second telling of the tale and should accept referential obligations to the poem's first telling. As a limited literary criticism, it must acknowledge the poem as its point of origin, whatever intertextual lines flow into and out of them both.

And readers of criticism, he cautions, "retain the right to ask that it try to give readings rather than

misreadings, however fated it may be—epistemologically and psychologically—to be trapped within the latter" (*Arts* 42).

These distinctions between poetry and criticism—and they cannot be attractive ones to theorists convinced that they are scaling Mount Parnassus—are extended in "Apology for Poetics," one of the most succinct statements of Krieger's recent position, to a distinction between the "factual" forms of discourse (like history, philosophy, and social science) and poetic discourse, despite their shared use of tropes and narrative. Suggesting first that the leveling of literature to *écriture* is actually more of a slight-of-hand way of elevating all written discourse to the status of poetry, he ponders the results of applying literary techniques of analysis, especially those of deconstruction, to non-literary works in an attempt to reveal their "naked fictionality." Pointing out that "instead of the concept of literature being deconstructed into *écriture*, *écriture* has been constructed into literature," he considers the implications, disciplinary and epistemological, of the work of Hayden White on the discourse of history:

Obviously, his reduction of every historian's truth claim to be the illusions of the poet's fictions, his obliteration of the realm of neutral fact and of discursive reference, will not please many historians who take their truth-claiming function seriously. Indeed, it may well seem to condescend to non-poetic humanistic texts for us to cut them off from any truth claim by restricting them to the realm of fiction and to the metaphorical swerve of private consciousness.⁹

Reminding us of the negative connotations of words like "fiction" and "illusion," Krieger observes that the historian, the philosopher, or non-literary scholar "may well resent our turning him into a poet *malgré lui*."

Rather than blurring altogether the distinctions between literature and the texts of non-literary disciplines, Krieger suggests that we respect the different aims, ambitions, and methods of the separate disciplines and the different worlds of discourse that constitute their identity:

Surely, even after we have granted that some

⁹Murray Krieger, "An Apology for Poetics," *American Criticism in the Post-Structuralist Age*, ed. Ira Konigsberg (University of Michigan Press, 1981) 94.

fictional obfuscation, with its rhetorical swerving, takes place outside the realm of literary fictions, we may allow some remnant of the free play of fictional reflexivity to be left to the literary intent, and may allow it to be replaced by more precise and clearly aimed objectives in, say, historical studies. . . .

Only by respecting these separate claims can we do justice to our sister disciplines and—hardly less important—identify and preserve our proper domain of the distinctively literary:

And the finally free-floating inventiveness of self-conscious make-believe in the literary text should also in the end be acknowledged as a thing apart, despite our best efforts to see in what ways these differing kinds of texts, produced in response to such varying purposes, may reflect on one another. Aesthetic foregrounding may well go on outside poems, but we do condescend to our writers in all the disciplines when we ignore, or deprecate, the several responses which the body of their works appears to be soliciting from their different readers.

("Apology" 95)

These discriminations among literature, criticism, and scholarly writing are based, in part, on Krieger's sense that poetry transforms *parole*, a speech act of absence, into *micro-langue*, a separate system that achieves at least the appearance of presence. This transformation is obviously one which not even the most inspired criticism can hope to achieve, even though he usually qualifies presence by explicitly labeling it "potential" or calling it an "appearance" or an "illusion," as he does in this passage from *Poetic Presence*:

Still, my coupling of poetic presence and poetic illusion is another way of describing the same relationship between poetry as metaphor and the reader's sense of both reality and the poem's reality. For the poem is present before its reader—like the drama before its audience—only within an illusionary context. That is, its signs are there to stimulate his capacity to create its presence as an illusion. . . .

The "illusionary context" of the poem's presence should not, however, lead to our undervaluing it

since it is a "real," a "positive force":

But the illusion should not be taken lightly as a false substitute for "reality." It is itself a real and positive force: it is what we see, and, as such, it is constitutive of our reality, even if our critical faculty deconstitutes that reality into being no more than illusion. But it is an illusion we can live with—and, most spiritedly, do—though now with self-knowledge, the knowledge of *its* illusionary nature and of *our* mystification. [This book] is based on the assumption—though it is one for which it also argues—that poems are the places where this dual action most strikingly occurs, and where it remains—thanks to their potential presence—for the rest of us to operate on.

(xii)

If this difficult passage seems too paradoxical (polarity is "transformed to identity, but without being any less polar") to be apprehended, it can be illuminated by being placed in its proper context, that of the two philosophical positions that inform his dialectical yet consciously and deliberately non-Hegelian thought:¹⁰

Nevertheless, I concede the post-Kantian flavor of my general position, though my existentialist modifications allow it to sanction a theory of poetry as self-deconstruction (I would prefer to say—in the spirit of Rosalie Colie—that it is a theory which sees poetry as a metaphor that "unmetaphors" itself). I have been urging this notion for many years now—well before the recent deconstructionist vogue.

(*Poetic Presence* xii-xiii)

And poetic metaphor, for Krieger, works on a similar principle of identity that overcomes but

¹⁰Krieger is a dialectician in a pre-Hegelian sense, in that he resists the notion of a synthesizing third term. It is apparently increasingly difficult for some to conceive of a dialectical thought without this third term. Paul Miers, for example, makes the surprising comment, in an otherwise perceptive and interesting review of *Theory of Criticism*, that Krieger "lacks" a concept of dialectic ("Murray Krieger, *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976], 245 pp." in *MLN* 91.6: 1636). Readers who feel uncomfortable with my use of "dialectical" may substitute "paradoxical," as this seems better than trying to force Krieger's system into a post-Hegelian dialectic, in which the poem itself would become the synthesizing third term.

neither mediates nor fully eliminates difference:

... In poetic metaphor the poles are to be seen as at once opposite, reversible, identical. These multiple views, mutually contradictory and yet simultaneously sustained, are permitted by the special character of fictional illusion, with its strangely duplicitous appearances and "realities."

(*Poetic Presence* 157)

Since Krieger seems to be rejecting deliberately here an identity in which difference would be mediated to or fused with similarity, it is clear that he wants both poles to be operative during the reading process so that the reader is aware simultaneously of the presence which the work achieves and the odds—the unavoidable emptiness of ordinary *parole*—it must work against to perform its "miracle" for us. In this sense, then, Krieger, as the title of *Poetic Presence and Illusion* suggests, is treating presence and illusion (or absence) as equal factors in the poem.

On the other hand, though, his title suggests something else. On the jacket of my edition of the book, the wide, boldface letters of "Poetic Presence" are filled in with black ink while those of "and Illusion" are left blank, their shapes indicated only by a narrow outline. Close at hand, this printing device seems to reflect the notions of presence (filled) and absence (empty). Viewed at a distance of several feet, however, "and Illusion" has almost disappeared, and, seen from across the room, it vanishes altogether, leaving "Poetic Presence" as the virtual title of the work, undercutting the coordinate balance of the full title. Given Krieger's theoretical interest in the physical form of manuscripts and printed books—which gives them a concrete form and places them firmly in the world of things—and his delight in the way the illuminated manuscript and fine edition printed book contain that most precious of all metals, gold, to underscore materially the "gold" of the verbal content, it is quite possible that he had some say in this detail of the printing of the title of *Poetic Presence and Illusion*. But whether he did or not, I am willing to take it as a type of emblem, like the series of four emblems drawn by Joan Krieger, his wife, which he used as illustrations, as markers of the structural division of the work, and as embodiments of the major concepts of *Arts on the Level*.¹¹ I see it, then, as a reflection of the way in which we may foreground the experience of

presence while engaged in our "intimate encounter" with the poem. Absence is always there too, of course, even if its only trace in our reading comes from our knowledge of what words are, of the emptiness of ordinary discourse. It is the "presence of absence" in the poem against which potential presence plays; and without that residual of absence, the poem would lose its complexity, its ability to move us as poignantly as it does, and its triumph in the face of dazzling odds.

If some of Krieger's oldest admirers object to finding presence so inextricably and explicitly linked to absence in his recent work and feel that the "illusion of presence" is no presence at all, they can remind themselves that he offers perhaps the only workable alternative to deconstruction, which, leveling all writing to *écriture*, would obliterate the distinctions between poetry and any other form of writing. Although more traditional critics may find any qualification of presence distasteful, they should realize that a deconstructionist would find equally unacceptable the degree to which Krieger argues presence, a degree at times just short of ontological claims. In "Apology for Poetics," he addresses some special remarks to his old and faithful readers, to whom he explains his present position and strategy quite clearly:

Any theory devoted to poetry must today argue for a separate definition of the poem, thereby justifying its own right, within the realm of language theory, to function as a maker of claims for its subject. Thus my apology is not for poetry, but for poetics, the theoretical discourse whose existence, resting on the assumption that there *is* a poetry, is threatened with every denial of poetry's separate place. . . . I can make my apology, I am now convinced, only by making the tentative, self-undercutting moves that separate me from those older new apologists and may seem at moments to align me with those who refuse to grant a separate definition to poetry *or* poetics.

(101)

Such an alignment, however, would be false, as

¹¹Joan Krieger's emblems serve as the frontispiece (iii), and plates 2 (2), 3 (26), and 4 (50) in *Arts*. Krieger discusses them in the "Preface" viii-ix, and elsewhere in the text. See also her emblem on the cover of *Poetic Presence* and his discussion on pages xv, 155n, and 266ff of *Poetic Presence* and also his discussion in "Both Sides Now," supra.

any strongly committed deconstructionist can explain at some length, since Krieger is investing much of his energy in justifying separate definitions of poetry and poetics, as my earlier remarks have shown. He does so because the distinctions between poetry and other writing, even the most imaginative criticism, must be safeguarded before poetry, in our post-deconstructionist world, can be given a full-scale defense. If some apologists for poetry fear that Krieger is behaving like a distressed landed gentleman, beset by hard times and hostile neighbors, selling off bits of the family estate, they should remember that the ancestral home he is struggling to preserve is, after all, the abode of poetry, the house of fiction.

Reminding ourselves that Krieger uses the term "potential presence" at least as often as the "illusion of presence"—and, of course, they are not exact synonyms since "potentiality" carries with it possibilities of actualization and fulfillment that "illusion" does not—let us see what claims he does make in *Poetic Presence* for poetry, even in a time that is dedicated to reading such claims as signs of naïvete, romanticism, and nostalgia:

We remain conscious of the common-sense view of language, resigned to the unbridgeable principle of difference on which it is based, and yet we permit the poem to seduce us into a magical view of language as creator and contained. . . . Because we do not lose our consciousness that the language of the poem is still only language and thus differential (mere empty words with absent signifieds), we indulge the miraculous powers of the poem only as we remind ourselves that miracles cannot earn their name unless they cannot occur.

(158)

He is urging, then, a view of poetry which insists that it brings us as close to presence as we may ever come, freeing us for a moment from the

absence that haunts ordinary language; a poetry that satisfies our deeply felt aesthetic need for the embodiment of the signified in the signifier, for closure, for unity, and for a centered world. That it does so, in the most successful and complex literary work, while daringly decentering itself, exposing its fictions even as it makes us assent to their reality, is surely an almost unassailable argument for the uniqueness and separate world of discourse which Krieger insists that poetry creates for itself. In one of his most moving descriptions of how the poem operates, he gives us in "Apology for Poetics" an indication of the direction in which his theory may move, should he turn to urging presence more strongly than he is at present able to do:

We cultivate the mode of identity, the realm of metaphor, within an aesthetic frame that acknowledges its character as momentary construct and thereby its frailty as illusion. But it allows us a glimpse of our own capacity for vision before the bifurcations of language have struck. The dream of unity may be entertained tentatively and is hardly to be granted cognitive power, except for the secret life-without-language or life-before-language it suggests, the very life which the language of difference precludes. In poetry we grasp at the momentary possibility that this can be a life-in-language.

(100)

Murray Krieger concludes "Apology for Poetics" with the assurance that his "hold-out separatist tendencies invariably win out," and, as I suggested above, time—in both of the senses in which he uses the word—is on his side, bringing him full-circle to a new apology for poetry.□

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Katherine Soniat

THE WOODWORKER

—for C.B.C. (1909-1984)

You've fallen in with that old parade,
columns of once-young men who staged
and restaged the world's great wars.

But tonight as one egret flickers
white onto this artesian pond,
you expand, breathe in and out

in the pine shadows. I can see
what night will do,
the whole space of it built for you.

You will hang just beyond the pale
cottage sunk in shade and watch
that garden where night and day

turned to the same name.
You felt them merge in you.
Until it came to the last tap

of the screen door. You leaving.
The old, knobby bedspread passing
out of sight with noon

coming down on your woodshed,
stacked still and high with pine.
All this passing before you,

who once stood head-down
in the long August heats, wanting
to shape a tree and live near it

like memory broken loose from the shed.
Proof. Now I measure the long spaces
above. I would shape you from air

until there was enough to squeeze
and say yes, it is true.
Far across the pond

a saw begins its piney song,
and you almost rise from the mud
and stars of your little River Styx.

Bart Ramsey

OF MAN'S DESIRING

You can't imagine how a person might feel looking up from a piano to stare directly into the eyes of Harry Lowe. This happened while I was taking a usual Friday afternoon lesson with his mother. Mrs. Lowe was fielding a phone call at the time, off in the kitchen somewhere, a place I'd never seen, when Harry appeared at the bottom of the stairs. I was struggling through "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," making shambles of it for the most part. I flubbed some easy fingering, stopped and slammed my hand on the piano bench.

"That's a nice tune, kid," came a voice from above and beside me.

"Thanks," I mumbled. The blood rushed to my face.

"The tune's been done to death, but I guess I know why," he said. He smiled. Everything about Harry Lowe looked mean except when he looked you in the eye. His eyes seemed to reach inside of you for something, maybe nothing more than one of those solid pieces of sky in a puzzle, a puzzle, you felt, he never worked at solving. There he was in his T-shirt and jeans, hair combed back and gleaming with oil, and with a wide forehead that narrowed sharply along the jaws to his chin. His smile unnerved me because I thought he might have something up his sleeve.

"What're you in, the seventh grade?" he asked.

"Sixth," I said. Harry was halfway through high school. I was thinking he'd given it up, but couldn't decide. He was looking at me just then like I was supposed to speak, so I swallowed hard and said, "Are you a drop-out?"

I was wishing I hadn't asked, but he got over his chuckle and said, "Not at the moment, but maybe I'd be better off. You?"

"Me?" I couldn't believe he even asked. "You gotta be at least sixteen or the police'll force you to keep in school."

"That's right, they chain you to the chair," he said.

I stared at him with my mouth open trying to think of something to erase the silence. All at once he shook his head and laughed to himself, then headed out the front door. I watched through the living room window as he walked down the front

walk. It was early November, cold and rainy, but still no snow. We were in for a mild winter, so I'd been told. Harry stopped at the end of the walk, put a cigarette between his lips, cupped his hands to block the wind, and struck a match. Everyone on the block knew how strict Mr. Lowe was, and the man would have surely beaten Harry were he to see him now, walking down the street smug and nonchalant with a cigarette in his mouth.

Mrs. Lowe entered the room apologizing for the length of the phone call. "I tried to be polite," she said, "but everybody seems to think they come first."

"Who was that?" I asked, even though I knew something like that was none of my business.

"The furnace repairman," she said. "Now let's hear that piece again." She indicated for me to play "Jesu" from the beginning. I did, playing it faster than usual and sloppier than ever.

"You're not concentrating, young man," she said. "Poor Mr. Bach probably just turned over in his grave from the way you tangled up those notes." She giggled. "Mercy me."

"Sorry," I said. I looked up at her through her ancient pale blue eyeglasses, into her tired gray eyes. She was right, I wasn't concentrating. I was thinking about Harry. He said he was still in school. I felt sure he'd dropped out. I knew he wasn't afraid to, and he'd been driving around town in that rusted-out Corvair with only the primer paint for over a year, so I knew he could quit legally. In our little town plenty of kids dropped out by Harry's age if they had any nerve at all. I tried to envision either Harry or his friends ever doing any classwork. About the only time I ever saw Harry around was when he was out driving with his pals, sailing an occasional beer can out the car window, burning a little rubber. It didn't seem to matter that his father owned the furniture factory. You got the feeling Harry couldn't be bothered. I thought of Butch Rowley. He was one of Harry's friends, and he'd been shaving for years. Everybody knew Butch had flunked out of the tenth grade. "You better believe I did," was his attitude if anybody asked. He was proud of it. A lot of people seemed to think Butch had gotten brain damage from a car

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wreck he'd been in years earlier when he was playing chicken with a freight train that clipped the tail end of his souped-up Rambler and flipped him into a gully. Pa and I drove out to the crossing when Pa got word, and I watched Butch get laid onto a stretcher for the ambulance, unconscious and covered with blood. But he was in and out of the hospital in no time. Once the bandages were off and the scars had seasoned on his chin and over the eyes, Butch was the same old bad news character around town. Anyway, he shared an interest with Harry in automobiles, and I'd seen the two together plenty of times, even though Butch was probably already in his twenties. Yet Harry *still* hadn't dropped out of school. Right then and there on the piano bench beside Mrs. Lowe as she urged me to concentrate, I made up my mind that if Harry never dropped out, I wouldn't.

"Well, try it again," Mrs. Lowe said.

"Hunh?"

"Start from the beginning with 'Jesu' one last time and play it all the way through. Then I want you to go home and practice it hands alone. Play it slowly and perfectly with each hand before you put them together. Listen to what you sound like—use those little ears of yours, that's what they're for—and make every note ring out . . . clearly, like it will leave the piano and fly onto the wings of an angel. But for now, one last time, with both hands, play the piece all the way through, young man. Then we'll be done for the day."

I started to play, stumbled over a few notes, backed up a bar, started again and plodded like a tired machine while Mrs. Lowe urged me along by telling me to keep a nice slow easy flow. It was kind of a joke to us both since the piece was still way over my head. I groped my way through the last few bars. Mrs. Lowe said, "Now you take that home and put some time in on it, along with that Kuhlau Sonatina, and what was that pop tune you're doing? We didn't get a chance to look at it today so you should be better with it next week. I'll be expecting you to play that one first." She smiled knowingly at me. "Also, see if you can scratch up something else you want to learn, otherwise you'll have to play what I give you."

I nodded as I gathered up my music books and wondered if I could get my pa to spring for some more sheet music. He hated Mr. Lowe, which made matters worse. And not simply because Mr. Lowe was the owner of Lowe Furniture where Pa worked, but "He's just such a creep about it," as he once told my mother. Pa was never too keen

on my going over to the Lowe's for lessons, but I think he didn't mind so much as long as he put up a little fight and made it a little rough on my mother and me. She could put up a pretty good fight herself, not like Mrs. Lowe. Mrs. Lowe was a lot older than her, and usually pretty meek. Pa once said that Mr. Lowe liked his wife to be a weak woman so she could keep him full of hot air. Still, I liked the piano lessons most of the time, even if they were on Friday afternoons, and Mrs. Lowe had never been anything to me except understanding and easy to get along with. She mentioned from time to time that she used to be a gifted piano player, or *pianist*, as she always said. I never asked her about it, though. I couldn't find the right question. She said she'd once been a member of some chamber orchestra way across the state in Chicago, one that even traveled a little, too, but that she'd given it all up when she got married. She made it clear, though, that she was still a good teacher and always would be. She'd say it like she was kidding, but I always had the feeling that what went on between her and the piano was the true joy of her life. On special occasions, during our lessons, she would reveal her secret admiration for jazz. Whenever she mentioned the subject her eyes would light up and her voice would lower. She would whisper to me about George Gershwin and Duke Ellington, and names I mostly hadn't heard enough to remember. She told me about hearing Oscar Peterson one evening twenty years earlier in a Chicago club. Her eyes glowed as she described how she managed to get back stage. There was a piano in the dressing room, and she asked him if he'd show her some of the chords he'd been playing. I could tell Mrs. Lowe had been hurt when Oscar Peterson refused, telling her she could listen to his albums for the chords if she wanted them bad enough. Of course, I could kind of understand Oscar Peterson's point of view, since Mrs. Lowe didn't exactly look like a hipster.

Just before I stood to leave the lesson I told Mrs. Lowe that I'd seen her son Harry leave the house.

"Really?" she said. "I didn't even know he was home." She puzzled over this a moment. "He must've been in his room." When I said nothing, she went on, "He's a good boy. He's probably the brightest in his class."

"Yeah?"

"I'm not exaggerating; that boy is very bright," she said. "All the teachers tell me he could be a great man someday if he'd only apply himself. But he refuses. He's happy just to squeak by. He

skips in and out of the house without even telling his mother, and I never know where he's been. He goes out and fiddles with his friends and those automobiles and whatnot, and I almost never see him."

"You should teach him piano!" I piped.

"I always wanted to," she said slowly, "but my husband wouldn't allow it. He said no son of his is going to be a musician." She adjusted the pale blue frames of her glasses on her nose. "And that boy Harry is so musical I could cry. I can see it in him, I can feel his sense of rhythm just being in the same room with him. But now . . ." she shook her head sadly, "it's too late to try and get a boy like that to learn."

I worked my way from the living room to the hall as Mrs. Lowe was reminding me, "Remember, play your pieces hands alone first for a while, and don't always be so anxious."

Just then her husband drove up in his shiny blue Cadillac. Mrs. Lowe and I ended up standing there stalling each other off until the man came through the front door. "Hello, son," he said to me, pausing in front of his wife as if deciding whether to kiss her in front of me. He decided not to and disappeared into the kitchen. Mrs. Lowe and I looked at each other blankly for a moment. "And try and spend more time on your scales," she finally said, then let me out the door.

Every Friday afternoon that entire winter I would trudge in what little snow there ever was to the Lowe house for my lesson. I worked on a little popular music, a piece by Beethoven, a little Bach. Mrs. Lowe urged me along like I was her own. She never pressured me, not for a second, as if she knew I would find a way to quit lessons as soon as possible if she did. She would always spend a little bit of the lesson on persuading me to practice as much as I could because it would make the rest of my life so much happier through the years. She also insisted I learn theory, although she was always careful to move on to other material when she thought I was getting the least bit bored.

That entire winter I only saw Harry once, and it certainly wasn't at his house on a Friday afternoon. No, I saw him at Bassett's Drug Store. I was in there hoping to swipe a comic, I hate to admit. Harry walked right past me and bought a pack of cigarettes at the counter. You could see why Bert Bassett didn't give Harry a hard time. The old guy didn't want any trouble.

Harry was about to leave the store when he saw me in the corner and stopped.

"Ey, it's the kid," he said. He looked at me for

a moment, then rapped his cigarette package on the magazine rack and opened it. "Still playing the piano?" he asked.

"Sure," I answered, hoping he wasn't going to tell me I was a pansy or something worse. He had a cigarette between his teeth and his matchbox poised when suddenly he offered me the pack. I looked at him awkwardly, then at old Mr. Bassett, then back at him. Since he was still holding out the pack, I took one. I pulled out the cigarette moving slower than usual, as Mrs. Lowe might have advised. I didn't want to look clumsy. Harry lit our cigarettes, then we both looked slowly over at Mr. Bassett. He happened to be looking right at us, but his eyes darted quickly elsewhere. I followed Harry out the drug store door, swaggering a bit as I flipped the door shut.

Outside I cuffed the cigarette as a couple of people my folks' age walked by. Harry looked at me and grinned. He said, "The piano's a nice instrument; don't you think?"

"I like it," I said, taking a puff of the cigarette, hoping somebody from my grade would cruise by on his bike and see me with Harry.

"Your teacher used to be a real star," Harry said.

"Really?" I said in a voice that wouldn't sound gullible in case Harry was putting me on.

"Does a 'possum pee in the woods?" he said, deadpan, with a smooth farmboy accent I easily recognized. I chuckled. He took a draw from his cigarette and went on, "Yeah, the old lady had a year to go at the conservatory when she got tendonitis. Not just in a thumb joint, either. In both forearms."

"That's like shin splints?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Painful," he said. "Her arms got swollen and stiff. She said she couldn't play five minutes before her arms wouldn't let her play. It broke her heart, little guy, you better believe it did. Her doctor told her she had to wait at least two years before she'd be able to get rid of it."

"What a bitch," I said.

"Sure was. She told me once how she used to pray, and soak her arms in Epsom salt and warm water hoping the inflammation would vanish like magic. And maybe someday she'd've got back to her music, performing like she always intended, but she married the old man and kept drifting away from it. He doesn't seem to be much of a music fan, does he?"

"Nope," I said.

"Well, see you later, kid," said Harry. I watched him walk down Grove to his rusted-out

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Corvair, then drive off. All at once I wanted to cry with joy. Not because of the tendonitis story, either. I just felt good standing there on Main Street outside of Bassett's with a cigarette in my hand—a Camel straight at that. Suddenly I felt like I was in the real world, the same one as Harry, who didn't seem so mysterious anymore. I took a last puff of the Camel and flicked it in the gutter, thinking of how Harry was human after all. It seemed funny how people could be so frightening until they weren't strangers anymore, and there Harry had been, standing with me outside of Bassett's, smoking cigarettes and talking about tendonitis. He almost seemed ordinary once he'd taken off his monster mask, and that to me was a big relief. The world wasn't so impossible after all.

Come spring, I had ball practice almost every afternoon and had to reschedule my lessons to odd hours of the week. Mrs. Lowe would be as flexible as she could be, and wouldn't be satisfied until we had our next lesson lined up. She used to tell me things about how I'd be ready for Chopin before I knew it if I kept up my playing and didn't neglect my scales. She made me feel good around her, as if I was some kind of prince like the one Cinderella fell in with. Every few weeks at the beginning she'd ask me, "Do you still play 'Jesu'?" And I'd always respond, "... Joy of Man's Desiring?" She'd nod like she wanted me to prove it, then all at once she'd call out my name announcing that I was about to play my latest hit tune. That was my cue to begin, and I'd tackle the piece with all I had. By then I could play it straight through, but Mrs. Lowe was never satisfied. Every note had to be where Johann Sebastian intended it, and then the feeling was up to me. Mrs. Lowe talked a lot about dynamics. "Purr like a kitten," she'd say as I made my way through a passage, or "Pretend here that you're a waterfall." I felt like she and I somehow shared our own secret world, a world safe within its walls from the rest of life.

One Friday afternoon in the summer I had a Little League game against Wilmington. Mrs. Lowe talked me into coming over on Saturday morning for my lesson. I even thought about quitting lessons at least until baseball season was over, but then I'd say what the heck and show up for whatever time we'd arranged.

On this particular morning I was about to pull out my Beethoven and plug away at "Für Elise" when Harry stormed out of the kitchen in plain view of the baby grand. "Sure Pop," he called into the kitchen, "I know you don't want me to

call you Pop, but what's the difference—Pop? I'll call you sir when you start calling *me* sir, get me? You're always trying to make me think that because you raised me I owe you something. Well, you got it all wrong. You brought me into this world, that's right. But I had no say in the matter. Nobody asked my opinion. No, I'd say if anything, it's *you* who owes *me*." With that Harry stormed out the door as Mrs. Lowe and I silently watched. "Just forget I'm alive!" Harry screamed, then slammed the front door. From the kitchen there came no response. You might say I was pretty shaken up by the whole thing.

For the rest of the summer I could never spot Harry. I started to wonder if he wasn't living with his folks, that he might be staying at Dick Rowley's above the pizza joint. I'd heard the two were both pumping gas at some small station outside of town by the freeway.

I skipped a lot of lessons when school started in the fall, what with after school sports and all, but whenever I showed up Mrs. Lowe welcomed me and treated me like her star pupil. We always took things where we'd left off, however rusty I'd got, or however little I'd practiced. "Seventh grade was a tough year for me, too," she said more than once. I guess she knew I felt kind of strange sometimes about taking piano lessons.

I missed about four weeks straight before Mrs. Lowe persuaded me to come in on a Wednesday afternoon. I finally agreed, and just after I'd arrived and had seated myself on the piano bench, Harry shuffled slowly out of the kitchen and up the stairs. "I see Harry's home," I said to Mrs. Lowe.

"Oh yes," she said. From the tone of her voice it seemed Harry really had been away awhile. Her eyes were ponderous, and I let my curiosity get the best of me by asking, "Did he ever drop out of school?"

"No," she said, surprised I'd asked. "He's always been very good at squeaking by."

"How's Mr. Lowe?" I asked.

"Very well," she responded, but volunteered no more.

"I hope he and Harry are getting along better," I ventured.

Mrs. Lowe kept looking straight ahead, over the sheet music and through the living room window to the tree-lined street. We both watched a pair of blackbirds flutter through the large oak in the front yard, then fly off after each other. All at once Mrs. Lowe said, "A couple of weeks ago Harry invited my husband and me to see some 'program' he said he was involved in one

Saturday night at the high school. He wouldn't say exactly what, but he led me to believe it was some sort of theatrical performance with his class. I agreed and finally got my husband to go. We arrived at what turned out to be a sock hop, the kind of thing I always thought Harry hated. Mr. Lowe was angry and wanted to leave immediately. We thought Harry was playing a joke on us, but that didn't seem like something Harry would do, so I insisted we go into the gym. And for the love of God, when I got inside and looked up at the older boys who were making the music, playing all that loud rock and roll and such, my Harry was on the drums."

