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De Litteris

Robert W. Jordan

Eugene P. Cognon

Gordon P. Wiles

Susan M. Woody

James R. Baird

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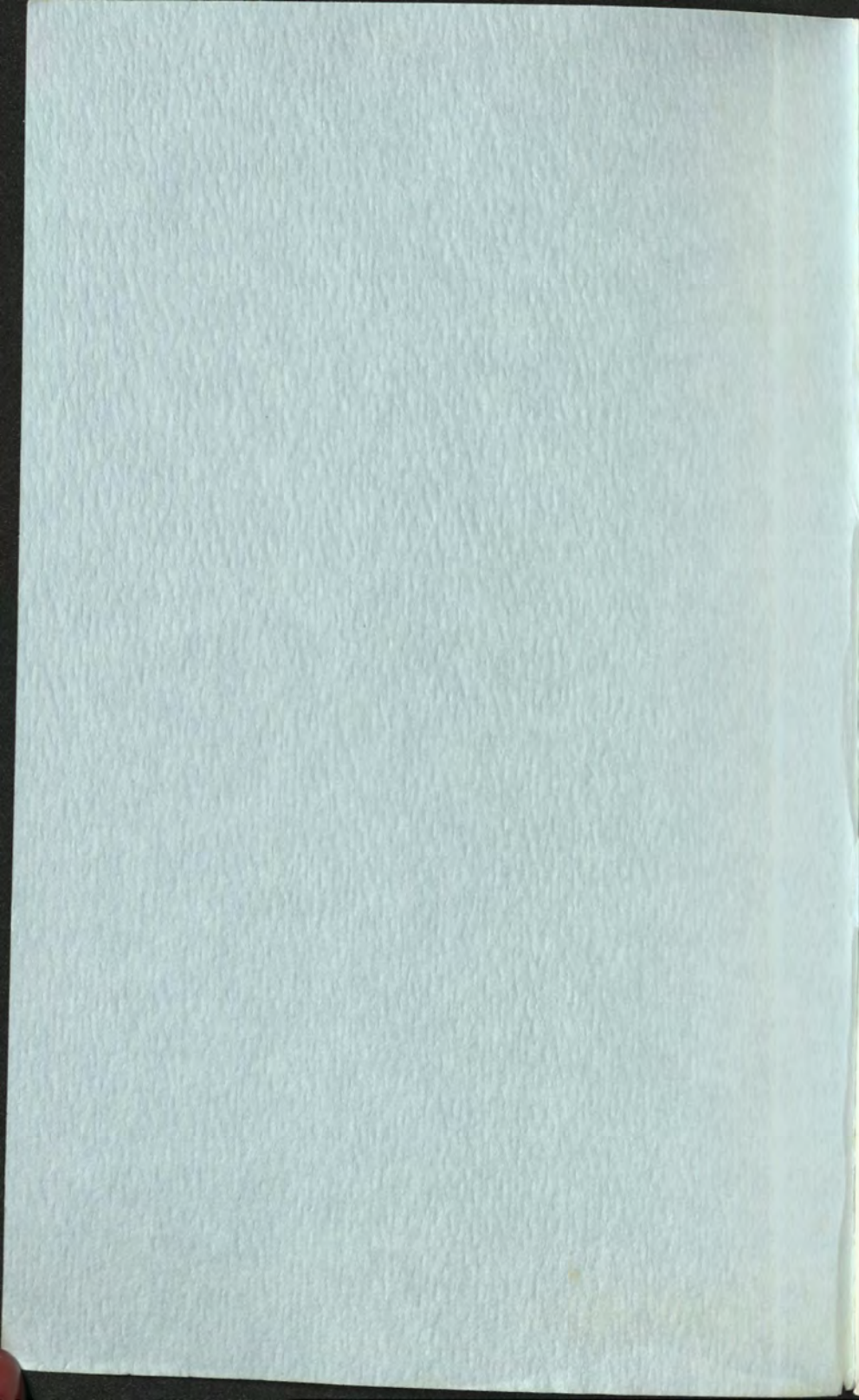
Authors

Robert W. Jordan, Eugene P. Cognon, Gordon P. Wiles, Susan M. Woody, James R. Baird, and F Edward Cranz

De Litteris



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DE LITTERIS
Occasional Papers in the Humanities

And they want to know what we talked about?

“*de litteris et de armis, praestantibusque ingeniis,*
Both of ancient times and our own; books, arms,
And of men of unusual genius,
Both of ancient times and our own, in short the usual subjects
Of conversation between intelligent men.”

Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*

Edited by
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Preface

Since 1973 the annual series of faculty lectures known as *De Litteris* has been an important contribution to cross-disciplinary endeavor at Connecticut College. The creativity and scholarly rigor of the papers have rewarded the careful listener with insights into varied aspects of the human condition. It is appropriate that the Library should sponsor the publication of this selection from *De Litteris* for the Library may be seen as a symbol of the diversity — and ultimate unity — of knowledge. Its collections record not only man's achievement, but the vast commentary upon that achievement and they provide a fund of resource material without which teaching and learning could not occur. In publishing these seven papers the Library is performing a variation of its traditional responsibility to make ideas and information available in convenient form to those who seek them.

Brian Rogers
College Librarian

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Brian Rogers
College Librarian

By Way of an Introduction

The circumstances surrounding *De Litteris* are minor; the whole annual series of lectures in the humanities, now in its seventh year, is a minor event in the profusion of such events visited upon the participants in the nebulous rites of higher education. The concerns of the contributors to this slim volume, however, constitute a significant circumstance. It alone, I think, may explain why the essays taken as a whole convey a hazy shape of a methodology; just as one of Conrad's misty halos sometimes made visible by "the spectral illumination of the moonshine" makes it possible to infer the central presence, a core.

I dare say everybody has had a dream in which a visitor from another world gravely and with intimidating simplicity wishes to obtain an answer to a perfectly ordinary question regarding some essential cause of the sleeper's vocation or profession. The sleeper invariably stumbles through several progressively less coherent beginnings and wrenching the right word from the blackness wakes up just as the word is about to pass over his lips. The word slips away. Unspoken? Unheard? Unremembered? The sleeper, now thoroughly awake, is saturated with the certainty that he has given the visitor a comprehensive, substantive answer, but the answer is enveloped by the dream, irretrievable yet horribly urgent.

Fanciful? Yes. For nowadays, if we are at all honest, we know that

if we cannot give an answer we are not going to wake up. And the visitor is not from another world, but our kinsman. And he wishes to know why learning is important. And dogmatic answers will not satisfy him for long. Nor will he find much comfort in the observation that each culture is a Bastille unto itself, that it storms itself periodically to proclaim its old newness. He wants an answer.

The purpose of learning is simple enough: it is "to recover what has been lost and found and lost again and again," as Eliot says in *East Coker*. And the task is always undertaken with imperfect tools, against a ceaselessly shifting mindscape. Thus the disciplined *doing* often appears to be the only stable, recognizable property of learning. When that is the case, the *doing* becomes an insidious and irresistible threat to learning. It is, therefore, imperative that what we *do* be subjected to regular and systematic theoretical scrutiny, lest our thought becomes opaque to itself and we become unable to think that our thought may be wrong.

De Litteris is a brief record of what happens when guardians try to guard themselves.

M.D.

Some Philosophical Remarks About Poetry

Robert W. Jordan

Several years ago, in *The Sewanee Review*, I tried to defend the thesis that poetry and philosophy are two modes of revelation and that while they must, of course, be distinguished, they must not be separated. To separate them, as I thought then and as I think now, is to diminish our chances for a comprehensive vision of the human condition and, therefore, to insure that we shall fall far short of the best that we might become. The thesis still has much to recommend it. Indeed, I now feel its significance with a much greater sense of urgency. It entails a number of unresolved fundamental questions concerning truth, sensibility and the nature of the interior life, the nature of education and the goals which a liberal arts education should pursue, and, above all, the question of non-conceptual knowledge which, I think, is the most important issue in contemporary philosophy. At any rate, it ought to be. I wish that I had something stunningly original and crushingly true to say about even one of these questions. As it is, I can only suggest why they are momentous and indicate the direction one must take in seeking answers to them.

Consider the question of poetic truth. I do not mean "poetic truth", nor the trivial matter of whether poetry sometimes contains assertions which could be regarded as true. We do not usually think of individual poems as bearers of truth although it would not be difficult to find examples which do just that, among the many other things that they do. But such poems are rightly understood only within the con-

Paper read on April 18, 1974

text of the whole body of work by a single poet, or within the context of writings by a group of poets who share a common vision such as, for example, the English romantic poets. The questions, then, might be put in the following way: does such a body of work reveal to us aspects of the truth concerning Nature, Man and God, or does it merely represent a spontaneity of impulse which finds some echo in us or which, at least, sweetens our emotional life, thus yielding the illusion of joy where no joy is? Whatever the answer to this question may be it must be understood as having to do with poetic truth straight out, without quotation marks, double or single. I shall assume that what is called poetic or artistic truth tells us something about the way things are which we could not learn in any other way.

Such a forthright affirmation is difficult to accept. Poetry is, of course, to be taken seriously, but literary fundamentalism is no more attractive than the Biblical variety and we all know how absurd that is. Therefore, qualifications are in order and are quickly forthcoming. In *Reason in Art* Santayana says, "Art is action which transcending the body makes the world a more congenial stimulus to the soul. All art is therefore useful and practical, and the notable aesthetic value which some works of art possess, for reasons flowing for the most part out of their moral significance, is itself one of the satisfactions which art offers to human nature as a whole."

Alas! a thing can be practical and useful, like Ptolemaic astronomy, without being true. Santayana is an extremely seductive philosopher for those who share his temperament and are therefore disposed to accept his defense of it. It frequently escapes their notice that in Santayana the moral life is subtly transformed into the aesthetic life. And in the cold, gray dawn of morning there comes the realization that one has been duped. I have admired Santayana, and I still do, as I admire his poetic counterpart Wallace Stevens, — excessively. I would pay these gentlemen the supreme compliment [as Plato did to Homer] of calling them dangerous. I take them very, very seriously. But at this time and in this place I am raising the question: is what they and their fellow-poets say true? From one point of view the question is outrageous, as any lover of poetry would protest, but I am not here concerned with that point of view. The question I want to consider now is a philosophical question intimately related to questions of literary criticism.

There is general agreement among philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle to the present, that truth is a property of propositions, and that we enter the area of the true and the false only when we speak at the level of propositions. We do not say that *things* are true. We say that they are, or that they exist. A dog is not true or false; a dog simply

exists. We may say that the dog before us now is a 'true' Newfoundland or a 'true' Miniature Schnauzer, meaning that the dog has the points required by the standards set for judging a genuine instance of a given breed of dog. And that is all that we usually mean when we use the word "true" in this way. Whether we could mean something more than that I shall put aside for the moment. I shall also put aside the question of whether the word "true" could appropriately be used of the works of art other than poetry, such as painting, sculpture, music, and so on. If we cannot make sense of "truth" as applied to poetry, which uses words, it is not likely that we shall succeed with painting or sculpture, and music presents enormous problems of a special kind. To mention but one: is there a grammar or language of music which corresponds in any way to the language of poetry? Let us suppose that the answer to that question is Yes. In that case, would it make any sense at all to speak of a musical composition as true? (If one has a season of speculation). The non-verbal arts present special difficulties, but I hope that if we can make a case for poetic truth it might be possible to consider other arts in a similar way.

Statements made in propositional form can be true or false and we distinguish them from non-propositional utterances such as exclamations, orders, questions, and so on. Poetry contains many propositional statements, but when we look for useful examples we find that they do not seem to fit our ordinary conception of a proposition, the most obvious difference being that the poetic utterance does not raise questions about truth or falsehood at all. On the contrary. Therefore, to treat a poem as if it were a logical argument shows a want of sensitivity and discernment.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting
The Soul that rises with us, on life's Star
Had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar
Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy.

True or false? If we choose to play the game I would be inclined to accept these assertions. I might not express them in the same way and, of course, not as well. But I would not call them false. Yet, that leaves only "true", unless one chooses to say that these words are merely saturated with emotion, that they are expressive of Wordsworth's mood at the time of composition and dependent for their effect on

one's mood at the time of reading. In that case the question of truth or falsehood does not arise, but such a position hardly does justice to Wordsworth's affirmation, which surely goes beyond the expression of a mood.

And yet, to say "true" does not seem quite right either. Many would probably hold that Wordsworth is talking romantic nonsense. They would allow us to admire the passage as an apt expression of a specific human feeling, but they would urge us not to spoil the aesthetic value of the passage by worrying about whether it is true or false.

But why not? Here it will be helpful to take a long look backwards to the classical philosophers of ancient Greece. Plato and Aristotle passed on to us not only their specific views about the nature of things; they also taught us *what it means to think*. The Greek understanding of thinking was one of the greatest achievements in Western civilization, and I intend no disparagement of it when I say that it still has us in thrall, even in bondage. It established the standards for what it *means* to think and, of course, we cannot do without it. But what we learn from it is that thinking is conceptual. It moves through concepts which are the bearers of meaning, and meanings are universals. Any other form of thinking is either an illusion or an emotional substitute for responsible thought.

To return to Wordsworth's lines. We can see that they are quite straightforward as far as their meaning is concerned. Anyone can understand the gist of what is being said in them. What about the following lines?

Life, like a many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

Again, true or false? My response to these lines is quick and positive, but if I am pressed to say just what they mean I shall have to appeal to a critic or scholar whose business it is to interpret difficult poetry for the common reader.

Now consider two stanzas of one of Housman's poems:

Shot? So quick an ending?
Oh, that was right, lad, that was brave:
Yours was not an ill for mending,
'Twas best to take it to the grave.
Oh, you had forethought, you could reason,
And saw your road and where it led,
And early wise and brave in season
Put the pistol to your head

True or false? Surely, false. I think that Houseman at his best will be read as long as English poetry is read; but this is Housman at his worst. It is sloppily sentimental and altogether meretricious. It is phoney. I cannot deny that someone who relishes the suicidal mood and has a taste for self-pity might think that this particular poem is one of the best things that he has ever read. But I think that if he resists self-destruction long enough he could be persuaded to change his mind.

At any rate, in answer to the question True or False? we have in the first case "True", in the second "Who knows?", and in the third example, "False". The fact that these are my personal judgments presents no problem. The answers I have given are possible answers and they are not meaningless. I claim that the above poetic assertions and others like them belong in the realm of the true and the false. The examples also show that such claims can be made even when passages are taken out of context, that is, in isolation from the work of which they are parts. My claim is ambitious and I am now in trouble. But let us consider the trouble I am in.

I have said that when philosophers talk about truth being propositional they are talking about conceptual knowledge and discursive thought. Concepts are universals — such as man, justice, beauty, and so on. The accounts of how universals are formed differ greatly, but I think that there would be general agreement that propositions are formed by the assertion of an agreement or disagreement between concepts, or between singulars and concepts. The agreement can be *a priori*, or it can be empirical. That is, some propositions are true by virtue of the meanings which the concepts have. Familiar examples are "All bachelors are unmarried," or "A square is not a circle." Other propositions are empirical such as "The cat is on the mat," or "There is a gazelle in the courtyard." If a proposition is to be regarded as true, it must be verifiable. This is a crucial point. *A priori* propositions require no verification because what is said in the subject is identical with what is said in the predicate. On the other hand, empirical propositions must be capable of verification, where verification means that the statement in question is open to empirical observation by anyone with the normal faculties of sense perception.

What would it require to verify any of my three examples? The question seems absurd. But *why* does it seem absurd? A provisional answer might be suggested. First it looks as if something like a category mistake is being made. A term taken from one universe of discourse is being used in another universe of discourse where it has no rightful place and no accepted meaning. Thus mis-used the idea of verification is not only unhelpful: it stands in the way of understand-

ding poetry. Second — and this is far more important — it will be said that poetic utterances cannot be verified anyway, that they exist outside of the realm of verifiable statements. Unfortunately, we live under a scientific imperialism as powerful as the philosophical imperialism of the ancient Greeks or the theological imperialism of the mediaeval scholastic philosophers. Everyone 'knows' that verification is under the control of experimental science in the sense that science tells us what verification *means*. But to define verification is, in effect, to legislate in advance for what is to be called true or false. I realize that generalizations about science and its methods are hazardous at best. Much depends upon which philosopher of science one reads and accepts. But I think that it is safe to say that the whole question of knowledge and truth is still generally understood as finding an explanation for something by deducing it from a universal law or principle — and this has been extended to cover even historical knowledge and historical understanding.¹

The question I want to raise now is this: is there anything in poetry which corresponds to the formal structure of logical arguments? More specifically, what is the movement of the mind in each case? I am aware that the phrase "movement of the mind" is a metaphor. I am suggesting that it is a metaphor we cannot do without. I take it that both in logic and in poetry we are offered a disclosure of some kind. What sort of disclosure is it and how does it work? The standard view of the matter is that metaphor makes poetry work. And I assume that nobody would deny that metaphor is crucial for the poetic rendering of the subtleties of experiences which ordinary language cannot adequately express. But it seems to me that most metaphors, taken by themselves, are timeless or tenseless and this is what they have in common with the valid forms of argument in logic. I would hasten to add that this is *all* that they have in common with logically valid forms, but I hope that this is enough for the comparison I want to make.

As a beginning consider the following line:

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

I cannot read this unemotionally, either silently or aloud, although I have read it many times. Part of what I am after is the reason why this line can affect me so strongly at each new reading. Just by the way, I realize that many people who read poetry will not respond as I do to this particular line. But I venture to think that everyone will have had an experience like mine in response to some line or lines which have a special meaning for them. We do not have to talk specifically about the same thing but only about the same sort of thing, at least at the elementary level of criticism at which I am operating.

If we look now at the whole poem from which the line is taken, Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, we find that the first twelve lines of the sonnet develop three related metaphors.

That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.

This though perceiv'st, which makes thy love more
strong,

To love that well which though must leave ere long.

Now, and in much of what follows, I shall borrow shamelessly from several writers whose work I have found particularly helpful for the kind of inquiry I am engaged in, and most of all from a book by Winifred Nowottny, *The Language Poets Use*.² In opening her discussion of Sonnet 73, Ms. Nowottny quotes a comment on the sonnet by Hallett Smith in which he says that "the richness of the sonnet derives more from its metaphorical involutions than it does from the clarity of its structure." Smith had said earlier,

Sonnet 73 is clear in its general design. The three quatrains have a relationship to each other and a natural development. They proceed from the declining of the year to the declining of the day to a declining of the fire, bringing the metaphorical point closer to the subject as the poem progresses.³

The clarity in this general design or ground-plan is the clarity of abstractions, a declining, a declining, and a declining. If we pay attention to the general design we may come to think that the three sets of particulars are intended to illustrate a common abstraction. But this is palpably absurd. The general design leaves out the richness of the sonnet, and it could not be otherwise. On this point Nowottny deserves to be quoted at some length. She says,

I cannot think of a better way of putting the difference between a poetic and a non-poetic structure

than to say that poetic structuring consists of more than a clear relation between clear abstractions, giving a general continuity to an utterance. Though this kind of clarity and continuity, obviously, is a marked and carefully contrived feature of this sonnet, it is equally obvious that to describe this clear and continuous ground-plan does not throw any light on the causes of the excitement we feel on reading the sonnet; there is nothing exciting in merely being told that the onset of winter and the coming of night and the dwindling of a fire are all examples of decline and that they metaphorically describe what the poet feels. If that is all, who cares?⁴

Just so! But we *do* care! Why?

We care because of the way in which these examples are particularized. The ground-plan, continuous and clear, permits the particularizing but it does not of itself effect it. What it does effect is some of the relating of the particulars to one another. The ground-plan relates the particulars to one another by provoking us to abstract from them a common formula and so it makes us relate all three metaphors to one another as examples of the same thing.⁵

Metaphors are examples of 'the same thing'. In this sense they are tenseless or static in themselves. But the particulars say something else; that these examples are different. What is the same and yet different is a simple definition of what philosophers call an analogous term, one kind of which is the metaphor. In general, a metaphor seems to contain a contradiction. Its form is "Such and such is the case, but really it isn't." The lion is the king of beasts but, of course, the lion is no such thing. Lions are not kings and kings are not lions, although we can speak of a king as a lion of a man. At this point we are inclined to adopt the expression "mere metaphor." Or, to be more accurate, philosophers are inclined to make that mistake, or, to be even more accurate, philosophers of a certain persuasion are inclined to make that mistake. But we can be sure of one thing: it is a mistake. Why?

Let us assume for the moment that it is a mistake and ask two preliminary questions: What *kind* of mistake is it? and, is it an important mistake or a trivial one? I would suggest that it is both an ontological and an epistemological mistake. That is to say, it is a

mistake about reality and about the nature of knowledge. And it is so far from being trivial we must acknowledge it to be at the very heart of the question about poetic or artistic truth. The phrase "mere metaphor" would refer to a figure of speech which is not to be taken seriously, at least so far as its cognitive value is concerned. However, we should distinguish between the poet's response to the charge of employing "mere metaphor" and the critic's response to that criticism.

First, the critic's response. René Wellek, in an essay entitled, "Philosophy and Postwar American Criticism," points out that from the late 20's to the early 60's (and I think we can extend this to the present time) critics became "more clearly conscious of their philosophical affiliations and assumptions." Elder Olson could say, for example, that "criticism is a department of philosophy". Wellek reminds us, further, that critics have been influenced by philosophers of quite diverse persuasions, all the way from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Bergson. Since Wellek's essay was first published the dialogue between philosophy and literary criticism has continued unabated. One might say the critics have learned from philosophy that many of the central problems of criticism, such as poetic truth and the ontological status of works of art, are distinctively philosophical problems. Philosophers, on the other hand, have learned (or should have learned) from the critics that if philosophy is to support criticism in the arts and literature it must not reduce meaning to the bare univocity of formal logic, that, as Aristotle warned, we should not demand more precision in our inquiry than the subject matter permits. Could we expect, then, that the phrase "mere metaphor" would no longer be tolerated? We used that phrase when we were comparing metaphor with something better, such as a bald statement of fact. But, if metaphor is not an instrument of knowledge in any way it is pointless to speak of "mere metaphor." On the other hand, if it is an instrument of knowledge (as I think it is) then to speak of "mere metaphor" is not just pointless, — it is a serious mistake.

Unfortunately, we cannot conclude that the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy has been, or is about to be, ended. A larger problem confronts both the critic and the philosopher — and its name is paradox. If we consult the OED in this matter we learn that "paradox" can mean or has meant a statement contrary to received opinion, often with the implication that it is marvelous or incredible, but it can also mean something that is discordant with what is held to be established truth. It can also mean (and this is, I take it, the currently received opinion) a statement or proposition which on the face of it seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common

sense, though when it is explained it may prove to be well-founded or essentially true.

Philosophers have a standard response to paradox, one which is understandable because it is often justifiable. They try to get rid of the paradox by showing that it is, in fact, a contradiction. We can say contradictory things, but we cannot *mean* contradictions. For this reason I distrust the notion which critics express almost with satisfaction, that the poet (or painter, or composer) must deliberately strive for paradox or ambiguity. This notion is unintelligible. If it were true poetry would, in the final analysis, be undiscussable, even if critics, for reasons known only to themselves, continued to discuss it. A recent example from the field of music is Leonard Bernstein's broadcast talks at Harvard, published under the title *The Unanswered Question*. But among literary critics it is Cleanth Brooks, in *The Well Wrought Urn* and later writings, who has defended the view that for the poet paradox is inevitable. The following passage from his analysis of Donne's "The Canonization" is representative:

I submit that the only way by which the poet could say what "The Canonization" says is by paradox. More direct methods may be tempting, but all of them enfeeble and distort what is to be said.⁷

But what, so far as I can see, goes largely unnoticed is that in this analysis of Donne's poem and other poems in the same book. Brooks shows that the paradox is *not* a contradiction. The paradox is not eliminated or resolved by the translation of the poem into the univocity of a paraphrase, for the very good reason that the poem cannot be paraphrased without being destroyed as a poem. I have a suggestion to make to the defenders of a paradox and ambiguity, and it is this: We do not have to say that the poet deliberately employs paradox in order to say what he wants to say. We *can* say that the poet must *risk* the use of paradox and therefore the possibility of being misunderstood or regarded as 'difficult', *because* he must work not merely with abstractions but with the complexity of the world and the richness of our experience when we try to understand our world and ourselves. I have always liked this passage from Austin Farrer's book *A Rebirth of Images*,

There is a current and exceedingly stupid doctrine that symbol evokes emotion, and exact prose states reality. Nothing could be further from the truth: exact prose abstracts from reality, symbol presents it. And for that reason, symbols have some of the many-sidedness of wild nature.⁸

I turn now to the poet's response to the charge of employing "mere metaphor", assuming that he thinks it worthwhile to respond at all. I must make the qualification because we cannot complain if poets simply ignore charges of this kind. Why should they not ignore them? We want, I take it, poets to write poetry, painters to paint pictures, composers to write music, and so on through all of the arts. How helpful would it be to an artist if he were told that he is making an object of knowledge *sui generis* which has a special ontological status? If he spends a significant amount of time worrying about the ontological status of what he is making, he will not get anything made at all. He would probably be inclined to settle for W.H. Auden's suggestion that we can expect two things from a poem. One is that it be well constructed as befits the work of a good craftsman, and the other is that it should present to us some aspect of reality about which we already possess some knowledge, but in a new way or from an entirely new perspective. Ordinarily, in the role of common reader, I should be quite happy to accept Auden's account and go on reading. In fact, that is just what I do, and what I shall continue to do. But with respect to the theme I am discussing, poetic truth, I must say that things are not so simple.

No artist is pure artist. No poet is pure poet. There is a limit to the artist's autonomy, which is in any case, largely a matter of skill. He cannot escape from the prevailing winds of doctrine any more than any of us can. There is a claim, implicit in any artist's work, that the thing he creates reveals to us new dimensions of reality and of truth. The common reader, again, is not inclined to challenge that claim, unless some critic or philosopher puts him up to it. But when the claim is challenged, the artist may find himself unequipped to answer the charge. An artist *qua* artist is not under any obligation to justify his action. But one of the things I am trying to show is that if *nobody* can justify it, we are all in trouble. We are naturally disposed to think that the creator of a work of art or literature *knows* more about it than anyone else could possibly know. And so he does, if we are thinking of the artist as the *maker* of a work. But neither his skill as a craftsman nor his intention in producing it are decisive where the question of truth is concerned.

Now, when the poet does choose to answer the charge that he is, after all, using merely figures of speech which are no more than expressive or emotive, his response seems to take one of two forms. C. Day Lewis's analysis in *The Poet's Way of Knowledge* is typical. The first response is the suggestion that there are remarkable affinities between the method of science and the method of poetry. An interesting parallel strategy is to be found in the writings of some apologists

for religion, who point out that an unbiased mind perceives an element of "faith" in all human efforts to gain knowledge, and that religion and science are not so far apart after all. The trick will not work with religion and it will not work with poetry either. These wonderful romantic terms such as "force," "power" or "energy" which lend themselves so readily to metaphorical interpretation yield very quickly to technical terms, that is, to concepts univocally defined and expressed in the austere notation of mathematics. One will never discern in that language "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower".

The second response, the kind C. Day Lewis seems to prefer, is that the function of a poem is to "communicate a unique state of mind." I cannot see that a poem "communicates" anything, but anyone otherwise minded would do well to read Chapter Four of *The Well Wrought Urn*. Consider the following passage from Lewis:

. . . if poets are not concerned with the exploration of 'life, naked living', at its most intense, and with giving us the feeling of it, then I do not know what they are up to. The initial stage of making a poem is often a kind of groping in the dark . . . The clue, the *donnée*, whatever it be, may have a self-evident bearing on what happens to be preoccupying the poet at the time; or it may seem to have none at all. The poet fixes this clue as bait on the end of his line, casts it into the sea of his experience, and in a watchful passivity waits for whatever may attach itself to the bait.⁹

I find it extremely difficult to believe that this is what poets are up to, or that this is more than a very small part of what they are up to. Their work-sheets seem to show something quite different. But I do not want to press the matter. I am, however, certain that this is not what philosophers and scientists are up to, even though I think that there is a visionary element in both philosophy and science. The passage wonderfully confirms the positivist contention that the language of poetry, like all emotive language, is an expression of feelings and consequently neither true nor false. The poet, accordingly, *has* no access to knowledge. As poet he may cast his bait, but even if he happens to make a true statement it is not as poet that he makes it but as something else, perhaps as part-time philosopher.

Let us return to our sonnet. Branches are choirs, but of course they are not choirs at all. Birds sing as choristers sing, but they do nothing of the sort. If anyone thinks that all that Shakespeare is doing is playing with words to produce an ingenious paradox, I simply do not understand what that could mean. I would expect any reflective reader

to perceive intuitively that no adequate substitute for line four could be produced which was free from paradox, assuming what we really cannot assume, that an adequate substitute could be produced at all. The univocal mind will always respond to a metaphor in the same way: *p* and not-*p*, and therefore, a contradiction. But it is possible, as the work of Cleanth Brooks illustrates so clearly, that the apparent contradiction is just that, apparent, and that the paradox is *not* a contradiction. It is not always easy to show this because of the complexity of interlocking metaphors in a particular poem, or because the poet writes obscurely. Dylan Thomas's poetry is a good example of how difficult the task of interpretation can be. But in the example under consideration the task is not difficult. I would interpret line four as asserting the following:

<i>empty choirs</i>	as	<i>bare branches</i>
absence of human song		absence of bird song

Where is the contradiction? The proportion does not assert that bare branches are empty choirs, and we know that they are not. This is a comparison not of one thing to another but of one relationship to another. In the traditional discussion of analogous terms this statement would be called a proportionality. Using that language for convenience, I think we can now bring forward the dominant figure in the whole sonnet and say that what we have in the sonnet is a proportionality in the mode of "declining." Read in this way, we can grasp at once the dynamic power of line four. Stated in it is a proportionality stateable, we might have thought, only in a prosaic assertion or paraphrase. And it is stated in such a way that the word "inevitably" comes to mind at once. Shakespeare's incredible ability to do this kind of thing over and over again (Keats called it Negative Capability), is a practical, poetical solution of one of the most fundamental and perennial problems of philosophy — the problem of the one and the many or, more accurately, the problem of the one *in* the many. If there is anything 'inevitably' built into poetic utterance, it is the analogous term. I said earlier that a metaphor always says *p* but not-*p*. But this is to reckon without analogy — because analogy means "sameness within difference" but without contradiction.

I can see the thing working and I fancy that anyone can see it working. Well then, may I simply rest my case and await congratulations? Of course not. I said earlier that our Greek heritage is not an unmixed blessing. But we cannot abandon it. If we do, there can be no intelligible discourse whatever. For that reason confident and robust assertion that poetic truth is *sui generis* and therefore transcends the sphere of logic and consistency altogether is sheer nonsense. There is

no hope of defending poetic truth (and theological truth) by making this desperate move.

