

ANTI-CRITICISM

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This thesis is concerned first with establishing an appropriate vacancy into which an individual critical method might fit, and second, with defending that method. The demonstration of a vacancy is accomplished by a brief survey of existing critical methods. The defense of the individual critical method takes the form of related critical essays which establish their own existence.

The initial section of this thesis summarizes the essences and ramifications of separate coexisting critical approaches such as the Realistic, the Naturalistic, the Universal, the Traditional, the Neoteric, the Didactic, the Evaluative, the Scientific, and the Anti-Critical. The second section is devoted entirely to the demonstration of Anti-Critical principles through critical essays which study selected works of Oscar Wilde, Charles Dodgson, Franz Kafka, and Thomas Mann.

The first section (Chapter One), which deals with several critical approaches, finds each approach valid to the extent that various aspects of each are interesting and competently handled (artful). At the same time, many of these approaches are weak to the extent that they tend to impose restrictive criteria on other critical approaches and on all literature.

The second section (Chapters Two through Six), which deals critically with various works of literature, further

establishes literary criticism, in general, as an art form and Anti-Criticism, in particular, as a concerted effort to produce Art. This attempt is made clear by the juxtapositioning of a somewhat scholarly chapter with less scholarly and less formal but more artistic chapters.

This thesis concludes with a critical essay which is designed to combine the critical findings of the first section with the major themes of the second section. If any one finding can be considered the essential conclusion, it is that Art is one thing and Criticism (of which no one approach can be considered definitive) another: an object and all art forms which describe it have separate integrities.

ANTI-CRITICISM

THESIS

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PREFACE

It will perhaps be noticed that Chapters Two through Six are partially characterized by a lack of transition or scholarly intervention which would tend to clarify their intent. Chapter One contains a relatively large number of transitions and other word groupings which are obvious statements of scholarly intention or opinion. The juxtapositioning of a longer, somewhat scholarly chapter with shorter, less scholarly ones creates contrast and inevitable balance. This balance gives the entire piece an appearance of visual symmetry and also illustrates differences in two styles: one style presents, explains, and connects ideas; the other tends more to imply opinions and let the reader draw his own connections between themes.

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CHAPTER I

ANTI-CRITICISM

Art for some people takes on the aspect, of many assumed aspects, of some diaphanous sylph which makes its presence felt but which also evades definition by constantly changing shape and degree of transparency (or opacity) and by revealing facets not previously seen. As a result of this continuous state of flux, art has been seen as different things by different people, and it seems that in many cases a man's view of art depends on the state of art and his own state when he experiences it. And as if the definition of art is not challenge enough, its method of production or its point of origin or even its reason for existing is also of great concern. But a scientific study of art's nature and generation, clinically establishing reasons why art is appreciated and produced, would involve an undertaking requiring skills not commonly mastered by students of literature, so the subject must be necessarily limited to a series of conjectures about what art is.

Many people believe, like Edmund Wilson and T. S. Eliot, that art is at least partial realization of some form of suffering (5, p. 35; 5, p. 82). Alain Robbe-Grillet opposes

this view by saying that art is the result of a conscious attempt, not something that is done in a swoon of agony or despair (11, p. 46). And Plato goes one step farther by dividing art into two basic forms: the lower and purely manipulative form which he calls "art," and the higher, deistically generated form which he calls "poetry." (8, pp. 223-24), "for all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not as works of art, but because they are inspired and possessed" (8, p. 223). Plato uses the word "art" much as Robbe-Grillet does, but "poetry" is exclusive of the control of man. More recently, Kenneth Burke has said that art is nature or fact which is so arranged that it exudes some essence beyond the sum of its parts (5, p. 348).

Theories of the nature of art run on a scale between (and possibly beyond) deistic intervention and human manipulation. Art can be seen, then, as any product of man that is created with a given, even if low, degree of skill but which is also influenced to a certain degree by the imagination (deity, suffering, collective unconscious, or whatever the imagination is). Art can be seen, if somewhat arbitrarily, as a synthesis of mechanical skill and imagination, and it seems that from this definition any human endeavor which reflects manipulation and imagination is art.

Literature, from the standpoint of its being an imaginative arrangement of words, is an art form. It involves the production and reception of words just as music involves the

production and reception of sounds. A word or a sound or a color or a shape is produced and subsequently received either by the originator or someone else (it might be said that the first voiced communication was an elementary form of literature). The producer conceives some idea and transforms or transfers it to a medium, and this medium makes some impression upon the receiver; when the receiver in turn produces a word relating to the initial stimulus, he becomes a crude but literary critic. It is further plausible that the receiver becomes a critic simply upon hearing or reading a word even if his response is un verbalized. For practical purposes, though, the word "critic" will be limited to defining that receiver who makes his response to the initial word known in further words.

Literary criticism involves the assimilation of literature and a subsequent written response, just as the literature which the critic is examining involved the assimilation of an idea and its subsequent transfer to a verbal medium. Literature results from a verbal response to some aspect of an author's environment, and literary criticism results from a critic's response to some aspect of a piece of literature. As S. E. Hyman says in The Armed Vision,

Imaginative literature organizes its experiences out of life at first hand (in most cases); criticism organizes its experiences out of imaginative literature, life at its second hand, or once-removed. Both are, if you wish, kinds of poetry, and one is precisely as independent as the other, or as dependent (5, p. 7).

The method of production for literature and criticism is the same, any difference being in the source material. Criticism, then, can be viewed as a form of literature and therefore as an autonomous art form.

Criticism constitutes a segment of literature and art and is therefore characterized by existence in a state of diversity which defies the application of any restricted criteria. That is, art cannot be exhaustively defined or judged by any given set of criteria when it is constantly being generated in new forms and generating new criteria: a minuet cannot be defined or judged in terms of a sonnet or even in terms of another short story. An art form can ultimately be judged only in terms of itself. Criticism, as an art form, can be whatever the critic intends, and it is not subject to any force other than the author's will. For the practitioner of what can be called anti-criticism, then, a critical essay can be viewed not only as a study of literature but as literature itself, and as such to be defined and judged on the same grounds.

A new form of criticism is not offered for the sake of augmenting the form (although it can) or for any other projected, didactic end. It is rather offered in the sense in which something is offered to a guest: the guest is likely not starving and probably does not need it. If he accepts, the host is flattered, and if he refuses it, then the host still has it for himself. A person can channel his literary ideas

into a critical method without feeling a need to justify something that is ultimately unjustifiable because of its admittedly arbitrary and metaphysical nature. Criticism does not particularly need a new form, and an examination of prevailing literary ideas does not so much present a problem in need of a solution as it tends to further characterize the literary form of which anti-criticism appears to be a part.

Literary criticism is by nature concerned with literature. As stated before, Plato advanced the theory that inspired literature is not the work of man but of a god through man, and the new novelists see literature as the result of purely conscious endeavor. Between and outside of these views lie many concepts, and if critics can agree on no one definition of literature (art), many have separate views of what it might or should be. These views constitute varying criteria, some more, some less restrictive, which can be represented, for the sake of discussion, in two major groups: literary criteria (what the critic thinks literature should or should not contain or accomplish) and critical criteria (how the critic thinks literature can be effectively examined and also what criticism should contain and accomplish).

One characteristic form of literary criteria is naturalism. The insistence that art, and therefore literature, is contingent upon nature finds historical precedent in the views of Plato and Aristotle and possibly in the views of earlier

philosophers as well. This nature-contingency theory has survived centuries of experimentation with art; if certain relatively modern theories can be granted as extensions of the nature theory. And from naturalism to realism is a natural step: if nature is reality, then everything in nature is real, and reality can be seen as natural. With this line of reasoning the writer can relate even his most abstract writing to nature: the Greek dramatists thought they mirrored nature because their plays supposedly reflected the real emotions of men who were children of nature; William Wordsworth saw his poetry as natural in part because it contained language which was "really used by men"(13, p. 500); the existentialists considered themselves naturalists because their treatment of characters was supposed to mirror natural limitations and consequences; and all felt that literature should be natural, that it should mirror the "real" world. Alain Robbe-Grillet, in his book Toward a New Novel claims, "Every writer thinks he is a realist"(11, p. 153). And further, "they are all right. And if they don't agree, it's because each has his own idea of reality"(11, p. 153). The critic who deals with these multiple representations of nature is faced with a decision of which works are and which works are not real or natural, if nature is still a critical consideration with him. If the critic insists on nature criteria, it is likely that he has some restricted view of what nature is and of what represents nature. He can insist

on Greek drama or existentialism and refuse to acknowledge any other school of writing (music, painting?) on the grounds of realism or naturalism. Or he can recognize anything that exists as an appropriate extension of nature by virtue of its being contained within nature (the universe) and probably drop the notion of judging some works of literature as more representative of nature than others.