"He was the drummer?" I asked in disbelief.

"I didn't even know he liked the drums," Mrs. Lowe went on, "let alone that he played so well for a boy his age. It turns out the barber, Arnie Schoefield, has been teaching Harry all these years, said it would've been a crime to let Harry's talent go to waste. Harry even reads the music."

"That's the most fantastic thing I ever heard!" I blurted, speaking for the entire story. Everything suddenly seemed dreamlike to me as I sat at the baby grand thinking about Harry playing those drums with all kinds of classy moves, a cigarette dangling from his lips and girls around too, probably plenty. I laughed loudly, defiantly, thinking about Mr. Lowe trying to bully his son around, and Harry all along doing exactly what he wanted—and just what Mr. Lowe hated! I expected that Mrs. Lowe was bursting with pride for her boy, and all at once I turned to look at her. She pushed her glasses up on her nose with a shaky finger and added, "He kept very good time for the band, too." She didn't look happy, though. In fact, she seemed to be harboring some deep and penetrating sorrow, judging from her face. She kept her hands and eyes in her lap. I settled myself down, fearing she was about to cry. I began to imagine all the years she was probably thinking she'd missed out on

by not sharing in Harry's music.

We got on with the lesson. Halfway through Mrs. Lowe reached over the top of the piano and came back with a large book that had the chords and melodies to five hundred songs, show tunes I'd mostly never heard of and a lot of other kinds. She said she'd got the book in Chicago some years ago and wanted to make a gift of it to me. I didn't refuse or anything, but I felt pretty strange. "It's time you start learning to improvise," she said. "In the years to come you'll be glad not to always need the sheet music in front of you to play." She flipped the big book open to a page and wrote some instructions at the top of "Take the A-train." I felt like I was being led into some foreign land, a savage land I'd never seen, but one where I could feel safe because I trusted my guide.

"The melody's a little tricky," she said as she began demonstrating. "Now this is a walking bass," she said, changing from chords to a single note pattern with her left hand. Her frail voice lilted with excitement as she added, "But don't worry about this now. There will be plenty of time in the future. For now just find the chords with the left and the melody with the right. Practice hands alone for a while, as usual; oh, and here's what a flatted fifth sounds like. Don't worry, it'll grow on you."

Mrs. Lowe would point something out, then have me try it to prove that I understood. We went about an hour over the lesson time without even thinking about it. I didn't feel worn out at the end, either, probably because of the day's excitement.

Just as we had finished up for the day and I was gathering up my sheet music, Harry rustled down the stairs and out the front door, maybe going someplace to practice. I walked up to the window and watched him until he disappeared down a side street.□

David Sanders

MAYFLIES

The way the pond popped
you'd have guessed
a light rain had broken out—
not fish. Hatching

mayflies hugged the surface,
frail in a mist
which shook the water
alive. Their one wish

(if you could call it that)
was to mate
before they died.
It had taken years

to come this far.
Years later
what I remember
is not the other couple,

or our cottage bed
during that quick weekend,
but the whiskered tails
and wings like shattered glass,

and the morning after,
with its thousands
of small bodies
scattered across the grass.

EKPHRASIS AND THE TEMPORAL/SPATIAL METAPHOR IN MURRAY KRIEGER'S CRITICAL THEORY

One of the major contributions of Murray Krieger's literary theory and criticism has been to reveal the importance of temporal and spatial concepts to the critic's theory and to our discussions of language and literature. Krieger's early essay on *ekphrasis* served to disclose the inevitability of spatial and temporal metaphors in the critic's language. His later work has suggested the extent to which these concepts and metaphors indicate the critic's position on the most fundamental theoretical issues: the nature of the literary medium (spatial or temporal, presence or absence); the conception of form (synchronic or diachronic, static or dynamic); the attitude toward the literary work as aesthetic entity (object or process, closed or open); as well as the sense of literature's relationship to the temporal and spatial arts. In contemporary criticism this issue poses major problems, for under pressure from new theories regarding language and the nature of interpretation, critics have tended to emphasize time-space oppositions and to move toward extremes of temporality or spatiality in imposing their vision upon the literary work. It is from his position within the humanistic tradition that Krieger seeks to redress the balance between the temporal and the spatial in literature and place the human form-making capacity at the center of his system. And it is from his position as a "new formalist" that Krieger insists upon literature and its words as a spatial form, a patterned presence, which acknowledges both the temporal flow of language and the temporal pressures of existential contingencies and which forces the self-conscious critic to the awareness that temporal/spatial metaphors describe an illusionary presence.

Krieger's position on the temporal/spatial issue is first given a complete statement in his essay "The Ekphrastic Principle and the Still Movement of Poetry; or *Laokoön* Revisited," written in 1965. Here Krieger puts forward a conception of "spatial form," introducing his notion of an "ekphrastic principle" in literature whereby the "spatial" elements impose themselves upon the

"temporal" flow of the work. He proposes that *ekphrasis*, the description in literature of a work of visual art, is introduced in order to use a static, plastic object as a symbol of the stilled world of internal repetitions and relationships which must be imposed upon the temporal movement of literature in order to perceive it as a pattern, a formal entity. The literary medium, or our perception, our reading of that medium, is temporal; but form in literature, or our conception of it, is spatial. Krieger maintains that "central to a poem's becoming successfully poetic . . . is the poem's achieving a formal and linguistic self-sufficiency." This self-sufficiency depends upon the poem's creating a "sense of roundness," a "spatiality," that is, upon its being perceived as an aesthetic, patterned whole through the operation of a number of self-reflexive devices, "through all sorts of repetitions, echoes, complexes of internal relations."¹ The poem thus converts temporal language into stilled form, often presenting an object of art as a symbol of the spatiality and plasticity of the literary work's temporal medium. The key words are "spatiality" and "plasticity," for these terms evince Krieger's agreement with at least some of the claims made by the spatial side of the temporal-spatial debate.

Krieger has consistently developed his theory in the context of his reading of the history of theory and criticism. In formulating his conception of spatiality in literature he acknowledges his indebtedness to a spatial tradition which had its beginnings in classical doctrine, but he is attentive to the oppositions of Lessing and contemporary theorists even as he builds upon modern concepts of spatial form propounded by Joseph Frank and some of the New Critics. Krieger grounds his ekphrastic principle in the classical *ut pictura poesis* doctrine, which promoted the relationship of literature to the spatial arts and which conventionalized the

¹Murray Krieger, "The Ekphrastic Principle and the Still Movement of Poetry; or *Laokoön* Revisited," *The Play and Place of Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967) 105.

ekphrastic strategy. But he also considers the opposition to the doctrine and its tradition put forward by G. E. Lessing in his *Laokoön, or On the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766). Krieger's ekphrastic principle defies Lessing's demand for the separation of the temporal art of literature and the spatial arts of painting and sculpture in its assumption that the temporal medium of literature takes on form through spatial metaphors or symbols developed by the verbal description of a work of visual art. At the same time, Krieger affirms the tradition that stems from Lessing (and from Edmund Burke), for he insists that literature "retains its essential nature as a time-art" in the process of manifesting its form spatially ("The Ekphrastic Principle" 125).

Krieger's theory in general places him in the tradition that develops out of Kant through the German romantics to Coleridge and finally to the New Critics. This tradition bears upon the critical issue at hand in its emphasis on temporal and spatial considerations. Although the classification of artistic media in terms of time and space had been made by the ancients, it is with the eighteenth-century theoreticians that the conception takes its modern form. As Newton had based physics and the measurement of the physical world on concepts of time and space, Kant conceived of these categories as fundamental to metaphysics and the apprehension of conceptual reality and Lessing applied them to aesthetics and the perception of artistic media. In Kantian epistemology, as expounded in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "things-as-such" cannot be known; all experience must be perceived and organized by the creative power of the sensibility according to time and space, the *a priori* forms of consciousness. Krieger depends on these concepts as the framework of his theory of spatial form. He also uses Kant's definition of aesthetic experience as "finality-without-end," which he adapts to his purposes to suggest the complexity of poetry as spatial and temporal, stilled form in continual motion ("The Ekphrastic Principle" 118-19).

Kantian epistemology is active in the Anglo-American tradition that develops through Coleridge and the modernist poets and critics, in whose work time-space concerns are central. It is evident that T. S. Eliot and some of the New Critics have been influential in leading Krieger's critical perceptions toward concepts of spatial form and his critical language toward spatial metaphors. In the ekphrastic essay, Krieger states: "I would take as my model statement

Eliot's words in 'Burnt Norton' about words and their relation to 'the still point of the burning world': ' . . . Only by the form, the pattern,/Can words or music reach/The stillness, as a Chinese jar still/Moves perpetually in its stillness' " (106).² Like Eliot, and before him Keats, Krieger depends upon the multiple meanings of the word "still" to embody the paradox of literary form in which the "still moving" temporal language is "stilled" into an observable pattern. Krieger also refers to Leo Spitzer's suggestion that Keat's Grecian urn be viewed as an ekphrastic symbol of the poem, which is "circular" or "perfectly symmetrical," (an idea uncritically accepted by formalist theorists). Krieger is aware of the problem of rigidly spatialized critical language, however. As a corrective to this tendency, he cites Cleanth Brooks' complex use of the urn as metaphor in *The Well Wrought Urn*, noting the necessity for retaining an awareness of the "ineffable, dynamic flow of experience," which the critic attempts to describe in spatial metaphors ("The Ekphrastic Principle" 110-11).³

Another important notion is added to Krieger's ekphrastic principle in his reference to Sigurd Burckhardt's claim that poetic language attains "plasticity," that through devices such as rhyme, meter, image, ambiguities and all sorts of verbal play, the poet converts the transparent referentiality of the verbal medium into words which exhibit the corporeality and malleability of the medium of the spatial arts. While Krieger accepts these spatial metaphors to describe his sense of poetic form and body, he also demands that the terms be made to reveal an awareness of the continual movement of temporality, both in language and in existential contingencies, which the poem's form seeks to encompass; hence, his play upon the "still movement" of poetry.

It is this insistence on the temporality of literature which sets Krieger apart from Joseph Frank, whom he credits for a seminal study of modern "spatial form" ("The Ekphrastic Principle" 106n).⁴ When Krieger claims in the

²Krieger quotes from T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952) 121, 193.

³See also Krieger's comments on Cleanth Brooks in the concluding chapter of *The New Apologists for Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956) 187.

⁴See Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," *The Sewanee Review* 53 (Spring, Summer, Autumn, 1945), revised as Chapter 1 in *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Matery in Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969) 3-62.

ekphrastic essay that the poem "converts its chronological progression into simultaneity," he is depending on Frank's terminology (105). In a later essay, however, he questions the terms "simultaneity" and "juxtaposition," pointing out that Frank's use of them is literalistic and loses "temporality altogether in the instantaneity of spatial form."⁵ The terms, for Frank, indicate an "abolition of time"; the work is "apprehended spatially, locked in a timeless unity that . . . eliminates any feeling of sequence by the very act of juxtaposition" ("Spatial Form" 59-60). In an effort to distinguish his ekphrastic principle from Frank's conception of spatial form, Krieger states that in Frank "the 'still movement' of Eliot is pressed into a candid insistence on simultaneity." He thus rejects Frank's notion of simultaneity as extravagant and uncritical.

Krieger would go beyond Frank, though, in positing the "generic spatially" of literature. Whereas Frank found "spatial form" in the work of modern authors (Pound, Eliot, and Joyce), Krieger argues for the operation of spatial metaphors in the literature of all authors and periods, claiming that the ekphrastic dimension of literature reveals itself not only in symbols of spatial art but "whenever the poem takes on the 'still' element of plastic form which we normally attribute to the spatial arts." Finally, he insists upon the inevitability of the use of spatial metaphors by the critic to account for form ("The Ekphrastic Principle" 106).

By the time Krieger systematizes his theory in his major work, *Theory of Criticism* (1976), the ekphrastic principle serves as the basis for his conception of literary form. Here he develops and refines his theory, reworking crucial issues which in the era of New Criticism had been too readily accepted and which, as Krieger notes, must now stand up to more recent and "shrewder epistemology."⁶ Krieger's definition of form as "the imposition of spatial structures upon a temporal ground" stands; but he is now extremely careful in presenting his claims for spatiality. Literature is a temporal medium, but because it is cast in print and functions through a series of repetitions and juxtapositions, it provokes the critic to claim to find spatial

interrelationships within it to describe its formal characteristics. That is, while literature, as a verbal or reading experience, must take place sequentially in time, the reader conceives of this experience as spatial in several ways. At the most immediate level of experience, literature as a printed medium exhibits an invariant spatial sequence and is an object which occupies space. At the next level of experience, and more importantly, conceptual mapping or spatializing is involved in any attempt to conceptualize a pattern, a structure, a field of relationships (all spatial metaphors) developed by the repetition or juxtaposition of key words, ideas, and images, which must be fixed or spatialized and held in the mind. Krieger warns, however, that "the critic cannot permit his own imposition of spatial structures to deceive him": the object and its structures must always be perceived through movement in time (*Theory* 39).

The literary object, then, is not simply temporal and spatial; it is paradoxically temporal/spatial. It is experienced temporally, yet to comprehend that experience, the critic must impose "spatial structures." Moreover, it is not actually an "object," except that in its written form it occupies space, for our experience of it must always be a mental process. And so Krieger criticizes his free use of the term "object" to refer to the "controlling feature" of the aesthetic experience "because our experience is a process and because what it encounters is a verbal product of a consciousness that is another process" (*Theory* 38). Yet he maintains the term "object" out of the theoretical need to posit "out there" a spatial form with body and presence which will somehow guide our experience of it by stilling the flow of the medium and giving it shape. Krieger asserts that his sense of spatial form, in accord with his earlier definition, affirms "a present structure while it acknowledges a sequence of fleeting words," but it does so by "at once creating body and denying its more than illusory nature" (*Theory* 240). Again, literature as spatial form is paradoxical: it is both "presence" and "illusion."

But spatial structures do not establish literature's "self-sufficiency" or lead to a purely "aesthetic" response for the reader. Krieger maintains that spatial elements focus attention reflexively upon the literary work, so that readers are discouraged from seeing those elements as leading to consequences outside the work. And the imposition of spatial structures is what characterizes the experience as "aesthetic" rather

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⁵Murray Krieger, "'A Waking Dream': The Symbolic Alternative to Allegory," *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, Harvard English Series No. 9, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981) 10-12.

⁶Murray Krieger, *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 207.

than as "cognitive" or "moral" (*Theory* 10-11).⁷ But he acknowledges that neither the "self-sufficiency" of literature nor our "aesthetic" response to it close out our awareness of the temporality of external contingencies, the movement of experience in time, in a word, death. He thus views the existential as a temporality which exerts pressure on the spatial object, at once establishing the literary work's difference, its aesthetic status, and revealing its fictional, its illusionary, nature.

This is a fictionality which extends to the critic's interpretation, to the attempt to comprehend and describe the literary experience. "The critic's descriptions of the object in formal and spatial terms—like his very use of the term 'object' to denominate it—must be applied with a delicacy that recognizes they are *his* weak metaphors, which, if he takes them too seriously, will distort—by freezing—the object (the temporal embodiment of temporal consciousness) . . ." (*Theory* 39). Krieger's multiple use of qualifiers indicates his extreme self-consciousness in claiming the poem as "spatial object" and his uneasiness regarding the possible reification of the critic's metaphor. The critic must finally recognize that the poem has been reduced "to the fixed structures that are the minimizing reductions that characterize his preconceptions about his own consciousness." The categories of time and space are not only the *a priori* internal, mental categories through which we view the external art object, they are the reductions which form our notion of that mental activity, of consciousness itself.

Yet Krieger continues to posit the literary work as a spatial object out of a theoretical need for literature to be a "shared and repeatable experience" (*Theory* 38). It is this humanistic and formalist thrust which leads him to add a key notion to his theory: the idea of human form-making as the center of the artistic work. Krieger credits E. H. Gombrich's early work, and Rosalie Colie's adaptation of this work, as sources influencing his notion.⁸ In *Art and Illusion*,

⁷Krieger distinguishes among cognitive, moral, and aesthetic responses—the Kantian triad—in making his claims for an aesthetic response to certain verbal structures.

⁸E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), especially p. 99, and Gombrich, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse," *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (New York: Phaidon, 1963) 1-11. See also the extension of Gombrich's ideas in Rosalie Colie, "Still Life: Paradoxes of Being," *Paradoxia Epidemica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 273-99.

Gombrich suggests that artistic activity begins with the development of schema, devices or conventions, which allow the artist to shape the material. Regardless of whether the work is manifested as representational or non-representational, the form-making work is primary: "Making comes before matching." Taking this form-making impulse as central, Krieger places the artistic forms which are manifested along a spectrum ranging from those that are most representational to those that are most illusionistic. By this he means to distinguish those works which appear least conscious of the "conventional, 'merely literary' role" from those which seem most conscious. Concomitant with these distinctions is another range of possibilities, from the most diachronic (and least spatial) to the most synchronic (and most spatial). At one end of the spectrum would be those works emphasizing temporal movement with a minimum of repetitions or self-referential devices, and at the other, a maximum number of repetitions, which would tend to pattern or spatialize the temporal medium. This development presumably allows Krieger to acknowledge a wide range of possible literary manifestations from the least to the most spatialized. But the spatial seems privileged, since by his critical definition the literary work must be self-conscious in distinguishing itself from 'reality,' and it must do so by shaping itself through repetitive structures, spatial devices.⁹ The notion is nevertheless useful to Krieger in that it centers his theory on a humanistic conception of the form-making impulse at the same time that it permits a formalist, "spatial" (understood as temporal/spatial) conception of literary structure.

As Krieger systemizes his theory, both in the *Theory of Criticism* and elsewhere, he seeks to defend himself against the challenges from contemporary critical theories, particularly those from Europe. Under the pressure of this opposition, Krieger's theory becomes increasingly more substantial as well as more self-conscious in its insistence on spatial form and its claims for poetic presence. It is significant, too,

⁹Krieger is actually at odds with Gombrich here, although he still sees Gombrich as providing the basis for these concepts, which refer more directly to Colie's adaptations of Gombrich. In a recent exchange, Gombrich declared that Krieger had misinterpreted his work as propounding conventionalism, and Krieger complained of Gombrich's falling back from an earlier, more strongly anti-mimetic stand. See *Critical Inquiry* 11.2 (Dec. 1984): 181-201.

that his defense against the new theories is consistently made in terms of the temporal-spatial or the diachronic-synchronic opposition.

The various structuralist and post-structuralist challenges to Krieger's critical system depend upon Saussure's description of all language as functioning through the differential operation of a present, temporal *parole*, the particular speech act, made possible by an absent, static *langue*, the general linguistic code. To counter this conception of language as it applies to literature, Krieger proposes the possibility of the poem's establishing its own "micro-langue," which allows him to maintain his concept of form as the spatialization of the temporal functioning of language and his notion of poetic "presence." He works out of some ideas developed by the Russian formalists and the Prague School concerning poetic language, which Spitzer, in the framework of stylistics, thought of as the poem's deviations from the linguistic norm and which Burckhardt, from the viewpoint of the reader, considered "disturbing elements," shocks to our expectations that the poem's language will accord with our prosaic use of language. With the poet's manipulation of language, the poem is no longer just another *parole*, an example of speech in accordance with the systematic features of the linguistic code. "The *langue* has been violated to the point that the *parole* appears to have become its own *langue*, a system of which it is the only spoken representation. In effect it becomes its own micro-langue" (*Theory* 187-88).¹⁰ This does not mean that the poetic language is incoherent in the system of the *langue* of which it is obviously a *parole*. But the *langue* cannot completely account for this particular speech act; the poem so disrupts the linguistic system that it establishes its own system within the context of the particular poem. Moreover, this poetic activity disrupts the temporal functioning of the *parole*, which is forced to reveal the synchronic structure of the new *langue*. But Krieger must claim the self-sufficiency of the poem's linguistic structure under the pressure of a self-conscious awareness of the fictional nature of the claim: the micro-langue is manifested "under the conditions of aesthetic illusion." The postulate of the micro-langue is necessary, however, for it permits the critical activity. It allows the interpretation of the temporal flow of the present example of language

¹⁰See particularly Krieger's tribute to the early Russian formalists, their followers in the Prague School, Spitzer, and Burckhardt, p. 187n.

to reveal the spatial structure of the language system but sees that system as self-sufficient and unique to the context of the present poem.

If Saussure dichotomized language into *parole* and *langue*, later critics working out of his system tend to move toward the poles of the temporal-spatial opposition in imposing their sense of language and form upon the literary work. Krieger finds that Claude Lévi-Strauss conceives of structure in literature in ways which are too static, too synchronic, and insufficiently cognizant of the temporal movement of the poem's language (*Theory* 217).¹¹ When Krieger speaks of the structuralist challenge to his doctrines, he has in mind the theories of Lévi-Strauss or what he refers to as "main-line" structuralism, which is more interested in establishing homologous methodologies and relations among the "sciences of man" than in analyzing poetic structures, especially as they differ from other linguistic structures. The structuralists work out of Saussure's principle of oppositions between signified and signifier and between *langue* and *parole*, and out of these distinctions arise the ones of special importance to Krieger and the issues at hand, the opposition of the "synchronic," the spatial, systematic model and the "diachronic," the temporal, sequential experience. The structuralists challenge in particular Krieger's theories of temporal/spatial form and of poetic "presence," threatening not only to polarize the operations of the temporal and spatial elements but allowing presence only to the temporal example of the absent spatial structure (*Theory* 214). These principles enforce differentiations when applied to literature, whereas Krieger would want the poem to force the temporal and the spatial together in a poetic presence.

Krieger finds the same dichotomy even in the work of Roman Jakobson, although this theorist does distinguish between the common functioning of the linguistic system and the special functioning of poetic language. Out of the synchronic-diachronic opposition, Jakobson develops his distinctions between metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor, which is synchronic, is based on the "similarity" and "selection" of verbal elements in the code of linguistic system; metonymy, which is diachronic, is based on "contiguity" and the "combination" of verbal elements in word order. But Jakobson seeks to

¹¹See Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roman Jakobson, "Les Chats de Charles Baudelaire," *L'Homme* 2 (1962): 5-21.

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distinguish poetry by positing "similarity" as its major characteristic, controlling combination as well as selection. Thus, metonymy is pushed toward metaphor, the diachronic toward the synchronic.¹²

Although Krieger is sympathetic to this effort to distinguish poetry from other linguistic structures, he argues that Jakobson's formalistic conception of poetry does not adequately account for the "unabsorbable temporal difference, after the spatial structure has done its work"; nor does it account for "the nagging persistence of existential contingencies" (*Theory* 218). Moreover, the structuralists' systematic linguistic methodology, which describes generic grammatical activity, fails to recognize fully the unique transformation of language that takes place in a particular poem. Krieger's dissatisfaction with these concepts, which dichotomize the temporal and spatial and emphasize the spatial at the risk of losing awareness of the temporal, drives him to seek a poetic center which would redress the balance between the temporal and spatial elements.

This endeavor leads Krieger to view both the words of the poem and the poem as a whole as a "metonymic metaphor" (*Theory* 196-97). What he wants to suggest in this term is the doubleness both of the poem's internal functioning and its relationship to an external reality. He would grant that the poetic language is pushed toward metaphoric similarities which spatialize its temporal sequentiality, but he would not leave behind the temporality of the poem's language, the diachronic, metonymic elements. In addition, the poem as a whole exhibits this doubleness, serving as a spatial metaphor for both its own self-referential world and for its contiguous relationship to a temporal external world, a metaphor which constitutes its own reality spatially within the poem at the same time that it acknowledges a resistant temporal reality beyond. This doubleness indicates a spatial metaphor which, while enclosing the poem as a

self-referential structure, assumes a metonymic relationship to existential pressures, leaving the poem open to the diachronic even as the poem's structure seeks to enclose it in the synchronic. And again, this doubleness presumes a high degree of self-consciousness regarding the fictionality of the poem's metaphoric "enclosure" and the interpretive system which seeks to encompass it. Upon this basis Krieger finds fault with Jakobson's analysis of poems and Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myths, for theirs is an "apparent doubleness," one in which the diachronic is "fully absorbed—without remainder—by the synchronic" (*Theory* 241, 239).

Krieger does give the structuralists credit, though, in helping to expose the "antiformal emphasis on the temporal" of the phenomenological critics, the "consciousness critics," such as Georges Poulet. Krieger's formalist proclivities lead him to denounce this "strain of romanticism" as mystifications arising out of their focus on the subjective consciousness prior to language and superior to it, which results in a by-passing of space and form as destructive to the temporal flow of consciousness between author and reader (*Theory* 219).

Another critic at the temporal extreme of the time-space spectrum is Paul de Man. Krieger is concerned with de Man's "rhetoric of temporality," which he sees as exhibiting a pervasive temporality that denies spatial forms and ultimately the power of human form-making. De Man conceives of symbolism as attempting to establish a "simultaneous," spatial, relationship between the image and "substance," subject and object; allegory is constituted in time and in the demystification of the analogical correspondences of an organic world posited by the symbolic mode. The synchronic symbol presumes to synthesize the subject and object in a myth of verbal wholeness; in contrast, the diachronic world of allegory reveals the difference and the distance between subject and object (*Theory* 221-23).¹³

Allegory, according to de Man, is constituted in time: in the temporality of consciousness and in the temporal functioning of signs. Consciousness is never authentically unified; it can only be aware of the difference and distance between self and non-self and is situated in the space between, the difference between, the self

¹²See Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (New York: MIT Press, 1960) 350-77, and Morris Halle and Jakobson, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," *The Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956) Chapter 5. See also the recent publication of Roman Jakobson, *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time*, eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). These essays, particularly those in the first section, clarify Jakobson's view that time is an integral factor in language and literature and demonstrate his struggle to integrate the temporal-spatial, diachronic-synchronic modes.

¹³See Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969) 173-209.

thinking and the self thought. Allegory reflects this "temporal predicament," de Man claims, for meaning as constituted by the allegorical sign must refer to another sign that precedes it, with which it can never coincide, never be simultaneous, and in relation to which it must be a repetition, always revealing difference, never identity or unity.

De Man finds a secularized allegory, which necessarily contains the demystification of the symbolic strategy, to be the characteristic mode of the romantics. This is a re-reading of the romantic imagination, which is significantly at odds with Krieger's view of Coleridge's organicism and privileging of the symbolic mode.¹⁴ Krieger argues that de Man's acceptance of allegory as the primary poetic mode leads to a negative and diminished view of the human capacity to construct form, which is the ability to impose spatial pattern on temporal elements. The charge that symbolizing is a mythification, a spatialization of elements that are ineluctably temporal, is acknowledged by Krieger, who sees value in de Man's ideas as a warning against a symbolist aesthetic and a concept of spatial form (particularly as put forth by Joseph Frank) which had too long been accepted unquestioningly by the New Critics ("A Waking Dream" 10-12). But he argues that de Man has moved to the extreme in temporalizing our conception of literature.

Krieger opposes de Man's notion of temporal allegory with his notion of the symbol, derived from the romantics but developed in his theory as a metaphor for spatial form. In answering de Man and the problems he raises regarding this issue, Krieger takes care to advance his concept of symbolic and spatial form as one which is paradoxically double—temporal/spatial—a characteristic suggested by the oxymoronic title of his essay, "'A Waking Dream': The Symbolic Alternative to Allegory." What Krieger must argue is that the symbolist and spatialist aesthetic is able to acknowledge and to contain coterminously its own countertendencies, its self-demystification: that his conception of temporal/spatial form can account for the temporal flow of language and the spatializing of that language in symbols, the difference as well as the similarities of its repetitions, and the demystification of its own myth of an organic world of stilled form. The poem thus takes form around its metaphoric and its counter-metaphoric tendencies. In this

manner, the counter-thrusts do not deconstruct the poem as symbolic language and spatial form—or the symbolist, spatialist aesthetic—but reveal the operation of the temporal/spatial dialectic and establish the aesthetic in its most self-conscious, its most critically aware form.

Two major issues in the time-space debate are revealed in Krieger's argument with de Man. One is that, as Krieger declared in his earliest formulation of spatial form and has consistently maintained, the critic is forced into the use of spatial metaphors in order to describe literary form and function, regardless of any attempt to focus on the temporal. This problem is clear when de Man describes "temporal difference" as the "unovercomable distance"—the space—between the allegorical sign and its antecedent and between the self and the non-self. De Man's terms, unlike "simultaneity," for example, do not suggest any privileged attribute of space; nevertheless, de Man must fall back upon spatial metaphors and concepts to describe the allegorical sign and form ("A Waking Dream" 14-15).¹⁵

Another problem is that it is unclear whether de Man's comments are grounded in a semiotic or a metaphysic of temporality. Presumably his argument is based upon the temporal functioning of language and consciousness; however, de Man's free use of terms such as "in truth," "actual" and "facticity" to discuss our "truly temporal predicament," suggests an "existential ontology of temporality" ("A Waking Dream" 16). The idea of a poetry which could manifest a world of myth and dream, one that might, even momentarily, join desire and language in spatial form and symbol ("a waking dream"), would be for de Man "an act of ontological bad faith" ("Rhetoric of Temporality" 194). It might seem here that de Man is requiring a descriptive rhetoric, attempting to establish an equivalence between the sign and external reality, a strategy of which he accuses the symbolists, except of course, rather than the correspondences between language and an organic world he is insisting upon correspondences with a world of temporal facticity.

