Shawangunk Review

State University of New York at New Paltz
New Paltz, New York

Shawangunk Review

Shawangunk Review
Volume Ten
Spring 1999

From the Editors

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This issue of the *Shawangunk Review* presents the graduate student papers from the Tenth Annual Graduate Symposium: "Twentieth-Century Literary Theory." We are particularly pleased to include "Books, Brains, and Bodies," the address by Norman N. Holland, our distinguished visiting speaker at the Symposium.

As this issue goes to press, we are preparing for the Eleventh Annual Graduate Symposium, "Grace Under Millennial Pressure: Reflections on the Hemingway Centennial," to be held on April 13, 1999. For this centennial year, an *annus mirabilis* in Hemingway studies which will be observed in scores of major conferences, symposia, and celebrations around the country and the world, New Paltz will make its mark on the Centennial map with an extraordinary event featuring Valerie Hemingway as keynote speaker, other Hemingway family members as special guests, a panel of the nation's leading Hemingway scholars, and, of course, presentations by our graduate students. The Symposium Director is H. R. Stoneback. For the year 2000, the Twelfth Annual Graduate Symposium topic will be "Shakespeare," with Professor Thomas G. Olsen as Symposium Director.

The editors of *Shawangunk Review* stress that, in addition to our primary mission of publishing the proceedings of our Annual Graduate Symposium, we welcome and encourage submissions concerning any area of literary studies: essays, explications, book reviews, scholarly notes and queries from any graduate student in English. We also welcome submissions of poetry, and translations of poetry, from English graduate students and faculty. (See submission guidelines, page 79.) Faculty members are also invited to submit book reviews and scholarly notes and queries. The deadline for all materials (including 1999 Symposium papers) for the next issue is May 31, 1999.

We will continue to publish our "news and notes" columns, as space permits, and we ask that readers continue to provide information regarding the many distinguished achievements of our former and current graduate students. For example, we would like to know the details of conference participation, publications, grants, and honors as well as news regarding progress of our MAs in Ph.D. programs, and reports about teaching and employment activities. Please submit items for this column to the editors. Also, we will include in future issues an "Abstracts of MA Theses" section. Degree candidates are encouraged to consult with their advisors and to submit a Thesis Abstract of approximately 150 words for publication in the *Review*.

H.R. Stoneback

Twentieth-Century Literary Theory
The Tenth Annual Graduate Symposium

Introduction

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All that the April 15, 1998 Graduate Symposium lacked was proscribed alcoholic beverages, and, therefore deserved toasts to its participants. So here is a virtual glass raised to George, Betsy, Jason, Christopher, Mark, Alexei, Susan, and Patricia, the brainy, witty and iconoclastic bunch of our M.A. English students who delivered such intellectually rich papers on twentieth-century literary theory. Our guest speaker, Norman Holland, who expressed great admiration for the work of our speakers, may be safely included in this toast. A second glass to Norman Holland himself, the renowned psychoanalytic and reader-response theorist for his provocative, cutting-edge and unfashionably lucid paper "Books, Brains and Bodies," a piece which left many of us not Saussure of ourselves, and which he has generously permitted us to publish here. A round to our audience as well, academics and non-academics, who packed the large conference room and contributed so much to the discussion therein.

As for myself and Daniel Kempton, co-chairs of the 1998 Graduate Symposium, lower your glasses: we were simply lucky to have all of the above zest and talent to work with and take pride in. We are indebted further to Tonda Highley and the Major Connections staff for so constructively sponsoring this event.

Arthur Hack

Books, Brains, and Bodies

Norman N. Holland

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You've been studying literary theory, but I'd like to take you in a different direction this evening. I'd like to talk about some new discoveries in what is being called cognitive science. They call it cognitive science, and you have to wonder, what would a non-cognitive science be like? You can tell they don't have any English teachers among the people who name scientific things. I'd like to raise some questions about the ways in which the things we are learning in brain science or, more generally, cognitive science, how these things are relevant to literary criticism. Most important, and the question I'd like to leave with you is, How do we put them together, literary theory and brain science or cognitive science?

Now, beneath or behind this line of inquiry is a basic assumption. That is, I believe that whenever you make a statement in literary criticism, you are assuming something, something basic, about human nature. When Aristotle talks about catharsis or Plato about kicking the poets out of his Republic or when Stephen Greenblatt talks about the relation of texts across history or Judith Fetterley about how women read, they are all making some assumption about human nature. They may be assuming that human nature has nothing to do with meaning, or they may even be assuming that there is no such thing as human nature—a common assumption these days—but they are all assuming something about human nature, something about the ways our minds, our thinking and our emotions, work.

Let me remind you that we are living in what George Bush and the Congress earlier declared is the Decade of the Brain. I suppose there is a certain irony in that, that George Bush and the Congress should advocate brains, but what the heck. We have to take these things where we find them.

I want to call to your attention six things that we have learned about the way our brains work, six things that I believe need to be taken into account when we think about literature.

The first is transformational grammar or generative linguistics—there are lots of names for it. Let me take you back to 1957, when a revolutionary book was published, Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*. The book led to two revolutions.

One was linguistic. Chomsky was challenging the prevailing linguistic paradigm which was a somewhat more advanced version of Saussure. One idea current then was that the meaning of a word was a simple stimulus-response proposition. You say the word and the hearer reacts with the appropriate concept. You recognize, I trust, Saussure's signifier and signified combined into a sign. As Saussure put it, when you know a language, what you have is a dictionary in your head.

What Chomsky showed was that this didn't really describe people's behavior with language. You need to know how to put the words together to form grammatical sentences. Can you imagine coming from Albania, say, and speaking only Albanian, then getting off the boat and trying to ask directions in Manhattan with only a dictionary to help you? Fuggedaboudit.

Chomsky was saying, You can't hope to analyze this major aspect of human behavior, language, by simple stimulus-response behaviorism. Now, the whole idea of behaviorism, as its name implies, was that you were to look only at overt behaviors and correlate a observable stimulus input with an observable behavioral output, the response. But Chomsky showed that in any sentence in which the end of the sentence depends on the beginning of the sentence, there has to be an underlying structure. For example, consider these two sentences—

> Arthur is too angry to talk to.
> Arthur is too angry to talk to Dan.

The sentences start out the same and they are the same for seven words, but then when you hear the word "Dan" at the end you go back and understand the beginning of the sentence differently. In the first sentence, "Arthur is too angry to talk to," you understand those seven words—or signifiers—to mean that other people are talking—or not talking—to Arthur. But in the second sentence, "Arthur is too angry to talk to Dan," you understand the first seven words—or signifiers—to mean that Arthur is the one doing the talking—or not talking. Now, how did you know how to interpret those seven words, "Arthur is too angry to talk to"? Answer: you had some kind of deep structure in mind, some structure deeper than the surface of the sentence, some structure that you used to interpret that surface, what Chomsky calls the "rule-governed creativity" of individual speakers and hearers. The mere surface of the sentence is not enough. Saussure, Skinner, Bloomfield, the structural linguists, are not being sophisticated enough. You have to look at what's inside the head of the person speaking or hearing language.

Chomsky's ideas—his proofs, really—contributed to a second revolution, a revolution in psychology. As Chomsky's ideas percolated into psychology, they encountered a change in that department as well. Until the mid-1950s, the dominant paradigm in psychology had been behaviorism. We look only at visible behaviors. Any attempt to talk about processes inside the skull is just speculation and unscientific.

Gradually, however, psychologists had begun to realize that how you perceive things, how you know things, how you remember things, all these depend not just on the stimulus, but on what you bring to the stimulus. What you have in your head to start with. So you have to talk about the contents of the mind and internal mental processes. And over some decades, this so-called New Look in psychology replaced behaviorism as the dominant paradigm. We now have a new concentration in psychology on mental processes.

In general, as I understand constructivism in psychology, it says that you construe or construct what you perceive, even down to the most basic things like the color of that wall. Some kind of computational process has to take place before you can adapt the inputs from the blue, green and red sensors in your retina to register that color as that nondescript institutional yellow. We can imagine even a simple filter or transducer as asking a question: Is this the kind of thing that triggers my response? Is this the frequency of sound I let through? Obviously, though, for more complicated perceptions or memories or knowledge, you have to bring more complicated hypotheses to bear. If I say to you "democracy" or "capitalism" or "psychoanalyst," you bring all kinds of preconceptions to bear.

In my own writings, I modeled this process as a kind of feedback. You put out a question or hypothesis or even a simple filter to the world. 1) Is this a red light? 2) Yes, it is red. Then that means stop. Or 2) No, it is green. Then that means go.

In other words, we bring hypotheses to bear on our perceptions, and we get those hypotheses from our culture. In our culture, no normal person would disagree with the proposition that a green light means go and a red light means stop or, in Gainesville, stop and pick your nose. That's a rather fixed hypothesis that we bring to bear. Call it a code.

But if I say "psychoanalyst," I think the hypotheses you bring to bear would be a lot more variable. They would depend a lot on the group to which you belong. Call them canons. If you are a psychoanalyst yourself, you'll bring certain canons to bear. If you are a Freud-basher, you'll bring quite different canons to bear.

And then each of us will bring these hypotheses to bear in different ways, according to our personalities. I might be very dogmatic about psychoanalysts, and you might be very easy-going. You might be quick, I might be slow to judge. And so on. I get the picture of a personal style, an identity that governs and directs these hypotheses onto the outer world. And psychoanalysis helps you to understand that personal style, to articulate it and to get some idea of where it comes from. That's why psychoanalysis is important to me as a literary critic.

At any rate, that is my version of what we might call psychological constructivism, the idea that we use mental hypotheses to perceive, to conceive, to know, to remember the world around us, including, of course, literature.

Chomsky's ideas were one thing that led to the development of cognitive science. The growth of psychological constructivism was another. But there were a number of other developments that focused on mental processes. A third factor was the interest in artificial intelligence. As people developed more and more sophisticated computers, they became interested in the question, Can computers think? And this in turn led to a lot more research into mental processes as opposed to overt behavior.

People began to play with the idea that the brain was something like a computer and that it managed perceptions by means of various programs. We could talk about the software, the programs in the brain, and the hardware or, as people called it, the wetware or meatware. And then we could ask how these programs work.

Something that came into play at that time was another idea of Chomsky's, namely, that we human beings are, so to speak, hard-wired for language, an idea that is now widely, but not universally, accepted among linguists. The proof is that all human languages appear to be structurally similar in profound and surprising ways. Evidently, then, those structural principles of "Universal Grammar" must be in some sense innate, part of the genetic inheritance of all human beings. As one linguist (Jerry Fodor) puts it, "There may be an alternative to the nativist explanation that linguistic structure is genetically specified; but, if there is, nobody has thus far had a glimpse of it."

Now, if our ability to use language is a kind of self-contained bodily system like that—STORY: Lacan was visiting the United States, and he decided to meet Chomsky. Lacan's English was pretty poor, and Chomsky speaks no French. They had an interpreter, Sherry Turkle, and she told me this story. The two were talking and getting absolutely nowhere, Chomsky the relentless rationalist, Lacan the obscure. Finally, Chomsky burst out, "Language is an organ! An organ like the liver! Surely you as a Frenchman can understand that."

Well, if language is an organ, then maybe vision is, hearing is, smell is—well, we know that's true, smell is—maybe we have separate systems in the brain for seeing, hearing, walking, and so on. Maybe then the mind is made up of a series of modules. Not just a big, global constructivism, but what is now called modularity. That doesn't rule out the psychoanalytic concept of personal style or identity. As one leading modularist (Fodor) puts it, "If… there is a community of computers living in my head, there had also better be somebody who is in charge; and, by God, it better be me." In other words, we get the picture of an individual playing a discrete series of instruments, synthesizers, if you will, each with rather specifically defined capabilities, but the individual plays in his or her distinctive style.

That brings us to the fourth item I want to pick up from cognitive science. This one comes from medical technology, the development of MRI and PET scans. These enable us to get a picture of someone's brain as it thinks, at least, pictures of the blood and oxygen flow and other things in the brain as that person fears or perceives or reads or listens to language. Scientists like Gerard Edelman or Hanna and Antonio Damasio are showing how we understand words in our brains. There is no simple correspondence between signifier and signified. Rather, just to understand one word, the brain must bring together a variety of separate features, the sound of the word, its grammatical role, other words that it is like and unlike. Apparently the areas in our brains that process nouns are different from the areas that process verbs. For example, the article in English, "an" or "the," conveys little information, while the article in German conveys a great deal. As a result, the brain processes English articles differently from German articles, and you can see that in the brain scans.

Then, to arrive at a meaning for a word, the brain assembles a variety of information from different places in the brain. Furthermore, and most important for the psychoanalyst, what information there is, where it is located, and what emotions accompany it are all highly personal. For each of us, the meaning of a simple word like "dog" or "cat" results from our unique history with that word. And, of course, for complex words like "democracy" or "psychoanalyst," the results will be even more personal.

We've come to a fifth development in brain science. One of the post-Chomskyan groups of linguists, the cognitive linguists (sometimes called "cognitive semanticists"), has developed what they call "the cognitive science of metaphor" or "the theory of conceptual metaphor." In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson published *Metaphors We Live By*. I know that that sounds like a self-help book like Deepak Chopra or somebody of that ilk, but it isn't. This book

started a whole new line of inquiry into the nature of metaphor and what it tells us about our brains and minds.

For example, we might imagine a love affair in terms of a journey. That would give rise to all kinds of metaphors:

> We're not getting anywhere in this relationship.
> It's off the track.
> It's on the rocks.
> We're sailing along.
> We've lost our way.
> We've come to a dead end.
> We're spinning our wheels.
> We're stuck.
> This has been a bumpy road, but we've come so far, we can't turn back now.
> We've come to a crossroads. We have to go our separate ways.

And so on.

These metaphors can get complicated like this line from a C&W song: "We're driving in the fast lane on the freeway of love." From "fast lane," I surmise that the relationship has gone on rapidly, perhaps a little dangerously, and that the lovers will get to the end very quickly. From "freeway"—no cost, no stopping, easy entrance and exit—I infer other things about the affair. In other words, I use the metaphor to reason with, to try to figure out, so to speak, where the lovers go from here.

For our purposes, we can borrow a simple definition from Lakoff and Johnson: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." Very loosely, we use something that is easy to understand, something immediate and sensual, to understand something harder to understand. The cognitive linguists use mathematical terms and speak of understanding a *target* domain, the one you want to understand, in terms of a *source* domain, the domain you get the metaphor from, a domain you already understand.

In the mathematical language the cognitive linguists prefer, the source domain, a journey, is *mapped onto* the target domain, the love affair. Complex entities in the domain of love (incompatibility, commitment) correspond systematically to the simpler entities in the journey (the travelers, the vehicle, the destination, the path, obstacles, etc.), giving rise not just to a single metaphor but a whole family. One can refer to such a family as the LOVE-AS-JOURNEY mapping.

This is an important general conclusion. The cognitive linguists are showing

that metaphor is not simply a linguistic device to be used by poets and advertisers. It is a fundamental way that humans think. Cognitive linguists estimate (perhaps over-enthusiastically) that 95 percent of our thinking goes on in these common metaphors. Language is non-metaphorical only when there is no interrelation of domains: "This dog has four legs." "The temperature is 20° Celsius."

For example, here are some of the things we say about literature and writing:

> I didn't get much *out of* that book.
> I have trouble putting my thoughts *into words*.
> His words sounded hollow, and the speech had little *content*.
> The idea is *buried in* terribly dense paragraphs.
> Try to get more ideas *in* fewer words.
> His promises were *empty*.
> The meaning is right there, *in the words*. (If you're a reader-response critic, you hear that a lot.)

Now, this is a completely conventional way of talking about language and meaning, so conventional that we mostly don't notice that it is metaphorical. But it is. It's called the CONTAINER metaphor for language or the CONDUIT metaphor. In fact, it draws on three different metaphorical mappings:

> 1. IDEAS (OR MEANINGS) ARE OBJECTS.
> 2. LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS.
> 3. COMMUNICATION IS SENDING.

Yet common sense tells us—and certainly our excursion into what the brain scientists tell us about how we interpret words—that these are pretty doubtful metaphors. They say nothing about the active role of the audience in understanding something. They don't allow for the fact that a single sentence can mean quite different things to different people. If I say, "You're not dealing sensibly with the drug problem," that means altogether different things to the head of the DEA and to the doctors who deal with addicts. Is communication sending down a pipeline, then? Or would it be more accurate to say that I put some words out there between us, and you take those words and actively interpret them? I think the latter, and I think generally, a lot of contemporary literary theory simply takes over these metaphors and works them into very complicated generalizations. I would say, for example, that both Derrida and Lacan do that.

One can distinguish primary metaphors and secondary. Primary metaphors are those that all cultures share, presumably because they come from immediate bodily and mental experiences: up, down, left, right, balance, symmetry, hot,

cold, higher, lower, inside, outside, near, far, blockage, flow, counterforce, similarity, and so on. In no known culture is anger cold. In no known culture is love distance.

Secondary metaphors are those that occur only in some cultures. For example, metaphors that use computers or subways or roller coasters might make little sense to someone in an underdeveloped country who had never seen such things.

There is some indication that the primary image-schemas hold for many, perhaps all, languages, including American Sign Language. Hence they are like Universal Grammar: they say something about how our physical bodies structure our minds or, in the title of Mark Johnson's 1987 book: *The Body in the Mind*. We take bodily experiences like containers, inside and outside, to reason about language. We take ideas like near-far or blockage or journeys to talk about love affairs. These clearly derive from physical experiences available to human beings in general.

