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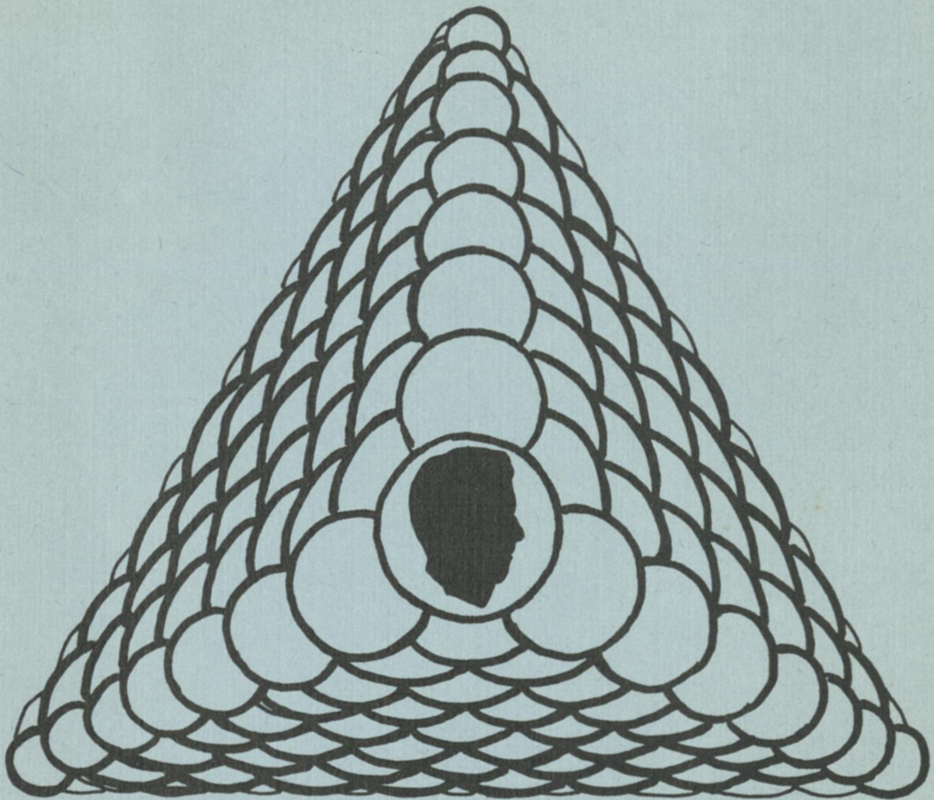
PERSPECTIVES: LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES

Two Essays on Interpretation



by

Marjorie Cook
Miami University

and

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Indiana State University

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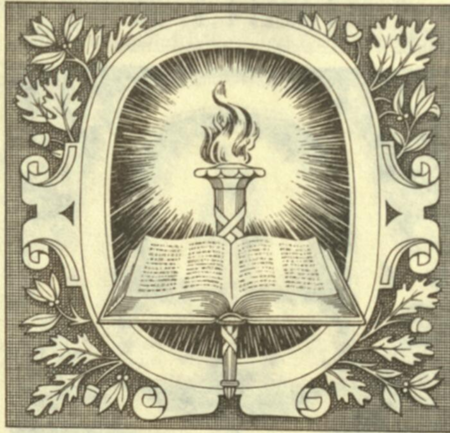

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Published by Taylor University Press
Upland, Indiana 46989

$2

Cover art: "Perspective," a pen-and-ink drawing by Randy Smith, art instructor,
Mississinewa Junior High School
Gas City, Indiana

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Upland, Indiana

PERSPECTIVES: LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES

Two essays on Interpretation

"Frost's Modernism: A Marriage of Irony and Imagination"

by

Marjorie Cook, Ph.D.
Professor of English and
Assistant Dean
College of Arts and Sciences
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio

and

"Applications of Perspectivism to Literary Criticism"

by

Lewis Sego, Ph.D.
Professor of English
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, Indiana

Papers delivered on the occasion

of the retirement of

Hazel Carruth, Ph.D.
Chairman of the Department and
Professor of English, 1946-1978
Taylor University

November 3, 1978 Hodson Dining Commons

Edited by Robert A. Cotner

1979

Hazel Butz Carruth

A FOREWORD

Gene Wise has written, "Perspectives are the 'pictures in our heads' which compress our experience into controllable form."[1]

The two essays in the monograph focus upon that highest form of expression, literature, and create new perspectives, new "pictures in our heads" regarding the poetry of Robert Frost and the general study of literary criticism. Taken together these two essays constitute a broad statement on perspectives in today's world, provide original insight into the ways of viewing important matters in the world of ideas, and suggest basic elements inherent in an understanding of both the modern world and its literature.

Marjorie Cook and Lewis Sego range widely in American literature and literary criticism. Dr. Cook begins with a definition of Frost's modernism as it arises from what she calls the "modern vision, . . . a balance of irony and imagination within a context of realism." She sees the present stance in this "Age of Irony" derived from three principles of the human condition: Change, Chance, and Finiteness. She pictures Frost moving beyond philosophic irony to "the leap of faith and commitment made possible in part by the imagination." She holds that "The imagination is the source of

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insight, of creative thinking, of synthesizing particulars into wholes, patterns." And she concludes, "Frost's playfulness includes this shrewdness about playfulness: he sees the irony of the ironic stance; he knows that belief is best. The awareness of potential irony, even total doubt in philosophic irony, and the affirmation of the imagination are balanced in Frost's modern vision."

Dr. Sego develops for what he calls this current age of "how," a new, pluralistic philosophy called "perspectivism." Utilizing the visual image of a tetrahedron composed of marbles, he develops this idea: "Essentially, the philosophy of perspectivism says that the aspects of mankind's dual nature, intellectual and emotional, should harmonize and reinforce each other." It is this "internal consistency, a resolution of conflicts, and a harmonious balance among the opposing forces and seemingly opposing points of view" that is, in Dr. Sego's view, "The sole criterion for reality."

In his view, "the ultimate law will be the law of love, perhaps a love that is so far beyond any that we have ever experienced as to amaze us." Thus the philosophy has implications not only in literary criticism but in society as well. "Ethically," he asserts, "perspectivism tests every act or decision by the simple test of balance and harmony."

These two papers were read upon the occasion of the retirement from Taylor University of Hazel Butz Carruth. They were given as a part of "A Literary Symposium," November 2 and 3, 1978, sponsored by members of the Department of English of the University. This symposium included addresses and presentations by Daryl Adrian, Ball State University; Marjorie Elder, Marion College; Roy Battenhouse, Indiana University; Arthur Shumaker, DePauw University; George Clark, Hanover College; Phyllis Scherle, IUPUI, and Janet Watson Sheeran, Rockhurst (Kansas) College, as well as members of the Taylor University faculty and administration.

