

LITERARY THEORY IN DEPTH



colin john holcombe

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Volume I: Text and References

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CONTENTS

1. Brief History of Literary Theory	4
2. Literary Theory in Action: The Great Gatsby	21
3. Theory in Context	38
4. Findings of Aesthetics	57
5. Art as Autonomous Aesthetic Objects	70
6. Art as Non-Autonomous Objects	83
7. Barthes	89
8. Derrida	94
9. Foucault	104
10. Bakhtin	108
11. Art as Emotive Expression	113
12. Nineteenth Century Philosophers	123
13. Kant	133
14. Hegel	142
15. Existentialism	147
16. Nietzsche	156
17. Heidegger	160
18. Hermeneutics	169
19. Freud	179
20. Jung	187
21. Lacan	191
22. Experimental Psychology	197
23. Brain Functioning	207
24. Metaphor Theory	248
25. Biological Models	261
26. Sociological Perspectives	276
27. Faithful Representation	311
28. Representation in Analytical Philosophy	318
29. Theories of Meaning	326
30. Davidson's Theory of Meaning	341

31. Theories of Truth	348
32. Truth in Logic	357
33. Mathematical Truth	365
34. Truth in Science	376
35. Myth of Science	385
36. The New Science	395
37. Linguistics	405
38. Formalists	416
39. Chomskian Linguistics	425
40. Art as a Purposeful Activity	431
41. Marxist Views	440
42. Religious Perspectives	455
43. Feminism	467
44. Post-Colonial Studies	473
45. Theory at War	491
46. Marketing Theory	540
Index	560

PREFACE

'Literary Theory *in Context*' might be an alternative title for this small update of my 2016 'Background to Critical Theory'. Again I have tried to make literary theory as simple as possible, but also provide the larger context to assess literary theory, not as a freestanding subject, but as one theme among many in the tapestry of ideas that we call European philosophy. Unless we know something of contemporary concepts of brain functioning, for example, we shall not realize how limiting and outdated is Freudian psychiatric theory. Similarly for the Postmodernist claim that reality is largely created by words: modern theories of language and reference make this a very doubtful proposition. Or, more exactly, accepting this notion leads to more serious problems elsewhere. Nothing in philosophy is straightforward, of course, and if literary theory grows more tangled as we delve into it, so do other branches of human understanding, even science, logic and mathematics. That consideration should at least give us some humility in probing the foundations of literary judgement.

Few doubt that good literature is broader than the university syllabus, however, and that if aspects, say, of Foucault's theories can be found in contemporary crime fiction, then recognition surely enriches our enjoyment of both. Much of the argument against literary theory in the 1980s and 90s has therefore disappeared, and today's theorizing takes its place among more conventional studies, which it has made more exciting, relevant and far ranging.

But the need for an objective, exterior truth has not disappeared. The lenses contemporary theory brings to bear on literature — political coercion, feminism, post-colonial

issues and the like — do need some independent veracity if their conclusions are also to be true. We could, for example, examine texts simply for numerological patterns, but the results would not have a currency beyond occult studies. All conclusions would have to be prefaced by ‘to the extent you go along with such notions . . .’ Unlike many university texts, this book does critically evaluate the leading schools of literary theory, therefore, which are not valid simply because they enable us to say many interesting and perhaps true things about the works under study. There are larger requirements.

I deal with the issue more in Chapter Three, where I also suggest more fruitful approaches to literature. Here in this Preface I am explaining why so much of the ‘Background to Critical Theory’ is retained in the present volume. Updated sections on brain functioning (23) and the social theories of literature, (26) and add a little political economy (26, 45), social history (44) and marketing theory (46) all appear because proper evaluation of these and other matters is arguably (45) more needed than ever.

I have largely kept the varied citation employed on the originating website, and students may wish to use the standard methods when quoting references. Similarly with the supplementary Internet references, which, in the interests of a manageable size for this publication, I have hived off as a separate ebook. Dead links have been removed, but I have not have updated the references much, as this becomes a never-ending task. Most of the Internet material should still be useful, however, and readers can make additional searches once alerted to relevant topics.

A collection of multiple but interrelated perspectives is not easily organised. Shaping about a central theme is scarcely

possible, and would anyway reduce what the reader is entitled know. I have therefore grouped the material into 46 fairly self-contained chapters. Each chapter is subdivided into sections numbered sequentially for easy reading. The chapters are constructed from the source material listed in the *References* section and shown in braces in the text, e.g. {12}. Quite different are the curved brackets — e.g. (12.2) — which (in place of hyperlinks, which may not work on some 7" tablets) — are cross-references to the same material explained more fully elsewhere, or from different perspectives. Thus the difficult and rather technical section on Davidson's theory of truth — chapter 30 — is introduced by a summary in section 29.6, for example, where the reference (30) appears.