The idea that metaphor plays a nearly exclusive role in our understanding of the world breaks up the old logjam of "subjective" and "objective. In the 1980 book and in later writings, Lakoff and Johnson challenge what they call the "myths of objectivism and subjectivism." These myths hold that either you believe in absolute truth or you are making the world in your own image. To the extent you are not objective, you are subjective. It is plus-minus, a zero-sum game. Truth is propositional: All men are mortal. $e=mc^2$.

Rather, these cognitive linguists argue, our understanding is "experientialist." Truth is metaphoric and bodily and fuzzy. We are looking at a "real world" that constrains our understanding of it, but our understanding is embedded in our bodily and cultural experience. The "experientialist myth" thus acknowledges that meaning is always meaning *to* someone, but it does not reach the Romantic extreme, that understanding is completely unrestrained. Rather, we understand the world through the physical experience of our bodies (as in a metaphor like LOVE IS A JOURNEY) and in the concepts that our culture provides us (as in the extension of that metaphor to fast lanes and freeways). Again, this confirms a long-established psychoanalytic idea, that every kind of thinking, even the most abstract and disciplined (like philosophy or mathematics), has an unconscious dimension, a personal, and now bodily, meaning to the thinker. When I talk about balancing my checkbook, for example, I probably mean more or less what you do. But what does that metaphor mean to someone who has chronic vertigo or who has only one leg? Our metaphorical thinking is grounded in our bodies, and each of our bodies has a different personal history.

Finally, I come to the sixth and last way in which personal history is important, perhaps the most important way of all. That's why I left it for last in my brief scan of five ways that cognitive science might touch on literary theory. I call it the growing and ungrowing of the brain.

We used to think that the brain is inherited (like any other organ), and the sites and features of that organ come from our genes. In just the past few decades, however, brain scientists have added some startling facts to that picture.

Research in the last few years has evolved the picture of a changing brain that first grows in infancy and then ungrows in adolescence. In one researcher's image, nature is like a sculptor of the brain. First, to an armature provided by genetics, nature applies plaster, more than is needed but in roughly the shape that is desired. Then nature chips the excess away until the adult brain appears.

The child's brain develops virtually all its potentially useful neural interconnections by the age of two, and then goes on to develop a lot more. The brains of children from three to eleven use twice as much energy as adults' brains. Specifically, in the first year of life, the metabolic rate of the baby's brain (established by PET scan) is about two-thirds that of an adult brain. By the age of two, the rate equals the adult's. During those two years, the neurons have been branching and interconnecting. Indeed, during the first year of life, "dendritic and synaptic elaboration" increases by a factor of 20. Then, by three or four, the metabolic rate becomes twice that of an adult's. By the age of six or seven, a child's brain equals in weight and volume an adult's, but it uses twice as much energy, and it has twice the number of synaptic connections. The brain stays "supercharged" until early adolescence. Then, from eleven to fourteen, the metabolic rate begins to fall until it subsides to the adult level. Similarly, there are twice as many synaptic connections in the cortex of a child's brain as in an adult's. Then that number falls by half in early adolescence. Young children experience twice as much deep sleep as adults, and then from eleven to fourteen years of age, children move into adult sleep patterns.

Further, as is well known, a child's style of thinking differs from an adolescent's or an adult's. Young children can often propose brilliant concepts, but they cannot take them further. They cannot concentrate for long. They daydream, perhaps because too many neural connections interfere with sustained logical thought. Indeed, it is only in adolescence that we can learn to solve complex, abstract problems at all.

In effect, nature first grows and then prunes away vast numbers of neurons, axons, and synapses in the course of bringing us from infancy to adulthood. Moreover, this growth and ungrowth results from activity—from early experi-

ence. Well-used neurons and synaptic connections seem to release nerve growth factors, substances that help insure their survival. In general, neural circuits that get lots of use generate substances that help them to survive. Neural circuits that get little or no use are sacrificed, probably in the interests of stabilizing the brain itself and reducing the energy consumption that the supercharged childhood brain had required.

In effect, to survive, nerves compete for a limited supply of such things as NGF (nerve growth factor), and since those nerve cells and brain cells that survive are those we use the most, we grow nerves and brains suited to the environment in which we live. For an infant, that is the whole process of mothering. In other words, we are seeing how early experience begins to outline the adult personality, how the child is father to the man, how as the twig is bent so grows the tree, how your relationship with your first caretakers begins to grow you into the personality you now have.

Your experiences as a child are literally written into your brain, and they become some of the hypotheses by which you read the world or read literature. The result is, every human brain differs from every other. To be sure, there will be structures in common, the hippocampus or the cerebellum or the corpus callosum. But within those structures or organs, the synaptic connections come from a history of personal experiences that will be different for each human being.

Further, what the brain scientists have found dovetails with the discoveries of the "baby-watchers" in the U.S. and the U.K. They have found in early infancy something considerably more complex than the simple self-object differentiation of infant from mother that I had been excited to discover in mid-century psychoanalysis. Instead, infant and mother both experience a complex, inter-related web of cognitive and emotive feedbacks which grow into the even more complex interpersonal feedbacks of the adult. It's a kind of emotional dance in which the baby and the caretaker, the mother, relate around feeding, gazing, being given a bath, changing diapers, being left to sleep or to cry. In all these behaviors, the baby and the mother relate in complex physical and emotional ways. The mother brings her characteristic style to bear, but the baby also brings its proto-personality, its temperament, into the relationship. There are two partners in the dance.

We used to think, in particular, psychoanalysts and psychologists used to think, that the baby was a *tabula rasa,* an unshaped piece of clay, on which the parents and the rest of the environment imposed a shape. Now we believe that babies are, like adults, beings who construct and shape their perceptions. From

earliest infancy, the baby personalizes the ways its environment will affect it psychologically.

I've covered a lot of ground. Let me summarize as briefly as I can the six aspects of cognitive science that I've tried to put before you as interrogations of contemporary literary theory. First, there was Chomsky's proof that we use and understand language by means of internalized deep structures beneath the surface of the sentence. Second, I mentioned the psychologists' conclusion that we interpret the world by active computation. We try out a series of hypotheses on the world and we get the feedback and then we act accordingly. Third, I mentioned the theory of modules, the idea that the brain works by a series of modules with a personal identity in charge. Fourth, we have the pictures of the brain at work, processing language in complicated ways, drawing on different modules in the brain, and the individual's personal history with a given word. Fifth, I've mentioned the theory of metaphor and our use of metaphorical reasoning grounded in sensory experience and in the body. Sixth and finally, I mentioned the growing and ungrowing of the brain, the way our personal experiences and histories are written into our synapses.

It's my impression that contemporary literary theory has not considered these discoveries. What do they imply for literary theory? I don't know, frankly. That's the question I want to leave with you. These six things do, however, make me rather skeptical of some of the statements I hear: that the author is dead; that the subject is disappearing; that the only politics is identity politics; that texts deconstruct themselves, and so on. I think we can draw some small conclusions. Six occur to me. (That seems to be my number tonight.)

One, the idea of signifier-signified, the process of signification, the idea that language signifies—that just doesn't seem to hold any more. Texts do not do things to people or to themselves. The notion that there is a process called signifying which is a simple stimulus-response is false. So too the idea that texts generate meanings or impose meanings or deconstruct meanings is false. *People* generate meanings, *people* impose meanings, *people* deconstruct meanings. If common sense alone did not tell us this, the brain studies do. I tell my students, the minute you hear the word "signifier" or "signified," you've come to the weak point in the argument. They don't like to hear that, because so much of current literary theory seems to hinge on the notion that language signifies, but I can't help it. That's what the cognitive scientists, with virtual unanimity, conclude, that signifier-signified is a woefully inadequate account of language, a kind of flat-earth theory that looks reasonable at first, but fails when you really explore it. We need to rethink literary theories that rest on that premise.

Two, the picture we get from contemporary literary theory is of a rather passive human being, someone on whom language or "discourse" imposes various ideas and meanings. In literary theory, human nature is arbitrarily plastic and minds are social constructs. Here again, this is not at all what the cognitive scientists find. They find that a lot of what's in the modules seems to be there innately.

They describe a person who has a variety of inherited abilities that are not touched by culture but are universal among all human beings, notably, the ability to use and understand language, but other things as well, for example, the ability to reason metaphorically on the basis of bodily experience. The cognitive scientists describe an active person, someone who is constantly busy hypothesizing about—constructing—the environment.

If this is so, then we need to use the term discourse very carefully. Discourse is not something floating around in the atmosphere. Discourse is anchored in our bodies, in our early experience as helpless infants, in our personal history through adolescence and on into adulthood, but most particularly in our physical bodies and brains. Human knowledge is bodily knowledge. Again, how do we fix literary theory to take this into account?

Three, discourse in the literary theory model imposes itself on this rather passive person. Culture constructs us willy-nilly. Now, it is clearly true, as literary theorists insist, that culture does impose itself on us. But how?

Again, the cognitive scientists complicate that question. They describe a human being who actively constructs or construes the world, including the texts of that world. They describe people who have innate characteristics, a cultural inheritance, and personal traits and experience, all of which they bring to bear on the perception and understanding of their world. If much of our mental endowment is innate, then how is culture, or stereotypes, if you will, imprinted on us?

I would suggest that what we inherit is our feedback method for perceiving and understanding the world. I understand human nature as a personal identity that tries out hypotheses and acts according to the results. What our culture imposes on us are the hypotheses by which we try out the world in that feedback process. A politically aware critic should make us aware of those cultural hypotheses, should question those cultural hypotheses, should offer alternative hypotheses.

If that's true, then human individuality is alive and well, despite all rumors to the contrary. And that would be my fourth point. The subject is not dead. The author has not disappeared. Rather, the new things we are learning about the

mind confirm reader-response theory. The uniqueness of you and of me plays a big part in how we write and how we read books. That is one reason, maybe the main reason, I'm a reader-response critic.

Then there are some larger questions addressed by cognitive science. My fifth point would address the matter of objective and subjective. A lot of literary theorists draw a line between objective and subjective. This is particularly true of an older school of textual or formalist critics, who might say, "The meaning is right there in the text." The general thrust of the cognitive scientists is that there is no clear dividing line between subjective and objective. Rather, we come out with what the metaphor people called *experientialism*. Our understanding of the world "out there" is all bound up with our bodily experiences "in here."

And finally, the sixth and last point at which I see cognitive science raising questions about contemporary literary theory, and perhaps the largest issue. Philosophy vs. science. As I read the theorists, they are doing a kind of philosophy, working entirely from reasoning and introspection as philosophers rightly do. But they are drawing conclusions about the world, about the way people relate to literature or advertising or television. Is this not a misuse of philosophy? That is, as the philosopher Charles Stevenson used to suggest, isn't philosophy good at framing questions, but poor at arriving at answers? The classic example is Immanuel Kant, perhaps the greatest of philosophers, who "proved" in his doctoral dissertation that there could only be seven planets. Typically, philosophy frames a question and then scientific inquiry begins to work with that question and eventually, we hope, provides answers, provisional answers of course, as scientific conclusions always are, but answers that enable people to better form subsequent questions to be investigated.

For centuries, philosophers have been asking, What is mind?, and finally we are beginning to get some answers because psychologists have new ways of inquiring empirically into the ways the mind does things. I would suggest that literary theory would be a lot better if it took those into account, and that is what I have been trying to do and what I have been trying to urge you to do this evening.

Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*:

Another Critical Misreading

George W. Krajca

In 1994, Harold Bloom published *The Western Canon* and included a chapter-long diatribe against many of the schools of criticism that we are gathered at this symposium to discuss. A short list of the schools attacked in his preface includes Multiculturalism, Marxism, Feminism, Neoconservatism, Afrocentrism, Deconstructionism and New Historicism (20). Bloom rejects them all because, in his opinion, they have politicized literature. Bloom advocates for "the autonomy of the æsthetic" (9), the idea that art transcends identity politics. Anyone who does not believe this as an article of faith is branded a heretic belonging to one of "the schools of resentment" (20). Predictably, representatives from each of the schools that he attacked vilified Bloom for voicing these opinions. They attempted to disprove Bloom's arguments by misreading his work within the context of their own æsthetic theories. Unfortunately, this inevitably resulted in circular arguments rather than a final refutation of his theory of art. The only way to reject Bloom's arguments is to make the internal contradictions in the theories apparent. This is best accomplished by deconstructing Bloom's most seminal work using the methods he helped to define.

In Bloom's manifesto, *The Anxiety of Influence,* he suggests that the correct strategy for reading a poet is first to identify the precursors from whom that writer borrows. Throughout the work, Bloom insists that what holds true of the poet also holds true of the critic. This is an invitation to analyze Bloom's relationship with his precursors. He acknowledges Freud and Nietzsche as precursors within the text, and dedicates the book to William Wimsatt, a key figure in New Criticism. By establishing how Bloom misreads these authors we should be able to come to a better understanding of *The Anxiety of Influence*.

Bloom refers directly to Nietzsche's "Von Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie fur das Leben" (The Use and Abuse of History) in the first chapter of *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom borrows the idea that the only knowledge gained by studying the history of mankind is an awareness of the infinite recurrence of being. Bloom deviates from Nietzsche by recognizing the impossibility of unlearning experience and disassociating oneself from history. Bloom does concede, however, that these are necessary illusions for the poet to maintain.

In order to explain this willful forgetting, Bloom is forced to borrow from Freud. According to Bloom's theory, studying great literature results in the heightened awareness in the contemporary writer that he is a "late-comer" and that the amount of imaginative space available continues to decrease as the millennium winds down. Bloom writes of "each poet's fear that no work remains for him to perform" (148). The anxiety that accompanies this realization must be repressed by the poet in order for any work to be done. Bloom uses Freud's theory of defense mechanisms to explain this willful forgetting as if the dynamics of writing within a tradition is similar to the dynamics of navigating through the typical Freudian "family romance." Just as the individual must redefine his relationship with his parents in order to develop as an individual, the poet has to redefine his relationship with his precursor poets as he moves through distinct phases in his career as poet.

Bloom breaks the process of becoming a powerful writer down into six discrete stages. The first stage of development for a poet is purposely to misread his precursors. Bloom terms this stage Clinamen. The late poet reads the earlier poem as if it were flawed and seeks to correct that error in his own work.

The second stage in a poet's development is to attempt completion of the "parent poem." Bloom terms this stage Tessera. In this stage of development the later poet comes to realize that his precursor's vision is incomplete. A poet in this stage attempts to synthesize a more complete poem by including material from the precursor's work and material antithetical to the original work.

The third stage in development is Kenosis or Discontinuity. After pursuing the antithesis long enough, the later poet breaks with his precursors by actively rejecting or emptying himself of their influence. This is accomplished by a partial journey down the *via negativa*. Unlike mystics, however, the poet seeks to negate everything except desire and ego. Bloom offers an alternative reading of Mythology that is worth quoting:

> The God of poets is not Apollo, who lives in the rhythm of recurrence, but the bald gnome Error, who lives at the back of a cave; and skulks forth only at irregular intervals to feast upon the mighty dead. (78)

The poetic imagination must define itself apart from the continuity of tradition by willfully perverse acts. As Bloom points out, however, the strong poet cannot conceive himself as perverse and must champion his vision as healthy. The tradition must be regarded as a reduction of what the poet identifies as primary reality. Once this has been accomplished, the poet becomes the only true prophet and can claim priority over his precursors, who are seen as having failed to achieve the true vision.

After defining the first three stages of poetic development, Bloom takes a pause to offer a manifesto for antithetical criticism. The argument runs that poetry can only be read in the context of influence. It is possible to read two poets critically, assuming that the later is a descendant of the prior, but impossible to read a poet in isolation. By identifying the "Clinamen," or correction, which occurs between the poets and adjusting for it, a critic can make an estimate of what the prior poem means. In effect, Bloom suggests that in order to understand Homer we should read Joyce, identify where Joyce misreads Homer and finally reread Homer in this context. This inversion of the typical treatment of issues of influence yields an illusion of priority to our own reading and invests the contemporary critic with power that traditional reading strategies deny him.

One aspect of the third stage of development, Kenosis, is that the poet identifies a truth denied to all of his precursors and rejects them on this basis. In the fourth step, Dæmonization, the poet becomes that truth personified and all else is literally void. As Stevens writes in "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," the poet is "the world in which [he] walks." To his credit, Bloom does not shy away from identifying this as solipsistic and admits the error. It is, however, a necessary error if the poet is to grow strong as a poet.

The fifth stage of development is Askesis or, to use the correct Freudian term, sublimation. After turning his dæmonic energies against his precursors, the poet turns that power on himself as a means of purgation. The aggression is directed inward and used as a means of transformation. This transformation is achieved at the expense of the Dæmon within the poet. Imaginative space is yielded in exchange for the full development of a poetic will, Bloom's counterpart to Freud's superego. This will is "harsher than conscience" (119) and capable of producing a poem in which "the center will hold better" (121).

The final stage in the development of the poet is Apophrades, the nights in which the dead return to reclaim their homes. In this stage of the poet's career, the precursors are again present but can only be read in terms defined by the later poet. The later poet has achieved priority in that his precursors can now only be read in relation to him. He has achieved the ultimate goal and engendered himself.

Having established Bloom's debt to Nietzsche, a philosopher, and Freud, a psychologist, we can now discuss Bloom's misreading of the literary critics who preceded him. By regarding William Wimsatt as the primary precursor we can attempt a more unified and complex reading of *The Anxiety of Influence*.

It is obvious that this text constitutes more than a swerve away from (Clinamen) or completion of New Criticism (Tessera). It is equally clear that

Bloom has not yet yielded identity to any impersonal "dæmonic" force. Thus we have established the text as an expression of Kenosis or willful perversion of a prior tradition.