But tolerance does not always take the place of restrictiveness; instead, restrictiveness often has a counterpart in reverse restrictiveness. Such a counterpart to the naturalistic critics can be seen in the universalist critics, the critics who insist on universality as requisite to good literature. These are the critics who believe in and expect some form of omniscience on the part of the author, and this knowledge, if a work is to be considered great, is to result in a piece of literature which has universal appeal.

A modern representative of this school of literary criteria is Matthew Arnold. His remarks from an essay on criticism, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," tend to illustrate the thoughts of similar critics. He proposes, in general terms, a prerequisite knowledge in writers that even the most brilliant men might find difficult to attain. It seems hardly possible, if the statement is taken literally, for a poet "to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry"(2, p. 6). And the man who has taken a lifetime of effort to semi-master one profession might

wonder if the poet exists, who has achieved "a thorough interpretation of the world"(2, p. 9). On grounds of incomplete knowledge Byron becomes "so empty of matter," Shelley becomes "so incoherent," and Wordsworth becomes "wanting in completeness and variety"(2, p. 7). And with this line of reasoning it is possible to condemn every work of art short of the universe itself.

It seems somewhat unreasonable or questionable to condemn producers of literature, who are members of a race which finds itself hard put to function in just one relatively narrow sector of just one relatively minute planet, for lacking something to which they as yet have little access. Perhaps it is more fair, though, to take Arnold's statements in the spirit in which they were possibly offered: that is, the more a man knows, the more he has to bring to his art form, and the more possibility then exists for magnitude in a work of art. Or if statements which require universality are to be taken literally, perhaps universality to one critic means something other than what it might to other people.

It is possible that when a critic refers to a literary truth he is referring to his own subjective conception of what truth is with little regard for what other critics think truth is. And it is perhaps this ethnocentric attitude which partially accounts for the insistence that one school or period of art is intrinsically superior or inferior to another.

he might see that school as more real or valuable than another school which contains ideas possibly foreign to his system of logic. The critic who restricts his appreciation to one tradition tends to see other work as relatively ineffective or meaningless: Robbe-Grillet says that "a new form, unconsciously judged in terms of the time-honored, established forms, will always appear to be more or less an absence of form" (11, p. 52). And Alexander Pope, in his "Essay on Criticism," an essay in verse form, says,

Some Foreign writers, some our own despise;
The Ancients only, or the moderns prize:
(Thus wit, like faith, by each man is applied
To one small sect, and all are damned beside) (9, p. 13).

It is by application of this principle that Wordsworth calls a great deal of the poetry not following his precepts "a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas" (12, p. 517). And it is with this principle that Aristotle, unable to see later literary forms, insists that a work is not a good tragedy unless it contains "Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Song" (1, p. 25). Arnold recognizes a necessary connection between great (whatever great is) historical periods, or knowledge of them, and great literature--a theory that great literature is not possible in every period, that literature requires great periods from which authors can draw materials, that great art indeed cannot exist without a great period or knowledge of one. This theory seems to eliminate any introspective

literature which draws its materials more from an artist's mind than from his national culture (Wallace Stevens, Franz Kafka).

Traditionalism can be conservative: Wordsworth feels that "we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased" (12, p. 517). But traditionalism can also be applied in the guise of modernism, such as that of Robbe-Grillet, who claims to be opposed to traditionalism, but who also says of older, preceding novelistic styles, "The branch in question has in actual fact died a natural death, simply because time has passed" (11, p. 59). In its extreme form a new-traditional view of literature is no less restrictive than reactionary traditionalism or any other kind; new-traditionalism recognizes a narrow sector of literature as good while scoffing at the rest as somehow inferior, and by its own principle literature which it presently recognizes is doomed upon the arrival of a newer form:

The writer must be proud to bear his own dates, in the knowledge that there is no masterpiece that exists in eternity, but only works that exist in history, and that they only outlive themselves in so far as they have left the past behind them and heralded the future (11, p. 45).

Regardless of the direction in which traditionalism is applied, it has an effect, as do other forms of narrow criteria of ruling out a great deal of at least well handled literature. The critic who allows exposure to a limited

traditional or any sector is, if nothing else, denying himself literature which is considered worthwhile, if by nobody else, by other critics who can function only in other separate sectors. Graham Hough says in An Essay on Criticism, "It is easy to ascribe to 'Nature' the prejudices of a class, a time, or a personal temperament. But it is one of the distinctions of a good critic that he succeeds in minimizing these distortions" (4, p. 29). And if this advice fails to improve the state of criticism, it should if nothing else help literary critics to enjoy literature.

But some critics see literature as something not so much to be enjoyed as to be used. Among these is the critic who sees only didactic literature as having value, its quality rising in direct proportion to its ability to teach a "truth." Didacticism is related to other forms of narrow criteria not particularly in content but in essence. Like other forms of literary criteria it recognizes only a narrow sector of literature as being good literature, seeing this small portion of the whole as the standard for literature in general. The critic who judges literature from a didactic point of view requires that in order to be judged as good literature it must have as its primary objective and effect the teaching of some truth which is designed to improve, depending on what the critic considers improvement, the state of man. The theoretical truth to be transmitted takes on the aspect of an immutable and almost deistically manufactured rule that has only to be

followed and man will become moral and happy (or even bring in a good harvest)(5, p. 10), and literature is a skillful adornment of this truth: Alexander Pope advises,

True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
 What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;
 Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,
 That gives us back the image of our mind (9, p. 10).

And the people who approach literature or art without regard for the "truth" are

. . . tuneful fools . . .
 Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,
 Not mend their minds; as some to church repair,
 Not for the doctrine, but the music there (9, p. 11).

And if the reader has an obligation to seek improvement, then the producer of literature has an even greater obligation to make improvement possible: Wallace Fowlie, in The French Critic, says of Sartre, "He defines, in 1946, the moral mission of the writer as that of illuminating the historical period in which he lives and influencing it"(3, p. 58). And further, "Sartre claims that the writer is involved in the problems and the disasters of his age. . . . A piece of writing is a commitment, an enterprise by means of which the author embraces his age"(3, p. 58). The author is represented as some sort of philosopher or propagandist whose duty it is to represent truth in such a way that it improves all those who are capable of recognizing the truth. Whether or not this kind of literature is possible depends a great deal on what men are willing to be taught; on the extent to which an artist is capable of extracting the useful truths from man's environment; or

indeed whether the truths the artist finds have any particular meaning to anybody but himself. The critic who insists on didactic literature may be assuming a degree of human unity, as in religion, mores, aspirations, that does not and perhaps cannot exist. Like other critics who require certain literary criteria he sees value only in one segment of literature.

Adherence to one form or another of literary criteria tends more to reflect the critic's individual opinions than to reveal any universal state of good literature. And recognition of this situation reflects no particular malediction; most people who read prefer some works of literature over others on grounds of literary criteria. But personal preference has no necessary connection with intrinsic truth, and the critic who recognizes a prevailing condition of arbitrariness might be wise to represent his own views as more individual than sacred.

And regardless of how seriously a critic takes himself, it can be assumed that his criticism is a synthesis of his literary and critical criteria. His criticism is influenced by his opinions on literature, and his criticism is influenced by his critical opinions--his ideas about what criticism should study, how criticism should study, why criticism should study it, or in short, what criticism should be. The principle of literary criteria tends to establish the kinds of literature to which the critic tends to give his attention in the first place; the principle of critical criteria tends to

establish the ways in which the critic tends to apply his attention, and the realization of critical criteria results in critical methodology.

One critical method which is sometimes considered synonymous with criticism itself, possibly because of an abundance of reviewers, is that of evaluation. Evaluative criticism assigns to literature different degrees of quality, and a judgment can be based on any number of arbitrary criteria. By this principle Yvor Winters describes different pieces of literature as "moral" or "immoral," "immoral" meaning "'formlessness, romanticism, experimentalism'" (5, p. 65), and any number of terms which he has decided to represent as bad. The evaluative critic establishes a set of criteria, which can vary at his discretion, by which he judges work as basically good or bad. This critical method seems by nature to make moral comparisons, the quality of a work being discussed in subjective, metaphysical terms. Even seeming objectivity is contained within a subjective framework: the criteria can be compared objectively to the contents of a piece of literature, but the criteria are subjectively generated in the first place. An evaluation is correct or incorrect depending on whether the reader is in moral agreement or disagreement with the critic; or an evaluation can be seen as neither correct nor incorrect but rather as an impression which is formed of a work while having no effect on the intrinsic quality or statement of a work. Graham Hough quotes

C. S. Lewis: "Dr. Leavis does not differ from me about the properties of Milton's verse. He describes them very accurately. . . . It is not that he and I see different things when we look at Paradise Lost. He sees and hates the very same thing that I see and love" (4, p. 166). Evaluative criticism is a metaphysical argument and as such is as defensible or indefensible as any metaphysical argument.