I have tried to provide a clear and balanced account of matters that form the bedrock of literary theory, without evading proper assessment or obscuring the fundamental disagreements between authorities. Rather than blend viewpoints into a general perspective, I have generally thought it better to let the disagreements stand, though sometimes adding an explanation. The section on literature as money (26.6), for example, includes a critique of Marx from a mainstream, slightly-right-of-centre political perspective, while the 19th century social history of Britain (45.15) is based on A.L. Morton's Marxist account. With a similar aim, a summary of Matt Ridley's optimistic neo-liberal outlook on the world (26.6) is preceded by nine references to authors who have much darker view of mankind's future. Chapter 2 presents literary theory in action, and Chapter 3, by looking at relativism, introduces the more technical and philosophical aspects of the book.

A few topics are treated in some detail to help the researcher in specialist areas — logic, brain functioning, Islamic studies

and political economy — but even these are only notes and summaries, i.e. pointers to extensive fields of study that will only come alive and seem persuasive if readers take the time to follow up the references and read further in books and web pages.

Literary theory, as I see it, should be a liberating experience, an adventure in the tapestry of ideas that constitute western thought. Rather than simply replace conservative views with more radical ones, as some works on literary theory attempt, the subject should make us more questioning of *all* views, outlooks and literary policies.

But also question them intelligently and responsibly. Intellectual views are often the product of social issues, which naturally come and go with the generations, but it is also the case that our most fundamental beliefs and values arise from customs that we humans have found essential if we are to live happily and cooperatively together. They are founded not on logic but experience. As Bertrand Russell once wryly remarked, philosophy is apt to start by questioning what no one could sensibly doubt and end by asserting what no one could possibly believe. Some restraint and common sense is needed in all areas of thought.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. What is Literary Theory?

Theory tries to make evaluation more meaningful by examining the assumptions and values that underlie the practice of critical reading. We ask not simply how good or otherwise is the literary work, but what the text fundamentally means, and from what point of view. Did it always have that meaning, even centuries ago when it was written for a different audience? Can we find larger and more far-reaching meanings in the work, perhaps even unknown to its author?

But why ask such questions? Can something so abstract be relevant to the rough and tumble of everyday life? Yes, says literary theory, because everything we write or say, even our everyday conversation or the newspaper article we skim, has some unexamined attitude or argument threaded into it. At their most basic, sentences are ruled by grammar, which is a school-based discipline we must adopt to make proper sense of the text. Sentences also assume codes of behaviour: what we say in the witness box, or craft into the terms of a contract, is very different from the yarn we spin for friends. And even words themselves have expectations, tacit assumptions and histories of usage. 'First loosen crew-retaining devices A and B,' says the workshop manual. 'Our very democracy is at stake,' says the politician. Words are being used precisely or imprecisely for different purposes.

Words are the currency of the academic world, and it is the academic world that has primarily embraced literary theory, probably for two reasons. First is academia's need for new fields of study, enlarging its status and earning power. After its shaky start in the early decades of the twentieth century, the study of English literature could have applied Formalist and other approaches to plays, novels and poetry, but the findings were not secure, particularly in areas like prosody, where authorities disagreed on readings and were hampered

by lack of sound theory. The New Criticism subsequently came to the fore, but it too ran out of new things to say on the comparatively restricted canon of English literature, being not so ardently pursued after the 1970s. Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Pound and Eliot, the Modernists, the Postmodernists . . . all these were studied, and still are, but the papers were often retouchings of subjects whose importance had been outlined long before.

Literary theory therefore came as a godsend. It was taxing, requiring undergraduates to write and think deeply on what they had hitherto accepted as self-evident. It liberated students from more parochial fields of Elizabethan theatre, Romantic poetry, etc. and required them to read widely in European thought and philosophy. It overturned accepted standards and could help broaden the English canon. And, finally, it brought an end to the Edwardian idea of English Literature as genial essays in connoisseurship that could be enjoyed by the public at large. Literary theory was a severely academic field, and was conducted in a strictly academic manner.

Literary theory — the second reason for its success — could also be used to invigorate social studies into communities disadvantaged by race or gender differences. Social economists might study the bald facts of spending power, living conditions or educational attainments, but literary theory was much more subtle. It made us read English literature in a new way, creating fresh insights into works that were comfortably part of the English canon. Literary critics had always been conscious of class differences in Jane Austen's novels, but now one could explore the buried assumptions in a land and plantation-owning group — how they obtained and held on to that power, to what extent that was maintained in novels and poetry. The stress shifted from literary matters to deeper issues, which contemporary writing also explores.

1.2. A Brief History of Literary Theory

The above paragraphs notwithstanding, literary theory is not a unified, all-embracing theory but a complex assemblage of ideas reflecting a long history of enquiry. Leaving aside the classical world, and many European thinkers, whose suggestions are still valuable, Victorian literature in the person of Thomas Arnold (1822-88) saw itself threatened by the crass materialism of a money-oriented middle class, and therefore championed poetry, which Arnold felt would come to replace religion. Poetry expressed a salutary attitude towards life, a 'freedom from fanaticism', a 'delicacy of perception' and a 'disinterested play of consciousness'. Admirable attitudes, but did this sympathetic and self-effacing contemplation of the world in all its variety, which Arnold saw exemplified above all in ancient Greece, really apply to the great majority of the hard, workaday lives in Victorian England? Arnold had the benefits of a classical education, and such high-minded ideals were scarcely possible without an independent income. Indeed, while we could recognise the 'aerial ease, clearness, and radiancy' of Hellenic art, we should also not forget how treacherous and blood-soaked could be everyday life in the Greek states.