This monograph, *Perspectives: Limits and Possibilities*, is presented as a tribute to Dr. Carruth by Taylor University, in loving gratitude for her devotion to her students, the University, and our Lord, demonstrated in a life of learning, scholarship, and teaching. She has, indeed, given guidance to and enhanced the perspectives of thousands through her life of service.

[1]Gene Wise, *American Historical Explanations* (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1973), p. 36.

RAC

FROST'S MODERNISM: A MARRIAGE OF IRONY AND IMAGINATION

MARJORIE COOK, Ph.D.

Eliot's poetry and criticism defined modernism and determined taste for two generations after he published *The Waste Land*. Frost never did approve of that definition for modernism nor standard for taste and said so whenever he was asked—and sometimes when not asked. One of my colleagues always baits me by calling Frost "a nice little nineteenth-century nature poet." Somewhat in self-defense both Frost and I have pondered modernism. In this paper I will be mainly concerned with the case for Frost's modernism in vision, though the case for his modernism in form and technique is fascinating as well.

The essence of the modern vision, I conclude, is a balance of irony and imagination within a context of realism. It is in their vision of balanced irony and imagination that Frost and Eliot are most alike. Both are ironists, but not philosophical ironists. Both move beyond philosophical irony to the leap of faith and commitment made possible in part by the imagination. (Such belief is related to, but is not the same as, religious belief.) Philosophical irony is simply the principle of irony become a philosophy, a way of viewing all of life. The principle of irony is the possibility of unexpected reversals, whether in rhetoric or in life. Not all reversals are ironic, but those which are sharp contrasts to what is expected are ironic. The sharper the contrast, the greater the irony. In other words, not only does what is expected not happen, but also *its opposite does happen:* an unexpected and sharp contrast.[1]

How did modern thinkers come to their particular balance of irony and imagination? To answer that, we must consider the world they inherited. Three principles of the human condition have always allowed for ironic reversals—change, chance, and finiteness. The modern value which produced a prevalence of philosophical irony was an overweaning desire for absolute rational certainty and, by implication, for perfect rational order. All should be as rationally expected. That desire ultimately led—over three centuries—to the conclusion that rational certainty cannot exist in this world. The subjective perspective which Descartes affirmed itself came to be doubted as solipsism, a prison of subjectivity destroying all certainty. With that, gloom, despair, negation—philosophical irony—descended on the modern world.

The three characteristics of this world which have always made possible ironic reversals, to repeat, are change, chance, and finiteness. First, the principle of process or change itself limits a person's certainty. People never have known the future—nor even the meanings and significance of the present—nor of the past completely, despite their having reflected on it. Moreover, partly because the human

[1]For more complete discussion of irony see D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1969) and Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

being can choose among options, the results of change cannot be guaranteed, are not completely predictable. For instance, the Romantics—to oversimplify for emphasis—had re-discovered that the world is dynamic, and they had valued organic growth, keeping a sense of the absolute in the ideal. The Victorians, having lost more of their sense of the absolute in the ideal, wished to improve the view of a world-in-change with the certainty of perfectibility; the Realists and Naturalists, however, could not find proof of any perfectibility in their neighbors' behavior—nor, confessed the great ones, could they find it in their own behavior. The Naturalists, in turn, saw a certainty in the Second Law of Thermodynamics applied to history: everything was spending itself to nothingness, disintegrating, degenerating. But to many modern authors the certainty of nihilism did not fit the facts of human experience either—Frost among them, as this paper will show.

Second, the principle of chance, even more so than change, makes many, even most, of the predictions about life at best only probabilities—and many not even that. If one longs for rational order and perfection, the potential, unexpected reversals in the world seem absurd. Third, with the Realists and Naturalists, late-nineteenth century thinkers emphasized human limits—one's finiteness and longing for infiniteness, as well as one's spiritual infiniteness confined in a finite world. This emphasis on a person's desire to know and his inability to know for certain, his longing for immortality and his inevitable death, point up the uncertainty, even absurdity, in the human condition. It should be noted, however, the human condition had not changed so much as had values, beliefs, and emphases.

How did these principles and values produce a wave of philosophical irony if contingency and ambiguity had always been inherent in the human condition? Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinkers were not able to maintain the harmony the great Romantics had worked out for themselves between the idealistic, imaginative, rational person and the dynamic, a-rational world. In part, people had lost their sense of the absolute, both in God and then in the perfect or perfectible machinery of the universe. Also, never before had so many people demanded scientific and mathematical proof for belief—and now demanded it because they needed some certainty. Under these circumstances, the uncertainty inherent in the human condition becomes overwhelming because people can see nothing worthy enough and certain enough—for some that is the same thing—on which to base their faith. Idealizing the rational statement and knowing it always to be a hypothesis, the philosophical ironist doubts all rational statement. He will make no commitments because he cannot be sure that he is absolutely right, that the truth he thinks he knows is really true or that the reality he thinks he perceives is truly real. He cannot see—nor leap—beyond this uncertainty, having only his intellect to aid him. Thus he is immobilized.

Modern thinkers who wished to move beyond this immobilizing philosophical irony had to explore the implications of limited persons in a changing world in relation to the counter values of the more structured and static world of ideals. The modern dilemma is actually a perennial human problem, but one which becomes a crisis, especially in such an Age of Irony. How could one establish values, let alone embody them in significant form? Frost was among those "Poets of Reality"[2] who worked through to a positive philosophy, to a commitment and faith again, beyond philosophical irony. Frost and these others

[2] J. Hillis Miller in *Poets of Reality* (New York: Atheneum, 1974) details the confrontation and movement beyond nihilism by six modern poets.

did not have the ironist's rational bias; Frost admitted that in matters philosophical "A melancholy dualism is the only soundness," but then asked an unexpected question: "The question is: Is soundness of the essence."[3] That was the key to moving beyond total doubt. Philosophical irony had reigned until poets and others found in the imagination the beginning of a way out: a person's imagination is essential to his humanity; a person is more than a rational animal. Without replacing religion by poetry, Frost and others saw the imagination as basic to one's making the leap of faith and commitment.

The imagination is the source of insight, of creative thinking, of synthesizing particulars into wholes, patterns. It is that which allows us to see beyond the narrow rationalism of deductive logic into the more expansive inductive logic which requires a leap in generalization and hypothesizing. To see beyond the literal present always demands imagination, and nearly all thinking is metaphorical. This play of imagination, this mental agility, is essential in all insights, in seeing new relationships. Through such analogical thinking people arrive at meanings and synthesize meanings into patterns of values and philosophy.

Certainly human knowledge is limited, but people must act. As Frost has Job say in *A Masque of Reason*, We don't know everything, but "we know well enough to go ahead with/I mean we seem to know enough to act on."[4] We do venture into the unknown, positing premises, acting on probabilities. Frost's speaker usually is not defeated or embittered, considering himself a rational being thrown unfairly (*unfairly* again revealing a bias for rationalism) into an a-rational world. He can create structures for meaning; he can even "escape" with his commitments, as in "I Could Give All to Time" (PRF, p. 334). Frost and many of his speakers enjoy putting their skill, shrewdness, courage, wisdom, and luck to the test in what he likes to call a game "play[ed] for mortal stakes" (PRF, p. 277). Even knowing the inherent and inevitable potential for tragedy, Frost values the right to fail and the right to suffer as necessary possibilities for one to attain meaning in the human condition.