On the other hand, it is obvious that poetic utterance will never fit the pattern of conceptual knowledge. When we talk *about* poetry, we engage in conceptual analysis. Critical commentary and evaluation are necessarily conceptual. Otherwise, the critic could only produce another poem, leaving to us the task he was supposed to perform, viz., the evaluation of the poem in question. All that this comes to, however, is that if there is such a thing as non-conceptual knowledge we cannot make sense of it by somehow switching off our conceptual knowledge while we experience a non-conceptual mode of knowing. The only problem here is whether there is, in fact, what must be described as non-conceptual knowledge. But let us assume that much, for the sake of the argument. Our troubles are far from over.

One of those prevailing winds of doctrine tells us that a propositional statement which is not a tautology must be open to verification. What stands in the way of the acceptance, of a general acceptance, of poetic truth (and also of theological or religious truth) is the principle of verifiability. If poetic assertions claim to be true, or if anyone claims truth for them, all the polite concessions from philosophers and scientists will be withdrawn. Do you, by chance, remember C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures*? And do you remember that there never were two cultures, really. There was only one, and that was the scientific culture. The pattern is typical, I think: the appearance of a concession which as soon as the discussion becomes serious turns out to be only that, an apparent concession but not a real one.

Let us return once more to Sonnet 73. Consider this question: how would one go about verifying Sonnet 73? I acknowledge, once again, that the question sounds idiotic. It sounds like a question which could be asked only by someone who lacks any imagination and who possesses an uncommonly literal mind. To the literal mind verification means taking a look or getting a pointer reading, and nothing more. In that event, there is no parallel between the language of poetry and the language of science. There is a parallel, and an important one, but it is between poetic utterances and assertions which are made in the context of interpersonal relationships. For example, a man tells his wife that he loves her. We cannot get a pointer reading on that one. We cannot verify that statement by taking a look, not even by taking a closer look. I think that statements of this kind *can* be verified and, in fact, we confirm or disconfirm them all the time. Such assertions are also at the very heart of religious language and the language of moral discourse, but that is another story altogether.

I shall assume that the language of Sonnet 73 embodies a truth of

some kind, that it illuminates at least one aspect of our human condition, and that it does so in such a way that we respond to it *affirmatively*. The form of the sonnet is static, of course, as tenseless and timeless as a logical form. It must be particularized in order to mean anything. However, as soon as particularization begins we are no longer concerned with abstract or static forms. The particularization introduces *action*. A poem *moves*, and its movement is reflected in the activity of the mind — our activity in trying to assimilate what the language of the poem offers us. (In what follows I shall regard knowledge as the assimilation of reality — a reality which is independent of the knowing agent.)

In one of his essays, Louis Mackey makes this observation:

In the course of teaching mediaeval philosophy I have observed that the doctrinal affirmations of the Augustinian tradition, though supported by careful and rigorous proofs, tend to bounce lightly and ineffectually off the tympana of modern students. But the *poetry* of that tradition, its pervasive *argumentum ad imaginem*, induces reverence. St. Bernard's extravaganza on the love of God speaks more persuasively than the ontological argument; the former enthalls the imagination, the latter (with some notable exceptions) inspires refutation.¹⁰

I have had the same experience in teaching. Perhaps the response was not quite reverence, but it expressed the conviction that the structure of images was more important than the formal argument. In confirming Mackey's observation I am not putting poetry on a level lower. Here is another passage from Mackey, this one from the preface to his book, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*:

a "poetic" reading is the best reading of any philosophy that still professes to love wisdom . . . Philosophy is not only dialectic, producing conviction. It is also rhetorical, aimed at persuading. All actual philosophical discourse is addressed, not to a putative pure rational "anyone" but to a particular "someone" in a particular context.¹¹

If anyone wants to disagree with this assessment of philosophy, he will have to refute Plato and Plato's teacher as well. And anyone who wants the job can have it for the asking. Mackey adds another comment which, I think, is squarely on target:

Nothing, of course, could be less poetic — nor, I suspect, less philosophical — than those philosophies that prefer

the mechanical clatter of logical symbols, the abstemious one-upmanship of language analysis, or the jejune solemnities of the epoche, to the untidy and rather dangerous mysteries of the *philosophia perennis*. But every philosopher worthy of this birth-right is also "a kind of poet".

I have now reached the point of no return. So, I may as well keep going. We should, indeed, revive the *argumentum ad imaginem*. But, is there any way of showing the possibility, not to mention the desirability, of such a project? One of the more interesting things in Nowotny's *The Language Poets Use* is her refusal to go along with the veneration of the metaphor as the sole repository of poetic power and energy. Her discussion of this point is too detailed even to be summarized here. It is designed to show that syntax is in many ways more important for understanding a poem and how the poem 'works' than metaphor is, but that we shall never appreciate the role of syntax as long as we continue to make metaphor the center of attention. If we follow this suggestion we shall see at once that the syntactical structure of a poem, a particularly clear example of which is Sonnet 73, requires that the mind move through the structure of images, often metaphors of course, in such a way as to *enact* or *act out* the meaning of the poem. I realize that the phrase "movement of the mind" is yet another metaphor but in the nature of the case nothing less than a metaphor will do. The movement of the mind, then, can be regarded as an analogue of an argument expressed in conceptual terms. It has a beginning (an initial premise), intermediate steps (additional premise), and a conclusion (what the poem finally affirms). Clearly, the dominant role here is played by the imagination. Discursive reasoning is secondary, although it is still operating. Otherwise — that is, if reason were not acting simultaneously with the imagination, — there would be no meaning of any kind. We should frequently remind ourselves, especially if we are philosophers, that words which in ordinary language stand for concepts become symbols or signs when they are used in poems. Even the simplest words do this. Juliet says of Romeo:

“. . . and when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine,
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.”

These are quite ordinary words, but the language is quite extraordinary. What I am suggesting is that we must substitute extraordinary language analysis for ordinary language analysis.

William Poteat has written very perceptively about the symbolic transformation of words made to become elements of experience which is being acted out. "These symbolic associations," he says, "are elements in the structure or shape of each one's own way of living in the world. Our way of feeling *in* the world, the rhythms of our *being at home* here have some kind of order, and therefore may be thought of as having a kind of syntax." He suggests further that reflective people are inclined to think all intellectual encounters are essentially arguments, and all arguments are of one sort, that is, arguments in which the assumptions are quite clear and held in common, where the problem is clearly understood and the rules of inference are clear and well defined. But how many times in our lives have we been in that situation? We do not live in the antiseptic atmosphere of purely formal inference. I suggested earlier that the language we use in interpersonal relationship is closer to the language of poetry than to the language of discursive reasoning, although it rarely, if ever, rises to the level of poetic utterance. But we have a right to call it argument even if the imagination plays a central role in what is said and in the way in which it is received. If that is so, there seems to be no reason why the movement of the mind as it follows a syntactic pattern of controlled images should not also be described as a kind of argument.

But what are arguments of this kind worth? Do they disclose the truth of things in any way at all? I said at the beginning of these remarks that it would be absurd to scrutinize poems in order to find statements which are true. If that is so, it indicates that the answer to my question cannot be a simple Yes or No. The question is phrased in such a way that it demands a simple affirmative or a simple negative answer. The question must be asked in another way. Can poetry generally, can the work of individual poets, can a particular poem in some cases, — be understood as falling within the domain of the true and the false? The answer to that question is an unqualified Yes. Someone is sure to ask whether Wordsworth's poetry is true and if so whether it is truer than Donne's poetry or whether Shakespeare comes closer to the truth than Ben Jonson. Or, we might beget questions like these: I like Blake but I do not fancy Coleridge. Does that mean that Blake's poetry is true and Coleridge's poetry is false? And aren't these questions just plain silly?

I would counsel patience. Suppose we shift our attention to philosophical arguments and raise similar questions. A good argument in philosophy does not have to reach a conclusion which all philosophers would accept as true. Consider, for example, Plato's argument for the immortality of the soul, Aristotle's argument for the

Unmoved Mover, or Hume's argument on causality. These are famous arguments and all philosophers must study them and decide for themselves whether the conclusions of the arguments are true or false. But there is no consensus among philosophers with respect to any of them. Indeed, many philosophers would reject all of them so far as *truth* is concerned. The point is that the arguments make intelligible truth *claims*, which is to say that there are capable of being true or false. They are not expressions of emotive preference.

Very well, can we find analogues in poetry? We can: "Paradise Lost", "King Lear", "Oedipus Rex", but we need not appeal to the most famous names. We might choose the poetry of T.S. Eliot, or Wallace Stevens, or Robert Frost. If we ignore or reject the implicit, or in Eliot's case the explicit, truth *claims* which these poets make, we shall trivialize their whole work and reduce it to a literary game, — and any number can play. Perhaps, but what about verification? In the first place, good poetry is never didactic. If it instructs or informs, it does so by indirection, which is one of the reasons why it is otiose to examine poetry for bits of wisdom or home truths. I do not have in mind isolated statements, however edifying, but the total vision of a whole body of work. In the second place, the claims made in poetry, implicit or otherwise, cannot be verified by an empirical observation (or series of observations) as this is understood in science or in philosophical empiricism. Instruments of measurement are useless because the data in question cannot be quantified. Taking another look will not get us anywhere either. At any given moment there may be nothing in particular to look at.

The language of morality and religion provides a clue to the solution of the problem of verification, although in both cases the problem is, if anything, more difficult than it is in the case of poetry. Nevertheless, I think we can see that there is something common to all three cases — the conception of truth as enactment. We are concerned not with notions but with motions, not with concepts and propositions but with the manifestation of truth in the concrete and the particular. The language of ethics and religion does not operate in exactly the same way as the language of poetry, but there is nothing mysterious or odd about the idea of enactment as applying to all three of these languages. We are so accustomed to thinking of truth as something we tell, that we miss altogether the more important aspect of truth as what we *do*. In some contexts *doing* the truth, standing in the truth, enacting the truth, are the only adequate expressions for saying what we really mean. For example, how are we to describe the integrity of a person whose whole life publishes and illustrates his character. His whole life is the verification of the statements we can make about him.

Similar examples are easy to find, the relation of love between husband and wife, the loyalty between friends, or the steadfastness of the faithful man in his relation to God. Examples abound. Poetic language does not function in quite the same way. Of course not. Even when poetry contains convictional language it does not demand that we should immediately alter our behavior, as if the poet were prescribing a rule of life. Enactment in poetry is carried out by the imagination controlled by the figuration of the poem, which can be simple or complex but is surely more than an aesthetic thrill.

Suppose, however, that someone says "You have claimed that propositional truth, conceptual truth, is somehow transcended in poetry, that poetry yields non-conceptual knowledge and truth. But isn't poetry made up largely of propositions?" Yes, but we must remember that when words become parts of poetic language they no longer function as general concepts. They become parts of a structure of images. To understand them we depend upon the imagination rather than our discursive reason. If we want our ideas always to be perfectly clear so that we can avoid inconsistency and ambiguity we must be sure that our concepts are univocal and that they remain so, that, in other words, they mean exactly the same thing every time they are used. If our concepts do become ambiguous or equivocal, and they tend to do so, we may find that the same term has radically different meanings. It may become rather tiresome to keep explaining what we mean by the term, but it presents no serious problem. We can never be accused of saying Yes and No at the same time. In other words we will never be guilty of speaking paradoxically. Unfortunately, it will then be extremely difficult for us to say anything interesting. The language of poetry is the language of analogy, the very heart of all metaphor. It is there that we can say "p but not-p", and without contradiction. Rather than say that paradox is inevitable in poetry I would prefer to say that what is built into poetic utterance is the analogous term. To understand this fundamental principle is to be able to see poetic language working, and also to see that what is at work is the analogical imagination. To understand poetic truth we must learn to understand what I shall call the epistemology of the image.

But, does it make any difference whether there is such a thing as poetic truth? What difference could it make. Might we not say — the difference between spiritual life and death? I don't want to be solemn, I only want to be serious. We have heard a great deal, in recent years, about creativity in the arts and literature. Poetry is always creative in the sense of making things which did not exist before. But as Erich Heller says so justly,

. . . it is creative also in a profounder and more elusive

sense. Poetry heightens and cultivates the creative element that is in experience itself. For experience is not the impressions we receive; it is a *making* sense. And poetry is the fore-most sense-maker of experience. It renders *actual* ever new sectors of the apparently inexhaustible field of *potential* experience.¹²

I feel bold enough to offer one small amendment, so that we can say that poetry and philosophy are the fore-most sense-makers of experience. And each is first among equals. There's paradox for you.

NOTES

1. I am concerned only with the structure of discursive thought understood as moving from perceptions to concepts, from concepts to propositions, and from propositions to arguments.
2. Winifred Nowotny, *The Language Poets Use*, The Athlone Press, 1962.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.
6. In *Concepts of Criticism*, Yale University Press, 1963. See also René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942, esp. pp. 157, 299, and 251.
7. Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947, p. 17.
8. Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, Dacre Press, 1949, p. 20.
9. C. Day Lewis, *The Poet's Way of Knowledge*, pp. 20, 30, 18-19.
10. From an unpublished lecture of Louis Mackey.
11. Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, pp. xi-xii.
12. Eric Heller, *The Hazard of Modern Poetry*, Bowes and Bowes, 1953, pp. 25-26.

Linguistics and Rhetoric

Eugene P. Cognon

I should like to consider rhetoric in its relation to modern linguistics, a science of language radically different from traditional grammar and traditional philology in that it approaches language as a purely operational system. I have chosen the subject for several reasons. In the first place, it seems to me that the present decline and loss of prestige of the "humanities" reveals a deep sense of frustration, and that this frustration may well be the result of the fact that we have expected and led others to expect too much from literary studies. What we can reasonably expect from literary studies obviously depends on what we think literature is, and in that determination we cannot afford to ignore the assistance proffered by modern descriptions of language. Secondly, if literature is still with us its meaning seems to have changed, just as its function has changed along with the whole panorama of the cultural scene. In the past literature was considered a suitable vehicle for all kinds of things, a multi-dimensional medium without a dimension of its own, capable of conveying factual, ideational and imaginative information. The appearance of new forms of communication and of art forms derived from technical discoveries has obliged critics to redefine the proper function of literature. Just as photography freed painting from the representation of "reality" and from the obsession with the model, the prodigious development of new means of information has freed, or deprived in this instance, literature of some of its traditional resources. Who amongst us will

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write a letter when he can use the telephone? How many will prefer a good novel to a good movie, now that movies are better than novels? We must approve of their taste. It may not be ours but its dispersion among the educated is clearly indicative of the gradual erosion of what was traditionally considered as the impregnable territory of literature. By literature I mean the narrative and descriptive power of words to tell a story convincingly, or to acquaint us with the thousand faces of the world. This is not to say that words themselves are becoming obsolete; certain uses of words are, perhaps, becoming obsolete as new instruments are invented which can better serve the same needs. It might be time to ask ourselves whether our idea of literature is in keeping with the development of our techniques, and in particular with our understanding.

There is yet another reason why I chose this subject for my talk. At a time when so many specialists in the field of ethnology, sociology, economics, psychology, biology, etc., are searching for a new ideal of intelligibility directly adapted to their different studies from structural linguistics (which has come to play the part of mathematics in the constitution of the "science of man"), it is paradoxical that students of literature remain impervious to modern theories of language. "A linguist deaf to the poetic function," says R. Jakobson, "or a specialist of literature unaware of the problems and ignorant of the methods of linguistics are both flagrant anachronisms in our time." The reluctance of scholars to adopt new techniques can be easily accounted for by the fact that they have been forced to undertake a heart-rending revision of all they hold dear and sacred. As humanism of old turns into "anthropology" not only the "values" of the past, but also our very concepts of knowledge, thought, and reason, appear in a radically different light: the *explanation* utilized by historians to account for cultural phenomena, with its insistence on genesis, growth, evolution, along the line of time (diachrony), is gradually replaced by a concern for *comprehension* based on the analysis of surfaces, spatial arrangements, synchrony. Instead of understanding a particular phenomenon as the result of an evolution, the term of a becoming whose historians strove to describe its sequential shape, contemporary researchers turn their backs on history to consider individual "facts" as parts of organized "systems," observable *hic et nunc*. Hence a remarkable mutation in the terminology of modern critics: they favor spatial models over temporal ones; such words as "level," "distance," "surface," "field," "pole," "transfer," have now "displaced" the historical vocabulary of "origin," "precedent," "evolution," "genesis," "dialectics." As far as literary studies are concerned the weakness of "literary history" is that it is a contradic-

tory proposition: it can hardly be "history" and "literary" at the same time. It can only be one at the expense of the other. Stressing erudition, biography, sources, influences and the like, only circumvents the problem by telling us what is *not* literary in literature. If we believe that literature is primarily the art of language there seems to be no other way but to forget as irrelevant all that generations of historians have told us about literature as the product of other forces. Our contention in this paper is that literary scholarship has a subject of its own, and that it runs the risk of losing itself in futility if it continues to ignore the only instrument that can best help delineate its scope with any degree of precision.

Even the least experienced student of a foreign language, whether ancient or modern, becomes aware when he tries to translate a passage that to understand the text correctly it is not enough to resort to the old procedure of parsing, or grammatical analysis. He senses that the text is inseparable from a larger context which he as yet does not possess, and that he will not be able to "make sense" of the passage unless he knows more about the circumstances in which it was written. He needs to know who utters the message, to whom the message is addressed, and, paradoxically enough, he also wants to know more or less what the message is about. Modern linguistics accounts for this: it explains how a word is never only a *sign* but also a *symbol*. If we accept the definitions given by de Saussure in his famous *Course*, "the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image," and is further determined by the intersection of the coordinates within an organic whole. A symbol, on the other hand, is defined by its relation to a reality which is, by its very nature, alien to it. To put it more simply, the word behaves exactly like a monetary unit whose value, as we know only too well, does not necessarily guarantee its buying power. There is inflation and deflation in language as in all value-systems; the meaning of a word as given in the dictionary may differ considerably from the meaning it is assigned in a particular sentence. This ambiguity is by no means accidental. It is fundamental. It ensues from the *hiatus* which separates the two levels of speech: the level of *signification*, related to the word as sign, and the level of *designation*, related to the word symbol. In the first instance, (signification), we are dealing with arbitrary and unconscious units, since we receive our language ready-made, so to speak, and since there are many different languages. In the second instance (designation), we are dealing with motivated and conscious discourse, since we are always free to choose the words we think are best to communicate our meaning. Those familiar with Saussure recognize the famous dichotomy between "langue et parole," (language and

speech). But Saussure, who followed the ideas of his time and was strongly influenced by Durkheim's sociology, believed that language was a social datum, speech — an individual datum, a description we find difficult to accept if only because of "idiolects," speech patterns developing within the limits of individual speech, mannerisms of expression which prove that a process of sedimentation, settling, takes place at the personal level as it does at the level of institutionalized language. In fact, the difference lies elsewhere; while language is structured, speech is the structuring (or constitutive) activity. When I speak the words I use constitute a structure modeled after the patterns of the language, and the reality which I inform in the process although extraneous to it lends to my words, paradigms, and syntagms (i.e. to the whole system), the determination which presides over the arrangement of the sentence. This reciprocal structuring of reality by language and of language by reality is probably one of the most difficult questions of the linguistic theory. It raises all sorts of difficulties which result from the absolute separation between words and things. However, the interaction between language and the world, in accordance with the analysis of contemporary linguistics, eventually accounts for the formation of concepts, of fields and contexts, in short, of "semantics" rooted in the similarities and solidarities of things.

We are thus led to examine the central question of meaning in the light of what has just been said. Because of philosophical implications I would have preferred to avoid the question, but there is no way in which I could do that short of changing my subject. In our perspective meaning, far from being, as it is generally thought, a simple operation, will be split along the line of the Sign/Symbol dichotomy. Saussure and his successors distinguish two poles, for they observe that language is a system of differences. "In language," Saussure says, "there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system." This differential conception of language imparts a negative character to Saussure's descriptions: everything in speech is the result of a continuous process of self-inducing disjunctions, separations, delimitations. One could almost speak of a dialectics of pure oppositions for in this view of language there is no third term. With Hegel, for instance, synthesis was the moment of hope; there is no such thing in the purely scientific approach of our linguisticians. They view meaning as the by-product of fragmentation, and they claim that "thought,

chaotic in nature" becomes ordered only through "the process of its decomposition."

In the division of meaning we find yet another example of the binary structure underlying the development of language. Meaning can always be broken up into two different, though closely related realms: the realm of what language means in me, and the realm of what I mean in it, the two being necessary to each other as well as inevitably inadequate to each other. Hence the ambiguities of our speech. *Polysemia* is unavoidable, and it is useless to recommend the use of the "proper" word since there is obviously no proper word, no right word. There would be one if language were only a process of naming, "a list of words, each corresponding to the thing it names." But that would presuppose that ideas exist before words, and that things exist before ideas, a state of affairs which is linguistically unacceptable, although commonly held to be true. Strictly speaking, the pure meaning of a word is confined to the silence of dictionaries. It is lost in the act of designation, or, if you prefer, in the application of living speech. Since things have no names *polysemia* (the multiplicity of meanings attaching to a given word or expression) is simply a fact of linguistic life; for all the reluctance of a certain pedagogy there is nothing scandalous to it. It is the result not of any deficiency in either of the two opposite poles of meaning, but of the conflict between them. In fact, if we avoid the confusion between words and sememes, meaning is always one and simple at the level of signification; conversely, a word supported by a given context has never more than one meaning at a time. But ambiguity will appear when we attempt to force things into a framework of relations which deprives them of their singularity and imposes on them limitations and classifications fundamentally alien to their nature. In other words, *polysemia* is the outcome of our effort to think the world of things by means of the world of language, whereas, we maintain, the two are incompatible. But, vain as this claim might be, the practical necessity of expressing reality through language will confer upon our thought, which in itself is pure logic, the coherence and unity of meaning demanded by the situation.

It also follows that the validity of a message can never be definitely established by language alone. This is the easiest part of the demonstration, because it is borne out by everyday observation. Even in a simple expression like "a brown leather shoe," nothing in the words suggests and only experience will tell whether "brown" refers to "leather," or to "shoe." In a sentence like "this coat is light," only verification determines whether we mean "light" as weight, or light as colour, and when I say that, "I knew him as a student," we cannot

know which of us was the student at the time. This may sound too evident, but it leads to the conclusion (itself perhaps less evident) that language as such is not interested in the "truth" or "untruth" of the statement. Just as the linguistic sign, according to Saussure, is arbitrary, we must infer that the whole system of language is arbitrary in its relation to the world of "things," that is to say that it is based on norms completely autonomous from the norms of reality.

The fact that we are dealing with two completely separate "totalities," or normative systems, each of them following its own independent laws can be illustrated in a different way. It is consistent with the laws of anatomy that a man walks on his feet rather than on his head; it is also consistent with the laws of mathematics that 2 plus 2 equals 4. It is consistent with the established set of facts, designated as historical, that George Washington was born in the State of Virginia; it is consistent with the practice of medicine or surgery that operations are performed under anesthesia, and so on. But when we talk of anatomy, or history, or surgery, when we talk of knowledge, of practice, of facts or habits, we have left the universe of language. Language does not care about any of these things, even when it tells us what they are or are not. Left to function on its own, like an idling engine, it opens out onto *schizophasia*, the surrealist poem, or the "histoire de fous" (mad hatter's tale) of Lewis Carroll or Boris Vian. Oddly enough, this does not prevent the message from sometimes fitting perfectly into a real situation, but it is only a matter of chance and we feel all the time that the correspondence will not last long. Ionesco, for instance, has drawn very amusing scenes from this indifference of language to reality. But when he makes his characters chatter at random yet speak to the point he makes us all the more aware of the separation between the two series of events. From this point of view, Ionesco's plays are highly significant examples of the contingent nature of language. We can now reverse our observations offered above and reach the obverse conclusion in cases of *aphasia* where the isolation instead of being isolation *in* language, as in the previous example, will be isolation *out of* language. The patients have not lost all possibility of expression by losing their faculty of speech: they can often prove pertinent. But even then, they are like instrumentalists who cannot read the score, prisoners of their own gestures, unable, for lack of appropriate mediation, to emerge out of the circumstances in which they happen to be caught.

Such is our dilemma. Either we are alienated by the blind automatism of language, or we become one with a situation which destroys our autonomy and reduces us to powerlessness. Grammar cannot do without rhetoric any more than rhetoric can do without

grammar. Normal speech, of course, is halfway between these two extremes which are not just two aspects but, as we have seen, two poles of the system. On the one hand, words tend to become void of content under the magnetic attraction of grammar (analysis), though they can never be completely transparent or cease to retain some allusiveness to reality. On the other hand, they can never exhaust the fullness of representation, although they tend to grasp as much of reality as they can by means of metaphor and metonymy. Of this dual tendency, the source of so many controversies, I will consider only the second in the rest of this paper: the one that has to do with the operation of reinvesting "reality" in the forms of speech. Rhetoric, then, will be understood as the process by which we try, without ever succeeding completely, to reduce as far as possible the arbitrariness of signs inherent in the system by conferring "meaning," namely an intentional direction, upon our messages.

Dealing with rhetoric, as I see it, is not to abandon the sphere of linguistics, but rather to explore the side of it which is less visible and almost totally unknown, the dark side of linguistics. We need hardly point out at this stage that rhetoric cannot be reduced, as it used to be, to a normative discipline, providing recipes for good writing, listing figures of speech, and teaching the rules of invention, argumentation, and composition. All this would be harmless and a good subject for scholars if it did not have the drawback of resting on a false conception of language. Today rhetoric should be considered cybernetics of message transmission rather than a normative science. We are no longer dealing with codes but with programs, and the task is to get the message across as efficiently as possible. Needless to say, this runs counter to the traditional precepts of rhetoric. While the old rhetoric insisted on standards of "correctness" it now seems to us that the best construction is not necessarily the most "correct" one, but the construction which works best. To take an instance, rhetoricians of the old school used to ban repetitions as pleonastic. (Pleonasms and repetitiousness are still synonymous with dull and untidy writing.) But a blanket condemnation of the practice is untenable because there are cases when it is necessary to repeat a word, an expression, or a turn of phrase, in order to render meaning more explicit or more expressive. Repetition can be highly meaningful. Peguy, for example, Claudel, and many of the new novelists in France and elsewhere have deliberately used recurrent patterns of expression as incantatory forms designed to induce specific mental states. Repetition cannot be condemned when it helps the artist achieve certain deliberately sought symmetries or echoing effects. "Conclusion" of the sentence, on the other hand, or "explanation" of an allusion for the sake of clarity or

good grammar can certainly impair the effectiveness of the message. Among people of the same age, cultural heritage, and education, a mere hint can convey more than a long disquisition. A scientific or technical term addressed to an insufficiently informed public can be an obstacle to communication because of its precision, and the least precise word will be the only appropriate one.

Obviously it is difficult to appreciate the intention of a message, or measure its cost and economy, if the situation enveloping it is not taken into account. The manifest weakness of the old rhetoric and the pedagogy derived from it was that it studied language in the abstract, cut off, as it were, from the circumstances of real life. A message is never produced in a vacuum. It is conditioned by the factors of its situation: its *content* always refers to a particular discipline or a particular field of experience; *the speaker*, or *the writer*, present even when apparently hidden behind the message, reveals his presence more or less directly by his personal "touch," akin to a signature tune, or a trade mark; *the recipient* of the message, who looms behind the communication — the public, an audience, the posterity for whom the message is eventually destined and which helps to shape it in return; and, lastly, the *vector* which assigns to the message a determined amount of time and space. One can hardly hope to satisfy all conditions at one time but none of them can be completely ignored, and only the occasion eventually suggests the factor which is to be preferred. There is no such thing as perfect communication: when the speaker/writer chooses the most suitable emphasis he rejects other solicitations, other promptings, and choice always entails frustration. One feels that something important has been omitted. Robbe-Grillet is certainly right when he eliminates metaphor on grounds of principle, but he is obviously wrong when he claims that the kind of impartial description he recommends is less anthropomorphic than the complacent humanism of old. The impersonal writer remains distinctly present in his impersonality: trying to reduce his vision, for instance, to a universe of pure "objects" he grants undue privilege to one factor of the situation at the expense of all the others and in so doing he condemns himself to the outmoded aesthetic of the "right word." In short, there is no solution. Each factor of the situation tends to "precipitate out" the totality of the message. Whether stable or not, the various crystallizations contained in the process of the production of a message make up the "content" of the message. A message oriented toward the "content" is essentially a *pragma*, the result of an activity which does not find its end in itself. Most of our messages clearly belong to this category: when we speak or write to impart a piece of news or information, to express a wish or give an order, we

use language as the vehicle for conveyance of a certain "content." And all we demand of the instrument is its immediate and faithful response to our intentions. If at the very dawn of civilization prose remained generally anonymous, it was only because it claimed no other reality than the reality of what it said. There was no signature, because there was no author; there was no author because there was no work in the modern sense of the word, since the message tended to evaporate spontaneously behind the "things" it conveyed. Its value lay in its transparency.

No wonder that we are sometimes confused when it comes to the choice of "models"! In the classroom we have been trained to admire a particular type of message which does not correspond to the actual practice of living speech. Anthologies purport to teach language by encouraging imitation of selected passages from the work of the "best" writers. Yet we know that it is impossible to learn to play the violin by just listening to the recordings of the greatest violinists. Besides, the selections are most of the time closed passages, isolated from the context, full of historical allusions, names of unknown people, forgotten habits, mysterious intents, which leave the unfortunate child with the feeling of confronting an absolute, whereas his language is to him a natural activity which can be put to any use, at any time, and which does not seem to deserve so much attention or respect. At a later stage, the study of masterpieces will reinforce in the student the impression that there exists a substantive, generic difference between the language of the famous writers and his own. But this is a delusion, for everybody is a rhetorician!

What I am trying to say is that pedagogy should be based on transformation rather than on imitation, since the child already speaks. We should try not to teach, but train through an intelligent variation of parameters a faculty which already exists. The job of the teacher is, nonetheless, essential. It is to help the child observe himself, and to study the child rather than teach the lesson. Such practice, based on the actual mechanisms of language, might still incur the old accusation of sophistry leveled at rhetoric since the time of the ancient Greeks (but which training is *not* sophistry?). It is, however, at least an *a posteriori* practice, and since it rests on the study of transformations it offers the advantage of preparing the student for a better understanding of law, government, advertising, computer science, in a word of an immense field of possible applications! To know one's language is one thing; to know how to use it is another. The two trainings go together and it is a fallacy to believe that one should know one's language *before* attempting to use it.