There is no edict which states that a metaphysical argument is inferior to one of a physical nature. Man simply has mastered laboratory techniques more completely for one than for the other. Literature is physical to the extent that words are detectable by physical apparatus. It is one further step to assume that words, which can be traced to a chemically operated and therefore ultimately fathomable brain, are subject to physical or clinical investigation.

The scientific critical approach is an attempt to view and treat literature not strictly as a metaphysical phenomenon, but also as an ultimately testable physical phenomenon. Scientific criticism draws heavily from fairly sophisticated schools of science like psychology, sociology, and linguistics, and prides itself on at least semi-observance of the scientific method. This approach is fairly modern but has its precedent, if not in practice, in spirit, in the views of classical philosophers, if not earlier views, who were concerned not just with art but also with the mental state of the artist. Plato ascertained that high art was motivated by some unknown

and unknowable deity. Aristotle, using what sociology he had, made deductions from literary content as to the artist's state of mind. He theorized in his "Poetics" that "the graver spirits imitated noble actions, and the actions of good men. The more trivial sort imitated the actions of meaner persons, at first composing satires, as the former did hymns and the praises of famous men" (1, p. 17). As unclinical as Aristotle's remarks seem in relation to the practices of modern sciences, they do represent an attempt to examine literature as something less mysterious than a deistically generated aesthetic ideal.

Modern scientific criticism is in agreement with this anti-aesthetic theory, not that art is not an aesthetic expression, but neither that it is unapproachable from a cause and effect point of view. According to S. F. Hyman, the first critic to apply experimentation (and not just conjecture) to literature was I. A. Richards (5, pp. 307-15). Whether he was first or not, he did implement a great deal of experimentation with which he backed his critical arguments, one of which is concerned with a need, according to Richards, for a uniform system of criticism. His survey of students demonstrates the widely varying interpretations produced by different forms of criticism (5, pp. 307-15). Richards interprets these various interpretations as symptomatic of a need for a more objective approach to literature: he sees literary criticism as being hampered by a lack of objective

and technical language, that the technical language of literature is poor compared with that of any of the exact sciences, and that this lack of technical terms can be remedied by objective investigation into literature with a subsequent exact classification of its elements.

An accurate classification system, if such a system is feasible, might increase a critic's ability to analyze literature from a formal standpoint and in turn to make his findings known. But the use of this classification system alone allows only for external description and makes no allowance for investigation into connections between semantic meanings and authorial intent, and the supposedly scientific critic sees as ideal a criticism which has the ability (if not now, ultimately) to derive from a work of literature the state of mind in which it was written. Alexander Pope saw the possibility of such an examination, and he too thought a more scientific approach might be an improvement of some other approaches: "A perfect judge will read each work of wit/With the same spirit that its author writ"(9, p. 9), and "In every work regard the writer's end,/Since none can compass more than they intend"(9, p.9). Kenneth Burke believes that analysis of "symbolic action" within a work of literature will reveal an underlying emotional structure in the author (5, pp. 351-53). T. S. Eliot, with his theory of the "objective correlative," goes a step further in saying that indeed the

will upon reading evoke the exact mood which prevailed when they were conceived (5, p. 82).

Scientific critics who assume the validity of terms like "symbolic action" and "objective correlative" pursue their objective with the help of various sciences. R. P. Blackmur approaches literature partly through the sciences of etymology and linguistics, and in a given work he investigates repeated words and their varying meanings in varying contexts. Then from a resulting word list he formulates an interpretation (5, pp. 239-41). Kenneth Burke draws on sociology and psychology in an attempt to demonstrate correspondences between an artist's work and his ethnic background (5, p. 349). And ultimately, any science which can establish an author's mental state from the context of his work is appropriate for use in scientific criticism.

A scientific approach to literature might produce a criticism which is less characterized by opinion than by empirically established fact. The possibility exists, however, that many critics who claim to approach literature scientifically are ill-equipped to practice the sciences which they appear to utilize. The critic who makes linguistic assumptions without the benefit of long research might be regarded, if not by other critics, at least by linguistic scientists, as what Thomas Pyles, in his book The Origins and Development of the English Language calls a "lay linguist" (10, p. 16). And similarly, little heed from a

scientific point of view is given the criticism of a man whose psychological-sociological conclusions are more smug than a relatively small amount of research warrants, and considering some critical attempts by some practicing and reputed scientists, it is doubtful that even pure scientific research is yet equipped to draw completely accurate correlations.

But whatever a critic's degree of scientific knowledge and research, he is a scientific critic by virtue of the belief, as S. E. Hyman states when speaking of William Empson, "that the poetic experience is human experience like any other and can be comparably studied" (5, p. 293). The scientific critic reasons that literature can be clinically studied because it is a product and extension of a physical object.

If literature is to be considered in the same category as other human actions, the extent to which literature can be objectively and scientifically examined depends on whether man is a deistic extension, a chemical sum of his parts, a blend of both, or something else unconsidered. Whatever the state of man or science, the scientific approach to literature is an established critical method which reflects a desire, and not just in scientific critics, to know from a work of literature the mind of an author.

If the desire to know an author through his work is the primary goal of critics in general, then perhaps criticism is evolving as a science or at least a semi-science; as Hyman says,

In the foreseeable future, literary criticism will not become a science (we may be resigned to this or grateful for it), but increasingly we can expect it to move in a scientific direction; that is, toward a formal methodology and system or procedures that can be objectively transmitted (5, p. 9).

But there are also critics who, as much as they might want to understand an author, are skeptical of critical methods which claim the ability to draw direct correspondences; in this group are critics to whom it has not yet been satisfactorily proven that a work of literature does or can say one particular thing, and for whom even the definite proof that an apple is an apple does not change the aesthetic impact of an apple or prevent a critic from representing it for whatever reasons as an orange or a pear. For the critic who belongs to this group a piece of literature is not so much a sacred institution or representation of irreducible truth as it is a work of art which is what the critic will have it to be; he sees all critical methods as permissible and recognizes no one method as being completely definitive of criticism; and he tends to enjoy literature rather than be ruled by it.

The anti-critic sees a piece of literature as a seemingly static entity in itself but one which can generate dynamic thoughts, as it is read, which can in turn be manipulated and grouped into a new piece of literature in the form of a criticism. And in this respect anti-criticism is not a great deal different from other critical methods like the type of traditional criticism which compares works to other works for the sake

of pure interest (5, p. 91), or didactic criticism which teaches ideas which the critic considers true (2, p. 6; 6, pp. 134-35), or any critical method which is a vehicle to any extent for a critic's private thoughts. The anti-critic, then, sees criticism not just as the scholarly examination of literature, but as literature itself and therefore an art form. Although Matthew Arnold says that "the critical faculty is lower than the inventive"(2, p. 3), he nonetheless admits that criticism might in some cases be a creative activity:

But it is undeniable, also, that men may have the sense of exercising this free creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature or art. . . . They may have it in well-doing, they may have it in learning, they may have it even in criticising (2, p. 4).

The critic functions in conjunction with pre-existing literature, using separate works as models for his own autonomous form: Hyman says that "he reacts to a poem by writing a new poem having only a stimulus-response relation to the original" (5, p. 305). And according to Graham Hough, "Though criticism is a natural extension of ordinary reading it becomes in the end a conscious art" (4, p. 5). The anti-critic sees his own criticism as literature and art, and he sees the work of other critics, whether or not they see the same thing, as literature.

The existence of a style of criticism is due partly to a rationale---a reason why the critic applies his energy toward criticism instead of something else and which tends to

dictate the form which his criticism will take. Many critics produce criticism as a reader service. Some critics engage in review writing because it is profitable. And other critics produce criticism for the sake of a kind of scholarly, literary house cleaning, as does Graham Hough, who feels that "the ultimate reason for which criticism is undertaken is that we may understand each thing rightly on its own plane, and that we may know the better from the worse" (4, p. 4). Or, among other things, criticism can function as a valve with which to let off literary steam, or it can be written for the ultimate amelioration of literature. Anti-criticism can and might agree with all of these reasons, but a major portion of its rationale is built out of a kind of curiosity about literature, a curiosity that the critic tries to satisfy by putting his own answers to his own questions, both generated by a work of literature, in tangible form. Matthew Arnold is of the opinion that all criticism is generated by curiosity:

But criticism, real criticism, is essentially the exercise of this very quality. It obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best, without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever (2, pp. 16-17).

But best varies from person to person, and in the same person from minute to minute, and Arnold's statement more closely describes the curiosity portion of the anti-critic's rationale if the phrase "to know the best" is altered to "to know." The theoretical practitioner of anti-criticism undertakes the

analysis of literature partially because he finds it extremely interesting, and a subsequent criticism becomes among other things a record of his reaction to a work of literature read in a given setting; and perhaps as Walter Pater theorizes in The Renaissance,

"To see the object as in itself it really is," has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step toward seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it; to realize it distinctly (7, p. xii).