Ultimately, the problem is the reification of temporality—or of spatiality. Krieger has attempted to make clear that his theoretical system works out of the self-conscious recognition that both time and space are conceptual categories. He thus would reject the

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¹⁴See Krieger on Coleridge and organicism, *Theory of Criticism*, Chapter 5.

¹⁵From de Man 191-209.

view that spatiality is an empty metaphor designed to evade a temporality that is considered unquestionably real. "In recent linguistic theory, after all, the diachronic, no less than the synchronic, relates to, and can function only within, the arbitrary conventions of human creation; the temporal model is as much the linguist's construction as the spatial model" ("A Waking Dream" 17). But what Krieger insists upon retaining is a sense of the power of the human being to construct models, to constitute a poetic world of temporal/spatial form, with full awareness of the illusion.

It is at this point that Krieger's theoretical system is most threatened by Jacques Derrida and the deconstructive critics. Indeed, Krieger views these critics as the enemy that would overturn "humanist" poetics. Krieger gives Derrida credit for exposing the structuralist's excessive emphasis on the synchronic, but he maintains that deconstruction as a literary theory results in a poetics of verbal insufficiency and absence. Krieger is most anxious to maintain the poem and its language as a privileged spatialized presence, and in taking this position, he must oppose Derrida's concept of "différance" and the absence of the word which that term implies.

Derrida is concerned that the structuralists did not sufficiently press the consequences of Saussure's conception of the differential functioning of language, that they were still conceiving of structural elements as operating in a unified, centralized system rather than according to a differential, decentralized model. Derrida shifts the conception of structure away from the idea of the center as a "fixed locus," spatial, to the idea of the center as a function, which allows, with the differential functioning of language, an infinite number of sign-substitutions to come into play—"freeplay."¹⁶ He hits at the core of Krieger's system with his opposition of freeplay to the privilege of presence. Freeplay disrupts presence; it indicates the interplay of presence and absence. The word, rather than being a present element, is always a signifying and substitutive reference functioning in a system of graphic, phonetic, and semantic differences, in which what is absent is as necessary and meaningful as what is present. These differences are inscribed through linguistic

movement in a chain of deferrals. Derrida's term "différance" thus indicates linguistic difference and deferral (and Krieger adds, punning once further, "deference"). Derrida intends to put into play the opposition of presence and absence, spatiality and temporality, but his system depends upon the movement of language and leads to a diachronic conception of form in which, Krieger complains, the word is always "moving off from itself" in time as well as in space (*Theory* 231).

Krieger grants that Derrida's analysis must be accepted as a description of ordinary language, but he wants to maintain a privileged status for poetic language. This argument is founded upon his notions of *ekphrasis* and "plasticity," which claim for poetic language, as a formal medium, an "illusionary" spatiality. At times, however, Krieger depends less upon arguments grounded in the consideration of the temporality and spatiality of language and literature than upon critical metaphors which have proved to be the most vulnerable part of his system: in particular, a defense of privilege which grants to poetic language an "elite" status (a critical metaphor which unfortunately has political connotations that call up the reactionary position of some earlier New Critics), and a defense of presence as "miracle," the imaginative transubstantiation of the word into an "illusionary" aesthetic presence (which depends on a religious metaphor that suggests the tendency of some modernists to substitute aesthetics for religion).¹⁷ Nevertheless, Krieger astutely turns Derrida's analysis of language against its author, arguing that the very qualities which Derrida sees as undermining the presence of the word—the play of meaning, ambiguity, punning—give form, body, spatial presence to the word. In fact, Derrida's own term "différance" demonstrates the principle: it is a word which must be seen graphically, spatially, to demonstrate the difference of its "a," and it seems to take on body as it is loaded with meanings, detaching itself from the flow of language to become a conceptual, spatialized presence.

The debate here appears to be between advocates of linguistic presence and absence, spatiality and temporality. But the disagreement

¹⁶Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970) 249.

¹⁷See Murray Krieger, *Arts on the Level: The Fall of the Elite Object* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981); *A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare's Sonnets and Modern Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), especially Chapter 1, "The Resort to 'Miracle' in Recent Poetics"; and *Theory of Criticism*, especially the concluding chapter.

at crucial points takes on metaphysical overtones. Derrida intends to press the consequences of the Saussurean principle of difference with no existential pathos indicated in his methodology. But Krieger argues that he seems to "use linguistic absence as a cover for the metaphysical disappearance of God. . . . He tries to convert nothingness from an ontological emptiness to a linguistic function, but the existential sense of loss remains beneath, though hidden by his concentration on an austere methodology of negations" (*Theory* 226n). Perhaps the fundamental question here is can we completely separate a philosophy of language from metaphysics, or does one conception need the other, to deconstruct, to reconstruct or to function ironically in a dialectical context? Furthermore, does the opposition between spatiality and temporality in language indicate deep-seated psychological responses of attraction and repulsion, of desire and fear, as both Krieger and Derrida seem to suggest? Krieger muses in a passage which he notes is put forth in a purposefully "melodramatic manner" in order to set up his argument with de Man: "Will our imagination confront and yield to the stark disappearances of all the moments of our time, or will it transform them into the comforting metaphors of space which allow us to hold on to them?" ("A Waking Dream" 3). Certainly, de Man views the issue as having metaphysical and psychological implications. Derrida, too, states that throughout the history of metaphysics, humans have "dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation. . . ." Opposing this "nostalgic" desire for spatialized forms, Derrida proposes a freeplay that tries "to pass beyond man and humanism," man designated here as that being who has sought presence ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 264-65). And so Krieger justifiably views Derrida as an enemy of his humanist aesthetic.

It is the emphasis on form-making, construction, which Krieger opposes to Derrida's deconstruction. Derrida's system depends upon an active, and thus fundamentally temporal, conception of structure and sign, which throws emphasis on the deconstruction of structures, the demystification of myths, and the absence of the word. Derrida posits this as an anti-humanist stance which finds its power in freeplay. Krieger wants to focus on the power to construct form—privileged, poetic structures—conceived through spatial metaphors, as an assertion of the human capacity to order and to hold in the

consciousness, if only momentarily and with full knowledge of the illusion, the movement, conceived as temporality, that continuously occurs in the ordinary operation of language and the inevitable procedure of existence. Since human form-construction provides the center of this theory, it is humanist as well as formalist.

Out of his opposition to these various critical challenges, Krieger proposes a defense of formalism in his latest collection of essays, *Poetic Presence and Illusion* (1979), which might serve as the foundation for a "new formalism." In a title essay, Krieger considers the "crisis of formalism," a literary theory which he believes was pronounced defeated before it could be defended on new grounds.¹⁸

It is this new grounding which Krieger provides in his redefinition of formalism. He rejects the notion of form as a fixed, ontological entity—the conception of "spatial form" which all those theories with a temporal bias assume in order to refute, to deconstruct. A new formalism need not accept earlier assumptions regarding the poem as an isolated object, a static form cut off from the temporal pressures of language and culture. Such a reification of spatial form, made in the face of the temporal nature of language and experience, would depend upon the acceptance of a naive epistemology and upon the neglect of poetry as a product of human discourse and culture. Krieger attempts to "deontologize" this conception of form and the poem as object by defining it in phenomenological terms. In laying the basis for this, he goes back to the Kantian heritage which ties the concept of form to our vision of the world. If we consider form as the primal means for the functioning of human consciousness, "we see in it the phenomenological categories for our coherent apprehension of the world's 'given.' It is what gives us the shapes of our world" (*Poetic Presence* 140-41). Form, in this sense, is the power by which we constitute 'reality,' all that we perceive and conceive. A formalism deriving from this notion of form would be "phenomenological as well as anthropological from its very outset"; that is, it would be seen as functioning through the consciousness and language of the author and of the reader and their relationship to the culture.

From this position, Krieger can maintain the major points of his theoretical system. In the

¹⁸Murray Krieger, "Poetic Presence and Illusion II: Formalist Theory and the Duplicity of Metaphor," *Poetic Presence and Illusion: Essays in Critical History and Theory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 139-68.

context of this new formalism, temporality and spatiality must obviously function as categories of consciousness. The literary work maintains its status as a formal object, but it is recognized as an "intentional object," a form intended by the poet, by the reader, by the culture within which its conventions and themes take shape. Form is thus a spatial presence, but it is conceptual, "illusionary." Similarly, Krieger claims presence for the poetic word, the metaphor which is built up out of intentions and conventions and which is fully recognized as illusionary. Moreover, literature presents a double illusion, manifesting as much a temporal illusion as a spatial illusion. Krieger reminds us that those who see only the temporal passage of words and actions fall prey to "art's illusion," confusing art and the temporal flow of life, while those who see only spatial patterns fall prey to the "illusion of formal presence," casting art in a fixed form that distorts the temporality of language and human history. But literature works to create these illusions, and so we must read "doubly," keeping before us the fictions of time and space at once as presence and as illusion. "So long as this double illusion holds, the illusion of a temporal sequence without form and the illusion of a spatial pattern without

contingency . . . cancel one another out, so that each is prevented from victimizing its witness into literalizing a mythic metaphor, as it can do acting singly" (*Theory* 241-42). What remains is a "moving presence" or a "present motion," as our aesthetic illusion—and as Krieger's temporal/spatial critical metaphor.

Krieger's concepts of *ekphrasis* and "spatial" form are central to his theoretical system and his effort to maintain a balance between the spatial and the temporal in language and literature. They are also central to his effort to defend and to extend the formalist and humanist traditions. But perhaps most importantly, Krieger's appraisal of the critical significance of temporality and spatiality has served to focus theoretical discussions on this issue and to question theoretical extremes that would force apart existential and conceptual experience, linguistic process and literary form, time and space.□

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Antonio Hernández

BESIDE WHAT DOESN'T DIE

Translated by Frederick H. Fornoff

I

What do I care if history is sadness,
an accumulation of legends and lenses,
if they made us this world with tiny mouths
and with perilous visions of other years.
What do I care about the first cold,
the glaciation of Würm, the change of fauna,
what do I have to do with paleolithic, the race of Grimaldi,
what can Cro-Magnon or Chancelade say to me.

If everything that makes me gratuitous comes
from accumulation, what's Altamira to me.
If they, like I, never got farther
than painting a bison like an immense sun-ring,
a frieze with the vain triumph of Homo Sapiens
or with the White Lady of Damaraland alone,
what do I care for little statues and bas-reliefs
like an imitation of one's own surprise.
Or the ninth millennium before our era
when the mesoliths, definitively,
lost contact with the purest branch.
And what do I care if history is sadness
and is written by eyes that became extinguished,
by people who refused to write it with life,
with hands resting on their ancestors' skulls.
How am I to believe that Herodotus can save me,
or Amon, while their past glory looks toward
Egypt, impotent and humbled when Dayan smiles.
How am I to weep over these poor things
losing with my tears the treasure of a dream.

I fly over the birds who understand my armature,
who know I keep watch in hope of a time
when we will be sweet as grass,
as dew on a dry pasture, as a snowfall
which knows it starts a river like a joy.

Why be sad, or ambitious, or seek glory,
if a warrior is a lightning bolt destroying huts
and frightening the clear gazelles from the fields,
if a man with a sword still inhabits Sparta

and a king is a poor copy of a man alone.
Why, why, if we only save ourselves
by gathering fruit, by trying the untouchable wings
of rhythm, by watching in the woods
the prudent smile of the falling leaves.

Only by contemplating does one connect the present
with the future and open man to his destiny,
splendid and vague as his own history.

What can my country tell me if they understand it
as a rebellion that leaps over borders,
what can it tell me if no one accepts it now
the way it is under the sky: an apple tree, a breeze.
And what can I say against so much wall
unless I fly, fly beside what doesn't die.

II

But, after all, I would be lying. If all I've said
were my thought, dismissing the suffering men
of my land, I would be lying. And my song
would be dust too, unwound image
of my years of struggle or my only beauty.
I would be untrue to myself because my song comes
from generations that ordered my bones,
the men of the fields, Andalusians swift
as fixed stars and just as dazzling,
creatures sheafed in the remote adventure
of making wheat grow, guarding the herd,
leading the mares down to the river to drink.

With them especially, and with all such as they
who like the fighting bull sniff out the path
of their enclosed option, the center of my song
which is the true life of my dream, its kernel.

III

I've lived in Athens and Seville. The years

didn't go by vainly, but now they're gone.
I don't complain or cry, because I said my words
and some of them were joy for other bodies.
I only want to say I've lived and it's unimportant,
but that I've learned something where it wasn't of use.

Now it's different and in the eyes of the bird
I learn that whatever doesn't obligate is a prison.
I was a seaman in Hamburg and drank the beer,
a priest in the temple of Ra in Heliopolis,
captain of the infantry and Calixto's friend.
Melibea built me an altar with her mouth.
And after all, what's left to me of those sensations,
what did Aguirre's wrath teach me of God,
having been in Harlem, what did it give me in the face of death
but fear and hating it, the desire not to find
in it all that the unknown offers.
(Savoring its aroma I've slept in wheatfields
in Andalusia; I set my feet
on the red Castillian wastelands
and a wave of tenderness rose in my blood;
in Galicia, the moist constancy of wonderment
made me a wing with no body to carry into space.)
To say it all, I dreamed, I lost knowing what I had
to do to win: cast out my purity;
I tamed, in countless sheets, women like colts,
and now, remembering, I'm only left with
regret that I didn't give my warmth to one only.
And even if the flesh is sad and I've read
the same book always, where did I spend my time,
which will reclaim the light like a possession
lent me once so I could learn it.

With my strict reason of likeness, I want
to talk with those who run away, to give them my godless faith
and find in their eyes the mirror most my own.

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André Bazin

WILLIAM WYLER, OR THE JANSENIST OF DIRECTING

Translated by Alain Piette

Adapted and Edited by Bert Cardullo

The Realism of Wyler

When studied in detail, Wyler's directing style reveals obvious differences for each of his films, both in the use of the camera and in the quality of the photography.¹ Nothing is stranger to the form of *The Best Years of Our Lives* [1946] than that of *The Letter* [1940]. When one recalls the major scenes in Wyler's films, one notices that their dramatic material is extremely varied and that the editing of it is very different from one film to another. When one considers the red gown at the ball in *Jezebel* [1938]; the dialogue in the scene in *The Little Foxes* [1941] where Herbert Marshall gets a shave, or the dialogue in his death scene in the same film; the sheriff's death in *The Border Cavalier* [1927]; the traveling shot at the plantation at the beginning of *The Letter*; or the scene in the out-of-use bomber in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, it becomes clear that there is no consistent motif in the work of William Wyler. One can find such a motif, however, in the chase scenes of John Ford's westerns; the fist fights in Tay Garnett's films; or in the weddings

or chases in René Clair's work. There are no favorite settings or landscapes for Wyler. At most, there is an evident fondness for psychological scenarios set against social backgrounds. Yet, even though Wyler has become a master at treating this kind of subject, adapted either from a novel like *Jezebel* or a play like *The Little Foxes*, even though his work as a whole leaves us with the piercing and rigorous impression of a psychological analysis, it does not call to mind sumptuously eloquent images suggesting a formal beauty that would demand serious consideration. The style of a director cannot be defined, however, only in terms of his predilection for psychological analysis and social realism, even less so here since we are not dealing with original scripts.

And yet, I do not think that it is more difficult to recognize the signature of Wyler in just a few shots than it is to recognize the signatures of John Ford, Fritz Lang, or Hitchcock. I would even go as far as to say that the director of *The Best Years of Our Lives* is among those who have least often employed the tricks of the trade at the expense of genuine style. Whereas Capra, Ford, or Lang occasionally indulges in self-parody, Wyler never does so: when he goes wrong, it is because he has made a bad choice. He has occasionally been inferior to himself, his taste is not absolutely to be trusted, and he seems to be capable sometimes of being a sincere admirer of Henry Bernstein or the like, but he has never been caught in the act of cheating on the form.² There is a John Ford style and a John Ford manner. Wyler has only a

¹Editor's note: This essay first appeared in *Revue du Cinéma* in 1948 and appeared in the first volume of the 1958 edition of Bazin's *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* 149-173. "William Wyler, or the Jansenist of Directing" was not included by Hugh Gray in his selected two-volume translation of Bazin's work entitled *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). Axel Madsen comments on the title of Bazin's essay:

Jansenism in contemporary French thought refers less to the theological principles of Cornelius Jansen, the seventeenth-century Dutch churchman condemned as heretical (for maintaining that human nature is incapable of good and for emphasizing predestination over free will), than to René Descartes's desire for austerity and ordered, if slightly subversive, behavior. By calling Wyler a directorial Jansenist, Bazin meant to qualify him as a filmmaker of stern virtues, order, and a certain artistic, *hauteur*.

(William Wyler [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973] 273, note)

²Editor's note: Henry Bernstein (1876-1953), French dramatist who had commercial success in London and on Broadway with *La Rafale* (*The Whirlwind*, 1906) and *Le Voleur* (*The Thief*, 1907), but whose attempts at profundity in such later plays as *Le Secret* (1913), *Judith* (1922), and *Le Venin* (1927) were heavyhanded.

style. That is why he is proof against parody, even of himself. Imitation of Wyler by other directors would not pay off, because Wyler's style cannot be defined by any precise form, any lighting design, any particular camera angle. The only way to imitate Wyler would be to espouse the kind of directing ethic to be found in its purest form in *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Wyler cannot have imitators, only disciples.

If we were to attempt to define the directing in this film and if we took its form as a starting point, we would have to give a negative definition. The whole tendency of the *mise en scène* is to efface itself. The alternative, positive definition would be that, when this self-effacement is at its extreme, the story and the actors are at their clearest and most powerful. The aesthetic sense of this kind of asceticism will perhaps be clearer if we locate it in *The Little Foxes*, because it is seemingly pushed there to the point of paradox. Lillian Hellman's play has undergone almost no adaptation: the film respects the text almost completely. In this regard, one can easily understand why there are no exterior scenes of movement in the film—the kinds of scenes that most directors would have deemed necessary in order to introduce a little "cinema" into this theatrical mass. Indeed, a good adaptation usually consists of "transposing" into specifically cinematic terms everything that can be freed from the literary and technical restraints of the theater. If you were told that Mr. Berthomieu, for instance, had just filmed the latest play by Mr. Henry Bernstein without changing a single line, you would start worrying.³ If the bringer of bad tidings added that nine-tenths of the film was set in the same living room that was used in the theater, you would think that you still had a lot to learn about the impudence of the makers of filmed theater. But if on top of all that, the messenger announced that the film does not include more than ten different camera angles and that the camera is mostly stationary in front of the actors, your opinion of the film would be final. "Now I have seen everything!" Yet, it is upon these paradoxical premises that Wyler has built one of the most purely cinematic works ever.

The majority of the action takes place on the same, totally neutral set, the ground-floor living

room of a huge colonial house. At the back, a staircase leads to the first-floor bedrooms: Bette Davis' and Herbert Marshall's, which adjoin each other. Nothing picturesque adds to the realism of this somber place, which is as impersonal as the setting of classical tragedy. The characters have a credible, if conventional, reason for confronting one another in the living room, whether they come from outdoors or from their bedrooms.



They can also linger there. The staircase at the back plays exactly the same role as it would in the theater: it is purely an element of dramatic architecture, which will be used to situate the characters in vertical space. Let's take as an example the central scene of the film, the death of Herbert Marshall, which indeed takes place both in the living room and on the staircase. An analysis of this scene will clearly reveal the essential secrets of Wyler's style.

Bette Davis is sitting in the middle ground facing the viewers, her head at the center of the screen; very strong lighting further underlines the brightness of her heavily made-up face. In the foreground, Herbert Marshall is sitting in three-quarter profile. The ruthless exchanges between husband and wife take place without any cutting from one character to the other. Then comes the husband's heart attack: he begs his wife to get him his medicine from the bedroom. From this instant, the whole drama resides, as Denis Marion has very aptly observed, in the immobility of Bette Davis and the camera.⁴ Marshall is obliged to stand up and go get the

³Editor's note: André Berthomieu (1903-1960), one of the most prolific of French film directors, a competent technician with no artistic pretense. He entered films in 1924 as an assistant to Julien Duvivier and three years later began a busy career as the director of some seventy commercially viable but none too significant films.

⁴Editor's note: Denis Marion collaborated with André Malraux on the original screenplay for *Espoir* (1939, released 1945; also known as *Days of Hope*, *Man's Hope*), also directed by Malraux (his only film). *Espoir* was an anti-fascist film that used surviving combatants of the Spanish Civil War to recreate events in it. Denis Marion is in addition the author of *André Malraux* (1970).

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medicine himself. This effort will kill him on the first steps of the staircase.

In the theater, this scene would most likely have been staged in the same manner. A spotlight could also have been focused on Bette Davis, and the spectator would have had the same sense of horror regarding her criminal inaction, the same sense of anguish at the sight of her staggering victim. Yet, despite appearances, Wyler's *mise en scène* makes as extensive a use as possible of the means offered him by the camera and the frame. Bette Davis' position at the center of the screen endows her with privilege in the geometry of the dramatic space. The whole scene revolves around her, but her frightening immobility takes its full



impact only from Marshall's double exit from the frame, first in the foreground on the right, then on a third plane on the left. Instead of following him in this lateral movement, as any less intelligent eye would naturally have done, the camera remains imperturbably immobile. When Marshall finally enters the frame for the second time and climbs the stairs, the cinematographer, Gregg Toland (acting at Wyler's request), is careful not to bring into focus the full depth of the image, so that Marshall's fall on the staircase and his death will not be perfectly visible to the viewer. This artificial blurredness augments our feeling of anxiety: as if over the shoulder of Bette Davis, who faces us and has her back toward her husband, we have to discern in the distance the outcome of a drama whose protagonist is nearly escaping us.

We can see here everything that the cinema adds to the means of the theater, and we can also see that, paradoxically, the highest level of cinematic art coincides with the lowest level of *mise en scène*. Nothing could better heighten the dramatic power of this scene than the absolute immobility of the camera. The slightest

movement, which a less skillful director would have deemed the right cinematic element to introduce, would have decreased the dramatic tension. Here, furthermore, the camera does not follow the path of the average viewer's eyes by cutting from one character to the other. It is the camera itself that organizes the action by means of the frame and the ideal coordinates of its dramatic geometry.

In my school days, when I was studying mineralogy, I remember being struck by the structure of certain fossil shells. Although the limestone was arranged in the living animal in thin parallel layers at the surface of the valves, a slow process in the dead animal had rearranged the molecules into thin crystals perpendicular to the initial direction of the layers. Apparently, the shell was intact; one could still discern perfectly the original stratification of the limestone. But, when the shell was cracked, the fracture revealed that the perpendicular external pattern was completely contradicted by the parallel interior architecture. I apologize for this comparison, but it illustrates well the invisible molecular process that affects the deep aesthetic structure of Lillian Hellman's play, and that at the same time respects with a paradoxical fidelity its superficial theatrical appearance.

In *The Best Years of Our Lives* the problems were of a totally different order from those encountered in *The Little Foxes*. The film had an almost original script. The novel in verse by MacKinlay Kantor [*Glory for Me*], from which Robert Sherwood drew his screenplay, has certainly not been respected as Lillian Hellman's play was. The nature of the subject, its relevance, its seriousness, its social usefulness, demanded first and foremost an extreme meticulousness, a quasi-documentary accuracy. Samuel Goldwyn and Wyler wanted in this film to do a civic good work as much as to create a work of art. The task was to expose through a story—romanticized, to be sure, but credible and even exemplary in its details—one of the most crucial and distressing social problems of postwar America, and to do so with the necessary breadth and subtlety. In a certain sense, *The Best Years of Our Lives* is still related to American wartime propaganda films, to the didactic mission of the film unit of the American army, from which unit Wyler had just been discharged. The war and the particular view of reality that it engendered have deeply influenced the European cinema, as we all know; the war's consequences were less strongly felt in Hollywood. Yet, several American filmmakers

took part in the war, and some of the horror, some of the shocking truths, with which it overwhelmed the world, could be translated by them as well into an ethic of realism. "All three of us (Capra, Stevens, and Wyler) took part in the war. It had a very strong influence on each of us. Without that experience, I couldn't have made my film the way I did. We have learned to understand the world better. . . . I know that George Stevens has not been the same since he saw the corpses at Dachau. We were forced to realize that Hollywood has rarely reflected the world and the time in which people live." These few lines of Wyler's sufficiently illuminate his purpose in making *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

We know how much care he devoted to the making of this, the longest and probably the most expensive film in his career. Yet, if *The Best Years of Our Lives* were only a propaganda film, it would not deserve very much attention, no matter how skillful, well-intended, moving, and useful it was. Come to think of it, the script of *Mrs. Miniver* [1942] is not so inferior to that of *The Best Years of Our Lives*: but *Mrs. Miniver* is marked by pedestrian direction and does not move toward any particular style. The result is rather disappointing. By contrast, in *The Best Years of Our Lives* Wyler's ethical reverence for reality found its aesthetic transcription in the *mise en scène*. Indeed, nothing is more fallacious and absurd than to contrast "realism" and "aestheticism," as was frequently done in reference to the Russian or the Italian cinema. In the true sense of the word, there is no film more "aesthetic" than *Paisan* [1946]. Reality is not art, but a truly "realistic" art can create an aesthetic that is incorporated in reality. Thank God, Wyler was not satisfied merely to be faithful to the psychological and social truth of the action (which truths, by the way, did not come off so well). He tried to find aesthetic equivalents for psychological and social truth in the *mise en scène*. I will mention these equivalents in the order of their importance.

First, there is the realism of the set, built in its entirety to realistic dimensions (which drastically complicated the shooting, as one might expect, since the walls had to be removed to give the camera mobility). The actors and actresses were wearing the same clothes that their characters would have worn in reality, and their faces were not made up more than they would have been in everyday life. Granted, this quasi-superstitious faithfulness to the truth of daily life is particularly strange in Hollywood, but its actual significance

lies perhaps not so much in the guarantee of verisimilitude it gave to the viewer as in the revolution it unmistakably implied for the art of *mise en scène*: lighting, camera angle, the directing of the actors. It is not on the basis of meat hanging down onstage or on the basis of André Antoine's real trees that realism defines itself, but through the means of expression that a realistic subject allows the artist to discover. The "realistic" tendency in the cinema has existed since Louis Lumière and even since Marey and Muybridge.⁵ It has known diverse fates, but the forms it has taken have survived only in proportion to the aesthetic invention or discovery (conscious or not, calculated or naive) that it allowed. There is not one realism, but several realisms. Each period looks for its own, i.e., the technique and the aesthetics that will capture, retain, and render best what one wants from reality. On the screen, technique naturally plays a much more important role than in the novel because the written word is more or less stable, whereas the cinematic image has undergone deep modifications since its creation. Lighting, sound, and color have wrought true transformations of the image. The syntax that organizes the vocabulary of cinema has also undergone change. "Associational montage," which is identified mainly with the period of silent film, has been succeeded almost totally by the logic of cutting, by narrative editing. Changes are undoubtedly due in part to fashion, which exists in the cinema as it does everywhere else, but all the changes that have a real significance and that add to film heritage are closely connected with cinematographic technique: and such technique is the infrastructure of film.

To want one's film to look true, to show reality, the whole reality and nothing but reality, may be an honorable intention. As it stands, however, this does not go beyond the level of ethics. In the cinema, such an intention can result only in a *representation* of reality. The aesthetic problem begins with the means of that representation. A dead child in close-up is not the same as a dead child in medium shot is not the same as a dead child in color. Indeed, our eyes, and consequently

⁵Editor's note: Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904), French physician and physiologist, took an early interest in the study of animal motion. His research inspired Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904), the British photographer, to begin his famous experiments (in America) in photographically recording the successive phases of animal locomotion. These studies were an essential step towards the development of motion pictures as we know them today.

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our minds, have a way of seeing a dead child in real life that is not the way of the camera, which places the image within the rectangle of the screen. "Realism" consists not only of showing us a corpse, but also of showing it to us under conditions that re-create certain physiological or mental givens of natural perception, or, more accurately, under conditions that seek equivalents for these givens. The classical approach to editing ("psychological montage"), which divides a scene into a certain number of elements (the hand on the telephone, or the door knob that slowly turns), implicitly corresponds to a particular natural mental process that makes us accept the sequence of shots without being conscious of the cutter's hand at work. Indeed, in real life our eye, like a lens, focuses spatially on the aspects of an event that interest us most. The eye proceeds through successive investigations: in scanning the space in which an event takes place, it introduces a kind of additional temporalization to that event, which itself is occurring in time.

The first camera lenses were not varied. Their optical characteristics naturally created a large depth of field that suited the cutting, or rather the near absence of cutting, of the films of that time. It was absolutely out of the question back then to divide a scene into twenty-five camera placements and at the same time to keep the lens focused on the actors. Progress in optics is closely linked with the history of editing, being at the same time its cause and consequence.