Wimsatt becomes, in this context, a representative of aforementioned Apollonian rhythm of recurrence while Bloom is a disciple of Error and joins the bald gnome in the back of the cave gnawing the bones of heroes. New Criticism, in its insistence on universal meaning and public knowledge serves as representative of a tradition that values continuity and recurrence. The ideals of this school are unity and complexity rather than originality. In contrast, Bloom rejects the notion that meaning is static and that there can be any such thing as public knowledge. In Bloom's vision the meaning of a strong poem changes over time in response to subsequent strong poems. Each generation will misread the canon to suit its own needs.

By making the subject of *The Anxiety of Influence* intention, Bloom commits a cardinal sin as far as the New Critics are concerned. Wimsatt takes it to be axiomatic that the intentions of the author are unavailable and that critical inquiry must be limited to the text. Bloom goes so far as to argue the exact antithesis, maintaining that the text is a literal representation of the author's anxiety, and therefore the only true subject of criticism is intention.

Another critical axiom of New Criticism is the division of public knowledge from private knowledge. Public knowledge is universal while private knowledge is idiosyncratic. Once again Bloom asserts a diametrically opposed position by insisting that a reading is always an idiosyncratic misreading. There can be no such thing as universal meaning if each strong poem redefines the entire tradition. At this point in the argument, a contradiction becomes evident. If there is no such thing as universal truth, how can *The Anxiety of Influence* have any authority as a manifesto? Bloom would suggest that his position as a "strong critic" is all the authority that he needs, but this is a circular argument. In effect, Bloom is arguing that as a strong critic he has the authority to claim importance within the tradition.

The next universal truth that Bloom rejects is the idea that a work must be evaluated without regard to its effect on a reader. In his essay, "The Affective Fallacy," Wimsatt suggests that a reader must be assumed to have a "normative response," and so the idiosyncrasies of individual readers can be disregarded. Antithetical criticism holds that the only way to read a text is to read another author who has read the text and to correct that author's misreading. In order to accomplish this feat, it is necessary to evaluate the psychic development of the second author and apply Bloom's theories of misprision in reverse.

As an example, one way to understand *The Anxiety of Influence* is to reflect on this paper and determine where I stand in relation to Bloom. Obviously I am not swerving from what I see as essentially true nor completing a fundamentally sound but incomplete work, so we can disregard Clinamen and Tessera. I know that I have not entered the realm of Askesis, having not yet directed my aggression inward to improve my character. By process of elimination, we are left with Kenosis and Dæmonization. I'll leave it to you whether I am just being perverse in order to preserve my individuality through discontinuity or whether I believe myself to be a personification of a dæmonic force. If I am in Kenosis, Bloom's theory is validated to the degree that I reject its arguments. Assuming I'm a dæmon, we need to identify the spirit that has possessed me. Am I the eternal poet, eternal critic, the fool, or magician? If I have reached this stage of development, those recurrent forms should be unavailable to me (though I may appropriate their names). Having disqualified the universal, we are left with the idiosyncratic and you, as reader, are left no better off than when you started. Reading Bloom through me is only possible to the degree that you can catalogue my idiosyncrasies and even then you will be forced to misread me to preserve your own power as critics.

The final stage in this exercise in antithetical criticism is to attempt to reread Wimsatt within the context of Bloom's theories. Once we have rejected both the idea of discontinuity for its own sake and the illusion of priority, we are left with a powerful challenge to Wimsatt's primary axiom. Bloom's assertion that two is the minimum number of poems that can be discussed is a seductive argument. The New Critics suggest something similar when they maintain that a discussion needs to take into account the text itself and public knowledge. But Wimsatt's public knowledge is too static to engender a vital tradition and is comprised primarily of his own cultural conventions. Bloom identifies public knowledge with Shelley's "one Great Poem which mankind is perpetually creating" and accepts the limits that this implies. As students of language and poetry, we need to recognize that both change over time in response to stimuli outside the scope of traditional literary studies. The change in women's roles, the recognition of different cultures, and the changes in our physical environment all modify the context in which we read poems.

By his own definitions, Bloom's audience necessarily falls into two classes, weak and strong critics. Weak critics are subject to the pleasure principle and love recurrence and repetition. Because Bloom champions originality, even if perverse, over continuity, a weak critic following his example will paradoxically celebrate discontinuity. Stranger still is the case of the strong critic who will

necessarily have to champion continuity in order to be discontinuous. He will have to reject Bloom in order to share Bloom's vision. On that side of the looking glass, criticism no longer serves truth, beauty, art, or even itself. Criticism becomes an endless series of reversals that result in nothing, except perhaps doctoral dissertations. Antithetical criticism requires that a work can only be read in the context of its descendants, and as Bloom's descendants, we owe it to ourselves to disagree with him as vehemently as possible, if for no other reason than to maintain our own power as critics.

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Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again:

Toward an Independent Sexuality for Women

Betsy Kraat

> Sex hasn't been the same since women started enjoying it.
> —Lewis Grizzard

It is hard not to laugh at such a statement, both because it is absurd and because, for some men, it is true. (The truth of the statement for women, however, is open to debate.) At the risk of sounding humorless, I would have to argue that such a statement points to a fundamental contradiction in contemporary American opinion—the assumption that the existence of women is not fundamentally different from that of contemporary men, even in the bedroom. As my students point out to me on a regular basis, what are women still whining about? Women are now hired for the same jobs as men are now; they don't have to stay home and raise the kids unless they want to; women are entitled to orgasms and dental plans; the most successful entertainer in the world is a woman (and she's black, too); there are women in executive positions in every business and academic field. Shouldn't all this be enough? Despite how the editors of *Mademoiselle* and *New Woman* spin such tales of success and triumph, the situation of the twentieth-century woman, while improved in some ways, has worsened in others. Women's sexuality, for example, remains a vastly controversial topic.

Recent events at my university speak to this. A women's studies conference, "Revolting Behavior," attracted national attention when the board of trustees discovered that the day-long conference included several sexually explicit workshops on various topics, among them the use of sex toys and safe and consensual S&M. Our president has been publicly chided by the SUNY Chancellor, and several trustees have called for his resignation. Governor George Pataki has added his voice to the throng, calling for closer supervision of such conferences to ensure that taxpayers do not foot the bill for the endeavors of perverts within the academy. It seems that women's sexual pleasure, when removed from the sphere of male erotic desire, is dangerous and subversive. This idea is neither new nor unique but pivotal when considering the history of sexuality.

Michel Foucault's series *The History of Sexuality Volumes I-III* provides a historical and social context for the act itself, as well as for the prohibitions surrounding sex and the politico-socioeconomic factors that have affected those

prohibitions. He analyzes our arrival at the current relationship of power to sexuality and hypothesizes why and how perceptions of sex have shifted throughout history. Foucault's work, if slightly exclusive, is certainly invaluable to anyone interested in sexuality as a product of historical and political forces.

In his essay "We 'Other Victorians'" (*History of Sexuality Volume I*), Michel Foucault asks:

> But have we not liberated ourselves from those two long centuries in which the history of sexuality must be seen first of all as the chronicle of an increasing repression? Only to a slight extent....We are informed that if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost... (5)

Foucault, it would seem, does not agree with the function of sexual repression as seen by classical philosophy. That 'fundamental link' Foucault describes is what distinguishes his theory of power and 'repression' from others in the field. In "The Deployment of Sexuality" (*History of Sexuality Volume I*), he writes:

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization...thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and ...[whose] crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (92)

In my paper I intend to explore Foucault's theories on repression, to question the possibility of liberation, to hypothesize possible sites for revolution (i.e., disruption of the public/private binary opposition), and to critique the way sex has been historicized or, as Foucault puts it, "the way in which sex is put into discourse." I also intend to compare Foucault's theories to those of Althusser, Irigaray and Wittig, and examine the ramifications these theories have on woman-as-subject.

Sex as text has "historically" stood for more than the sum of its parts. If what Foucault claims is indeed true—if sexual repression is a not a chronological phenomenon but a spatial one—then "overcoming" repression cannot be achieved through current modes of opposition, at least, not by these modes alone. Repression, although it does exist in a historical context, does not seem to be a product of history. It seems that sexual repression, rather than an unfortunate side-effect of the patriarchal power structure, creates and promotes the systems of power instead of the opposite—a widely accepted belief challenged.

Foucault employs a devious and deceptive strategy in his argument; he mim-

ics the opposition's argument. He does not name the theorists he argues against but encapsulates their ideas in what he calls "the juridico-discursive model." Foucault writes that

> ...we will not be able to free ourselves from [repression] except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required. (5)

According to Louis Althusser, repression is a function of ideology, and most Ideological State Apparati cannot be undone by simple means, if at all. By definition, an ISA is the foundation of the power structure; therefore, removal of an ISA first requires demolition of the structure above. Is it possible for this structure to be dismantled, or, more importantly, is it possible for the subject to live outside of the power structure? According to Althusser, the answer would be no:

> In every case, the ideology of ideology thus recognizes, despite its imaginary distortion, that the 'ideas' of a human subject exist in his actions...This ideology talks of actions: I shall talk of actions inserted into *practices*. *And* I shall point out that these practices are governed by the rituals in which these practices are inscribed, *within the material existence of an ideological apparatus...* (243)

Ideas are imaginary. Ideology is real. There is no possibility of life outside of ideology or agency within it, because our 'ideas' are not our own but rather a superimposition of an ideological practice. Therefore, the subject of sexual repression cannot obtain freedom simply by discussing his/her repression. Because repression is a result of the dominant ideology, the subject is created by repression; this repression is not merely part of the subject's consciousness. Althusser's ideas about ideology's pervasiveness are similar to Foucault's ideas regarding the institution of power, but this is where the similarities end.

According to the "juridico-discursive model," "power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two non-existences.... Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification" (84). In other words, the dialectic of sex gives its subject two choices: to acquiesce to the dialectic, or deny the dialectic. If the subject acquiesces, s/he is consenting to repression; but if s/he does not consent, s/he disappears.

Foucault would argue that, on the contrary, power does not prohibit but instead *perpetuates* "deviant" sexual practices with repressive ideology. Repression, by making a practice "deviant," ensures repetition of the practice and therefore *affirms and perpetuates* its own existence, as well as the existence of

the deviant practice, for repression cannot exist if there is nothing to repress. Therefore, power's relationship with the subject is not paradoxical at all. The subject can escape sexual repression if power is eradicated, but power can never be eradicated, so repression holds fast.

Foucault's own theories on the creation and sustenance of power are too complex and varied to explore completely here. It is necessary, however, to understand some rudiments of Foucault's arguments. It is important to know that Foucault sees power as all pervasive and invisible, everywhere and nowhere, and most importantly, one can never exist outside of power:

> Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations) but are immanent in the latter...relations of power are not in super-structural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a *directly* productive role, whenever they come into play. (94)

Therefore, we see that power does not prohibit or suppress, but rather enables and creates. A Marxist 'transgression of laws' is impossible, because this would imply a hierarchy where Foucault sees none. While many feminists have argued that Foucault's vision of power is damaging to women, it is ironically Foucault's vision that allows the most possibility for agency.

Although I would not claim that men's sexuality has been free from oppression, it is erroneous and false to assert that ideology affects both men and women equally. As Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex:* "Even if the need [for the other] is at bottom equally urgent for both, it always works in favor of the oppressor and against the oppressed" (72).

It is unnecessary to illuminate the oppression of women as *de rigeur,* so I will limit what I say here for brevity's sake. As a repressed subject, woman has been oppressed not only by the ideology of the power structure but by the patriarchy as well. It could be said that the power structure and the patriarchy are one and the same, but we still need to differentiate between men and women as repressed subjects. Nancy Hartsock elaborates on this idea of multiplicity:

> Put differently, we need to dissolve the false "we" I have been using into its real multiplicity and variety and out of this concrete multiplicity build an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the center. (171)

One of the reasons why Foucault's theories do not work especially well for those exploring the construction of women's sexuality is that one needs to con-

sider the margins as well as the center, since women in many traditions have been defined by their position with respect to men. When theorizing the repressed subject, it is as important if not more important to examine the location of the repressed (instead of the center).

Privilege—power—is created through these binary oppositions. Consider the following list:

MALE—FEMALE
LIGHT—DARKNESS
GOOD—EVIL
STASIS—FLUX

We could continue this list *ad infinitum,* but the point I wish to make is this: In a binary system, one variable will always be at the "center," and one variable will always be marginalized. It is this marginalized variable Lacan comes to know as the "Other." However impossible it may seem, "we must produce a political transformation of key concepts, that is of the concepts which are strategic for us…"(Wittig 30). Such "transformation" would include a fragmentation, a disruption of binary oppositions as they now exist. In this list, we can easily see which column is the oppressed one: female, darkness, evil, flux. Albert Memmi in his work *The Colonizer and the Colonized* observes that

> …the Other is always seen as "Not," as a lack, a void, lacking in the valued qualities of the society, whatever those qualities may be. Second, the humanity of the Other becomes "opaque." Colonizers can frequently be heard making statements such as "you never know what they think. *Do* they think?"…Third, the Others are not seen as fellow individual members of the human community, but rather as part of a chaotic, disorganized, and anonymous collectivity… (83, 85)

We can say that woman as "Other" assumes all of the qualities of "Other" as outlined by Memmi above, neither human nor individual—an essential lack. This leaves women's sexuality, and many other aspects of femininity, curiously vague and open for speculation. Because the Other is not individual, the possibility of individual sexuality or individual experience is eliminated, i.e., what is true for one must be true for all. For the Other is not individual; it is collective, and its presence gives the Individual, the Agent, its power. Monique Wittig claims that "supposedly 'subjective,' 'individual,' 'private' problems are in fact social problems, class problems; that sexuality is not for women an individual and subjective expression, but a social institution of violence" (19).

Consider this: in a system of binary oppositions, one element is "central" or

"traditional" and the other element is "marginalized." In this sort of spatial rela-
tionship, both positions rely on a consequent, proximate component.
Nevertheless, the values assumed by either component are not proximate,
regardless of their relationship. What is ironic about such oppositions is their
polarity. It perhaps goes without saying that light cannot exist without dark,
good cannot exist without evil, and so on. Both qualities in an opposition
assume characteristics based on their antithesis, simultaneously filling in blank
spaces while creating a space for the other to exist.

Foucault blames the binarization of sex on a Marxist economy:

> For was this the transformation of sex into discourse not governed by the
> endeavor to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable
> to the strict economy of reproduction: to say no to unproductive activities, to
> banish casual pleasures, to reduce or exclude practices whose object was not
> procreation? (36)

A most unfortunate occurrence, as many non-procreative practices provide
more diversion than the procreative ones. But what are these gratuitous prac-
tices in the economy of pleasure that Foucault presents? Any act that does not
result in reproduction. Therefore, we can assume that all sex other than penis-
vagina intercourse is "banished"—including (but not limited to) masturbation,
oral and anal sex, and any form of homosexuality. Foucault explores the latter in
The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure, focusing specifically on
the ancient Greek practice of pederasty. Foucault's exclusion of feminine sexual-
ity seems to indicate that because women are included in the heterosexual
procreative sex act, they are included in the narrow boundaries of acceptable
pleasure.

But I would argue that this is not the case. Although women's vaginal sexual-
ity is affirmed, their clitoral sexuality is denied. The clitoris has no economic
value the way the penis does; the clitoris does not ejaculate or play any signifi-
cant role in the procreative process. (Recent studies may indicate otherwise;
however, we shall assume at this moment that the clitoris is not involved in
reproduction.) The clitoris does not make babies as the vagina, ovaries, and
uterus collectively do; therefore, the vagina, uterus and ovaries have economic
value. Women's pleasure—women's orgasms—has been adversely affected by
this "transformation" of sex into discourse, whereas men's orgasms have not.
Women's orgasms have been written out, as it were.

To understand the reproductive values of sex, we must accept Foucault's
juridico-discursive model—sexual repression has been a dominant force in the
shaping of Euro/American culture for the past two hundred years—is a valid
one. There is one prevalent Marxist argument in the many that Foucault puts

forth: "...sex is so rigorously repressed...because it is incompatible with a general and intensive work ethic" (6). Sexual repression, in this sense, is economic. But it is not so simple that we can even use words such as "permit" or "encourage," because such words imply agency. According to theorists such as Althusser and perhaps Foucault, the subject, located inside of ideology, has no agency.

Hartsock reminds us that Foucault rarely addresses problems encountered by repressed groups such as women, who are "victims" of systematic, ideological repression, preferring to focus on the mechanics of power rather than the effects of those same mechanics: "Foucault's is a world in which *things* move, rather than people, a world in which subjects become obliterated or, rather, recreated as passive objects, a world in which passivity or refusal represent the only possible choices" (167).

And perhaps this is true. This has been one of feminism's problems with Foucault. As a theorist in the dominator's position, it is not explicitly in Foucault's interest to find agency for the dominated. Nancy Hartsock writes:

> First, despite his obvious sympathy for those who are subjugated in various ways, he writes from the perspective of the dominator...Second,...systematically unequal relations of power ultimately vanish from Foucault's account of power—a strange and ironic charge to make against someone who is attempting to illuminate power relations. (165)

It is apparent that however noble Foucault's aspirations are on paper, he does not supply us with the means for revolution. But the answer to Foucault's proposition, the way to forge this "whole new economy" Foucault envisions, lies in a subversion of the binary system.

Psychoanalytic theorist Luce Irigaray states that

> ...the nothing of sex, the not of sex, will be borne by woman....What fault, deficiency, theft, rape, rejection, repression, censorship, of representations of her sexuality bring about such a subjection to man's desire-discourse-law about her sex? Such an atrophy of her libido? Which will never be admissible, envisionable, except insofar as it props up male desire. (53)

Woman—the blank space which "props up male desire." There is no female sexuality without male sexuality. Women are created as sexual subjects through the lens of male desire. According to feminist theorists like Wittig and Irigaray, male desire is presented as monolithic, free, and independent of female desire. Female desire, conversely, does not exist in the absence of male desire. Wittig writes than women are defined by their sexual function: "The category of sex is the product of heterosexual society that turns half of the population into sexual beings, for sex is a category which women cannot exist outside of" (7). According

to these feminists, women's sexuality is a paradox: Women do not exist except through their sexual servitude; however, women do not have a feminine sexuality, that is, a sexuality that exists independently. One does not find evidence of an independent female sexuality among Foucault's musings. And indeed, to search for one is a pointless exercise. Is it, then, possible to resolve the rift between female and male sexuality? Foucault would say no; I say that the answer lies in the potential disruption of the public/private opposition.