If this is so, it is no less of a delusion to believe that the development

of one's proficiency is the business of the "humanities." There are, of course, differences between our use of language and the use found in the writings we are given to admire when we go to college. But, as I have already indicated, the difference is not fundamental: it is only a difference of degree, by which I mean that most works of literature are amplifications, variations, embellishments of what we all do spontaneously when we speak. They refer us to the rhetoric of *pragma*. The dazzling and complex organizations of literary devices are still intended to communicate a particular content, and therefore to become eclipsed by what they disclose to us. As a consequence, the hermeneutics appropriate to what the "best" have written does not have to differ essentially from the hermeneutics appropriate to the messages of "ordinary people." When "ordinary" people discuss an idea, tell a story, report an incident, make a request, or whatever, they aim at something which has its "meaning" outside of the message. This imparting of knowledge makes artisans, craftsmen of them. Hence the traditional scholarship which has obfuscated and sometimes buried masterpieces of the past in order to reconstruct the situation which holds the secret of their meaning. Indeed, from this vantage point the historical approach seems to be not only legitimate but inescapable, since the reference is part and parcel of the message. At the same time the new criticism has done well to remind scholars of the symbolic value of language, even in its most mediatory function, and to insist on the necessity of opening up new avenues of interpretation, starting from the work itself and leading in all the directions indicated by the development of what is now called the "human sciences."

As far as the study of content is concerned there is no reason why each student, each specialist, should not be at liberty to choose his point of observation. This is no sheer relativism but rather a sensible division of intellectual labour. Not that we condone some of their interpretations: under the guise of "science" too many recent critics return to the fold of impressionism, showing arrogance and complacency the better to conceal their ignorance of facts. But if a number of specialists study individual works of literature in the light of their particular disciplines, and if the points of view are sufficiently diverse one can hope that, in the end, the truth of the work (if there is such a thing) will emerge at the point where the different perspectives converge (if they do). Should this kind of collaboration become widespread, however, and even under the most favorable of circumstances, it is uncertain whether the results would be commensurate with the effort. A good example of what I mean can be found in the quarrel between Picard and Barthes, some ten years ago, a quarrel

which put criticism in the forefront of literature by boldly reexamining the central question of interpretation. For all their talents neither of the contenders rose above the level of the rhetoric of *pragma*, although they took radically opposite positions on the problems of truth, reality, etc. One might presume that they would have settled their differences easily if they had considered the problem not, as they did, from the perspective of *praxis*, where literature gets bogged down in the contradictions and obscurities this world is heir to, but from the viewpoint of *poiesis*, where literature comes into its own, so to speak, in the world of Forms.

Poiesis is not poetry. I use the term for the sake of convenience because it connotes, like *praxis*, a specific kind of activity, another dimension of rhetoric. *Poiesis* is *praxis* inverted, turned upside down, a rhetoric of *pragma*. Instead of being directed toward the world of "things" the message becomes a *poiema*, a moment directed toward itself, a structure unto itself, carrying its own motivation and finding, as if spontaneously, its own form. All this does not mean, of course, that there is no "content" left in the *poiema*, but the content has assumed a totally different nature: the message ceases to be a "for something"; it now has no other end but to be "for itself" as so many poets have said, from Poe to Baudelaire, from Valéry to T.S. Eliot. In the words of MacLeish "a poem should not mean but be." We have heard the statement so often that it has become a commonplace of literary criticism, and I am afraid some of you may wonder why I had to take such pains to arrive at this trite remark. The reason is, as I have by now said several times, that even the most familiar idea is not really perceived and it certainly is not understood until it has been replaced in the whole perspective of the subject. And the subject here is how language works. Besides, although we "know" that "a poem should not mean but be" we usually do not draw all the consequences from this assertion. It implies, among other things, that poetry cannot be "narrative" or "descriptive," or as we say nowadays "representational" or "engagée," "revolutionary" or "conservative," much less "lyrical" or "dramatic." These are qualities of the *pragma*; it makes no sense to ascribe them to the *poiema*; it makes hardly more sense to ascribe them to literature, if we understand literature as a form of language in which the "contents" is a means for the work to exist rather than the ultimate justification for its existence.

This view of things compels us to revise a number of "clichés." Style, for instance, in spite of what Buffon declared, is not "man himself" but, on the contrary, a quality of writing. And when we come to "inspiration" we must also reverse our belief that it comes to us as a gift from the gods. The relation of the author to his message at

the level of *poiesis*, poetic experience, is exactly the reverse of the relation between the speaker and his message at the level of *praxis*, everyday communication. Since the poet cannot find the source of his words outside of words themselves he is naturally inclined to believe that he owes them to a spell of divine origin. For it is true that his freedom is, in a way, compromised: the artist is a slave to his act. While the craftsman or the artisan acquires freedom in the realization of his intent, the artist is ever more obedient to the rules of his medium: dancing may lead nowhere but it is nonetheless far more strictly controlled than walking. Furthermore, the poem, independent of the idea that the poet may have of it and not bound by the impression it may produce in the reader, does not communicate in the usual manner but offers itself as a self-contained universe. In this universe a different notion of propriety is at work: the poetic word does not correspond to itself in the connotational mode but to a previous enunciation of itself, the power of which event calls it into being in this very place, at this very time, by virtue of an inner determinism or necessity, which, in each instance, renders the recurrence manifest. The sign is no longer a symbol, it has become a "motif." The variations of the motif within the rigid pattern created by the rhythmic divisions of the message reveal to the eye or to the ear, as well as to the mind, a form which makes it impossible, for instance, to imagine oneself "A Paris sur un cheval gris" without immediately imagining oneself "à Nevers sur un cheval vert." In the strictest logic of experience the poetic message of Max Jacob's lines does not make sense: there are no green horses in this world, not even in Nevers; we all know that. But in the logic of the poem the message makes sense, it even makes the only possible sense since no other word could be substituted for "vert" without causing immediate decomposition of the message itself.

This example should be enough to illustrate what "meaning" represents in the rhetoric of *poiesis*. If, according to structural linguistics, meaning is the reduction of the arbitrariness inherent in the world of signs, or to put more simply, if meaning is an expectation, an anticipation of a harmony, rejection of what is contingent or subject to chance, then it should be clear that rhythm *is* meaning. We must not think of poetry, not even of literature, as the superimposition of verbal ornaments on what would constitute reference in the rhetoric of *pragma*. Although Max Jacob's green horse denies experience it reveals a form of knowledge. It has been pointed out that we can speak of poetry as truth. But the relation between the utterance and the world of things has been inverted: poetry is to experience what anti-matter is to matter. We continue to associate these two contrary forms of "knowledge" because the dual nature of the linguistic sign

encourages confusion. A great deal of what we read as poetry is poetry solely from the standpoint of sound. It retains its allegiance to the universe of "things" and tries, under the veil of music, to fulfill some useful purpose . . . That is why it is so easy to read a confession, a surrender in trust, a philosophy, into poems of this kind. The confession is there, and the surrender, and the philosophical musings: the question for the poet is to force into the narrow straight jacket of a given rhythm a message which emanates not from itself, but from actual life. The same confusion accounts for the popular superstition that it is enough to be in love to become a poet, when it should be obvious that strong emotions tend to make one less articulate, rather than more. In fact — neither the emotions, nor the ideas, nor the experience of a man can make a poet out of him unless he has a special sense, a unique talent to hear the suggestions of language itself, or to quote Mallarmé, "to leave the initiative to the words."

Such a conception would certainly invite us to revise many of our judgments about literature. What we have just said of poetry is valid beyond the traditional "genre" divisions and it would be easy, for instance, to show how it applies to the literature of fiction. To take only the example of a writer like Robbe-Grillet, the way his narrative becomes description and his description narrative in *La Jalousie*, or *Le Labyrinthe*, clearly shows that the time and the space of these works have nothing to do with time and space of the world. The constant flashback, the kind of musical "da capo," which we also find in *Marienbad*, are, in my view, devices of a structural nature, analogous to the refrain in popular ballads and folk songs. But, unlike other redundancies, the refrain is a departure from natural speech, an obstacle to normal communication. We can find similar devices in the echoing dialogues of Beckett and Ionesco. Critics have been too eager to recognize in them modern proponents of the absurd: they may break up the logic of experience in their novels and in their plays, but the pieces they pick up regain a higher meaning, so to speak, revealed in the manner of their insertion in the arrangement of a work of art. Far from being philosophers of despair or social critics with a message for our time, they are in the vanguard of modern poets.

The close solidarity between the structure inherent in our linguistic behaviour and the two types of structures we try to impose either on things or on our own messages leads us to offer an irreverent suggestion: literature is perhaps nothing more than a ready-made idea. It includes artists, naturally, but not all of them since folk literature is excluded, as well as minor works. But it also includes "craftsmen," jobbers bent on producing works for high consumption, meant to inform, to amuse, to educate and edify, whose subjects are generally

confined to the picture of love, the expression of "personal" philosophies, or the invention of fictions. Finally it includes, today, those who, like Ionesco and Vian, use literature to carry out serious and sustained inquiry into the nature of language. All this is called "literature" only because literature presents no clear-cut boundaries, and it has no boundaries because it remains coextensive with the un-surveyable field of *pragma*. Only if we are willing and prepared to draw the line between the two sides of rhetoric, i.e. between the two opposite ways in which language can be put to use, can we hope to separate the chaff from the grain. For there is just no way to avoid the dilemma: either we are dealing with things — and that is not our province — or we are dealing with the way in which we tell things.

In grammar and in the two kinds of rhetoric we have tried to distinguish, we sense the same ambition. Whether exploring an etymology, discovering an intention, or experimenting with forms and patterns, all three are in search of "meaning" (by which we should understand some form of necessity), although in different ways. In the last analysis, literature, through the poetic function inherent in all language, is a perfectly demonstrable entity. We feel that it will be cleared of the accusations leveled against it and saved from its present disrepute if it can be recognized for what it is.

Literary Problems in Interpreting Paul's Letters

Gordon P. Wiles

It is a strange fact, when you think of it, that a large proportion of early Christian writings belongs to the literary genre known as letters. This is true not only of writings selected for the New Testament canon, but also of the wider range of early Christian literature. Because of this it has been recognized for decades that an understanding of much of the New Testament requires a serious study of ancient letter style. This involves a literary rather than a theological analysis, even though it goes without saying that the primary reason for studying the New Testament letters has been, and still is, their theological and religious content. In this connection a group of scholars in America has recently been at work re-examining Paul as letter writer rather than Paul as theologian or missionary.¹ Their joint progress to date, and my own special interest in the prayer passages in Paul's letters, will be reflected in the first part of this talk. The second part will take up a recent debate about one letter, the lengthy epistle that he sent to Rome.

Within the New Testament canon four main literary types are represented. The first is a strange genre which we call "gospels", in many ways a unique kind of document. Besides the four gospels we find a book of church history (The Acts of the Apostles), an apocalyptic visionary writing (The Book of Revelation), and finally the letters, twenty-one in all. Of the letters, seven at least are by Paul himself (I Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon,

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Philippians; six others (the "deutero-Paulines") are ascribed to Paul — somewhat in the Pauline manner, but probably written by his followers (Ephesians, Colossians, II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus). The remaining eight documents in letter form stand apart from Paul and his direct influence (Hebrews, James, I and II Peter, I, II, and III John, Jude). In addition, several other short letters are incorporated within Acts and Revelation. It is noteworthy, then, that "the dominant literary form found within the Christian canon is the letter,"² and that this form continued in subsequent centuries to be used extensively by the apostolic fathers as a vehicle for theology and ethical teaching. In striking contrast, the Hebrew canon (Old Testament) and the succeeding Jewish writings preferred entirely different literary forms.

Of course, the publishing of letters was by no means uncommon in the ancient world. We may recall that a century before Paul over nine hundred Latin letters of Cicero had been published posthumously.³ This large group of lively and interesting letters must have contributed to a growing habit of making collections of letters. But Cicero was a famous man, not unaware that his Latin letters would be preserved for posterity. Paul, by contrast, was an unknown figure, who wrote some obscure non-literary letters in everyday *koine* Greek, to some scattered little groups of his undistinguished fellow religionists — letters certainly not originally intended for publication, whatever their immediate use might be. It was only later, through a variety of unforeseen circumstances, that they were collected and published and finally became an important part of the sacred writings of the growing Christian movement. Eventually they became the most influential and widely published letters ever written. Why did this come about? Perhaps a general answer may be found in the ethos of the Christian movement and this may help us to interpret the letters themselves.

Christianity was a rapidly spreading missionary movement, centered around the believers' memories and growing adoration of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they believed to be alive and present with them. To adapt an aphorism of Professor Robert Funk, "What the gospel stories set in motion, the letters kept in motion." They supplied a flexible vehicle for ongoing communication between widely scattered groups of Christians. Unforeseen crises and dissensions required the sending of letters of "paraenesis" (advice), to re-apply the basic gospel to emerging problems. Certainly in the first extant Christian letters, those of Paul himself, there was a mood of unexpectedness, creativity, aliveness. It was only the subsequent post-Pauline letters in the canon that tended to lose this spontaneity.

Strangely enough, Paul seems to have written letters unwillingly,

unlike the prolific Cicero. It is true that his enemies taunted him with sheltering behind his letters. "His letters are weighty and strong," they said, "but his bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account" (II Corinthians 10:10). Naturally Paul objected! Didn't they realize that he preferred to confront them in person? "Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present." This is underlined repeatedly in the well known "travel passages", emphasising that for him letters were but a poor substitute for his apostolic presence or "parousia".⁴ For example, in I Thessalonians 2:17-3:2 we read, "But since we were bereft of you, brethren, for a short time. . . we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face; because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. . ."⁵ Indeed, his letters were not even meant to be complete in themselves. Usually they were mere outlines; much of the development of their message was purposely left to the trusted bearer of the letter to deliver orally. In this capacity such messengers as Timothy, Titus, or Epaphroditus would represent Paul himself. They would be expected to fill out the details and elucidate whatever seemed cryptic (e.g., II Corinthians 8:16-24).

So it was only the later deuterio-Pauline and Pastoral letters that tended to become self-contained treatises in letter form — a kind of "letter-essay".⁶ His epistle to the Romans, however, seems to be on the borderline, as we shall see.

From the first there must have been many other letters than Paul's passing between the scattered Christian communities. But it was Paul, with his intense concern for his churches, who made the letter come alive. It was his genius that took several of the current letter styles and transmuted them into something new in literature, the so-called "apostolic epistle". To understand this requires us to study the letters of the ancient world so as to place Paul's in their proper literary milieu.

We know for example that there was a vast amount of letter writing of all kinds in the Hellenistic world, not only in Greek and Latin, but also Semitic letters among the scattered Jews of the diaspora. Thousands of Greek papyrus letter fragments have been uncovered in the past century from the dry sands of Egypt, emanating mostly from the lower social strata and dealing with day-to-day personal, family, and business affairs. Letters in Aramaic, on skin, papyrus, and ostraca are presently under close scholarly scrutiny. Besides these, there have long been available to us the more literary letters such as those ascribed to Plato, Demosthenes, Isocrates, Epicurus, Cicero, Seneca and others.

The various letters of the Hellenistic world may be classified according to their place in a private, public, official, commercial, political,

literary, philosophical, ethical, religious, or some other contest. A second classification, often bisecting the first, would be as to the various kinds of messages they convey, whether apology, rebuke, advice, commendation, or other.

Under our first classification we may begin with private letters, especially those written on papyrus in Greek. These everyday letters were surprisingly stereotyped and impersonal, limited in range and confined for the most part to a small number of stock phrases and concepts, with none of our modern chattiness. The following is a typical example of their restricted level of communication.⁷

Serapion to his brothers Ptolemaeus and Apollonius greeting. If you are well, it would be excellent. I myself am well. I have made a contract with the daughter of Hesperus and intend to marry her in the month of Mesore. Please send me half a chous of oil. I have written to you to let you know. Goodbye. Year 28, Epeiph 21. Come for the wedding day, Apollonius.

Among private letters was the common business letter, including such things as wills and inventories in letter form, usually on papyrus and severely stereotyped. In complete contrast was the expressive range of the private letters of a cultivated man such as Cicero, but this must have been comparatively rare.

Official government or royal letters appeared to carry with them the sense of the actual presence ("parousia") of the ruler, as he sent his message to his subject community. For this reason they were often given appropriate permanence by being engraved on a stone monument. Well-known examples of these are the official letters of Hellenistic kings, heirs to Alexander, sent to various cities after 300 B.C.⁸ Public or open letters were sometimes used to spread political propaganda, such as those of Isocrates (446-338 B.C.) and Sallust (86-35 B.C.).

Somewhat similar to open letters were the various kinds of literary or discursive letter, a treatise in letter form or a letter-essay. These extended letters often contained ethical or religious advice (paraenetic or didactic letters) such as Seneca's voluminous *Epistolae Morales*, addressed to Lucilius, or the earlier letters of Epicurus, giving his scientific and ethical teaching in summary form. It was not uncommon, also, to write pseudonymous letters, often with didactic intent, using the illustrious name of some earlier writer. Far from having any taint of false pretences, or of what we today would call plagiarism, this practice was considered a legitimate extension of the earlier writer's work. For instance, the twenty four letters ascribed to the great physi-

cian Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.) and forming a sort of biographical account of his life, were probably composed pseudonymously in the first century A.D., during the time of Paul.

Less studied and literary than the letter-essay were the semi-official letters of Hellenistic religious leaders, preachers, or philosophers to their disciples. The ninety seven letters ascribed (somewhat doubtfully) to Apollonius of Tyana, a travelling wonder-worker of the first century A.D., were addressed to his followers and others. Their style lay half way between the elevated language of the literary letter-essay and the plain idiom of the papyrus letters. Somewhat akin were the so-called "Responsa" letters from Rabbinical teachers, sent apparently in answer to questions from Jews scattered about the Roman Empire in the Jewish diaspora.⁹

Where, if anywhere, do Paul's letters belong? In what kind of sociological or religious context did they function and how did he use the Hellenistic and Jewish epistolary models already available to him? We have suggested that he adapted several of these letter types for Christian purposes, often mixing them, and thereby fashioning a new sub-genre, the "apostolic epistle", which in turn became the model amongst Christians for ecclesiastical and theological letters. We shall try to see how and why this came about.

At the turn of this century a pioneer in the field of ancient letters, Adolf Deissmann, was so impressed by the similarities between the newly discovered papyrus letters and Paul's epistles that he came to regard the latter somewhat romantically as spontaneous "unliterary letters" rather than as studied "literary epistles." For his day this was a liberating insight. He rescued Paul's letters from the traditional view that they were literary theological treatises, a pious misconception that had distorted the understanding of Paul for centuries. But since Deissmann's day there has been a move away from his too simple dichotomy between unliterary and literary letters. The pendulum of scholarly opinion has swung back somewhat and it has been argued that Paul did prepare his letters carefully, not for publication, it is true, but for reading aloud in a church community assembled for worship. We may, for instance, note the solemn injunction that his letter to the Thessalonians should be read to the whole community (I Thessalonians 5:27). Each of his epistles is addressed not to an individual but to one or more churches. They are, then, at least on the way to becoming literary texts with a kind of official character.¹⁰

Yet few would go so far as to turn Paul's letters once again into theological treatises in letter form. A balance seems to have been struck that compares them with those letters already mentioned, from Hellenistic religious leaders to their adherents, or with the "Respon-

sa" letters of Jewish Rabbis to their distant questioners,¹¹ or even with that Jewish letter referred to in a contemporary work, the Apocalypse of Baruch. Here instructions are given about the communal reading of a religious letter: "When therefore ye receive this my epistle, read it in your congregations with care. And meditate thereon, above all on the days of your fasts."¹²

Even so, to try to fit all of Paul's letters neatly into some previously evolved epistolary type may not be entirely illuminating. It is to ignore the spontaneous freedom of the man. As he threw himself creatively into the new dimensions of his apostolic mission, so he discovered new possibilities for the form of his letters. In the same way that he broke-out of the theological and ethical norms of his previous Jewish heritage, while not completely rejecting them, so he used the letter models available to him, while somehow transcending them. Under critical analysis, his apostolic letters have been found to go beyond any previous functional or formal stereotypes, both in their general structure and in their detailed components. One instance of the latter is his use of the customary prayer forms often found in Hellenistic letters. In his hands these routine phrases become weighted with new meaning and intensity.¹³ Other epistolary conventions, too, are modified and used in such a way as to adapt the letters for their special function: to be read as an integral part of the liturgy of a church community assembled for worship.¹⁴

We may say, then, that he composed "apostolic epistles"; and that this type of letter, while deriving from previous and contemporary models, must be delineated in its own particular but flexible terms.¹⁵ It has its special setting within the subculture of a vital religious minority group. Paul worked in the doubly stimulating context of an intensely liberating personal religious experience and a dynamic corporate religious movement. His creative use of the ancient letter types reflects this, as I shall try to illustrate.

This brings us to the second sort of typology of Hellenistic letters, one that Greek stylists themselves used to guide their letter writing. This classification was based in the particular mode of communication employed and occurs in school handbooks like that of Demetrius, *Epistolary Types* (Tupoi Epistolikoi, between 100 B.C. and 300 A.D.) and Proclus, *Concerning the Epistolary Type* (Peri Epistolimaïou Characteros, fourth century A.D.). They give school examples of a large number of basic letter styles: the letter of friendship (philikos), advice (parainetikos, or symbouleutikos), introduction or commendation (sustatikos), ironic rebuke (eironikos), up to a total of forty one separate types!¹⁶ Such ancient textbook models offer us additional help in interpreting New Testament epistles. Where do Paul's letters

fit in this second classification?

It is fascinating to try to discover how he selects from several of these types, according to the situation. But because he follows no fixed letter mode, it is a complex matter to decide exactly what styles he is using in any letter. Let me illustrate from several of his epistles.

The tiny little letter to Philemon was written towards the end of the apostle's life. It contains no overt theology, is in no sense a letter-essay, but an *ad hoc* real letter. But its very simplicity is deceptive. Paul is pleading on behalf of a converted and reformed runaway slave, Onesimus, who had attached himself to Paul in prison. The letter commends the slave and begs his master Philemon to accept him back with the forgiveness due from one Christian to another. Clearly this is an example of the letter of commendation (*epistole sustatike*). We find a textbook model in Demetrius:

So-and-so, who is conveying this letter to you, is a man we have proven and whom we love because of his faithfulness. Please be hospitable to him both for my sake and his, and indeed for your own sake also! You will not be sorry if you trust him . . . When you have learned how useful he can be in everything, you will even praise him yourself to others.¹⁸

Compare Paul to Philemon:

I Paul . . . appeal to you for my child, Onesimus . . . Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me . . . no longer a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother especially to me but how much more to you [then Paul puts it into the Christian context] both in the flesh and in the Lord.

But this is not the whole story. Cleverly interwoven into the expected language of a letter of commendation are a number of stock commercial terms that half playfully transmute it into a kind of business letter.¹⁹ For example, "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I will repay it" (vv. 18f.). It is from prison that Paul offers this symbolic kind of commercial guarantee on behalf of the reformed Onesimus. Yet there is still more in the style of this little document. Besides being a letter of commendation with business overtones, it manifests also many of the marks of a quasi-official apostolic letter, not a merely private one. For instance, it is addressed not simply to the individual Philemon, but "To Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church in your house." In its general structure it contains the full address and blessing, the thanksgiving and intercession, and the formal liturgical conclusion that characterize his more extended epistles.²⁰ In

our first classification it functions as an ecclesiastical apostolic epistle, but with overtones from the world of commerce. In our second it is a letter of commendation, pressed into the service of a Christian request.

From this gentle letter we turn to a much longer one — a letter of rebuke addressed to Christians in Galatia. But what kind of rebuke is it? In Galatians Paul is writing as an authoritative apostle, in what seems to be his most fiery style, hotly chastising the readers for slipping back from Christian freedom into legalistic bondage. Yet, bound as we are by our twentieth century use of language, we may be unconsciously misreading the mood of the letter. For here we have an example of a very common type of ancient letter, described by Proclus as the "tupos eironikos", the letter of ironic rebuke.²¹ One mark of this is that, after the customary address and greeting at the beginning, Paul omits his usual opening amenities (thanksgiving and prayer) and launches into an apparently abrasive attack: "I am astonished that (thaumazo hoti) you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel . . ." (Galatians 1:6). Yet surprisingly enough, the readers would not take it as a violent attack, but as a gentle one. They would be well aware of the irony—that the writer has not astonished at all, but disappointed. We may compare this with scores of similar Greek and Latin letters, such as one from Cicero to his friend Atticus: "When I read your letter I was certainly surprised (admiratus equidem sum) that you had so utterly changed your opinion . . . What did astonish me beyond measure was that you should use the words . . . etc."²²

What we have to realize is that the ironic phraseology was frequently used where *good* relations were expected to be maintained in spite of a rebuke. Such a letter would signal this by the use of "philophronetic" language, i.e., endearing terms and phrases. In keeping with rhetorical practice, this appropriate style would make clear the benign intention of the writer. In the Galatian letter, to our ears so angry and hostile, the ironic use of the phrase "I am astonished" would be further clarified by such gentle sentences as "Brethren, I beseech you [not "I command you"] become as I am . . . though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God . . . you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy be telling you the truth?" (4:12-16). As apostle, Paul roundly rebukes the church members, yet in such a recognizable style that readers of that day would be able to maintain friendly relations with him. Because of this sidelight from ancient letter style, our usual estimate of the heated mood of the Galatian letter is modified in im-

portant ways and our estimate of Paul and his relations with his churches needs to be altered.

Next we glance at I Thessalonians. It has recently been argued by Professor Malherbe of Yale that the whole letter should be seen as a typical "paraenetic" letter of advice (*tuπος paraienetikos*).²³ Malherbe has shown a striking number of parallels of idiom and style between Paul's letter and many Hellenistic letters of paraenesis like those of Seneca, or certain discourses of Isocrates. One stylistic parallel among many is Paul's exhortation that the readers imitate himself (1:6). This view of the letter will most likely change our understanding of its basic intention and tone.

Each of the three letters so far mentioned may be seen as a genuine letter of a quasi-official nature, each dealing with a different kind of historical situation, each using different letter styles. It has now become untenable to talk too simply about "the Pauline letter structure or style." We have at least as many styles as there are letters and the basic structure itself is subject to some fluctuation.²⁴ Each of these variations, however, seems to be pressed into the service of Paul's "apostolic epistle."

The last letter that we have time to consider, however, seems to be of a widely different character. It is an extended and complex theological writing addressed by Paul to the Christian community at Rome. Exactly what species of document may this one be? Of course, we could ask more substantial questions about such a profound work as Romans — about its theology, about its dialectical or contrapuntal texture, about where, if anywhere, its central theological thrust is to be found. But the prior literary question as to what type of letter Romans is, is also a basic question of interpretation. It has a direct bearing on all the questions of substance. For instance, our understanding of its epistolary type will affect and be affected by our estimate of what is central in the letter and what only peripheral.

The literary question is confusing and much debated,²⁵ but the answer seems (perhaps over optimistically) to resolve itself into three principal options: that Romans, like Paul's other letters, is a genuine letter, i.e. shaped for and directed to a specific group of readers in a concrete situation at Rome (the so-called "historical" view); that it is a letter-essay or treatise, concerned with some important generalized theological problems, while assuming the guise of a letter (the "non-historical" view); or, third, that Romans is a more complex kind of letter, used by Paul in an unprecedented apostolic situation.

First, the "historical" view. Several explanations are offered as to how such a treatise could be a genuine letter. The most straightforward, propounded by Professor Minear of Yale,²⁶ is that Paul writes

in response to a particular crisis in Rome, a crisis that the letter is specially designed to alleviate. The apostle treats of dissensions at Rome between liberal Gentile Christians (the "strong in faith") and Jewish Christians of a more conservative cast (the "weak in faith"). According to this view the whole thrust of the letter centers in a practical section near the close (14:1-15:3): "As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions . . . One man esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike . . . Why do you pass judgment on your brother? . . . Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." So the letter is directed to an actual situation at Rome. We will return to this view later.

The next explanation of the historical view centers the letter in the apostle's own plans. It points to both opening and closing passages for a clue (in chapters 1 and 15). In these passages Paul seems to show that his basic purpose in writing is to inform the Roman church about his own missionary program and enlist their aid, rather than to deal with their problems at Rome. He hopes to visit them and gain their support for his further work in the Western half of the Roman empire. Early in the letter he writes, "So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (1:15). Near the close of the letter he says, "I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little" (15:24). The delicacy of the circumstances and the eager impatience of the apostle are shown by his restrained tone at the beginning, as he hesitates to take too much for granted (1:10-12). He postpones his real request until near the end, when he comes out openly to appeal for their assistance (15:22-25).²⁷ In addition, according to this view of the matter, his strategy is to work through friends and acquaintances on the spot, in order to introduce himself in an uncertain situation. So he adds, quite contrary to his usual practice, a long list of greetings to those he already knows in Rome (16:3-16).²⁸

Related to this explanation is a third one that interprets the whole body of the epistle as showing that Romans is a genuine letter. Paul's main purpose is explicative and apologetic. He is writing a letter of self-introduction, to explain his controversial gospel and disarm the readers' suspicions. He must engage the sympathy of a strategic church that he himself has not founded and which he knows to be partly distrustful of him. Furthermore, by defending his own understanding of Christianity he is attempting to substantiate his right to be accepted as a true apostle. At the beginning and the end of the letter he makes open claims to being specially commissioned as an apostle to the Gentiles, thus establishing a right to minister to the

Roman Christians (1:1-7 and 15:14-24). The long and complex bulk of this weighty letter would serve a double purpose: defending his gospel and establishing his own authority.

A fourth indication that Romans was written as a genuine letter is found in its various liturgical elements, especially those that form a recognizable liturgical pattern at the close of the letter. I have tried elsewhere to demonstrate that Paul shaped even this difficult epistle to be read as an integral part of its worship by the church that received it.²⁹ It was tailored for this specific use. Each of these four explanations on how Romans may be seen as a genuine letter has merit; each has ardent support among some scholars.

We turn to our second principal option: that Romans was a letter-essay, edited to look like a real letter, but actually a treatise about general theological problems — a “non-historical” document. Again, there are several explanations put forward in support. The first points to textual signs that we have here a circular or encyclical letter, sent to several churches of which Rome was only one. One hint of this is that in some manuscripts the word “Rome” is omitted from the address at the head of the letter (1:7). Another hint is that the document, as it has reached us in various manuscripts, appears in at least three recensions. This is thought to suggest that Paul used slightly different versions for different groups of churches. The basic letter was adapted in only external and superficial ways for reading at Rome. In further support of this is the theory that chapter sixteen, with its surprisingly long list of persons purporting to be already known to Paul at Rome, where he had never been, must in fact be a separate letter of recommendation and a covering note added to the copy sent to Ephesus. Had not Paul recently worked at Ephesus for three years, and would he not know a large number of people there?³⁰ All this would show that Romans is a kind of letter-essay, only tenuously related to the actual situation at Rome.

A second explanation, offered recently by Bornkamm,³¹ sees Romans as Paul’s “last will and testament”, a summary of his theology occasioned by his sense of the impending extreme danger that would attend his proposed trip to Jerusalem. Or perhaps it is a draft of what he would say in his defense in Jerusalem, with a copy sent to Christians in Rome for their information.³²

A third explanation sees Romans as a general treatise written for the purpose of introducing his views to Rome, but with no signs that it was specially adapted to the Roman situation.