To consider a different method of filming, the way Jean Renoir did as early as 1933 and Orson Welles did a little later, one had to have discovered that analytical cutting or classical editing was founded on the illusion of psychological realism. Although it is true that our eye changes its focus continually according to what interests or attracts it, this mental and physiological adjustment is done after the fact. The event exists continuously in its entirety, every part of it demands our undivided attention; we are the ones who decide to choose this or that aspect, to select this instead of that according to the bidding of our feelings or our thinking. Someone else, however, would perhaps make a different choice. In any case, we are *free* to create our own *mise en scène*: another "creation" or cutting is always possible that can radically modify the subjective aspect of reality. Now the director who does the cutting for us also does the selecting that we would do in real life. We unconsciously accept his choices, because they

conform to the seeming laws of ocular attraction; but they deprive us of a privilege that is well grounded in psychology and that we give up without realizing it: the freedom, at least the potential one, to modify at each instant our method of selection, of "editing."

The psychological, and in addition aesthetic, consequences of this are of significance. The technique of analytical cutting tends to destroy in particular the ambiguity inherent in reality.⁶ It "subjectivizes" the event to an extreme, since each shot is the product of the director's bias. Analytical cutting implies not only a dramatic, emotional, or moral choice, but also, and more significantly, a judgment on reality itself. It is probably excessive to bring up the controversy over the "universals" in regard to William Wyler. Even if the philosophical dispute over nominalism and realism (at the basis of which is the controversy over the definition of "universals" or abstract terms) has its equivalent in film in the opposition between formalism and realism, formalism and realism are not defined only on the basis of a director's shooting and cutting method. It is certainly not a coincidence, however, that Jean Renoir, André Malraux, Orson Welles, Roberto Rossellini, and the William Wyler of *The Best Years of Our Lives* come together in their frequent use of depth of field, or at least of "simultaneous" *mise en scène*, of action occurring simultaneously on different planes. It is not an accident that, from 1938 to 1946, their names are attached to everything that really matters in cinematic realism, the kind of realism that proceeds from an aesthetics of reality.

Thanks to depth of field, at times augmented by action taking place simultaneously on several planes, the viewer is at least given the opportunity in the end to edit the scene himself, to select the aspects of it to which he will attend. I quote Wyler:

I had long conversations with my cameraman, Gregg Toland. We decided to strive for a realism that would be as simple as possible. Gregg Toland's talent for keeping the different planes of the image simultaneously in focus allowed me to develop my own style of directing. Thus I

⁶Bazin's note: I say "tends," because it is nevertheless possible to use this technique in such a way that it compensates for the psychological mutilation implied in its principle. Hitchcock, for instance, excels in suggesting the ambiguity of an event while decomposing it into a series of close-ups.

could follow an action to its end without cutting. The resulting continuity makes the shots more alive; more interesting for the viewer, who can choose of his own will to study a particular character and who can make his own cuts.

The terms used by Wyler above plainly show that his concern was drastically different from that of Orson Welles or Jean Renoir. Renoir used

⁷Bazin's note: In *The Rules of the Game* Renoir actually made more use of the simultaneity of actions happening at the same time in the same shot than of depth of field. But the goal and the effect of these two techniques are the same. We could almost call simultaneous *mise en scène* a lateral depth of field. A psychological paradox must be noted here. The depth of focus of the lens ostensibly permits us to view clearly a cross section of reality. Granted, this clarity seems at first to be the clarity of reality itself: a chair is not blurry just because our eye doesn't focus on it; therefore it is right that this chair should stay in focus on the screen. But an event taking place in reality has three dimensions: it would be physiologically impossible in reality, for example, to see at the same time, with the same clarity, the glass of poison in the foreground on Susan Alexander Kane's night table and the door to her bedroom in the background. We would have to re-direct the focus of our crystalline lens from the night table to the door, as Henri Calef [French director, b. 1910] re-directs the focus of his lens during the municipal council scene in *Jéricho* [1946, dir. Calef]. One could maintain, then, that the true representation of reality is achieved with analytical cutting. But this would be to disregard the mental factor in perception, which is more important here than the physiological one. Despite the fact that our attention shifts, that our eyes move from one object to another, we perceive the event or the space of which these objects are a part in a continuous manner.

Moreover, the adjustments of the eye to new objects, with the resulting "angle shifts," are so swift that they amount, through an unconscious summation in the viewer's mind, to the reconstitution of a complete mental image; they do so almost in the same way that the scanning of the fluorescent screen by the cathodic beam gives the television viewer the illusion of a continuous and constant image. One may even add that the viewer of a deep-focus shot continuously trains his eyes on the screen and thus necessarily and constantly perceives an event in all its sharpness *without being permitted* a physiological way out (by watching from a closer point or from farther away); in this way the continuity of the event (its ontological unity, which precedes its dramatic unity) is made evident to him.

The slight cheating or "special effect" implied in a cinematic image in deep focus does not work against realism, then, but on the contrary reinforces it, confirms it, and is true to its ambiguous essence. A shot in deep focus gives concrete form to the metaphysical affirmation that all reality exists *on the same plane*. The slight physical effort of ocular adjustment often masks, in our perception of the world, the corresponding mental operation that is the only one that matters. On the other hand, in the cinema, as in the portraits of the *quattrocento* where the landscape is as clear as the human faces, the mind cannot escape the purity of the one choice open to it, ocular reflexes are destroyed, and attention becomes a function of the responsibility of conscience.

simultaneous, lateral *mise en scène* mostly to underline the connections between plots, as is clearly visible in the feast at the castle in *The Rules of the Game* [1939].⁷ Orson Welles sometimes aims toward a kind of tyrannical objectivity à la Dos Passos, sometimes toward a kind of systematic extension in depth of reality, as if that reality were sketched on a rubber band that he would take pleasure first in pulling back to scare us, second in letting go right into our faces. The receding perspectives and the low-angle shots of Orson Welles are fully extended slingshots. Wyler's method is completely different from Welles' and Renoir's. We are still talking about integrating into the overall structure and the individual image a maximum of reality, about making the set and the actors totally and simultaneously present, so that action will never be an *abstraction*. But this constant accretion of events on the screen aims in Wyler at perfect neutrality. The sadism of Orson Welles and the ironic anxiety of Renoir have no place in *The Best Years of Our Lives*. The purpose in this film is not to harass the viewer, to break him upon the wheel and to quarter him. Wyler wants only to allow him to: (1) see everything; (2) make choices "of his own will." This is an act of loyalty toward the viewer, a pledge of dramatic honesty. Wyler puts his cards on the table. Indeed, it seems that the use of classical editing in *The Best Years of Our Lives* would have been somewhat deceptive, like a never-ending magic trick. "Look at this," the camera would say, "and now at that." But what about in between shots? The frequency of depth-of-focus shots and the perfect sharpness of the backgrounds contribute enormously to reassuring the viewer and to giving him the opportunity to observe and to make a selection, and the length of the shots even leaves him time to form an opinion, as we will see later. Depth of field in William Wyler aims at being liberal and democratic, like the consciences both of the American viewers and of the characters in *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

The Styleless Style

The depth of field of Wyler is more or less the film equivalent of what André Gide and Roger Martin du Gard have deemed the ideal of composition in the novel: the perfect neutrality and transparency of style, which must not interpose any filter, any refractive index, between the reader's mind and the story.⁸ In consonance with Wyler, then, Gregg Toland has used in *The*

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Best Years of Our Lives a technique distinctly different from the one he used in *Citizen Kane* [1941]. First the lighting: Orson Welles preferred chiaroscuro lighting, that is, lighting which is harsh and subtle at the same time; he wanted large areas of semidarkness penetrated by rays of light with which he and the actors could skillfully play. Wyler asked Gregg Toland only for lighting as neutral as possible, which would not be artistic or even dramatic, but simply honest light that would sufficiently illuminate the actors and the surrounding set. It is a comparison between the lenses Toland used, however, that will enable us to understand better the difference between the two techniques. The wide-angle lenses of *Citizen Kane*, on the one hand, strongly distort perspective, and Orson Welles exploits the resulting receding quality of the set. The lenses used in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, on the other



hand, conform more to the optics of normal vision, and tend because of deep focus to foreshorten the image, that is to say, to spread it out on the surface of the screen. Wyler thus deprives himself, once again, of certain technical means at his disposal so that he can respect reality better. This requirement of Wyler's seems, by the way, to have complicated Gregg Toland's task; deprived of optical means, he had to "diaphragm" [to regulate the amount of light entering the lens of the camera] far more, they say, than had ever been done on any film in the world.

⁹Editor's note: Roger Martin du Gard (1881-1958), French novelist who won the Nobel Prize in 1937. His reputation was made by, and rests on, *Les Thibault* (1922-1940), one of the outstanding *romans-cycles* of twentieth-century French fiction (it is in seven parts) and which exemplifies his ideal of composition: it is a strictly objective or impersonal and unsparingly realistic narrative.

Sets, costumes, lights, and above all photography each tends now to neutrality. It seems that this *mise en scène* defines itself through its absence, at least in the aspects we have studied. Wyler's efforts systematically work toward the creation of a film universe that not only rigorously conforms to reality, but also is as little modified as possible by cinematic optics. Paradoxically, even though enormous technical skill was necessary to shoot scenery built to realistic dimensions and to "diaphragm" a lot, Wyler obtains (and wants) on the screen only a picture that resembles as closely as possible, despite the inevitable formal elements required to create it, the spectacle that an eye could see if it looked at reality through an empty framing device.⁹

This experiment could not take place without a change in editing, as well. First, for rather evident technical reasons, the average number of shots in a film diminishes as a function of their realism, of the long take with its respect for continuous time and unfragmented space. We know that talking films have fewer shots than silent films. Color in turn further diminished the number of shots, and Roger Leenhardt,¹⁰ adopting one of Georges Neveux's hypotheses,¹¹ could maintain with some credibility that the cutting of the 3-D film would naturally recover the number of scenes in Shakespeare's plays: around fifty. One understands indeed that the more the image tends to resemble reality, the more complex the psycho-technical problem of editing becomes. Sound had already created

⁹Bazin's note: Compare the kaleidoscopic *Prisunic* of *Antoine and Antoinette* to the drugstore of *The Best Years of Our Lives*, where one can always see simultaneously all the items for sale (and nearly the price tags, too) and all the customers, as well as the manager perched in his glass booth far in the background.

¹⁰Editor's note: Roger Leenhardt (b. 1903), influential film critic for a number of French publications who began making documentary shorts in the mid-1930s. These covered a wide range of cultural subjects and gained him a reputation for excellence. His series of biographical studies of prominent personalities in literature and the arts has also been of special interest. In between dozens of shorts, he directed two feature films of some quality: *Les Dernières Vacances* (1948) and *Le Rendez-vous de Minuit* (1962).

¹¹Editor's note: Georges Neveux, writer of the original screenplay for *Mademoiselle Docteur* (*Fräulein Doktor*), dir. G. W. Pabst, 1936. Marcel Carné's *Juliette ou la Clef des Songes* (1951) is based on Neveux's work of the same name.

problems for "associational montage," which, in fact, was almost completely replaced by analytical editing; depth of field has made of each change in camera placement a technical *tour de force*. It is in this sense that we must understand Wyler's esteem for his cameraman. Indeed, Toland's talent does not lie in a particularly deep knowledge of the properties of the film stock itself, but above all in an ability to maintain a consistent flow from image to image, besides his sense of framing, about which I will speak again later. Toland maintains a consistent flow not only in the sense that he creates a sharp surface in the conventional shots, but also in the sense that he creates the same surface even when he must encompass the entire mass of set, lights, and actors within a virtually unlimited field.

But the determinism of this technique perfectly suited Wyler's purposes. The composition of a scene into shots is an operation that is necessarily artificial. The same aesthetic calculation that made Wyler choose depth-of-focus shooting was bound to lead him in his mind to reduce to a minimum the number of shots necessary to convey the narrative clearly. As a matter of fact, *The Best Years of Our Lives* does not have more than 190 shots per hour, i.e., approximately 500 shots for a film of two hours and forty minutes. Let us recall here that contemporary films have an average of 300 to 400 shots per hour, in other words, more or less double that of *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Let us remember in addition that *Antoine and Antoinette* [1947, dir. Jacques Becker], which undoubtedly represents the absolute opposite in technique from Wyler's film, has some 1,200 shots for one hour and fifty minutes of projection time. Shots of more than two minutes in duration are not infrequent in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, without even the slightest reframing to compensate for their stasis. In fact, there is no trace of "associational montage" in such a *mise en scène*. Even classical editing, which is the aesthetic of the relationship between shots, is drastically reduced: the shot and the sequence tend to fuse. Many of the scenes in *The Best Years of Our Lives* have the unity or discreteness of a Shakespearean scene and are shot as a result in a single long take. Here again, a comparison of *The Best Years of Our Lives* with the films of Orson Welles clearly shows different aesthetic intentions, although these intentions are based upon techniques that are in part similar. Because of its realistic quality, depth-of-focus shooting was bound to lead the director of *Citizen Kane* as well to identify shot with sequence. Remember,

for instance, the scene where Susan takes poison, the scene of the falling out between Kane and Jed Leland, and, in *The Magnificent Ambersons* [1942], the admirable love scene in the carriage with the endless tracking shot that the final reframing reveals to have been an actual one and not a traveling matte, or, in the same film, even the scene in the kitchen where young George stuffs himself with cake while talking with Aunt Fanny. But Orson Welles uses depth of field for purposes of extreme contrast. The deep-focus shots correspond in his aesthetics to a certain way of rendering reality, to which other ways of rendering it are opposed, such as those of the "March of Time" newsreel and, above all, the compressed time of the several series of lap dissolves that sum up long portions of the story. The rhythm and the structure of events are thus modified by the dialectics of Orson Welles' narrative technique. Not so with Wyler. The aesthetic of each shot remains constant; the narrative method aims only at a maximum of clarity and, through this clarity, at a maximum of dramatic efficiency.

At this point in my analysis, the reader may wonder where the *mise en scène* is in *The Best Years of Our Lives*. It is true that all my analysis so far has attempted to demonstrate the absence of *mise en scène*. But before considering finally the concrete aspects of so paradoxical a technique, I would like to avoid another misunderstanding. Even though Wyler has systematically sought to create a perfectly neutral dramatic universe, sometimes creating in the process technical problems never before encountered in film, it would be naive to mistake this neutrality for an absence of art. Just as the respect for dramatic form and theatrical representation in the adaptation of *The Little Foxes* conceals subtle aesthetic modifications, so the arduous yet skillful achievement of neutrality implies here the advance neutralization of numerous film conventions. Whether it be the nearly unavoidable technical devices (which also carry with them almost inevitably certain aesthetic conventions), or editing methods imposed by custom, courage and imagination were needed if the director wanted to do without them. It is rather common to praise a writer for the austerity of his style, and Stendhal is after all admired for writing in the unadorned manner of the French Civil Code: he is never suspected of intellectual laziness for doing so. Earlier I compared Wyler's concern to achieve a perfect neutrality and transparency of style with Gide's and Martin du

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Gard's concern to define the ideal style for the novel. It is true that this preliminary "stripping away," in film as in the novel, takes its full meaning and value only from the artwork that it makes possible and for which it paradoxically provides the necessary grounding. But I still have to demonstrate this.

In the article from which I quoted above, Wyler did not hide the confidence he had in Gregg Toland to compose shots on the set. What is more, he confirmed this in person to me, and it is easy to believe him when we carefully examine the shots. The happy collaboration of the two men on this film, which would be exceptional in a French studio, can be accounted for by the fact that they had already made six films together. Consequently, since he relied on his cameraman's judgment and on their artistic concurrence, Wyler did not use a shooting script. Each scene had to find its technical solution on the set. A lot of preparatory work was done before the photographing of each scene, but this work had nothing to do with the actual shooting. The *mise en scène* in this film, then, concentrated wholly on the actors. The space filled by the individual actor, already cut off and limited by the frame of the screen, was additionally robbed by Wyler of significance in and of itself, so that the entire dramatic spectrum polarized by the actors would attract the focus. Almost all Wyler's shots are built like an equation, or perhaps better, like a dramatic mechanism whose parallelogram of forces can almost be drawn in geometrical lines. This may not be an original discovery on my part: to be sure, every true director organizes the movement of his actors within the coordinates of the screen according to laws that are still obscure but whose spontaneous perception is part of his talent. Everyone knows, for instance, that the dominant character must be higher in the frame than the dominated one.

But, aside from the fact that Wyler knows how to give his implicit stagings an exceptional clarity and strength, his originality lies in the discovery of a few laws that are his own and, above all, in the use of depth of field as an additional coordinate. The above analysis of Marshall's death in *The Little Foxes* clearly reveals how Wyler can make a whole scene revolve around an actor: Bette Davis at the center of the screen is paralyzed, like a hoot owl by a spotlight, and around her weaves the staggering Marshall as a second, this time mobile, pole, whose shift first out of the frame and second into the background draws with it all the dramatic attention, in

addition to creating tremendous suspense, because it is a double disappearance from the frame and because the focus on the staircase at the back is imperfect. One can see here how Wyler uses depth of field. The intention in *The Best Years of Our Lives* was always to keep the depth of field continuous within the frame, but Wyler did not have the same reason for using this method of shooting in *The Little Foxes*. The director elected to have Gregg Toland envelop the character of the dying Marshall in a certain haziness, to have Toland, as it were, befoog the back of the frame in order to create additional anxiety in the viewer, so much anxiety that he would almost want to push the immobile Bette Davis aside to have a better look. The dramatic development of this scene does indeed follow that of the dialogue and of the action itself, but the scene's cinematic expression superimposes its own evolution upon the dramatic development: a kind of second action that is the very story of the scene from the moment Marshall gets up from his chair to his collapse on the staircase.

Now here is, from *The Best Years of Our Lives*, a dramatic construction built around three characters: the scene of the falling out between Dana Andrews and Teresa Wright. This scene is set in a bar. Fredric March has just convinced Dana Andrews to break off with his daughter and urges him to call her immediately. Andrews gets up and goes towards the telephone booth located near the door, at the back of the room. March leans on a piano in the foreground and pretends



to get interested in the musical exercise that the crippled sailor [Harold Russell] is learning to play with his hooks. The field of the camera begins with the keyboard of the piano large in the foreground, includes March and Harold Russell in American shot, encompasses the whole barroom, and distinctly shows in the background

a tiny Dana Andrews in the telephone booth.¹² This shot is clearly built upon two dramatic poles and three characters. The action in the foreground is secondary, although interesting and peculiar enough to require our keen attention since it occupies a privileged place and surface on the screen. Paradoxically, the true action, the one that constitutes at this precise moment a turning point in the story, develops almost clandestinely in a tiny rectangle at the back of the room, i.e., in the left corner of the screen.

The link between these two dramatic areas is provided by Fredric March, who, with the viewer, is the only one that knows what is going on in the telephone booth and who, according to the logic of the scene, is impressed, like us, by the musical prowess of the crippled seaman. From time to time, March turns his head slightly and glances across the room, anxiously scrutinizing the behavior of Dana Andrews. Finally, the latter hangs the telephone up and, without turning to the men at the piano, suddenly disappears into the street. If we reduce the real action of this scene to its essence, we are left with Dana Andrews' telephone call. This telephone conversation is the only thing of immediate interest to us. The one character whose face we would like to see in close-up is precisely the person whom we cannot clearly discern because of his position in the background and because of the glass surrounding the booth. His words themselves are of course inaudible. The true drama occurs, then, far away in a kind of little aquarium that reveals only what appear to be the trivial and ritual gestures of an ordinary phone call. Depth of field is used here for the same purpose it was used in Herbert Marshall's death scene in *The Little Foxes*. The position of the camera is such that the laws of perspective produce the same effect created by the haziness enveloping the staircase in the background: even as we felt anxiety because we couldn't view the dying Marshall clearly on the stairs, we feel anxiety because we cannot distinctly see Dana Andrews in the phone booth at the back, nor can we hear him.

The idea of situating the telephone booth at the back of the room and thereby obliging the viewer to figure out what is happening there, i.e., obliging him to participate in Fredric March's

anxiety, was in itself an excellent directorial device, but Wyler immediately felt that by itself it destroyed the spatial and temporal balance of the shot. He therefore set out at once to counterbalance and to reinforce the action in the phone booth; hence the idea of a diverting action *in the foreground*, secondary in itself, whose spatial prominence would be conversely proportional to its dramatic significance. The action in the foreground is secondary, not insignificant, and it is one that the viewer cannot ignore because he is also interested in the fate of the crippled sailor and because he doesn't see someone play the piano with hooks every day. Forced to wait for Dana Andrews to finish his call in the phone booth and unable to see him well, the viewer is obliged furthermore to divide his attention between this same booth and the scene at the piano. Thus Wyler killed two birds with one stone: first, the diversion of the piano allows him to extend as long as possible a shot that would otherwise have seemed endless and consequently monotonous; second, and more important, this parasitic pole of attraction organizes the image dramatically and spatially. Against the real action at the phone booth is juxtaposed the action at the piano, which directs the attention of the viewer almost against his will to itself, where it is supposed to be, for as long as it is supposed to be there. Thus the viewer is induced actively to participate in the drama planned by the director.

I should mention, for the sake of accuracy, that this scene is interrupted twice by close-ups of Fredric March glancing toward the phone booth. Wyler probably feared that the viewer might become too absorbed in the piano-playing and gradually forget the action in the background. He therefore cautiously took a few "safety shots"—the close-ups of March—which focus completely on the main action: the dramatic line between Fredric March and Dana Andrews. The editing process probably revealed that two interpolated shots were necessary and sufficient to recapture the diverted attention of the viewer. This degree of caution, by the way, is characteristic of Wyler's technique. Orson Welles would have placed only the telephone booth in the frame, filmed it in deep focus, and would have let the booth forcefully call attention to itself through its very position in the background; he would also have held the shot as long as necessary. The thing is that, for Orson Welles, depth of field is in itself an aesthetic end; for Wyler, depth of field is subject to the dramatic demands of the *mise en*

¹²Editor's note: A term for the Academy aperture two-shot (a two-shot is one composed with two characters; in the scene that Bazin refers to, the "shot" of Fredric March and Harold Russell occupies only the foreground of the deep-focus image), which is more intimate and involving than the widescreen two-shot.

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scène, and in particular to the clarity of the narrative. The two interpolated shots amount to a kind of attention-getter: a rerouting of the viewer's eye.

Wyler particularly likes to build his *mise en scène* on the tension created in a shot by the coexistence of two actions of unequal significance. This is clearly discernible once again in a shot from the last sequence of *The Best Years of Our Lives*. The characters grouped on the right, in the middle ground, apparently constitute the main dramatic pole, since nearly everyone is assembled here for the wedding of the crippled sailor and his long-time sweetheart. In fact, however, since their marriage is now to be taken for granted, the attention of the viewer focuses on Teresa Wright (in white in the third plane) and Dana Andrews (on the left in the foreground), who meet for the first time since their breakup. During the entire

wedding party into the room and the coming together of Andrews and Wright. These two characters have not yet reunited, but the shift of the wedding party to the right of the frame, which seems so natural but is actually contrived by Wyler, clearly reveals their connection. Teresa Wright's white dress, which is located almost in the middle of the image, constitutes a kind of dramatic boundary between the two components of the action. The two lovers are the only ones in the scene to be spatially, and logically, set apart on the left side of the screen.

We should also notice in this shot the importance of the looks the characters direct at one another. These always constitute with Wyler the foundation of the *mise en scène*.¹³ The viewer has only to follow these looks as if they were pointed index fingers in order to understand exactly the director's intentions. One could easily



wedding scene, Wyler skillfully directs his actors in order gradually to isolate from the wedding party Andrews and Wright, who, the viewer feels, cannot stop thinking about each other. The still reproduced here corresponds to the intermediary stage between the entrance of the

trace the paths of the characters' eyes on the screen and thereby make visible, as clearly as iron filings make visible the field of a magnet, the dramatic currents that flow across the image. All of Wyler's pre-production work consists, as I have suggested, of simplifying to a maximum the

technical aspects of the *mise en scène* so as to free him to compose each shot as clearly and effectively as possible. In *The Best Years of Our Lives* he reaches an almost abstract austerity. All the dramatic joints are so conspicuous that a few degrees' shift in the angle of a glance would not only be clearly visible even to the most obtuse viewer, but would also be capable of causing an entire scene to lose its symmetry, as if this shift in the angle of glance were extra weight added to a perfectly balanced scale.

Perhaps one of the distinctive qualities of a skillful "scientist" of *mise en scène* is that he avoids proceeding from a preestablished aesthetics. Here again Wyler is at the opposite end from Orson Welles, who came to the cinema with the declared intention of creating certain aesthetic effects out of it. For a long time Wyler labored on obscure westerns whose titles nobody remembers. It is through this work on westerns, work not as an aesthetician but as a craftsman, that he became the recognized artist whom *Dodsworth* [1936] had already revealed. When he speaks of his directing, it is always in regard to the viewer: his one and only concern is to make the viewer understand the action as precisely and fully as possible. Wyler's immense talent lies in this "science of clarity" obtained through the austerity of the form as well as through equal humility toward his subject matter and his audience. There is in him a sort of genius about his profession, about all things cinematic, which allowed him to stretch an economy of means so

far that, paradoxically, he invented one of the most personal styles in contemporary cinema. To attempt to describe this style, however, we had to pretend first that it was an absence of style.

Cinema is like poetry. It would be foolish to imagine cinema as an isolated element that one could capture on celluloid and project on a screen through a magnifying lens. Such pure cinema can be combined as much with a sentimental drama as with the colored cubes, i.e., the abstractions, of Fischinger.¹⁴ The cinema is not any kind of independent matter whose molecules have to be isolated at any cost. Rather, cinema is that matter once it has achieved an aesthetic state. It is a means for representing a narrative-spectacle. Experience proves sufficiently that one should be careful not to identify the cinema with any given aesthetic or, what is more, with any style, any concrete form that the director must absolutely use, as he would salt and pepper. Cinematic "purity" or values or, more accurately in my opinion, the cinematic "coefficient" of a film must be calculated on the basis of the effectiveness of the *mise en scène*.

Paradoxically, insofar as Wyler has never attempted to hide the novelistic or theatrical nature of most of his scripts, he has made all the more apparent the cinematic phenomenon in its utmost purity. Not once has the *auteur* of *The Best Years of Our Lives* or *Jezebel* said to himself *a priori* that he had to have a "cinematic look"; still, nobody can tell a story in cinematic terms better than he. For him, the action is expressed first by the actor. Like a director in the theater, Wyler conceives his job of enhancing the action as beginning with the actor. The set and the camera are there only to permit the actor to focus upon himself the maximum dramatic intensity; they are not there to create a meaning unto themselves. Even though Wyler's approach is also that of the

¹³Bazin's note: To the real looks the actors direct at one another, one must add the virtual "look" of the camera with which our own identifies. Wyler excels in making us sensitive to his camera's gaze. Jean Mitry has noticed in *Jezebel* the low-angle shot that clearly points the lens directly at Bette Davis' eyes looking down at the white cane that Henry Fonda holds in his hand with the intention of using it. We thus follow the dramatic line between the character and the object much better than we would have if, by the rules of conventional cutting, the camera had shown us the cane from the point of view of Bette Davis herself.

A variation on the same principle: in *The Little Foxes*, in order to make us understand the thoughts of the character who notices the small steel box in which the stolen bonds were locked and whose absence from the box is going to indicate theft, Wyler placed it in the foreground, with the camera being this time at eye level and at the same distance from the box as the eyes of the character. Our eyes no longer meet the character's eyes directly through the beheld object, as in the above-mentioned scene from *Jezebel*, but as if through a mirror, the angle of incidence of our own view of the object being as it were equal to the angle of reflection of the character's view, which angle takes us to this person's eyes. In any case, Wyler commands our mental vision according to the rigorous laws of an invisible dramatic optics.

¹⁴Editor's note: Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967), German avant-garde painter who had begun toying with the idea of creating abstract visual interpretations of poetry and music at the age of nineteen and became involved in film animation in the course of diagramming the emotional movements in a Shakespeare play. He made his first animated shorts in 1920 with the help of a wax-cutting machine of his own design. In 1926 he presented the first of a series of "absolute film" shorts, which he named *Study 1*, *Study 2*, etc. In 1933 he began exploring color with a special process he had helped develop and in 1935 won a prize at the Venice Festival for his *Komposition in Blau* (*Composition in Blue*). He won the Grand Prix at the Brussels Exhibition of 1949 for his *Motion Painting No. 1*, in which he used intricate designs and geometric forms to the accompaniment of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3.

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theater director, the latter has at his disposal only the very limited means of the stage. He can manipulate his means, but no matter what he does the text and the actor constitute the essence of theatrical production.