What we have in our human condition is a world of appearances which must be interpreted to have meaning. No interpretation is absolute; all interpretations depend upon imagination, point of view, and other subjective elements. While the imagination is necessary, reason and even a consciousness of philosophical irony are also essential. Interpretation, after all, involves both looking clearly at what is and positing reasonable theory. (In this, Frost is neither far from nor alienated from the sciences.) Frost keeps both imagination and reason in a reasonableness.

Consider, for instance, "A Boundless Moment":

> He halted in the wind, and—what was that
> Far in the maples, pale, but not a ghost?
> He stood there bringing March against his thought,
> And yet too ready to believe the most.
>
> "Oh, that's the Paradise-in-Bloom," I said;
> And truly it was fair enough for flowers
> Had we but in us to assume in March
> Such white luxuriance of May for ours.
>
> We stood a moment so, in a strange world,
> Myself as one his own pretense deceives;
> And then I said the truth (and we moved on).
> A young beech clinging to its last year's leaves.
> (p. 233-34)

In the poem the first interpretation of the whiteness ahead is an illusion which does not fit the facts. The first character is right to "bring/March against his thought": the outer and inner worlds must be in harmony for a proper perspective on the

[3] *Selected Prose of Robert Frost*, edited by Hyde Cox and Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 112. Future references to this work will be in the text, designated *SP*.

[4] *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, edited by Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 483. Future reference to this work will be in the text, designated *PRF*.

world. Poirier, in an otherwise excellent book, goes too far in calling this a poem praising the imagination in its boundlessness.[5] He seems, in fact, to neglect the ending. The positiveness associated with imagination is overpowered at the end by the strength of one word—*truth*—and the power gained by that understatedness: the abruptness, the matter-of-fact and even casual tone at the end. In its understatedness, that last statement becomes the strongest, most positive assertion in the poem. The speaker's earlier words for accepting the illusions all have negative connotations: "Myself as one his own pretense deceives." Not all fictions are useful; the imagination in its unboundedness can be destructive, deceiving.

In "A Boundless Moment," the pair, having realized and accepted the truth (if realized, it must be accepted), can move on, which is better than staying "in a strange world" with a false "luxuriance," an unrealistic dream. Moreso than Poirier's comment, John Lynen's comment on the poem keeps the balance between the value of the imagination and the preference of the actual over an unrealistic dream. Even more important, Lynen sees in the poet's acceptance of realistic boundedness an assertion of a person's spiritual being. (Perhaps that is the same truth Poirier comes at aslant.)

> The fading of a vision may be sad, but the truthfulness which will not take it too seriously has something noble about it. The speaker's refusal to accept anything but the truth, when the truth is disappointing, demonstrates the courage of man's intellect.
>
> Unflinching honesty in the face of facts is a recurrent theme in Frost's nature poetry. For it is in this that he sees the basis of man's power and indeed of his spiritual being. Man can never find a home in nature, nor can he live outside of it. But he can assert the reality of his spirit and thus can exist independently of the physical world in the act of looking squarely at the facts of nature.[6]

Not all situations are this clear. An appearance may have different and even opposing interpretations, and therein begin the problems, as people have always learned. The Puritans, along with their other trials, had to face this one as well: for instance, when lightning struck the minister's house, they asked what it meant, and their asking each other instead of the minister was a turning point in New England government. Was it a trial for the just or a warning to the wicked? The answer depended in part on what you thought of the minister—and what you thought he thought of you—and you see how quickly it becomes very complicated.

Frost knows the value and richness of ambiguity and would insist on it to keep his freedom to interpret, his right to interpret. In the poem "On the Heart's Beginning to Cloud the Mind," the poet emphasizes that ambiguity is inherent in appearances, here heightened by the appearances being just the barest of fragments, and he also asserts the ambiguity of the roles of reason and emotion—irony and imagination, if you will—in interpretation.

> Something I saw or thought I saw
> In the desert at midnight in Utah,
> Looking out of my lower berth
> At moonlit sky and moonlit earth.
> The sky had here and there a star;
> The earth had a single light afar,
> A flickering, human pathetic light,
> That was maintained against the night,
> It seemed to me, by the people there,
> With a Godforsaken brute despair.
> It would flutter and fall in half an hour
> Like the last petal off a flower.
> But my heart was beginning to cloud my mind.
> I knew a tale of a better kind.
> That far light flickers because of trees.
> The people can burn it as long as they please;
> And when their interests in it end,
> They can leave it to someone else to tend.
> Come back that way a summer hence,
> I should find it no more no less intense.
> I pass, but scarcely pass no doubt,
> When one will say, "Let us put it out."
> The other without demur agrees.

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[5]Richard Poirier, *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 213-14.

[6]John F. Lynen, *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 151-52.

They can keep it burning as long as they please;
They can put it out whenever they please.
One looks out last from the darkened room
At the shiny desert with spots of gloom
That might be people and are but cedar,
Have no purpose, have no leader,
Have never made the first move to assemble,
And so are nothing to make her tremble.
She can think of places that are not thus
Without indulging a "Not for us!"
Life is not so sinister-grave.
Matter of fact has made them brave.
He is husband, she is wife.
She fears not him, they fear not life.
They know where another light has been,
And more than one, to theirs akin,
But earlier out for bed tonight,
So lost on me in my surface flight.

This I saw when waking late,
Going by at a railroad rate,
Looking through wreaths of engine smoke
Far into the lives of other folk. (p. 290-93)

The poet emphasizes that appearances here are fragments, from which he draws enough facts for two possible interpretations. The opening statement is a sentence fragment, and the narrative framework shows that the incident is just a glimpse into the distance. Finally, the last four lines are set off, emphasizing again the narrative framework and the incident-as-fragment. This ending seems to suggest that the fragmentary nature of the incident cannot lead to any final interpretation; we simply don't have enough evidence, and we've gained what was to be gained through speculating. The tone here shifts from the serious comic vision in the poem to the merely humorous in these last four lines, to mere word-play, although perhaps *wreathe*, related to *writhe*, maintains the serious comic tone of the whole. This throw-away ending, which is characteristic of Frost, usually gains ironic force from understatement, as in "A Boundless Moment," but here the throw-away conclusion seems to accomplish simply that—to destroy the significance built carefully by the rest of the poem. The reader is returned to his own world and left to build his own significances from these appearances—and by implication, from appearances in his own experience. The reader must take what he knows, here and elsewhere, and interpret for himself.