In the binary opposition of *public/private*, *public* is the privileged term, and *private* the marginalized one. The public world is controlled by men for the most part, and women are restricted to the private world. Is it that sex itself belongs to the private sphere, or that only women's sexuality belongs there? It is hard to say where women's sexuality belongs, since we are not even sure if it exists, and if it does, it is certainly not where we can see it.

What is it that privileges the public world over the private one? Nothing inherent, but rather the *institutions of power* that make the public sphere what it is—the government, the media, and the academy shape the dominant ideology. It is rare for an individual to find a voice outside of one of these institutions, however. The private sphere is "soft," feminine, nebulous, without written law (notice I did not say "without law"), and oppressed. The public is the oppressor.

Historically, the private sphere has been woman's domain—home and hearth, the rearing of children, nursing, and death rituals. In short, women have been responsible for cleaning up the mess our humanity causes. Notably absent from these human functions assigned to the private sphere is sex. The responsibility surrounding reproduction has been woman's duty, but the sex act *per se* has not.

Popular representations of sex are (and have been) predominantly male-oriented, presenting women's bodies and desires for men's consumption as one might package an assortment of chocolates for purchase. But I do not wish to digress here. The point I wish to make is that male sexuality has been revered by the public—consider "peep" shows, "skin flicks," and "girlie" magazines—while female sexuality has been hidden, gagged, and erased. Because there is no place for female sexuality in our dominant institutions, it effectively does not exist. It should be included here that the public representations of sex I have mentioned are not the sole possibilities for male sexuality. But our perception of sexuality is guilt-ridden and reductive, and while the dominant ideology does not allow women a sexuality other than that of object of male desire, men are not permitted any sexual alternative to that of the macho and selfish pillager.

Therefore, by disrupting this opposition of *public* and *private*, we would hope to find a voice in an institution in order to create a sexual existence. Although

we cannot seize power, it is possible to infiltrate the structure and exploit those in power. The first step to overcoming sexual repression is introducing women-centered depictions of sexuality in our public institutions. As the response to the "Revolting Behavior" conference tells us, we cannot expect to receive much support from the oppressors. But at least we can tell the voices have been heard. Such conferences are critical in establishing a forum for marginalized points of view. It is ironic that such a conference indicates only a paradigm shift, if that, and not an end to the power structure.

It is difficult to know how women-centered desire would look if I saw it. It is obviously not the flip side of the "Playboy" coin—an oiled and muscular man in a thong does not equal an oiled and buxom woman in a bikini. The "equivalent" to topless bars, such as Chippendales, seems to cause more giggling than arousal, although I am loath to proclaim what women do and do not find stimulating. Women's sexuality has been disguised for so long that a "feminine" sexuality seems impossible to represent.

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Koestler's *The Act of Creation*:

Shop Manual or Road Atlas?

Jason Taylor

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Most people know Arthur Koestler for *Darkness at Noon*, his chilling portrayal of Stalinist Russia. What many people don't know is that Koestler also published widely in both psychology and biology. In 1964, he published *The Act of Creation*, an attempt at developing an all-encompassing theory of human creativity and discovery. The work has developed something of a cult following and is the only Koestler title other than *Darkness at Noon* that is currently in print. Although Koestler's work is somewhat out of the mainstream of twentieth-century literary theory, W.K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks thought highly enough of it to include excerpts in their *Literary Criticism: A Short History*.

I confess that I find the idea of a single theory that explains all of human creativity to be very seductive, so I wanted to see just how useful Koestler's ideas are to a student of literature. I found that the work successfully unifies the various types of creation (scientific, comic, and artistic) into a single model which offers an elegant explanation for the mechanism of creativity and its physiological roots. Koestler provides a useful set of tools that allows us to consider and interpret any given work of creation. If it is to function as a unified theory of art, however, he must also provide the criteria by which these works and their creators are to be evaluated. It is in this respect that *The Act of Creation* becomes problematic.

A "quick summary" of Koestler's arguments would be impossible; the work is simply too broad and complex. Instead, I will review two crucial concepts and proceed to examine just those portions of *The Act of Creation* which can be said to comprise a theory of art.

The fundamental notion upon which the work hinges is "bisociation." Koestler coins this term to mean "perceiving a situation in two habitually incompatible associative contexts… [which] causes an abrupt transfer of thought from one matrix to another governed by a different logic" (95). Although Koestler begins by showing that this process provides the underlying mechanism for comedy, the concept may be easiest to grasp in terms of the familiar chestnut about Archimedes. The famous Greek mathematician had been unable to calculate the volume of a complex solid (Hiero's golden crown)

until, watching the water level change as he sat in the bathtub, he suddenly realized the principle of the displacement of water, saw a way to solve his problem, and was inspired to run naked through the streets exclaiming "Eureka!" Puzzling over the geometry of the crown is one "associative context"—what Koestler calls a matrix—and the routine of taking a bath is another. The mental flash that bridges the two is an act of bisociation.

The second essential concept is Koestler's assertion that *all* forms of creativity—whether in science, comedy, or art—are driven by this mechanism of bisociation. The scientific "moment of truth" that inspired Archimedes came about by *integrating* two conflicting matrices. Laughter, similarly, is sparked off by the *collision* of matrices. And æsthetic experience in the arts results from the *juxtaposition* of matrices (305). Koestler provides hundreds of examples which support this structure and traces his concepts back to both unconscious and biological systems. This portion of his theory is both convincing and useful. For one thing, it provides a handy tool for understanding comedy. When comedian Paula Poundstone delivers the one-liner "I don't have any kids—that I know about" we laugh at the bisociation of a statement typical of a philandering male with our image of what a woman has to go through in childbirth. Poundstone forces us to consider these two conflicting frames of reference simultaneously, which—in Koestlerian terms—creates a sort of "explosion" that must be discharged through laughter.

Here, Koestler's theory feels intuitively valid, making it easy to accept his complex assertion that the mechanism of bisociation has roots both in the unconscious mind and in human physiology. In fact, I suspect that the process of bisociation is at work in many situations that go beyond the scope of Koestler's inquiry. In politics, for example, it seems that the matrix of associations that many people have with the concept "First Lady" is in conflict with the image of a smart lawyer who has made successful financial investments. Similarly, there seems to a be a conflict between the "Presidential" matrix and the notion of a young intellectual who would logically have been against armed conflict in Vietnam and may have experimented with marijuana. Koestler maintains that the collision of conflicting matrices will produce laughter; in these cases, it seems to produce conflict and controversy.

The mechanism of bisociation seems also to be at work in situations that simply produce a sensation of delight, many of which have little to do with the creative endeavors outlined by Koestler. The sensation of being newly in love, for example, can be viewed as a bisociation of an individual's habitual matrix of romance with a set of fresh and surprising qualities that make up the character

of the new partner. A well-prepared meal or dish can easily be viewed in bisocia-
tive terms as well. I remember having an orange soup at a restaurant in Mount
Tremper several years ago that perfectly integrated my matrix of "hot soup" with
my associations of "citrus taste." The recipe, clearly, was creative, but is this
integration really an example of scientific discovery?

In what may be an effort to address questions like this, Koestler extends his
theory to outline the conditions that tend to produce creative invention and
develop a model for the nature of æsthetic experience. First, he examines situa-
tions that have produced major creative breakthroughs. Using Archimedes,
Gutenberg, Kepler, Newton, Darwin and Einstein as examples, Koestler con-
cludes that most discoveries are made when the conscious mind was blocked "in
vacant or in pensive mood." At this point, he proposes, the mind retreats—or
regresses—so as to get a better start for the bisociative jump that will be required
to solve the problem. Koestler describes this process with the French phrase
reculer pour mieux sauter ("to retreat for a better jump").[1] This model may
indeed be valid for imaginative endeavors that have shaped the course of his-
tory—what we tend to call "genius"—but is it really likely that a chef needs to
free his mind from the limiting constraints of conventional knowledge and lan-
guage in order to come up with an orange soup?[2]

Having put forth a model for creative inspiration, *The Act of Creation* goes on
to describe the ways in which people respond to creativity—what he calls
æsthetic experience. Here, it is helpful to touch briefly on Koestler's classifica-
t   i   o   n
of human emotions into two categories: "self-assertive" and "self- transcending."
Emotions of the self-assertive type, he maintains, are based on the sympathico-
adrenal system and thus involve actual bodily changes. Koestler considers these
emotions, which include aggression, self-defense, rage, fear, hostility and appre-
hension, to be an essential element of anything that produces a comic effect.[3]
Similarly, the theory proposes, there is a self-assertive component to anything
that provides intellectual illumination.

The other class of human emotions is "self-transcending," defined by Koestler
as that which "may cause a welling up of joyous or sad emotions, which moisten
the eye or overflow in tears" (54). He lists situations of compassion, bereave-
ment, love or feeling in a "state of grace" as prompting self-transcending
emotions such as sympathy, identification, pity, admiration, awe and wonder. In
each case, Koestler notes a feeling of participation or belonging:

> The common denominator of these heterogeneous emotions is a feeling of
> participation, identification or belonging; in other words, the self is experi-
> enced as being *part of a larger whole*, a higher unity which may be Nature,

> God, Mankind, Universal Order or the *Anima Mundi*. (54)

Using these two classes of emotion, Koestler portrays the æsthetic experience as being a sort of "one-two" punch. First, there must be a component of *intellectual illumination* in which bisociation allows one to see something familiar in a new light. This moment of discovery—driven, at some level, by self-assertion—is followed by *emotional catharsis* which involves "the rise, expansion and ebbing away of the self-transcending emotions" (304). In straightforward applications, this model seems valid. When the chorus in the opening lines of *Henry V* asks,

> ...can this cockpit hold
> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt? (11-14)

it is fundamentally an invitation for the audience to bisociate its knowledge that the players are actors on a stage with the illusionary premises of Shakespeare's plot. Having thus suspended disbelief, we can allow the tale to engage our sympathies and release our self-transcending, or "participatory" emotions through catharsis. This model has been around since Aristotle's *Poetics* and is hardly controversial. Koestler successfully extends the model to the visual arts, neatly including even the most abstract creations through his discussion of "Motif and Medium," which asserts that there is no such thing as non-representational art (375-376).

All of the above elements of *The Act of Creation* deal with the mechanism of creativity; we have a model for the source of creative inspiration and a model for how people respond to creative works. What we haven't yet addressed, however, is the means by which these works are to be evaluated. How do we tell the good art from the bad? How do we recognize true innovation? Koestler bravely attempts to construct a framework for the evaluation of all creation, but his argument becomes too complicated—and, ultimately, less useful—in the process. In the briefest possible terms, Koestler demands that successful creation be both original and significant. He describes originality as follows:

> The originality of genius...consists in shifts of attention to aspects previously
> ignored; in seeing appearances in a new light; in discovering new relations
> and correspondences between motif and medium. (392)

On a personal level, I find these criteria to be valid. It explains, for example, why I find more recent male-oriented, tight-trousered, big-haired, guitar-rock bands to be a tedious rehashing of forms that Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones perfected twenty years ago. Similarly, it provides a rationale for my expe-

rience that a Robert Altman film is vastly more rewarding than the latest *Lethal Weapon* sequel. However, I can't help but feel that Koestler begs the questions: "previously ignored" by whom? "In a new light" for whom? And "new relations" for whom? In other words, doesn't he imply that art can be successful as long as it is fresh and original for any one person? Can we not, therefore, imagine a situation in which a line of verse on a greeting card at Ames can be just as creative for one reader as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is for another?

Adding Koestler's concept of the significance of a work into the mix helps a little. In his terms, successful art "can happen only if the matrix which provides the 'new light' has a higher emotive potential or 'calorie value;' in other words, the two matrices must lie on an *ascending gradient*" (383). Koestler's builds a continuum of "emotive potentials" based on the capacity of a particular matrix to "generate and satisfy participatory emotions" (321). At the bottom of this hierarchy are simple sensory perceptions (sight, sound, smell, touch) which, Koestler admits, work differently for different individuals. The matrices with the highest emotive potential, he asserts, are those rooted in some archetypal motif[4] which recalls "the deep layers of the 'collective unconscious' below the level of personal memories" (353). I suppose Koestler would tell us that the Ames greeting card is unlikely to tap into Jung's "psychic residua of numberless experiences" (353) and thus has less emotive potential than Eliot's verse.

Koestler offers some additional thoughts on originality that are worth exploring. An artist, he asserts, can react to "the stagnation of the commonplace" (336) in one of two ways. The first approach is simply to increase the level of emphasis, offering "spicier fare for jaded appetites" (337). One has but to look at the escalation of sex and violence in movies and on television to bear this out. Much of what was considered scandalous and subject to censorship when Koestler was writing in 1964 is now thought to be laughably tame; *Midnight Cowboy* was rated "X" when it was released almost thirty years ago, but would easily earn an "R" rating by the standards of today's "jaded appetites." The other option for an artist is to employ the technique of "infolding," by which the work is made more implicit and with greater economy. Broadly speaking, this is similar to the technique of "showing" rather than "telling" as defined by Wayne C. Booth and others. In Koestler's words:

> The intention is not to obscure the message but to make it more luminous by compelling the recipient to work it out by himself—to recreate it. Hence the message must be handed to him in implied form—and implied means 'folded in.' To make it unfold, he must fill in the gaps, complete the hint, see through the symbolic disguise. (338)

Koestler goes on to note that with the passing of time, the audience starts to learn all the tricks, forcing the artist to make the work more tightly "folded." The logical example is James Joyce. The average reader has to work hard to begin to figure out *Ulysses*, and when she does, it can be intensely rewarding. *Finnegan's Wake*, on the other hand, is so charged with allusions and implications that many readers find it incomprehensible. Koestler does concede that "if the infolding technique is pushed too far, obscurity results" (339). but he does not allow for the fact that what is too far for one person could easily be not far enough for another.[5] Once again we see the specter of relativism and have to allow for the person who is moved to tears by the æsthetic beauty of the greeting cards at Ames.

On balance, it seems that the problem with Koestler's system of evaluating the arts is analogous to Elder Olson's critique of William Empson:

> Now it is impossible to have a single art, science or discipline unless some homogeneity can be found in the subject matter; and criticism was thus faced with the impossible task of finding homogeneity among heterogeneous things: that is, of finding a common principle among things that had no common principle, and of finding a single definition that should state the common nature of things that had no common nature. (37)

Koestler spends a lot of time establishing and explaining the common principle that he finds behind the mechanism of creativity, but it doesn't necessarily follow that all of the products of creation can be explained by similar common principles.

So where does that leave us? *The Act of Creation* is certainly a remarkable work of scholarship, and its explanations for the mechanisms behind creativity are consistently useful. When it comes time to evaluate a particular work, however, Koestler's model is lacking. Ultimately, he has provided us with a shop manual for the engine of creativity—we know the principle of internal combustion, and we know how to change the oil and gap the spark plugs. These skills are certainly useful for any student of literature and critical theory. The universe of artistic creation, however, is vast and complicated; so a unified theory of art must function as a road atlas that will enable the critic to navigate from one area of inquiry to another. *The Act of Creation* tells us how to get the car running, but we still don't know whether to turn left or right at the end of the driveway.

NOTES

1. Given Koestler's understandably dim view of communism, it is hardly surprising that he chooses to illustrate this point with a French idiom, and not with reference to Chairman Mao's "Sometimes it is necessary to take one step

backwards in order to take two steps forward."

2. This drastically over-simplifies Koestler's case. He offers a theory of hierarchies—"partness" and "wholeness"—which extends his discussion of "saturation" as a prerequisite for inspiration to cover both the individual and society at large. This provides a particularly elegant explanation for the simultaneous development of theories of evolution by Darwin and Wallace, among other things.

3. The implication that all humor has a nasty, aggressive side is troubling, but difficult to refute. Where is there an example of comedy that does not either assert the superiority of the humorist or allow the audience to assert itself? I suppose children laugh while watching "Barney," a program which is supposed to be sanitized of anything malicious or confrontational. Even there, however, I wouldn't be surprised to find some sublimated aggression.

4. The importance Koestler places on archetype is just one of several parallels between *The Act of Creation* and the work of Northrop Frye. Frye's notions of tragedy-as-isolation and comedy-as-integration are very much like Koestler's distinction between self-assertive (isolating) emotions and self-transcendent (integrating) emotions.

5. My own Joyce professor admitted that whereas he once felt that *Ulysses* magically captured the actual processes of human thought, he now finds it somewhat obvious. In order to preserve the richness of the æsthetic experience, he craves the complexities of the *Wake*.

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They Shoot Critics, Don't They?:

Barthes, Foucault, and the Birth
of Postmodern Criticism

Christopher Hartley

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The 1960s were witness to many literary passings: 1961 brought the death of Ernest Hemingway; 1965 saw the demise of Thomas Stearns Eliot; 1964 was the year in which Flannery O'Connor shuffled off her mortal coil, still young and in the full bloom of her talent. More significant than any of these losses, perhaps, was the death, in 1968, of the Author. Oh, it's true that people had pronounced the Author's decline and death for years, but there was never any certainty about the matter, no official documents or eyewitness reports of the tragedy. Until 1968, that is. That was the year in which Roland Barthes published his essay, "The Death of the Author," thereby ending the years of rumor mongering and speculation and satisfying the issue once and for all. And after that, everything changed.