Film is not at all, as Marcel Pagnol naively would have it, magnified theater on screen, the stage viewed constantly through opera glasses. The size of the image or unity of time has nothing to do with it. Cinema begins when the frame of the screen and the placement of the camera are used to enhance the action and the actor. In *The Little Foxes*, Wyler has changed almost nothing of the drama, of the text, or even the set: one could say that he limited himself to directing the play in the way that a theater director would have directed it, and furthermore, that he used the frame of the screen to conceal certain parts of the set and used the camera to bring the viewer closer to the action. What actor would not dream of being able to play a scene, immobile on a chair, in front of five thousand viewers who don't miss the slightest movement of an eye? What theater director would not want the spectator in the worst seat at the back of the house to be able to see clearly the movements of his actors, and to read with ease his intentions at any moment in the action? Wyler didn't choose to do anything other than realize on film the essence of theatrical *mise en scène*, or better still, of a theatrical *mise en scène* that would not use the lights and the set to

ornament the actor and the text. Nevertheless, there is probably not a single shot in *Jezebel*, *The Little Foxes*, or *The Best Years of Our Lives* that is not pure cinema.¹⁵□

¹⁵Bazin's note: After rereading this ten-year-old article, I feel the need to readjust my judgment for the reader of 1958, and I also feel the need to do so because of my current opinions. If I had not thought that the analyses contained in this essay retained their interest for me independent of my enthusiasm for William Wyler in those days, I would certainly not have devoted so much space here to this director whom time has treated so rudely. I wrote this article at a time when Roger Leenhardt was shouting, "Down with Ford! Long live Wyler!" History did not echo that war cry, and wherever one places John Ford today, one must place Wyler below him. Both directors have their intrinsic artistic values, however, and it is from this point of view that one may continue to prefer the "writing in cinema" of some of Wyler's films to the spectacular cinema of John Ford.

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Film stills courtesy of National Film Archive and The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

Larry French

CORNFIELDS

She looked up from her cooking at the sound of the door. A large man stood in the doorway in bib overalls and muddied boots. Behind the man she could see the sun setting over the fields in the distance.

"Take those boots off out on the porch before you come walking in here."

The man was gone for several minutes then appeared back at the door. He wore heavy grey hunter's socks. He walked across the kitchen to where the woman was cooking and looked down into the skillet. The moist socks left his footprints across the linoleum floor.

"Where's he at?" he asked.

"Gone. Runned off again."

"But where?"

"You know where," she said. "He's out there in those cornfields again."

The man walked to a formica table and sat down hard. His face was bright red and his hair was grey and long for a man of his age.

"It ain't natural," he said. "Spending all this time in there."

She put a plate of food on the table in front of him. There were biscuits and gravy. The gravy had pieces of meat in it. She brought them both coffee and pulled the string attached to a yellow bug light hanging above the table.

"He says he's got whole towns in there," she said. "Says he's got roads and lakes and everything in there. That's what he says."

The man went to an old black console radio and fiddled with the dials until he found a farm station. He sat quietly listening to a weather report.

"We're only a month away from harvesting, Emil," she said. "What's he gonna do then?"

The woman walked to the refrigerator and lifted a large watermelon out of it. She carried it to the counter and sat it down. She took a meat cleaver from above the counter and hit the watermelon once in the center to divide it. The man looked up at the sound and saw her watching him. The watermelon split apart except for one small piece of green rind near the bottom.

"You tell me that," she said. "What's he gonna do then?" □

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Robert A. Brinkley

THE CUNNING OF DIALECTIC: PLATO'S MASTERY

Those who introduce an infinite series . . . are eliminating the nature of the good . . . Nor would there be intellect in the world . . . Nor is it possible to know a thing.

—Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (994b)¹

You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them are now able to tell about it. . . . How can you know that the situation existed? That it is not the fruit of your informant's imagination.

—Jean-Francois Lyotard²

About ten years ago Jean-Francois Lyotard began to catalogue the ruses in which those

¹The following editions have been used in this paper: for Plato, the Cornford translations of the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*, the Joyce translation of the *Symposium*, and the Hackforth translation of the *Phaedrus*, all reprinted in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963); for Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the translation by Hippocrates G. Apostle (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1966); for the excerpt from the *Physics* and for Simplicius' version of Zeno's First Paradox of Motion, *Zeno of Elea*, ed. H. D. P. Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1963); for Parmenides and Heraclitus, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, ed. G. S. Kirk and R. E. Raven (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960); for Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), and *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1894); for Bergson, *Bergson's Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1913).

²*Le differend* (Paris: Minuit, 1984); trans. by Georges Van Den Abbeele in "The Differend, the Referent, and the Proper Name," *Diacritics* 14.3 (Fall 1984): 4.

³These ruses may come to define reality, but "reality is not what is 'given' to this or that 'subject'; it is a state of the referent (that about which one speaks) which results from the effectuation of establishment procedures defined by a unanimously agreed-upon protocol, and from the possibility offered to anyone to recommence this effectuation as often as he wants" ("The differend" 4). In addition to *Le differend*, see Lyotard's studies of major and minor rhetorics in *Rudiments patiens* (Paris: Union generale d'editions, 1977); and *Au Juste* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1979).

in strong and those in weak positions entangle one another.³ This paper may constitute a contribution to that catalogue, a consideration of what has become a master ruse—inasmuch as it presents itself as truth. While I have not wished to regard this presentation as mythic, there may after all be a story for its plot. When Zeus devours Metis, he makes her his cunning (*metis*), his mastery. It will take Plato to turn *metis* into *logos*, cunning into dialectic, thus to make this mastery available to the rest of us, to Hegel eventually—but not simply to Hegel—as the strongest argument, as that which is most true.

I

In Plato's *Parmenides*, Socrates—still a young man, more pupil than master—learns from Parmenides and his disciple Zeno "the laborious game" which structures Platonic dialectic (994b). "If you want to be thoroughly exercised," Parmenides tells Socrates,

you must not merely make the supposition that such and such a thing *is* and then consider the consequences, you must also take the supposition that the same thing is *not*. . . . Whenever you suppose that anything whatsoever exists or does not exist or has any other character, you ought to consider the consequences . . . if you are really going to make out the truth after a complete course of discipline.

To which Socrates replies, "There would be no end to such an undertaking, Parmenides" (136b-c).

Hegel believed that the "genuine dialectic . . . is contained" in the *Parmenides* (*Phenomenology* 44); the genuine dialectic which Hegel finds there is, of course, Hegel's own. In his reading of the *Parmenides*, Hegelian dialectic presents itself as an interpretation of Platonic dialectic, but this play of interpretation does not originate with Plato's dialogue. What Hegel reads in the *Parmenides* is Plato's own interpretation—or, better, his recreation—of a rhetorical strategy employed by the Eleatic philosophers. Reading Hegel's reading of Plato's recreation of that strategy, we observe a metamorphosis in which a mode of cunning becomes dialectical truth. Is it the *cunning* of this truth which will impel us with its logic?

II

According to Hegel, dialectic is "the true discourse and positive expression of the divine life" (*Lectures* 2: 56). He finds divine life particularly expressed in Parmenides' advice to Socrates:

The marvellous fact that meets us in thought when we take determinations such as these by themselves, is that each one is turned round into the opposite of itself.

(*Lectures* 2: 57-8)

Thought does not merely entertain the affirmative and then the negative, first *is* and then *is-not*. Instead thought finds that *is* leads to its opposite, but that non-being (*is-not*) leads back to being once more. The consequences of the supposition that a thing is lead to a realization that it cannot *be*, but the consequences of its non-being lead back to the realization that it *must be*. The genuine dialectic is this movement, articulated in Plato's dialogue when Parmenides considers the consequences of the statements, *the one is* and *the one is not*.

If Parmenides' considerations are true discourse because they "show forth the necessary movement of pure Notion" (*Lectures* 2: 49), dialectic reveals that Notions "are this movement, and the universal is just the unity of these apparent Notions" (*Lectures* 2: 49). The *Parmenides* concludes with an affirmation which may seem merely negative and contradictory. "It seems," Parmenides remarks,

that, whether there is or is not a one, both that one and the others alike are and are not, and appear and do not appear in all manner of ways, with respect to themselves and to one another.

(166b)

But the conclusion of the *Parmenides* is the affirmation of dialectic *per se*, of the movement—as Hegel writes—"which resolves and has resolved contradiction in itself. . . . This sublation of contradiction is the affirmative" (*Lectures* 2: 52).

It is also, as Socrates has already concluded, without end. The *Parmenides* makes truth an endless movement of prospective truths (the one is) vanishing into their opposites (the one is not). Seeking the end of the movement in the assertion *the one is*, we find that a myriad of consequences intervene, all leading to the conclusion that *the one is not*. If we seek to affirm this conclusion, however, other consequences will intervene which lead to the conclusion—equally unattainable—that *the one is*. We never get to the end, and to affirm this endless movement as truth is to identify the truth with both a desire and an inability to achieve stasis.

III

Hegel agrees with Aristotle that Zeno discovered dialectic. "What specially characterizes Zeno," Hegel writes, "is the dialectic which, properly speaking, begins with him" (*Lectures* 1: 261). According to the *Parmenides*, dialectic may have begun with Parmenides himself, yet the *Parmenides* of Plato's dialogue differs crucially with the Eleatic philosopher whose name the dialogue bears. The historical Parmenides thought non-being inconceivable: "That *it is-not* and needs must not-be, that I tell thee is a path altogether unthinkable." The Parmenidean formula "*is* or *is-not*" leads to an exclusion of the negative; only the proposition "*it is* and cannot not-be" leads to truth (Diels 2). The *Parmenides* who appears in Plato's dialogue, however, entertains the thought which the historical Parmenides rejected—not only the thought that *it is*, but also the thought that *it is not*. The transformation of the historical figure into the Platonic figure seems to require Zeno as an intermediary, for it was Zeno who asserted the negative. As Socrates suggests to Parmenides in Plato's dialogue, "You assert, in your poem, that the all is one . . . Zeno, for his part, that it is not

a plurality" (128a-b). While for Parmenides the all is expressed as an affirmation, for Zeno it is expressed as a negation. "We find specially interesting," Hegel writes,

that there is in Zeno the higher consciousness, the consciousness that when one determination is denied, this negation is itself again a determination.

(Lectures 1: 261)

The denial of plurality is the determination "that all is one." On the other hand, Hegel suggests, true dialectic is an absolute negation which Zeno only anticipates, a negation in which "both the opposites must be negated": "We find this higher dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides*" (Lectures 1: 261). There Parmenides finds that all is not one and that all is not a plurality. For Hegel the *Parmenides* perfects Zeno's method.

IV

But what Plato's *Parmenides* perfected was first of all a rhetorical strategy. As Hegel notes, while the historical Parmenides denied those philosophical systems which contradicted his own, Zeno defeated opponents by showing that they contradicted themselves. In each case, contradiction is a weapon employed against an opponent, but in Zeno we see "the battle fought with new vigor within the enemy's camp" (Lectures 1: 264). As Zeno tells Socrates in the *Parmenides*, his treatise

is in fact a sort of defense of Parmenides' argument against those who make fun of it by showing that his supposition, that there is a one, leads to many absurdities and contradictions. This book, then, is a retort against those who assert a plurality. It pays them back in the coin with something to spare, and aims at showing that, on a thorough examination, their own supposition that there is a plurality leads to even more absurd consequences than the hypothesis of the one.

(128c-d)

Zeno's strategy seems to trap opponents in a dilemma: either they must admit absurd consequences or they must deny their own hypothesis. But the dilemma may be more complex: implicit in Zeno's account (or at least as

the *Parmenides* recounts it) is an admission of absurdities in Parmenides' own argument. Zeno does not deny that Parmenides' position involves contradictions. Thus Parmenides' antagonists are trapped not only in the absurdities of their own suppositions, but in the absurdities that *they* have demonstrated. By denying their hypothesis that a plurality exists, Zeno leaves them with an hypothesis which they have already negated. In Plato's dialogue, Parmenides will embrace this double negation as that which is "most true," but what truth here affirms is entrapment in a double dilemma (166b).⁴

V

The genuine dialectic moves between dilemmas. As such, its movement is negative. Dialectic blocks affirmation. In the *Parmenides*, when Socrates affirms the existence of forms, Parmenides leads him to envision consequences which would deny this affirmation. "I admit that, Parmenides," Socrates responds, but the statement that forms do not exist leads to absurd consequences as well (135b): "If you deny the existence of forms," Parmenides remarks, you "completely destroy the significance of all discourse. . . . What are you going to do about philosophy then?" To which Socrates replies, "I see no way out" (135b-c). Similarly, when Parmenides announces that "there is a one," consequences intervene which deny his statement (137c): "The one in no sense is" (141a). The one "always proves to be two and can never be one" (142e). Yet the statement that "the one is not" leads to consequences which deny that proposition as well: the one does not exist because it is many, but "you cannot imagine many without a one. . . . If there is no one, there is nothing at all" (166b).

In Plato's dialogue, the consequences of an affirmation seem to negate it. However, the notion of *consequences* is paradoxical here. The consequences of a proposition appear after the proposition has been stated; yet as that which *intervenes*, the consequences come *between* the subject who speaks and the truth which he has appeared to affirm with his statement. It is as if the appearance of consequences moved the speaker in reverse—back from a point which he

⁴As Lyotard suggests, "the linchpin of Hegelian dialectical logic" is this dilemma or double bind. It argues 1) that either *x* is or else *x* is not, and 2) that if *x* is, then *x* is not ("The Differend" 5).

apparently reached as he spoke. Parmenides and Socrates affirm truths. A moment passes, however, and they no longer seem to have attained the truth. Although the truthful statement is past, they must consider what follows logically *before* they can speak truly. Consequences, however, will prevent any statement of the truth, for moving the speaker in reverse, they distance him from it and negate the movement toward truth. Can the speaker then replace his initial truth with its negation? Can he affirm the truth of the negation? When Socrates and Parmenides attempt to do so, they find that consequences push them back once more, distancing them from that affirmation as well. Once more they discover that they have not reached, cannot reach a spot which they seemed to occupy only a moment before. Dialectic involves an experience of endless regression.

The experience of such regression is the experience of Zeno's paradoxes—in particular, his paradoxes of motion. While those paradoxes demonstrate the absurdities involved in notions of plurality and motion, what they establish in place of these notions are negations and a negating movement. Opponents who affirm the existence of plurality or motion will find that the consequences move them in reverse:

An object in motion must move through a certain distance; but since every distance is infinitely divisible the moving object must first traverse half the distance through which it is moving and then the whole distance; but before it traverses the whole of half the distance, it must traverse half of the half, and again half of this half . . . these halves are infinite in number because it is always possible to halve any given length. . . . [I]t is impossible to traverse an infinite number of positions in a finite time.

(Simplicius 1013.4)

The rhetorical force of Zeno's argument involves the order of presentation which begins with the certainty that movement is possible but confronts such certainty with the absurdity of its belief. The argument begins with an object in motion, moving through a finite distance, yet as the argument proceeds, the object can only move half the initial distance. In the next instant, it cannot move even so far, for first it must move half of a half, and half of a half of a half. Because every finite distance is infinitely divisible, the object cannot begin to move at all—though such

a consequence is, of course, impossible: the object has moved, it was moving when the argument began. Yet if it has moved, then the conception of movement is, nevertheless, absurd; the concept leads to consequences which negate all movement.

Aristotle sought to refute Zeno's paradox by revealing its false assumption, "that it is impossible to traverse an infinite number of positions or to make an infinite number of contacts one by one in a finite time." What Zeno's argument conceals is that the *infinite* can have two senses, "either in respect of divisibility or of extension":

While it is impossible to make an infinite number of contacts in a finite time where the infinite is a quantitative infinite, yet it is possible where the infinite is an infinite in respect of division; for the time itself is also infinite in this respect.

(Physics 233a)

If a finite distance contains an infinity of positions, a stretch of time contains an infinity of instants. Yet what Aristotle's refutation ignores is the interlocutor's experience of Zeno's paradox. By dividing a finite distance into an infinite number of positions, Zeno makes that distance *extend* to infinity—*though not for the object in motion*. Achilles running along a track will not experience Zeno's paradox. As Henri Bergson suggests, he who experiences the paradox will be *he who conceives of the motion*, conceives of it in as much as *observes* it (310). What the observer will experience will be one position after another, extending infinitely. The time of his experience will not be the one that Aristotle describes, isomorphic with the infinitely divisible finitude through which the object moves. The observer's time will be a finite duration which cannot achieve an infinite extension; the observer will discover his inability to *conceive* of motion.

According to Bergson, what an observer can envision for any movement is its trajectory, the line which the movement traces. Because a line is a sequence of static points, a movement becomes such a sequence as well; the observer transforms the movement into the line:

At bottom, the illusion arises from this, that the movement, *once effected*, has laid along its course a motionless trajectory on which we can count as many immobilities as we will.

(Bergson 309)

Zeno's paradox catches the observer who believes

the absurdity that movement coincides with immobility . . . that what is true of the line is true of the movement. . . . But the possibility of applying the movement to the line traversed exists only for an observer who keeping outside the movement and seeing at every instant the possibility of a stop, tries to reconstruct the real movement with these possible immobilities.

(Bergson 310)

Only for the observer can movement and line appear isomorphic. Only the observer can "practice on movement, which traces the line, divisions corresponding, each to each, with the diversion arbitrarily chosen on the line once it has been traced" (Bergson 310). The observer transforms present movement into the representation which signifies a movement already past.

VI

The concealed difference between movement and its observation makes Zeno's paradoxes and their movement of negation possible. The paradoxes of motion create a static position and perspective (the observer's) from which movement becomes inconceivable even as the observer is encouraged to conceive it. Such cunning, the strategy of the paradoxes, is Zeno's discovery—dialectic itself—and dialectic is the observation of becoming which replaces movement with a sequence of positions. To use Bergson's words, dialectic is a "trick of our perception" which "consists in extracting from . . . profoundly different becomings the single representation of becoming *in general*, a mere abstraction" which connects a "series of views" (304).⁵ At the same time, the cunning of dialectic

⁵As Bergson writes, "From this we conclude that we have the right to suppose the movement articulated as we wish, and that it is always the same movement. We thus obtain a series of absurdities that all express the same fundamental absurdity. . . . The absurdity vanishes as soon as we adopt by thought the continuity of the real movement, a continuity of which everyone is conscious whenever he lifts an arm or advances a step. . . . [W]e seek in vain to practice on the movement, which traces the line, divisions corresponding, each to each, with the divisions arbitrarily chosen of the line once it has been traced. The line traversed by the moving body lends itself to any kind of division, because it has no internal organization. But all movement is articulated inwardly. Take the articulation of this movement into account, or give up speculating on its nature" (310-11).

involves not only the observation of movement but the insistence that such observation is the truth, that movement and becoming truly exist only *as* they are observed.

Thus the truth of each—becoming in general, movement in general—is that which negates both *in particular*, which renders the existence of each inconceivable. Such a strategy can be employed against any *cognitive* act. The acceptance of an invitation to observe thought in the *Parmenides* engages both Socrates and Parmenides in the regressive movement of dialectic; the same acceptance engages participants in Plato's other dialogues. In the *Parmenides*, Socrates imagines the existence of forms; his thought is a movement of the mind. Socrates, Parmenides asks, "do you believe that there is such a thing as likeness itself?" The question creates the trap. "Certainly," I do, Socrates replies (130b). Agreement does more than merely affirm the thought which Socrates has just expressed. By agreeing, Socrates affirms his thought *as Parmenides has positioned it*. Let us look at what you are saying, Parmenides suggests. Let us look together at this *thing* you call a form. When Socrates consents, and looks at what he has said, he permits a metamorphosis to occur: the form Likeness becomes an object of cognition. As an observer, the occupant of a position which Parmenides proposes, Socrates will not only examine his thought. He will also believe that his thought must be envisioned in terms of what his observation discovers.

At the same time, he will discover that he can no longer think what he has thought. Innumerable difficulties arise in the attempt to observe a cognitive act as an object, and all lead to the same conclusion, that observation makes thinking unending and the end of thought unattainable. Consider one of the difficulties which Parmenides persuades Socrates to observe: the Third Man Argument. Socrates thinks that one form exists, the Large, which permits him to observe that a number of objects appear large. "But now," Parmenides suggests,

take Largeness itself and the other things which are large. Suppose you look at all these in the same way in your mind's eye, will not yet another unity make its appearance—a Largeness by virtue of which they all appear large? . . . If so, a second Form of Largeness will present itself . . . and again . . . yet another, which will make all of them large. So each of your Forms will no

longer be one, but an indefinite number.
(131e-132b)

Parmenides creates an infinite regression by transforming the Large into an object of cognition. According to Socrates, the Large enables us to observe the same attribute in a number of particulars. While the particulars and the attribute are objects of cognition, the form involves a cognitive act. It is that "by virtue of which" the objects "appear large." Parmenides' argument persuades Socrates to observe the Large as an object of cognition as well.⁶ But each observation of a form presupposes the existence of another form that is yet to be observed, another form "by virtue of which" the first form appears. Form A appears by virtue of Form B, B by virtue of C, and so on *ad infinitum*. At the same time, Socrates finds that what he cannot observe, his thought cannot attain. Observation traps his thought in an infinite regress—just as Zeno's paradox traps a moving body in an unlimited extension of a finite space. Regression structures the interplay of *is* and *is-not* which Parmenides recommends to Socrates as the complete discipline and which the Third Man Argument exemplifies. When Socrates affirms that A is the form, he discovers that A is not the form because B is the form. But when he affirms that B is the form, he discovers that B cannot be the form because C is the form.

The invitation to observe a cognitive act transforms it into an inaccessible idea. When Socrates tries to elude Parmenides' argument by reformulating the theory of forms, Parmenides creates an infinite regress again. A form is an image, and things represent these images, Socrates suggests. If so, Parmenides asks, must not the thing and image have a common form in which they share? "A second form will always make its appearance. . . . [T]here will be no end to this emergence of fresh forms, if the form is to be like the thing that partakes of it" (132d-133a).⁷ But so long as Socrates observes the form as an

object of cognition, the form will be like the thing; the regress will occur. When Socrates attempts to escape by distinguishing between forms and objects, Parmenides blocks the escape by seducing him into observing the distinction:

But Parmenides, said Socrates, may it not be that each of these forms is a thought which cannot properly exist anywhere but in a mind. In that way each one of them can be one and the statements that have just been made would no longer be true.

Then is each form one of these thoughts and yet a thought of nothing?

No, that is impossible.

So it is a thought of some thing?

Yes.

(132b-c)

But a thought must only be a thought of some *thing* because Socrates accepts the assumption that thought observes its objects.

VII

To observe anything is to posit that *it is*, a formulation which simultaneously posits an opposition with *what it is not*. *Is* and *is-not* are the units of observation, and while *what is* is always finite, limited, *what is not* is unlimited, infinite. The reason why observation cannot envision *becoming*—except in the abstract—is because it envisions *being* instead—even the *being of becoming*, a paradoxical notion. Carefully observed, becoming can always appear to be a sequence of units of being, but more carefully observed, the non-being of becoming will manifest itself in the infinite number of such units. Such a manifestation, blocking the observation of a limit, blocks the vision of being. Any observation of becoming, as it defines what is, can always discover (or be persuaded to discover) that what is, in fact, is not.

What Parmenides leads Socrates to observe is the unlimited character of thought. Its infinitude makes being unattainable. When Parmenides examines his own conception, the notion that *the one is*, he is lost as well in the infinite character of his own thought. The infinity which both experience—in its opposition to the limited, to being—is one which the Pythagoreans

⁶As a result, form becomes what Jacques Derrida calls an "undecidable," the element in a logical system which "stand[s] as the very possibility of systematicity" but "cannot be simply assigned a site within what it situates, cannot be subsumed under concepts whose contours it draws" (*Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson [London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981] 103). To borrow Derrida's description of an undecidable, the form becomes that element in a dialectic which "grant[s] philosophy . . . the inexhaustible adversity of what funds it and the infinite absence of what founds it" (70).

⁷I have discussed the Third Man Argument at greater length in "Plato's Third Man and the Limits of Cognition," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60.2 (June 1982): 152-57.

formulated and which the historical Parmenides denied. According to the Pythagoreans, the unit is the fundamental element of reality and depends on the opposition of the limited to the unlimited, the finite being the good in its opposition to the infinite. Throughout the world of limits, the unlimited manifests itself (as the plural, the moving, the feminine, etc.), and in opposition to these manifestations, manifestations of the limited appear (the one, the resting, the male, among others).⁸ Opposition creates the becoming of the universe, the Pythagoreans argued, but against them Parmenides urged that the proposition *the unit is* precludes the existence of the unlimited and any of its manifestations. For the unlimited would mean that *the unit is not*, a thought of which we cannot conceive:

that it *is-not* and needs must not be, that I tell thee is a path altogether unthinkable. For thou couldst not know that which is not (that is impossible) nor utter it; for the same thing exists for thinking and for being.

(Diels 2)

Implicit here is the assumption that what cannot *be*, cannot exist—an assumption employed by Zeno in his demonstrations that movement and plurality are not. Zeno loses both conceptions in the unlimited.

Yet what the *Parmenides* demonstrates is that the statement of being (and thus any statement) can always be lost in the unlimited. The statement of the limit is itself unlimited—because it expresses an observation, itself a movement of thought. Observe the movement of observation, and you observe an unlimited number of limits—the process of limitation recurring indefinitely. “If there is a *one*, of course the one will not be many,” Parmenides observes, but if the one is only one, then it cannot have being:

being and *one* are not the same thing, but both belong to the same thing, namely that *one* which is . . . *one* and *being* will be its parts. . . . Therefore, any *one* that is . . . has parts.

Again, take each of these parts of one being—its unity and its being. Unity can never be lacking to the part *being*, nor being to the part *unity*. Thus each of the two parts, in its turn, will possess both unity and being; any part proves to consist of at least two parts and so on forever. . . . What is *one being* must

be unlimited in multitude.

(142d-143a)

Observing the one, Parmenides finds that as an object of cognition it divides into units, divides in the same way that the line divides which Zeno substitutes for motion. If the one is an object of cognition, then as we observe it, the one appears unlimited. Yet the one *is* the limit upon which all other limits depend. Thus the limit is itself unlimited, for the one is a collection of attributes. If, as the attributes proliferate, all have their oneness in common, then oneness itself is caught in that infinite regress which Parmenides has led Socrates to observe. The thought of the one (that it is) may well make the thought of movement an absurdity (the Eleatic argument), but the thought of the one is a movement which makes the one of which it would conceive unattainable—in *as much as movement is an absurdity*. The dilemma appears absolute, which is perhaps why Hegel (seeking the absolute) envisioned it as the positive expression of divine life. In Hegel's vision, divine life is the existence of the observer.

VIII

The observer lives in a negative movement, distanced from the one, lost in unending plurality. Yet that plurality is only the one, a unit, replicated indefinitely. If the perception of multiplicity is at strife with the desire for the one, multiplicity would not appear if the one did not exist. The dilemma has the structure of the Heraclitean *logos*, and the truth which Parmenides discovers in Plato's dialogue may well be that the thought of the one plays to the measure of Heraclitean change. In the *Parmenides*, the one, the form of unity and rest, is sensed as a process of endless disunity and motion (the experience of the dialectic quest for the one). Sensing the one by experiencing the many which blocks our passage to unity, our truth is the dilemma of thought. Dialectic is the *logos*, the infinite limitations—the measure—of the strife of opposites.⁹

⁹“Being at variance it agrees with itself,” and “all things happen by strife,” Heraclitus says (Diels 51, 80). In Plato's dialogues, such strife—the Heraclitean *logos*—becomes the experience of thought. Consider Parmenides' experience in the *Parmenides*. The one and the many are held together through the strife of their opposition. Aristotle writes that Plato posited forms in order to escape Heraclitean flux (*Metaphysics* 987a-b, 1078b-1079a, 1086a-b), but what we discover in the *Parmenides* is that the thought which conceives of the form—in particular its being, its oneness—is, in effect, strife itself.

⁸See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 986a-b.

"You must make an effort and submit yourself" to "the form that Zeno used," Parmenides tells Socrates. "Otherwise the truth will escape you" (135d). Yet following Zeno's method, truth will always escape you—unless, that is, like Hegel or like the participants at the end of the *Parmenides*, you consider the movement which truth eludes, the truth. Having been caught in the cunning of dialectic in the *Parmenides*, Socrates learns to elude it. When Parmenides would lure him into endlessness once more, Socrates traps Parmenides instead. Commenting on the endlessness of the course which Parmenides prescribes, Socrates adds the gesture which will characterize his own cunning in those dialogues of which he seems the master:

There would be no end to such an undertaking, Parmenides, and I don't altogether understand. Why not enlighten me.

(136c)

What Socrates seems to know—with a knowledge which inspires his strategy in the other dialogues—is that dialectic is a process in which you engage someone else. Truth is for others to discover—or rather their inability to attain it.

Involved in this discovery is a recognition of powerlessness. Meditating on the opposition between limited and unlimited, Aristotle suggests that the unlimited deprives us of understanding. In order to understand, Aristotle created a catalogue of causes because that catalogue imposes limits on phenomena (*Metaphysics* 994a-b). To observe existence in terms of its causes is to observe it in terms of limitations. "Men of understanding know the cause," Aristotle says, and to know the cause is to have the right to power (*Metaphysics* 981a): "The wise man . . . must not obey another but must be obeyed" (*Metaphysics* 982a). Alternatively, the observer who can discover no cause and cannot limit what he observes does not understand and has no right to power. Aristotle suggests a *telos* of dialectic—not truth or understanding, but another's loss of power. Those who employ dialectic employ it on another in order either to create another's impotence or to entrap another in the fear of such loss.