So there is no lack of plausible theories, each mustering some support from the text of Romans, each taking some account of the historical situation surrounding the letter, each aware of the epistolary

and other models available to Paul, but each weighing the available evidence differently. My purpose in the time remaining is to concentrate further upon one phase of the current debate between the genuine letter and the letter-essay proponents.

The former may be represented, as we have noted, by Paul Minear.³³ In addition, Wolfgang Wiefel has done careful research, using a wide variety of classical sources, into the historical situation in Roman synagogues after the Emperor Claudius' expulsion of the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 and their subsequent return.³⁴ The strong and slanderous anti-Semitic sentiment in Rome would form an obvious matrix for the Gentile and Jewish tensions to which Paul seemed to address himself. It would, for example, account for the positive pro-Jewish coloring of chapters nine to eleven, as contrasted with his earlier negative tone in I Thessalonians (2:15ff.): "... the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out . . . so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last!" In the Thessalonian situation it had been the Jews who were doing the persecuting. Contrast his later cry in Romans: "... I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed . . . for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race" (Romans 9:2f.). So now the situation may be reversed, with Paul trying to counteract the fierce anti-Semitism especially virulent in Rome at this juncture.

Minear's approach complements Wiefel's background research by concentrating on the text of Romans itself and analysing the striking thrust and counter-thrust of the developing argument between Gentile and Jewish Christians. As the letter progresses, each position is answered by a counter position from either the Gentile or Jewish point of view. E.g., 3:1, "What advantage has the Jew? . . . Much every way." 3:9, "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all." 11:13, "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles . . . Do not boast over the branches" (i.e. Jews). All this is leading up to a climactic section (chapters 14-15), where Paul will bring to a head and clearly delineate the dispute between liberal Gentile Christian and conservative Jewish Christian, the so-called "strong" and "weak" in faith. He will plead for a tolerant acceptance of each group by the other, in a reciprocal way not equalled elsewhere in his letters (15:1-13).

Various rebuttals of a literary nature are offered to show that Paul is, after all, not addressing a definite situation at Rome. We have time to glance at only two. First, as early as 1910 Rudolf Bultmann argued in a doctoral dissertation on Romans that Paul was heavily influenced by the diatribe style of contemporary cynic and stoic preachers, with their rhetorical thrust and counter-thrust between fictitious opponents

conjured up for the occasion. In Romans Paul is using this rhetorical device rather than facing a real situation among his readers.³⁵ But more recently Bultmann's whole analysis has been indirectly called in question by the work of some classical scholars.³⁶ The elements of diatribe style are found to be so widespread in classical literature, that Paul might have used this kind of rhetoric quite naturally, with its generalized positions, even when dealing with a specific situation. Here Donfried draws attention to a passage in Quintilian:³⁷

Further, in questions in which have reference to a particular person, although it is not sufficient merely to handle the general question, we cannot arrive at any conclusion on the special point until we have first discussed the general question . . . But Cicero has relieved me of any feeling of shame . . . since he . . . instructs us to abstract such discussions from particular persons and occasions, "because we can speak more fully on general than on special themes, and because what is proved of the whole must also be proved of the part."

This is precisely the progress used by Paul in Romans, from the general argument (chapters 1-11), through a narrowing application (chapters 12-13), to the particular application for the specific situation at Rome (chapters 14-15). Evidently the diatribe style would not preclude a specific situation for which the letter was intended.

A second rebuttal of the genuine letter view concerns itself especially with the paraenetic (exhortation) section of the letter (chapters 12-15). This argument claims that on stylistic grounds Paul's moral teachings appear to be a patchwork of well-known maxims garnered from popular stoic preaching and popular Hellenistic Jewish teaching.³⁸ But against this it is pointed out once again that Paul uses a purposeful progression from the general to the specific. He is carefully arranging and shaping older ethical material for the particular intent of the letter, leading up to the special problems at Rome.³⁹ We are warned by this fact "not to be led astray in thinking that traditional formulations cannot serve specific situations,"⁴⁰ and are reminded that one of Paul's contemporaries, Seneca, "although he has a high regard for traditional wisdom, nevertheless realizes that the task of selection, adaptation and application always remains."⁴¹

I have long since overtaxed your patience and must draw this contested matter to a close⁴² by moving briefly into our third principal option: that Romans must be a more complex kind of letter, improvised by Paul for an unprecedented and complex apostolic situation.

It would seem that in Romans we have a document both like and

unlike the Hellenistic letter-essay. In writing it, Paul may well have made use of his previous notebooks and jottings. This is not at all improbable, as Stirewalt has pointed out in connection with the letter-essays of Epicurus, Dionysius and Plutarch. He sees these as outlines or summaries of other work by the same author, or as substitutes for a work projected for the future.⁴³ Plutarch, for instance, writes in his *De Tranquillitate Animi*, "I gathered together from my notebooks those observations on tranquility of mind which I happened to have made for my own use . . ." ⁴⁴ Elsewhere he writes, "I have therefore drawn up a compendium . . . putting it in the form for brief comparisons that it may be more easily remembered."⁴⁵ May we say that Paul, too, is drawing together from his notebooks⁴⁶ a summary of arguments already thrashed out in his debates with the Corinthian and Galatian churches, but also adapting them carefully for the situation in the worshipping Christian communities at Rome and for his own missionary plans? Then we have an apostolic epistle that is both a letter-essay and a genuine letter with a specific address and purpose. Once again Paul uses, but goes beyond, conventional norms.

What do we profit from such literary analysis of Romans, and from corresponding analysis of Paul's other letters? Experience shows that we gain new, and, we hope, more authentic insights into the nature of these documents, their original meaning, weight and intention. Those who view these ancient Hellenistic writings as sacred scripture, should, I believe, try to let them speak in their own way and on their own terms.

NOTES

1. Seminar on the Form and Function of the Pauline Letters, N.A. Dahl, chairman; under the auspices of the Society of Biblical Literature. In reporting on their unfinished work I shall have to be arbitrarily selective and more conclusive than the debate presently warrants.

For a most useful survey of this area of research, including work by some members of the Paul Seminar, see W.G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, Philadelphia, 1973.

2. Doty, p. 19.
3. Doty, p. 2.
4. See R.W. Funk, "The apostolic 'Parousia': Form and Significance," in *Christian History and Interpretation*, ed. W.R. Farmer *et al.*, Cambridge, 1967.
5. See G.P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of*

- the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of Paul*, Cambridge, 1974, p. 48, n. 2.
6. M. Luther Stirewalt, Jr., "The Form and Function of the Greek Letter-Essay," privately distributed to the Paul Seminar in 1971.
 7. Doty, p. 13.
 8. C.B. Wells, *Royal Correspondence of the Hellenistic Period*, New Haven, 1934.
 9. M. Luther Stirewalt, Jr., "A Survey of the Uses of Letter-Writing in Hellenistic and Jewish Communities through the New Testament Period," privately distributed to the Paul Seminar in 1971.
 10. Wiles, p. 9.
 11. C.f. Acts 28:21, where local Jewish representatives in Rome speak of letters from Judea instructing them about Paul: "We have received no letters from Judea about you."
 12. Syrian Baruch 86:1-3; c.f. Baruch 1:14.
 13. I have tried to examine this fully in *Paul's Intercessory Prayers*. See p. 293 and *passim*.
 14. Wiles, p. 10, n. 2, etc.
 15. So as not to overburden this talk, I am omitting all discussion of the general structure of the Pauline letter. See J.L. White, "The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter," *S.B.L. Dissertation Series*, Missoula, 1972.
 16. See Chan-Hie Kim and J.L. White, *Letters from The Papyri: A Study Collection*, Society of Biblical Literature, 1974, pp. 15-30; A.J. Malherbe, "Ancient Epistolary Theorists," *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies*, V (1977) pp. 3-77.
 17. I have had to bracket out the complication of how far each letter has been edited or conflated, before reaching the form in which we now have it.
 18. Kim and White, p. 16; translated in Doty, p. 10. Compare Cicero's numerous "Litterae Commendaticiae", included in his *Epistolae ad Familiares*, XIII.
 19. For details see Wiles, p. 216, n. 7.
 20. See Wiles, p. 217.
 21. N.A. Dahl, "Paul's Letter to the Galatians: Epistolary Genre, Content and Structure," privately distributed to the Paul Seminar, 1973 and available at Yale University Divinity School Library. See pp. 12ff.

22. Att. XVI, 7, quoted in Dahl, p. 19.
23. A.J. Malherbe, "I Thessalonians as a Paraenetic Letter," privately distributed to the Paul Seminar, 1972; forthcoming in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, ed. Wolfgang Haase (1978?).
24. See above, n. 15.
25. Here I make use of K. Donfried's recent article, "False Presuppositions in the Study of Romans," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XXVI (1974), pp. 332-55, in which he draws together the complex debate in a thorough way.
26. P.S. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans*, London, 1971; Wiles, pp. 72-76.
27. For details see Wiles, pp. 191-93, 263-70.
28. Wiles, p. 92.
29. Wiles, pp. 95-97, 263ff., 301f.
30. T.W. Manson, "St. Paul's Letter to the Romans — and Others," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Manchester, 1948, pp. 3-10. But see above for a contrary opinion.
31. G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, New York, 1971, pp. 88-96.
32. J. Jervell, "Der Brief nach Jerusalem," *Studia Theologica*, 1971, pp. 61-73.
33. Minear, *Obedience of Faith*.
34. W. Wiefel, "Die judische Gemeinschaft im antiken Rom und die Anfänge des römischen Christentums," *Judaica*, 1970, pp. 65-88.
35. A few examples of diatribe style in Romans:
 - 2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another . . .
 - 2:3 Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge . . .
 - 2:17ff. But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law . . .
 - 3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? . . .
 - 3:5 But if our wickedness serves to show the justice of God, what shall we say?
 - 6:1-3 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means . . .
 - 9:19 You will say to me then . . . But who are you, a man, to answer back to God?
36. Donfried, p. 348, citing H. Cancik and especially H. Rahn, *Morphologie der antiken Literatur*, Darmstadt, 1969.

37. Quintillian, *Institutio Oratoria*. III. V. 13ff. (Loeb). See Donfried, p. 33.
38. C.H. Talbert, "Tradition and Redaction in Romans XII. 9-21," *New Testament Studies*, 16, 81-93.
39. V.P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, Nashville, 1968, pp. 100ff.
40. Donfried, p. 341.
41. Malherbe, p. 19, n. 6. Seneca wrote, "But even if the old masters have discovered everything, one thing will always be new — the application . . . of the discoveries made by others . . . Prescriptions must be adapted to the particular disease and to the particular stage of the disease." *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*. LXIV. 8 (Loeb).
42. One more important omission from this talk has been reference to the continuing study by W. Wuellner, R. Scroggs and others, concerning Paul as rhetorician, influenced by both Jewish and Hellenistic rhetorical and forensic customs.
43. "The Form and Function of the Greek Letter-Essay," p. 2.
44. *Moralia*. VI. 464 (Loeb).
45. *Moralia*. II. 138 (Loeb).
46. Cf. II Tim. 4:13, "When you come bring . . . the books" (ta biblia), "and above all the parchments" (tas membranas). Membrana meant a leaf-book made of parchment, widely used from the first century B.C. for note-books, memoranda, first drafts of literary work. Donfried, p. 352.

**Iris Sacred and Profane: Iris Murdoch as
Philosopher and Novelist**

Susan Minot Woody

Iris Murdoch is a philosopher; she is also a novelist. Hence our title: *Iris Sacred — Iris Profane*. Hence also our task: to seek out the relation between her philosophy and her literature, hoping that in the quest one may illuminate the other and in the process enlighten us as to the ways in which literature can be philosophical and philosophy, literary. Most of us acknowledge, however dimly, that both things are possible: there is really no dispute, for example, that Plato wrote literature nor that Shakespeare philosophized supremely well. And yet most of us acknowledge, perhaps also dimly, the hazardousness of both undertakings, and Iris Murdoch herself scolds Jean Paul Sartre for the sin of writing didactic drama.¹

It may appear that the title itself proposes an answer to the question posed; 'Iris sacred' seems to correspond to 'philosopher,' 'Iris profane' to 'novelist.' Is the structure of the title then tendentious: do I mean to say that philosophizing is a sacred activity, while making novels is somehow merely profane? This question, too, needs to be illuminated.

Finally, the paper is undertaken under the guidance of the minimal assumption that there is something here — a puzzle and a problem — which requires to be solved. We seem to be demanding that the activities of the philosopher should bear upon, illumine the activities of the novelist, and conversely. But why? Abstractly considered, it would seem that any of the following might be the case. First, Iris Murdoch's

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philosophy and her literature have *nothing* to do with one another: they are perfectly unrelated. In this case, the philosopher and the novelist just *happen* to inhabit the same skin. But, secondly, it might be the case that one enterprise is thoroughly subordinate to the other; for instance, maybe her novels are nothing but literary illustrations of her philosophy; or her philosophy is perhaps only a sustained apology for, or conceptual transcription of, her literature. But finally, maybe none of these accounts is correct. Perhaps while thoroughly independent activities and productions, there may be both a species of consistency and of mutuality between her philosophy and her literary output such as to make them reciprocally illuminating while not negating the complexity and obscurity of their interrelations. In fact, it is this third situation, I believe and hope to show, which we actually face with Iris Murdoch's diverse and heterogeneous opera. Like her namesake, the rainbow, Iris Murdoch is in no one place: hers is a spirit of genuinely broad yet curiously unified reach. I shall try to prove, at any rate, that this is so, in a discussion divided between her recent novel, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* and her book of important philosophical essays, *The Sovereignty of Good*. As between the *title* of her latest novel, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, and its *narrative line*, there is a deceptively simple, even transparent correspondence. Its main character (certainly not its hero), Blaise Gavender, an educated, upper middle-class and middle-aged psychotherapist, is living a double life, pivoting on two loves — one sacred, licit, public; the other, profane, illicit, hidden. The first life is that with his wife, the other with his South London mistress of nine years' standing. His wife and holy love is Harriet: luminous, curved, quiet, loving. His profane love is Emily: dark, angular, condemnatory, passionate. Harriet, whom Blaise originally loved and married in recognition of her ability to redeem him from the dark and potentially ominous aspects of his chaotically appetitive consciousness, remains even as his wife curiously apart. She never, for example, becomes for him a woman with whom he could have impetuous, instinctive, insatiable sex. Emily, inexhaustibly sexual, poised passionately for whatever a wild and lusting mood might demand, is almost more himself than he is, Blaise knows. *Only* with Emily is he fully himself, *only* with her does he genuinely exist. She is his key to authenticity. She is his soul.

Both women have borne him sons. Each child is, both physically and spiritually, iconic of the love which called him into being. David, Harriet's son, is blond, cool, chaste, beautiful. Even the anguishes of adolescence, through which he is living as the novel unfolds, do not seriously compromise his luminous, attractive, altogether sweetly acceptable being. Emily's child, Luca, is in every aspect of his being an

embarrassment: a bastard, of course — but also solitary, dark, largely speechless, endlessly watching. His motives and perceptions remain throughout inscrutable and mildly repulsive to his father. For Blaise, and indeed, for Harriet, Luca will prove an instrument of fate from the moment when he invades the other world his father inhabits — the world of his father's licit life with Harriet and David, lived in their enchanting, flower-ringed home, Hood House. Indeed, it is Luca who signals the beginning of the end of Blaise's double life. After one of Blaise's regular weekly sessions at Emily's slum flat, Luca secretes himself under the floor carpet of his father's automobile and is unwittingly transported by Blaise from Emily's South London tenement to the enchanted, garden-ringed home he shares with his sacred and licit love, Harriet. On the evening of the day Blaise's life begins to unravel, Luca, standing like a spy at the foot of the garden, in the luminous late night air of midsummer's eve, gazes uncomprehendingly yet fatefully at his father's *other* house; as he does so he is seen, uncomprehendingly, by Harriet in turn. Before the gods have had their last laugh, Harriet will have come to know and love this mysterious, dark trespasser. Indeed more: she will finally demand and seize motherly possession of Luca (as her price for releasing Blaise), and she will die for it.

There are other important characters in the book, not all of whom we need to pass in detailed review. There is, for one, Montague Small. He lives in Locketts, the other house which stands on the property, at the far end of the garden. He has recently lost his wife to cancer (well, the full story is more macabre) and is almost totally absorbed in a curiously dispassionate and yet anguished process of mourning her. Monty knows himself with unloving, clinical precision which has a withering effect both on himself and those who come within his orbit. In an almost godlike manner he trenches upon the lives of all the main characters, indifferent to them and yet manipulative. (Is he contemporary British philosophy personified? There is good reason to think so.)

Then there is Edgar DeMornay. A classicist, about to become master of an Oxford college, he has discretely loved Monty's deceased wife, Sophie. He drinks too much, cares too much, is compassionate, full of need and love. Although his words are among the only healing ones spoken by anyone throughout the novel, he is not exempt from the workings of the sacred and profane love machine. It will catch him up in its workings.

Well, perhaps enough has been said to suggest that the theme of *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* is nowhere near as simple as a superficial survey of the narrative suggests. In fact, every character in

the novel, whether major or minor, oscillates in a measure of anguish or blindness between sacred and profane loves, and neither we nor they are perfectly sure whether any particular erotic episode to which they give themselves is sacred and saving, or the opposite. To be more accurate, we do not know what a sacred and saving love would be. The novel poses the question — indeed, poses it repeatedly and in every light — without providing an answer. To add to our difficulties Iris Murdoch delights in causing things to turn into their opposites, with the result that we have not merely the, so to speak, *normal* ambiguities of experience to deal with, but more exotic uncertainties as well. For instance, we are made aware through most of the novel that Emily and Blaise's illicit love is a sunless, violent, driven, corrosive passion. Yet at least at the beginning, it had seemed to Blaise salvational, the key to his true being:

“A philosopher said that the spiritualization of sensuality is called love. Blaise had certainly felt his early love for ‘Emily to be all sense, all spirit.’ The absolute interpenetration of the two gave him, together with experiences of pleasure which he never previously knew existed, a sort of certainty about the whole thing which seemed to create its own truth and its own morality. In the light of this truth, his relations with Harriet seemed hopelessly insincere, not only in this situation now, but fundamentally and always. Emily told him that he had married Harriet for snobbish social reasons, and he did not deny this, because although it was not true, something rather like it, it then seemed to him, was. He had loved Harriet. But he had married her in a muddled, compromising, impure, deliberately blinded state, thinking this to be the best possible. He had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost . . . by wilfully excluding the possibility of perfection.

All this he saw in the illumination of the dark rays of his glinting girl. Could one doubt the absolute incarnate truth when confronted by it, as by God? He felt like a disciple in the presence of Christ.”

Could so true, so redemptive a love ever go bad? . . . ever turn into its opposite? Murdoch's emphatic answer is, Yes! Under the pressure of guilt, inward shame and Emily's ceaseless condemnations, his secret life begins to become poisonous to him:

“Blaise felt shame before Emily, before David, before Luca. Where Harriet was concerned, something much stronger had been happening which was now his chief and

most awful preoccupation. As one mystery wound its way into deeper defile of horror, the other mystery, though without thereby bringing him any hope or release, had emerged into a new brightness. At one time Blaise had scarcely recalled Harriet when he was with Emily. Now he scarcely recalled Emily when he was with Harriet. Once Emily had seemed real and Harriet a dream. Now Harriet seemed real and Emily a dream. He had told Emily that he had no sexual relations with Harriet. This had been true. It was true no longer. Harriet had, of course, silently, perfectly, waited. How much, if only it were not for the devils, he would have enjoyed, and somehow in spite of them did enjoy, being once more with his chaste, modest, virginal dear wife. How much more satisfying this was than doing things with Emily. Harriet had once seemed to lack what Emily possessed in such abundance, "seductive vitality." But now his wife drew him with quiet power, rousing in him mixed intensities of reverence and desire. He had never felt any such emotion in his life before, and he regarded himself with awe."

The sacred and profane love machine indeed! A loom that unravels as much as it weaves!

Blaise's crucifying oscillations cease, of course, with Harriet's ghastly and unforeseeable death in an airport massacre. In the wake of Harriet's death, Emily becomes Blaise's legitimate wife, moves in to Hood House and begins its transformation into *her* home, *her* domain. Emily and Blaise together engage in a real and ritual expunging of Harriet's recent existence there.

". . . he and Emily worked silently, surreptitiously, feverishly, like people trying to conceal a crime, to erase all traces of Harriet's existence from Hood House. A perpetual bonfire burnt in the garden, onto which the spouses, usually avoiding each other in this chore, quietly piled the Harriet's more dispensable belongings, the poor rubble of Harriet's finished life: the contents of her desk, her childhood mementoes, the water colours of Wales, her book of recipes, her newspaper cuttings about her father's regiment, picture postcards from her father and brother, drawerfuls of cosmetics and combs and ribbons and old belts, even underwear. The strange funeral pyre gradually consumed them all. Harriet's clothes and her few inexpensive jewels had gone to Oxfam. Only a silver-gilt bracelet

engraved with roses had been coveted by Emily, who had prompted Blaise to urge her to keep it. She had never worn it, however."⁵

At a certain moment, Emily and Blaise know that their task is done: every last hairpin and handkerchief has been turned to ash. Hood House harbors not a thread which would lead back in any way to Harriet. And now at last the once-guilty pair sink comfortably back into the bland, unexciting and undemanding business of being a married couple. Blaise anticipates their future in the following way:

"They would have money, comfort, a pleasant house, a pleasant easy life. They had suffered together, and would now enjoy worldly consolations and rest at last. How ordinary we shall become, he thought without much regret; and he felt in himself a sort of achieved moral mediocrity, a resignation to being unambitious and selfish and failed which gave him a secret wry delight."⁶

For the moment, at least, no mementoes of their guilt are in evidence. David, mourning and outraged, has moved temporarily into Locketts with Monty. Luca, whom the distraught and fleeing Harriet had taken away with her on her impulsive departure for her brother's home in Germany, is mercifully out of sight. He had survived the airport massacre physically but not emotionally or spiritually (they had found him under Harriet's bullet-riddled body). He has been placed in a psychiatric home for severely disturbed children. He may or may not ever be restored to them. David assuredly will not be. He will make the geographically innocuous but personally decisive journey up to Oxford at summer's end, and the strong implication is that he will never return, at least not spiritually. One of Blaise's patients, Dr. Ainsley, inadvertently became a blood-sacrifice. In a state of acute suicidal depression he had left a telephone message for Blaise with Emily. But Blaise, deeply preoccupied with his need to retain Harriet's dying love, had put off responding to the call until it was too late. The novel ends in a way that provides the story with closure and yet manages to suggest vistas into the future: while on the one hand, Blaise and Emily are tucked snugly into Hood House to anticipate the child of their newly legitimized love, and their tale, in a sense, thus ends, David, bound for Oxford, will be sought out there, at Monty's insistence, by Edgar. Meanwhile, at least three strong, erotically charged women are descending on Edgar! Each of these women has been suddenly freed from a variety of constraints as a collateral effect of Emily and Blaise's regularized union. One almost hears the "whirligig" cranking up again: the love machine preparing for yet another go-around.

Frankly, whenever I finish an Iris Murdoch novel I vow to myself that it will be the last . . . not because she is a bad novelist, but on the contrary, because she is a *good* one — because she does *what* she does so well. And what is that? She causes us to dwell for a season in the almost palpable presence of her characters, and that we do not willingly do — not because her characters are human and flawed; after all, so are Shakespeare's, and so are we. But they know only one song and the song is *me*. Ego. Ego sum. Ego sum. Ergo Ego. The living love machine of which they are the unwitting gears and cogs moves through time and history fueled by the most polluting distillate known: self-love; an absolutely powerful but blind energy source. Thus, our unwillingness to spend time with the people Iris Murdoch creates has to do with the fact that however disparate and differently situated they may be, their souls are all importantly similar in at least one way: each moves exclusively on the terrain of self-love; that is, each is either a confirmed lover of self, or has recently been victimized by such a one. None seems to know how to move from that terrain to any other; on the contrary, the victims usually show excellent promise of becoming the victimizers — at least when they are not simply sacrificed. Such a landscape, with such denizens, is profoundly disheartening, all the more so because Iris Murdoch delineates it with unflagging fidelity. In this respect, Henry James, her primary literary inspiration, taught her well indeed.

And what says Iris the philosopher of this novelist's world? Nothing, of course, directly; but indirectly and obliquely, she says a great deal. What she says we may begin to gather by reflecting on the fact that Iris Murdoch embraces and affirms Plato's greatest metaphor, that of the Cave, as pointing to fundamental and perennial truths. You'll remember that the cave contains prisoners in chains who watch the flickering shadows cast on the cave wall by two-dimensional cut-out figures carried in front of the fire, which burns behind them at the far end of the cave. Beyond the cave, of course, is the sun-lit world of real, three-dimensional existents, but it would take courage to make the long, arduous climb out of the cave to get to that sun-drenched world, and supreme courage to bring oneself to gaze squarely at the sun. For Socrates, telling this parable of the cave, the sun, the source of all light and illumination, stands for the Good. Murdoch preserves that sense.

It is inevitable that a myth so fundamental as that of Plato's, even when affirmed without reservation as Murdoch affirms it, will be adapted by succeeding generations of philosophers to their special concerns and topics. Let us look at Murdoch's special adaptation of the great myth. Having done so, we will have the materials for a

somewhat systematic overview of her position.

"Plato has given us an image of this deluded worship (of false suns) in his great allegory. The prisoners in the cave at first face the back wall. Behind them a fire is burning in the light of which they see upon the wall the shadows of puppets which are carried between them and the fire and they take these shadows to be the whole of reality. When they turn around they can see the fire, which they have to pass in order to get out of the cave. The fire, I take it, represents the self, the old unregenerate psyche, that great source of energy and warmth. The prisoners in the second stage of enlightenment have gained a kind of self-awareness which is nowadays a matter of so much interest to us. They can see in themselves the sources of what was formerly blind selfish instinct. They see the flames which threw the shadows which they used to think were real, and they can see the puppets, imitations of things in the real world, whose shadows they used to recognize. They do not yet dream that there is anything else to see. What is more likely than that they should settle down beside the fire, which though its form is flickering and unclear is quite easy to look at and cosy to sit by.

This powerful thing (the empirical psyche) is indeed an object of a fascination, and those who study its power to cast shadows are studying something which is real. A recognition of its power may be a step towards escape from the cave; but it may equally be taken for an end-point. The fire may be mistaken for the sun, and self-scrutiny taken for goodness.'"

This long but important passage from her paper, "The Sovereignty of Good," in which Murdoch discloses her peculiar use of The Great Cave Myth, also and at the same time places us close to the heart of her philosophical position. Indeed, the passage just above is replete with sign-posts pointing us in the direction of The Murdochian hub. First, there is the rueful sense of the terrible, consuming energy of the self and of its hypnotic power over us, so much stranger and less resistible than the hypnotic fascination of a leaping fire, which we cannot bring ourselves to stop gazing into dreamily. Again, in the instant passage, Murdoch expresses her awareness of the ease and danger of going astray — of venerating, *not* God and *not* the Good, but only a cunningly disguised version of the self again. (We are reminded here of Kant's sage warning not to be too confident of the morality of our

motives; if we take a more seeing look, we may find "the dear self.") Finally the passage expresses the sense characteristic of all Platonists that the real is not disclosed — or at least not unambiguously disclosed — through the appearances, but lies elsewhere — beneath or beyond — and must be made the goal of conscious striving by anyone who hopes to escape illusion and fantasy. — Together, these three themes nearly triangulate the core of Murdoch's position. Needless to say, much thought of importance, developing out of this core of concerns, moves beyond it, but time is too limited for us to trace these many areas of development. Suffice it to say that the uses to which she puts these themes and insights is determined by the fact that her primary concern is to explore and elucidate moral life. For this purpose, she confesses to having found much of twentieth century philosophy, both British and Continental-existentialist, emphatically inadequate, and while I don't want to dwell on the polemical dimension of her philosophy, a telling passage from "On God and Good" may help us to understand why the dominant themes of much twentieth century thought are ones which she finds not only alien but also unpalatable.

"Much of contemporary moral philosophy appears both unambitious and optimistic. Unambitious optimism is of course part of the Anglo-Saxon tradition; it is also not quite surprising that a philosophy which analyses moral concepts on the basis of ordinary language should present a relaxed picture of a mediocre achievement. I think the charge is also true, though contrary to some appearances, of existentialism. An authentic mode of existence is presented as attainable by intelligence and force of will. The atmosphere is invigorating and tends to produce self-satisfaction in the reader, who feels himself to be a member of the elite addressed by another one. Contempt for the ordinary human condition, together with the conviction of personal salvation, saves the writer from real pessimism. His gloom is superficial and conceals elation. (I think this to be true in different ways of both Sartre and Heidegger, though I am never too sure of having understood the latter.) Such attitudes contrast with the vanishing images of Christian theology which represented goodness as almost impossibly difficult, and sin as almost insuperable and certainly as a universal condition."⁸

Thus, from both sides so to speak, contemporary moral philosophy, following Kant's lead, depicts the moral agent in these terms:

"How recognizable, how familiar to us, is the man so beautifully portrayed in the *Grundlegung*, who confronted even with Christ turns away to consider the judgment of his own conscience and to hear the voice of his own reason. Stripped of the exiguous metaphysical background which Kant was prepared to allow him, this man is with us still, free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave, the hero of so many novels and books of moral philosophy. The *raison d'être* of this attractive but misleading creature is not far to seek. He is the offspring of the age of science, confidently rational and yet increasingly aware of his alienation from the material universe which his discoveries reveal; and since he is not a Hegelian (Kant, not Hegel, has provided Western ethics with its dominating image) his alienation is without cure. He is the ideal citizen of the liberal state, a warning held up to tyrants. He has the virtue which the age requires and admires, courage. It is not such a very long step from Kant to Nietzsche, and from Nietzsche to existentialism and the Anglo-Saxon ethical doctrines which in some ways closely resemble it. In fact Kant's man had already received a glorious incarnation nearly a century earlier in the work of Milton: his proper name is Lucifer."