But perhaps I am getting ahead of myself.

For also in 1968, Michel Foucault was kind enough to eulogize the deceased in the form of his essay, "What is an Author?" Foucault's question is a good one to ask, especially if we are ever to understand the importance of the death of the Author or gauge its impact on current literary criticism. Foucault begins his essay by seemingly reassuring us that he is here not to bury the Author but to praise him:

> Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scansions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work. (101)

This seems very high praise, indeed, and those of us who might have cause to resist the death of the Author, who believe there is still some life in the old boy yet, can be excused for finding ourselves rallied by these words. Maybe this Foucault isn't such a bad fellow, after all. Of course, Marc Antony seemed like a stand-up guy, too, and look how *that* eulogy turned out.

For soon after this passage, Foucault confronts us with a quotation from Beckett which sets the tone for the rest of the essay: "'What does it matter who

is speaking,' someone said, 'what does it matter who is speaking'" (101). The answer may seem self-evident to some of us, but we'll play along anyway. More than one literary critic has naively proceeded under the notion that the Author, the one who is speaking, matters because it is the Author who is responsible for the text and is the arbiter of its essential meaning.

Not so, says Foucault, for two of the assumptions made by such critics have been proven false by modern times: namely, that of writing as a means of self-expression and writing as a means of immortality. Building upon the linguistic structuralism of Saussure, Foucault suggests that, rather than point outside the text and qualify some aspect of the real, a text can only ever point inward, the meaning of each word predicated on those words which surround it. And since each word means nothing in and of itself but can only exist in its own unfolding meaning, its "exteriority," writing becomes "a question of creating a space into which the writing subject [the Author] constantly disappears" (102).

As far as our other misconception, this notion of immortality through writing, Foucault suggests that if this was ever the case, it is certainly not so now. We are no longer the heroes of Greek epic but find, instead, "effacement": through literary contrivance and the anonymity this causes, we disappear within the text, we "assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing" (103). There is no Tomb of the Unknown Author, after all, no way of memorializing someone who does not exist, who may never have existed at all.

But wait, what does Foucault mean when he says that the Author, the writing subject/subject writing, disappears? Isn't the Author there in every word, in the very construction of the text; if nowhere else, does not the Author at least exist on the title page? And even if an author is anonymous, like those early scribes eking out verse during the Middle Ages (the "Gawain poet" for example), does that mean this unknown man or woman cannot be discerned through a certain mode of expression, a continuity of thought and language that would lead us to group one text with another as belonging to a common hand?

In light of all these questions, let us at least be thankful that we are dealing with Foucault, who has gone to the enormous trouble of anticipating these qualms of ours and who is ready to assure us that things are not quite as clear as we might at first believe them to be. For one cannot even speak of the name of the Author, a liberty we might have taken for granted were Foucault not here to tell us better, without first considering that the name of the author, because it is a *proper name*, can never operate as a "pure and simple reference"; instead, it is "the equivalent of a description," which encompasses all the associations that are suggested by a single human being (105-06). The name of an author is even more complex and problematic than an ordinary proper name, though, because,

among its other duties, it also occupies a special place in discourse in that it acts as a classifying element:

> It would seem that the author's name…does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being. (107)

What is the function of the author then, if the disappearance of authors within their own works seems to be so necessary and irreducible, as authors become mere guardians of their texts in the same way that gargoyles perch atop hospitals and churches and become a part of the edifice?

Foucault's answer to this question comes in the form of a historical overview of the author function, tracing its development from birth to maturity and, in keeping with the general purpose of the essay, to impending death. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as various apparatus were put in place to protect the author and clarify the relationship between author and text, the fear that had initially surrounded matters of artistic "ownership" was replaced by this curious being called the author function, a creature so strange and powerful that it not only affected our view of literature and transformed the nature of scientific inquiry, but also gave rise to complex systems of definition and discourse that eventually came to represent the way in which criticism viewed the author in relation to a text. These systems, in turn, had limited the ways in which a work could be understood: they had trapped meaning within the confines of the Author, outside of which no other meaning would be allowed.

Foucault points to all of this classification and effort in order to prove to us a fact that is as simple in its expression as it is essential to his theory: "The Author" is a social construct (Siegle 127). That is why it is so maddeningly complex and elusive, that is why it has changed so dramatically over the course of history and meant so many different things to so many different people, and that is why, finally, we should bury the Author and be done with it. With the Author gone, though, expunged from the collective memory, what is left? Who or what is the natural heir to the Author? Rather than answer that question just yet, let us leave Foucault as we now picture him in our mind's eye: in mid-oration, standing with left hand half-raised, palm open to show us he is unarmed and the other hand placed across his heart to show us he is sincere.

Why should we leave Foucault frozen in time at the moment of his near triumph, as the masses are just beginning to stir, a swell traveling through the crowd, which, at any moment, might hoist Foucault onto its shoulders and carry him off to glory? Well, let us just say that it seems as though there is something

not quite right about these proceedings, that maybe the author did not die of "natural" causes at all but was, instead, the victim of foul play. Let us pause for a second because, for just a moment, Foucault resembled Marc Antony less than he did Brutus, and, although we are surely mistaken, that up-turned palm, far from empty, might conceivably hold a dagger within it. We leave him here because, before we can name a literary successor, we must first sort out, once and for all, the circumstances of the Author's death.

And who better to do that than Roland Barthes, too long left standing in the shadows of this essay when he rightly deserves center stage? For Barthes, unlike Foucault, does not equivocate when it comes to the author, does not take the time to eulogize or contextualize this tyrant; if Foucault is, indeed, the Brutus of these proceedings, than Barthes is its Cassius, knife ready to finish off the task so many of us have been, up until now, too squeamish to contemplate. From the very beginning, Barthes makes clear that the author is a concept and nothing more, an unnatural creature who, through the mirage of identity, obscures the fact that writing, rather than define one voice, "is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (142).

Barthes, like Foucault, tells us that the author is a thoroughly modern concept, the "product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual" (142-43). Like Dr. Frankenstein, we have patched the author together out of the disparate strands of philosophy and religion; as a society, we truly are the Modern Prometheus prophesied by Mary Shelley, and our monster is this tapestry of tattered rags known as the Author. This is no benign creation, though, nor can it be easily banished from the scene by torch-wielding mobs. Instead, the Author has been far more insidious and destructive, infiltrating society to the point that now, in the twentieth century, as Barthes himself puts it:

> The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyranically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. (143)

Ordinary culture, to which I am afraid most of us must admit we belong, is *tyranically* centred on the Author. Lucky for us, then, that these men have little more on their minds than the deaths of tyrants. The history of Western literature may indeed have been imperialistic, stretching out to the farthest reaches of the globe to conquer and assimilate all that lay before it, but thanks to Barthes, it is forever to remain an empire without an emperor.

For it is the texts which speak, the words, and not their cruel masters, the Authors. Freed from the indentured servitude of authorial tyranny, it is language that "acts" and "performs" and that, by association, also frees us the reader (ordinary culture again), from our shackles and restores our place of importance and preeminence in the world of letters. Surely, when one considers what Barthes is trying to do for us, it is ungrateful to protest, as Donald Keefer has, that these efforts are "squeezing out intelligence and excellence in the name of a solidarity that is ultimately insulting to the people it supposes to affirm" (82). This is mere quibbling in the face of revolution, a revolution, Barthes tells us, in "which all recourse to the writer's interiority [seems] pure superstition" (144).

In case Barthes has not yet convinced us of the necessity of the Author's demise, he examines the relationship between the Author and the text, or, at least, the naive notions we have long held about this relationship. Simply imagining those days, the dark ages of literary superstition and ignorance, must necessarily send a chill down our collective spines. We now know better, of course, and with the removal of the Author from the scene, we can witness the birth of the uber-writer, that thoroughly progressive entity referred to by Barthes as the "modern scriptor," who never pretends to live outside a text, to have a past or future that in some way might extend beyond the text or presume to inform our understanding of its purpose:

> In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*. (145)

A text is not simply a semantic construct, the stringing together of words and phrases like a puzzle that, once deciphered, will surrender up its solution. Instead, Barthes says it is a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and crash" (146). Thank God for theorists like Saussure who, through their analyses of the structuralism of language, have revealed to Barthes that nothing is meaningful or original in and of itself; by writing, by expressing themselves through language, writers immediately disappear through the trap door of imitation, their selves, their being, absorbed by the text. But, wait, did we just thank *God* for Saussure and his ilk? This would be a mistake, for it appears that God, who has had a hand in so many of humankind's tragedies, has once again led us astray in the form of the Author.

For Barthes tells us that our search for absolute meaning in a text is ultimately theological in nature; we look to the Author for knowledge, for the revealed truth, in much the same way as we look to God for the meaning of life

revealed in a burning bush or a trumpet's blast. To "give a text an Author," is to limit its possibilities, to say that it can only mean this and never that, in the same way that providing human beings with a god is to limit the possibilities of existence and say that life can only be one thing and never anything else (147). In this essay, Barthes is continuing the work of Nietzsche, who famously reminded us that "God is dead" and, in so doing, destroyed one traditional notion of what it meant to be a human being; Barthes, in saying that the author is dead, wants nothing more than to destroy our humanistic notions of what it means to be a reader.

We might point out, of course, that the danger inherent in Barthes's revolution is the same peril associated with Nietzsche's: in removing "the ethical element" of literature, the contract between author and reader in which each must take some responsibility for the other, we open ourselves to the possibilities of a world in which there are no boundaries, no responsibilities, and in which each person develops his or her own value system, his or her own meaning (Keefer 81). But perhaps we are not giving human beings enough credit. God has been dead for over a century now and the development of a personal morality hasn't caused any great catastrophes, has it? How serious could the consequences possibly be if we agreed that the author was, indeed, dead and set ourselves to the task of the reader as Barthes himself defines it: he or she "is simply someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (148). That seems easy enough.

But before we go any farther with this type of speculation, let us now return to Foucault. Let us reunite him with Barthes, his co-conspirator, and let us survey this brave new world purchased at the point of a dagger. What exactly did these two modern scriptors hope to accomplish through the death of the Author and what has been the actual outcome, at least as far as we witnesses can attest, of this revolution?

It has been thirty years since Barthes's historic proclamation that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author," long enough, I think, for us to step back and take stock of its outcome (148). Perhaps it might be useful to hear what Foucault himself, after helping to set this junta in motion, had to say about the result. Poor Foucault. No matter which role we might wish to cast him in, he is doomed forever, it seems, to play the part of Brutus. For a mere ten years after his historic efforts, Foucault found himself questioning the wisdom of what he had done, finding, as he did, that deconstruction "gave rise to such mediocre literary products" (Hollier 24). As if he himself had not helped deliver the killing blow, Foucault looked upon the literary battlefield and lamented that, "We are at present experiencing the disappearance of the 'great

writer'…The whole relentless theorization of writing which we saw in the 1960s was doubtless only a swansong" (Hollier 24).

But what was this literary product which so disheartened our valiant Brutus? If it is true that we had become tied to the Author, tethered by responsibility to a voice, a personality not our own, then with the death of the author we became like teenagers whose parents had left us alone for the weekend: we, as writers and critics, too often celebrated our newfound freedom by abusing it. Rather than heralding the birth of the reader, the death of the Author instead created what Keefer has called an "industry of 'discursive practices' or the production of texts on texts" (79) which grow in inverse proportion to what they feed upon: the fewer the ideas, it seems, the more that is written about them. We are all familiar with these types of texts: essays and works of fiction that bear the mark of so many critical fingerprints that the meanings become smudged and impenetrable.

And so we now have super-hyphenated words and parentheses within brackets within parentheses; we now know that difference can be spelled with an "a" and that "if" is, indeed, the middle word in "life"; we have explored the etymology and derivation of so many words that scholarly essays often read like an all-night cramming sessions for a Scrabble tournament, and yet can we truly say that we have a better understanding of any text than we had thirty years ago or that this revolution in thought has produced the great works we might fairly have expected from it? Instead, to paraphrase Barthes, it seems as though the birth of the reader has come at the cost of no longer having anything worthwhile to read.

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Discourse Without The Novel:

Shakespeare's Fathers and Sons

Mark W. Bellomo

According to M.M. Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" from *The Dialogic Imagination,* discourse not only serves as "information, directions, rules, models and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior" (342). Looking at this idea closely, Bakhtin believed that discourse takes two different forms: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse (342).

The former can be exemplified by an "authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.)" (342). In contrast, the latter is "'one's own word'... half-ours and half-someone else's," which is "... gradually and slowly wrought out of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two are at first barely perceptible" (345).

In studying Elizabethan England, more specifically the plays of William Shakespeare, we find that Bakhtin's theory of discourse is a powerful tool for interpreting the father-son relationship in *Hamlet, 1 Henry IV,* and *2 Henry IV.* In these plays, Elizabethan England's emphasis upon patriarchal authoritative discourse emerges as the "word of the fathers" or, in this case, of the kings, who have a tremendous influence on Princes Hal and Hamlet. In fact, it is how the princes' internally persuasive discourses react to and clash against their fathers' authoritative discourse that creates the plots within each play.[1] To reiterate, the true consciousness of the princes is created by the "dialogic interrelationship of these [two] categories of ideologic discourse" (342).

The ideological "word of the fathers" can be illustrated quite easily with King Henry IV, who, even before Prince Henry appears in a play, laments the "unthriftiness" of his son (see *R2* 5.3.1-10). The relationship between King and Prince is severely strained because Hal drinks and cavorts with Falstaff and his cronies. Exhausted with his son to the point where he feels the prince a curse to him, the King pleads with Hal to become more responsible, begging him to be more humble in his station, and less obvious to the people. Discussing with Hal "strategies of monarchical self-preservation" (*Norton* 1152), Henry IV asks Hal to imitate his own role as king, illustrating that "by being seldom seen, I could

not stir / But like a comet I was wonder'd at…" (*1H4* 3.2.46-47):

> That men would tell their children 'This is he.'
> Others would say, 'Where? which is Bolingbroke?'
> And then I stole all courtesy from heaven ,
> And dressed myself in such humility
> That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts…
> Ne'er seen but wondered at; and so my state,
> Seldom, but sumptuous, showed like a feast,
> And wan by rareness such solemnity, (3.2 48-59)

According to Henry IV, Hal's presence is "glutted, gorg'd, and full… With vile participation," a commonness which a future king shouldn't possess (3.2.84-87). Henry IV gives his son plenty of fatherly advice, which the prince can assimilate into his own consciousness.

Another more prominent example of this "word of the fathers" is shown during Henry IV's most desperate moment of concern over his son inheriting the throne. In Act IV, scene five of *2 Henry IV,* Hal prematurely dons the crown while his father lies on his deathbed. This act rouses the weakened King Henry, who spouts vile epithets (sick as he is, obsessed with the threatening civil war), comparing his son to a rebel who fights against him. The king decries: "See sons, what things you are! / How quickly nature falls into revolt / When gold becomes her object" (4.5.66-68). His faith in his son is shaken and he is about to resign England to doom.

Hal tries to ease his father's fears, swearing that upon finding no breath within the king's body, he lifted the crown to his head, wishing not to usurp Henry IV's throne with "…any strain of pride; / [for] If any rebel or vain spirit of mine… / Give entertainment to the might of it, / Let god for ever keep it [the crown] from my head" (4.5.172-178).

Henry is jubilant with Hal's pledge and gives the Prince two last pieces of fatherly advice, realizing that this is "the very latest counsel / that [he] shall ever breathe" (4.5.184,185). First, he explains the crooked ways through which he obtained his position, and then he reassures Hal that his own reign will be more fortunate. Second, Henry makes it completely clear that civil war poisoned his state. Therefore he wishes his son "to busy giddy minds / with foreign quarrels…" (4.5.215-216). By giving this advice, the dying king shows hope for a more peaceful England. King Henry is always fretting about this "central problem" of his reign throughout 1 and *2 Henry IV*: "[how to] maintain control over and enforce unity upon the territories over which he claims dominion, but which threaten to break away or assert a worrisome autonomy" (*Norton* 1149). This

problem is particularly complicated because of the guilt Henry IV feels over seiz-
ing his kingdom from Richard II.

Many more difficulties plague Henry IV's reign besides a lack of legitimacy:
his delayed pilgrimage to the Holy Land, his lack of effective strategy to rule,
and most importantly, an absence of domestic unity with the Scots, the Welsh,
the north, and the church—"the land seethes with the murmurings of rebels"
(*Norton* 1149).

Facing all of these conflicts, Henry IV leaves Prince Hal with "the pressing
task of finding better strategies for ruling the changed world his father brought
into being..." (*Norton* 1150). Hal must construct himself within a patriarchal
society first by assimilating the good qualities of his father's "word" and second
by reflecting upon his father's failings, formulating his own unique conscious-
ness and ultimately redressing the wrongs of Henry IV's rule.

Hal listens to his father, whose discourse is internally persuasive to the Prince
and is acknowledged by him, thus allowing Hal the possibility to evolve an indi-
vidual consciousness. As stated by Bakhtin:

> [This] discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual
> consciousness: Consciousness awakens to independent thought precisely in a
> world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially
> separate itself. (345)

Apart from Henry IV, there is another character whose authoritative discourse
exerts a powerful influence on Prince Hal. Even though Hal doesn't place much
faith in the "lord of misrule," Falstaff acts as a type of bumbling surrogate father-
figure to the prince. Hal enjoys the time he spends with Falstaff, but his love of
the bungler's discourse has its limits, however, as he comes to realize that cavort-
ing with the lower-classes does not make for kingly behavior. In order to be a
proper king, Hal must ultimately reject Falstaff and his decadent ways.