A more interesting ambiguity here is that of the roles of reason and emotion, irony and imagination, in interpretation. The important thirteenth line and title is quite obviously the crux of the poem. But is it the head or the heart which inclines toward a "Godforsaken brute despair" in the darker interpretation expressed in the first part of the poem in contrast to the more encouraging interpretation detailed in the latter part? The darker view may be seen as coldly factual and rational—reason in its narrow sense leading to philosophical irony—or the darker view may be seen as an unduly) fearful imagination in "a boundless moment." The poem has been interpreted both ways. Emphasizing the ambiguity by repeating the line, the poet, I think, means to show the terms are false oppositions; one should interpret with *both* heart and mind. Interpretation involves both looking clearly at what is and positing a reasonable theory—utilizing with the best skill and insight, based on understanding and courage, both the rational and imaginative capacities.

Many fears are groundless, but not all are. The worst possible tales may be true, but here they do not square with the probabilities, the more reasonable view, based on the greater understanding. Here the more positive view, in contrast to that in "A Boundless Moment," fits what facts are known, and it also has the benefit of being encouraging, heartening. Encouraged, motivated to persist beyond what narrow reason alone might dictate, a person can accomplish much that had not seemed possible at first. The flickering light does not necessarily signify the pathetic state of humans; the "spots of gloom" are merely trees, after all. I wish to emphasize, however, the encouraging interpretation the poet affirms here includes much discipline and toughness. Futile repeating, regretting, or dreaming is not

"indulged." Most significantly, the narrator comments, "Matter of fact has made them brave."

What Frost objects to is what he sees as the abuse of either reason or imagination—when either alone is offered as sufficient in itself for life. Imagination by itself may dwell unrealistically in "boundless moments." Intellect alone leads to irony, and Frost sees the irony of philosophical irony. But Frost will not easily dismiss reason; he has too much respect both for Yankee common sense and shrewdness and for the Greek Golden Mean. But intellect by itself, though it may produce great rational systems, may also be unrealistic. It cannot predict the future with certainty nor give absolute answers to the great questions of human meaning. Frost is neither anti-science nor anti-philosophy, though he will remind us of the limits of both. More exactly, he is anti-systems; he sees too much systematizing both in science and philosophy as an abuse and exaggeration of reason, as assumption and a presumption that rational structure should be supreme. In any system, as any careful student knows, much variance will remain unexplained, and Frost insists that that variance be acknowledged somehow.

The ideal attitude in life seems a conscious and dynamic balance of reason and imagination, infused throughout with an awareness of potential irony. "Two Look at Two" shows a couple capable of both sense and sensibility, irony and imagination.

> Love and forgetting might have carried them
> A little further up the mountainside
> With night so near, but not much further up.
> They must have halted soon in any case
> With thoughts of the path back, how rough it was
> With rock and washout, and unsafe in darkness;
> When they were halted by a tumbled wall
> With barbed-wire binding. They stood facing this,
> Spending what onward impulse they still had
> In one last look the way they must not go,
> On up the failing path, where, if a stone
> Or earthslide moved at night, it moved itself;
> No footstep moved it. "This is all," they sighed,
> "Good-night to woods." But not so; there was more.
> A doe from round a spruce stood looking at them
> Across the wall, as near the wall as they.
> She saw them in their field, they her in hers.
> The difficulty of seeing what stood still,
> Like some up-ended boulder split in two,
> Was in her clouded eyes: they saw no fear there.
> She seemed to think that, two thus, they were safe.
> Then, as if they were something that, though strange,
> She could not trouble her mind with too long,
> She sighed and passed unscared along the wall.
> "*This*, then is all. What more is there to ask?"
> But no, not yet. A snort to bid them wait.
> A buck from round the spruce stood looking at them
> Across the wall, as near the wall as they.
> This was an antlered buck of lusty nostril,
> Not the same doe come back into her place.
> He viewed them quizzically with jerks of head,
> As if to ask, "Why don't you make some motion?
> Or give some sign of life? Because you can't.
> I doubt if you're as living as you look."
> Thus till he had them almost feeling dared
> To stretch a proffering hand—and a spell-breaking.
> Then he too passed unscared along the wall.
> Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from.
> "This *must* be all." It was all. Still they stood,
> A great wave from it going over them,
> As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor
> Had made them certain earth returned their love.
> (pp. 229-230)

The situation has a perfection about it; the first and last words in the poem are *love*. The couple have a great sympathy with nature; the animals are—or seem to be—unaware of alien presences. The couple even have sufficient sympathy and imaginative relationship with nature to be playful, to engage in the fantasy of saying "Good night to woods." Significantly, such an "unlooked-for favor" as they receive can come only to those who already believe. Although playful, the couple are not especially naive: they are sufficiently rational not to court disaster, showing at least a latent awareness of potential irony in nature as antagonist. Their sigh reveals reluctant but realistic resignation to necessity. Accepting reality, they are then surprised by the unexpected, additional events which seem special favors.

The meaning of the events is posited from interpretation, as are all meanings, and the meaning here is believable because in this instance the "design" seems com-

pelling. The narrator plays the game of "as-if," seemingly with them, in interpreting the meaning of the deer's actions and the great wave of feeling which follow. The closing scene seems an epiphany:

> Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from.
> "This must be all." It was all. Still they stood,
> A great wave from it going over them.
> As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor
> Had made them certain earth returned their love.
> (p. 230)

All interpretations are "as-if" constructions and are related to fantasy and faith: one acknowledges the reality of the outer world and one's inability to penetrate it completely. This game of interpretation, "as-if," is serious play, the only *modus vivendi* possible to humans—play because one must interpret to determine meanings, and serious because one's "salvation" depends upon the patterns he discerns and the values he establishes. By consciously acknowledging his "as-if's," he maintains his saving grace: he knows he might be wrong—the ironic consciousness. The interpretation is an "as-if" construction, but it is not necessarily not real. It is real for them, and neither the narrator nor the poet seems critical of their response. Some readers think that, with each pair remaining on its own side of the wall, communion does not occur, and the epiphany is thus not warranted. Communion of the Romantic kind, however, is not claimed; the poet *is* claiming something *unusual* has occurred—at least for the couple—in "two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from." The couple here are capable of a trust in the "as-if," and thus they—or perhaps only the narrator—come to realize that "happiness makes up in height for what it lacks in length" (PRF, p. 333). Humans do not experience a constant sense of metaphysical transcendence, but the imagination which produces these epiphanies and the poetry which perpetrates them do sustain the human being. Poirier's comment on "A Boundless Moment" is not, as I have indicated, applicable to that poem so much as it is to this one:

> Frost is a poet who sets out to prove that nature itself wants us to "pretend" while knowing we are doing so, that it wants us to believe in something without certifying what it should be, and that, in its capacities for self-preservation, it offers a model for how we might preserve our mythologies in poetry. It is a process, to use Frost's own good way of describing it in "A Boundless Moment," of letting one's "own pretense" deceive. . . . This is a poem about "pretending" whenever nature gives you any sort of license, apocalyptic or redemptive, for doing so. And it is out of such moments of illusion or extremity that images emerge which belong to and are perpetuated by poetry.[7]