This emphasis upon the free, lonely, self-determining ego has become characteristic of both Anglo-Saxon and Continental philosophical attention. Both brands of contemporary moral thought are preoccupied with this lonely individual's making leap-like choices and acting in a public space-time world in such wise that finally we come to say, with Hare or Hampshire, that the moral agent simply *is* the sum-total of his chosen acts. Meanwhile, Iris Murdoch complains, neither Continental existentialism nor its British counterpart has faced up to the challenge of Marx or Freud. Concerning the latter's view of man she says the following:

" . . . it seems clear that Freud made an important discovery about the human mind and that he remains still the greatest scientist in the field which he opened. One may say that what he presents us with is a realistic and detailed picture of the fallen man. If we take the general outline of this picture seriously, and at the same time wish to do moral philosophy, we shall have to revise the current conceptions of will and motive very considerably. What seems to me, for these purposes, true and important in Freudian

theory is as follows. Freud takes a thoroughly pessimistic view of human nature. He sees the psyche as an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy, largely determined by its own individual history, whose natural attachments are sexual, ambiguous, and hard for the subject to understand or control. Introspection reveals only the deep tissue of ambivalent motive, and fantasy is a stronger force than reason. Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings."¹⁰

To revert to her dissatisfaction with much twentieth century moral philosophy, Iris Murdoch finds the dominant perspectives both in the Anglo-Saxon and Continental worlds both alien and misleading. The lonely agent with his transparently clear choices and his fully conscious will not only fails to encapsulate the moral experience of thoughtful lay persons, but as an image of moral life it altogether fails to appreciate the fact that the central task of moral life is and has always been to love. To be more accurate, it is her conviction that we are called upon to *love well*; so demanding is this task and so numerous the obstacles to our achieving it that it is literally an age-long labor which goes forward ceaselessly as the central activity of the morally serious life. But before going further, we must ask what it would mean, according to Murdoch, to love well. (Some might think this an odd question to pose in an age such as ours, so plenteously furnished with illustrated, low-cost sex manuals.) Murdoch's reply is like Plato's; to *love well* is, in the first place, to love only what is genuinely lovable, and that is the Good. Secondly, we must love it selflessly. It won't surprise anyone to know that she amplifies this answer by saying that to love the Good is like seeing — really seeing — the Beautiful, as we do in the contemplation of nature or great art:

"To silence and expel self, to contemplate and delineate nature with a clear eye, is not easy and demands moral discipline. A great artist is, in respect of his work, a good man, and in the true sense, a free man. The consumer of art has an analogous task to its producer: to be disciplined enough to see as much reality in the work as the artist has succeeded in putting into it. The appreciation of beauty in art or nature is not only — for all its difficulties — the easiest available spiritual exercise; it is also a completely adequate entry into the good life, since it is the checking of selfishness in the interest of seeing the real."¹¹

Again, on the same theme she says:

"I am not simply saying that suppression of self is required

before accurate vision can be obtained. The great artist sees his objects (and this is true whether they are sad, absurd, repulsive or even evil) in the light of justice and mercy. The direction of attention is, contrary to nature, outward away from the self which reduces all to a false unity, toward the great surprising variety of the world. The ability so to direct attention is love."¹²

The vision of her teacher, Simone Weil, shines forth here. (Weil suggests in many places that praying ought to be understood in the first place as a concentrated and devout *attending* to God.)

Here, then, is the bridge from Murdoch's sense of the Beautiful to the Good; the bridge is love, understood as a just and selfless *attending* to what is there. But how can paying attention, even in this rather exalted sense, be an account of the moral life, we may be tempted to ask in irritation. Part of her answer is as follows:

"Realism — the ability to attend with fidelity to the real — I treat as a moral achievement, and in so doing, I make another assumption in the field of morals: that true vision occasions right conduct."¹³

Thus Murdoch's view of the task of moral life suggests that only through the exercise of such vision, just and merciful, can the moral universe, properly speaking, come into being because only then will I see the other as distinct, separate and yet with needs and hopes as real as mine.

In her essay, "Against Dryness," Murdoch praises the great novelists of the 19th century. — Scott, Austin, Tolstoy — for their depiction of other persons as "eccentric, opaque, messy, contingent, *different* and *real*."¹⁴ That is the beginning of moral consciousness: to see that others are three-dimensional, real. The just and loving gaze through which this recognition comes is in itself a moral triumph over ego, which knows the other only as a tool of *its* purposes, as an item within *its* landscape. (I am haunted here by those appalling lines from Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*: the transcendence of the other is wholly immanent within my consciousness.) *Beyond* ego, indeed, lies my self to whom I am *also* called to be morally just and merciful, but *that*, of course, is a very late achievement if it ever comes. We need only add that moral life, with its inner struggle, its vision, its refusal of consolatory "magic" is good for nothing else in the world; it is autotelic — it is its own end — and constitutes a realm of grace. Ordinarily human love fails of this ideal.

"If one is going to speak of great art as 'evidence', is not

ordinary human love an even more striking evidence of a transcendent principle of good? Plato was prepared to take it as a starting-point. (There are several starting-points.) One cannot but agree that in some sense this is the most important thing of all; and yet human love is normally too profoundly possessive and also too 'mechanical' to be a place of vision. There is a paradox here about the nature of love itself. That the highest love is in some sense impersonal is something which we can indeed see in art, but which I think we cannot see clearly, except in a very piecemeal manner, in the relationships of human beings. Once again the place of art is unique. The image of the Good as a transcendent magnetic centre seems to me the least corruptible and most realistic picture for us to use in our reflections upon the moral life. Here the philosophical 'proof', if there is one, is the same as the moral 'proof'. I would rely especially upon arguments from experience concerned with the realism which we perceive to be connected with goodness, and with the love and detachment which is exhibited in great art."¹⁵

When the prisoner, who has escaped from the cave and dwelt in the sun-lit world for a while goes back into the cave, he finds he is almost completely blind, and must grope. Similarly, when we leave Murdoch's philosophical discourse on love to return for a last glance at the land of the love-machine, we stumble: someone has turned off all the lights and only the palest and most distant glimmer of philosophical illumination remains with us, like the flashings of an underground phosphorescent river. But its light is sufficient for us to see now more certainly the law that rules this land.

Specifically, it is clear that the machine of self grinds out 'sacred' and 'profane' loves indifferently. Everything is grist for its mill. Blaise called Harriet his sacred love, Emily his profane one. But, we may now ask, has he ever really *seen* either woman, with that truly seeing, unsentimental, just and merciful gaze which *is* love? And David: is he not above all in love with his own pain, rather than genuinely engaged in mourning his mother? But of *that* the philosopher however, has said:

"Even suffering itself can play a demonic role here, and the ideas of guilt and punishment can be the most subtle tools of the ingenious self."¹⁶

Finally, with respect to the arid Monty, with his poisonous self-knowledge, Murdoch's philosophical text provides the following com-

ment: "One's self is interesting, so are one's motives interesting, even the unworthiness of one's motives is interesting; one's pain, unless it is very intense indeed, is far too interesting."¹⁷ Thus, all the characters in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* are deeply caught in its toils; and for nothing and no one will it stop. To attempt to alter its workings is dangerous in the extreme, for, like the juggernaut, it will crush anything in its path. It is frightful because its perpetual motion is combined with perfect sightlessness. It does not and never will see its victims — those whom it has maimed, destroyed and sacrificed. And contrary to the laws of merely physical machines, the longer it runs, the more fuel is available to it. Some who watch it, or manage to ride it, are delighted but that is because, like the deluded prisoners in the cave, they do not know or even suspect that beyond the land of the machine, lies a land of freedom and grace, and that it is worth every attempt to get to.

NOTES

1. See Iris Murdoch's *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, pp. 70-71, and the whole of Section X, in which she discusses Sartre's theory of 'La Litterature Engagée.'
2. At any rate, Monty's fictional detective-hero, Milo Fane, is strongly reminiscent of some personification of contemporary British philosophy. Consider the following passage:
 "(Monty) was "rescued" by a seemingly felicitous personification of his "demonism" combined with his intellectualism in the person of Milo Fane, the ironical, disillusioned, diminished man of power. Milo was, at first, almost therapy. With the help of this scornful, sceptical homunculus, Monty could criticize his earlier yearnings while at the same time quietly gratifying them." *Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, p. 33.
3. *Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, pp. 76-77.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 346.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 350.
7. "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts" in *The Sovereignty of Good*, pp. 100-101.
8. "On God and Good", *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

10. Ibid., p. 51.
11. Ibid., pp. 64-65.
12. Ibid., p. 66.
13. Ibid., p. 66.
14. Quoted by Frank Baldanza in *Iris Murdoch*, p. 24.
15. "On God and Good", Ibid., p. 75.
16. Ibid., p. 60.
17. Ibid., p. 68.

Toward An American Epic: Four Poets

James R. Baird

We have no national epic in our literature; we are not likely to have one. But the questions rising from aspirations toward epic expression are insistent. The major ones take these shapes. Why should American culture, among the major modern cultures of the planet, have uniquely, without even remote likenesses abroad, expended so much literary energy toward epic statement? What urgencies in American national being have prompted so much poetic will to define an American typicality, an essential Americanness, past and present, as though to establish a monument for human beings in our area of this continent? What may be said of divergences within epic intent since the close of the eighteenth century and the American reflection of the Enlightenment? Of these divergences why is it that the first thrust, coming upon the close of the Revolution and the federation of the States, is of so superficial a character, and the second, springing from romantic individualism in the mid-nineteenth century, of so deep a reach in our literary currents?

We should begin with some broad assertions. American culture has been, and it continues to be, essentially amorphous, resistant to definition. Since the end of the colonial era, there has been no fixed center of American being. American spokesmen began with Emerson and the Transcendentalists to attempt specifications of Americanness. In our present years of the twentieth century the effort continues, some of it expatriate and frequently denunciatory, for example, in the present

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measurements of Gore Vidal. I am thinking here of free-standing observers who seek to address us with a self-elected oracular power.

On the academic front we have intensified our efforts to get at the character of American being, efforts marked by near-anxiety, as our broad-spread curricula in American studies have proliferated over the last thirty years. In this academic venture we are as amazing as we are peculiar, remembering, as we should, that there are no such comparable *native* studies in Britain, Scandinavia, France, Germany, Italy, or, for that matter, in the major cultures of the Far East. No doubt we bear gratitude toward foreign universities, certainly spurred to action by Fulbright grants, where a new discipline in American studies has been introduced. This foreign modishness aside, we grant that foreign scholars illuminate the work of individual American creators in the arts, and that they offer interesting addenda to our knowledge of American history. But I have not seen evidence that they are any nearer than we are to specifications of Americanness, the essentiality of our national being.

American culture is amorphous. Our brief history is essentially a history of emergence and mutation. National identity becomes increasingly elusive of definition. The image of New England is said by some to have lost its authority as a giver of intellectual posture. California is said by some to be the paradigm of our future. What do these contentions *mean*? They mean nothing more than that American intellectuals express a peculiarly American rage for definition.

Aspirations toward an American epic come of the source which urges this continuing quest for definition. If one had to choose a single American writer who is epic without epic intent, he should indeed be untroubled about alternatives. That *one* is Mark Twain, the real Mark Twain, from his literary beginnings through the publication of *Huckleberry Finn*. His response to American culture was unintentionally epic. He was utterly faithful to American amorphousness, to the constancy of emergence and mutation as the essentiality of American being. But we propose to talk of Americans who followed an archetypal quest: how to achieve a form in language to give speech definitively to the *isness* (as opposed to the *becomingness*) of this American, our far-flung and diverse tribal existence.

Obviously, we should be concerned with American poets as these archetypal questers. Thus far, our major aspirants are Walt Whitman, Hart Crane, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams. The magnitude of each need not be pressed. For each of these has addressed us as an *Urdichter* (to rely upon the more explicit German term). They are singers as close as we possess to the classic makers of *epikos*, in the Greek sense. Their poetic speech did not, indeed, subsume and define

national being. But this *Urishness* among them, this aspiration to speak for the tribe marks each as the quester. Whitman, with broad vision if little learning, would name his prototypes in the ancient makers of saga in the Vedic lore of India; Hart Crane found his prototype in Virgil; every reader of Pound's *Cantos* is acutely sensitive to his insistent reach toward Homer and Dante; and Williams, in all his digging down to sources in but one American place, Paterson, New Jersey, is near Pound as he closes Book IV of his mindful epic, Homer's Thalassa, the sea of the voyager, and the great theatre of Dionysius. All these wished to assume the role of the maker of *epikos*. If they could, they would become singers of a new tribe, the Americans, speaking to us in a language of a new identity. Their speech is difficult to grasp, to understand. The audience is small. As our great *Ursangers*, they are would-be spokesmen of primal being. We read them as great poets. Yet we know the close confines, the singularities of each would-be epic which they left us. And, if we are acute readers, we know their frustrations.

This archetypal quest implies some notice of manifestations in other areas of American art. We should need to study the urgency toward epic statement in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie*. This vast novel, finished in Paris in 1824, seeks to relate the epic vision of the Puritan covenant, mordant as Cooper wrote, and the vision of inexorable Western expansion in the regulum of manifest destiny stemming from the Enlightenment. One should pause to consider the epic urgency of John Dos Passos' trilogy *U.S.A.*, the longest novelistic sequence in American literature. We should ask questions of Eugene O'Neill's epic intent in his plotting of a "Nonology" (incomplete at his death) to embody the epic sweep of American history. And what shall we say of epic vision as we encounter it in MacLeish's *Conquistador* or in Benét's *Western Star*, though these works are essentially poetic statements of events in North American history? I take these widely separated expressions as evidence of a typical American compulsion. They are, apart from any consideration of their individual merits, *large* figurations of American experience wherein their makers sought to specify an American uniqueness.

The archetypal thrust has alike had some grotesque manifestations. The late Aline Bernstein Saarinen, a great historian of American art and a superior art critic of the contemporary for *The New York Times*, named our biggest monument as one of the seven *hideous* wonders of the modern world: Gutzon Borglum's four American presidents carved in bas relief on a cliff face in the Black Hills of South Dakota. What on earth, she asked, could prompt such a monstrosity? Why carve the land in a quest for American epic?

Because, she said, there is a persistent anxiety in our American being, some curious unhappiness that we are not well defined. In the grotesquerie of this reference, she was speaking of this same archetypal long which I have suggested.

The surface current in the epic stream may be measured rather quickly. Two poets are here for consideration before we turn to the four major figures named for emphasis. Joel Barlow and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow are epic poetasters, if that term is permissible. Yet I must argue that the propulsion of each came of the source which compelled Whitman, Crane, Pound, Williams: the search for unique Americanness.

Barlow is our first would-be national poetic spokesman. He was of that small group of writers on the first national frontier, most of them Yale-bred, who bear the name, the Connecticut Wits. He was a somewhat arresting international figure, as well. In 1788 he went to France as agent for an Ohio land company. He remained abroad for seventeen years. But his nostalgia for his native clime is most touching as we read a memorial written at, of all places, Chambéry, in Savoy, in 1793. It is his homely piece, "The Hasty Pudding," dedicated to Martha Washington, and exhibiting an epigram with a simple recipe: "He makes a good breakfast who mixes pudding [i.e., mush] with molasses." We grant the wit. But we also sense the small presence of an American identity beneath this mock-seriousness. Barlow went on to become American consul to Algiers in 1795. By 1805 he had become a consultant in diplomacy in Washington. In 1811 he was sent to Europe to negotiate a commercial treaty with Napoleon. When he went to Wilno in Poland for an interview with the Emperor, he died of exposure suffered in the retreat of Napoleon's armies from Moscow.

The career of Barlow is curiously marked by his aspiration toward a broad poetic statement of American being. It is the first such marking in the history of American poetry. In the year before his departure for France, 1787, he published by subscription a long verse narrative, *The Vision of Columbus*. If one is to advance a celebration of American identity, had he not better begin with Columbus? The new nation which came to flourish in the New World is revealed in nine books. Every student of American literary history is aware of the indentured state of American poetry until Emerson and Whitman liberated it. What poetic voice would we have had, from Ann Bradstreet and Phyllis Wheatley to the Connecticut Wits, had not the English masters provided the models? Pope is Barlow's mentor in prosody, of course. But since Barlow intended a "patriotic poem," as he was later to call it, disclaiming any intent to write an "epic," what bet-

ter guide than Milton, as he planned nine books of vision? The poem opens with imprisoned Columbus in chains, at the close of his second voyage. An Angel-instructor comes to him to offer solace in a vision of the New World. The hero is the counterpart of Adam in *Paradise Lost*; the Angel is the counterpart of Michael sent to instruct Adam of man's future. Much is written today of the Adamic strain in American expression. This interview of Columbus and his angel is the longest exposition of the American Adam to be found in American literature to the date of Barlow's writing. In Book II "Columbus enquires the cause of the dissimilarity of nations." What a strange and wonderful transposition, from Milton's Adam inquiring of Raphael, his first instructor, concerning the creation of the world and the diversity of the creatures thereof! The angel informs Columbus that the dissimilarity of nations is to be understood in recognition of dissimilarity of the parts of the human body. Milton is the prototype; but in unraveling Barlow's mind one can discover some evidence of Tom Paine's deism, as well.

The transporting vision of Columbus, directed by the Angel, reveals the shape of marvels to come. Succeeding books of the poem recount the venture of the Spaniards in Peru, the colonizing of North America and the settlement of Canada, and the American Revolution. There follow a dissertation on the arts and commerce of the union of the states and a discourse on the progress of science. Book IX prophesies a council of all nations, this to be, of course, inspired by free Americans. This prediction, the first of its kind in American literature, strikes us as rather uncanny.

To wander through *The Vision of Columbus* is to feel the instability of quaking canvas. The *mise en scène* is most precariously fixed. And there is no more security in Barlow's revision of the poem. Soon after his return to Washington in 1805, Barlow set to work anew. The *Columbiad* appeared in 1807. Why he should have persisted is an interesting question. As a would-be singer of national identity, he, no doubt, felt compelled to repeat, the better to inscribe. The changes are not many. The Angel of the first vision is exchanged for an instructor bearing the name of Hesper, the guardian genius of the Western continent. The prison of Columbus is exchanged for a lookout, a "mount of vision." A new Book VII celebrates the French alliance with the new American states. Expansions of the succeeding visions allow for the addition of a tenth book, which predicts "assimilation and final union of all languages" as the general congress of nations is established. Barlow's struggle to define the nation, its thin past, its uncertain present, and its claim upon the future of humankind ends with the *Columbiad*. What recommends him to our attention? His attempt at

definition is, of course, artificial in its end. But his poem, the original or the revision, tells us much of a typical American craving for antiquity, as though the new nation had somehow to justify its presence among the old cultures from which it derived. Barlow was seeking the weight of a deep past, the weight of history. These he attempted to impose, seeking the weight in the voyages of Columbus, in Spanish Peru, in the speeding duration of the colonial era. Having exhausted these possibilities, he had then to celebrate an American greatness of the future, its arbitration among nations, its founding of universal peace (very much, we must add, as though he had resurrected the Puritan doctrine of the Covenant.)

But it is this craving for antiquity, this insistent appetite, which most engages my attention. Wallace Stevens wrote once to a foreign friend of Mayan art and the American search for age: "This art consists very largely of glyphs and sacrificial and calendar stones, all of them completely hideous. They are found in Mexico and in the jungles of Central America . . . Many people believe that these early Indians came from the South Pacific. We feel a special interest in things of this sort because they give us the antiquity which the English like to deny us. The English insist that Americans have no background." Whatever any one of us may think of Mayan art, this observation of Stevens has a particular relevance. The judgment of the English, which we felt keenly until the era of the First World War and which we still sense, probably had much to do with Barlow's search for American justifications. In him it amounts to an American consciousness of insufficiency.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow follows in this surface stream of our literary history, this poet who of all American poets to this immediate present enjoyed in his lifetime the widest public reception that can be named. The placing of him alongside Barlow will seem to you odd. I find an affinity only in this zeal on the part of each for claiming an American antiquity, for giving weight, for establishing background. If Barlow's design is quaking canvas, then Longfellow, although the better craftsman, left us a stage even less secure.

Longfellow graduated from Bowdoin in 1825, and in the following year departed for Europe. It was a long residence abroad, a period of study in languages and literatures which was to lead in 1829 to his appointment to the Bowdoin faculty. In 1836 he was appointed Smith Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard, a post which he held until his resignation in 1854. Our present judgment of Longfellow ought rather to center upon his contribution to American higher education than upon his diminishing image as a poet. For it was Longfellow at Harvard, accomplished in the languages of Western Europe, who

overturned the rigid authority of the Greek and Latin curriculum and thus became one of the founders of our present concept of humanistic study. We should note, too, the breadth of his reading in the mythic diversity of Teutonic literature, and, in the later years of his life, his accomplishment in his translation of the *Divine Comedy*. But Longfellow's record as educator and scholar is not our concern here. I wish to emphasize his appetite for antiquity, his recognition of the weight of European cultures in the depth of history. As a poet, he sought to satisfy this appetite, an actual passion, in making American statements from American materials. The satisfactions for us are small, if even existent. What is there to note in those verse narratives, *Evangeline* and *Miles Standish* other than a genteel pallor and emaciation?

Were there nothing else from Longfellow to observe, we should find little reason to associate him with the surface current in which we encounter Barlow. But there is another venture to note, one which has, really, no counterpart in American poetry. It came of Longfellow's Teutonic quest in Europe. It was published in 1855, the year, incidentally, of Whitman's first *Leaves of Grass*, and but one year beyond Longfellow's termination of his Harvard professorship: *The Song of Hiawatha*. That the poem was intended as an American epic (however frail we find it in its twenty-four swift books) is rather certain. Longfellow called it an "edda." Based upon American Indian legend, *Hiawatha* is cast in the mould of the Finnish *Kalevala* and written in an emulating trochaic meter. (We might note here, as well, that Karl Gustav Jung, who had studied the poem, found archetypal affinities between it and the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic!) *Hiawatha* tells the story of an Ojibway mythic hero. But its consequence in American literary history must be related to the American quest for antiquity. Wallace Stevens' notice of anxious American claims for Mayan art to make a weight for American distinctiveness seems to have a curious applicability to Longfellow's effort in *Hiawatha*. Book XIV of Longfellow's poem proposes for our attention Indian "picture-writing," his term for pictographs. It was a mode of inscription before the white man; it defined the cosmos of the Indian and the values of his tribe; it was, then, an epic form. Longfellow established nothing of Americanness in his "edda," despite his vision of the white man as the inheritor. *Hiawatha* is merely an evidence of an American poetic quest; its effort to claim a weight of American being from Indian culture fails. But, then, Longfellow is no more curious in his purpose than is Barlow who resorted to the Spaniards in Peru in his elaborate design of a visionary Columbus.

I have intended to suggest Barlow and Longfellow in this surface

current as American poets disturbed and frustrated by the expense of American newness. Each is a public poet; and each, by his own self-election, seeks a statement of American distinctiveness in his public address. Barlow amuses us with his dependence upon Popean prosody and Milton's epic. The insubstantial Longfellow rather disturbs us, so much of his poet's life, save that period when he translated Dante and wrote some compelling sonnets, having been devoted to attempts at American legend and American definition. He is an anachronism: *Hiawatha* in 1855 as Whitman published *Leaves of Grass* and changed the course of American poetry! Whitman was the maker of the unique American poetic voice. He remains our progenitor in this present. We remember Emerson's exclamation when he read his copy of *Leaves*: "Americans abroad may now come home. For unto us is born a poet."

This brief tracing of Barlow and Longfellow has attempted to suggest the duration of an American search for antiquity, for American uniqueness, and for American identity. We have been speaking of a traditional regard for poetry as the primary instrument of epic statement; and we have noted some of the residuum of foreign models in this American expression. In the expression of the NEW American poetry, i.e., that of Whitman and his successors, there are evidences of aspiration akin to the surface current, however deep their passage in the stream. Each seeks to articulate a uniqueness of American *being*. Each is intent upon epic statement. But the deep current which sweeps from Whitman onward is as it is in the voyage of the SELF. I quote, then, the most important lines in American poetry. Whitman opens "Song of Myself": "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

The consequences from Whitman are vast. The voyage of the self perseveres into our time. The last great epic singers of the self are Pound and Williams, Pound continuing with the Pisan Cantos and the Rock Drill Cantos during his years of confinement as a mental patient in Washington, Williams ill and struggling with the last fragments of *Paterson* as his death in 1963 approached. Whitman's great purpose in the lines I have quoted from "Song of Myself" should give us pause. Here is the annunciation at the center of *Leaves of Grass*, that declaration of independence for American poetry, set in type by Walt Whitman's own hand and published on the Fourth of July, 1855. What is this speech of annunciation? We know that it was inspired by Emerson's call to an Americanness of being, by Emerson's celebration of the sovereignty of *selfhood*. An American epic of selfhood begins. "I celebrate myself, and sing myself." This new epic is to be double-

voiced. Here the first voice praises individual being. "And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." And here the second voice speaks. What I sing of this American existence within my being is to be a song of your American being, for in human flesh we are one. But this annunciation does not comprehend the all that is to be in this epic praise. Whitman inherits from his predecessors as the stream flows. He becomes the seeker of antiquity. To be an American Adam upon new American soil is not enough. He must claim for his epic of the self the weight of history. The depth of the quest becomes strangely, marvelously the weight of the song. All that was, before Americans, *became* and *became* to an apotheosis in the American self. I am speaking of Whitman's trust in the deep, the primary current. He seeks American primal being; he seeks lyrically to define it. Thus *Leaves of Grass* becomes the source book of every epic quest following Whitman. It remains *Leaves of Grass* through every new and expanding edition, as more and more poems are added. It must become an epic without end. The passion for definition urges its onwardness, even to the threshold of death. And it is this same passion which we recognize in Hart Crane, Pound, Williams, each set upon the endless voyage.

Whitman in "Song of Myself" and in the great poetic clusters adhering to it is the plunderer of time. "I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of things to be." All priesthoods, all faiths of human history become one in him; the soul in him evolved from the immense history of the universe; and thus it encompasses all forces that moved to complete him. For his embryo the nebula cohered to an orb. This vision of genesis is accompanied throughout *Leaves of Grass* by visions of a cohering of all human events in the Self. And in the sensuousness of physical being there is the marvel of things accomplished, the long, slow work of primordial life forms now realized in this human body, the temple of the self. To be American in this American place is to feel a culmination of these patient processes. It is to stand free and secure among the nations of earth, to admit of subservience to none, to know, in fact, the American realization as *the* acme. These brilliant affirmations by Whitman, spoken in a language, an idiom never before encountered by readers of poetry in English, reveal the strength of his epic. Alongside these, an imprisoned Columbus seeing into the American future or a rehearsal of Indian legend from the shores of Lake Superior are, indeed, timorous and hesitant, and even apologetic.

If we must choose one part of Whitman's epic which names his prototype as epic saying, that recognition, as he would have it, is inherent in "Passage to India," his song of praise written to com-

memorate the opening of the Suez Canal. The poem is a supreme revelation of the epic voyager; and nothing from Whitman's address to us more clearly illustrates his rigorous quest for the depth of human history. He begins in praise of modern technology, inventiveness and skill which made the canal possible. He follows with a celebration of great navigators, Columbus, Vasco de Gama, and with ascriptions to the great explorers of the East. The voyage of the poet leads to India, to quote him, "to primal thought." His soundings, again to quote, plunge below "the Sanscrit and the Vedas." Farther he goes in search of primal being. The poem ends with the limitless expanse beyond India, the source. It is a voyage without end as the poem closes: "O my brave soul! / O farther farther sail! / O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God? / O father, farther, farther sail!"

For Whitman the epic of the Self must contain this weight of history, this search for primal being of which the self is the accomplishment. But there is for our study the other part of selfhood; the uniqueness of individual being, the particularity of experience which makes possible a sovereign identity, the individuality to himself as he is. Two illustrations from this province of Whitman's expression must suffice. The first is the confession of the poem "Starting from Paumanok" preceding "Song of Myself." It is a reflection upon the beginnings of self-realization, as the poet's imagination returns to his home on Long Island. This beginning on Paumanok (the Indian name for Long Island) should be read in conjunction with "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," a return to the beginnings of self-awareness in childhood. "Starting from Paumanok" reveals a youthful resolve upon epic stature, the assumption of the role of epic sayer. The second poem, first set down some twenty years later, is a symbolic rendering of the child awakening to the rocking sea, on the beach, the place of a limitless setting forth. "The outseting bard," he is called, "I . . . that child, my tongue's use sleeping." The awakened tongue sang of the self in its time: of Manhattan streets, of builders of towns and cities, of tillers of the soil, of the violence of the Civil War. Its song was of America. This America was the acme of "things accomplished." American being was the immediacy, the presentness of one life. It was also the repository of the total past of the race of men. The closing lines of "Song of Myself" expose Whitman's aspiration. He would be the spokesman of the nation. "You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, / But I shall be good health to you nevertheless, / And filter and fibre your blood." Few of his countrymen knew what he meant, or cared. Few know today.

When Hart Crane jumped (or fell?) from the stern of a passenger ship near Cuba in 1932, he was recognized among a small group of in-

tellectuals as an aspiring maker of American epic, and a successor to Whitman. He had published parts of *The Bridge* in the late twenties. The full text had appeared in 1930. The eight sections of this work pose difficulties in analysis which we expect in major American poetry, especially that appearing since the publication of Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*, at the close of the First World War. Crane is the immediate inheritor of modernism, as we think of it, though in his time the modernism of Whitman was certainly for an American audience equally forbidding and arcane. We may cite at once a line from the close of Section IV (entitled "Cape Hatteras") of *The Bridge*. "Thou, Vedic Caesar, to the greensward knelt!" One needs to know: that Whitman is the conqueror invoked, that Vedic refers to Whitman's analogy of his own song to the primal speech of the Indian Vedas (to which we have just referred in a notice of "Passage to India",) that the figuration of the one who knelt on the green grass mantle of the earth refers to Whitman's symbol of his poetry as leaves of grass, common to all men as the earth beneath their feet. In his brief essay "Modern Poetry" Crane argued that the function of poetry remained unchanged in this century: it should present "the most complete synthesis of human values." But he acknowledged the inevitability of complex statement in an age of technology and science.

What in this twentieth century is the expense of our worship of the machine? It is a facturing of faith. Hence Crane in the Proem to *The Bridge* will seek a complete synthesis of the values of his countrymen. He chooses Brooklyn Bridge as a symbolic instrument, the bridge in its arching sweep a triumph of technology. Its cables will be the strings of his harp, the instrument of an epic bard. The last line of the Proem reads: "And of the curveship lend a myth to God." There must be a new music, one of modern speech, one to recapture faith in the soul, a new age of soul united, harmonized with the inexorable vigor, the *forwardness* of modern science. Who, then, will work this harmony? The poet. Crane was twenty-seven when he set forth. The more astonishing his assumption.

And more astonishing even his proposal as he outlined the plan of his poem in a letter to Otto Kahn in 1927. "*The Aeneid* was not written in two years — nor in four, and in more than one sense I feel justified in comparing this historic and cultural scope of *The Bridge* to this great work. It is . . . [to be] a symphony with an epic theme..." ARMA VIRUMQUE CANO, "Arms and the man I sing" . . . he who set forth from Troy, began Virgil. I doubt that Crane was a competent Latinist. He probably used a translation. But in Virgil he heard an epic voice, a synthesis of values, a summation of history, a song

of heroic voyaging. Virgil's poem is epic in pure form. It is, in no sense, a voyage of Virgil as the celebrant of the poet-self.