Curiosity about literature contributes to the production of anti-criticism, but only obliquely: curiosity or interest motivates a person to read and interpret a work of literature in the first place, but the act of writing a critical essay is motivated more than anything else by a desire to talk about literature. Graham Hough says, "Literary discourse is ultimately a conversation about a shared enjoyment" (4, p. 176). The critic finds a discussion a reason or rationale for producing criticism which makes more didactic reasons secondary: it is not the primary function of his criticism to enlighten himself or the public (although it is fine if any sight is imparted), or to effect a private discovery of self (although any psychological discovery is welcome), but to talk about literature as interestingly and artfully as possible. And anti-criticism works toward this end most comfortably under certain assumptions.

The critic approaches a work of literature with the support of all his knowledge but at the same time with an assumed innocence. That is, he uses his knowledge, not just literary knowledge, to interpret a work but forces himself to read with no stylistic or contextual expectations, as if he had never before been exposed to that particular kind of literature. This approach allows the critic to read and judge a work as a separate entity, not in terms of another work, even a work by the same author. Also, if the work varies slightly in form from another work supposedly of the same form, the critic's remarks can note that variation as an interesting occurrence rather than a formal failure. And by the same principle, when a critic discovers a new or exotic form that momentarily evades him, he can admit ignorance and can experiment rather than condemn. Walter Pater expresses this principle as applied to his ideal "aesthetic" critic: "To him all periods are in themselves equal. In all ages there have been some excellent workmen, and some excellent work done"(7, pp. xiii-xiv).

Style and period are relative. There is no divine mandate which establishes one form as superior or inferior to another, and the anti-critic tends to follow the example of the musician, or his equivalent in any other field, who is happy to hear, enjoy, and play many musical forms without making value judgments. If a musician adheres more to one medium or form than another, it is because he is better equipped in that

medium, not because he considers it superior. For the critic also, then, a narrow approach can be taken without the necessity of exercising narrow criteria. He can produce criticism from an historical or sociological or any point of view while expecting no particular handling or content from the work being examined. The critic deals with a given approach not because he considers it superior to others, but because he works better with that approach, or perhaps because he just wants to use a given approach on a given work, nor does the choice of a work to be examined necessarily imply anything more than a personal preference.

And a critic can vary his approach from work to work or to the same work without implication of inconsistency. Different interpretations are simply different, not at odds: Robbe-Grillet sees differing essays on the same work as "repetitions from a different angle, re-examinations, the same idea seen from the opposite point of view, or perhaps a complementary idea, when it isn't purely and simply a question of a warning against a mistaken interpretation"(11, p. 47). A rich work of literature can spawn many interpretations, each of which can be correct, and this condition reduces the probability of the existence of just one correct interpretation. Any interpretation, like any work of art, is correct to the extent that it is not the object it portrays.

The anti-critic feels (not knows) that a statement or number of statements about an object (including a work of

literature) has no intrinsic connection with the object itself--that a statement has nothing to do with the state of matter which constitutes an object, and that any number of opinions about an object are neither right nor wrong, but merely co-exist in separate metaphysical and physical realities exclusive of each other and the object which generated them. An interpretation, like another piece of literature, is physical to the extent that its constituents (paper, ink, sound) are physical; and it is metaphysical to the extent that it exudes some as yet unmeasurable essence beyond the sum of its parts. A work of art or an interpretation (literature, criticism) can ultimately, therefore, be judged on the same grounds as any physical object--its existence either acknowledged or denied, any further argument being of an admittedly metaphysical nature and carrying the same weight as any other metaphysical argument--that is, as much weight as is individually desirable. And anti-criticism ultimately presents neither more nor less than a metaphysical argument or exercise and is perhaps different from other critical methods in this respect only to the extent that its metaphysical nature is listed and observed as an essential quality.

Again, anybody who reads is a critic. Even the act of eliminating all the myriad readers for the sake of isolating the comparatively few recorded critics of any magnitude falls short of distilling any one essence, beyond the act of reading and responding, of criticism. Perhaps Graham Hough has a

viable, if somewhat general idea: "Criticism has undefined frontiers with a number of other fields; it is not a simple and homogeneous activity; but it is unified by its purpose, which is to elucidate works of literature and to establish as may be a true judgment of literary matters" (4, p. 3). But if literary criticism can be characterized by any one term such as "literary truth," then it might be well remembered that the word "truth" is as noncommittal as the word "criticism." If critics throughout history have pursued literary truth and perhaps to their thinking found it, then they have pursued different areas of truth. Criticism, then, is a literary form that is characterized, like many art forms, by a multiplicity of forms within a form, and to which it seems absurd to ascribe any one sub-form as definitive of the whole. And it is with this idea in mind that anti-criticism is offered, not as definitive of criticism but as one sub-form which can, like any other style of criticism, ultimately make no concrete claim other than its own existence.

The anti-critical (or para-critical) nature of anti-criticism therefore allows less for an evaluative defence (a defence which attempts to rank one method as superior or inferior or comparable to other methods) than for proof of hypothetical existence by a demonstration (in the form of characteristic critical essays) of existence. Following, then, are not defensive or evaluative statements, but exercises in the style of anti-criticism, essays which are partial

illustrations of general views, expressed by the first chapter, which can be condensed for the sake of reference into six basic opinions.

1. It is not necessarily the function of the critic to praise or deride a work of literature. When he says that a particular piece is good or bad, he is stating a personal opinion, not a basic truth. For the anti-critic the presence of a critical essay indicates at least some degree of interest which a piece held for him. But more than any intrinsically sound reasons why evaluation is not part of the style, the critic does not like to evaluate.

Nor does criticism necessarily, although it can, deal with the magnitude or uniqueness or whatever quality of ideas within a work. Criticism can deal rather with the handling or musical juxtapositioning of ideas. A complex or original idea can be awkwardly stated, and a simple or old idea can be at least interestingly or fluently stated. A work is not studied so much because it contains great ideas as it is because it is interesting (for whatever reasons).

2. It is not so much the function of the critic to criticize as it is to creatively describe, and any form of narrow criteria, including criteria of anti-criticism, which prevents this end is seen not as some kind of basic truth but as a form of narrow criteria which has no necessary connection with criticism or literature.

3. Handling or critical method is arbitrary: the critic takes a given approach because he wants to, or because a particular work is more easily treated (for that critic) with that approach than with another, not because it enjoys any intrinsic superiority.

4. Criticism is neither correct nor incorrect, neither right nor wrong. A critic states his opinions using existing works of literature much as an author used existing circumstances. Both critic and author have license--neither necessarily gives the correct interpretation; each just gives an interpretation.

5. If art for art's sake is a viable proposition, then so is criticism for criticism's sake. Criticism is not so true or false as it is interesting or dull (again, for whatever private reasons).

6. Criticism, then, can be viewed as one more creative literary form just as can the short story or sonnet or even (in advanced form) the novel. A critical essay can achieve one desired effect, it can attack a problem from a given or arbitrary angle, or it can be given mood or continuity or interest by the use of literary devices. Criticism is literature and is to be considered by the same criteria, not on the grounds of preconceived notions of how it should be, but by how it is. There is no should which can in literature effectively counter is. So a critic ultimately works with the same freedoms and limitations as does an author. And

like other literary forms criticism can neither effectively judge nor be judged; it can be taken or left with varying amounts of interest and enjoyment, and it can itself be described with varying degrees of artistry.

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CHAPTER II

WILDE-DODGSON-KAFKA

Criticism in "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime"

To Oscar Wilde people are unfortunate bastards who are composed, like the Frankenstein monster, of ill-fitting parts: Lady Windermere says of Septimus R. Podgers,

Well, he is not a bit like a chiromantist. I mean he is not mysterious, or esoteric, or romantic looking. He is a little, stout man, with a funny bald head, and great gold-rimmed spectacles--something between a family doctor and a country attorney (4, p. 266).

And more generally,

People are so annoying. All my pianists look exactly like poets, and all my poets look exactly like pianists; and I remember last season asking a most dreadful conspirator to dinner, a man who had blown up ever so many people, and always carried a dagger up his shirt sleeve; and do you know that when he came he looked just like a nice old clergyman, and cracked jokes all evening (4, p. 266)?

The Lady Windermere is herself "forty years of age, childless, and with that inordinate passion for pleasure which is the secret of remaining young" (4, p. 265). Arthur's mother, a wealthy duchess, wears "a rather soiled kid glove" (4, p. 267). Lady Clementina says, "The fact is that, though I hate doctors, I love medicines" (4, p. 283). Wilde says of Lady Fermor that "she did not care a bit for music, but was extremely fond of

musicians"(4, p. 269). The chiromantist says of a girl at a party, "Ah, a pianist! I see. . . , an excellent pianist, but perhaps hardly a musician"(4, p. 268). And Arthur, who is an elegant and innocent young man, must commit murder.