Frost would agree with Wordsworth that a person half perceives, half creates his world. With the "as-if" Frost is calling attention to what he sees as the essence of poetry and its significance to the human being. Frost goes so far as to say, "Give us immedicable woes—woes that nothing can be done for—woes flat and final. And then to play. The play's the thing. Play's the thing. All virtue is 'as-if' " (*SP*, p. 67). Poetry is made from these immedicable woes in the human condition, and the poetry (or any accommodation of them) is made by the play, the play of mind and imagination in interpretating, in positing useful "as-if" constructions which may even give us bases for action, and, furthermore, some of our action is believing those "as-if" constructions into being. Play involves detachment, which can mean perspective, even sanity. One can master the immedicable woes through the serious play of "as-if," through imagination manipulating the details into a pattern, controlling the outer forces that can be destructive, by fitting them into a formal structure. They are not then completely uncontrolled, chaotic, and destructive; one has a perspective on them. Life is "played seriously" in this way. This control by play, by imagination, is the main

[7]Poirier, pp. 213-14.

effect that Donald Greiner sees in Frost's use of irony.[8]

While Frost, like Wordsworth, believes a person half perceives, half creates his world, he, like Wordsworth, also emphasizes that one should be carefully attentive to the realities, hard facts, of that outer world. One's relationship with that outer world can incorporate trust—but one also knows what he is doing, marrying irony with that glorious imagination—faith and commitment beyond irony and in the face of irony—a perspective which allows him to be tough-minded, realistic, and still capable of faith. Frost takes a hard look at what he sees, and he can be objective enough to see much value on both sides—reason and imagination, common sense and those "passionate preferences" (*PRF*, p. 467). The opposing truths complement each other. One must balance his "passionate preferences" with his intellectual preferences. Reasonably and pragmatically, people simply devise the best working balance they can live by it, as in metaphor, until it breaks down and needs revision.

Because Frost knows each side has limits and is valid only in relation to the other side, to its counter-truth, he can play with the limits, can engage in whimsy and fantasy, knowing their value and truth in relation to hard facts. He is not saying that whimsy is hard fact, but why should one eliminate the fun and the particular effect of whimsy? Whimsy is "wrong," as any view is "wrong," only when it is pretending to be its opposite—for instance, whimsy parading as realism—or asserting that its opposite has no value, that it itself is absolute in value and validity.

While one should not believe in judgments as absolutes, neither should one refuse to make them. One sees both the difficulty of constructing an order that can be believed in—and the necessity for doing so. Irony, humor, play—all forms of detachment—may exist—and should exist—but without nullifying belief. One may live in relativity with a firm center of conviction: one may believe with "a most knowing eye" (Poe, "Romance"). Frost understands belief in what he knows are necessarily and necessary "as-if" constructions, imaginative constructions.

A final point: for Frost, form itself enhances faith. Creating structures involves belief, even depends upon one's believing. Whereas the philosophical ironist may emphasize form as perhaps a person's only certainty and only value worthy in itself, Frost counters, "I think [form] must stroke faith the right way" *(SP*, p. 106). To him the creation of form is itself a commitment beyond irony, a "believ[ing] the poem into existence" *(SP*, p. 45). Writing a poem demands a faith beyond the narrow intellect. In that commitment itself, we find his justification for a commitment not only to structure, which the philosophical ironist may accept, but also to belief. "Making little poems encourages a man to see that there is a shapeliness in the world."[9] He elaborates this point in some detail in "Education by Poetry":

> The person who gets close enough to poetry, he is going to know more about the word *belief* than anybody else knows, even in religion nowadays. There are two or three places where we know belief outside of religion. One of them is at the age of fifteen to twenty, in our self-belief. . . . In his foreknowledge he has something that is going to believe itself into fulfilment, into acceptance.
>
> There is another belief like that, the belief in someone else, a relationship of two that is going to be believed into fulfillment. . . . That belief can fail, of course.
>
> Then there is a literary belief. Every time a poem is written, every time a short story is written, it is written not by cunning, but by belief. The beauty, the something, the little charm of the thing to be, is more felt than known. . . . No one who has ever come close to the arts has failed to see the difference between things written (mechanically), with cunning and device, and the kind that are believed into existence, that begin in something more felt than known. . . .

[8]Donald Greiner, "The Use of Irony in Robert Frost," *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 38 (May 1973), 52-60.

[9]Quoted by John Ciardi in "Robert Frost: Master Conversationalist," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 42 (March 21, 1959), 20.

Now I think—I happen to think—that those three beliefs that I speak of, the self-belief, the love-belief, and the art-belief, are all closely related to the God-belief . . . the relationship we enter into with God to believe the future in—to believe the hereafter in. (*SP*, pp. 44-46)

Such believing the future into being is the most creative act in our lives. Moreover, he wrote to Untermeyer, "Belief is better than anything else, and it is best when rapt, above paying its respects to anybody's doubt whatsoever. At bottom the world isn't a joke."[10] Frost's playfulness includes this shrewdness about playfulness; he sees the irony of the ironic stance; he knows that belief is best. The awareness of potential irony, even total doubt in philosophical irony, and the affirmation of the imagination are balanced in Frost's modern vision.

[10]*Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, edited by Lawrence Thompson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 300.

APPLICATIONS OF PERSPECTIVISM TO LITERARY CRITICISM

LEWIS P. SEGO, Ph.D.

When I decided on the title, "Applications of Perspectivism to Literary Criticism," I had anticipated that the advance article on perspectivism would already be in print by the time this address came around. However, as many of you know, the first time an article is sent out it does not always lodge. The advance article bounced back and had to be sent out again. It is therefore not in print yet. Before I can deal with literary criticism to any advantage from the perspective of perspectivism, I must talk about the background of the theory and the philosophy itself.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once published in the *Morning Post* a quatrain which said of "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" what might well be said of perspectivism:

> Your poem must eternal be,
> Dear Sir. It cannot fail.
> For 'tis incomprehensible
> And without head or tail.

Perspectivism is a philosophy growing out of a theory of the organization of intellect. "My mind to me a kingdom is," wrote Sir Edward Dyer in 1588. Nor did he know the truth he spoke. A recent book, *The Mystery of the Mind*,[1] by Canadian surgeon, Dr. Wilder Penfield, presents results of studies of mental functioning during his long career in brain surgery on over 3,000 patients. His recently published findings lend support to the view that dominance of one hemisphere of the cerebral cortex over the other predisposes some individuals to see the forest and miss the trees, while others see the trees but never the forest. This differentiation remains independent of intelligence but sets the stage for other cognitive processes.