Interestingly enough, Bakhtin's philosophy provides the precise reason why
Falstaff is rejected by Prince Hal, through its explanation of the process of
becoming an ideological subject with an individual consciousness:

> When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and dis-
> criminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally
> persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse [Hal's carousing
> versus Henry IV's finger-pointing], *along with a rejection of those congeries of
> discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us.* (345, my emphasis)

So, after assimilating what he needs from others' discourse, and finding a way to
correct the problems with the state, Prince Hal *has to* reject Falstaff—a congerie

of suet that does not touch him. This example of Prince Hal's ideological becoming shows just how difficult it is to maneuver as an ideological subject in a strongly patriarchal society.

Hamlet's experiences with patriarchy and the ideological "word of the fathers" is even more complicated. If in *Hamlet* all we learn about the personage of the father is through the discourse of his ghost, and through the gossip of others, how can Hamlet's consciousness be fully shaped and sanely determined? If, according to M.M. Bakhtin, every subject's consciousness is in some degree contingent upon the discourse of others, then shouldn't an individual whose ideological existence is being shaped by the lamentations of his father's ghost be considered maladjusted?

Looking at Act I, scene five of *Hamlet,* we find the only conversation between "father" and son in the play. In this scene, a wrathful ghost seeks vengeance for his regicide at the hands of his evil brother. As Henry IV appeals to Prince Hal, so does the ghost of Hamlet's father entreat his sensitive son, a very melancholy and highly impressionable young Hamlet.[2] He wishes his son to "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.29), because he was killed without being given the sacrament of last rights, "Doomed for a certain term to walk the night, / And for the day confin'd to fast in fires / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purg'd away" (14-17).

Hamlet reacts wildly and lashes out unreasoningly to the foul murder and the performance of his father's restless spirit. His reply of "O horrible! O horrible! most horrible!" (1.5.86) when told of his Uncle Claudius's cutting off his father "Of life, of crown, of queen" (81) shows that the young man is emotionally overwhelmed and can't articulate his thoughts. Even after his father's ghost begs of Hamlet "howsomever thou pursu'st this act, / Taint not thy mind" (90, 91), the prince cries to the angels, shouting "Remember thee? / Yea, from the table of my memory / I'll wipe away... / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, / And thy commandment all alone shall live / within the book and volume of my brain" (99, 103-109).

Immediately after his father's ghost tells him not to "taint" his mind, Hamlet decides in this speech to do just that. The Prince is irrational because the only thing he will let occupy his thoughts is his father's commandment of revenge. This is key to understanding the character of Hamlet: unlike Prince Hal, who picks and chooses his words, cleverly sorting through his father's discourse and Falstaff's to formulate his own, Hamlet can never fully express an internally persuasive discourse because of his manic obsession with the "word of [his] father." It is a persistent and unyielding loyalty to this authoritative discourse

that makes Hamlet paradoxically unable to atone for his father's sins: the Prince simply can't function as an autonomous subject because of his single-minded desire for revenge.

To add to Hamlet's confusion is another powerful patriarchal discourse: that of his father's murderer, his Uncle Claudius. Wicked Claudius is an immensely powerful patriarchal figure acting as Hamlet's uncle, step-father, and king amalgamated into one character. He is a man who unconsciously provides Hamlet with a malevolent authoritative discourse on which the Prince must model his own. Because of the sinister nature of this model (the most insidious example of "the word of the fathers" in the play), Hamlet's subjectivity is confronted and further destroyed, rendering him helpless, fragmented, and desperate.

The gap between Hamlet's internally persuasive discourse and authoritative discourse is vast, whereas Hal's gap is relatively small. According to Bakhtin, when the distance between these discourses is too great, there can be little chance of the person forming their own discourse and individual consciousness (346). To review, Hamlet does not fully develop an internally persuasive discourse because of many reasons: his bouts of deep melancholy, his overzealous attachment to the commandment of his father's ghost, combined with his being surrounded by the negative and dissociating effect of Claudius' discourse. The circumstances surrounding (and abilities possessed by) Hal are much different. He listens carefully to the words of King Henry IV and Falstaff and, distancing himself from emotion, incorporates portions of their discourses internally, retaining those qualities which he considers important for his ascendancy to the throne.

Apart from his assimilation of others' discourse, the singular quality aiding Prince Hal's ideological survival (letting him succeed where Hamlet fails) is his use of role-playing, wielding theatricality as a means of studying and theorizing about his discourse.

By assuming a role—pretending to be a thug, a thief, a baser man than he actually is—Hal assumes a powerless position. But when the Prince changes, finally actualizing his charismatic true self, "Redeeming time when men think I least will" (*1H4* 1.2.192), people will look on in amazement while he shows his attributes of shrewdness, and intelligence: only after discarding his roguish facade will Hal obtain power. It is this ability to study and assimilate discourses while moving within ideology, adapting different roles for himself as they suit his purpose, that makes Hal able to assume power. Hal can negotiate between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse.

This leads to a conclusion shared by new historicist Stephen Greenblatt:

"Theatricality, then is not set over against power but is one of power's essential modes" (*Bullets* 46). Thus, by his use of theatricality Hal effectively engages in the utilization of a mode of power, a power which lets him observe the discourse of others, and at the same time become basically aware of his own ideological being—succeeding in forming an internally persuasive discourse.

As a marked contrast, the character of Hamlet has a major problem: he can not effectively use theatricality to eke out his own discourse within ideology in order to obtain power. This is because the Prince simply refuses to come out of his period of mourning for his father, his capitulation to "the word of the father" as absolute truth. Hamlet does not accept the fact that "The death of fathers is natural and inevitable, and while it is customary to grieve, it is unreasonable to persist obstinately in sorrow" (*Norton* 1660). Clouded with anger over his father's death, the Prince explains that his grief is not a theatrical performance, a mere costume to be put on and then discarded:

> Tis not alone my inky cloak...
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> *For they are actions that a man might play*
> *But I have that within which passes show;*
> *These but the trappings and the suits of woe.* (1.2.82-90, my emphasis)

Hamlet has a sorrow within him that "passes show," a feeling that surpasses mere acting. Lost in emotion, Hamlet uses the theater as the briefest means to an end: his use of his father's signet ring to seal the fates of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or his use of the players to catch Claudius's guilt with the *Mouse Trap*. Because of his single-minded obsession over his father's murder, Hamlet utilizes theatrical power only in *reaction* against evil perpetrated upon himself, never realizing the awesome power of theatricality, or that he could wield the theater as Hal does—to further his power as Prince and ultimately, most effectively, gain revenge for his father's death.

Always desperate in his use of theatricality, he does not fully understand how he could use this power to benefit his position. Hamlet wants to redeem the sins of his father, but doesn't have the intuitive knowledge of how to use theatricality to help formulate an identity for himself. Only by separating his "word" from that of his father, by constructing an internally persuasive discourse, would Hamlet be able to create himself as an ideological subject.

Hamlet's further adventures with ideology can be best observed during the critical Act III, scene three of the play, where he can finally gain revenge upon

Claudius, killing him and putting his father's spirit to rest. At this moment Hamlet opts not to destroy his Uncle, a horrible man who, as we are informed by Shakespeare, is "still possess'd / of those effects for which [he] did the murder, / [his] crown, [his] own ambition, and [his] queen" (3.3.56-58). Hamlet, however, doesn't kill the evil Claudius because he does not want to murder the man while he's at prayer, sending his Uncle's villainous soul to heaven.

Hamlet, unaware of the ideological forces at work here, does not understand that letting his Uncle live (simply because he is at prayer) signifies that he is being dominated by an ideology that is just as effective as patriarchy: he is being controlled by the ideological apparatus of religion. Hamlet cannot escape ideology, cannot begin to comprehend the concept of ideology in any way, and thus, will not achieve his single, burning goal of revenge.

Strangely enough, within *Hamlet* there is another example of the direct effect of the ideology of religion (the church) on its subjects. The exchange takes place after Claudius tells Lærtes of his father's (Polonius's) murder at the hands of Hamlet:

> CLAUDIUS: What would you undertake
> To show yourself in deed your father's son
> More than in words?
> LÆRTES: *To cut his [Hamlet's] throat I' th' church.*
> CLAUDIUS: No place, indeed,
> Should murther sanctuarize;
> Revenge should have no bounds. (4.3.139-141, my emphasis)

This ominous dialogue is an example of how characters can start to form an internally persuasive discourse. The first step is to assimilate what is needed from certain ideologies (such as patriarchy) as Lærtes does, and next, if a specific ideology (such as religion) goes against one's nature — don't make use of it. As the dead Polonius' words echo through Hamlet: "This above all: to thine own self be true, / and it must follow, as the night the day, / thou cans't not then be false to any man" (1.3.82-84).

By not developing his own discourse, Hamlet fails to obtain the only truly important goal after seeking revenge upon Claudius—to succeed his father to the throne. Hal achieves succession by developing an internally persuasive discourse. In following his carefully structured plans, a mixture of his own ideas combined with other useful discourses, Prince Hal redeems his father's kingdom: he puts an end to English civil war by waging and winning a war with France, he is not afraid to be seen as an active and present monarch to his constituency, and he atones for his father's sin of usurpation by laying Richard II to a final rest,

building monasteries as a sign of penitence.

For Hal is a person who becomes aware of ideology and can separate his realm of the self from "the word of the fathers"—he recognizes the performative nature of subjectivity, and he negotiates productively with the external discourses in which he is immersed. Hamlet, however, believes that there is a sorrow beyond discourse—a natural, true, untainted sorrow of which his antic performance is just a caricature. He does not recognize that this sorrow is an effect of patriarchy, a requirement laid upon him by the "word of the father," or, strangely enough, the word of the father's ghost.

Notes

1. Keeping in mind that discourse is ideological by definition. The Ideological State Apparatus of patriarchy is the guiding/controlling force behind the words of a king who is discussing his prince's inheritance.

2. "Hamlet's painful interiority, his melancholy insistence that he has something 'within,' is already clear from his first appearance, before the Ghost's revelation" *(Norton, 1660)*.

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The Consciousness of Signs and Things:

Concerning Literary Discourse and Its Criticism

Alexei Tushinsky

We use words to make literature. And as self-evident as this truth may be to us, it is still replete with hazards.

Words are signs, and signs have developed where intercourse has occurred between human beings; yet having grasped that signs have developed only through this interaction of people, we must also come to understand that signs are inherently ideological. I'd like to give a talk today about literature and literary studies, but this very notion poses a dilemma for the discourse whose subject is itself: how might one begin to speak or write about 'writing' while in the very act of it, without one's words turning empty, vapid in the process? Perhaps a slightly more oblique approach to the matter is in order.

So let's look at words or, more properly, signs before we address our topic proper. Can something exist beyond the sign that delineates the thing? It is preposterous to claim that things do not exist apart from words; things exist, words exist to describe them—nothing can be simpler than this, you might say. But is this idea—common to our day to day thought and seemingly verified in our everyday experiences—as transparent as you would like to make it out to be? Let's begin with a thought experiment:

You have entered a bare white room whose sole furnishing is a black metal object sitting dead center on the floor. Examining the object reveals it to be an empty trash can. A second person enters the room behind you and makes his way up next to you. He does not give the object a thorough examination, as you have; instead, this person proceeds—to your genuine surprise—to stand on his head before the trash can and begin mumbling a long string of nonsense syllables. You hurriedly leave the room.

Later, you come across this fellow, and upon recognizing you, he politely says hello, speaking in a pleasant, though unfamiliar, accent. You stop short, and noting that he doesn't seem particularly demented at the moment, you ask: "Tell me, why did you stand on your head before and mumble all that nonsense?" With sudden anger he responds: "How dare you call it nonsense? When you die God shall refuse you entrance into heaven." The fellow stalks off in a huff, leaving you thoroughly flushed at the exchange.

You have understood this black metal object—correctly—as an ordinary trash can; the stranger—correctly—understood this black metal object differently, for in the city that he comes from, these objects may be found in innumerable bare white rooms as objects of veneration. You deposit trash in such objects every day, but to this fellow the emptiness of the can is a sign of infinity, of God's spirit residing in the empty space we call reality. Can this black metal object be said to be the same material thing for both parties? An art critic may perhaps decide that it's an installation of sorts. A fourth party—an atheist for whom littering is second nature and whose æsthetic sensibility can hardly be called developed—will see nothing beyond some useless black thing sitting in an otherwise empty room.

Clearly, the object exists only insofar as a sign exists to describe it. In this connection a member of the Bakhtin group, Valentin Nikolaevich Vološinov, observes that "the physical object is converted into a sign. Without ceasing to be a part of material reality, such an object, to some degree, reflects and refracts another reality" (9). Nominalism offers up the only objection. A bit uneasy at the thought that things are in such a state, one may continue feeling that nothing has been factually demonstrated, but then that is to believe that at all points the object in question was nothing more than some black metal object. But an icon is an icon, and a trash can is a trash can, not just a piece of metal, or when it is, it isn't there as anything in particular again, just another manifestation of, to use Arthur Danto's term, an indiscernible counterpart.

Heidegger writes in his collection *On the Way to Language:* "We could go further and propose this statement: something is only where the appropriate and therefore competent word names a thing as being, and so establishes the given being as a being…The being of anything that is resides in the word" (63); "stated more explicitly…the word makes a thing appear as the thing it is, and thus lets it be present" (65). Words relate to material things in a way that belies the idea that we are dealing with material objects on the one side and words standing in for them on the other. Martin Heidegger's essential insight is that "the word itself is the relation which in each instance retains the thing within itself in such a manner that it 'is' a thing" (66).

Heidegger identifies the word as a "relation" because the conversion of sign into material reality—and *vice versa*—suggests a relational-system that controls this process. This process is first and foremost a material process, which is to say a socially and historically conditioned process.

The Bakhtin circle's principle insights into linguistics develop from their rejection of a synchronic model on the grounds that it is an essentially meaning-

less abstraction (Vološinov 67); linguistics cannot be separated from history because language is historically conditioned, and hence, always in a process of becoming. While useful in isolating certain aspects of the linguistic system, a static model—the one that Saussure claims to be the sole proper object for scientific inquiry—has often only led to severe methodological error. A synchronic model presupposes the existence of a diachronic model because the static moment contains within itself both the past that has led to its present and the future that will follow from all the elements that reside in the synchronic system: "Every sign…is a construct between socially organized persons in the process of their interaction. Therefore, the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction" (Vološinov 21).

But as we've begun to speak of "social organization" and "conditions of interaction," it becomes impossible not to add another term to our discussion: ideology. The term cries out for definition—we shall turn to Louis Althusser for this in just a moment—but irrespective of what one understands the word "ideology" to denote all definitions naturally presuppose its communicability. In this connection Vološinov's understanding that "everything ideological possesses semiotic value" (10) must be stressed; for, to quote further: "The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present, too" (10). Of course, language differs from other kinds of sign-systems in that it is ideologically "neutral" (14)—words may be used in any ideological context—but it is impossible to speak outside an ideological context. Hence, there can be nothing non-ideological about a linguistic sign as it exists in the world.

There is a common element running through the critics we've been citing: all agree that our entire consciousness of things is dependent upon signs. If signs are social and ideological by nature, it should follow from this that the content of the psyche is the ideology of a given period. Vološinov puts it this way: "The individual, as possessor of the contents of his own consciousness, as author of his own thoughts…is a purely socio-ideological phenomenon…The content of the 'individual' psyche is by its very nature just as social as is ideology, and the very degree of consciousness of one's individuality and its inner rights and privileges is ideological, historical, and wholly conditioned by sociological factors" (34). This psychology, as Todorov points out, presupposes intersubjectivity before subjectivity, but I would rather say the two should be understood as coming into being simultaneously. This much must follow from Vološinov's claim that "the content of psychic life is thoroughly ideological" (Todorov 31): subjectivity is socially and historically constructed and hence generated at once throughout

the species.

Once again we find the material thing coming into being with its word.

We've approached the reality of signs through the material world, and from semiotics we began discussing consciousness; it's time to look at ideology, to define precisely a term I've been using rather too loosely. But it seems that we have already managed to come very close to a definition.

Ideology, put in more or less spatial terms, is an infinitely fine mesh in which each individual is fixed in a perceived relation to everything around him—other objects, discourses, individuals, social, governmental and religious institutions, whatever. It is less a descriptive set of beliefs than social organization, and understood in such a manner, we find that ideology has been defined for us: it is the 'individual' consciousness itself—the conceptual-horizon of the period as expressed through signs of all kinds, which are the elements of our thought.

To put this another way, consciousness is created in and by ideology, and if consciousness is transparent to the individual, this is because ideology is transparent to the subject. Ideology operates as the subject's consciousness to the blindness of its "host." Because of this very blindness to itself, each subject is made to sense his or her individuality in ideology: "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (Althusser 245), which is to say, as Sartre also found, that as the consciousness can only look upon the Other and never at itself, the subject is placed upon a wholly different ontological plain of being. By differentiating concrete subjects among themselves, ideology creates the unique individual we perceive as an objective fact. But "what is represented in ideology is…not a system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals," writes Althusser, "but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (243).

Ideology operates through the various sign-systems of society—principally, through the neutral word—and this in turn radically affects the material reality we inhabit. The sign has the power to transform the individual biological organism into a socially constituted subject, and in such a way that it seems wholly natural to us that this be so. (We are never conscious of ourselves as social beings, but rather as unique and individual subjects.) To put it a bit crudely, this is the *modus operandi* of ideology: it must be transparently obvious to itself—in the same way that consciousness is transparent to itself—for ideology to work because it must pass itself off as being natural and inevitable. Althusser expresses this idea bluntly enough, writing: what "seems to take place outside ideology… in reality takes place in ideology," so that "what really takes place in ideology

seems therefore to take place outside it" (246). This insight carries some fairly extensive implications for us.