Crane would give to his countrymen an epic of national being. But, as with Whitman, and with Pound and Williams, it is an epic of the voyaging self. The music of Crane passes through eight sections. The first theme celebrates the voyage of Columbus; the second section is wrought in a counterpointing of materials from American history: the Indian and the colonial past, the advance of the Western frontier intricately combined with prospects of New York harbor and Manhattan in the poet's present; the third and fourth sections trace American science from the era of the clipper ships to the conquests of aircraft; the fifth and sixth turn to meditation upon the American loss of an iconography of the soul in its relation to divinity; the seventh marks a descent into a Hades of the dark machine, with an almost Dantescan vision of captive humanity, modern Americans in the New York subway; the eighth and last is a song of resolution, a prophecy of the American future when the promise of Columbus sailing to a New World will be realized in a new faith, a new myth lent to God. Science and the soul will be united; mind, with its increasing power of inventiveness, and beauty will become one in indissoluble marriage. As an epigram for this final movement in his music Crane uses a sentence from Plato: "Music is then the knowledge of that which relates to love in harmony and system."

It is obvious that Crane sought a depth of history, even as Whitman did. But the yield of the American past for Crane is actually the evidence of Crane's self-exploration. What of this past is vestigial in him? The whole of *The Bridge* is then a long confessional cast in an epic mode. Beneath the complex imagery of the meditation on Columbus is the self-reference of a poet who seeks a new symbolism of being, one to affirm anew with a new myth, one to replace the *Te Deum Laudamus* on the lips of Columbus. It is Crane who regards the skyscrapers of New York as monuments to our technology, cathedrals dedicated to the worship of science, empty of any altar of the soul. If his music on the cables of Brooklyn Bridge was made "to lend a myth to God," a symbol of harmony affirming the significance of American being, then the new myth eventuates for the voyaging poet, and for him alone.

Ezra Pound began writing *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* in 1915, when he was thirty. The poems were published three years later. This sequence is a testament of dismissal. Pound purposed to remove the weight of authority stemming from Victorian and Edwardian expression, and to denounce the allegiance which he himself had invested in the mode of Imagism. The yield of these poems was for Pound a

stripping-bare. With Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, he became one of the makers of modern literature in English. He intended with them a total liberation from the preciousness which, as he judged it, marked expression at the close of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Soon after *Mauberry* he asserted in his *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (a Roman poet B.C. 50-16): ". . . long is my life, long years . . . God am I for the time." We must emphasize this exaltation of the poet as God. For, as this liberated American, expatriate though he was, set forth on the voyage of his *Cantos* in 1925, he disclosed nothing of those mystic visions of a new religion which we find in Whitman and Crane. Pound detested all religions, Eastern or Western, all symbolisms of religious ascription. As self-elected god, he intended to create his own world in his voyage-as-process, a voyage never completed.

Yet it is of impressive moment that Pound, arrogantly despising the gross materialism of Americans, and the veneers of their thin culture, deliberately allying himself with the intellectual circles of London and Paris, chose to acknowledge Whitman as he prepared to begin the long sequence of the *Cantos*. The poem is a short one, entitled "A Pact":

I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman —
I have detested you long enough.
I come to you as a grown child
Who has had a pig-headed father;
I am old enough now to make friends.
It was you that broke the new wood,
Now is a time for carving.
We have one sap and one root —
Let there be commerce between us.

And what is to be this commerce? I think it clear that Pound, sensing his own American origins, recognizes in Whitman the primal urgency of the voyager, the epic singer who plundered time and dredged history to the encompassment of the self. "I celebrate myself, and sing myself," began Whitman. So Pound, to break the wood.

In the opening lines of "Song of Myself" Whitman resolved to seek "Nature without check with original energy." It is this original energy which Pound acknowledges in Whitman, the breaker of new wood. Pound must have found this display of energy in Whitman exactly related to his own intent in his theory known as vorticism. With Wyndham Lewis Pound argued, as a vorticist, for the abstract and non-representational in art. But his alliance with Whitman is to be found in his insistence upon the vortex, which, to simplify for our pur-

poses, is the whirlpool of poetic energy passing into form. Of this energy at the center of a poet's total speech it must be said that primal being requires form which is traditionless, uniquely of the self, dependent upon no other form. The display of Pound's energy in the *Cantos* is all but matchless. He left 116 of these intricate poems, many of them impervious to full critical explication. I am perhaps over-bold in suggesting that Whitman is a direct predecessor of Pound, the vortical. For, though Pound intended 120 Cantos modeled on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, these to be divided into hell, purgatory and paradise, and though upon this design he intended to superimpose images of the Homeric voyage, there is something peculiarly American, *savagely* American in the energy displayed. Pound, after all, admits in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* that he was born in a "half savage country." What one has from Pound's maelstrom, the vortex of energy unleashed, is a huge epic of self. Into it he poured all the vastness of his learning, all his skill in some ten languages, ancient and modern, and, for good measure, his partial knowledge of Chinese ideograms. It is no wonder that some would-be readers find themselves in the presence of an immense and wild churning, a turbulence of images crowding as though in wreckage from almost countless sources. Indeed, the art of the Cantos taken as a whole is non-representational. I find in them an analogy with the manifestoes of Cubism: Nature smashed into fragments and then reassembled according to the will of the painter becomes for Pound, the poet, the realities of history invaded, smashed, reassembled with fragments from the present. It is the unique self alone which is to be served.

The epic of Pound is the epic of a modern Odysseus. Canto I marks the setting forth: "And then went down to the ship, / Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea. . ." The voyage memorializes the energy of the vortex, as we read. Of this energy is the passion of *one*, born American, one who acknowledged one sap, one root with Whitman, the passion of a titanic selfhood which would encompass the total weight of the past, self an acme of both past and present.

Pound's reiteration of usury as the source of all human ills, past and present, becomes a continuing threshold for his emerging definitions of American being. Canto thirty-eight suggest the scope. What should be said of a country with so little history and less of any ennobling myth? American being is to be read in the evidence of traffic in munitions and in the greed and plunder of the Stock Market. "And that year [1929] Mr. Whitney / Said how useful short sellin' was, / We suppose he meant to the brokers / And no one called him a liar." This, in essence, remained Pound's measurement of America, a capitalistic democracy. I believe him to have been sane when he served

the cause of Italian fascism, sane throughout a decade of internment as a mental patient in a Washington hospital. Not until the atavistic longing of old age in his last years in Venice did he wish to return to the land of his birth, and then to the Idaho of his boyhood. Whatever one's response to the *Cantos*, there lie before the reader the broadest epic design in American literature and much of the greatest American poetry written since Whitman. As for redemptive vision, there was none. There was nothing save the celebration of great art as redemption; and in that Pound joined his friend and fellow poet, Yeats.

My final comment is directed to William Carlos Williams, close friend of Pound when the two were fellow students at the University of Pennsylvania in 1904-5. Williams was preparing for medicine, Pound for a career in teaching, which he soon abandoned. The friendship endured, though one can scarcely imagine two American poets whose directions in the experience of poetic expression became so sharply opposite. As writers, they were linked only in epic intent. Williams came to detest expatriates, and to detest the poetry of erudition so fully represented by Pound and Eliot, Americans who, as he put it, gave poetry back to the academics. Recalling the impact of Eliot's *The Waste Land* as he wrote his *Autobiography*, Williams wrote: "Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself — rooted in the locality which should give it fruit." To my knowledge he never spoke with equal denunciation of Pound's academic posture, of his deliberate loading of every rift of the *Cantos* with the vastness of his encyclopaedic knowledge; nor did he condemn Pound's desertion of his American place. But Pound's charge against his old friend reached Williams in the correspondence of the two. It is preserved again for us in Book I, Section III of Williams's *Paterson*. Pound to Williams: "Your interest is in the bloody loam, but what I'm after is the finished product." Pound's recognition is exact. The loam of America (I except the "bloody" part as a mere Briticism of Pound: *very*) — this loam is the stuff of Williams's making, that and no other. In the epigram of *Paterson* one finds Williams's resolve: "a reply to Latin and Greek with the bare hands." He is not replying to Homer and Virgil, but to Pound. I, Williams, answer you, larding your art with your academic learning of the ancients, I answer you with this loam dug in my American place.

This insistence of Williams upon the *native* loam is very close to Whitman's resolve as he closes "Song of Myself": "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, / If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles." If Williams had never mentioned

Whitman, we should still know from very feeling the inspiring source of Williams's genius. But there are ascriptions enough to Whitman. I mention only two. We learn from the *Autobiography* that Williams at the University of Pennsylvania adored two models as he began to learn his poet's craft: Keats and Whitman (an odd pairing indeed). But when it came to his notebooks, he wrote: "I reserved my Whitmanesque 'thoughts', a sort of purgation and confessional, to clear my head and my heart from turgid obsessions." He went on to say: "Ezra . . . used to assault me (as he still does) for my lack of education and reading. He would say that I should become acquainted with . . . differential calculus — like himself, or course. I'd reply that a course in comparative anatomy wouldn't at all harm him . . ." Ezra came to ally himself, in his resolve, with the American root, the sap of Whitman. But it was Williams who found an American purgative power in Whitman, a sap to clear his head and his heart from "turgid obsessions." Keats remained treasured, certainly. But as Williams sought an American voice and an American language, it was Whitman who encouraged him. In a little essay entitled "How to Write" there is a second ascription to the value of Whitman, the value of his model in free verse. And here Whitman is cited in the context of Williams's statement on *depth* in expression: "It is a primitive profundity of the personality that must be touched if what we do [as writers] is to have it." Certainly, Whitman was in search of this primitive profundity: the primal nature of American being and the primal sources of the unique self.

The first sketch of Williams's *Paterson* was published in the *Dial* in 1926. From this inception onward the development of the design and the language to clothe it were slowly taking form. Book I appeared in print in 1946 and the following four books at about three year intervals through 1958. Dr. Williams practiced medicine in Rutherford, New Jersey. Close by, the Passaic River flows in its course to Newark Bay. Upstream is the city of Paterson, bearing a particular identification with the river because of the adjacent falls over a high escarpment. Paterson is the site of an epic named for the city. Through the five completed books of the poem and the fragments of a sixth Williams undertook and extended his voyage of the self. The history which it encompassed was to be and remained an American history of one place and its urban adjacencies, these extending to New York, and the history of one American, William Carlos Williams. The poet's choice of this urban complex is related to the complex life of *everyman*, in the modern sense, everyman as a city. The voyage is a river passage. Thus Williams wrote of the structure of *Paterson*: "[It] follows the course of the Passaic River, whose life seemed more and

more to resemble my own: the river above the Falls, the catastrophe of the Falls itself, the river below the Falls and the entrance at the end in to the great sea." One should add to this statement Williams's first announcement in the epigram to *Paterson*: "a local pride; spring, summer, fall, and the sea." The voyage will, then, proceed through the seasons of his life. His death at the union of river and sea will terminate it.

The difficulties for us in reading *Paterson*, in grasping its total speech, come of its intricate braidings, the strands of local history entwined with the personal history of the symbolic *persona*. There is a reflection of Pound's vorticism here, a vortex of energy in which memorials of existence, both public and private, reach us in fragments, cohering in odd associations, passing through metamorphoses in the work of imagination — and evidencing the non-representational in art. But we must stress the utter adherence of *Paterson* to American place and one American self. Stand where you are on American ground, dig deep into the layers of American history, however thin the deposits in comparison to European age, dig deep into yourself. Thus *Paterson*, in its great range and in its magnificent faithfulness to American language, is an *exemplum*, as much as to say: how it might be for other Americans, identifying the place where they stand, identifying themselves. Through love, imagination, total involvement in the joy and the beauty of life itself they may yet be saved from the tyranny of mechanisms — yes, even in the gaseous expanse of northern New Jersey.

Paterson, the epic of an American self, was left unfinished. But we may think of Williams's last poem, *Asphodel, That Greeny Flower* as a coda. It is one of the great lyric meditations on love, imagination, and beauty — even the beauty of death — in the language, English or American. It reaches to the place of the soul, through waters dark and deep, to the primal being which Whitman touched in his late sequences, "Whispers of Heavenly Death" and "From Noon to Starry Night."

It was initially contended that we have no national epic, nor are we like to have one. Whitman, Crane, Pound, Williams gave us epics of the Self, each distinct from the others in the nature of his voyaging. American being is *becoming* and *becoming*. It is emergence and emergence. The singer to encompass the All of it, to speak totally of American being in poetry, to record "a synthesis of all values" (as Hart Crane aspired to do), has yet to come. Whitman offered every atom of himself to his countrymen. Few Americans are takers.

1100 A.D.: A Crisis for Us?

F. Edward Cranz

I am about to take advantage of a friendly audience, though I hope also a critical one, to speculate about some problems to which I have no firm solutions; indeed I am not even sure that I understand the problems. But the issues are important; the problems ought to be faced; maybe together we can come a little closer to the solutions.

The origin of the problems lies in some simple intellectual history of the West ca. 1100 A.D., and the trouble seems to be that we cannot *do* that history as long as we remain who we have been. In a way the situation is the opposite of that faced not so long ago in modern science, where it became clear that when we deal with things sufficiently small we cannot observe them without affecting them. In the case of the history of 1100 A.D., on the contrary, it appears that we cannot study it without *its* affecting *us* in ways which are extensive, unpredictable, and not always comfortable.

The consequences of the history of 1100 A.D. are my main interest tonight, and I'll get to them as soon as I can. However, it is clear that I shall first have to outline the history itself; I shall not try to 'prove' it or we'd never reach the problems I'm concerned with. It is only fair to tell you that many learned scholars believe that my history is all wrong. I have listened to them explain this for a year or so, and I have simply become more and more convinced that whatever errors of detail I may be guilty of, the thesis of a fundamental reorientation ca. 1100 A.D. still holds. But of course my conviction hardly ranks as proof.

This talk was given in a somewhat different form as a History Department Lecture in March, 1978.

I contend that toward the beginning of the twelfth century, say in the generations of Anselm of Canterbury and of Abelard, there occurred in the West an over-all reorientation of the categories of thought and experience. The reorientation was so complete and so successful that we ourselves are to a large extent the consequences of it and, as it were, trapped within it. The event can be illustrated first from the special categories of knowing, sensing, and making. In each case the ancients, by whom I mean the Greeks, the Romans, and the Graeco-Roman Christians, experience all three processes conjunctively through a form of union; in knowing, for example, the knower somehow becomes one with what he knows. With Anselm, in contrast, each of these processes is experienced in the context of a dichotomy: in knowing we no longer find union but rather a dichotomy between the knower and what he knows. Behind the reorientation of the categories of knowing, sensing, and making, lie two more fundamental changes. In the first place, ancient experience falls within a single realm of which the individual is in the fullest sense a part; with Anselm, experience is divided between two realms, one of 'meanings,' and the other of 'things.' In the second place, there is a change of structure within the realms. The ancient single realm was, for want of better terminology, an aggregate order; the two medieval-modern realms, again for want of better terminology, are systematic universes. I shall try to show that the ancient categories of thought and experience involved conjunctive knowing, sensing, and making within a single aggregate order; the reorientation of ca. 1100 A.D. led to disjunctive knowing, sensing, and making within two systematic universes.

To demonstrate the reorientation I shall examine the categories of knowing, sensing, and making. In each case I shall argue that there is clear evidence of a reorientation but that we cannot do a 'history' of any one of them in isolation, or indeed of all three together; hence we are driven to expand our field of inquiry to include the change from the single realm of ancient experience to the two realms of Anselm and of Abelard. But here again it turns out that no history is possible unless we also take account of the change from aggregate order to systematic universes.

Let me begin, then, with knowing and intellection. The dominant ancient tradition is that we have here to do with a union or conjunction of the knower and the known. One could illustrate it with the familiar passages from Aristotle's *De anima*:

We say once more that the soul is somehow all beings, for beings are either sensible or intelligible, and

science is somehow the knowables and sense the sensibles . . .¹

And,

In what is without matter, what intellects and what is intellectured are the same . . . Theoretical science and that which is so scienced are the same . . . Science in act is the same as the thing (*to pragma*).²

The Platonists hold the same position, and one might note as a last epigrammatic summation of the tradition the remark of John the Scot in *De divisione naturae*:

The knowledge of what are is what are (Cognitio eorum que sunt, ea quae sunt est)³

But with Anselm, and even more with Abelard, we encounter fundamentally different categories of knowing. In the ancient tradition just noted, intellection occurred as the intellect became, or was conjoined, with a being or form. In the famous 'ontological argument,' however, Anselm assumes without question that 'in the intellect' (in intellectu) is always distinct from 'in the thing', or really (in re).⁴ And after he has analyzed thought and knowledge in terms of the internal 'word,' he explains in *Monologion*:

For the word, in so far as it is a word or an image, is so in relation to something else (ad alterum est), for it is not word or image except in so far as it is the word or image of something; and these properties (*propria*) are so much of the one that they cannot at all be joined to the other (*coaptentur*).⁵

I do not think that there is any need to labor the point. A dichotomy has appeared between intellections and things, and all thought henceforth starts from the dichotomy, even if it ends by trying to overcome it. The ancient category of 'knowing' has disappeared, and a new and different one has taken its place.

Before going on, I should speak at least briefly to an obvious objection. How could such an important change have occurred without anyone in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance becoming aware of it? The general answer is that with Anselm an entire new constellation of the categories of thought and of experience (not only of the category of knowing) had appeared. Men now read the ancients only through these new categories, and everything had to be translated into them or be meaningless (and the ancients, whether pagan or Christian, were know not to be meaningless). The change was so thoroughgoing that it was invisible.

But one could then ask about the massive reception of Aristotle in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Didn't that make the reorientation obvious? No. By then the new categories were so firmly established that one medievalized or modernized Aristotle not only in the commentaries but even in the translations. One decided whether Aristotle was talking about meanings (intentiones) or things (res), and translated accordingly (and it might be noted that the Oxford translation of Aristotle into English still does this). Thus the reorientation was made invisible not only for knowing but also for the other categories.

The more important point to be made is that while we now have some *data* for a history of knowing we do not have any real history for the ancient period, since there we can't make use of the data. To use Anselmian terminology, we can, like the fool, say in our hearts that the knower becomes one with the known, but we can't truly say it because we cannot think it. It calls for a change not only in the content of our thought (that we can manage) but in the categories of our thinking, and here our knowing seems a prisoner, willy-nilly, of the modern categories.

I believe that one can show a comparable situation in the tradition of sensing, notably seeing, and of making; in each case we find a radical reorientation ca. 1100 A.D., and in each case we confront an impossibility when we try to move beyond the reorientation. The multiplication of instances supplies further evidence for the reorientation, but it doesn't solve the historical problem, so this evening I shall not deal specifically with sensing and making. It simply compels us to make use of wider perspectives in an attempt to move historically beyond Anselm and Abelard, and even to pursue risky and inadequately based hypotheses when they seem to offer any hope of a way out of impossibility. What follows is speculative and tentative, but I shall not burden it with constant qualifications and caveats.

I would first suggest that as we look at the period around 1100 A.D. we begin to see a reorientation on a larger scale than that found in the categories of knowing, sensing, and making; this larger reorientation is in some sense the cause of the special changes, not they of it; it makes them understandable rather than they it.

My best guess at a general statement of this larger reorientation is to repeat what I said at the beginning, that the ancients somehow lived within the single order of the *cosmos* or *mundus*, the world of natures and of beings; beginning with Anselm and Abelard, however, experience was categorized into the two dichotomized orders of meanings and of things.

The ancient single order was all-embracing, and individuals were in

the fullest sense its parts. Texts illustrating this single order are not easy to find (though in a sense they are everywhere), and this is natural enough. The best of the ancient thinkers never had the slightest suspicion that anything so odd as our post-Anselmian world would ever emerge; hence they wasted no time in explaining that it was not *their* world. (Contrariwise, even in Anselm the ancient world seems to have become completely invisible, so he doesn't have to explain that it's not *his* world.)

One might start from a text in Plotinus' *Ennead*, since he works with the tradition of conjunctive knowing which we have already seen.

Hence the intellect is truly the beings . . . and hence it is rightly said 'knowing and being are one and the same' (Parmenides) and 'Science of what are without matter is the same as the thing' (Aristotle), and 'I sought myself out' (Heracleitus), *namely as one of the beings.* (my emphasis).⁶

Or one could try to realize the full import of what Aristotle says in the *De anima*:

Now in summarizing what has been said about the soul, we say again that the soul is somehow all beings. For the beings are either sensible or intelligible, and science is somehow the scienced, and sense the sensibles.⁷

In other words, if one starts from the order of beings one finds the self among them, and if one starts from the soul one finds that it somehow includes all beings. There is a single order, unbroken by the existence of the conscious self as a separate and discrete universe of meanings.

For evidence from a different school, one might cite Chrysippus in connection with his argument that the one *kosmos* is a rational, ensouled (*empsychon*), and intellectual animal: "that the *kosmos* is ensouled is clear from our own soul which is a particle detached from it."⁸ Or Cicero in the *De natura deorum*: "Man is not in any sense complete (*perfectus*) but he is a particle of that which is complete (i.e. the world or *mundus*)."⁹

In ancient thought not only is the self part of this single order, but as the ancients 'turned within' they found that the self was identical with the highest elements of the order. As illustration one might look at the discussion of the 'I' and of 'my essence' in Themistius' paraphrase of Aristotle's *De anima*. It occurs in the section dealing with the factive and potential intellects, and as usual Themistius is in-

sistent that the intellect becomes what it knows. He finds that the 'I' as individual is a composite of the two intellects, but 'my essence' derives entirely from the factive intellect which alone is form in the strictest sense, indeed the form of forms, and the highest point which nature could reach.¹⁰ Themistius concludes, "Therefore, we are the factive intellect."¹¹ He goes on to present arguments for the unicity of the active intellect; it is one in all men. The specific theses of Themistius on the factive intellect were of course not universally accepted, but I believe he is typical of ancient experience where as one turns within, as one tries to 'know oneself', one finds that the movement is to a universal and impersonal single order of Being. And when Neoplatonism developed the doctrine of a One beyond being, they soon moved also to identify the 'I' with the One or with the 'One in us.'¹² And thus the ancients lived within a single order, and the self or the I was identified with or conjoined with the highest elements in that order.

But when we move to Anselm and Abelard in place of the single order we find a new context of two large orders, the one of the newly invented 'meanings', and the other of the newly invented 'Things'.

I don't believe that this reorientation from single order of experience to two discrete orders requires much documentation. It appears clearly, as we saw above, when Anselm sets up a sharp division between what is 'in intellect' and what is 'in thing' or in reality. In scholasticism, as in Thomas Aquinas, it appears typically as a contrast between spiritual or intentional being and natural, material, or real being. And of course we all remember Descartes' decisive formulation of the distinction between 'thinking substances' on the one hand, and 'extended substances' on the other. We may thus assume, at least as a working hypothesis, that the reorientation of categories in Anselm and Abelard involved not only the shift from conjunctive knowing, sensing, and making to disjunctive forms of the same but also a movement from the ancients' single realm to the two realms of the medieval-modern categories.

Have we now gone far enough in our analysis so that we can finally enter historically into ancient thought? I am afraid not, for when we attempt it we encounter a last difficulty, namely the ancient single realm of intellects and beings is *structured* differently and reasoning takes place differently within it than in the two medieval-modern realms of meanings and things to which we are accustomed. In the ancient world the structure appears primarily in the beings with which the intellects are conjoined in knowledge; in the medieval-modern world the structure appears primarily in the universe of meanings and secondarily in the universe of things. For terminology to contrast the two modes, I shall use 'aggregate' for the ancient and 'systematic' for

the medieval-modern.¹³

To look at the ancients first, the order of the *kosmos*, or *mundus*, is an aggregate order of natures or of beings; there is no whole antecedent to the parts and of which the parts are functions. Human thought and intellection take place as the intellect is conjoined with the beings of the *kosmos*. Ancient reason remains within this context. It rests upon conjunction with what is, and its force and dynamic comes from the beings with which the intellect is conjoined, not from the mind (or from the mind only insofar as it has beings within it).

Here, for example, is one of Augustine's analyses of reason. He treats reason as a kind of vision, and it must be remembered that for Augustine vision, like intellection, is conjunctive.

Hence reason is a vision (*aspectus*) of the mind, while reasoning (*ratiocinatio*) is the search of reason, that is the movement of such vision through what are to be seen.¹⁴

The argument follows the pattern of vision, as in the following conclusion of an argument in *De Trinitate*:

There is this good and that good. Remove the 'this' and the 'that', and *see* if you can, the good itself. Thus you will *see* God, not good by any other good, but the good of every other good.¹⁵

In an Augustinian argument, the vision of the listener is compelled to follow and to agree with the vision of the speaker.

Let me now try to show the different 'systematic' structure which emerges in Anselm's universe of meanings and universe of things. In the case of the meanings, I think we see it most easily by contrasting his 'reasons' and his 'argument' with those of Augustine. Anselm, for example, adapts the Augustinian proof of God which we just noted, but the context has changed completely; there is no 'seeing', and the only dimension is that of saying or meaning. Here are the opening sentences:

It is most certain and clear to all who will take notice that whatever (things) are *said* to be something in such a way that in relation to one another they are *said* to be so more or less equally, then not one (thing) and then another, but the same is *understood* (*intelligi*) in these diverse (things), whether it is *judged* to be in them equally or unequally. (my emphasis)¹⁶

The same point can be illustrated, perhaps even more clearly, in the ontological argument of the *Proslogion*, where the whole basis and motive of the proof is something meant or 'cogitated' but not seen. Compare, for example, Anselm's cry of triumph at the end of his *responsio*:

The meaning (*significatio*) of this expression (that than which nothing greater can be cogitated) has so much force of itself that that which is said, *by the very fact that it is understood or thought*, is of necessity not only proved to exist but also to be that itself which we ought to believe of the divine substance. (my emphasis)¹⁷

Both quotations from Anselm bespeak the existence of a separate realm of 'meanings,' but my point here is the different role of reason or thought in Anselm, compared with Augustine's and the ancients'. Augustine's reason and thought lay in the vision of beings. Anselm has no such vision, but he has something which Augustine lacked. He works with a 'systematic' coherence of 'meanings' or 'cogitations,' and this coherence is the motive of his proofs: *if you say or cogitate this, then you must say or cogitate that*. To risk an extreme statement, in the ancients the thrust of the argument lay entirely in beings, and in the mind only insofar as it contained beings; for Anselm, the thrust of the argument is entirely in meanings, and in things only insofar as they are taken into meanings. And it seems to me that this thrust in Anselm is usefully called 'systematic.'

Anselm's main works are called meditations about the *reason of faith* (*de ratione fidei*). I would argue that the *reason* involved is actually systematic coherence, in which parts of the faith 'prove' the whole and the whole 'proves' the parts. To use the example of the ontological argument again, Anselm starts from an experienced faith in the existence of God and in his being that than which nothing greater can be cogitated. He then starts from the second alone and 'proves' the first. Similarly, in the more elaborate argument of the *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm assumes all the faith but the Incarnation, and then from this starting point 'proves' the Incarnation.¹⁸

As the new order of 'meanings' is a systematic order, we find that the new order of 'things' is also systematic. In Anselm this is probably best seen in the universal order which he sometimes calls 'God's honor' in the *Cur Deus homo*. In part what needs to be said here has already been said in commenting on Anselm's 'proofs,' namely that in some way the systematic whole 'proves' any hypothetically missing parts; this is as true of the external and real order of things as it is of the internal and intentional order of the mind. What should be added

now is that the order of God's honor is an eternal order which precedes any of its parts and which no action of men or of angels can change. Anselm brilliantly explains this with the analogy that those who would escape being under God's honor are like those who would escape being 'under heaven.'

If what are contained under the circuit (ambitu) of heaven wished not to be under heaven or to become distant from heaven, they could nevertheless in no way exist except under heaven nor could they in any way flee heaven. For whence and whither and however they moved, they would still be under heaven.¹⁹

At this point I believe we can call a halt in our search for further points of contrast between the ancient and the mediaeval-modern categories of human thought and experience. What we have already found might, I believe, serve us as a first diving-bell within which to descend to the ancient world. *If* we could, then, put on an aggregate awareness of a single order of which we were ourselves parts, and *if* we could exercise this awareness in conjunctive forms of knowing, sensing, and making, *then* we might have the beginnings of a 'history' of the ancient experience, however limited and even inaccurate some of the data out of which we made the first diving-bell.

The above is a 'history of 1100 A.D.', admittedly in a very summary and inadequate form. Now I'll try to point out how this history involves a kind of crisis for us. The argument is surely going to lack geometric and most other kinds of precision, but I'll attempt to group the material around three points: 1. Because of us the history of 1100 A.D. is impossible; 2. Also because of us a history of 1100 A.D. is necessary; 3. The third is simply a question: are there any so far untried avenues which might help us to achieve at least in part this history which is for us both impossible and necessary.

First, as to the impossibility of the history of 1100 A.D. It has until now seemed that the ancients were making difficult our understanding of them, but in the end it turns out that we ourselves are responsible for the difficulties which appear to be insurmountable. To paraphrase Pogo, "We have met the problem, and we are it." Maybe there is a path to the ancients, but it does not seem that we can take it: we are still within the Anselmian and Abelardian reorientation. To use Anselm's analogy, this is our heaven from which we can in no way flee. I shall try quickly to show how this is so both for our 'history' and our 'selves.'

As far as history is concerned, the main tradition for intellectual history runs from Giambattista Vico through such modern thinkers as

Dilthey, Croce, Collingwood and Cassirer. Its main assumption is that understanding is possible within the human worlds of meanings and of symbols. It places the past within this context so that it can rethink understandable past thought and its symbols and thus 'reenact' the past (and clearly this was a great triumph as against *not* being able to 'rethink' or 'reenact' the past). Further, I suspect that systematic coherence gives such rethought symbols whatever life they have.

But from the data we have discovered it seems that we cannot apply such a historical method in our study of the ancients. We found ourselves confronting an ordering of experience which was not systematic, which was not based on a dichotomy between meanings and things, and which was, therefore, not 'understandable.' We can without obvious trouble translate 99%, perhaps more, of the ancient texts into post-Anselmian categories. But the remaining 1% on which we have been concentrating are the most central and in some ways the most important, since they are the constant context of all the rest. Hence our historical method based on post-Anselmian categories, far from opening up to us the ancient world, has the opposite effect of making entry in to the ancient world impossible.

We might then take the chance on abandoning our historical method. Instead of changing only our 'meanings' in order to reach the past, let us go further and change our categories of thought and experience; let us put off the Anselmian and put on the pre-Anselmian. Unfortunately, however exciting such a procedure might be it wouldn't do us any good as historians alive today, since when we were *there* we couldn't talk to those of us who were still *here*. When one of us came back, if indeed he could come back, he would have no memory of his *there* experience; he would suffer the fate of those with multiple personalities, none of which is memorable to any of the others and none of which can enter into dialogue with any of the others. He would have to begin again with his reading of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine where he would again encounter an insoluble problem which might tempt him, fruitlessly, to go back *there* again.