How did someone in English, I am frequently asked, become interested in the relationships between cognitive processes and language and literature? I must say that it was a rather freaky accident that I ran across a student at Bob Jones University several years ago whose background was quite different from mine and whose innate predispositions seemed to have been almost diametrically opposed to mine. Hence, we were attracted. After leaving Bob Jones University in order to wed this young lady, I found that every problem we tackled somehow turned inside out for one of us. If the problem were to determine how many groceries we were going to be able to afford for the remainder of the month, my wife would very likely subtract and I would very likely add. We approached almost everything diametrically oppositely. It became necessary for us to ask questions to cope with this seeming divergency of mind. In those early days I began to suspect that there was something in the organization of intellect, something dating back much earlier in our lives, that was influencing our

[1] Wilder Penfield, *The Mystery of the Mind: A Critical Study of Consciousness and the Human Brain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

perception.

Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning had experienced something of a similar attraction of opposites. Robert's poetry was almost entirely antithetical in form, in function, and in essence to that of Elizabeth. And yet they were the immortal lovers.[2] It seemed that there was a compatibility between opposites that needed further study. When the time came for submitting a proposal for my doctoral dissertation, the first thing that occurred to me was a study of the Brownings, since I was interested in Victorian literature, as well as cognitive functions.

Thus, I combined the two studies and conducted an empirical investigation of cognitive styles among students studying the Browning poetry. The result was a startling discovery to me because I thought perhaps I was seeing rare instances of the phenomenon, not a pattern that would permeate society. Approximately fifty percent of the students randomly selected from all of the freshman English classes at Indiana State University turned out to be "field dependent."[3] Now, this term is one widely used in cognitive study but not so widely used in our discipline. "Field dependent," to cast it in other terms, is basically a sort of Gestalt dependency, a dependency on patterns to recognize details, a tendency to see the forest first and then the trees. About fifty percent of the students—and this was quite apart from their intellects, quite apart from their intelligence quotients—kept seeing the trees and missing the forest at first and had to work to put the trees together to see the forest. They were the "field independent" people.

In order to study them further I developed an inductive presentation of some of Robert Browning's works and a deductive presentation of the same works and presented those to both types of students in a random pattern. There was an actual crossing of abilities, so that it seemed to indicate that there was a tendency, somewhat stable, toward dominance of one hemisphere of the cerebral cortex over the other. This later led to a reconsideration of philosophy. I went back and reread Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and parts of Kant. I looked again at Hegel, reread T. S. Eliot. I decided that Socrates had seen both forest and trees from afar, that Plato had gotten the message and had seen the forest a little bit more closely. Aristotle, rejecting the basic premise of Plato, took interest in the trees and saw them in greater detail. Then Jesus came along and synthesized the whole thing. From these considerations I had to reconstruct my own philosophy. When I finished, I had what I termed a pluralistic philosophy called "perspectivism."

Now, if you will allow me to implant in your imagination for a moment a model that we could use as a visual aid, I should like to construct in your mind's eye a tetrahedron, or a four-sided pyramid including the base as one side, built, in other words, of equilateral triangles along the sides. Furthermore, I should like to construct it of marbles, just ordinary agates. I should like to glue them together with superglue, starting at the base and trying to hold them in place in a triangular shape until I could fit others in the center and stick them all together.

But, you can already see the problem of trying to form a triangle first. It is much easier, especially with superglue, to stick two or three marbles together in the center and build the triangle around them. It is easier yet to take one marble and stick it to three already stuck together lying on the table and create a

[2] Frances Winwar, *The Immortal Lovers: Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, a Biography* (New York: Harper, 1950).

[3] Lewis Sego, "The Interactive Effect of Inductive and Deductive Sequences and Cognitive Styles on the Acquisition of a Higher Order Concept in English Literature" (Diss. Indiana University 1974).

tiny pyramid, and then lift it up, placing some others there and pushing them together until that other pyramid can stick to those, and so build the pyramid from the top rather than from the bottom. Now, if you visualize this tetrahedron of marbles as composed of four equilateral triangles of glass spheres, you can see readily that tipping it over makes no difference in its appearance. We can continue to tip it from one side to the next. And, each time we tip it, there is a point at the top where one marble rests above all others.

With this visual aid in mind, I should like you silently to respond to the question, "What is this that I imaginatively hold in my hand?" The responses that normally come from vocal members of an audience range all the way from "a pyramid" to "a paperweight." If you said a pyramid, you were thinking about the form. If you said a tetrahedron, you were being more specific about the form. If you said a tetrahedron of marbles, you were thinking about the essence and the form. If you said a tetrahedron of glass marbles, you were being even more specific about the essence. And if you said it was a paperweight, you were speaking functionally. If you said it was a model presented to our imaginations, you were speaking functionally. And if you said it was a model made of marbles, you were dealing with both function and essence.

This insight began to glow as a new concept in my mind in relation to these other studies. I began to see as it rested on its base, each of the three upright facets, a different perspective on which we view reality and literature. I began to realize that out in the real world, outside the ivied walls, most people would have reacted to the form first. In fact, it would have been almost as if we had turned this tetrahedron so that the bottom side, of course, would not be visible, and the other two sides would be behind with only one facet, the facet of form, appearing to the general populace.

However, some technically trained people in a new age—in an age of "how"—have turned slightly this pyramid so that they can see a bit of the side we call function. They see a great deal of the form side; they see a little bit of the functional side. But, when they see two sides from the front, they cannot see the side that is behind. They cannot see the essence unless they take a new perspective. As long as they go around the base of such a pyramid, they will see only one side at a time; but, if they ever reach the top, they can see three sides at once; they can see form, function, and essence simultaneously.

I began to think about this analogy in relation to exercising critical scholarship. If Plato's black horse and white horse in the *Phaedras* had been made a team instead of antagonists, their cooperative efforts might have resulted in a new discovery for Plato and new strength for mankind. And, if one of the horses had been male and the other female, not only would they have been a powerful team, they would have spawned new generations of powerful teams. Out of such a hypothesis has emerged this new pluralistic philosophy called perspectivism. It seeks to establish its solidarity, not on a single way of perceiving reality, but on multiple but harmonious ways of perception of what is real. Perspectivism, like a tetrahedron, can assume a new base and a new vortex each time it is tipped. The sole criterion for reality, therefore, becomes internal consistency, a resolution of conflicts, and a harmonious balance between opposing forces and seemingly opposing points of view. Its merit lies in its potential for bringing harmony among the perspectives that until now seemed to be antagonists, that until now had not been teamed up. A potential new strength for mankind could conceivably result.

Essentially, the philosophy of perspectivism says that the aspects of mankind's

dual nature, intellectual and emotional, should harmonize and reinforce each other, much in the way male and female harmonize and reinforce each other. So convinced of this premise was Nathanial Hawthorne that he said on one account that he suspected the unpardonable sin was the separation of the head from the heart. And now in the midst of scientific discoveries about the two hemispheres of the cerebral cortex and about their different functioning, one being a logical cortex and the other storing exactly the same material that is stored in the other half but storing it in an entirely different way—in not so logical a way, but in an intuitive way—we begin to develop a hunch that what Plato described as two horses was a phenomenon he had sensed in his own intellectual development as he shifted the emphasis from one hemisphere to the other.