IX

According to Hegel, the experience of dialectic

involves a repeated encounter with loss. What motivates dialectic is the desire to recover what it is always in the process of losing:

Thinking . . . in reality feels itself checked by the loss of the Subject, and missing it, is thrown back on the thought of the Subject.

(*Phenomenology* 38)

The "subject" is the unit which the observer posits and which represents his ability to limit. Experiencing the loss of the limit (thus of the power to impose a limit), the observer recreates it—again and again—only to experience its loss—again and again. Not surprisingly, however, dialectic presents itself as progressive, as a gain—ultimately of power. Dialectic seduces with a promise of such progress.

In Plato, two modes of seduction are characteristically employed. The first—following Zeno or Parmenides in the *Parmenides*—questions another in such a way as to make him an observer of his thought and of himself. The second—equally potent—lures another into dialectic by affirming its quest. The unexamined life is not worth living. "Know thyself." Thus in the *Symposium*, when Socrates questions Agathon and recreates his audience (who thought they could speak of love) as lovers (those who seek an object they lack), he creates an unattainable goal for the lover's quest—the possession of the one forever (when "if ever it is given to man to put on immortality, it shall be given to him" [212a]). But what Alcibiades knows is that the one in reality is unattainable and that the quest for the one empowers Socrates—the master who seduces you into attempting it:

I've been bitten in the heart, or the mind or whatever you like to call it, by Socrates' philosophy, which clings like an adder to any young and gifted mind it can get hold of, and does exactly what it likes with it.

(218a)

The one is as elusive as Socrates himself, the beloved who sleeps beside Alcibiades for a night and yet remains inaccessible ("When I got up the next morning I had no more *slept* with Socrates, within the meaning of the act, than if he'd been my father or an elder brother" [219c-d]). Those whom Socrates engages cannot limit him—even as he seems to limit them with an unlimited quest. In effect, another's quest for the one makes Socrates the personification of dialectic, and as

the quest makes another impotent, it gives Socrates power. As Hegel suggests, the master involves his servants in dialectic in order to be uninvolved himself. His lack of involvement is power—a strategy which Hegel does not sufficiently explore.¹⁰

Socrates' interlocutor finds himself searching in the world of appearances whose deceit the historical Parmenides described: "Helplessness guides the wandering thought . . . to be and to be-not are the same, yet not the same . . . the path is backward-turning" (Diels 6). Alcibiades tells his companions in the *Symposium* that Socratic arguments "help the seeker on his way to the goal of true nobility," and Socrates often presents himself as one who seeks (222a): "I can't as yet 'know myself' as the inscription at Delphi enjoins. . . . I direct my enquiries . . . to myself" (*Phaedrus* 230a). Yet the *Parmenides* suggests another presentation of Socrates. Learning the logic of the quest, he traps his master in it. Socrates becomes what he will be in the other dialogues; directing his enquiries to others, he is the midwife of their quests. "You are like Fate," Theodorus tells him. "No one can elude the toils of the argument you spin for him" (*Theaetetus* 169c). Dialectic is inescapable—unless you elude

its engagement. Only the elusive avoid the web: the one, Socrates himself—perhaps another as well, his pupil Plato. Plato is the one student of dialectic whom Socrates never manages to engage in any of the dialogues. Is it for this reason that Plato has become the master?¹¹ □

¹⁰Cf. *Phenomenology* 111-19.

¹¹A question raised by a friend, Rob Dyer. This essay is indebted to him throughout and I am grateful for his insights. Plato's cunning involves his recreation of Socrates. The history posited by the *Parmenides* is curious in this regard. A late dialogue, written after the dialogues in which Socrates is the master, the *Parmenides* recreates an event that precedes this mastery. The dialogue implies that *before* Socrates became the master, he already understood the infinite regress in which dialectic can entrap others. At the same time, all the dialogues imply Plato's understanding of the trap, a remarkable fact about the dialogues being that Plato is always absent. Even in the *Phaedo*—the only dialogue in which his name is mentioned—Plato excuses himself from being present at the execution.

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Daryl E. Jones

THANKSGIVING

If it is true
that what we wish most
will happen

that we will
after all
wake
in that other place
and walk
arm in arm
a man and a woman
in orchards of light

then the dusk
settling now
over this table
over the picked bones
of another year

is but a dark
elaborate ruse
to make us love

But if it is true
that what we crave most
we devour
that the dusk
takes everything

then let it be
for the moment
enough

to have
simply
the sun going down
in cranberry
in plum

and you
seated across from me
pulling one half
of the wishbone

Neil P. Hurley, S. J.

JOE WALKER: THE CAMERAMAN



In an interview with Philip Dunne last December, the noted screenwriter of *Stanley and Livingstone*, *How Green Was My Valley*, and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* said that when he also turned to directing, Darryl Zanuck advised him to listen carefully to his cameraman, for he felt that two people were solely responsible for the quality of the images the audience sees on the screen—the director and the cinematographer.

Obviously the director has many things to think about, whereas the cameraman focuses his attention more narrowly on capturing on celluloid what the director envisages. However, in film research relatively little attention has been paid to cameramen, although Oscars are awarded for that category and there have been films identified with spectacular cinematography—Lee Garmes' work on Von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Express*, Joe August's contribution to John Ford's *The Informer*, Gregg Toland's bravura camerawork on William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* and on Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, and Sven Nyqvist's visual artistry in Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* and Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby* (shot in New Orleans). The list could go on. Nevertheless, the average moviegoer is oblivious

to the feeling communicated by optical effects such as lights, reflectors, lenses, and focal lengths. So it is a delight to see that the American Society of Cinematographers has recently published a unique memoir, *The Light on Her Face*, by the famous "glamour cinematographer" Joe Walker, who photographed twenty of Frank Capra's films and some of the best films directed by Howard Hawks, George Stevens, Richard Boleslawski, Victor Schertzinger, Alexander Hall, Julien Duvivier, and George Cukor. Walker's wife, Juanita, co-authored this valuable "insider's" view of Hollywood as seen from Columbia's back lot over a more than twenty-four year period (1927-1952).

When a director and cameraman, supplied with a good script and cast, work together "hand-in-glove," movie magic invariably results. That was the case with Frank Capra and Joe Walker. Like Federico Fellini, Capra liked faces—those of stars and those of supporting versatiles such as H. B. Warner, Thomas Mitchell, Jimmy Gleason, Donald Meek, Gene Lockhart, Walter Connolly, Spring Byington, Beulah Bondi, Ruth Donnelly, Warren Hymer, Nat Pendleton, and Raymond Walburn. In his autobiography, Walker does not

talk much about male actors or supporting players, nor does he discuss Robert Riskin, a scenarist who was an important team player in the Columbia successes of Frank Capra.¹ Walker does write, however, of (1) the faces of women he lit up, thus making aging stars and comely actresses more beautiful; (2) the art of diffusion through special lenses he collected and ingeniously made (e.g., one he called "the Jean Arthur lens"); and (3) his inability to convince the gifted Capra to accept Cohn's generous offer to stay at Columbia.

An essentially modest man, Walker does not step back to assess his complete role as head of that Capra crew which worked on the early sound action/melodramas *Submarine*, *Flight*, and *Dirigible* through the early successes—*The Miracle Woman* (1931), *Platinum Blonde* (1931), *Forbidden* (1932), *American Madness* (1932), *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), *Lady for a Day* (1933)—and, of course, on the classic *It Happened One Night* (1934), which "shook the Oscar tree" (to use Capra's own words from his biography, *The Name Above the Title*).² The relationship between Capra and Walker became very close with each honing his talents in a way that dovetailed with the other.³ Crew members such as Joe Walker's assistant, Al Keller, the chief electrician ("the gaffer"), George Hager, sound engineer Edward Bernds, and his assistant, Buster Libbot, were never sure whether they would be on the next Capra picture, for he reserved the right to find a replacement. It was a privilege to be assigned to a Capra film, for it meant, usually, that the director asked for that person. That Walker was sought by Capra is a compliment of the highest order and an indication that Walker helped Capra, the crew, Harry Cohn, and the stars (particularly the actresses).

Walker was self-taught after having acquired a

¹Walker told me that he got along well with Riskin and talks about him in the original manuscript. However, although some two hundred pages were excised from the original manuscript, Walker still has more to say—much more.

²*Broadway Bill*, a story of a race horse, was filmed after *It Happened One Night*, so that its release rode the publicity coattails of that smash hit. Clark Gable was not available, so Warner Baxter was cast instead.

³In a letter to Alfred E. Keller, his former assistant, Walker said on November 25, 1984: "As to my work with Capra, he once told me, 'With you on the camera, I can spend more time and energy on the story, the actors and on the probable audience reaction.'"

camera, and with the encouragement of Billy Bitzer, D. W. Griffith's cameraman, learned through experiments everything about lighting, lenses, camera angles, and movements.⁴ He had a sponge-like curiosity about wireless radio, and the mystery of light, in almost the same dedicated way Albert A. Michelson studied the velocity of light. As Robert Flaherty had a philosophy of "non-preconception," and surrendered himself to motion pictures, so too Walker learned by "trial-and-error" why certain things could not be done. He was told you could not pan from daylight into shadow, but not wanting to be limited by the rules, he carefully shaded the lens and found that, contrary to general wisdom, with an assistant helping (i.e., a third hand), the lens could be opened gradually as he panned into the shadows. Walker trusted himself and read, practiced, reflected, and added to his accumulated storehouse of knowledge, sedulously guarding his secrets from all the pioneer cameramen, Billy Bitzer included (though Bitzer trusted the young Walker and shared a few kernels of his experience). This zeal for learning and mastery of his equipment gained Walker a fast reputation for competency. The camera became an extension of his very being.

Walker, moreover, was a paragon of patience, psychological balance (practically without any ego), and cooperativeness in teamwork. Barbara Stanwyck's foreword to his autobiography gives a clue as to how a star in four of his (and Capra's) pictures felt about him: "But more important than his photography and his remarkable inventions—he is and always was what I said—Joe Walker—A Gentle Man." That sums it up: Joe Walker was first a Gentle Man and, secondly, a Camera Man. The loyalty he earned from crew members and stars was unconditional. As Stanwyck said: "I never saw him angry and I never heard him abuse or demean anyone—and that is one hell of a record in our business." If it was a privilege to work for Capra on a feature, it was an additional incentive to be part of a "back lot crew" which when headed by Joe Walker, was considered by many to be the best in Hollywood.

What Columbia lacked in resources as compared with the major studios, it made up for in spirit and work ethic.⁵ Economy was the

⁴Bitzer advised Walker not to serve an apprenticeship as an assistant cameraman but rather to develop his instinctive talents. Bitzer was inventive with gauze for the purpose of creating soft focus, probably the earliest example of diffusion, which would be Walker's forte.

priority—until the success of *Lady for a Day* (1933). Al Keller, Walker's assistant cameraman, said that after that Capra picture, the staff did not have to save paper clips, rubber bands, and used pencils. Working for a Poverty Row studio under the tight-fisted mogul Harry Cohn created an *esprit de corps*. Capra wrote Joe Walker in 1983 regarding an early picture taken of the two of them together, saying: "Man, did we look young. Most important of all, we looked happy. And, Joe, we were happy." When I told Edward Bernds, the sound engineer, that there is a peculiar spirit that issues forth from the characters in the great Capra films, he wrote me on February 29, 1984 to say: "I think your 'speculation' that there may be an 'inner warmth'—some intangible quality in Capra's Columbia films—may be quite valid. I think that sober analysis will confirm that Capra's post-Columbia films never quite reached the overwhelming appeal of his best Columbia films. Did he need the support of his loyal Columbia crew? No one can answer that question." Continuing with his thoughts on the Capra crew and its morale, or *esprit de corps* as he put it, Ed Bernds wrote in the same letter: "The heart of the crew, of course, was Joe Walker, a truly noble man. The men under him—George Hager, gaffer, Jimmy Lloyd, grip, and the men of his camera crew—were all fanatically loyal. When I tell you that Al Keller is typical of the high quality of the men Joe had in his camera crew, I think you'll accept what I say about George Kelley, Victor Scheurich, Andre Barlatier and many others."

Evidence of this felt "intangible"—this infectious *esprit de corps*—is to be found in the case of Clark Gable, who was sent to Columbia on a punishment assignment by Louis B. Mayer of M-G-M. Joe Walker describes in *Light on Her Face* Gable's sour mood: "Highly disgruntled when he came on the Columbia lot for his first interview, Clark had saturated himself with scotch." Once shooting began, however, with Claudette Colbert as the female lead in *It Happened One Night*, his spirits picked up. Little Jimmy Lloyd was the grip.⁶ Gable took a liking to Lloyd, who came behind Gable one time on the set and encircled his waist with his brawny arms, then lifted the

actor and carried him several feet to another spot where he deposited him. To the surprised Gable, Jimmy Lloyd calmly apologized, saying: "Mr. Gable, excuse me, but you're in the way." Gable thought that move plucky and showed his delight with that inimitable grin of his.

During the shooting, Gable and Capra clowned around a lot, providing comic relief at tense moments. When Gable rose early to drive out to the location for the shooting of the famous "hitchhiking scene," he asked Bus Libbot, assistant sound man, to accompany him in his roadster. On the way, they stopped for coffee and doughnuts in an out-of-the-way roadside eatery. From the moment Gable walked in till they both left, the waitress—wide-eyed and incredulous beyond description—never took her eyes off Gable, serving him more coffee with every swallow he took and ignoring Libbot (quite handsome in his own right). After a generous tip and exiting with the fixed gaze of the counter-girl following him, Gable turned to Bus Libbot outside and remarked: "Bus, did you notice how that girl couldn't take her eyes off you in there?"

Walker was the natural leader of Capra's crew on the film. Their spirit impressed Gable, who would visit the Columbia lot from time to time to relive his memorable moments which, apart from the fun and team spirit, won him an Oscar and a raise in salary at M-G-M.⁷

In his autobiography, Capra refers jocularly to Cohn as "His Crudeness." Capra and Cohn, as Jimmy Stewart said, "fought like mad dogs."⁸ Having been raised in a tough "inner city" Italian neighborhood in Los Angeles, Capra knew how to deal with bullies: he resisted Cohn and at times cursed him out. However, Walker was a different type of person. He would not meet Cohn on his ground but on his own, for from the very first day he went for an interview at Columbia Pictures, Walker let it be known that he personally did not want to work for Cohn. It was, however, the desire to work with an experienced director, George B. Seitz, which motivated Walker to consider the "trade-offs." As he puts it in his book: "I reasoned that already I'd been schooled by his likes on Poverty Row—one more 'Harry Cohn' wouldn't stop me from a chance to be with

⁶One time the crew worked an average of fifteen hours a day for two weeks with no days off.

⁷Smaller than Capra, he was assured that for that reason he would always have a job at Columbia.

⁸Capra facetiously said of Gable's "bad behavior" disciplinary duty at Columbia Pictures that "he was spanked into an Oscar."

⁹See Hurley interview with James Stewart in the *New Orleans Review* (Winter 1981).

Seitz." The man Walker was replacing had nothing good to say about Cohn, who, unexpectedly, brought Joe Walker to meet him to satisfy to Walker that he was not displacing another worker (recall Stanwyck's description of him as a "Gentle Man"). Despite the bad report card Walker was given by the man in Cohn's very presence, the studio boss took no umbrage, saying: "See. What did I tell you. You're not taking his job." It was then that Walker saw another side to "His Crudeness"—"i.e., when confronted with a problem he took you to the heart of it, with no beating around the bush or passing the buck."

Impressed by this kind of forthrightness and putting himself on guard against the defects—coarseness, miserliness and opportunism—Walker served Cohn for twenty-four years, not only as a crack cameraman but as a diplomatic envoy to bridge the differences that Cohn's impetuous and inconsiderate nature would often create. For example, Leo McCarey became indignant when Cohn ordered a guest of his off the set: it was Harold Lloyd, and Cohn sent Walker on a peace mission to make amends. And, of course, when Frank Capra, tired of Cohn's unethical practices at his expense, decided to leave Columbia, Cohn sent Walker to convince him to stay, offering him fifty percent of the profits of every picture he shot at the studio. Walker used all his persuasive powers, feeling that the deal was more than fair, but Capra felt that other problems would arise. He longed for independence; and he found it—but at a price: except for *It's a Wonderful Life*, Capra would never work with Joe Walker again. One could speculate that Capra's career would change without Cohn, his neurotic sparring partner, and without the spirited crew that made him what Andrew Sarris would later call a "Pantheon director"—but not that Capra's career would decline; it didn't, for *Meet John Doe*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *State of the Union* are high quality films. But America was changing on the eve of World War II and things would never be the same. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal created a psychological mood of hope, equality, and populism that was a plus for Capra just as his films were a tonic for American moviegoers, embodying the hope that the New Deal offered.

If one is to assess the stature of Joe Walker in the history of the Golden Age of Hollywood, then three aspects of his personality and career must be understood. He was an exceptionally endowed technician and artist within his calling;

he was a natural leader who thought about others and not his own interest (the definition of a genuine leader); and he had the confidence of those above him—the studio head, the production manager, front office people, and other directors with whom he had to deal in the name of Harry Cohn. These qualities were exhibited on the screen over a twenty-four year period at a studio which went from a struggling, minor-ranked filmmaking production facility with few distribution outlets to a major studio with a disproportionate share of Oscars and a record for creating a new genre—the romantic "screwball" comedy—and many new stars.⁹ Joe Walker was a pivotal person, a cameraman who, together with the director, was jointly responsible for the quality of the images in the release print.

Keeping in mind, therefore, this composite picture of Joe Walker, let us now dwell on his skills and his genius as "Camera-Man," or more accurately, "LENS-MAN." He grasped early in life that the lens was the eye of the camera, that the way a lens was ground and selected exercised a determining influence on the way light was reflected or refracted onto sets, sites, and stars. He was a meditative man, and he never had his sense of wonder exhausted by the mystery of light, whether watching the colorful panorama of the *aurora borealis* in Northern Canada while working on his first feature (*Back to God's Country*, 1919), or in observing how diffused light could make an opera singer, Grace Moore, look more glamorous in *One Night of Love* (1934).

The cameraman must work with light, either natural or artificial. In the old days (less so today), directors like John Ford would wait for the light of the sky or the sun to change before shooting. (In his book, Walker mentions shooting in the valley during the day and then going to the mountain ridge later to take advantage of the failing, but still photographable, light.) In Hollywood the majority of scenes were interiors and were shot on sound stages with artificially created light. In these instances, a cameraman like Walker would need the assistance of his Chief Electrician or, colloquially, "the gaffer" or "the juicer." This man was generally George Hager, another unsung hero of the Columbia Pictures/Frank Capra era of memorable hit films. Through Joe Walker's informative memoirs we read of key

⁹Columbia Pictures, more than any other studio—even Paramount, M-G-M, and Warner Brothers—developed the romantic comedy either in its musical form or its "screwball" version.

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lights, reflectors, broadside lamps, dimmers, backlighting, baby spotlights ("inky-dinkies"—inky meaning incandescent and dinky meaning small), and "rifles" (spirally-grooved parabolic reflectors used to create soft fill light). These were, then, the different light sources. In combination with these, Walker would use a wide assortment of camera lenses, many that he had collected over the decades and several that he himself (as previously mentioned) had designed and made.

Any mention of Capra's career must include the name of Jean Arthur (*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *You Can't Take It with You*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*); any mention of Columbia Pictures must also include her name, for she played opposite top stars in John Ford's *The Whole Town's Talking*, *Adventure in Manhattan*, *More Than a Secretary*, and in Howard Hawks' *Only Angels Have Wings*. Furthermore, she made two Western classics—Cecil B. DeMille's *The Plainsman* and George Stevens' *Shane*—as well as a creditable entry, *Arizona*, shot by Walker at Columbia. Her career might have been compromised, perhaps even aborted, had not her face been "idealized" by Joe Walker and the special lens he created for her. "Off-screen" portraits did not favor her as much as the Walker heavy diffusion treatment. Harry Cohn did not want Arthur for *Deeds*; Capra wanted her, possibly knowing that Walker could adapt her to the big screen advantageously. Joe Walker was never greater than the treatment he gave her in *Deeds*, especially in the romantic couple sequences with Gary Cooper.

In October, 1984, I saw two early Capra sound films starring Barbara Stanwyck in her early twenties: *The Miracle Woman* (1931) and *Forbidden* (1932). The vitality and freshness of this screen personality is electrifying, even in movies that are dated and that have forgettable supporting players. Capra learned to capture the Brooklyn-born star in "the first take." And Walker knew how to make her more glamorous than she really was. He proved it brilliantly in *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), the film that opened Radio City Music Hall in New York City. Garbed in Oriental, sheathed dresses and in love with a Chinese warlord (Nils Asther), Stanwyck's Christian missionary struggles against this inadvertent love. When one realizes the limited resources allocated to this tragic romance, a re-seeing of the film stirs wonder. In her foreword to Walker's book, Barbara Stanwyck (with unerring grace) wrote: "I am not—or have I ever been—a beautiful woman. But Joe—with his

God-given talent—showed the world a beauty—me! His beauty. His creation. And throughout his photographic years, all his ladies were beauties."



The beauties referred to include Rosalind Russell, Joan Crawford, Irene Dunne, Loretta Young, Merle Oberson, Evelyn Keyes, Janet Blair, Judy Holliday, and Rita Hayworth.¹⁰ Glamour was the order of the day, for it meant box-office revenues. All the major Hollywood executives wanted glamour: Harry Cohn, Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg, Carl Laemmle, William Fox, Adolph Zukor, Jesse Lasky, David O. Selznick, and Jack Warner. Columbia's rapid rise from insignificance to stature and success must be credited to Frank Capra and the amazing string of successes he put together, and to the contributions of Joe Walker and his crew. *Lost Horizon* is one of the most prestigious and mystical feature films ever turned out in Hollywood. This excerpt from *The Light on Her Face* will give the reader a flavor for the "light-composition" wizardry of Walker and his assistants:

Photographing the High Lama, I didn't want to accentuate the contours of his withered face. . . . To obtain a strong dramatic effect, and still leave much to the imagination, we placed a tall candle alongside the carved mahogany chair where he sat, ostensibly as the source of light in the room. My real source, however, came from an open 500

¹⁰Edward Bernds and Bus Libott tell of how the Columbia leading ladies would come into the studio at around 6:00 A.M. with shawls around their heads, slinking along the corridors to avoid being seen in their natural "flat" state, having postponed "making-up" until arriving at work. Only Carole Lombard would walk jauntily along, head upright, with a cheery greeting for whomever she met.

watt projection lamp on a stand placed directly behind him and hidden by his body. This lamp cast a soft glow on the wall, silhouetting his head and body, and a baby spot from the direction of the candle etched a few delicate highlights on his otherwise darkly-subdued face. Both of these lamps were on a dimmer. Fill lighting was obtained by two heavily diffused rifles, one on each side of camera, not on the dimmer. A heavily diffused arc light illuminated the full-length window curtain from rear, simulating moonlight.

This is the most moving scene in the film, for the Lama is dying and is handing on to Ronald Colman's Western visitor, Robert Conway, the legacy of collecting the treasures of civilization in Shangri-la. The audience knows that the High Lama (Sam Jaffe) is dead when "the diaphanous curtain at the window gently moves, [and when] the candle flickers and goes out as the lamps are dimmed. . . ." Movie magic seems effortless, but as Walker's account indicates, it requires planning and a proper instinct for what will move the audience. Capra had said that he brought no previous theatrical or entertainment experience to movie-making, only the perspective of the audience. Walker too, as a self-taught artist and artisan, had that empathy with the audience. Otherwise he would not have designed lenses in order to re-create/transfigure actresses on the big screen in the way that audiences wanted to see them.

Walker specialized in three types of film glamour. A publicity-type erotic glamour was used in the filming of Jean Harlow in *Platinum Blonde* (1931). Her glistening milk-white hair and pale skin tone prevented diffusion from being used; thus that had to be blended down at the same time that Loretta Young's image was to be treated with diffusion in the scenes they shared. (Surprisingly, Walker rarely discussed Rita Hayworth [only mentioning her roles], a possible indication that he saw no photographic challenge in this natural beauty, which was scarcely in need of diffusion "re-touching.") The second was photographic mood effects such as the one mentioned from *Lost Horizon* and as used in disaster/adventure pictures.¹¹

Following these successful "A" films, Walker was assigned to a low-budget plot-formula film, *Fifty Fathoms Deep*, which starred the stand-by

actor Jack Holt, and the blonde Loretta Sayers. Holt is called to do a salvage job on the sunken yacht of a millionaire who has been philandering with the wife of his best friend. They have become estranged due to a misunderstanding that Holt has been the philanderer. Holt finds the dead bodies of the wife and the millionaire but cannot surface due to a tangled air hose. His buddy is sent down to rescue him and, while doing so, recognizes his wife: thus the two men become reconciled. The eerie scene of a beam of light revealing the underwater tragedy interested Walker. But his expertise was further demonstrated: he photographed Loretta Sayers head down in an upside-down section of the yacht cabin, a fan gently blowing her streaming blonde hair; he used a fog filter and wavy plastic to photograph her through a murky fish tank. Shot in slow motion, the scene was printed right side up. Critics commented on the ingenuity and "believability" (a favorite expression of Capra's) of the scene.

Walker's greatest work with Frank Capra was on romantic mood sequences which were not intended to be sexual but (only) to emphasize the "first glimmering of love" or its deepening beyond the limits of friendship. These were cameo scenes which bound the man and woman to each other and both to the movie audience. One of the earliest—possibly the first—is from Barbara Stanwyck's first film with Capra—*Ladies of Leisure*. (In her study of Stanwyck's career, *Starring Miss Barbara Stanwyck*, author Ella Smith wrote in 1974: "Stanwyck's work in *Ladies of Leisure* is perfection. If she had never made another film, she would be remembered for this one.")

In *Ladies of Leisure*, painter Jerry Strong (Ralph Graves) meets Kay Arnold (Stanwyck), a free spirit. A wealthy scion, he invites her to his Manhattan penthouse studio to do a portrait. They walk out to the terrace and gaze at the sky and the New York apartment lights (a scene meant for the Walker mastery of light and lenses). When Jerry tells Kay to look up at the twinkling stars, she refuses, saying that they are too far away. Her face is silhouetted beautifully against the night-sky as he encourages her to reach for them. After the sitting for the portrait, he invites her to stay; she timidly accepts. The cinematic and photographic power of the scene is described by authors Victor Scherle and William Turner Levy in their book, *The Films of Frank Capra* (1977):

She turns out the light and, in a daring scene

¹¹He made three with Capra: *Submarine*, *Flight*, and *Dirigible*.

of great sensitivity, undresses in silhouette before the large studio window. The firelight flickers on her face. He undresses in his room. The camera alternates between them. She is photographed through the window through the rain. She, in love with him, is perplexed and unhappy. Unable to sleep, she looks to his doorknob, the rain beats against the window; she closes her eyes; she hears him walking to her bed; he gently puts an additional blanket over her, certainly not what she expects. She pretends to be asleep, happy, she draws the blanket up and bites it in an unrestrained moment of emotional release.

This scene is the blossoming of young love. Women identify with it immediately and men are taken by the psychological insight into the feminine psyche. Cohn had insisted that Joe Walker give the new actress "the glamour treatment," and the movie did that but it did so discreetly, allowing her dramatic abilities and her integral personality to shine through. Capra deliberately soft-pedaled the glamour in her screen test and got Walker to cooperate, even at the risk of a "calling down" by Cohn.¹² However, the risks taken in this subdued strategy of "gentle glamour" paid off: Cohn liked the test. Walker admitted that camera illusion can be overworked, that, in the case of Barbara Stanwyck, it would have been "gilding the lily," for she had everything in her favor: high cheek bones, a face that responded to light; and she was young—thus no need to hide wrinkles, sagging chin fat or receding hair-lines.

Mr. Deeds Goes to Town is the film in which Capra and Walker proved to Cohn that he had a valuable acting property in Jean Arthur. In his book, Walker describes the problems of diffusion when one person, Gary Cooper, needs little and a responding actor, Jean Arthur, needs a great deal (mentioned above). How does one avoid a jarring effect in a romantic scene with close-ups involved? Walker talked with Capra, who thought, then replied: "By all means, go ahead with the close-up of Arthur. This is the way he sees her! The man is in love and he sees her . . . softly diffused . . . ethereal . . . beautiful . . . Yes, it'll work. Because the audience will see her through his eyes." The audience's reaction to

these romantic interludes in the plot with a heavily diffused image of Jean Arthur produced the desired results, causing Graham Greene, then a film critic, to remark:

For Capra has what Lubitsch, the witty playboy, has not: a sense of responsibility, and what Clair, whimsical, poetic, a little precious and a *la mode*, has not, a kinship with his audience, a sense of common life, a morality; he has what even Chaplin has not, complete mastery of his medium, and that medium the sound-film, not the film with sound attached to it.