So it looks as if our path to the other side of the range somehow requires us to give up not only our historical method but our very 'selves,' and here we must draw the line. History exists for us, not we for history. So let us collectively give history and the historians a few firm orders. *Don't follow* that newly discovered path. If the ancients were so alien to us that we must lose our very selves to find them, then history must abandon the search (who's master here anyway?). Let the historians remain within the limits of their old method of understanding and rethinking, which was good fun and games in any case, and let them leave us in peace.

So the first argument is that the history of 1100 A.D. and of the thought of the ancients is impossible for us since it would destroy not only our old historical method but also, and more importantly, our old selves.

But there is another argument leading to the opposite conclusion, that since we are who we are and since we have the commitments that we do we must do a history of 1100 A.D., and we must reach out to the ancients historically. As to what these commitments are, I suppose that the first and more general group come ultimately from the Jewish and Christian traditions, and they persist today even if secularized. They commit us to the love and support of other lives and other civilizations, however different from our own they may be, even though for lives and civilizations of the past this can be accomplished only in thought and not in action. Such commitments compel our rejection of the claim that we must abandon our search for the ancients now that we have discovered how alien they are to us, since both the Jews and the Christians knew that they themselves were aliens. Moses had said, "I am a stranger and alien here, in an alien land" (*Exodus* II,22), and because the Jews were 'aliens' they placed unusual emphasis on the duties and care owed other strangers. The Christians took over the position and extended it. When it comes to the central commandment of love of neighbor, the stranger and alien *is* the neighbor as in the parable of the good Samaritan. Indeed it is as the alien (*xenos*) that the Christians receive Christ (*Matthew* XXV,35). The Marcionite heresy simply carries certain Christian drives to an extreme when it worships God as the 'alien one' who out of love chose to save sinful men, not *His* creation, who were in turn 'aliens' to Him.

It is surely clear that the ancients are historical neighbors to us in the fullest sense of the word, and I believe that commitments which touch us in our whole persons drive us to reach out to them historically. Indeed it almost seems that if we cannot reach out to them, neither can we reach out to ourselves who are also exiles and strangers.

A second group of commitments working in the same direction do not so much speak to us generally as persons but more specifically as historians or *mutatis mutandis*, scientists. Greek civilization was in some ways unique among civilizations, and in this uniqueness lie the origins of our modern intellectual disciplines. We are therefore as historians compelled to keep open or to reopen a road to the historical understanding of the Greeks or we lose what are so to speak the scriptures of our intellectual faiths.

The Greeks proclaimed that there are universal, demonstrable answers to all the important questions which concern man, and that it is the obligation of man to answer these questions. No other civiliza-

tion, to my knowledge, ever made such a claim or asserted such an obligation, except in dependence upon the Greeks. Modern history and the other modern intellectual disciplines have inherited the claim and obligation, though the context in which we believe such asking and answering to be possible has been severely limited by the reorientation of 1100 A.D. One sees both the inheritance and the limitation in Robert Nisbet's summary of what he calls the academic dogma: "Knowledge is important. Just that."²⁰ Such a position is, I believe, traditional in the strictest sense, passed on to us from the Greeks. Clearly it cannot be proven, and I do not know that there has been any new prophetic proclamation since the Greeks.

Hence the crisis for us if we cannot reach the Greeks is far more serious than if we cannot reach the ancient Egyptians or the modern Balinese. In the latter cases we simply come to a stop with the realization that for the moment we have reached the end of the road for the particular method we have been using. In the case of the Greeks, however, we do more than reach the end of the road if we cannot reach them historically: we also lose the method, derived from the Greeks, by which we had progressed as far as we had. Historical scholarship would thus be cut off from its roots and would wither away; to give my gloom full sway, so would all the other theoretical disciplines.

I suppose that I have made clear my conviction, though surely I haven't proved it, that the history of 1100 A.D. is a crisis for us or, at the very least, for me. Maybe I should stop here. However, my nature is such that I cannot for very long enjoy basking in the existentialist tensions of tragic contradiction, so I've continued to explore various alternatives in the hope that at the end I might leave you, and myself, with something more comforting than an 'impossible necessity' or a 'necessary impossibility.' Those of you who know my intellectual loyalties will not be surprised to hear that among the various alternatives the one which now seems to me most hopeful is a reexamination of the position of Nicholas of Cusa, or Cusanus, (1401-1464), for a possible analogue to a solution.

When I reread Cusanus in preparation for this talk and in the hope of solving some of the problems arising for us out of 1100 A.D., two points struck me. First, I saw for the first time how important it is to read him in the light of the reorientation of 1100 A.D., and how much more understandable he is in this context. Second, as already noted, I was delighted to find that his response to the reorientation struck me as being of significant potential help in formulating our own response.

Cusanus' almost unique achievement, as I now see it, is that in a powerful fashion he made use of both the reorientation of 1100 A.D.

and of the pre-Anselmian tradition; in using both he had to modify both. In the first place Cusanus saw clearly many of the consequences of the reorientation of 1100 A.D., and he was very sensitive to certain dangers in the post-Anselmian development, notably in Aristotelian scholasticism. However, Cusanus had no intention of trying to reject the new universes of meanings and of things; his purpose was rather to place the newness of 1100 A.D. in a context where it could be fulfilling and not destructive. In the second place, he seemed to have found in the ancient tradition, particularly in those aspects with which have been concerned, cures for the deficiencies of the new post-Anselmian categories, and he used these aspects in constructing a larger context for the new universes of Anselm and of Abelard. But Cusanus also recognized that one cannot introduce systematic universes of meanings or of things into an ancient tradition where the central structures are Being and the Ground of Being. Hence he found that to accomplish his purpose he had to work out a new metaphysic or first philosophy, one in which *mind and meaning*, not Being, were ultimate. Out of this complicated response Cusanus fashioned an answer which made use of the innovation of Anselm and Abelard, and which, had it prevailed, would have obviated the development which led to Descartes and his successors.

Let me first cite a few typical texts in illustration of Cusanus' acceptance of the central features of the reorientation of 1100 A.D.

In the first place there are two worlds or universes, one of things or creatures and the other of human meanings and conjectures.

Conjectures come forth from our mind as the real world comes forth from the divine and infinite reason The human mind is therefore the form of its conjectural world, just as the mind of God is the form of the real world.²¹

And, in *De beryllo*:

For just as God is the creator of real beings and of natural forms, so man is the creator of rational beings and of artificial forms; man's creations are nothing but the likenesses of his intellect, just as the creatures are the likenesses of God's intellect.²²

And in modification of the well known passage in Aristotle's *De anima* (III, 8 431b29), Cusanus writes: "The stone in the knowledge of the mind is not a real being but a being of reason."²³

In the second place, Cusanus gives precise statement to the systematic structures of the universes of things and of meanings.

The universe does not exist except contractedly in things, and every thing which exists in act contracts all things (universa) so that they are in act that which it is.²⁴

In his later writings Cusanus largely drops the notion of the 'universe' as a system, but he continues to give a systematic definition of the realm of reason as an explication of what is complicated in the intellect.

Despite this acceptance of the central categories of the reorientation of 1100 A.D., Cusanus, as already indicated, works out a new context within which to place them, and I find, somewhat to my surprise, that it is possible to discuss the new context in terms of the same three topics which we used to contrast the ancient position with that of Anselm:

1. The ancients see knowledge as vision; Anselm finds the mind and reason to be defined not by vision but by understanding and comprehension; Cusanus restores vision as the central and culminating function of the mind.

2. The ancients see knowing as the conjunction and union of the knower with the known; in Anselm knower and known are separated by a sharp dichotomy; Cusanus reestablishes for the intellect in particular the identity of the knower with the known.

3. In the ancients the self as it turns within finds itself conjoined or identical with the highest elements of the all; in Anselm the self tends more and more to be limited to the level of meanings, to become a 'thinking substance;' Cusanus reestablishes the self as existing in or identical with the Absolute.

But in none of the three cases can Cusanus simply restore the ancient position, and for each I shall show briefly how Cusanus must transform the ancient inheritance in order to accomplish his purpose.

To begin with the relation of reason and vision, you will remember that Anselm breaks with the ancient tradition of knowledge as vision: reason comes to be restricted to the compulsions of language and of thought. Cusanus maintains that this definition of reason has led to the loss of all immediacy and direct experience, and of course Anselm himself had expressed just this sense of loss in his despairing cry after the great triumph of the ontological argument in *Proslogion*:

If, O my soul, you have found God, why is it that you do not feel or experience (sentis) Him? Why, O Lord God, does not my soul feel or experience you, if it has found you?²⁵

But Cusanus' point is that the loss is characteristic only of the realm of reason. When one rises, as one should, above reason to the intellect, there one encounters vision, experience (*experimentum*), and taste (*gustus*). Here are a few texts.

Therefore logic and all philosophic inquisition fail to reach vision But in the region of the intellect, the vision of the mind, without discursive reasoning (*sine discursu*) attains to the coincidence of unity and plurality, of the point and the line, and of the center and the circle.²⁶

And further, in *De non aliud*:

All things which are investigated by reason but which are not seen by the eye of the mind (*oculi mentis acie*), though they seem to approach truth, nevertheless fail of ultimate certitude. Final certitude, complete in every respect, is vision.²⁷

Cusanus recognizes that the effects of the reorientation of 1100 A.D. run deep and that we are constantly tempted to retreat from vision to reason.

It is a great achievement to fix oneself with stability in the coincidence of opposites. But even though we know that this is what ought to be done, nevertheless when we return to the discourse of reason we frequently fall, and we try to find reasons for a most certain vision, which is above all reason.²⁸

But within his own new 'mental philosophy,' Cusanus is able to recapture an almost Augustinian sense of an argument which never leaves the level of vision. As he remarks to his disciple in his last work, *De apice theoriae*, "Whatever I see, you too, when you have applied your mind, will also see."²⁹

In these statements one sees how Cusanus has in one sense reached back to the ancients for material within which to transform the dominant post-Anselmian tradition. One also sees, however, the extent to which he has been compelled to transform the ancient inheritance in the process. The ancients had emphasized 'vision' almost as much as Cusanus, but their vision of the mind was a vision of articulated and knowable beings; Cusanus' vision, however, is a vision of the coincidence of opposites and of the invisible. As he states it in a call to go beyond the categories of 1100 A.D.,

Therefore the power of the mind to see exceeds its power to comprehend. Hence the simple vision of the mind is not a comprehending vision but from comprehension it raises itself to seeing the incomprehensible.³⁰

A second phase of Cusanus' revision of the reorientation of 1100 A.D., involves the unity of knower and known. This dominant characteristic of ancient thought disappeared with emergence of the dichotomy between meaning and thing in Anselm and Abelard. Cusanus accepts the dichotomy between the conjectural world of man and the real world of God's creatures, and he fully accepts the fact that we cannot know the creatures in themselves, but only by conjecture. But for the realm of intellect, the realm of vision, the ancient unity is reestablished, almost in the words of Aristotle's *De anima*. Cusanus says in *De coniecturis*:

You see that you cannot know any intelligible as it is if you take your intellect to be a different thing from the intelligible itself.³¹

And, further, in *De filiatione*:

The most pure intellect makes any intelligible to be the intellect itself, since every intelligible in the intellect is the intellect itself Every intelligible in the intellect itself is the intellect.³²

Hence at the level of his 'mental philosophy' Cusanus has reestablished the ancient identity of the knower and the known, and *mutatis mutandis* of the sensor and the sensed.

But here, even more obviously than in the case of vision, Cusanus must effect fundamental modifications in the ancient tradition and in the categories of Anselm in order to be able to maintain both the dichotomy between the conjectural and the real words, and the essential unity of knower and of known. I can only indicate what he does in the broadest outline. His basic innovation in relation to the ancient tradition is that in place of a structure centered on Being or on the One as the Ground of Being, he substitutes a structure in which the Absolute is one of intention or vision or manifestation; he effects a comparable revision of the Anselmian categories in so far as Anselm's 'things' or Thomas' 'objects' disappear in favor of the 'intentions' of the Absolute.

Thus in one of his latest works, Cusanus explains how the Absolute is related to the real world; he here calls the Absolute the power itself

(*posse ipsum*), which is the last of the many names he uses for what is unnameable.

Since therefore the power itself (*posse ipsum*), than which nothing is more powerful, wishes to be seen, this is the reason for everything.³³

And in application of this position to the creatures Cusanus declares that every creature is an intention of the will of the omnipotent. He was well aware here of his departure from the ancients, since he goes on to explain:

Neither Plato nor Aristotle knew this, for clearly each of them believed that the creator intellect (*conditorem intellectum*) made all things by necessity of nature. From this all their error followed.³⁴

So when Cusanus asks why God led the beauty of this visible and sensible rose to emerge from the thorn, the only answer is:

What can one reply except that (God's) marvellous intellect intended to manifest Himself in this his word . . . ?³⁵

In the light of these theses Cusanus can then go on to explain that there are two orders of the manifestations of the Absolute. The first, and higher, is that of minds, which are the images of God; the second includes all the other creatures which are only explications of God. Both orders start from the Absolute, and like the Absolute both orders are 'intentional.' Hence Cusanus can maintain the Anselmian dichotomy between the conjectural and the real orders, yet both are substantial and have being; within the order of minds intellection is characterized by the same unity and conjunction found within the very different ancient single order of beings.

The third phase of Cusanus' transformation of the reorientation of 1100 A.D. is that he rejects the definition of the self as located within the realm of meaning and of reason, the definition which will eventually crystallize in Descartes as that of the 'I' as a 'thinking substance.' Once again, Cusanus reaches back to borrow and to adapt from the ancient inheritance. The ancients had found that the 'I' was ultimately conjoined with the highest portions of the all, with the whole of Being or with the One. Cusanus similarly finds that man's self is ultimately to be found nowhere but in the Absolute.

Just as Cusanus recognizes and justifies the realm of reason, though

it is not ultimate, so he recognizes a kind of self on this level, but it must be relinquished in order to reach one's true self.³⁶ Even in the early *De docta ignorantia*, Cusanus writes that the creatures reply to the inquirer that he can find his self only in God.

If you would know anything of us, seek it not in us but in our reason and in our cause . . . Nor will you find yourself anywhere but in Him Go on then, says our knowing ignorance, and find yourself in Him.³⁷

In his later writings Cusanus develops the point in greater detail, particularly in the language of vision. Thus he declares:

Then (O God) you raise me so that I realize how it is that whoever sees you . . . sees himself in you, for he receives from you what he is.³⁸

Cusanus also goes further and identifies man's seeing of God with God's seeing of him.

What else, O Lord, is your seeing, when you regard me with the eye of piety, than your being seen by me . . . Nor is your being seen anything else than that you see him who sees you.³⁹

In the highest action of the self, the vision of God, the self is therefore seen as the focus where the seeing of God coincides with His being seen, and one might relate this to Cusanus' speaking of God as "the ultimate of all perfection of intuitive vision of everything."⁴⁰

Such, in broad outline, is Cusanus' response to the reorientation of 1100 A.D. . While the avowed purpose of my analysis was simply to see if Cusanus could offer any suggestions to us for ways out of our dilemma, I am afraid I may sometimes have been carried too far by the sheer interest in what Cusanus had to say. But I believe that the long digression was worth it and that there is indeed a harvest for us here.

As I see it, Cusanus' essential insight is that the ancient categories of thought and experience were in important ways more adequate to common human experience than those of Anselm's reason, or of our own. Human language and thought and knowledge *ought* to be characterized by the immediacy of vision and by the conjunction or union of knower and known; the human sense of self *ought* to be directly related to what is ultimate. Cusanus' solution tries to achieve

these ancient goals, though he accepts the new categories of Anselm and of Abelard as 'our' categories.

Perhaps it is useful to speculate a little at this point about what Cusanus would say of our present history and of our present selves in relation to the dilemma which 1100 A.D. apparently posed for both.

I believe his general comment would be that both our history and our selves are simply phases of the modern secular, anthropocentric rationality which developed out of the very tradition of reason he had attacked as incomplete in itself. More particularly, I believe he would argue that because our history is 'rational' it inevitably excludes what is holy or absolute from its perspective, and the method itself cannot be grounded in what is holy or absolute. As Cusanus explains the scope of reason:

The human mind, when it uses reason as its means of investigation, ejects the infinite from the entire circle of its apprehension.⁴¹

Cusanus is far from denying the validity of Anselm's reason in its own realm, but when it is made total the consequences for the intellect are tragic. In reason the intellect can find neither itself nor the Absolute which is its cause. As Cusanus writes of the intellect under these conditions:

The intellect is an eye, but it cannot see because it is not in the light And this is interminable torture, to have an intellectual being and never to be able to use the intellect.

Indeed Cusanus will go further and argue that on any level the creature, whether it knows it or not, is moved and affected only by the infinite which has been excluded from the realm of reason; if the infinite did not exist, no more would any of the beings.⁴³ Hence Cusanus would not be surprised that our history cannot reach the Greeks, since they were subject to no such limitation. The holy and the divine were for them, as for most of mankind, the most serious subjects of thought, speech, and writing.

I believe that Cusanus would go on to argue that the anthropocentric character of our history is also a consequence of its limitation to reason. The anthropocentrism is particularly evident in Giambattista Vico, the founding father of the tradition in which I stand. You will remember Vico's insistence that human power is the decisive factor in defining the scope of history. Things and creatures are made by God; therefore only God can know them and man cannot. But 'the world of

nations and (the) civil world' are objects of history made by man, and therefore man can know them.⁴⁴ Past human thought and actions remain within our power to reenact in thought, and thus to know.

It is interesting that Cusanus is an early representative of part of Vico's argument, but in the long run the differences are more important than the similarities. Cusanus agrees that only God can know the creatures: "Hence of all the works of God, there is no precise knowledge except with Him who made them." Man has precise knowledge only of mathematics, a human creation in the realm of reason. But Cusanus quickly limits this knowledge:

Hence, if we have rightly considered, we have nothing certain in our science except our mathematics, and the mathematics is an enigma for searching out the works of God.⁴⁵

But man has no certain knowledge of what we encounter through sense, and no two sense experiences are identical; he has no certain knowledge of another's intellectual experience, and no two intellects are identical.⁴⁶

Hence from this standpoint too, Cusanus would not be surprised that our history has its troubles with the Greeks. By limiting ourselves to an anthropocentric rationality, he would say, we have excluded the factors which do the most to make men human and we have surely made ourselves anything but fit companions for the Greeks, whose assumptions were contrary to such anthropocentrism.

Finally, where we were worried that we might lose our 'selves' if we abandoned Anselmian categories for those of the Greeks, Cusanus would say this happened only because we recognized no self but that of the realm of reason, and that self ought in any case be transcended in the ascent to a vision of our true selves in the intellect and in the Absolute. More important, he would argue that only when we had risen above the realm of reason we could see that the common relation of men to the Absolute is precisely what makes possible the extraordinary 'history' of all the philosophic and theological positions known to him.

Admittedly, Cusanus shows little interest in history as 'development,' but he shows an almost unique positive appreciation of different and contradictory human formulations; he sees the basis for this not in a common rational understandability but in a common relationship to that which is beyond all rational understandability. Thus in the *De filiatione*, he writes:

All those who have theologized and philosophized have tried to express only one thing, though in a

variety of modes Their ways of speaking are adverse and incompatible, but they nevertheless all tried to express nothing else than the one itself which is located above all contrariety beyond our reach; each did this in his own way, the one affirmatively, the one negatively, and the one doubtfully Thus all possible ways of speaking all try to express that which is ineffable, and they all fall under this theology (of the ineffable) itself.⁴⁷

Cusanus accordingly believes that through his new 'mental philosophy' he can reach out to the Greeks historically, and there is no reason why we should not extend the method to other civilizations as well. And while in the texts with which we have been working his main concern is to show how this can be done as the Greeks try to reach the Absolute through the intellect which is 'above' reason, one should note that Cusanus holds that all men, including the Greeks, also confront the Absolute at the other end of the scale, in sense which is 'below' reason.

The sight of the mind and the sight of sense have only one and the same object; the sight of the mind sees it as it is in itself, while the sight of the sense sees it as it is in signs. The one object of both (the mind and of sense) is the power itself (*posse ipsum*), than which nothing is more powerful.⁴⁸

Thus through the proper vision of our own selves we are able without loss of self to enter into the different but also similar selves of the Greeks and of all mankind, in so far as it is given to minds to know other minds.

* * *

In the first part of this talk, I tried to outline the history of a reorientation of 1100 A.D. . I suggested that the history made certain demands upon us which seemed impossible in the light of our modern historical method and of our modern selves. In the second part, in search for a way out of our dilemmas, I analyzed Cusanus' response to 1100 A.D. and from the standpoint of his response commented upon our own dilemmas.

As a brief epilogue I can only raise the question: do we in fact, encounter an answer in Cusanus, or an analogue to answer which might help us get past the crisis into which the simple history of 1100 A.D. has plunged us? Perhaps from this small beginning we might overcome other, larger, crises.

Cusanus, speaking from the Christian standpoint, argues that all human experience of thought and language and things is human precisely because it is constantly bracketed by transcendence, whether in the descent from intellect through reason to sense, or in the ascent from sense through reason to intellect; in the light of this argument he criticizes the Anselmian reorientation, and by implication us, for using a method of reason which explicitly excludes that which makes us human. As I think of the common human experience of thought and of sense both the argument and the criticism seem to me persuasive, even if we choose to detach them from the Christian context. Helen Keller, one of the very few people to whom it was given to remember the transition to the world of human experience through language, was driven to the Old Testament to describe the gift and the grace that the transition involved: "I learned a great many words that day, words that were to make the world blossom for me, like Aaron's rod, with flowers."⁴⁹

With such intimations of ecstatic transition and quite apart from our relation to the Greeks, one can only regret that the modern intellectual disciplines, among them history, followed so completely the Cartesian, Galilean, and Vichian traditions which in their exclusively secular and anthropocentric rationality all led to the exclusion of what appears to be most human in man, first in the disciplines and then in the selves of those who use the disciplines. It might have been better to have taken the alternate route mapped out by Cusanus, and to have assumed with him that what makes the human use of signs in thought and language differ from that of animals and of machines is in the final analysis human awareness of the transcendent which is beyond the signs.

And if this is so, then I wonder whether we should not also reject the assumption, made explicit in Descartes, that the self as thinking substance lies within man's conscious thought, and instead move to Cusanus' position, or to an analogue of his position, in which our selves would be found to be based ultimately in the transcendence which made our thought human, not within the universes of meanings and of things.

If we give up the secular, anthropocentric assumptions of our historical method, then history can enter into the categories of the ancients as well as those of Anselm and Abelard. If we give up the 'Cartesian' definition of the self, we can enter both the ancient and the post-Anselmian worlds without loss of our own selves. And if we can do both of these things, then my problems are solved and I can return happily to my simple and straightforward history.

So there are some possibilities for your consideration. I admit that

they are still only possibilities, and I also grant that they are not entirely comfortable ones. Despite the attendant gains a loss or transcending of an old self *is* involved, and this is never without danger. But the difficulties out of which these possibilities emerged are, I submit, real ones; they will not go away. And to close on a more cheerful note, the road explored by Cusanus is a lovely road. Who knows? Perhaps if we have the courage to follow it we shall find, like Cusanus, that we have been given "this whole visible world and all that has been written (totam scripturam) and all ministering spirits"⁵⁰ to help us in our quest.

NOTES

1. *De anima*, III, 8 431b21f.
2. *De anima*, III, 2 430a3-5; 19-20.
3. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* CXXII, 535.
4. *Prosligion* II. *Opera*, ed. F.S. Schmitt I, 101f, and the *Responsio editoris*, *ibid.* 130 f.
5. *Monologion* XXXVIII., *ibid.* I, 5.
6. *Ennead* V, 9, 5 22 f.
7. *De anima* III, 8 431b20 f.
8. *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, ed. Ioannes ab Arnim II, 191, #633 — Diogenes Laertius VII, 142, 143.
9. *De natura deorum*, II, 11, #30.
10. *In libros De anima paraphrasis*, Logos VI. *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* V.3 [Berlin, 1889] p. 100, 28 f.
11. *Ibid.* 100, 37; see also 101, 9; 102, 6.
12. See W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, Frankfurt a.M., 1965, 367 f.
13. The terminology is borrowed from Ernst Cassirer, who used it to contrast the hierarchic cosmos of scholasticism with the new 'universe' of Nicolaus Cusanus and of modern science. *Individuum und Kosmos*. Studien der Bibliothek Warburg X, Berlin-Leipzig, 1927, e.g. 191 f.
14. *De quantitate animae* 27 #53 (PL 32, 1065).
15. *De Trinitate* VIII, 3 #4.
16. *Monologion* I (S. Anselmus, *Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, Edinburgh 1946 [henceforth *Opera*]) I, 14.

17. *Responsio editoris* #10 (*Opera* I, 183).
18. See, for example, I, 10 *Opera* I, 67.
19. *Cur Deus homo* I, 15 *Opera* II, 73.
20. Robert Nisbet, *The Degradation of the Academic Dogma* (N.Y., 1971) p. 24.
21. *De coniecturis* I, 1 #1, 1-8 (H III, 7). Where possible I shall cite Cusanus from the Heidelberg edition (= H). For works not yet contained in the Heidelberg edition I shall use the Paris edition of 1514, reprinted Frankfurt/Main, 1962 (= P).
22. *De beryllo* VI (H XI, 1 p. 7, 8-11).
23. *De ludo globi* II (P I, 163r, 27-28).
24. *De docta ignorantia* II, 5 (H I, 76, 18-19).
25. *Prosligion* XIV, 1 (*Opera* I, 111, 13-15).
26. *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* (H II, 14, 24-25 and 15, 10-13).
27. *De non aliud* XIX (H XIII, 46, 9-13).
28. *De beryllo* XXI (H XI, 1 p. 25, 14-19).
29. P I, 220r, 45.
30. *De apice theoriae* (P 220r, 20-22).
31. *De coniecturis*, I, 11, #55, 1-3 (H III, p. 56).
32. *De filiatione* III, #70, 45, and 13 (H IV, 1 p. 50-51).
33. *Compendium*, Epilogus #47, 4-5 (H XI, 3 p. 34).
34. *De beryllo* XXIII (H XI, 1, p. 29, 22-24).
35. *De beryllo* XXXVI (H XI, 1 p. 50, 12-14).
36. Compare Cusanus' letter of 1453 in E. Vansteenbergh, *Autour de la docte ignorance* (*Beitrag* XIV, 2-4) p. 114, and Cusanus, *De aequalitate* (P II, 17r, 45-17v, 3).
37. *De docta ignorantia* II, 13 (H I, 113, 26-114, 2).
38. *De visione Dei* XV (P 107r, 5-7).
39. *De visione Dei* V (P 100v, 20-25).
40. *De quaerendo Deum* #26, 5 (H IV, 1 18). In this passage and elsewhere Cusanus plays with the etymology of *theos* as connected with *theo*, to see. Cf. *De Deo abscondito* #14,1 (H IV, 1 p. 9) and *De quaerendo Deo* #19, 1f, and in particular 9 f. (H IV, 1 p. 14-15).
41. *De coniecturis* II, 3 #87, 4 (H III, p. 84).
42. *Idiota* I. *De sapientia* (H V, 14, 7-8 and 12-14).

43. See *Theologicum Complementum* VII (P II, 2 96r, 18 f.; *De coniecturis* I,1 #6, 9-11 (H III p. 9-10).
44. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, tr. T.S. Bergin and M.H. Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y., 1948) #331 (p. 85), #349 (p. 93), and #374 (p. 104).
45. *De possess* #44, 1-2 (H XI, 2 p. 54).
46. Compare for the sense experience, *Theologicum Complementum* XI (P II, 2, 98v, 6 f.; for the intellects, compare *De Docta ignorantia* III, 1 (H I, 122, 15 f.).
47. *De filiatione Dei* V #83, 1-3, 7-11, 15-17. See also the comparable statement in Cusanus' last work, the *De apice theoriae* (P 220v, 9 ff.).
48. *Compendium*, Epilogus #45, 4-7 (H XI, 3 p. 33-4).
49. Helen Keller, *Story of My Life*, N.Y., 1924 p. 24.
50. *De visione Dei* XXV (P I, 113v, 37-39).

Of Messages and Messengers

Marijan Despalatović

Tonight I perforce stand into danger, as the naval language describes the condition of a ship which borne by its element approaches shoals and sands. For what I wish to consider I must seek words outside of my "discipline" thus incurring danger of failure and the scorn visited upon the pretentious ignorant. There is no other course open because I should like to imagine intents other than my own and the structures of thought which bear such intents and shape their destiny.

Lest we think that this is an extraordinarily weighty endeavor, this desire to be tentative about one's own work, let us remember Kant's adjuration: "Do you really desire that knowledge which concerns all men shall surpass common understanding and be revealed only by philosophers?" (1933:859) Needless to say the stakes here and now are very modest, and if we wish to be tentative about our work we should also be tentative about the results of our examination of it. So I expect that I shall not be able to answer queries put to me by those whose professional fields I have despoiled with so little proper respect. I shall simply have to quote Pirandello: "It is so if you think it is so."

The most difficult point, to my mind, where to begin thinking about the specialised form of thinking we call *critique* is, naturally, reading, and in reading that part which is behind the neuro-physiological operations of the process although permanently joined to it in a symbiotic, incestuous union. What I *read* is always conditioned by the *ac-*

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tivity of reading, and unless I am mindful of the fact I engage in a scholastic game. Obviously by reading I do not mean any kind of reading; I do not mean reading for comprehension, I do not mean skimming, and certainly not speed-reading. I wish to consider the reading which is attended by a special and recognisable grace.

I contend that *reading* always includes a perspective of total envelopment, and that the reader's pre-reflexive experience of a poem (or a painting, a sculpture, a concerto, a play) has all the qualities of a special conviction, of belief. The belief concerns the existence of the poet's world, the reality of the "world" being the *a priori* of the poet's truth. As Bachelard says somewhere: "Tell me what your world is like, and I shall tell you whether or not you are a poet." The reader believes that the poet is right, even if he cannot tell why he believes in the poet's rightness.

Here, of course, is my first difficulty. I must consider belief if I am to consider the text in one of its innumerable and elusive permutations. I must do that bearing in mind that belief does not confer any degree of *empirical* reality upon the text around which it glimmers, and that belief is not susceptible to quantifiable, perceptible change wrought by the agency of the text. Empirically the text can be a patent lie, yet we may be prepared to accord it a degree of reality which we would refuse to a person purveying a lie of equal magnitude. Our willingness to believe the text when we no longer find it possible to believe a friend or a parent clears a little of the confusion — belief has nothing to do with empirical verifiability of statements, or, as Kant says: "No objects of *empirical* knowledge are matters of belief" (1800:103). Matters empirical are capable of description (and I use the term very broadly), whereas matters of belief defy description. It is impossible to describe either the belief or its object; the attempt is at best an asymptotical solution which, to many, means no solution at all.