The intellect, in its analytical plunge from some ideal of truth and beauty toward the foundations of human experience, keeping in mind the tetrahedron, of course, needs the guiding of emotion to bear it up when its feet become stone-bruised. John Stuart Mill, for example, found that when he spent his energies for long periods of time in analytical thinking, starting with the top marble and going down, breaking things into finer and finer parts, he became despondent, depressed, for no apparent reason. Upon chancing to find Coleridge's poem, "Dejection: an Ode" Mill records in his *Autobiography* that his spirit was renewed and his dejection lifted at finding sympathetic companionship in the poem. Thereafter, he refreshed his emotions periodically by turning to literature and the arts where he could bring back into balance the emotions and the intellect. Similarly, Ezra Pound found such elation in his synthesizing of experience and his soaring to philosophical heights beyond everyday, conventional reality that, had it not been for his intellect to keep a tight rein on his emotions, he might not have been able to remain in the kingdom of the sane as long as he did. The dual nature seems to function best when neither side dominates and when the two are not regarded enemies but allies of equal rank.

Functionally, the philosophy of perspectivism says that a consistent ontology must consist in love, that a consistent ethic must consist in harmony, that a consistent aesthetic must consist in balance, and that a consistent epistemology must consist in raw experience. Berkeley would say, "sense data." However, the unique strength of the philosophy lies, once again, in its flexibility, not its rigid philosophical system. I think Frost would like that. Its ontology can also consist in raw experience when its epistemology consists in love. We tip the tetrahedron. You may have to take that down in your notes and think about that a bit. We have, in allegorical fashion, equated the base of this tetrahedron with the individual experiences, myriads of individual experiences, over all of the sensory channels that have been feeding into our cognitive kingdoms for our entire lives. Those are the raw experiences from which another kind of ontology could develop.

In other words, the ontology can start at the top, or the ontology can start at the bottom. Within the Christian perspective the epistemology can begin in God's love, you see, the beginning of wisdom. Or, it can begin in raw experience. It can begin in the law, which for the Apostle Paul became his schoolmaster to lead him to experiences with Christ. In other words, if we hold that love is the summum bonum, the philosophy will function for us as long as the method of analysis is applied in our quest for knowledge, that is, as long as we proceed from love, wherever that is viewed on the tetrahedron, to analyze it into its components, proceeding analytically until we have ultimately reached the level

of specific experience.

The relationship between love and fear and mental processes holds importance for our study. Recent brain research seems to indicate that fear inhibits the free flow of electrical energy across the corpus callosum, a network of nerves connecting the two hemispheres of the brain. When fear comes in, the inhibition of those nerve impulses causes the brain to shunt down to a lower level of operation. Now researchers have tested this with electronic probes in open brain surgery and found this to be the case. Recently in Great Britain an inventor developed a device to put on the throat of a stutterer that would generate unpredictable tones into headphones to block out the sound of the speaker's own voice, with instantaneous curing of stuttering. Had I not heard this on the BBC in a live demonstration, I would have doubted it. A stutterer was placed on the air and asked to read, and he read, stuttering almost every word in the lines. The experimenters turned the page, placed on his throat the device I have described, put the headphones on his ears, and had him read another passage. He read it without stuttering, without faltering a moment, because every time he uttered a syllable, the vibration of his voice generated an electronic sound totally different from his own and blocked out the inner transmission of the sound of his voice. The experimenters concluded that it was fear, fear of the reader's own voice, that was producing his stuttering.

The studies are continuing and indicate even further that fear seems to inhibit mental processes. Interestingly enough, however, love of the *agape* type —even of the *filia* type but especially of the *agape* type—facilitates mental functioning. A mother or a father in times of tremendous stress, when they would normally be afraid, have been able because of love for a child, selfless love for a child, to plunge into a burning room and bring the child out. So, interestingly, it began to occur that perhaps love and hate were not the antagonists or the opposites, but love and fear. Love tends to draw people together; fear tends to draw them apart.

If we hold that raw experience is the summum bonum, the philosophy will function for us as long as we apply the method of synthesis in our quest for knowledge, that is, as long as we proceed from the base of firsthand experience to synthesize the experiences into hypotheses, test those hypotheses, synthesize those that will fit together into theories, test those theories, synthesize those theories that will fit together into laws, test those laws, and synthesize those laws into truths. With that synthetic process at work in the scientific community, we have a logical direction in which to proceed. For, from those laws, presumably, ultimately will emerge the truth. It will not be the kind of truth that Sherwood Anderson talks about in "The Grotesques," the kind of truth that each one latches onto and goes off into his own corner to contemplate, thus distorting his reality.

To illustrate, let us enlarge our tetrahedron in our minds' eyes now—and I much prefer imaginary models to physical models because in the imagination we can perform the miracle of enlarging a marble tetrahedron into one large enough to postulate some interesting relationships on it. If we, in going toward the top, stop short of the real truth, the ultimate truth, and think we have it, we become what Anderson calls "grotesques."

It is grotesque to stop short of the ultimate truth in our quest, to think that because we have arrived at some notion that fits everything that is below it, we have reached the top. If we let one marble along the side represent the top of a smaller tetrahedron and all the additional marbles we peal away, if that were possible, we might be deluded into

thinking that we had them all—that we had all our marbles. We would still have a tetrahedron, only this time a smaller one. Perhaps our cognitive realities are too small. Perhaps our literary criticism partakes of this smallness, this grotesqueness.

The philosophy assumes that the ultimate law will be the law of love, perhaps a love that is so far beyond any that we have ever experienced as to amaze us. Thus, a harmonious whole will pervade the system to provide stability and direction to the further interpretation of experience. More specifically, the analyst cannot properly proceed from a close scrutiny of a single experience without risking a hasty generalization. If, however, the analyst wishes to proceed in building his philosophy from a starting point of faith, he must begin with the assumption that there is some ultimate reality, some supreme truth, some universal beauty, perhaps a god or deity of some kind, I submit. From such a starting point, the analyst need only test subsequent parts of his system by the test of harmony. If the new parts harmonize with the previous structure, the new parts have validity and can be safely incorporated into the philosophical system.

The ancient Greeks began with the concept of love analyzed into three subconcepts: *eros*, the physical, animal form of love; *philia*, the mental or brotherly form of love; and *agape*, the spiritual or selfless form of love, perhaps the full measure of which we have not yet attained. This emotion seems to harmonize both intellect and emotion and to produce not only internal harmony, harmony within the individual human being, but harmony between individuals and between groups of individuals, no matter what other differences may exist.