Capra truly had an ear for dialogue; he had a way of drawing actors out of the memorized lines; he had an advanced sense of pacing, a full realization that, magnified on the screen, action had to be speeded up to be "believable." But—and here I would complement Greene's perceptive remarks—it was Joe Walker who created the visual texture, the idealization that New Deal audiences wanted.¹³ Frank Capra's collaboration with Joe Walker and the crew under him not only mirrored on the screen idealized models of "getting to know you" but also provided an active force for teaching sensitivity and "role-modelling" manners to the public. "Light on Her Face"—yes—but—and this is left unspoken in both Capra's and Walker's autobiographies—this "light" was reflected on human faces and then beamed out from the big screen at the audience, largely made up of the "common men and women" (whose praises Capra sings so eloquently in *The Name Above the Title*). The light "on" mysteriously connects with and activates a radiant warmth within certain actors and a good portion of the audience.

The Walker treatment elevating mass tastes through light represented Capra's obvious intent to fuse democratic populism with Biblical values and *must* be seen against the background of the new social and political sensibility represented by the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt. In *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, Gary Cooper plays a secularly-transfigured Christ figure; this becomes manifest when Lionel Stander refers explicitly to his symbolic "crucifixion"—the moral agony of his defenseless silence in the courtroom scene

¹²In the autobiography, he reported having said to Capra, "It's all right with me. The only thing is—when Harry Cohn sees it, I'll be right out on Gower Street looking for a job."

¹³I stress the socio-political background because both Franklin D. Roosevelt and Frank Capra believed in the "common man" (and "common woman"), a feeling that they too could feast royally at the banquet table of romance.



and finally his resurrection when the farmers raise him up on their shoulders after his acquittal. The "believability" is generated not by the fairy tale story of a "Cinderella Man," but by four "non-story romantic sequences" in which Joe Walker's diffusion techniques find supreme fulfillment. The first scene is in the restaurant: Deeds and Babe Bennett eat and drink, while a strolling violinist plays soft music. The second scene is atop the Fifth Avenue double-decker bus, where Deeds feels attracted to and puts his arm around Babe Bennett. The third scene is in a boat on Central Park Lake; Babe spies two reporters with cameras and, indignant, tries to scare them away. The fourth scene is the most enchanting of all: It is night in Central Park as Deeds and Babe are seated on a park bench; they begin to improvise on "Swanee River"—he goes "oompah-pah, oompah-pah," imitating a tuba, and she uses two sticks to beat on a rubbish can.

These scenes were done under budgetary and time constraints, however effortless they may seem to us the audience. In a letter from his home in Las Vegas to Alfred Keller, Walker wrote the following on November 25, 1984:

Frank Capra liked to use more than one camera which complicated the lighting and the composition, and even a Capra picture has a tight budget and a schedule and so many of the scenes had to be a compromise between what I would like to do and what I had to do.

My method of lighting sometimes made it difficult for the sound crew with the mike placement and mike shadows, but Ed Bernds



and Buster Libbot were very understanding, and we were generally able to get ready for a scene without any pressure on Capra.

In lighting I tried for a certain brilliance so the photography would not have just a dull flat newsreel quality. The negative film of those days was very slow and it took a lot of lights, many of them huge—to light a scene.

The crew worked democratically, everyone doing his job—no fuss, no shouting of orders, no tension. There was discipline without impulse controls, a quality Capra put into *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. (Deeds slid down bannisters, chased fire engines, rode home early in the dawn hours with the horse-drawn milk wagon.) The romance scenes showed ingenuity. Capra told his actors not to memorize lines; he wanted them to read the lines out loud and adapt them to their character—again for the sake of "believability." This quality of improvisation was sought for diligently so that it could be filmed freshly on the "first take."¹⁴ This directorial style matched the camera style of Walker, who always sought ways to defy the classic rules of photography.

The camera art of Walker and the philosophical intent of Capra blended, unconsciously but effectively. While Capra was starring Gary Cooper and Jimmy Stewart as "man-child"—golly, gee whiz—types of heroes in the big city (thus humanizing the impersonal metropolis), Walker, with light and shadow, was communicating to the mass audience an escape

¹⁴Capra told me that 70% of his shots were on the "first take."

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from the gray pedestrian world of work and obligation. Both were teaching tens of millions what idealized romantic relationships could look like. (This point takes on more interest when it becomes evident that these pain-heroes were the afore-mentioned thinly disguised Christ-figures, democratized and romanticized.)

In *Lost Horizon*, Capra took James Hilton's best seller and, returning to his flare for the exotic (e.g., *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*), combined the monumentality of Shangri-la with the moody interior scenes of the High Lama (Sam Jaffe). Despite the expressionism of torch light processions at night, Joe Walker insinuated a good share of diffusion with close-up faces. However, it was in *You Can't Take It With You* that Walker and Capra returned to "impressionistic populism." The diffusion technique is seen at best advantage in the early scene when James Stewart, son of Edward Arnold's munitions tycoon, explains to his sweetheart (Jean Arthur)—his social inferior, incidentally—that his ambition is to study chlorophyll, the magic chemical that makes grass grow green. (Here Walker used his own cinematic chlorophyll to make the screen faces livelier, lighter and idealized—and yet "believable.") One can study the characters in a Capra movie and see that there is not only light on their faces in half-tones and nuanced shadows but also a strange inner glow that comes from within the characters, an ethereal quality that is rarely seen on the screen. (Carl Dreyer captured that quality in a sacred context—e.g., *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.)

The democratic spirit, which basically rests on equality, was shown at its best in *It Happened One Night*. Clark Gable, a hard-nosed, hard-drinking New York reporter, meets a runaway heiress (Claudette Colbert) on a bus from Miami to New York. Socially they are worlds apart, but love shrinks the distance. Walker was responsible for the effectiveness of the interlude in the hayfield where both must spend the night. Walker writes in his book: "The beginning of romance sparks between these two. Yet, they are restrained. The setting must be idyllic; the night tender, mysterious. I visualized that hayfield, practically down to the last straw." However, the production office assigned a hard field with phone wires in the background. Walker balked and fought till he got a tent at R-K-O which could be fixed up to give the marvellous effect the film still manages to convey a half century later.

Walker's sense of technique is a romantic one, not naturalistic, or expressionistic. He expressed



it in his closing remarks: "We didn't want life as it is; we wanted it as it could be." This is not only attested to in the romantic "audience-bonding" scenes discussed above but also in the many tender romantic pictures he shot for other directors at Columbia: *One Night of Love* (1934), *Love Me Forever* (1935), *Theodora Goes Wild* (1936), *When You're in Love* (1937), *The Awful Truth* (1937), *The Joy of Living* (1938), *Only Angels Have Wings* (1938), *His Girl Friday* (1939), *Too Many Husbands* (1940), *He Stayed for Breakfast* (1940), *Penny Serenade* (1941), *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* (1941), *You Belong to Me* (1941), *Bedtime Story* (1941), *They All Kissed the Bride* (1942), *My Sister Eileen* (1942), *The Jolson Story* (1946), *Born Yesterday* (1951), and *The Marrying Kind* (1952). In any history of the genre of romantic comedies or "screwball" comedies, Joe Walker's name must figure as more than a footnote, for his knowledge of romantic and comedic mood under the direction of Frank Capra added a glowing "believability" through his idealization by means of diffusion and mood lighting.

It must strike us as curious that romances and comedies are labelled "light," and that the cameraman who well knew how to deal with light in its refracted, reflected and diffused states made most of the memorable "light" pictures at Columbia. Add these credits to his great Capra achievements and one must ponder the meaning of that phenomenon "light" in its technical nature and its human equivalency.

This mystery of light asserts itself time and again. We must ask what the attraction is in seeing again and again films such as *It Happened One Night*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Lost Horizon*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Mr. Smith Goes to*

Washington, and that post-Columbia classic (shot in great part by Joe Walker), *It's a Wonderful Life*. If you study these films and pick out the tender courtship scenes or the family scenes or the obligatory confessional scene of desperate courage or near despair, you will feel deeply about the character(s). It is not just crisp dialogue, not just bravura acting, not just superb direction; these are there in abundant evidence, to be sure. But it is light—the characters light up from within, not merely from without: “Light on the face” and also “light from inside the character,” a radiance from within. Why did Frank Capra’s pictures outlast the popularity of directors as popular and as well-known as he in the 1930’s—for instance, Frank Lloyd and Frank Borzage? For one thing, Capra cultivated the younger generation, lecturing at universities all over the country and leaving his manuscripts, notes, and still photos at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. But that does not explain the regenerative powers of his great works with succeeding generations of youths in general.

Many explanations can be offered. Certainly he painted on celluloid a picture of America which, though realistic in terms of corruption and opportunism, did not feature sex, violence and vulgarity, all traits of Hollywood films after the late 1960’s such as *The Wild Bunch*, *Easy Rider*, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and *The Graduate* (all “NOW” movies as they were called by the press). The films of Capra, Walker and their collaborators are, by contrast, “AGAIN AND AGAIN” movies.

It was said of Abraham Lincoln, featured so prominently in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (and whose portrait can be seen on the wall of the Millville City Hall in *Meet John Doe*), that he suffused politics with charity: “With malice toward none and charity for all!” Capra, following his curious semi-mystical meeting with that faceless man who told him to use his God-given talents for inspiring films, started a chain of successful features that had a core of idealism in each one. Starting with *Deeds* (1935) and ending with *State of the Union* (1948), there is a love of personal integrity, of sweetheart or wife and of community and country. Throughout it all are references to the Bible—Moses, Christ, Judas, Pontius Pilate, the Last Supper—and to the great spiritual masters and teachers of the ages—Buddha, Lao-Tse, Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. In the Capra classics are true “democratic parables”—messages of light. What Walker added is a mode of communicating that

inspirational light, not only his innate talent for evaluating technical requirements for achieving optimal effects on “set-ups” and “takes” but also—and this the modest Joe Walker would never think to talk about in his memoirs—the light of his own being, which won over Capra, his crew members, the leading stars of Hollywood, and even that obsessive businessman Harry Cohn.

An interesting scene with Cohn is recounted by Joe and Juanita Walker in their book, a scene which shows a softer side of Cohn beneath the thick crust of defensiveness which, apparently, hid a radical insecurity. After *Affair in Trinidad* (1952) Walker made up his mind that he did not like the new direction Hollywood was taking—namely diluting standards in order to meet the lowered expectations created by television, so-called “free entertainment.” In their chapter “The Last Picture Show,” the Walkers narrate the reaction of Cohn when he discovered that Joe had valuable patents on a precision-built zoom lens for television, that Cohn could not even block Walker from making a living if he insisted, as he emphatically did, on quitting Columbia. Melting with nostalgia but hiding it under sarcasm, Cohn said bluntly: “Y’know, there’s one thing that’s always made me curious about you. Practically every money-making picture we’ve had at Columbia, you’ve worked on. How do you account for that? . . . And don’t tell me it’s the photography. Photography doesn’t sell pictures!” Walker laughed and agreed: “No, it’s not the photography. Maybe I’ve just been lucky. Or, maybe I pick the right ones and stay off the bad ones.” Cohn still wanted to know how Walker could pick the ones to stay away from, but Joe insisted it was luck. His contract permitted him to reject pictures if he desired. Cohn would not attribute that “luck” to Walker’s good taste for that is to surrender bargaining leverage; Walker would not allude to it—modesty was his second nature. As Walker moved toward the door, Cohn said in a softer tone: “Joe—it’s been a long time, huh, Joe?” “Long time,” echoed Joe Walker. And Cohn’s final words were: “Well, if you decide to come back, you’re welcome here, y’know.” Joe Walker never made another motion picture—there or anywhere.

If there is character on the screen, there must be character behind the screen; if there is inspirational light on the screen, there must be such light in the persons who created it in enthusiastic team-spirit; if there is charity on the screen, there must be a pulsating source of such

loving concern in those who project that message. Capra, Walker, and their collaborators suffused the screen with charity, not only screen love (which they did chastely and movingly), but also romantic love which bespeaks fidelity and commitment. The films of Capra and Walker would not turn a proper face purple or make a young child uncomfortable. That was not, of course, their purpose—they made entertainment for profit and scored consistently on both counts—and yet with it all they infused their convictions, their characters, their talents. They were surrogates for the audience—conduits for a message from some mysterious source; untrained professionally and self-instructed in the school of raw experience, they knew what it was on the screen that would touch men, women, and children in a darkened theater for two continuous hours. Capra dealt in messages of sacrificial love in *Deeds, Mr. Smith* and *It's a Wonderful Life*; Joe Walker added light—in both its technical and spiritual sense. (In the book of Genesis, we read: "Let there be light!") The combination has been unmatched on the screen, not by this or that film classic but as a continuing partnership over eighteen years in duration.

As I was composing this article, I happened upon a TV rerun of *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), the last collaboration of Capra and Walker. (Capra replaced his cameraman with Joe Walker, and Harry Cohn, owing Walker a favor, acceded to the request.) It was two days before Christmas, and I watched the heavy expressionistic scenes at the end when Jimmy Stewart's George Bailey is saved from a suicidal drowning by Clarence the Angel trying to earn his wings. Clarence (Henry Travers) leads Bailey through Pottersville, no longer beautiful Bedford Falls but a morally diseased town, represented in its alternate state as if George Bailey had never lived. He begins to realize gradually what meaning his life has had and shouts with glee to find that he is still alive. The scene of his joyous reunion with his wife (Donna Reed), his children and mother and many friends was shot by Joe Walker. We see the faces of the reunited family; the daughter, Zuzu, notices that a bell on the Christmas tree is tinkling, symbolizing that Clarence had received his wings, that he is no longer a "Second-Class Angel." It is a heavenly scene, suffused with

charity. The camera pans right (a left-hand or sinister pan signifies doom or danger in many films); it moves across the smiling faces and bright radiant eyes of the friends of George Bailey and his family. His brother, Harry (Todd Karns), enters in a naval officer's uniform and toasts George: "To the richest man in Bedford Falls!" Fade to credits! That is the last and most appropriate Capra-Walker scene ever shot. It is Americana at its best; it is Lincolnian in spirit. It reflects, as well, Lincoln's great thoughts—populism: "Of the people, for the people and by the people!" and loving forgiveness: "With malice toward none and charity for all!"

In that spirit it is only fair to give Harry Cohn some credit for enabling Walker and Capra to collaborate. One could speculate that Capra needed Cohn, if only to have the crew and liberty that other directors at major studios did not enjoy.¹⁵ Finally, I agree with Capra's axiom—"One man, one film." Throughout *Light on Her Face*, passing references are made to Capra's decision to do a scene in a certain way. The casting, the rehearsal style, the pacing, the purposive use of romantic cameo scenes, even the set-ups and angles—all these are to Capra's credit—no question. But when it comes to the unique patterns of light, diffusion and chiaroscuro compositions—light on characters and radiant light from within confident people with towering trust in the name "beneath the title" and "behind the camera," as well as in the director—then there Joe Walker must take his long-overdue and well-deserved bow. □

¹⁵When Capra shot *State of the Union* at M-G-M, he discovered the bureaucratic constraints that prevailed, right down to the prescribed light ratios for the cameraman so that the film could be more economically developed in "assembly-line" type chemical baths.

Neil Hurley, S. J. is the author of *The Reel Revolution*. His interviews with Frank Capra and James Stewart have appeared in earlier issues of the NOR.

Joe Walker, who read the draft of this article and made numerous corrections to it, passed away shortly before this issue went to press. This essay is intended as a tribute to him and to his achievements.

Daryl E. Jones

MAIDENHAIR

*L*ook, I hear you say, *how delicate.*
And stopping, turning round

under a rain-bright canopy
of second-growth spruce and fir,

I think how easily it might
not have been: this moment

shimmering in returning light
after a summer shower, this hush

on the forest floor, steaming
and fragrant. But no, you are pointing

over there, to a clear-cut stump
healed-over by lichen and moss,

where a clump of maidenhair
has randomly taken hold, and

sending its taproot
deep into heartwood,

lifted a delicate tracery
into the chartreuse light,

its slender fronds unfurling,
curling through one another, like

your fingers, now, through mine.

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John Rieder

THE PROBLEM OF VALUE IN "SIMON LEE"

Although this essay is primarily concerned with an interpretation of Wordsworth's "Simon Lee," I want to frame my reading by posing a question about the periodization of literary history. Rene Wellek describes the task of the literary historian as "tracing the sequences of periods, the rise, dominance, and disintegration of conventions and norms."¹ The dominance of a convention, Wellek is careful to explain, cannot be determined by a mere statistical measurement. Rather, the dominant convention is the one used "by writers of greatest artistic importance. It thus seems to me impossible to avoid the critical problem of evaluation in literary history" (2). This essay is an attempt to pose the problem of evaluation in regard to a text from *Lyrical Ballads*, a volume which has long been recognized as a crucial document in the transition from one set of dominant literary conventions to another. But how can one raise the question of aesthetic value or determine the relative worth of a work of art without also raising questions about economic value or also becoming involved in the determination of hierarchies by political and social forms of dominance? And if asking questions about economic, political, or social value and domination takes the appearance of smuggling foreign weapons onto the field of literary criticism, perhaps we should declare the borders of the discipline illegitimate. For these concerns are already interwoven with every text we pick up—and with the act of picking up one text instead of another.

Wordsworth raises a question about value when he remarks in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* that his poems are to be distinguished from the popular poetry of the day by "this, that the feeling therein gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (248).² His statement does this in two

ways. On the one hand, Wordsworth's insistence on the priority of feeling over action implies that the poems' value, that which "gives importance" to them, originates in the expressive subject rather than in the objects being represented. But, on the other hand, this emphasis on expression depends on linked notions of decorum and generic purity which serve as a foil to it. Wordsworth is calling attention to the fact that in this volume, low things will call forth elevated feelings. The problem of decorum occupies much of the "Advertisement" to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. The poems, says Wordsworth, will experiment with adapting "the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society" to poetry, but it will appear to many readers that the author "has sometimes descended too low, and that many of his expressions are too familiar, and not of sufficient dignity" (7). The class hierarchies Wordsworth invokes with regard to diction derive from a prescriptive attitude towards genre such as appears, for instance, in Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*; and I suggest that these same hierarchies structure the question of the importance of action and feeling in the "Preface."

In fact, Wordsworth's discussion of action and feeling seems to be caught between a neoclassical, prescriptive discourse on genre and a more modern, descriptive generic criticism.³ For his emphasis on feeling is certainly an attempt to describe a technique, as John Danby and Steven Maxfield Parrish do when they point out the "dramatic" features of the lyrical ballads, or as Robert Langbaum does when he calls the essential innovation of these poems the "epiphany."⁴ All of these critics try to describe the

¹Rene Wellek, "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History," *Comparative Literature* 1 (1949): 172.

²All quotations of Wordsworth, unless otherwise noted, are from *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuen, 1963). Page numbers appear in parentheses following quotations.

³For the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive generic criticism, see Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1942) 243-45.

⁴John F. Danby, *The Simple Wordsworth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960) ch. 2; Steven M. Parrish, *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973) chs. 3-4; Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (1957; New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963) 46; see also Robert Langbaum, "Wordsworth's Lyrical Characterizations," *Studies in Romanticism* 21 (1982): 319-339.

creation of poetic value in terms of some kind of interaction between subject and object or feeling and situation. From this perspective, the problem involving low things and elevated feelings in Wordsworth's poetry takes on a different form. Here is how Andrew Griffin asks the question in an essay on "Simon Lee": "Can the surface *business* of any narrative (characters, causes, events, consequences) adequately express or even coexist with the deep, still truths of the imagination?" Griffin thinks that the proposition at the center of "Simon Lee" is that it cannot: "[The imagination] never really moves at all but stands still, pointing and praising, contemplating things to which the narrative and natural eye is blind."⁵

But this question and its answer, with their praise of the imagination at the expense of narrative, are fully as hierarchical and prescriptive as any neoclassical treatment of genre. Griffin simply evaluates the imbalance between feeling and situation in terms of metaphysical and perceptual categories rather than in terms of social classes and codes of behavior. My thesis is that "Simon Lee" itself produces this transposition of social categories into metaphysical ones by producing a set of value-laden oppositions similar to that of action and feeling. This movement can be made obvious by examining the way the poem sets up these oppositions and asking how they express measurements of value. Griffin raises metaphysical issues in his interpretation of "Simon Lee" by reading the poem primarily as a drama of self-consciousness. My analysis seeks to recover the class relationship residing within Wordsworthian self-consciousness—or in the opposition between imagination and narrative—and so to recover the conceptual ground which unites literary and social history.

The poem's full title is "Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman, with an incident in which he was concerned." It is one of those lyrical ballads in which almost nothing happens; the sole incident is the narrator's helping old Simon Lee to sever the root of a stump. The bulk of the poem—the first sixty-eight lines—is taken up by a description contrasting Simon Lee's vigorous youth as a huntsman in the service of the master of Ivor Hall with his poverty-stricken old age as the "sole survivor" of the master's household. The narrator

interrupts the long description to address the reader directly. He acknowledges that if one expected a "tale," one must be growing impatient; but he adds that a "gentle reader," one who comes to the act of reading with "Such stores as silent thought can bring," will "find/ A tale in everything." He exhorts the reader to respond contemplatively and productively to the poem: "It is no tale; but should you think,/ Perhaps a tale you'll make it." The "incident" promised in the title follows: the narrator helps Simon Lee by severing the root of a stump for him. The old man responds with tears of gratitude, prompting the narrator's striking response: "—I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds/ With coldness still returning./ Alas! the gratitude of men/ Has often left me mourning."

It is clearly in Simon Lee's gratitude and the narrator's meditative mourning that feeling gives importance to—indeed, seems to overwhelm—the action and situation. But this only seems to be the case if we limit the action and situation to the bare incident of the cutting of the root. For the narrator has made a tale of it already, the tale that occupies the poem's first sixty-eight lines. The narrator is not mourning because of Simon Lee's gratitude but because of the situation the old man's gratitude brings home to him. The cutting of the root reverberates within Simon Lee's history, becoming a symbol of his uprootedness; and in the narrator's understanding, as he unfolds it to us in preparation for the incident, the uprooted stump should be taken as an emblem not only of Simon Lee but also of the decay of the patriarchal order and the organic, rooted community of Ivor Hall.

So it is not simply a feeling that gives importance to the situation, but rather a narrative history which provides the basis for the feeling. This helps to explain the odd turn of the last four lines. "I've heard of hearts unkind" echoes the fourth line of the poem: "I've heard he [Simon Lee] once was tall." This symmetrical placing of received narratives highlights the fact that the whole poem is heavily concerned with playing different types of narratives against one another. The final quatrain measures the understated tale the narrator makes out of Simon Lee's gratitude against a sentimental or tragic tale of "hearts unkind" and "cold deeds," and finds the unspectacular tale of the common man's woe more moving.

This play of narratives hinges upon the narrator's address to the reader in the middle of the poem, since it is not so much a matter of

⁵Andrew Griffin, "Wordsworth and the Problem of Imaginative Story: The Case of Simon Lee," *PMLA* 92 (1977): 393.

competing narratives as of different qualities of response. The lyricism of this lyrical ballad comes out of the narrator's sympathy for Simon Lee. He "kindly takes" Simon's expression of gratitude by discovering his kinship with the old man, mourning for him, and most importantly, by generating a narrative out of this sympathetic response. This is, of course, precisely what he asks of the "gentle reader": "It is no tale; but should you think, / Perhaps a tale you'll make it." The simple incident of the narrator's aid to Simon Lee is deepened and enriched by the narrator's "stores of silent thought." Here is where the opposition of imagination and narrative arises. For the "silent thought" the narrator brings to bear on the incident turns out to be the resource of a prior narrative, a resource the narrator has in his turn supplied to the reader in the long description of Simon Lee. But is this narrative the cause of his sympathy or its effect? The form of the poem militates against a clear answer to this question by presenting the making of the "tale" as a moral responsibility of the reader and at the same time providing the ready-made tale as the ground for fulfilling that responsibility. This confusion of cause and effect marks the separation between the silence which the narrator and the gentle reader hold within themselves and the narrative responses which their thought produces. The narrator's sympathy and imagination—his silence—is a kind of genius which informs the narrative as a whole rather than functioning as a causal link within it. It is a depth which only appears in the poem as the impression one has that the narrator's emotion is incommensurate with the incident that provokes it. The silence of "silent thought" thus stands in opposition to all the deeds cold and kind which form the surface of the narrative.

This opposition is a hierarchical one. Compare what Wordsworth says a few years later in his "Preface": "The human mind is capable of excitement without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know that one being is elevated above another in proportion as he possesses this capability" (248-49). This is surely the point of the address to the "gentle reader." One should not require the violent stimulants afforded by a tale of "hearts unkind," but rather should find in a common occurrence like the one in this poem the occasion for elevated reflection. Wordsworth appeals to the reader's natural sensitivity, but this appeal has a social

tendency as well. The "Preface" goes on to blame the modern reader's "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" on "the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupation produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies" (249). As opposed to extraordinary incident and hourly gratification, Wordsworth offers a common incident which calls forth an elementary passion; and this is not simply a matter of literary fashion, a preference for primitivism rather than urbane, sophisticated artifice. The severing of the root also radiates a social history which is linked to the "accumulation of men in cities," and in which Simon Lee plays the role of a helpless victim. Simon Lee's excessive gratitude bespeaks his isolation. He is a displaced fragment of the English countryside's lost, patriarchal past, the "sole survivor" of Ivor Hall, where, one suspects, he could have taken for granted the simple act of kindness the narrator performs for him. The narrator's mourning re-establishes his natural, sympathetic attachment to that past only by recognizing its decay and his own profound difference from Simon Lee. His encounter with Simon Lee inspires in him a nostalgic vision of manorial England and the personal ties of lord and servant in a feudal order.

Referring the opposition of imagination and narrative to the poem's social dimension allows us to recast the opposition yet again in terms of genre. For just as the narrator's sympathy provides the lyricism of the lyrical ballad, we seem to be approaching the home of the ballad proper when Simon Lee's gratitude leads us back to Ivor Hall. The lost form of community apprehended by the narrator becomes, in generic terms, the native English ballad itself. The key rhetorical figure here is the radical attachment to the soil which the severed stump ironically signifies. The narrator's tale is an organic product of his own attachment to English ground. It is thus typical of the contemporary ballad revival in that it shares the project of reconnecting modern literature to the vital sources of Romance.

The ballad, then, is like Simon Lee's youth: "No man like him the horn could sound. / No man was so full of glee." Bishop Percy's "Essay on the Ancient Minstrels in England" contains a long etymology of the word "glee" and the relation of its derivatives to the Anglo-Saxon "gleemen" or minstrels. Says Percy: "The arts [the minstrels] professed were so extremely acceptable to our ancestors that the word 'glee,' which particularly

denoted their art, continues still in our language to be the most expressive of that popular mirth and jollity, that strong sensation of delight, which is felt by unpolished and simple minds."⁶ The narrator apprehends this lost glee in the pathetic old man; his sympathy for the old man establishes a continuity with it, a continued access to the native fund of "popular mirth" and "simple and unpolished" pleasure. But this very act of sympathy only deepens the opposition of his lyrical contemplation to what we may now call balladic incident.

For the medieval ballad is notorious for its extraordinary actions and situations, as Coleridge's medievalist contribution to *Lyrical Ballads* testifies. Although one may be tempted to think of the inferior tales of "hearts unkind" as silly or sentimental poetry, the narrator's brief allusion can just as easily refer to "Edward, Edward." The modified ballad stanza invites such comparison (just as the poem's convoluted narrative technique invites comparison to contemporary sentimental fiction).⁷ But even if Wordsworth is not inviting direct comparison to the classic English folk ballad, he is certainly measuring his poem against other contemporary attempts in the balladic mode, such as the efforts of Lewis or Bürger. Its poverty of incident, at least, must be read in the context of Wordsworth's criticism of Bürger: "Incidents are among the lowest allurements of poetry. Take from Bürger's poems the *incidents*, which are seldom or never of his own invention, and still much will remain. . . . Still I do not find those higher beauties which can entitle him to the name of a *great* poet. . . . Bürger is the poet of the animal spirits. I love his 'Tra la la' dearly; but less of the horn and more of the lute—and far, far more of the pencil."⁸

Bürger's horn and animal spirits call forth the image of the young huntsman Simon Lee once more. Whether as a character or as a spectator, he is the very type of the man wholly caught up

in action or incidents:

He all the country could outrun,
Could leave both man and horse behind;
And often, ere the race was done,
He reeled and was stone-blind.
And still there's something in the world
At which his heart rejoices;
For when the chiming hounds are out,
He dearly loves their voices!

Simon Lee, like Bürger's ballads, combines splendid vitality with a lack of vision or fine discernment, and this combination has partly determined his descent into liveried poverty. His life repeats the pattern of the races he ran in his youth. His vitality causes him to outlive his social milieu, and yet he finishes half-blinded ("he has but one eye left") and with no resources to draw from other than his now decayed physical strength. But if the narrator's sympathy for Simon Lee is a matter of recognizing the common humanity of one who is also constitutionally and socially his inferior, then what does it mean that the difference between the narrator's contemplation and Simon Lee's life is also parallel to the hierarchical opposition of "silent thought" to the surface of narrative?