David Hume offers a pregnant illustration of the predicament (1888:97-98). Let two men read the same book, according to Hume, one as a "romance" and the other as "a true history," and they will receive the one text in two distinctly different ways although they will have put "the very same sense upon the author." The meanings they will have found in the text will be identical, but the "testimony" of the author will not have the same influence upon them. The *believer* will have "a more lively conception of the incidents." The *sceptic*, unable to give "credit to the testimony of the author" will have "a more faint and languid conception of all (these) particulars." From this follows that belief "is something felt by the mind," but it is also "that act of the mind which renders realities more present to us than fictions"

(1888:629). But these realities *are* fictions, one may exclaim in exasperation. Hume offers no consolation. Poets, who are "liars by profession," endeavor with more or less ingenuity to impart "an air of truth to their fictions." The kind of truth that poets strive to construct in their artifacts has been discussed elsewhere in this volume. Suffice it to remember that, on Hume, ideas do not necessarily have any "manner of influence on the will and passions," but an air of truth and reality is an indispensable condition for their reception. In other words, Hume, I think, shifts the emphasis from the *poem* to the *mind*; the poet's most difficult undertaking has to do not with ensuring that his fictions command more obedience than facts but with preparing the mind of the prospective reader so skillfully that it will "give assent" (the phrase is Hume's) to what is presented to it. Hume goes even further: "the constant repetition" of poetic ideas makes them enter the mind "with facility" and prevail over fancy; the mind can be conditioned to consider forms of reality which it would under ordinary circumstances reject. The poet, then *makes* extraordinary conditions for the reception of ordinary notions. I venture to say that what poet *makes* is belief, and that poem is almost a byproduct, detritus of the more ambitious purpose. The poem can never be as plainly and as efficiently informative about a given circumstance as an account, or an article. It is not meant to be informative about the circumstance, it is not meant to be *informative* at all, not unless we remember that the word *informare* in Latin means "to give form to, shape, fashion."

Belief, therefore, "consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment," says Hume, "in something that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters" (1888:624). Thus Hume reaches the end of his enquiry. I do not know whether more progress has been made since his day. Bertrand Russell admitted that belief "is the central problem in the analysis of mind" (1921:231) and then yielded the floor.

It almost looks as if I have set out to prove that since my first condition for a *critique* escapes definition we should give up altogether and joyously immerse ourselves in "interpretation" and other forms of pleasant games. I think not. If the world of the poet's experience does not coincide exactly with ours, and it never does, there is yet a significant part of that world which does coincide with ours, although the coincidence is not of the poet's making and eludes rigid and categorical definitions. I have in mind the expression of the world, its contours and shapes, and that expression in linguistic. This suggestion I owe to Wittgenstein to whom the expression of belief "is just a sentence: — and the sentence has sense only as a member of a system

of language" (1953:42). And here the path to be followed is reasonably clear: in relation to a linguistic act our experience is not ontologically superior, nor is it the only given we have at our disposal. The other and more important given is the linguistic act itself in a specific form — the language-game as Wittgenstein calls it, *Sprachspiel*. And in a critique we are, or at least we ought to be, more interested in the game than in our experience, although in the working out of the rules of the game we rely on the rules of experience. We should never forget that we think about language in language, and that the personal pronoun we apply so simply and casually, the *I* of the modest cogitator, represents a most serious danger. *I* think about the game, and how easy is it for me to assume that the rules *I* know must exist in some form in the object upon which my thought converges. This is one of Wittgenstein's "delusions," namely that "the concepts of proposition, language, thought, and world stand in a line one behind the other, each equivalent to the other" (1953:93).

If belief is a matter of language, and we desire to think about another matter of language, the *poem*, then perhaps we should say a few words about how we consider the poetic act.

To consider a poetic act critically is to think about it out of an absolute synchronic level of the poetic system whose concreteness provides only the matter and impulse for a far-reaching metamorphosis. On this level the poetic act in its absoluteness becomes a possibility of change to be wrought upon the system out of which it has risen. Only on the synchronic level of a system of world literature can we appreciate the accuracy of Eliot's statement in "Tradition and Individual Talent" which represents an opposition to the historical position (1932:47-59). The statement is, in fact, anti-historical. The notion of literature as a body alive and present in its synchronic multiplicity enables us to approach particular poetic systems in the light of a movement incepted by Mallarmé, a movement which shifts the question of literature from the writer to the process of writing, from individual works to a system in which boundaries between works and their forms disappear.

Even before Mallarmé's concept of *The Book* whose intended content is the whole world in the pure quality of verbal presence, Gustave Flaubert wishes fervently: "If only I could read all the one hundred fifty-eight pages in one glance; if only I could embrace all of them with all their detail in one single thought." (1968:63) This aggressively expressed concept of a total act of reading posits the condition of perfect synchrony: this dream of a complete presence of the work expresses merely the desire of a writer turned critic to be simultaneously present in all the elements of a work as an active consciousness ap-

prehending not sequentiality but synchronous wholeness, not a sum of elements but the system of their "activity."

Poetry, like every conceptual system hierarchical in nature, rests on the general system of language. The notion of the poetic system of interest to us is simultaneously a linguistic system and a metasytem based on a particular manner of organisation and a unique expressive purpose of poetry. Organisational "idiosyncrasies" of a poet reveal an essentially distinctive principle of constitution and communicativeness of language. All these "idiosyncrasies" are firmly founded upon the general level of linguistic concreteness, and each one of them in its system reflects and renews this concreteness in a slightly different, individual fashion. If we, then, apply de Saussure's definition of the linguistic system in general to a particular poetic system, a "world," we emphasise the elementary interdependence of all parts of the system and its ontological supremacy over its constituent elements. An approach from the position of the system directs the analyst towards the fundamental levels of the work, toward the concrete totality of its signifiers, precluding indulgence in clever mechanistic "thrusts" and predetermined ideological "enquiries." Only if we begin with this totality can we determine the *topos* of an individual expression. "It is a grave error," says de Saussure, "to consider an expression as nothing but a connexion, a link between a sound and a concept. To define it thus is to believe that one can begin with expressions and construct the system as a sum of expressions; on the contrary, one must begin with the firm, solid whole, and by analysis reach down to its constituents" (1961:164). The level of the system places the analyst above the limitations of induction, above the conceptual caprices of deduction, and leads him directly to the non-intentional experience of broadest concreteness of the work and its signifying totality. In the critique of the system, which is truly a *systematic* critique, there is the whole programme of a critique which shifts the act of reading across the linearity of writing into the concentric grasp of the synchronic openness of the work.

Ultimately the position of the system raises serious doubts about the traditional notion of "critical performance." The activity of the *krites* has always been far more selective than evaluative. On occasion the latter was merely an excuse for indulgence in the former. *Krites'* global judgment has always been based on an *a priori* choice of the meaning of the work and a pious hope that the meaning may be "read into" the work: the critical act was in the last analysis an attempt to represent the work as a book finally decoded, broken open, its meanings offered up for reading. The work was objectified, recast into meanings determined by the *krites*: the epoch was at last given *its own*,

definitive "translation" of a literary act.

The analytic of the system leads us first into the open ambiguity of poetic texture, the text itself, where we are compelled to admit that it is impossible to separate one fixed, self-contained meaning from the contexts of other meanings outside of the system whence they originate. Furthermore, the existence of the system precedes the essence of meaning, language precedes thought, thus there can be no meaning before there is a system because language has no substance, it is form. This significant de Saussurian thesis inherent in the demand that the analysis begin with the whole is based on the experience of the linguistic system as a collection of formal relationships among elements of varying degrees of similarity or, on occasion, complete incompatibility. Meanings which these elements acquire are only functions of their relationships with each other. Meaning is relative: ". . . the language contains only differences," says de Saussure. "Moreover: a difference generally assumes the existence of positive expressions between which it is interposed; but language contains only differences without positive expressions . . . Language contains neither ideas nor sounds which antedate its system, but only conceptual and phonetic differences brought into being by the system. Conceptual and phonic contents of a sign are less important than its signal environment" (1961:166).

Meaning is difference: this revolutionary and simple discovery about the nature of language became possible only when the tyranny of exclusive meaning of concept-essence was brought into question, when, as Foucault says, "the language returned" in its mysterious, irreducible mass, the language that speaks of everything we do, of every silence of our being, and refuses to yield to our desire to "say" something, anything; when it becomes evident that our activity in language assumes meaning only in that total, all-embracing reality which contains every conceivable transaction with our world into which we may want to enter.

To give sense, signify, name, and, ultimately, to speak, is to analyse certain global meanings, create differences in the same, wreak a Babylonian schism in one meaning so that two different meanings may be liberated from it. This phenomenon is particularly fruitful in the poetic language which strains toward the discovery of new, as yet unarticulated qualities and transmutations. Gaston Bachelard, a firm believer in concrete archetypes and substantial elements perceived the differentiability of poetic imagination in the organic unity of concrete and dynamic imagination: "Image is an essence which differentiates itself in order to exist. Literary imagination provides the clearest example. A literary image destroys indolent perceptual images. Literary

imagination de-imagines in order to re-imagine better" (1958:26).

Once we have accepted the insubstantiality of language it is inevitable that we should realise its non-conceptual essence, as Martinet calls it. In the traditional representation of a linguistic sign, fixed in de Saussure's fraction: *signifier*, the numerator and the denominator are *signified*

forced into a relationship in which one translates and renders the other intelligible. The reality of language is inseparable from the abstract world of ideas, the sound is forever wedded to the concept. It is true that, according to de Saussure, the link between the numerator and the denominator is arbitrary, but in the process of conceptual determination the arbitrariness of the link makes the unity, the mystical equality of elements inevitable.

Increased awareness of the independence of language brought into question the hitherto canonical straight, linear connection representative of the conceptual functioning of the sign. The discovery of functional informativeness as the essence of a linguistic phenomenon separated language from its cultural connotations to a degree, but it also brought it closer to our activity in language by positing the totality of its signifying relationships. "The independence of language," says Oswald Ducrot, "which had to be fought for step by step in the linguistics of conception, is an immediate given in the linguistics of communication" (1968:53). Language is a communicative phenomenon, as an informative code "it is a signal, not an expression of thought" (1968:53). The signal informs through sets of relationships — links between various totalities which communicate their otherness, difference — as a difference in tension, in charge, a circuit closed by differential meaning.

We are now near an explanation of why we can nevertheless think and conceptualise in language. If a concept is not a little picture projected by each articulated word it must obtain its totality and sense from a global possibility. The concept is not a partial projection to be integrated with other partial projections; it is a unique sensible design, a framework of signifying behaviour. In short, it is a system in which the signifying gesture of separate poetic images acquires the conceptual body of poetic individuation. The projection, in its potentiality, is not only spatial, it is also temporal: each poetic image always projects the future of its system. This is the unique flight of a poetic image in its striving to found its universe and invent poetic individuality as a categorical demand for a home of an imagination. Conceptuality is, consequently, that outward, global, in a word, systemic condition of a sign which begins to signify only when it has reached it. Francois Wahl (1968:329) rightly places conceptuality outside of the sign, in the

denominator of a new fraction, thus:

$$\text{System} = \frac{\text{sign} \left(\frac{\text{signifier}}{\text{signified}} \right)^n}{\text{concept}}$$

Concept is an imaginary design of a whole anticipated in elements, a proximity of signification apparent as a subconscious situation rather than as a conscious framework. However, before we base the conceptuality of a word on a defined system of meaning, such as a poetic system, the word already exists in the system of language, in the potentiality of meanings and sounds of a whole field of close or opposing values in relation to which it acquires its own meaning and sound. The word enters this *semantic* field in a poetic act. It retreats from the rigid determination of its *topos* into the system, where its poetic transvaluation has to occur. Valéry described it as the direct poetic experience: "To create a poem — to move into words — around a thematic word or an impression, to call forth words caused by a variety of reasons. To create in this manner a palette, before the inception of articulation. From it come into being combinations indicative of a variety of affinities, and ultimately a general sense is liberated" (1961:35).

The *Book*, or the *poem*, however, are concrete in ways in which our thought is not. The concreteness of the poem tempts one to wonder whether it might not be possible to get at belief, for instance, since belief and the poem seem to be of the same order. Edmund Leach encountered what appears to be a similar predicament working in the anthropology of religion. Remarking that a great many anthropologists get lost in the scholastic nonsense regarding the content of belief and its "rationality," he proposed a straightforward methodological solution: "To ask questions about the content of belief which are not contained in the content of ritual is nonsense . . . Ritual action and belief alike are to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order" (1954:14). The decisiveness of Leach's approach is attractive. If the *poem* is considered a form of ritual action, then it must contain the parameters of the elusive, pre-reflexive state we call belief. We have an object, the *poem*, and the job at hand is to treat the object with all the care it merits assuming that we are interested in the content of belief and that the content is going to be co-extensive with the content of the poem. I am not sure. I am not prepared to accept that the belief that attends *my* reading of a poem is identical with the belief attendant upon the reading of *my neighbour*. Belief is not a collective representation, it is an inner state which can only be claimed by one man, and even he would be hard put to describe it. And the object I

have in mind is not an ordinary object at all, therefore an objective reading is almost a misnomer. If, however, we offer a reasonably simple definition of *objective* maybe all is not lost. I propose that we understand *objective* to mean that which is general in signification, an articulation of elements and characteristics also known as paradigmatic modeling; objective pertains specifically to the definitions of relationships between the *poem* and the *system* which contains it.

This form of *objectivity* is the immanent determinant of the poem, even though it seems to threaten its being. At least it keeps at arm's length the intoxication of subjective empathy and every identification of poetic structure with a private experience of life, or of an event with the meaning of history. The structure of the system is *real, actual*, and, most importantly, trans-subjective.

Under ideal circumstances objective critique would avoid equivocation; one sign would denote one thing, one situation, one proposition. It would be a precise language of structural morphology containing signs originating in different systems and pooled in a comprehensive semiotics of culture. If this radical unification of language were possible it is difficult to imagine what the function of critique might be. The initial situation of this ideal but undesirable critique would resemble a dictionary of a dead language, without grammatical clues, without phonetic rules, without a single document in which words function as language. It would be a language outside of the dynamics of language, reduced to signs which cannot produce significant relations even when forced into proximal dependencies.

Signs, however, in their aggregate condition are one thing: when they have entered into a system of a larger construct their structure and properties change: they begin to signify. So the *poem* is a sign emitted by a larger, infinitely complex system and that is why we willy-nilly use conceptual dictionaries of other parts of the originating matrix — the culture. Such dictionaries are conveniently recognisable transmitters (not bearers) of social and ideational *epistemes*, but they also tend to circumscribe and limit the area of discourse to descriptions of the obvious and laborious reconstructions of isolated elements. The *poem* as a sign cannot be described or reconstructed by application of a single set of rules: that would mean that we are prepared to reduce all mental operations to one single type, without regard to the ambiances that produce imaginative models. Such cultural absolutism, as Lévy-Bruhl points out (1910:20-21), assumes the existence of one "psychological and logical mechanism," and while it makes possible neat and tidy solutions it reduces, implicitly, the *poem* to the level of a thing, a tree, a chair. And a poem "about" a

tree, or Van Gogh's painting of his chair surely tells us nothing "about" specific objects and everything "about" virtual objects of imagination.

The meaning of a poem cannot be identified with the reflection of objective reality: that meaning must be understood as model-making activity which is by no means an empirically literal description but a heuristic cataloguing of signs capable of producing meanings to which we are susceptible, to which we "give assent," as Hume puts it. An attempt to approach and understand the *poem* as a unique entity of a national as well as universal tradition by elaboration of cognitive categories represents an insoluble problem. A good example of confusion and strife which inevitably ensue from such manipulations, for that is what they are, manipulations, is to be found in the heated debates regarding the historical and theoretical application of periodisation concepts — realism, classicism, romanticism, etc. It seems that Benveniste is not quite right when he asserts that "we can say everything, and we can say it as we wish" (1966:63). If we could we would need no poet to un-say it, as it were.

I should like to suggest that we can appropriately identify the *poem* as a sign which establishes a logical connection between the *signifier* and the *signified* in de Saussurian sense. The *signifier* comes from the enormous riches of values sanctioned by a cultural tradition: the *signified* is a cluster of meanings, i.e. functioning *epistemes* articulated topologically. We advance through concepts which serve as bridges not of an emotional, emphatic understanding, but of an essentially and primarily culturological grasp of the *poem* as an intersection of different knowledges, consciousnesses and perceptions, physical and spiritual forms, an imaginative intersection of the known and the unknown, the sacred and the profane, the significant and the insignificant.

The purpose of reading is topological determination of relations which obtain within structures. This form of conceptualisation has nothing in common with mediaeval scholasticism (even in its contemporary disguises) which insisted, categorically, that universal concepts, i.e. the concepts of real essence, reside from the beginning in the mind. On the contrary, we believe, and here is that word again, that concepts are models, schematic representations of the structure and properties of the object or the circumstance which imagination appropriates and claims for its own. The hypotheses we could not put to a test in a poem because of extraliterary influences visited upon the reception of the uniqueness which differentiates one poem from another within the same topological system, we can test on a model. Modeling as an abstractly logical activity is based on the study of analogies, on statistical classification of sequentiality and combina-

tions of significant core elements in a poetic structure. For instance, E.R. Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, although in appearance a continuation of the traditional philological approach presents a whole series of characteristic thematic and stylistic properties which constitute significant determinants of different authorial structures. In V. Propp's *Morphology of the Fairy Tale* application of statistical research shows not only the "nature" of the miraculous in the fairy tale but offers clear ways of understanding how identical functional distributions and arrangements govern the flow and shape of a "literary" narrative.

Model is a means of concretisation: it and its original are not identical, they are only similar. Certain dominant features of the original must be transposed into the model. If they are not, we reject the proposition contained in the original, we turn away from the poem. The failure, however, is not necessarily the fault of the maker of the poem but of the maker of the model. And, to make matters more difficult, the model is tested against belief, which explains why it is possible to be awed by a poem yet give not a hang for it, or, conversely, why one occasionally "gives assent" to a trite piece of sentimental fluff. By and large, however, there is a broad, global, tacit agreement regarding certain "greats."

One is almost prepared to accept the notion that these general and inexplicable agreements — why should peasants of a remote village in Yugoslavia become so profoundly and shockingly moved by the fate of Hamlet, for instance, or why is Shakespeare, the voice of a "civilized" urban culture, a "hit" in the bush? — bespeak the quality of the mind that is anterior to logical thought, the sort of thing Lévy-Bruhl must have meant by "pre-logical" mentality, namely the capacity of the mind to sustain itself in contradiction, something we find difficult to imagine. Is it not possible that Weber's suggestion should be pursued as a rewarding clue: some causes can have only *one* type of consequence, he claims (1963:36), but on *different* levels — sociological, poetic, semantic, semiotic? I find Weber's idea attractive because it confirms my conviction that poetry as pure subjectivity is bunk. The *poem* is an *attitude*, a *proposition* regarding certain orders and their constituent elements. "A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it," says Wittgenstein (1976:19). And while I probably misunderstand most of Wittgenstein the last statement is, I think, almost incapable of misunderstanding. A theory of a thinking whole rests on the praxis of reading: the two processes are not to be understood as a sum of processes external to each other but as a spatial and temporal unfolding of certain ideal unities. "Every organism is a melody which sings itself," says Uexküll. The organism

does not necessarily know the melody, nor does it know that it is singing, let alone that it is singing a unique, characteristic melody which attests to the existence of systematic behaviour. But such an organism is a whole and as such significant for the consciousness that knows it, not merely a thing-in-itself.

The cluster of *attitudes, propositions* of the poem is the immanent structure of the language of the poem. Its syntax is a relationship between the *poem* and the *reader*. The poem without the reader is empty, mind-less; it is like a galvanic element drained of electrolyte. Reading starts the poem up, as it were. The mind in the poem is a hidden mind: it is hidden because it is not produced in the form of the mind itself; it is a mind for the mind that comes to it; it is mind-in-itself but not mind-for-itself. Only in reading does it become mind-for-itself. So when we say the poem we mean the consciousness of the poem, just as when we say life we mean the consciousness of life. The poem, then, is the manifestation of an "interior" in the "exterior" — a duplication of the process whereby consciousness projects onto the world a *new* world. And that *new* world in the assent of pre-reflexive belief is perceived as an "interiority" when we have perceived certain patterns: in other words, on the level of perception, I think, actions dissipated onto the world merely inform us of the vital situation of an organism; the sudden grasping of patterns is understanding which *makes* the poem.

An enquiry into the activity of signs is a concrete submergence in a game whose rules are known in part, a play we can describe as a process but whose outcome is opaque. Such an enquiry is only a partial attempt to abstract a general system of functioning meanings attached to fields of signification in the constitution of plot by stylistic devices. The structuration of the fields, again, is an attempt to abstract everything that evidently lies behind them in the interest of a comprehensible functioning whole. Structuration as a procedure is an operation of idealisation in which "deviations" and irregularities of the poem's language become integrated into a logic compressed into understandable patterns obtaining in the world: such patterns are simultaneously part of the image of the world, because they are logical. If it were possible to create an artificial language of criticism, a language which would be its own standard of reification and provable truthfulness, this "meta-language," as Barthes calls it, would represent the ideal relationship between the living tradition and life-giving innovation. Such a language would represent, analogically, an "operational" advance comparable to transition from manufacture to industrial production, from the little old watchmaker in the 17th century Schaffhausen to the present-day Doxa works in the same locale.

The phenomenon of literariness becomes more accessible by the application of extra-disciplinary procedures, even if this application is clumsy, as mine is. At least one is forced to ask questions in a different language, thus avoiding the strategy of fitting the question to a pre-conceived answer. This strategy is based on the assumption that literariness, or *poiesis*, is a transcendental quality of the imagination, something like a repeatable immaculate conception. The questioner can never be wrong, only inept or inelegant. The logic of consequentiality is always upheld, never questioned. And what is never questioned must be considered suspect. Consecutivity as a principle is easily discredited, and it is usually discredited that a consequential logic may be established. A journey to the significant core of the poem, for example, can easily and attractively be "reified" by the core itself. But there must be other ways to verify the metaphor. In the process we may discover that the core is a decoy.

When we are "informed" by the poem we are shaped from within by a specific activity of the text. Information is not generated by meanings deposited in signs, but by the arrangement of signs themselves. They *are* the melody I mentioned earlier. A distinct piece of information is generated when a group of signs reveal certain choices and preferences in the use of signs, as Shannon says. Consequently, in the area of language information is also shaped by the procedures of choice. Syntax, after all, comprises only linguistic signs, and since Shannon's concept of information appears to be applicable to any statistically significant group of signs there is no reason why it should not be applied to the poem (*vide* Propp). The use of language is in the final analysis a behaviour, a properly human activity which has no intrinsic significance, only referential significance. Behaviour can only be understood in reference to aims of life — linguistic behaviour is a means of adaption to "unorganized mass," to life. But life does not have the same meaning in animality and humanity, and man's act of speaking expresses the fact that he is severing his adhesion to environment, that he recognizes the act to be co-extensive with his mind and that the specific modality of this co-extension is knowledge. For thought language is simultaneously a principle of slavery, since it is interposed between thing and thought, and a principle of liberty, since the naming of an attitude, or a conviction, constitutes separation of it from the being, an increase in the transparency of the consciousness. That in itself is an attitude, a proposition with regard to the world.

The *poem*, then, is an example of the systematic use of signs. By that I mean the use which purposefully organizes the behaviour of reading. We do not perceive signs separately, in fact we are not generally aware of signs as specific pieces which form a shape, any

more than we see each single piece in a mosaic, or each stroke of the brush in a painting. We see a mosaic, or a painting, before we know how it is made, or we do not see them at all. We do not make inferences from a number of distinct elements of a whole. The whole is apprehended, and from our apprehension of the whole its constituent elements derive their meaning. Natasha's face is radiant, Tolstoy tells us, but the radiance is ours. Rather, the radiance is not capable of description: we either know what it entails or we remain at a loss as to why it is of any particular import. The radiance of Natasha's face is only a brush-stroke on the grand canvas of *War and Peace*, it is a sign emanating from the comprehensible system of the novel. Signification, the most distinct property of the system, is its ontological essence.

This understanding of signification offers a way to deal with the consciousness of here and now, when, specifically, such consciousness becomes overt in a collapse of the dimensions of the *poem* into the dimensions of the *reader*. In this catastrophe the elimination of successive contributions of memory and intelligence reduces the initial consciousness of a fact of experience to that swift shock we experience when, at night, we believe, no, we *know* without being completely certain how, that we have glimpsed or heard a man. This judgement which does not embrace its object, nevertheless marks a point of contact with reality, absolutely irreducible in experience, thoroughly inseparable from being. We speak about the feeling we have of present reality, of presentness, of an unconditional density, of the "reality function," as the psychiatrists call it. It is different from reality as a referential illusion, but without the reality function the illusion would be impossible, I think.

The *poem*, I venture to say, is lived as a reality, it is not known as an object. Our account of it inevitably impoverishes the experience of it, but if our experience is pre-determined by language what accounts for the enormous difference between the experience and an account of it? Is language an indecomposable structure and therefore an *a priori*? Yes, language as a human social event is such an *a priori*. What constitutes the dividing line between an account and the *poem*? Certainly not the content, because it is a secondary characteristic. The structure, then! And that which is alone capable of containing the structure — the consciousness, the most problematic part of my discussion. Consciousness is a network of significative intentions which is sometimes clear, transparent to itself, i.e. known, and sometimes lived rather than known. Some of our most profound convictions elude cognitive knowledge: they are not clear to consciousness yet their power and weight are impressive because they are rooted in the life of con-

sciousness. And if the vocabulary of consciousness were limited to the juggling of experiential data, we would probably never have climbed down from the trees.

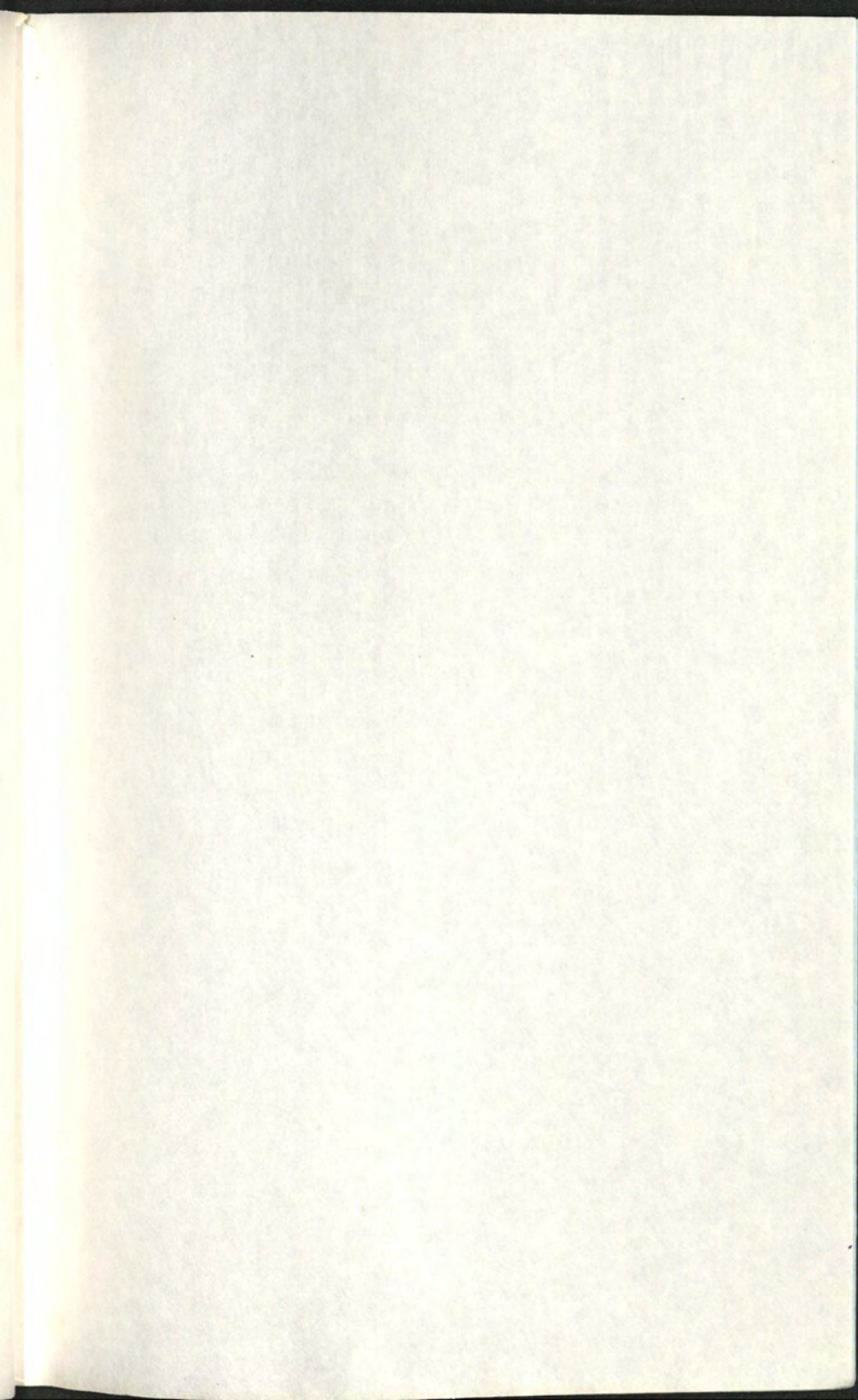
The poem *is* in the conjoining of the ideal signification and true signification. The message represents *ideal* signification, the recipient of the message provides *true* signification. The *ideal* signification is visible from the outside of the poem, the *message*, but this visibility entails a corresponding visibility from within. I see myself seeing, I am more profoundly in being, the *poem* and the *reader* are *one* event: the *ideal* structure of signification and the *true* structure of recipient signification flow so closely that signification constitutes a single "form" and the separation between the ideal and the true is suspended. It is a form of consent, a union. This union has several recognizable features:

1. *Reading is an event* — by that I mean that it occurs within the dimensions of consciousness;
2. *Reading is a linguistic event* — by that I mean that language is not used instrumentally as an extension of the self in the conquest of the world, but that language is a medium in which the world stands before us and in us;
3. *Reading is a dialectical event* — by that I mean that true consciousness enters into a relationship with the ideal consciousness, and that ideal consciousness, standing over and against, permeates the true consciousness;
4. *Reading is an objective event* — by that I mean not only that it has the characteristics of otherness, namely what stands before us in the poem, in language, is not the outcome of the reflexive activity of the mind. Rather, the mind by entering into a world it has not shaped conforms to that world;
5. *Reading is an ontological event* — by that I mean that in conforming to the poem the mind dies and is re-born, and dying and birth are disclosures of being.
6. *Reading is an historical event* — by that I mean that reading entails the collapse of history into the presentness of the event; thus whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, reading is a genuine experience of history in the guise of its total absence;
7. *Reading is an event of the text* — by that I mean that the text is at least as important as the reader.

Whenever language works, as Needham says, we are the locus of the phenomenon. Perhaps that is why we are so inept in trying to understand how it works and so endlessly fascinated by its working.

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