The very least this point suggests is that we have generally misunderstood the separation between inner and outer forms of experience, but beyond that it prompts us to infer that "objectivity"—in science, in criticism—is an illusion. One is always within ideology because it is ideology that makes us human, that gives each individual the sense of a unique existence as a subject, and it alone separates man from the animal realm, which is full of individual biological specimens but no particular subjects. The price of our humanity is the impossibility of direct intercourse with the objective world, a material reality unmediated by signs, consciousness, ideology.

Granted that one cannot disengage oneself from ideology, what are the prospects for a scientific knowledge of the mechanisms by which ideology operates? Althusser suggests the possibility in his essay (245), but he leaves the reader wholly at loose ends as to how this might be accomplished. Even the natural sciences have abandoned any notion of the Absolute in their discourse: the model always begs the observation. Is objective knowledge possible? Though Althusser is of little help in this regard, it seems to me that an objective knowledge of ideology is eminently possible; the solution to this dilemma comes from an unexpected corner, but it is one whose validity surprisingly rests in part upon Althusser's own investigations into ideology.

This last point will clarify itself as we continue. It's now time for us to take up our stated topic: literature. For Althusser literary discourse belongs within the Cultural Ideological State Apparatus, performing its role in the formation of society by quietly assisting in the interpellation of individuals as concrete subjects. Setting aside for the moment the question of what precisely is revealed in the work of art, let us pose the question of its means of revelation first.

Arthur Danto argues convincingly in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* that art is fundamentally dependent on interpretation; that an artwork comes into being only with its interpretation—that is, with its word:

> [T]o seek a neutral description [that is, a non-ideologic description of an artwork] is to see the work as a thing and hence not as an artwork: it is analytical to the concept of an artwork that there has to be an interpretation. To see an artwork without knowing it is an artwork is comparable in a way to what one's experience of print is, before one learns to read; and to see it as an artwork then is like going from the realm of mere things to a realm of meaning." (124)

Danto understands that the limits of interpretation are always fixed by the limits of knowledge, which in Althusserian terms is to say that the limits are fixed by

the ideology of the period; ideology assumes a certain unity of understanding, and because the concrete meaning of a text had been generated in ideology, it must be possible to decipher that meaning objectively.

Criticism is understood to remain within ideology, and this should hardly surprise us, for it is only in ideology that ideology may be possibly studied. (Even the modalities of criticism are determined by ideology.) This is essentially where Althusser leaves off his gloss on "objective knowledge." To move ahead, however, let us pose a second question, since we've answered our first: what does the ideological subject find revealed before him through the work of art? Danto writes:

> While we see the world as we do, we do not see *it* [that is, the way in which we see the world] as a way of seeing the world: we simply see the world. Our consciousness of the world is not part of what we are conscious of. Later perhaps, when we have changed, we come to see the way we saw the world as having an identity separate from what we saw, giving a kind of global coloration to the contents of consciousness…[This coloration, which may be called a 'style'] expresses the age—which means that the beliefs and attitudes that define the world as lived by those whose period it was, are somehow expressed…When those beliefs and attitudes change, the period is over, and one no longer sees…anything…quite [the same] way. (163-4)

Danto's insight is that art discloses the way in which we as interpellated subjects see reality. Put another way, it is through the artwork that we are constantly made aware of the way in which an ideological conceptual-horizon functions through us as interpellated subjects. This claim is not particularly startling in and of itself, and that the artwork exposes the ideological horizon of its day in no way denies art its role in the interpellation of subjects in ideology.

The artwork, of whatever period, remains true to its function—that is, it attempts to "interpellate" you, the reader, per the mechanism of Althusser's cultural apparatus. But here we must pause to ask: what exactly is, say, Dante's *Divinia Commedia* interpellating the reader *into?* Does the reader actually find himself interpellated through the poem into a conceptual-horizon proper to the Middle Ages? No, but though this interpellation fails, one does nonetheless retain a sense of what that form of consciousness was somehow like. Inactive styles are interpretable because they have lost their transparency for us who exist in the posterior historical moment; in these styles we may come to isolate functions, operations, historical transformations, whatever in order to gleam from the particular artwork the general elements of ideology. In reading works of foreign languages and time periods we never succeed in stepping outside ideol-

ogy—this is an impossibility—but we do begin to amass a "repertoire," as it were, of ideologies. Comparative assessments follow from the sample.

These assessments subsist as the basis of all literary criticism. Criticism in and of itself cannot objectively describe an ideological reality because "criticism" presupposes "theory," which is ideologically configured; the work of art, on the other hand, only comes into being with an interpretation, and while the art-work holds within itself an ideological conceptual-horizon, it does not necessarily follow that the work of art is even capable of ideological interpella-tion. Taken together, however, these two forms of discourse create the possibility of an objective inquiry into the nature of ideological functioning.

Rigorous textual study must proceed in developing a sufficient body of objec-tive knowledge about the conceptual-horizons of prior historical periods. With that alone, however, we could add nothing to the objective knowledge of ideol-ogy, but we'll have grasped at least how former ideologies functioned. From the empirical evidence at hand it should then become possible to construct the basic elements of a poetics of ideology. Such a system tested and refined over time will in turn lead us toward an objective understanding of ideology as an eternal process—paradoxically, as if we really were outside ideology at this point. Understanding ideology itself will then make the transparency of our own "style" opaque to us.

Literary criticism is in the best possible position for the study of ideology because literary criticism is immediately concerned with the sign as it is employed in forming a given period's ideological conceptual-horizon. In focus-ing upon the way in which language has variously constituted thought throughout our human history, literary criticism thus attends to the objective delineation of those ideologic-semiotic processes which combine to make us who we are. This is made possible because a great book is a richly decorated room in the house of Being.

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Revising the Virgin Maternal:

A Reading Between the Texts of Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater"

Susan Piperato

———————

When I first encountered "Stabat Mater," the now classic essay on motherhood and the Virgin Mary written by French theorist, linguist, Freudian psychoanalyst and feminist Julia Kristeva, I was a novice mother, holding a screaming baby whom I had not yet learned how to comfort. This was a disconcerting introduction to the essay, to say the least, and I would not realize how fitting this was for years to come, until I returned to the essay in the midst of my own first attempts at writing. "Stabat Mater" was first published in the French intellectual journal *Tel Quel* under the title "Herethique de l'amour," or "Herethics of Love," in 1977, reprinted as "Stabat Mater" in *Histoires d'Amour* in 1983, and then published in translation in *Poetics Today* in 1985. The title of the essay as we know it is taken from Jacopone da Todi's medieval Latin poem, which has been set to music by Pergolesi, Haydn, and Rossini. The poem depicts the Virgin Mary keeping vigil at the Crucifixion of Christ, and begins "Stabat mater dolorosa," meaning "Stood the mother, full of grief." The text culminates in a request to share in the Virgin's "grief divine." The poem's last lines—"Let me to my latest breath/In thy body bear thy death/Of that dying son of thine"—bear testimony to that profoundest of grief which only a mother can know, even if she is the mother of God: to raise a child knowing that his life will be sacrificed.

Kristeva treats the Virgin as an ideological construct exploited—needless to say—by the patriarchal church, but also available for appropriation by women. The essay is as well-known for its unconventional presentation as it is for its controversial subject matter. Kristeva divides each page of text into two portions. While the main text on the right is devoted to tracing the history of the Virgin, the alternative text on the left is a stream-of-consciousness autobiographical account of Kristeva's own maternal experience. In this way, she dares to liken her own motherhood to that of the Virgin, demonstrating that all mothers suffer and sacrifice, and that the maternal state itself is essentially one of grief, punctuated by experiences of *jouissance*, an acute state of pleasure and joy.

By depriving Mary of the pain of childbirth and of her own death, the church has ensured that her value lies only in having been chosen by God to bear the

Christ-child, and that her grief lies in what He, rather than she herself, experiences. Mary suffers through a lifetime of knowing her child's fate, then watches helplessly as it unfolds before her. For these reasons, many feminists dismiss her as a pale ideal of motherhood, and a passive, empty conduit that safely delivers the patriarchy's male God into the world of the flesh.

Veneration of the Virgin was introduced and encouraged by the church starting in the third and fourth centuries as a means of competing with the still-popular pagan Great Mother goddess. Later, Mary's status was officially lowered when she became more popular than her father and her son. Although initially an *ad hoc* tool for proselytizing, the cult of the Virgin became firmly rooted in Catholicism, and subsequent attempts by the church to alter it only empowered the Virgin and her worshippers. As Kristeva notes: "The story of the virginal cult in Christianity amounts in fact to the imposition of pagan-rooted beliefs on, and often against, dogmas of the official church" (164).

When I first tried to make sense of "Stabat Mater," only weeks after my first son's birth, I was finally forced to drop the essay to the floor in order to comfort him by surrendering to the rocking chair's rhythmic motion. I was introduced to the essay through a Xeroxed copy of it included in a box of baby presents sent to me by my former college roommate, now a tenure-track medieval art historian who is childless by choice. Not a word of explanation accompanied the essay, so I wondered not only which side of its densely-printed pages to read first, but what my friend's intentions were. Was she condemning or celebrating my decision to have a child? Was she trying to understand, on her own feminist academic terms, the divergence of our paths as I shucked off my career goals to have a baby? Or was I exhibiting a symptom of postnatal depression, namely paranoia, when all she wanted to do was give me an intellectual treat?

Seven years later I returned to "Stabat Mater" when my (male) professor agreed to place it on the syllabus for a seminar in contemporary criticism. When I had first encountered the essay, I'd found it tantalizing enough to make me want to read it, but its unconventional format made it seem like too much of a hodgepodge to decipher easily. Besides, so soon after my own traumatic experience of childbirth, Kristeva's descriptions of her labor were so poetically graphic and disturbingly realistic that her words often cut far too close to my own still-shaken bones. However, by immersing myself in "Stabat Mater" within an academic setting, I was able to become aware of the space between Kristeva's dual texts, which ultimately contains the whole of the essay's meaning. In this space, Kristeva revises the concept of the virgin maternal—the myth of the perfect mother who is always composed, self-sacrificing, self-effacing and nur-

turing, who can pick herself up and return to work, or even ride a donkey into Egypt, after giving birth.

Kristeva is indebted for the source of her main text to Marina Warner, author of the landmark study, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*. To deconstruct the Virgin, Kristeva, like Warner, adopts the standard detached, authoritative tone of academic discourse—in other words, patriarchal language—having begun "Stabat Mater" in response to Freud by asking a distinctly feminist question: If it is not possible to say of a woman what she is (without running the risk of abolishing her difference), would it perhaps be different concerning the mother, since that is the only function of the "other sex" to which we can definitely attribute existence ?

In answer to her own question, and in direct counterpoint to the main text, comes Kristeva's intimate account of her pregnancy, labor, and early motherhood. This alternative text, written in language that is lush, lyrical, raw and visceral, answers the call of French feminist Helene Cixous, who first called on women to do what is now known as "writing the body" in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa": "...write yourself," she urges, "Your body must be heard" (Cixous 250). In response, Kristeva begins:

> FLASH—instant of time or of dream without time; inordinately swollen atoms of a bond, a vision, a shiver, a yet formless, unnameable embryo. Epiphanies. Photos of what is not yet visible and that language necessarily skims over from afar, allusively. Words that are always too distant, too abstract for this underground swarming of seconds, folding in unimaginable spaces. Writing them down is an ordeal of discourse, like love. What is loving, for a woman, the same thing as writing. Laugh. Impossible. Flash on the unnameable, weavings of abstractions to be torn. Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible. (162)

Kristeva's use of two distinctly opposed voices, placed side-by-side in different typefaces, creates an opening into a kind of fertile void, or cosmic womb. While the linear-style main text flows predictably in standard typeface down the right side of each page, the intuitively expressed left-hand text appears only sporadically in bold, unjustified type throughout the essay, as if in defiance of the right. As Kristeva dismantles the Virgin, she simultaneously and sympathetically recreates her, putting flesh onto the Virgin's shimmering form by presenting her own birth experience as one shared by the Virgin and all women. Neither the main nor the alternative text would be as profound without being placed in contrast to the other. The essay's meaning lies, therefore, on neither the left nor

the right, but between the texts, within their dynamic tension. This duality allows Kristeva to make a claim which is hardly typical of mainstream feminists: that the language of both the patriarchy and the female body belong to women, and because their interplay creates a fluid text resonating in constant change, both can be included in an authentic feminist discourse.

Kristeva's refusal to dismiss the male gender outright is something that enrages feminists such as Cixous, who believe that a purely feminist discourse— virginal as it were, and untainted by the patriarchy—is entirely possible. Kristeva's inclusion of a male voice implies something so offensive to feminists that she, like the Virgin, is also left alone of all her sex. She suggests that both the male and female polarities are necessary and even desirable for creativity.

Furthermore, the male and female polarities both have their place within the unconscious, which Kristeva calls the chora, meaning "receptacle" in Greek, and which she defines as a "non-expressive totality" (*KR* 93). The chora within each of us brims with all that we have ever experienced, although this plenitude can never be realized simultaneously or fully. The chora contains the drives (that toward death being the strongest, as Freud posits); all a being's energies; "various constraints imposed upon [the] body by family and social structures" (*KR* 93); and all life experiences, both forgotten and significant enough to have left what Kristeva calls "distinctive psychical marks" (*KR* 93). The chora is held in abeyance until it is "ruptured" by a traumatic experience. For Kristeva, this rupture occurred in giving birth, and "Stabat Mater" is the result.

That Kristeva writes from the chora, attempting to express the inexpressible, is one of the essay's many paradoxes. It calls into question the idealistic feminist desire for a purely biologically-based form of self-expression, devoid of all connections with the male gender. In calling on women to write the body in order to create a feminist discourse, Cixous doesn't take into account the fact that, at some point in her life, every woman has been affected by men. Indeed, a woman's body is created by her own mother coupling with her father. And if a woman's life experience lives within her chora, which is housed, in turn, within her body, then eradicating all her relationships with the patriarchy would require amputation—especially if that woman has given birth.

Cixous' viewpoint rather ironically reflects the patriarchy's, for neither one allows women to feel or express the least ambivalence about living in a female body. Kristeva embraces not only the female body's relationship with the patriarchy but the contradictions and ambivalent feelings this relationship produces. She demonstrates this by contrasting the Virgin's myth with her own experience of the mother-child bond, in which both mother and child become naturally

and intrinsically the center of each other's universe by virtue of their blood ties and the pain each has experienced in birth. Kristeva writes in her alternative text:

> My body is no longer mine, it doubles up, suffers, bleeds, catches cold, puts its teeth in, slobbers, coughs, is covered with pimples, and it laughs. And yet, when its own joy, my child's, returns, its smile washes only my eyes. But the pain, its pain—it comes from inside, never remains apart, other; it inflames me at once, without a second's respite. As if that was what I had given birth to and, not willing to part from me, insisted on coming back, dwelled in me permanently. One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain: the child represents it and henceforth it settles in, it is continuous. (167)

The concept of the virgin maternal is thus revised. The Virgin, as presented by the church, lives her life of pain in silent, tearful vigil, never allowed to experience what occurs naturally between a mother and her child. We never hear from the Virgin how she feels about her child or being a mother, nor do we see the Christ-child's smile "wash[ing] only [her] eyes," for he looks away from her always, toward His father. Mary is not even recognized fully as a mother by her own son, let alone by the patriarchy. She is to be honored not for who she is but for doing God's bidding. Yet because Mary is such a blank, malleable construct, Catholics have been able to "venerate [her] in herself" (167). The implications of the church's denial of Mary's death are most clearly illustrated in the following directly juxtaposed passages. In the main text, Kristeva presents the standard patristic version of the Virgin as a pale, eviscerated "ideal totality that no individual woman could possibly embody." She writes:

> The fulfillment, under the name of Mary, of a totality made of woman and God is finally accomplished through the avoidance of death. The Virgin Mary experiences a fate more radiant than her son's: she undergoes no Calvary, she has no tomb, she doesn't die and hence has no need to rise from the dead. Mary doesn't die but, as if to echo oriental beliefs, Taoist among others, according to which human bodies pass from one place to another in an eternal flow that constitutes a carbon copy of the maternal receptacle— she is transported. (SM 167-8)

But Kristeva suggests in the alternative text that there is another side to this ideal with a deeply moving account of the moment of her son's birth in order to demonstrate the potential power of the Virgin with her body restored to her. Here, Kristeva universalizes what she felt about childbirth—fulfilled yet bereft, overcome with love, stricken with grief, and in physical pain:

> Dream without glow, without sound, dream of brawn. Dark twisting, pain in

the back, the arms, the thighs—pincers turned into fibers, infernos bursting
veins, stones breaking bones: grinders of volumes, expanses, spaces, lines,
points...Then, slowly, a shadowy shape gathered, became detached, darkened,
stood out: seen from what must be the true place of my head, it was the right
side of my pelvis. Just bony, sleek, yellow, misshapen, a piece of my body jut-
ting out unnaturally, unsymmetrically, but slit: severed scaly surface, revealing
under this disproportionate pointed limb the fibers of a marrow...Frozen pla-
centa, live limb of a skeleton, monstrous graft of life on myself, a living dead.
Life...death...undecidable. (167-8)

Not even a fate more radiant than a deity's can deny the power of nature. Any
receptacle constitutes a void, and all voids paradoxically contain creative poten-
tial and imaginative possibilities. Kristeva's interpretation of the Virgin as a
"maternal receptacle" in itself may be read as a condemnation of her as empty
and sterile, or as an affirmation of her as brimming with new and unforeseen
potentialities. This is why Catholic women (and many men) have long found
their greatest spiritual solace and satisfaction in the worship of Mary, and revere
her, regardless of current church dogma or the fact that, as Joseph Campbell
remarked, claims of virgin birth "can no longer be taken seriously by anyone
with even a kindergarten education" (10).