But people are not at fault; their inconsistencies are due not to their own designs, but to designs of some powerful force which seemingly exhibits less manipulative skill than human artists:

Actors are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in a tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears, But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Prince Hal. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast (4, p. 272).

Reality Through the Looking Glass

In Charles Dodgson's fairy tale Through the Looking Glass, Alice examines a world which she sees in her mirror. And Alice's mirror is not a precise mirror, but one which, although it is dependent for an image upon some element of Alice's physical world, reflects and enlarges what it wishes (or what Alice wishes). In mirror land objects are not merely representative of another reality; they have characters of their own which have little to do with external reality. The chessmen move and talk; the flowers argue in metaphysical terms; the train passengers criticize; and Alice herself converses with things not normally fond of conversation.

Even in her own reality Alice converses with her kittens, whom she tends to anthropomorphize. Certain biologists hold that animals such as cats are incapable of abstract motives, but for Alice it is at least entertaining (even with biological knowledge) to transfer human motives to cats. Alice scolds a kitten which has supposedly voiced displeasure at its mother's actions: "Her paw went into your eye? Well, that's your fault, for keeping your eyes open--if you'd shut them tight up, it wouldn't have happened" (1, pp. 126-27). Alice advises Dinah (the mother), who has no conception of "ought," in terms of "ought." And Alice's anthropomorphizing extends to inanimate and even unliving things:

Do you hear the snow against the window panes, Kitty? How nice and soft it sounds! Just as if some one was kissing the window all over outside. I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up smug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says 'Go to sleep, darlings, till summer comes again'(1, pp. 127-28).

And because Alice is fond of enlarging upon existing phenomena she is suited for examining the world in the mirror.

In this world Alice finds conditions less restricted and defined than in her world: she observes of the room in mirror land, "They don't keep this room as tidy as the other" (1, p. 131). She finds flowers in a garden who judge other flowers in terms of themselves, and who judge Alice not as a little girl but as another flower:

"Her face has got some sense in it, though it's not a clever one!' Still, you're the right colour, and that goes a long way."

"I don't care about the colour," the Tiger-Lily remarked. "If only her petals curled a little more, she'd be all right"(1, pp. 138-39).

On a train Alice finds people who act very much like the flowers:

All this time the Guard was looking at her, first through a microscope, and then through an opera glass. At last he said "You're traveling the wrong way," and shut up the window and went away (1, pp. 148-49).

And the passengers have their opinions:

"She must go by post, as she's got a head on her--"
 "She must be sent as a message by the telegraph--"
 "She must draw the train herself the rest of the way--"
 and so on (1, p. 150).

And Alice finds the "Jabberwocky" poem which must be translated into physical form (translated or transmuted by the mirror from mirror land form to a medium in Alice's reality) and which, perhaps like other objects in mirror land, even then has form but no particular meaning.

Theme and Variation in Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist"

The series of stories entitled "A Hunger Artist" is characterized, among other attributes, by unity of theme: a hunger artist. Each of the four stories dramatizes a form of hunger and its appeasement.

"First Sorrow" deals with a hunger which a person cultivates. The trapeze artist is seemingly happy until one day he discovers (with no external motivation) that he needs a second trapeze. He is appeased only after much mental stress and after reassurance by his manager. The symbolic level of

the story suggests a hunger or need discovered by a relatively high and nebulous brain function, and the need can be fulfilled or assuaged only with the constant, reassuring help of a lower and more pragmatic brain function (the manager).

"First Sorrow" illustrates a brain function by which a self-imposed need, if not immediately appeased, is modified by more pragmatic considerations, or is appeased by a certain pragmatic kind of education which in itself is a form of appeasement. The story also sets a theme which is followed by three variations or movements (stories).

"A Little Woman" illustrates a hunger for social acceptance, even in a case in which society is unreasonable and impossible to please, even when complete sacrifice is offered. The speaker is confronted by a little "straight laced" woman who is "quick and light in her movements" (2, p. 234). The speaker senses that the woman is not pleased with some aspect of his, and he hungers for her approval. After attempting for many years to please her, the speaker recognizes the impossibility of the situation and finds a certain satisfaction in simply having adjusted, which is similar to Thomas Mann's "getting used in time to not getting used" (3, p. 241).

The story "A Hunger Artist" perhaps shows a universal form of hunger and appeasement: a masochistic and absolute hunger as food for hunger. The hunger artist is not miserable because he must fast, but because he cannot fast enough. In a world which denies satisfaction, perhaps the most effective

way in which man can laugh at the gods lies in culturing and enjoying the things which they intend as punishments. The hunger artist finds salvation in the enjoyment of deprivation and is thereby, in his negative absolute state, undeprived as opposed to the other people who find only partial fulfillment in a positive state (the non-hunger non-artists).

"Josephine the Singer" is perhaps a professional autobiography of an author. Kafka says that Josephine is not such a grand singer, but there is just something about her which makes her seem an artist. And people do listen to her, and she is apart, so there must be something. But then everyone must be an artist even if he does not know it, because, everyone sings or pipes, but what is it that makes Josephine an artist? She does not know, nor does anyone; she just is. But Josephine, with all her following, becomes dissatisfied for no apparent reason (much like the trapeze artist). She invents her own hunger; she invents her own dissatisfaction, and maybe she is just fulfilling a human drive. Perhaps like all other hunger artists (people) Josephine "will rise to the heights of redemption and be forgotten like all her brothers" (2, p. 277). And maybe for this reason "Josephine the Singer" is a fitting finale to the quartet: Josephine, like many other people, will live mostly in a state of hunger because she cannot discover an acceptable method of appeasement.

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CHAPTER III

THE ABSTRACTED ABSTRACT IN KAFKA'S "ELEVEN SONS"

Abstract literature can be generated by abstract literature. "Eleven Sons," the eleventh story of the series entitled "A Country Doctor," seems to interpret the ten stories before it, plus interpreting itself. The reading which this story offers the reader is not an interpretation which is meant to transfer the symbols of the stories to the reality of the outer world. "Eleven Sons" goes in another direction. It makes symbols of symbols, interpreting symbols in terms of other symbols. "Eleven Sons" abstracts the already abstract much as more conventional stories abstract reality.

In "Eleven Sons" Kafka or the narrator is ostensibly describing his children. The first story of "The Country Doctor" is "The New Advocate." Dr. Bucephalus, the hero, who was once the battle charger of Alexander, has reduced his life style to the study of ancient law codes in a modern law office. Bucephalus is aware that murder has always prevailed, but in classical times it carried the varnish of teleological nobility; now there is no glory, just murder: "Today the gates have receded to remoter and loftier places: no one points the way;

many carry swords, but only to brandish them, and the eye that tries to follow them is confused"(1, p. 136). So Bucephalus isolates himself and reads. In describing his first son, Kafka describes the mood and content of "The New Advocate." He says that the first son "is outwardly very plain, but serious and clever. . . . He looks neither right nor left, nor into the far distance; he runs round all the time, or rather revolves within his own little circle of thoughts"(1, pp. 161-62). Bucephalus loses himself in "his own little circle of thoughts," and the story itself is short (less than two pages) and "very plain," but it is concerned with universal disillusionment and withdrawal and is "serious."

The second story in the series is "The Country Doctor." This story pictures a whirlwind, dream-like sequence in which a doctor is rushed off by powerful horses who squeeze out of a hole as if being born. The doctor is unable to return to prevent his sister from being raped; he is taken to a bed and placed next to a raw wound; he is chanted over by a chorus; and he is taken slowly and helplessly into a snowstorm. This story affects muscularity, blood, birth, vitality, and fecund putrefaction, and is "handsome, slim, well made"(1, p. 162). Like the doctor who is dragged away from home, the second son "has seen much, and therefore even our native country seems to yield more secrets to him than to the stay-at-home"(1, p. 162). Kafka goes on to say that the style of the story is

"inimitable"(1, p. 162) by other authors. Like all of Kafka's controlled, fantastic stories "The Country Doctor" has the attributes of one who does a "fancy high dive. . . , somersaulting several times over, yet with almost violent self-control"(1, p. 162). Kafka says that style cannot be imitated, that people will try, but that in the end they will give up and make excuses. And in describing the second son's shortcomings Kafka notes a possible problem with all his work, with his "whole family:" he sees in the story "a kind of stray poison in the blood, a kind of inability to develop to the full potentialities of his nature"(1, pp. 162-63).