A NASA physicist has just recently published a book in which he postulates the theory that photons are being given off and received by every atom in the universe—in a random pattern unless in some way directed—and that photons may be the means by which matter and, he says, "if there is spirit," spirit may communicate.[4] There is one problem with photons, philosophically and physically: unless they are traveling at precisely 186,000 miles per second, we cannot detect them. If they are going faster, they cease to be detectable and, therefore, for all we know, cease to exist. If they go more slowly they are nondetectable and, therefore, for practical purposes, cease to exist. He is speculating that the photon may be the next item of study in physics along with the neutrino, the particle that is smaller than the neutron, electron, and proton.

If the energy that we know love can produce releases photons from the brain, it may account for the facilitation that I was describing along the corpus callosum connecting the two cerebral hemispheres. It may even give scientific credence to what Nathaniel Hawthorne had to say about the unpardonable sin, that we dehumanize ourselves and put ourselves off from divine love when we separate the heart from the head. Such harmony and balance in perspectivism is, I think, an important aspect of the philosophy, by which we can test good literature from bad literature.

The synthesist, unlike the analyst, cannot properly proceed from the assumption of faith in some preconceived notion of truth, beauty, or deity. To proceed synthetically from the top marble, to proceed synthetically from such an assumption, risks moving into existentialism and ultimately into nihilism. In other words, if we start synthesizing when we are standing on the top marble, we are in nihilism. We can synthesize as long as we are down on the ground of raw experience. We can analyze when we are at the top. If, however, the syn-

[4] Adrian Clark, *Psycho-kinesis: Moving Matter with the Mind* (West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Company, 1973), p. 112.

thesist wishes to build a harmonious coherent system, he must begin with personal experience, carefully observed and paired with similar personal experiences to construct a hypothesis. The hypothesis must be tested because individual experience is subject to individual interpretation. About fifty percent of what we see occurs in the mind. A blind man was running along a campus sidewalk a few days ago, his cane snapping back and forth in rapid succession from the walls of the buildings to the concrete pavement. Though sightless, he was running with confidence. He had developed such a keen sense of hearing that he was reconstructing in his mind's eye the picture of that entire pavement far enough in advance to make rapid steps without stumbling. Everything he saw occurred in his mind. To avoid the distortion of subjective vision, we must test our hypotheses and join them with other tested hypotheses that can be used to form a theory. The theory must be harmonized or synthesized with other theories to form laws; and this, fellow students of literature, I believe, is where we need to begin in forming some sound direction in studying language and literature. We need to start with these fundamentals and start forming hypotheses about these fundamentals, testing them and comparing them with similar ones to create theories and then test those theories to find similarities among theories to create laws of language and literature. Then we may be able to get somewhere. This is the way the hard scientists have gone about selling their subjectivity. Once the laws have been synthesized or harmonized, a supreme law should emerge, maybe not in our lifetime. This law should be one's summum bonum, one's truth, one's beauty, or if you will, one's deity.

We have looked at perspective essentially; we have looked at it functionally; now we shall look at it formally. Formally, the philosophy of perspectivism says that both the idealist and the realist are right, each being right for whoever thinks he is right. Yet, the restriction placed on each becomes one of investigatory method. The idealist must conduct his investigations of reality deductively, analytically. The realist, contrarily, must conduct his investigations of reality inductively, synthetically. Either method will result in a satisfactory cognitive structure provided harmony becomes the test of validity and provided the deducer starts with the truth he believes in and the inducer starts with an experience or experiment in the validity of which he has a high degree of confidence. This constitutes perspectivism's formal epistemology—simple, direct, and tailored to the individual's own perspective. Pirandello expressed it in his play, "Right You Are if You Think You Are."

If, to return to our analogy, we imagine the topmost sphere of the tetrahedron to be the summum bonum and the base to be raw experience, we can readily see that to analyze we would proceed downward and that to synthesize we would proceed upward. The deductive approach of the idealist would lead us downward from the summum bonum toward basal experience, so that we could begin to interpret our experiences, so that they would not be so widely divergent from one to another. From such organized experience we could interpret the experience that writers incorporate into characters. This interpretation would enable us to test the quality of character, to see whether the character is a full-blown lifelike character, consistent and logical and feeling, or whether he is a half-baked grotesque.

The inductive approach of the realist would lead us upward from basal experience toward the summum bonum. Each approach would produce an integrated view of reality that would be stable even if tipped to a new perspective. If, for example, our perspective

should be formal, as opposed to functional or essential, the approach, inductive or deductive, would remain constant, even if the perspective were tipped to the functional or tipped to the perspective of the essence of things. Furthermore, we could conceivably shift our perspective at will without becoming disoriented.

Using the models of the tetrahedron or the pyramid to express the relationship of perspectivism to two other major philosophical systems of the modern age, we might view the pragmatic philosophy as a basement dug under the base line of raw experience, into which the pyramid will tumble when the digging is carried to its logical extremes. We might view the existentialist philosophy as a needle-sharp antenna rising from the top of a pyramid into nothingness or nihilism, from which the only logical course of action is suicide, as Ernest Hemingway concluded several years ago. John Dewey, at the opposite extreme, turned his analytical method on base experience. Starting with Berkeley's sensory data, Dewey began to deduce the elements in that experience that he believed were essential to education and ultimately knowledge. He was deducing, starting at the base of the pyramid. He found the system of thought not very stable. In fact, he decided the only constant was change, an illogical posture in which to find oneself, seeing that that constant would also be subject to change.

Paul Tillich and Jean Paul Sartre, on the other extreme, started with the concept of a summum bonum and began to employ the inductive process to investigate upward from the top of the pyramid, only to find themselves rising to a level of meaninglessness. Paul Tillich, however, unlike Sartre, decided that the meaning must therefore reside in God, in whom we exist and of whom we consist; thus, he returned to the top of the tetrahedron to the summum bonum. Much of modern theology seems to spin off the needle-sharp pinnacle of the existentialist antenna atop the pyramid, as much of modern science seems to employ analysis below the level of human experience and thus seems to undermine the foundations on which the pyramid rests.

Ethically, perspectivism tests every act or decision by the simple test of balance or harmony. If an act does not produce disharmony either within the individual or between the individual and other individuals, it is deemed good. This test may be applied with equal force to larger segments of society or political units, or, I submit to you, to literary studies. Often it results in the simple expedient of a refraining for love. The same test may be applied to a work of art, to a piece of literature, to determine aesthetic values. If there is harmony in form, in function, and in essence, there is beauty. As John Keats said in his immortal "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

In summary, perspectivism affords a fresh perspective on what is real and suggests something of the subjective nature of verifiable reality. In attempting to harmonize seemingly irreconcilable differences, the new philosophy conforms to the function of the two semicircular canals in the inner ear that serve as our sixth sense, the kinesthetic-kinetic sense, the sense of balance and sense of motion or harmony. The new philosophy removes the individual ego from an "I/thou" relationship to a "we" relationship, in which we all share individual differences without one person's being superior to another. In such a spirit of togetherness and cooperation, even genial criticism, perhaps true harmony can be realized or idealized in the world of tomorrow.

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