Despite the patriarchy's and western culture's presentation of the Virgin as a
distant figure of almost robotic serenity, she may still empower women if her
humanity and vitality are restored to her as Kristeva attempts to do in "Stabat
Mater." This is demonstrated most concretely in the juxtaposition of Kristeva's
breastfeeding experience with a recounting of the ways in which the Virgin
"became the fulcrum of the humanization of the West" (171). The alternative
text is sheer poetry:

Scent of milk, dewed greenery, acid and clear, recall of wind, air, seaweed (as
if a body lived without waste): it slides under the skin, does not remain in the
mouth or nose but fondles the veins, detaches skin from bones, inflates me
like an ozone balloon, and I hover with feet firmly planted on the ground in
order to carry him, sure, stable, ineradicable, while he dances in my neck, flut-
ters with my hair, seeks a smooth shoulder on the right, on the left, slips on
the breast, swingles, silver vivid blossom of my belly, and finally flies away on
my navel in his dream carried by my hands. My son. (171)

As Kristeva tells it, the Virgin's humanization, taking place beside her idealized,
unearthly form, began with Francis of Assisi's thirteenth-century portrayal of
her as poor and humble and culminated in the Virgin's being rejected by Simone
de Beauvoir, the mother of contemporary feminism. Kristeva reports that
because the mother in Piero della Francesca's famous nativity "kneeled before

her barely born son," de Beauvoir "too hastily saw a feminine defeat" (171). "Too hastily," indeed. To be a feminist, for Kristeva, is not to reject any aspect of feminine experience, so it is only natural to fall astounded before the child which you have created. But for many feminists, motherhood is not a physical realization of feminine power. Instead, it is utter submission to the patriarchy. De Beauvoir's dismissal of the Virgin is a principled feminist reaction, but it seems ironic in light of the fact that she underwent many abortions during her relationship with Sartre. How she could be so myopic as to fail to see her own victimization is incomprehensible.

Confronting the Virgin has drawn parallels for me between writing and mothering, making me realize that my own life's contradictions and my ambivalence can be fruitful. After all, "What is loving, for a woman," says Kristeva, but "the same thing as writing" (162). This deliberately fragmented essay encapsulates my own experience as a woman writer caught between the rational way in which I was taught to express myself and the irrational and ultimately, perhaps impossible, urge to describe those bodily experiences, such as motherhood, which are beyond words. Being both a mother and a writer means living a life that is paradoxically enriched but utterly fragmented, with each part always intruding on the others. Yet in the face of potential daily losses, I cannot keep a silent vigil. I reach for words flashing at the bottom of the fertile void like minnows in a fast-flowing river, even if I often lose them from my grasp by having to attend to my children's smallest, most unbearable agonies and banal messes. For if I ignore these incidents in order to go on working, they will reside as painful shards in my family's communal chora.

As a feminine archetype, Mary does fulfill one of the roles of her predecessor, the Great Mother, by functioning as a cosmic womb that paradoxically realizes the loss involved in bringing forth life but in itself never dies. Kristeva's recounting of her own maternal experience is an example of how any woman might become such a womb. By embracing the paradoxical death-in-life nature of motherhood, a woman may gain the power to be transported, as well as to transport others, through her art. Perhaps motherhood is "the only function of the 'other sex' to which we can definitely attribute existence" (161). For only a woman has the potential simultaneously to experience the fullness of life, the death of her former self, and the actual threat of physical death through the experience of childbirth. Yet Kristeva, like all mothers, cannot always tell which is which: "Life...death...," she writes, "undecidable" (168).

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Freudian Legends of Good Women

Patricia Corbett

How has our perception of women, both in literature and in life, changed over the past several hundred years? In his *Legend of Good Women,* Chaucer seemed to feel that the only "good woman" was a dead one. William Shakespeare, in his tragedies, shares the same idea. But why is this? What is it about women that leads even such enlightened authors as Shakespeare to feel that in order for a woman to be good she must be in her grave? In order to discover the reasoning behind the various authors' treatment of women, I looked into the twentieth century for an answer. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, seemed to me to be a good place to seek my explanation. Who better to explain the motives of these famous authors?

Sigmund Freud's essay on the development of femininity proposed a theory which allegedly derived from a careful study of exhaustive scientific observations. In his essay Freud attempted to address the problem that has bedeviled man since the beginning of time: woman. He concluded that a study of the physical differences between men and women was insufficient to explain the riddle of femininity and proposed that the definitive answer could only be uncovered by psychoanalysis. To tackle the question of femininity he first explored the process by which the young bisexual child transforms itself into a feminine woman. Freud acknowledged, almost gleefully, that the transformation process that women experience is more complicated than the one that men experience, and requires the female to perform two more tasks than the male. The little girl, therefore, has two additional chances to fail.

The Phallic phase of development in children is marked by the children's having learned to derive pleasure from their own sexual organs; the little boy plays with his penis and the little girl with her clitoris. The female vagina is, at this point, undiscovered by either sex. As the girl matures, however, the clitoris should hand over part or all of its sensitivity to the vagina, as well as all of its significance. Freud noted that this is one of the extra steps in feminine development. In the Phallic stage, the first love object of both sexes is their mother or mother figure. Once the child moves on to the Œdipal stage, the female child must transfer her attachment to her father figure while the male maintains his attachment to his mother. This is the girl's second extra task and one that Freud

stated was necessary for the child if she is to have any hope of obtaining normal mature femininity.

Freud explained that the female enters the Œdipus stage of development when she discovers that the little boy has something she does not, a penis. Both girls and boys make this discovery at about the same time, but the final outcome of their discovery is different. Although both sexes are horrified by this revelation and both develop a Castration Complex, the similarity ends there. For boys, this information serves as a sufficient warning to end their masturbation. Girls, on the other hand, are so horrified that they place the responsibility for their mutilation directly upon their mothers. This Castration Complex, and penis envy, drives girls away from their mothers and compels them to adopt their fathers as object. Penis envy, noted Freud, leaves a permanent scar on a woman's development that can never be escaped, and the stronger the girl's attachment to her mother-object, the more violent the emotions manifested in the transference of object from mother to father. To justify their shift in affection, girls construct a list of grievances, real and imagined, against the mother which run from, but are not limited to, having been given too little milk as a baby, seduction and rape, and attempts to poison them. The girl may also claim sexual frustration brought on by the mother's first having sexually aroused her as a small child and then forcing her to cease her masturbation.

Having turned from her mother toward her father, the young girl has now entered her Œdipus stage of development. Freud noted that whereas there is only one route through the Œdipus Complex for men, there are three paths possible for women. One of these paths will lead to a masculinity complex and possible homosexuality, one to sexual inhibition or neurosis, and the last to normal femininity.

The first possible path of female development, the masculinity complex, occurs when the female discovers that she has been castrated and is unable to deal with her mutilation. As a way of compensating for the penis she lacks, she exaggerates her masculine side, clings to her masturbation, and takes refuge with her masculine object. The normal wave of passivity is avoided and the path of normal development lost. According to Freud, in extreme cases the masculinity complex manifests itself in the female's choice of another female as love object: homosexuality. A female traveling this path may not have fully entered into the Œdipus Complex, or she may be over identifying with her male object.

Sexual inhibition and/or neurosis are also the direct result of a woman's inability to come to terms with her lack of a penis. Penis envy causes the developing woman to lose her enjoyment of her own sexual organs, cease her

masturbation, and repudiate her love for her mother—all seemingly normal characteristics of the Castration Complex—but with this particular path of development the female is led to suppress her natural sexual trends because of a loathing of her own body. Freud noted that this individual's self-love has been "mortified" by the comparison of her sexual organs to those of the male and his "superior equipment" (*New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* 157).

The road to normal mature femininity begins when the girl ceases to masturbate and allows passivity to control her personality. This passivity makes it possible for her to abandon her attachment to her mother and turn to her father as object, a turn which will secure for her a penis. True femininity is established successfully when the girl's wish for a penis is replaced by the wish for a baby—what Freud referred to as the penis-baby. A woman only achieves full independence and the development of the super ego with the successful delivery of a male child. At this point a woman secures for herself a relationship that will continue for the rest of her life and a penis. This appears to be the only circumstance under which Freud saw a woman as being able to obtain full mature development and contentment.

But now that we have been provided with such a reasonable explanation of why women behave the way they do, we need to find a model upon which to try Freud's theory. Because he found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* such a perfect model of the masculine side of the Œdipus Complex, it is reasonable for us to look to another of his plays for a female model of the Œdipus Complex at work. Actually, we can see examples of all three of Freud's possible paths of development in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

In the first scene we see Lear preparing to divide his kingdom up among his three offspring. He calls each one of them before him and, starting with the eldest, Goneril, demands that they publicly profess their love for him before receiving their share of the kingdom. We may see this as an attempt by Lear to cement his position as object in his daughters' minds. Both Goneril and Regan profess their boundless affection for their father, but their asides and private conversations indicate that these two have another agenda. It is also clear from the very beginning that these two daughters lack the passive nature that Freud characterized as being necessary for the development of true femininity.

Cordelia, the youngest of Lear's daughters, is the only one who will not do as her father has asked. She appears to be trying to break the Œdipal bond when she replies to her father's request with:

> Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
> According to my bond, no more nor less. (1.1.91-3).

Although this could be interpreted as Cordelia's attempt to break away from her father, an attempt at the development of a super ego, if we have listened to her comments as she witnessed her sisters' actions, we see that she has chosen to speak the truth rather than the empty flattery that her sisters have resorted to. She lacks the guile and cunning of her sisters, and she is therefore the one most likely to be on the path of "normal" development.

Goneril is the eldest daughter and, because Lear has no wife here, the one who may be the maternal figure for her two younger sisters. Without a mother to rebel against during the Castration Complex, without a woman to blame her castration on, Goneril may be caught in the Phallic phase of her development. Or because she has lacked a female object, she may be over identifying with her male object, her father, and may have fallen prey to a masculinity complex.

Remember that Freud has said that a powerful masculinity complex develops in females when they discover their castration but refuse to accept the fact that they do not have a penis. One may suspect early in the play that Goneril is less than the meek and dutiful daughter that she presents herself to be. By the end of the first act, she has begun to try to rule her father. She assumes the role of parent and treats Lear as if he were a wayward little boy, belittling him in front of his retinue and her household. This may be an attempt by Goneril to "castrate" her father and secure for herself not the penis-baby of the "normal" woman but a "penis-throne." It seems clear from the text that Goneril wants to be Queen/King and have the power to control the kingdom in her own hands.

Lear seems to recognize the masculine nature of this daughter and calls upon Nature, which he sees as having failed in her, to keep her barren (1.4.265-80). He adds that should Nature see fit to grant her a child that it should be such a child as Goneril herself is, "a child full of spleen" to make her life the hell that she has made his. (1.4.273). Lear is not the only one to feel the wrath and scorn of this daughter; Goneril's husband fares little better. She says of Albany, "..our mild husband" (4.2.1), and refers to him as a "vain fool" (4.2.62), and a "milk-livered man" (4.2.50), and then plots his murder. Albany sums up his opinion of her, and women in general, quite directly when he says:

> Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
> So horrid as in woman. (4.2.60-1)

If Albany sees his wife and women as evil and corrupt, we must acknowledge that this view is similar to the view Freud expressed. To Freud, woman was always "other," not male. He made it clear in his essay "Femininity" that to be anything other than male was to admit to deformity, the lack of a penis, and to neurosis and the lack of a super ego. Femininity is nothing more than a façade

behind which women hide and seek their revenge. Albany also acknowledges his wife's use of the female form as something to hide herself behind when the tells her, "A woman's shape doth shield thee" (1.4.67).

Regan, Lear's second daughter, begins much as her elder sister did. However, after Goneril has turned her father out, Lear discovers upon arriving at Regan's home that he has gone from the proverbial frying pan into the fire. If Goneril suffers from a masculinity complex, then her younger sister appears to be caught in the throes of a neurosis. After her appearance in Act 1, we don't see her again until Act 2 where we learn that there is a violent and nasty side to her personality. It may be that Regan views Goneril as a mother figure, and if we assume that what Freud has told us about the Castration Complex is true, then it is only fitting that Regan rebel against Goneril and her wishes. At one moment Regan is pledging her love to her father, and in the next moment she is plotting first with her sister and then against her. She is mild and reasonable when she meets her father on the road and tells him that he should return to Goneril's house and apologize to her for misbehaving. However, not long after that she is urging her husband Cornwall to gouge out Gloucester's eyes and killing a servant who tries to prevent the act. Regan's shifts between violence, mildness, aggressiveness, and passivity only serve to reinforce our view of her as unstable.

Lear makes an attempt to call Regan back to himself, back into the Œdipal Phase and onto the road to normal femininity, by appealing to her passive side:

> ...Thou better know'st
> The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
> Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude. (2.4.172-4)

But Regan seems to have slipped too far into madness to be called back by her father's gentle reminders of a daughter's duty. We may see Regan's attempt to reduce the number of men in her father's retinue as another attempt to castrate him. Goneril has already insisted that Lear reduce his followers by half before Regan tells him that if he expects to lodge with her he must reduce their numbers by half again. Is this Regan's way of obtaining the power-penis for herself?

When we examine Lear's daughter Cordelia, we find that it is she who comes closest to filling Freud's description of the normal mature feminine personality. She began the play by being the only daughter who refused to heap false professions of love upon Lear—who seemed to be attempting to break free of the Œdipus Complex—but we soon discover that Cordelia never really does free herself from her attachment to her father. We get a hint of the depth of this attachment just after she has told him that she loves him only as much as a daughter should. She goes on to tell him:

> ...When I shall wed,
> That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
> Half my love with him, half my care and duty. (1.1.100-2)

This dualistic allegiance bears all of the earmarks that Freud noted for a woman still locked in the Œdipus Complex. Cordelia has severed her relationship with her mother-object, her eldest sister, and she is the only truly passive female in this play. When her father disowns her and leaves her dowerless, she does not heap blame and scorn on him but accepts the King of France's proposal of marriage and marries him. But note that Lear himself has chosen both France and Burgundy as prospective bridegrooms for his youngest daughter, and that by accepting France as her husband she pleases her father and maintains her Œdipal connection to him. Cordelia has, in effect, married her father or father-object.

Additional evidence that Cordelia has not broken the bond between herself and her father is seen when she receives news of her sisters' plot to secure control of Lear's kingdom for themselves. She swiftly assembles an army and sails back to England and her father. At first her husband is with her, but he soon returns home to attend to some personal business. Perhaps he has realized that his wife is more interested in her father than she is in her duties as wife. Cordelia herself says:

> ...O dear father,
> It is thy business that I go about.
> Therefore great France
> My mourning and importuned tears hath pitied.
> No blown ambition doth our arms incite,
> But love, dear love, and our aged father's right. (4.4.23-28)

Cordelia is still assuming the passive role here. The only reason that she has come to England is to restore her father to his proper place. She has not come as a conqueror or to unseat her sisters.

In the midst of Lear's darkest hours, one gentleman reminds him that he has one daughter who is all that a daughter, and a woman, should be:

> ...Thou has one daughter
> Who redeems Nature from that general curse
> What twain have brought her to. (4.4.201-3)

After Cordelia, a prisoner at the hands of her two sisters, has been killed, and the two sisters have killed each other, Lear fondly remembers that "Her voice was ever soft, / Gentle, and low—an excellent thing in woman" (5.3.273-4).

None of Lear's daughters successfully achieves what Freud described as mature normal femininity. Only Cordelia comes close, seemingly developing the wish for a penis-baby. We can only assume that Cordelia has reached this stage of development because she does enter into a marriage that we assume will lead to a sexual relationship. However, even under these circumstances, if we accept Freud's definition of mature femininity, in order for Cordelia to reach this pinnacle of female development, it would have been necessary for her to fulfill her wish for the penis-baby by birthing a son. With the birth of a son, the wish would have been fulfilled and Cordelia would have gained for herself a penis, independence, and fulfillment.

Going back to our original question, what does all of this tell us about the view of women held by the English-speaking world? Have our perceptions of women changed? Is a "good woman" a dead woman? I think that it is fairly evident that there was very little change in society's view of women from the time of Chaucer to that of Freud, and that some of the responsibility for that must be laid upon the shoulders of individuals like Freud, who have taken societal norms, not science, and crafted a model of behavior which reinforces the stereotypical ideas to which women must conform. How can we expect our perceptions of women to change when the work of such authors and scientists is directed toward the reinforcement of stereotypes, not breaking them. Freud's only new contribution to our view of women came when he broke the cycle of death, for according to Freudian legend, the only "good woman" is a man.

<div align="center">Works Cited</div>

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As the journal of the English Graduate Program, *Shawangunk Review* publishes the proceedings of the Annual Graduate Symposium. In addition, the editors welcome submissions from any graduate student in English concerning any area of literary studies: essays, explications, book reviews, scholarly notes and queries. Beginning with the next issue, English graduate students and faculty are invited to submit poetry and translations of poetry, and faculty members are invited to submit book reviews and scholarly notes and queries.

MANUSCRIPTS should be original material on literary biography, history, theory and methods, analysis and interpretation, and critical syntheses that may emerge from courses or seminars taken at the college. Manuscripts should be prepared in the preferred style published by the Modern Language Association in its *MLA Handbook*. All manuscripts should include an abstract of 50 words or less and biographical information of four to six lines that indicates the author's professional, research and literary interests. Please submit three copies.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR are invited to promote scholarly discussion and debate.

The deadline for all submissions is May 31, 1999. Manuscripts and other submissions should be sent to *Shawangunk Review*, Department of English, State University of New York, New Paltz, New York, 12561.

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