Kafka says, "My third son is handsome too, but not in a way that I appreciate"(1, p. 163). "Up in the Gallery" pictures a pink lady riding a horse. Kafka says of his third son that he has "curving lips. . . , the kind of head that asks for drapery behind it. . . , legs that move delicately because they cannot support a weight"(1, p. 163). This is a picture of weak femininity. Kafka prefers to keep this son in the background because the world is not ready for him yet; perhaps Kafka is referring to the story style, or perhaps he thinks it safe not to dwell upon any feminine delicacy which holds only transient interest for the audience, or perhaps he cannot allow his mind to rely on and hide behind delicate thoughts.

"An Old Manuscript" is a study of savagery and an awareness of non-communication and horror. In the story Nomad soldiers

with whom it is impossible to speak control the area where the narrator works. When the butcher does not butcher an ox, the Nomads eat it alive, and the narrator voices the artist's inability to change the situation, although it is expected of him. This is a situation that would be understood in the cataclysmic Europe of Kafka's time. Kafka says of his fourth son, "A true child of his age, he is understood by everyone, he stands on common ground to all men and everyone feels inclined to give him a nod"(1, p. 163). Non-communication and horror are things everybody knows. "An Old Manuscript" describes man deprived of divine law- -sterile man in a "Waste Land." The fourth son, Kafka says, "is like a man who makes a wonderful take-off from the ground, cleaves the air like a swallow and after all comes down helplessly in a desert waste, a nothing. Such reflections gail me when I look at him"(1, p. 163). Just look how gloriously man started out, and just look at him now.

In "Before the Law" Kafka sees man waiting a lifetime for a definition of the law, only to find at the end of his life that he is his own law and that his is the only law which applies to him. Kafka says that his fifth son has "promised less than he performed; used to be so insignificant that one literally felt alone in his presence; but he has achieved a certain reputation"(1, p. 164). The Kafka who wrote The Trial wants an absolute definition of the law, and he would be more pleased with a definition than he is with his own

manufactured ideology designed as something (for lack of anything) with which to fill the void.

"Jackals and Arabs" is Kafka's sixth son. It is a dream-like story in which the narrator is confronted by talking Jackals who hate the Arabs and ask the narrator to slit the Arabs' throats with rusty scissors. An Arab comes along, scatters the Jackals, and gives them a rotting camel carcass which they attack with sexual zeal. A symbiotic relationship is pictured: the Jackals need the Arabs, whom they can hate and from whom they receive sustenance; the Arabs need the Jackals, who will give them the hate they desire and who depend on them as providers. It is difficult to go past an external, non-interpretive reading of this story, and Kafka says, "he is not easy to get at. . . ." And "in the full light of day he often fights his way through a tangle of thoughts as if in a dream" (1, p. 164). This story is difficult to fathom, even relative to Kafka's other writings. If the public cannot enjoy this rhapsodic type of story, it is because "he is much too tall for his age" (1, p. 164). Kafka says that his son looks ugly in general but that he has beautiful details although his forehead is ugly from "arrested development" (1, p. 164). And this son-story is possibly an example of one of Kafka's self-seen problems as an artist: his beautiful, verbal, inchoate responses outstrip his "arrested" capacity for expressing them to the extent of his desires, and imbalance prevails.

"A Visit to a Mine," seventh in the series, is a frame story similar to "Eleven Sons" in function. The story describes ten engineers and a porter in a mine. Perhaps the ten engineers equate to the first ten stories, although their connection is difficult to establish. The porter seems to parallel the story "Eleven Sons." The narrator says that the porter should be respected (as an art form perhaps), but no one knows why, just as the reader is left with a question about "Eleven Sons." "A Visit to a Mine" is a reminiscence of a fond author's story forms, and Kafka says of his seventh son, "The seventh son belongs to me perhaps more than all the others"(1, p. 164). Perhaps the dramatization of abstracts is more innate to Kafka than any other literary possibility.

"The Next Village" is a one-paragraph summation of the aspect of time which makes the attainment of even the most elementary ideals difficult, and Kafka says, "My eighth son is my child of sorrow"(1, p. 165), and ironically, "Time has done much to lessen the pain"(1, p. 165). "The Next Village" gives the impression of a man growing old so fast that he is still an infant when he dies. Kafka says, "I hear that he is the only one of my sons to grow a full beard; that cannot look well, of course, on a man so small as he is"(1, p. 165). Perhaps Kafka is expressing his feeling of helplessness in the face of an absurd proportion: man's mentality and his frail body are no match for his ambitions and the force of time.

"An Imperial Message" carries the idea that any divine fiat which might bestow order will never arrive. A dying king gives a message to a runner to deliver to the individual, "the meanest of his subjects, the shadow that has fled before the Imperial sun until it is microscopic in the remote distance (1, p. 158). . . ." The messenger must push his way through an infinity of humanity in order to reach the individual, so reaching the individual in time is impossible; the runner has forever in front of him "the center of the world, overflowing with the dregs of humanity"(1, p. 159). If this is another time indictment, then maybe the constant birth of the innocent and ignorant coupled with the constant death of the learned and wise forms a constant stalemate in which truth is never universal (or perhaps never existing in the first place). But the story hints that a divine truth (even if from a dead man) must exist, and a yet unfulfilled hope is preferable to no hope at all, even if it is a weak hope. Kafka says of his ninth son, ". . .there are occasions when he can cajole even me, although I know that a wet sponge is literally enough to wipe away all that earthly brilliance"(1, p. 166). Kafka's son dreamily lounges on the sofa, and what he says is "quite empty"(1, p. 166). Hope of a delayed divine fiat is something evidently inherent in Kafka, but he would stop his son from talking if he "had any hope that such slumberous eyes were even aware of the gesture"(1, p. 166). Man must be content with the continuing, tantalizing torture of hope.

"The Cares of a Family Man" is perhaps a Kafka self-portrait. The story describes a fantasy creature who resembles a spool of thread and who has Slavonic and German origin. Odradek (the spool man) rolls down the stairs, unrolling his patched-together bits of old thread (perhaps attained knowledge or perhaps bits of fiction) in front of generations of children. This is perhaps Kafka's notion of how his readers see him: a strange, exotic, hybridized puzzle whose nature can never be understood, whose nature can only be studied by the examination of his "bits of thread" (1, p. 166). Kafka describes his tenth son (and possibly himself) as a person who appears to be insincere. He describes his son as a man

with the pomposity of a man twice his age, in a frock coat always tightly buttoned, an old but meticulously brushed black hat, with an expressionless face, slightly jutting chin, protruding eyelids that mask the light behind them--anyone seeing him thus is bound to think: what an utter hypocrite" (1, p. 166).

Perhaps Kafka does see himself as a hypocrite; people are attracted to his son because of his conversational power, and some people find his conversation hypocritical, and Kafka says that he tends to side with the hypocritical camp (at least in this story).

Kafka's eleventh son is extremely delicate. Possibly this verbalized, compounded abstraction only seems weak due to the established nature of more conventional literary forms, and Kafka makes no apologies for its seeming weakness:

". . .it is not a weakness to be ashamed of, merely something that appears as weakness only on this solid earth of ours" (1, p. 167). This story employs a style of which Kafka cannot apologize but also of which he cannot be too sure. Perhaps Kafka wishes to surrender himself to the abstracted abstract, not only in art but also within himself; and his son asks that if he cannot be Kafka's permanent companion, that he at least be allowed to be his final literary choice.

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CHAPTER IV

REALITY IN WONDERLAND

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland follows a little girl through several seemingly surrealistic adventures. The common term for this particular literary treatment is "night-journey," a comparatively comfortable term. But "night-journey" applies to phenomena occurring only within the main character's mind. An interesting alternative for a night journey reading is the consideration that the fantastic occurrences through which Alice travels are sectors of external reality. Alice's adventures can be seen, then, as not only internal mental manifestations, but also as real happenings in which a real little girl is immersed. And Alice can then be viewed as a representative of modern man who is forced to function in an uncomfortably real world.

Alice is a representative of men who have looked at their society and universe and formulated a kind of existential self-sufficiency; Alice is her own best critic and guiding friend:

She generally gave herself good advice (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her eyes; and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing

against herself, for this curious person was very fond of pretending to be two people (1, p. 23).

Such self-sufficiency seems not so voluntary as just in the nature of post-romantic man. Indeed, it would be much more comfortable if there were some degree of real human communion: Alice, in a sort of dramatic monologue, says,

"Who am I then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person I'll come up, if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else"--but oh dear! . . . I do wish they would put their heads down! I am so very tired of being all alone here (1, p. 27)!