We have seen that the relation between Simon Lee's life and the narrator's encounter with it and meditation upon it actually constitutes a double plot. One plot, the life of Simon Lee, is dominated by action; the other, the narrator's, is primarily concerned with feeling. If feeling gives importance to action in this poem, then the double plot is not only an intersection of lives, but also a way of measuring the difference between them. It turns out that the two plots are unified by the same movement which determines their hierarchic relation: the positing of value and of the question of its origin.

This appears most clearly at the point of contact for the poem's double plot, the "incident." The narrator performs a kind deed for Simon Lee, who responds with an almost embarrassing flood of thanks. In the plot of Simon Lee's life, this incident is part of a losing struggle for subsistence, but it comes within that struggle as a welcome relief from it, a momentary restoration of the older, lost community of reciprocal personal ties and services. For the narrator, however, the incident has the opposite effect. It brings before him the dissolution of a community and the isolation of its sole survivor. For Simon Lee the incident consists of the exchange of a

⁶Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London: L. A. Lewis, 1839) 1: xxix.

⁷See James H. Averill, *Wordsworth and the Problem of Human Suffering* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980) ch. 1, esp. pp. 28-29.

⁸*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt; 2nd ed. rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 234-235. Quoted in Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (1798) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 220.

service for fealty: a feudal transaction. But for the narrator this exchange generates a kind of surplus, in that it moves him to a sympathetic understanding which he expresses by making a tale of it. The two plots diverge by evaluating the transaction differently, or by inserting it within different orders of value. We could say that, while for Simon Lee it has the character of a service, for the narrator it is a gift. As a service that incident momentarily revives a social order, but as a gift it bears a metaphysical dividend, the awakening of understanding. The poem has a dual economy, then, to match its double plot, and I want to show that the poem's movement between these economies produces a translation of social categories into metaphysical ones.

The poem juxtaposes a subsistence economy and a profit economy, and these are related to one another as exchange to production. Simon Lee exchanges labor for subsistence, while the narrator produces understanding on the basis of a reservoir of feeling. Simon Lee and his wife own a scrap of land, but its value exists for them not as wealth but as an opportunity for work: "What avails the land to them,/ Which they can till no longer?" It avails nothing, since their lives run in the narrow track of work and nourishment: "You with your utmost skill/ From labour could not wean them." They occupy a position of child-like dependency. Deprived of the paternal benevolence of the master of Ivor Hall, they seem to be orphaned, as it were, in the maternal embrace of labor. This is the situation the narrator momentarily reverses, and which dictates Simon Lee's response to the narrator's kindness. But the narrator is not a lord, and he reacts to Simon Lee's gratitude with a complex, antithetical mourning. The exchange works upon the narrator and he upon it, so that he finally gains more from his kind deed than his beneficiary does. The poem itself represents his profit, so to speak; it is a kind of valorization of his "stores of thought" by reflection and contemplation upon the experience.

The difference between these two economies is the difference between the subjects who act in them. On the one hand, one occupies a place or rank in a social hierarchy which dictates certain obligations and rewards. Far from having been set free by the death of his master, Simon Lee is deprived of the relationship which constitutes his worth. His glee and his gratitude are decorous expressions of the happy commoner whose subsistence is assured by his lord's benevolence. But on the other hand, the eyes of the narrator

transform Simon Lee from a commoner to the "common man." The narrator's sympathy rests on the same ground as Wordsworth cites in the "Preface" to justify his preference for scenes from "low and rustic life." Both appeal to "elementary feelings," "the essential passions of the heart" (245). This universalization of the subject is precisely where social differences dissolve into metaphysics. Simon Lee's dilemma becomes man's confrontation of necessity, as the social descent to the low and rustic man's life becomes the narrator's—or Wordsworth's, or the "gentle reader's"—access to the primary elements of human nature. Yet this sympathy does not transcend social differences but rather translates them. For the poem requires of the reader a prior access, as well, to the stores of silent thought. The narrator's sympathy for Simon Lee bathes its object in lyric emotion, lifts him into an organic history, and installs him within an ideal community: but installs Simon Lee as the inferior, active, unpolished, and simple Other by whose difference from oneself the "gentle reader" comes to recognize his or her own contemplative, self-conscious depth and complexity.

This poem cries out to the "gentle reader" like the truth crying out to be heard. It grants that reader a privileged rank and identity within its discourse. The reader occupies this rank in opposition not only to Simon Lee and his wife but also to those who deal in other types of narrative. The play of competing narratives in "Simon Lee" shares the hierarchical relation of exchange to production. The inferior stories to which the narrator compares his own response are structures of exchange: "I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds/ With coldness still returning." In the same way, also, the debased modern readers condemned in the "Preface" constantly renew their demand for stimulation by fresh news, that is, for an exchange of narrative incidents for feeling. But the gentle reader is called upon to give meaning and value to the action and situation by investing his or her feelings in them. Instead of a commodity on the market of desire and gratification, the poem becomes an organic product of the expressive subject.

Simon Lee and the economy and narrative associated with him emerge from the poem as socially and historically contingent, while the narrator's sympathy overcomes social differences and recoups historical loss because it recovers the ground of the natural, the universal, and the necessary. The measurement of value in the

poem tends not so much to obscure its social character as to denigrate social as opposed to metaphysical reality. Yet these same oppositions reveal an economic pressure and a differentiated and hierarchical access to our culture's discourse which are clearly forms of social dominance. For must we not ask how the "stores of thought" are accumulated, what cultural acquirements enable a reader to respond adequately to the narrator's invitation, what economy produces these acquirements and regulates their uneven distribution?

Insofar as the opposition of action and feeling serves as a measure of value it also serves to establish a privileged position for the "gentle reader" within the discourse of the poem and the "Preface." Simon Lee becomes the foil against which narrator and reader measure themselves in the poem. The measurement of value in the "Preface" has its necessary foils as well. It supersedes the neoclassical rhetoric of decorum, on the one hand, and, on the other, rejects a contemporary literature in which we can discern the beginnings of mass culture and consumerism (the "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" provokes "deluges of idle and extravagant stories"). The universalizing sympathy which gives value to incidents from low and rustic life is one which seeks out the reader's or poet's affinity with the common man and a cultural heritage associated with him, but transforms this search into a quest for metaphysical origins, the silence or informing genius of the soil.

This description certainly accords with the most widely accepted accounts of the rhetoric of Romanticism as dynamic organicism.⁹ A set of aesthetic values based on proper representation and prescription (the modern reader consumes his tale like a drug) is rejected for one emphasizing expression and imagination. But if the rhetoric of organicism privileges a certain kind of reader, we ought to ask whether the dominance of organicist conventions entails the social and economic dominance of this class of readers as well. How and when does this class come into being? How is it related to the class that would have been privileged by a rhetoric of mechanism and decorum? Are we, perhaps,

uncovering a crisis in the terms by which England's dominant class recognized itself in the latter half of the eighteenth century? These are not questions I will attempt to answer. I only hope to have demonstrated that the route that leads from questions of poetic value and the dominance of conventions in literary history to issues of value and domination in social history is not an extravagant one. Rather, these issues are intrinsic to and interrelated within the poetry itself. I think that my reading should serve as a caution against any theory of periodization which separates the history of thought from social history. Take for instance the excellent argument recently advanced by Hans Eichner that "Romanticism is, perhaps predominantly, a desperate rearguard action against the spirit and implications of modern science."¹⁰ I would add that the discursive action he writes of could only take place within the society of the machine, and that its function of flight from, attack upon, or legitimation of the "spirit and implications" of that society must be made to inform Eichner's argument. The proper frame for such an analysis would be closer to the theory of "cultural revolution" in Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*. According to Jameson, "the Western Enlightenment may be grasped as part of a properly bourgeois cultural revolution, in which the values and the discourses, the habits and the daily space, of the *ancien regime* were systematically dismantled so that in their place could be set the new conceptualities, habits and life forms, and value systems of a capitalist market society. . . . The corpus of work on romanticism is now repositioned as the study of a significant and ambiguous moment in the resistance to this particular 'great transformation.'"¹¹

To separate the history of thought from social history is especially fatal in the study of Romanticism because the separation is fostered, as we have seen, by the rhetoric of Romanticism itself.¹² In Wordsworth's major poetry, for instance, the value-laden oppositions I have

¹⁰Hans Eichner, "The Rise of Modern Science and the Genesis of Romanticism," *PMLA* 97 (1982): 8.

¹¹Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981) 96.

¹²Cf. the similar but wider ranging argument of Jerome J. McGann, "Romanticism and Its Ideologies," *Studies in Romanticism* 21 (1982): 573-599.

⁹e.g., in Wellek, "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History"; in Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," *PMLA* 66 (1951): 5-23; and in greater detail in M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953).

uncovered in "Simon Lee" prop up the stage of his drama of self-consciousness. Thus, the opposition between Simon Lee's glee and the narrator's silent contemplation is recast as the opposition of "glad animal movements" to "still, sad music" in "Tintern Abbey"; or of the "noisy years" to the "eternal silence" in the great "Ode"; or of the crossing of the Alps to the recognition of the imagination's glory and infinitude in *The Prelude*. The movement that proceeds from youthful possession of a power in uneasy and incommensurate alliance with nature to the mature recognition of that power and its destiny is, I am suggesting, closely analogous to the relation between huntsman and narrator, or even better, between ballad and lyrical ballad in "Simon Lee." All are separated as economic spheres within which the subject operates differently, so that a process of subsistence and simple exchange becomes transformed, in the higher sphere of production, into a prophetic gift or profit-taking. But the dialectical movement by which the poet valorizes nature's gifts is also a dialectic by which social structures become structures of consciousness, and the objectified

Other who provides the foil to Wordsworthian introspection becomes as intimate to the poet as language itself. That is, if this rhetoric is a measure of class dominance, its linguistic form makes the class relation not simply a relation between individuals but an antagonism which constitutes Wordsworthian subjectivity as such—a kind of rhetorical *a priori*. The best theorist of this relation is Jacques Lacan, who could be speaking of the problems raised in this essay when he says of Freud, "The slightest alteration in relation between man and the signifier, in this case the procedures of exegesis, changes the whole course of history by modifying the moorings that anchor his being."¹³ I have tried to show that in the exegesis of Wordsworth's texts we should treat "being" as a social rather than a metaphysical form of necessity. □

¹³Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977) 1974.

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LuAnn Keener

SECURITY

Late, late, all of us in bed,
me tucked down in the rollaway
watching Grandfather's cigarette,
a tiny sun in deep space . . .
the slow river of their talk. . . .
And the train would whistle
and pass. Nothing like it,

nothing like it since.
And yet still, no matter what,
when I hear it I am there
in the moon-white sheets, in the dark,
a whole loaf of joy rising,
rising toward morning, morning
can hardly wait.

Kay Sloan

THREE HITCHCOCK HEROINES: THE DOMESTICATION OF VIOLENCE

Alfred Hitchcock's female characters and their identity crises form a recurrent pattern in his body of work. In the conflicts faced by women in his early, silent films throughout those within his contemporary pieces, a thematic thread surfaces that weaves into the social fabric, changing texture and shade over the years, but nevertheless remaining a single coherent thread. From Hitchcock's first sound film in 1929, *Blackmail*, to *The Birds* in 1964, a psychohistory of women's roles emerges that spans the first post-suffrage decade to the era of modern feminism. It is a vision that both validates the discontent with traditional sexual roles felt by women—and expresses the destructive rage and chaos unleashed by that discontent.

Though Hitchcock's women reflect the changing sexual roles throughout this long period, one dynamic remains consistent throughout his films: tensions between social order and changing sexual identity repeatedly thrust women into vulnerable positions. The interior realm of the psyche clashes with the exterior world—and both levels are precarious.

A common theme in Hitchcock's films involves the breaking down of unstable social realities through violence and suspense. Faced with the collapse of the given world, his characters must rebuild their identities and, through that process, reconstruct the social world. This process becomes essential to the sexual development of his female characters, when family structures and sexual roles can no longer be taken for granted. The cracking of mundanity drops Hitchcock's characters into a confusing maze of psychosexual dilemmas. We watch them feel their way through a psychic labyrinth, touching taboos and stumbling through the debris of crumbled authority. At the end of the maze Hitchcock's women either embrace the family and traditional values or meet violent destruction. There is little room for compromise in Hitchcock's world of good and evil, guilt and innocence, and—often literal—black and white.

Three of Hitchcock's films, *Blackmail* of 1929, *Shadow of a Doubt* from 1943, and *The Birds* from

1964, are instructive for their similar resolutions of those contradictions, despite the very different time periods in which they were released. Their heroines appear to undergo rites of initiation that seem universal; only the fashions alter with the times. *Blackmail*'s Alice White, an apparent "new woman" of the 1920s, flirts with acceptable sexual boundaries and as a consequence learns a lesson in the dangers of such casual flirtations. Forsaking her boyfriend, Mitch, who is a stable but boring policeman, Alice has a tête-à-tête with a young bohemian artist. She hesitates before visiting her new companion's apartment, but, wanting both the appearance of sophistication and the preservation of her innocence, she violates the conventions of the day and enters his bedroom. But when one sexual barrier falls, Hitchcock invokes the domino theory: all the rules begin to tumble.

Alice tries on a frilly tutu in his apartment, parading around in a skimpy, outsized costume—too large for her both figuratively and literally. The situation spins viciously out of her control when the artist attempts to rape her. Alice refuses to be a passive victim, however, and kills her date/rapist. But she is left in a nether world of guilt, for Hitchcock leaves the important questions unanswered. Were her sexual overtures an invitation to sex? Is she guilty of murder or was she only defending herself? Yet there is one unquestionable element in the world of *Blackmail*: Alice brought the collapse of her social universe upon herself by first rejecting her policeman/sweetheart—and symbolically rejecting the law—and then violating sexual taboos by entering the artist/rapist's apartment. The legal questions posed by Alice's murder of the artist remain unresolved, however, for Alice will never be brought to trial. Mitch, her loyal policeman/boyfriend, has hidden incriminating evidence to defend her. Having dispensed of the legal question of her guilt, Hitchcock reveals his interest in Alice's psychological guilt.

Alice must pay for her irresponsible attempts at manipulating men and exploring her own sexuality, however innocently it was done. The

teasing girl-woman of the film's beginning is irrevocably transformed by the closure of the film. Even her clothes, in typical Hitchcock fashion, have changed from black and white (guilt and innocence) to totally black. But the change is an inner one that permanently alienates Alice from society. Committed to sparing her parents from knowing about the murder and attempted rape, Alice marries Mitch in a symbolic acquiescence to the law and order that he represents as a policeman. Thus she is bound forever to a man whom she does not love. Hitchcock suggests that only in the romantic, conventional commitment to Mitch can Alice find stability. But perhaps the ultimate irony in *Blackmail* lies in the fact that at the film's end, Alice and Mitch form a family unit—one that is bound together for all the wrong reasons. It is fear and paranoia rather than love that forces them into the protective shell provided by their marriage.

In 1943, Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* allowed a similar dissolution of the family, again exploring a liminal realm of sexual taboos. In that year, Thornton Wilder and Alfred Hitchcock pooled their talents to make *Shadow of a Doubt*. The product of their collaboration is a film that seethes with repression, a seemingly benign "Our Town" swept with undercurrents of violence, murder, and sexual taboo. Hitchcock turns the wholesome family life of Wilder's middle America belly side up and finds it crawling with unresolved psychic conflict. The placid Newton family of Santa Rosa, California becomes the setting of a psycho-sexual drama similar, in many ways, to that of *Blackmail*. Teenaged Charlie Newton is entering young womanhood frustrated with small town life and appalled by her mother's boring existence. Bemoaning her mother's fate of cooking, cleaning, and sleeping, Charlie hits upon the idea of inviting her mother's sophisticated brother, Charles (for whom she was named) to visit. "He can save us!" she informs her bewildered father. Charlie conjures up both an outer world of glamour and an underworld of sexual confusion through her uncle. As his niece's masculine alter-ego, Uncle Charlie can rescue her from the traditional sex roles implied by reaching womanhood in stifling Santa Rosa.

A supernatural affinity exists between the two Charlies as we first see them. They lie on their beds in the same pose, resting in similar shadows, sharing kindred thoughts even though they are miles away from each other. When Charlie telegrams her uncle to visit, he is already en route to Santa Rosa to avoid detectives who

are trailing him for the murders of several wealthy women on the East Coast. Not only are uncle and niece one in name, they are singular in their thought processes as well. This dreamlike, eerie quality to the film suggests that both Charlies are archetypes, representing a masculine/feminine duality, as well as an opposition of criminality and innocence, engaged in a struggle for dominance within the young Charlie. Uncle Charlie's arrival marks a slow mounting of tension between the two, as young Charlie's sexual identity becomes increasingly confused. The film can be seen as Charlie's psychic nightmare.

Charlie has not yet psychologically accepted the female identity represented by her mother, and thus she remains somewhat androgynous in her rebellion. Not only does she have a masculine name, but her identification with her uncle is nearly total: "Why, we're like twins, Uncle Charlie," she beams, explaining to him that there can be no secrets between them. They are one even in their thoughts—and Charlie claims she can read her uncle's mind. She is thus the only member of the family who senses something amiss in her uncle's attempts to become part of the family. Though she discovers a suspicious inscription in the emerald ring he gives her and finds him surreptitiously clipping an article about a murderer of women in the newspaper, she refuses to suspect him of any crime—that is, until a handsome young detective arrives to challenge her identification with her male counterpart. But Charlie's first inclination is to protect her uncle—or a masculine part of her psyche—from the detective's prying questions.

Indeed, Uncle Charlie is a crucial part of Charlie's safely androgynous selfhood. Even her bedroom symbolizes the sexual confusion going on in her mind. She hesitates to show the detective her bedroom—where Uncle Charlie is temporarily residing—as if some intruder has invaded her most private sanctuary. Only when reassured by the detective that Uncle Charlie is not inside her bedroom does she open the door. It is a symbolic opening. At that point, Charlie looks about the room as if for the first time and sees a sparsely furnished, plain bedroom. She is overcome with shame—with the entry of the handsome young detective, she now wishes it were "frilly and yellow." The detective's presence, representing both conventional sex roles and law and order, has activated a new conflict in Charlie's psyche. She is no longer so fully united with the male aspect of her

personality, represented now by Uncle Charlie, the woman murderer.

Hitchcock allows us to see Charlie's sexual yearning in the symbolic terms for which he became famous. Shadows cast bars across Charlie's bedroom door, indicating that she does not yet have access to the processes represented by her bedroom. Instead, she shares her younger sister's bedroom while Uncle Charlie visits. Significantly, it is not decorated with any signs of "girlishness."

Shadow of a Doubt and *Blackmail* suggest that there is sexual evil in the world which the women themselves unleash by violating sexual codes. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, it is the appearance of the detective—that reminder of law, order, and social demands—who inspires Charlie to doubt her uncle and investigate his past. She begins to violate the cultural expectations traditionally restraining her: she rushes to the neighborhood library to look up the article on a murderer clipped by her uncle; in doing so, she brushes past the policeman, who reprimands her and sends her back to the curb. The librarian accuses Charlie of an uncharacteristic inconsideration. Social rules and authority no longer exercise their tight grip on Charlie; she is losing her innocence, manifesting elements of her uncle's personality.

The newspaper confirms the detective's story: lying beneath Uncle Charlie's urbane demeanor is a savage murderer—of women. The struggle in young Charlie's psyche suddenly falls into place like a jigsaw puzzle suddenly fit with a missing piece. To continue defending her uncle is to act as an accomplice in the murder of women and, implicitly, of her own femaleness. Charlie is torn in what Jung might interpret as a battle between anima and animus. The masculine facet of her psyche, which her "twin," Uncle Charlie, represents, struggles against the femininity called up by her "opposite," the detective. She faces a crucial dilemma: if she chooses to defend her uncle, she relinquishes her womanhood to misogyny and criminality. If she aligns her loyalties instead with the detective/suitor, she chooses the traditional role of her mother, the "woman's role" that she abhors. There appears to be no compromise possible. Charlie exists in a tortured nether world of sexuality, as the criminal woman-destroyer (her uncle) and the representative of both law and romance (the detective) vie for her very selfhood.

But like Alice, Charlie has conjured up the sexual threat herself—she has called up Uncle Charlie in a way similar to Alice's violation of

sexual taboos in *Blackmail*. Significantly, neither Uncle Charlie nor the detective are permanent citizens of Santa Rosa; instead, like Alice's artist, they are dreamlike intruders on Charlie's everyday reality—intruders who are balanced by masculine representatives of the law who also represent sexual conventions. So Charlie must choose which outsider will become integrated into her psyche, and into the community: her brutal, fascistic uncle or the law-abiding detective.

Like Alice some fifteen years earlier in *Blackmail*, Charlie murders her sexual threat. Her conscience blossoms in identification with legal authority—and Uncle Charlie suddenly metamorphosizes into a horrible figure in her eyes. She orders him to "leave town or I'll kill you!" And the battle between the male/female elements of her psyche is on in earnest.

Charlie's resolution, like Alice's, is no compromise: she ironically affirms law and her sexuality in one decision—she will kill Uncle Charlie, who has begun to make attempts on her own life. If the two sides can be seen as alternate elements in Charlie's own psyche (she has, after all, "dreamed" him up in her wishful thinking about being freed from the restrictions on her mother's life) then they are battling for domination of her sexuality. A surreal sense grows in *Shadow of a Doubt*. Charlie appears to be in a trance; her uncle's violent acts against her have psychological rather than physical consequences for her. She recovers immediately from poison given to her by Uncle Charlie, and manages to survive a nasty fall down stairs with which he has tampered. Now that she has identified herself with law and with repression, she cannot be threatened by Uncle Charlie.

Hitchcock's violence in *Shadow of a Doubt* is too surreal and otherworldly to be that of the "real world"—it is taking place in Charlie's psychic nightmare, which culminates when she and Uncle Charlie have a shoving match in the doorway of a moving train. Charlie pushes him onto the tracks of an oncoming train—ending the "shadow of a doubt" about life in Santa Rosa and her own sexuality. Her sexual dilemma is thus resolved, and we next see her standing with the detective in front of a church, symbolizing marriage that is linked with law and order. The shadow of her sexual doubt, we are thus assured, will never again cast its sinister image across her psychic landscape.

Both Charlie and Alice have undergone psychic resolutions that shook the solid foundations of

middle America. Family and law are challenged, shaken in the winds of sexual and social change, but they emerge unscathed, their values strengthened as the two heroines identify themselves with a detective and a policeman. Sexuality in both cases is rigidly defined; legality is aligned with the repression of the heroines' challenges to sexual codes; and the family is preserved at all costs. The world outside may be fascistic and decadent, but *Shadow of a Doubt* reassures Santa Rosa—that microcosm of middle America—that its traditions will endure.

The sexual violence expressed in *Blackmail* and *Shadow of a Doubt* has grown more subtle in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The unrepressed desires which Alice and Charlie act out are represented now by an animal force—a "natural" force unleashed by the sexual tensions of the hero and heroine, Mitch and Melanie. In one of the film's earliest scenes, Melanie carries a pair of "love birds" in a cage to present to Mitch. At this point, Melanie is carrying only the threat of sexual liberation; the birds, correspondingly, are tame, lovable creatures. She has arrived in Bodega Bay from San Francisco as a sophisticated woman in full control of the world—we have already seen her exercising that sense of control in the pet shop buying birds. There, she played the role of salesgirl until Mitch Brenner, soon to be her sweetheart, suggested, "Shall we put Melanie Daniels in her gilded cage?" And, like Alice, like Charlie, Melanie challenges traditional sexual and social codes until Hitchcock "cages" her discontent in marriage, again to a male who represents legal authority. This time the hero is not a policeman or detective, but a lawyer.

In 1964, however, the chaos and violence released by sexuality is a force of nature—the birds—which corresponds to Melanie's sexual freedom. It is significant that the attacking birds have broken down their normal species separation. Barriers and taboos have been broken and anarchy reigns in a warning to Melanie, who is heedless of conventional sexual roles—a factor which does not go unnoticed by the townswomen. Melanie is a wild bird in a tradition-bound town. The townswomen, "caged" in tradition, respond with resentment to Melanie's intrusion, accusing her of bringing the disaster upon the town. Melanie is a latter-day witch, invoking mysterious forces upon an innocent, placid village.

As in *Shadow of a Doubt*, a representative of the sophisticated outer world disrupts small town values and is eventually defeated in a painful

process that reinforces the family and traditional roles. Like Uncle Charlie, the birds represent the violent nature of unleashed sexual repression, women who are stepping beyond their conventional roles, and sexual confines freed from tradition. Significantly, the "expert" ornithologist in *The Birds* is a wrong-headed, obstinate woman who assumes that the birds are innocent, thus defending a symbol of the destructive forces of womanhood. But the birds/women have stepped beyond the bounds of what can be tolerated in Hitchcock's world: they must be brought back within an "appropriate" realm by suffering the destructive forces they have brought about. Melanie's salvation from those forces must involve more than the love of a policeman or detective which saved Alice and Charlie: she endures a savage attack from the birds before Mitch rescues her and then integrates her into his own family.

The new "family" flees Bodega Bay in their automobile still bearing the caged lovebirds as symbols of the stabilizing effect of social tradition, family, and structure. Melanie has undergone intense change of identity through the crisis of Bodega Bay, and she is comforted and accepted at last by Mitch's mother. The assimilation of Melanie into the family/automobile/cage is complete, but the ominous presence of the birds surrounds them, indicating that the irrational always lurks beneath the facade of order in Hitchcock's world. We are left with a world in which even minimal violations of moral codes lead to violence; those violations must be resisted through the womb-like closures of the nuclear family. Mitch at last is firmly in control at the wheel of the family vehicle as the film ends. The survivors are the re-integrated family unit with a male authority firmly in command, as the once-domineering mother and the once-freewheeling Melanie huddle together in the backseat. It is the family against a hostile world.

Yet to conclude that Hitchcock's films ideologically support the traditional values of the family, patriarchy, and conventional roles for women would be a simplification. Clearly, ambivalence manifests itself repeatedly throughout his films. Hitchcock shows his audiences the monotony generated by the family and by small town life—Charlie, for instance, has reason to rebel against the confines of Santa Rosa tradition; by the same token, the society Melanie encounters in Bodega Bay is a stifling one. Beneath the monotonous surfaces of everyday life, however, taboos and hostilities lie dormant,

repressed until a triggering event breaks down that precarious mundanity. The social order that the family represents can no longer sustain its underlying tensions. But in Hitchcock's world, the psychic dilemmas are repeatedly worked out within the context of the family unit. From Alice White in *Blackmail* in 1929 to Charlie Newton in 1943, and then to Melanie Daniels in 1964, Hitchcock's more daring women return from unconventional sexual roles to the comforting solace of romantic attachment and family structure. Though the family may be a wellspring of anxiety, isolation or conflict, for Hitchcock it is preferable to freer moral codes of a more sophisticated outside world. Time and again he informs us that we need the confines of family

and tradition to order an irrational world. But, importantly, the family is both the problem and its eventual solution—suggesting serious questions about the role of the family as a repressive agent in modern society. Hitchcock transports us into a liminal realm in which the repressed returns. It is there that dissatisfied or adventurous women like Alice, Charlie, and Melanie act out violations of a moral code or the conventions of a traditional sex role—and reveal a society precariously dependent upon the family for social order. □

Kay Sloan is Acting Director of the American Studies Program at Miami University. She is currently at work on a manuscript on the origins of the social problem film during the Progressive Era.

FEATURED ARTISTS

Peter Briant is a New Orleans watercolorist whose works have been exhibited around the world. Although the concentration of his work is of the Old South, many also depict settings from England, Ireland, Mexico, and France. In addition to paintings, his most recent local exhibits also included a limited edition of carousel sculptures.

Frederick H. Fornoff is professor of Spanish and creative writing at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. His translations of Costa Rican poet Laureano Albán's *Autumn's Legacy* (1982) and *The Endless Voyage* (1983) were published by Ohio University Press and the International Poetry Forum.

Larry French is a poet and short story writer living in Marina del Rey, California. His work has appeared most recently in *Ascent*, *Northwest Review*, and the *Mississippi Review*.

Antonio Hernández was born in Arcos de la Frontera (near Cádiz, Spain) in 1943. He now lives in Madrid and has published several books of poetry and criticism. The three-part poem "Beside What Doesn't Die" is from *Donde da la luz* (*Where the Light Strikes*), which won the 1977 Rafael Morales Prize.

Daryl E. Jones is professor and chairman of the English department at Texas Tech University. His poems have appeared recently in *Black Warrior Review*, *Descant*, *Sewanee Review*, and elsewhere. He is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship for 1985.

LuAnn Keener is presently completing an M.F.A. at the University of Arkansas. Her poems have appeared in *The Chariton Review*, *Poetry Now*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere.

Bart Ramsey lives in New Orleans.

David Sanders lives and works in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Katherine Soniat presently teaches at Virginia Polytechnic and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. Her book *Notes of Departure* won the Camden Poetry Prize and will be published by the Walt Whitman Center for the Humanities. Her poems appear in such journals as *Poetry*, *The American Scholar*, and *The Southern Review*.