And if loneliness is a consequence of nineteenth century discoveries, so is ceaseless labor; nineteenth century man dedicated himself to perpetual learning, but perpetuity is not necessarily comfort: Alice ponders, "Shall I never get any older than I am now? That'll be a comfort, one way--never to be an old woman--but then--always have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn't like that" (1, p. 40)! Further discomfort is brought on by the removal of long accepted absolutes; sudden learning can be devastating to a previous conception of self, and Alice's exposure to previously unheard-of realities is responsible for a disorientation which society must have faced in the presence of such previously unheard-of conceptions as Darwinism: Alice says:

Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is "Who in the world am I?" Ah, that's the great puzzle (1, p. 26).

But man tries somehow to adjust. Alice is continually striving to become the "right size," a size which she never really reaches, through the medium of food and drink. Perhaps this food and drink is equivalent to the stimulus and education which man consumes in order to be, in relation to his environment, the "right size." But in an environment of constantly fluctuating conditions, in which it seems "quite dull and stupid for life to go on in the common way"(1, p. 23), it is improbable that one size will long remain the "right size,"

When Alice falls down the rabbit hole, she has not only to contend with one reality (knowing previously of only one) but with several realities which require of her a certain degree of elasticity. And her adventures, fantastic as they are, are real: she sees a rabbit running and talking, and "when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it seemed quite natural (1, p. 17). . . ." And the foreignness of her adventures to her own conception of reality eventually demonstrates to Alice the possibility of not just one, sacrosanct, sub-reality, but of a continuum of comparable sub-realities: "For, you see, so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible"(1, p. 21). The separate adventures, then, are real, just as different languages, although not mutually intelligible, are real.

Each adventure constitutes a certain segment of reality which appears exotic to an unexposed, unsophisticated child. Alice meets a Mad Hatter whose watch keeps track of days instead of hours; she meets a pigeon who can see her only as a serpent; she meets a Duchess who considers it normal to nurse a pig and dodge pans thrown by the cook; and she meets a Mock Turtle who says that arithmetic consists of "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision" (1, p. 91). As Alice progresses, things become "curiouser and curiouser" (1, p. 24). She must make constant adjustments such as learning to hold a flamingo (for a croquet mallet); and things such as the caucus race which everybody-nobody wins, the mouse's tale which is printed in the shape of a tail, and the caterpillar's recognition of separate sides on a round mushroom tend to suggest an arbitrary quality in the realities of Wonderland. The realities which Alice finds are arbitrary, or perhaps more accurately, restricted, but they are no more arbitrary or restricted than the reality which exists in Alice's world. What are Victorian morals and social conduct if not arbitrary? Alice's own opinions are no less arbitrary or restricted than any of the creatures': her literary opinions amount to "what is the use of a book. . .without pictures or conversations" (1, p. 17)? She obeys certain rules: ". . .she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember

the simple rules their friends had taught them. . . ."
(1, pp. 21-1). And some of these rules are, "A red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long. . . . If you cut your finger very deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds. . . . If you drink much from a bottle marked poison, it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later" (1, p. 22). Reality, then, or narrow conceptions of reality, can appear to be negotiable and arbitrary.

But there is a certain degree of comfort (for modern man) in viewing reality from an ethnocentric stance, in seeing one particular reality as absolute, in refusing to acknowledge other conceptions of reality as feasible, in seeing other realities as being not quite as real as one given reality. For Alice a yearning for an absolute reality is exemplified in her yearning for Dinah, her cat. Dinah recalls for Alice the comfort of hearth and home and the stable reality which she knew before plunging down the rabbit's hole. Alice tells the first creatures (mice and birds) she sees, "Dinah's our cat. And she's such a capital one for catching mice, you can't think! And oh, I wish you could see her after the birds! Why she'll eat a bird as soon as look at it" (1, p. 36). And when the rabbit and other creatures threaten to burn a house down around her, she shouts, "If you do, I'll set Dinah at you" (1, p. 43)! But in following the rabbit into the hole Alice commits herself to a fairly open-minded quest, and an arbitrary decision (regardless of how comfortable) to view

just one reality as absolute is unacceptable: Alice says of Dinah, "Nobody seems to like her down here, and I'm sure she's the best cat in the world! Oh, my dear Dinah! I wonder if I shall ever see you any more" (1, p. 37)! If finding the true, inclusive (or perhaps exclusive) reality (or God) is the purpose of modern man's quest, then arbitrary resolution or faith is a hindrance.

If absolute reality does exist, then its discovery might return to man the comfort which his search caused him to lose. Absolute reality is possibly represented in Dodgson's book by the Cheshire Cat, and what better foil than a cat for a Cat? The Cheshire Cat appears and disappears at will; he can be seen only in glimpses (somewhat like Dostoevsky's perfect harmony of a man with the universe which is only rarely experienced), and in his conversation with Alice he refuses to consider the condition of "oughtness": he sees Alice's movements simply as manifestations of her whims. And the seemingly foolish logic in which he indulges gives the impression of being a grinning, tongue-in-cheek parody. But the Cheshire Cat represents Reality not so much in what he says; he is more clearly seen in the reactions which man has to him. When the Cat appears at the Queen's croquet match, he causes a general uproar. He chooses to only show his head (whatever that indicates), and this strange occurrence creates certain problems in logic for the King and Queen, the executioner, and Alice. Even though they are all at the

moment co-existing with one reality, Alice and the card characters cannot agree on how to deal with the Cat:

The executioner's argument was, that you couldn't cut off a head unless there was a body to cut it from: that he had never to do such a thing before, and he wasn't going to begin at his time of life.

The King's argument was that anything that had a head could be beheaded, and that you weren't to talk nonsense.

The Queen's argument was that, if something wasn't done about it in less than no time, she'd have everybody executed, all around.

Alice could think of nothing to say but "It belongs to the Duchess: you'd better ask her about it" (1, pp. 82-3).

With all their arguing and logic Alice and the cards still say nothing of the condition of the cat, and in answer to their arguments the Cat just leaves:

The Cat's head began fading away the moment he [the executioner] was gone, and, by the time he had come back with the Duchess, it had disappeared: so the King and the executioner ran wildly up and down looking for it, while the rest of the party went back to the game (1, p. 83).

The cards are so interested in their game of croquet that they soon forget about the Cat, but further efforts to fathom Reality might have been futile, anyway. Just as art to Wilde has nothing necessarily to do with external "truth," logic to Dodgson has nothing to do with absolute Reality. Reason is the tool of playing cards who call each other by numbers (much as men of the twentieth century tend to do). These cards are monochromatic, two dimensional creatures of whom Alice says, "Why, they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them" (1, p. 77). And even Alice

"reasons" that if a mouse does not speak English, then it logically follows that it must speak French. Man uses logic, and for that reason he cannot see Reality; Reality prevails in spite of logic. Logic and Reality function separately, and for that reason logic is inadequate for the discovery of Truth.

Alice never lays hands on Reality, but she at least gains some insight regarding sub-realities (or at least the reader does). The Wonderland from which she awakes is neither more nor less real than her native countryside in which

the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells, and the Queen's shrill cries to the voice of the shepherdboy--and the sneeze of the baby, the shriek of the Gryphon, and all the other queer noises, would change (she knew) to the confused clamour of the busy farm-yard--while the lowing of the cattle in the distance would take the place of the Mock Turtle's heavy sobs (1, pp. 115-16).

But Dodgson is not totally pessimistic about the outcome of the search for an absolute Reality, and a certain open-ended hope is voiced by a fish to a snail in the Mock Turtle's song:

"What matters it how far we go?" his scaly friend replied,
 "There is another shore, you know, upon the other side.
 The further off from England the nearer is to France--
 Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join
 the dance" (1, p. 95).

The novel's three main characters are Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton, and Dorian Gray. These as well as other characters vary in importance depending on their relationships to art. Basil paints Dorian, and Dorian sits and listens while Henry gives advice. Basil is easily recognizable as an artist because he produces a beautiful picture. The relationship which Dorian and Henry have with art is somewhat more difficult to see, and considering Wilde's frequent use of verbal equations, the relative functions of Dorian, Henry, and Basil can be expressed by an algebraic formula: Dorian is to Basil as Henry is to Dorian. Dorian is a model whose face and bearing inspire Basil and allow him to transfer his soul to canvas. Henry initially provides ideas (inspiration) which allow Dorian to make his life an art form: ". . .he [Henry] would try to be to Dorian Gray what, without knowing it, the lad was to the painter who had fashioned the wonderful portrait"(1, p. 52). But there is an important fact which Wilde says must be understood: although an inspiring model is needed to initiate a soul transfer, the artist is more important than the model. Basil says that "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas reveals himself"(1, p. 23). Just as the mother is more directly involved with the birth of the hero than is the father (although he is necessary), the artist is more directly

CHAPTER V

ART AS HERO

The nineteenth century supposedly witnessed the demise of several formerly revered institutions. If one of these institutions was the classical hero, then the Victorian author was forced to alter his conception of the hero or find a phenomenon which would comfortably fit into the void left by the dead hero. Oscar Wilde in his novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, chose the latter alternative, and when the classical hero disappeared, Wilde was ready with the hero's new-born successor, Art. In most novels the hero (or anti-hero), regardless of his degree of heroicness, is the character who is most thoroughly studied, and the character (entity) most studied in Wilde's novel is art.

Art to Wilde implies "soul"(1, p. 23), a term which he never tries to define, possibly because "to define is to limit"(1, p. 207). But whatever its definition, "soul" is used repeatedly throughout the novel and is always used in relation to art. If Wilde's conception of art is to be defined, then, art is the transfer of the soul to a medium, and this transfer is performed to varying degrees by the characters of the novel.

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involved with the birth of art than is the model. For this reason Basil has a place of relative honor because he produces art, and so Dorian also has a place of honor because he produces art in the form of a life style: Wilde comments that "now and then a complex personality took the place and assumed the office of art, was indeed, in its way, a real work of art, life having its elaborate masterpieces, just as poetry has, or painting"(1, p. 72). Henry is less important because while he provides inspiration, he produces no art. Because Basil and Dorian believe in and (the reader is led to believe) have souls they can be artists; because Henry does not believe in souls and has none, he is incapable of producing art.

It is relatively simple to see how a painter produces his form of art. The painted canvas is an obvious testament to the painter's effort. A work of art in the form of a life is less graphic but is nonetheless, according to Wilde, art. After witnessing several years of Dorian's evil, Henry says to him, "Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets"(1, p. 227). The Victorian reader might consider an evil life a dubious and at best undidactic art form, but art to Wilde is neither moral nor immoral, and it is non-pragmatic; it does not have to advocate or teach anything; it can be an end in itself, and of Dorian's life Wilde says, "It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly, yet it was never to sacrifice

of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be" (1, p. 143). Morality is a tool of the artist, and the act of producing art is the only accomplishment of salvation the artist needs.

Dorian and Basil are artists, but they are not heroes; they are still important because they produce art, but art is still the hero. Henry says that artists "exist simply in what they make, and consequently are perfectly uninteresting in what they are" (1, p. 71). When Basil is killed his body is referred to as simply a "thing" (1, p. 171), and his disintegration in chemicals implies the ultimate unimportance of his body when separated from his soul (his art). And Dorian is seen by Basil as less real than his portrait: when asked whether he will go to the theater with Doraism or stay with the portrait, Basil prefers to stay with the portrait, with what he calls "the real Dorian" (1, p. 45). Wilde even goes as far as to imply that art can function as a kind of messiah: Henry says,

. . . I believe that if one man were to live out his life and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream--I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of mediævalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal--to something finer, richer than the Hellenic ideal, it may be (1, p. 35).

Art is given by Wilde the attributes of the old style hero, and the character who interacts with the other characters while keeping the central focus of glory and attention on himself is not Dorian, or Basil, or Henry, but Art.

When Dorian falls in love with Sybil Vane, he falls in love not with the person but with her art. He tells his friends of all her magnificent roles, and when asked when she is simply Sybil Vane, he replies, "Never" (1, p. 69). Dorian scolds Henry for never telling him "that the only thing worth loving is an actress" (1, p. 67). Dorian's entire attention is directed toward Sybil's art; he even wants to buy her from the Jewish theater owner just as he would an art object. What would seem a fantasy on Dorian's part is a real love affair, but not with a woman; Dorian addresses himself only to Sybil's art. When he says, "I left her in the forest of Arden; I shall find her in an orchard in Verona" (1, p. 91), he is to be taken seriously. Dorian lives in awe of Sybil's acting ability, but when she loses it (purposely) she loses the only thing that has attracted Dorian, and he tells her, "Without your art, you are nothing" (1, p. 101). Dorian's relationship to Sybil is that of actor to actress on a stage; after her death he reflects on their affair: "It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded" (1, p. 114). Sybil gives up acting because of her imagined love for Dorian, but the unselfish gesture she makes in giving up her life's art for Dorian's love is ironic: she has in fact never loved Dorian but only his art: he says, "She regarded me merely as a person in a play" (1, p. 69). To give up art for any reason is to give up life.

Art in Wilde's novel is a vengeful hero whose wrath is experienced by anyone who has known and then forsaken him. When Basil looks upon the grotesque picture of Dorian, he renounces his art and is immediately struck down. When art leaves, Basil dies and becomes simply a "thing." When Sybil renounces her art, she also loses Dorian's art, and she dies (of suicide). And when Dorian finally becomes horrified at the thought of polluting a young girl, he renounces his art-life and dies (while trying to murder his own picture). Without art man is nothing and might as well be dead. The artist gives his soul to an art form, and when he renounces his art, he loses his soul. Perhaps the deaths of Basil, Sybil, and Dorian symbolize what Wilde considers a problem with his world: the loss of art (soul) is the loss of direction or meaning and rationale and the consequent loss of self. Art, then, becomes a hero that saves man from the nothingness which is offered by seemingly authoritative iconoclastic revelations. Perhaps Wilde is even a well camouflaged reactionary (but only aesthetically). Art has the power to freeze a moment in time and space. Like the Grecian urn it can be praised for no other reason than "it will never alter" (1, p. 45). Men are weak because they change; that is, they are powerless to remain stationary in time and space, and Wilde has a certain respect for men who have at least partially frozen their lives in a certain time: Henry says, "A bishop keeps on saying at the age of

eighty what he was told to say when he was a boy of eighteen, and as a natural consequence he always looks absolutely delightful" (1, p. 21). And of Henry's uncle, Lord Fermor (perhaps a homonym for firmer), Wilde says, "His principles were out of date, but there was a good deal to be said for his prejudices" (1, p. 48). Art can be worshipped by people like Keats and Wilde because, unlike men, art never changes. If art does change, as does Dorian's picture, then it becomes corrupt; it becomes, like man, non-heroic.

But regardless of its possible weaknesses, art does, for Wilde anyway, fill the vacuum left by the death of the classical hero, and the birth of this aesthetic conception was spawned by a great need. The Victorian world was ugly to Wilde perhaps because all its discoveries caused man to lose his soul, and this loss is tragic: "The harmony of soul and body- -how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void" (1, p. 28). If Art can convince disillusioned, modern man that he has a soul by reflecting that soul, then perhaps Art can be seen as a modern day quester who can return a lost fertility to a waste land.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

"Tristan"

Art is not what it describes. Art is one thing; the thing that generates it, regardless of similarity, is another. A man named A. C. Kloterjahn becomes, through the imagination of Detlev Spinell, "a plebeian gourmand, a peasant with taste" (2, p. 352). A baby who has hardly had time to form any motives becomes a threat, "a well-fed, trading, tax-paying citizen; a capable philistine pillar of society; in any case, a tone-deaf normally functioning individual, responsible, sturdy, and stupid, troubled by no doubt" (2, p. 353). And a pianistic rendering of an operatic score becomes a sort of prose-poem:

What was it dying away in the distance--the ring of a horn? The rustle of leaves? The rippling of a brook? Silence and night crept up over grove and house; the power of longing had full sway, no prayers or warnings could avail against it. The holy mystery was consummated. The light was quenched; with a strange clouding of the timbre the death-motif sank down: white-veiled desire, by passion driven, fluttered towards love as through the dark it groped to meet her (2, pp. 344-45).

Physical phenomena mean nothing. Notes of music mean nothing (or whatever the listener wishes). A description of notes, although open to interpretation, means nothing. It is

a realized abstract, which assumes separate identity, of which Poe says, "Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth" (4, p. 161). Criticism means nothing. Criticism is not what it describes and is therefore free to exist in any degree of abstraction. Criticism is restricted, then, only to the extent that it in some way utilizes art as a subject.

Musical criticism uses music and literary criticism uses literature, and one is perhaps not extremely different from the other. Each discusses art; each is separate and not accountable to the thing it discusses; each, by virtue of being constructed from words, is literature; and the art forms on which critical forms are dependent for subject matter have extreme potentialities for sophistication. Charles Dodgson is perhaps thinking of literature in relation to other forms when he says through his Red Queen, "I've seen gardens, compared with which this would be a wilderness" (1, p. 142).

But Oscar Wilde is perhaps somewhat more optimistic:

Words! Mere Words! How terrible they were ! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give plastic form to formless things, and to have music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere Words! Was there anything as real as words (5, p. 36)?

Words are physical entities with the ability to generate metaphysical notions which, if in turn are translated into

more words, produce not truth, but further physical art:

Walter Pater says, "In its primary aspect, a great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow for a few moments on the wall or floor: is itself, in truth, a space of such fallen light (3, p. 94)

. . . ." If artists can come to view literature as a physical manifestation, subject more to the laws of the universe than to any metaphysical rulings, perhaps the manipulation (inspired or otherwise) of words can be regarded like music, as a plastic art.

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