Such approaches were purely theoretical, moreover. No one had ever demonstrated that reading good literature made us better people. Nor what exactly made for good literature. That last was the concern of the *The New Criticism* founded by I.A. Richards, which undertook a technical audit of the work in question, usually a lyric poem, identifying what worked, what didn't and why. Ostensibly, that was also the aim of T.S. Eliot's essays in the 1920s, to identify 'the best that has been thought and said in the world', but Eliot himself practised little close reading, and tended to champion the schools of modern writing to which he belonged. His own work was dry and impersonal, moreover, somewhat

anguished and drawing on the troubled world of late 19th century French poets for its themes and imagery.

Eliot indeed had his own nostalgia for a vanished excellence in the Metaphysical Poets, after which writers suffered a 'dissociation of sensibility' where intellect and emotion had gone their separate ways. Had they? That was never demonstrated, though the term 'organic unity' was popular for generations. Nonetheless, poetry was still seen 'as the storehouse of recorded values', and the canon of good books dominated English literature in the 1920-70 period, when it fused with the 'essential reading' of academic courses. Literary criticism of the novel, too, came into its own with F.R. Leavis, whose evaluations included a strong emphasis on life-giving meaning. Good novelists exhibited a 'vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity'. A similar approach was applied to the theatre, most notably the plays of Shakespeare.

Initially, the New Critics were concerned with the relationship between poetic form and poetic meaning, and not with the emotion generated by the poem. Nor with truth, it must be said. Whether the poet was truly in love when he poured out his despairing longings was irrelevant: the focus was on the text, what the plain words said, independent of place, time, author and intention. A key concern came to be 'literariness'; the way literature was different from other, more utilitarian forms of writing. Literature defamiliarized language, it was claimed, enabling the writer to depict the world in his or her own way. There were two schools of formalism, both originating in revolutionary Russia: one suffering under Stalinism as it stayed in Russia, (38.1) and the other moving to Prague (38.4) and thence to the west. Both studied the devices that poetry (and to some extent novels and fairy

tales) employed to distance itself from everyday reportage, devices like rhyme, stanza shaping, metaphor and symbols. Poetry is not treasured because it expresses time-honoured truths or depths of meaning, therefore, but because of the skilled and extensive way it deploys such devices. Poetry, and all art forms to some extent, are artificial, and certainly not a 'slice of life'.

Novels were not poetry, of course: the imagery is much pruned back and rhyme absent. Boris Tomashevsky (1890-1957) therefore introduced a distinction between the straightforward narrative (fabula) and how that narrative is presented (syuzhet) with all its contrived dialogue, purposeful characterisation, and needful plot. Somewhat similar was Alexander Propp's (1895-1970) analysis of folktales, though here the fabula applied, with different actors and factors added to help the story along. Actors (hero, villain, false princess, etc) were quite limited in number, but there were 31 different functions (happy ending, punishment of villain, etc.) Functions caused things to happen, and so constituted a hidden structure — something that would become important 30 years later.

Did literary excellence depend entirely on the extent such defamiliarization devices were employed? Clearly not, as the literary work entirely composed of such devices would be unintelligible. Literary works were a mixture of everyday language and devices, and it was *how* those devices operated in the larger context — everyday language, devices, and readers' expectations — that was important. A concluding flourish could be expected in a literary essay, for example, but not a legal document. Creative literature in particular evolved, moreover, and what was striking in theme or expression in one generation had become passé in the next. That evolution could be studied through selective use

of defamiliarizing devices, but literature, even the most self-centred lyric, was also seen to reflect larger concerns. Literature was not wholly autonomous, sealed off from the outside world. Nor did the various devices operate in isolation, in ignorance of other devices and the aims of the writing as a whole. What had seemed intriguingly simple was now becoming immensely complex.

Some simplifying principles were clearly needed. One was the concept of dominance. Though literature applied primarily to itself, as a self-referencing whole, it was given shape and order by certain elements, everyday words and devices that pointed to the outside world. The Prague group of formalists also recognised 'foregrounding', (38.5) by which certain words were given prominence in the text and others pushed into obscurity, a theme that would be later taken up by deconstruction. Roman Jakobson took matters further by claiming poetry projected the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination, a complex way of arguing that poetry has greater freedom of word choice — which is often true but not a defining feature. (37.2)

Meanwhile, under the French theoreticians, but originating from notes left by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), language had become a self-contained system of signs. (38) How languages had diverged from Latin into French, Spanish, Flemish, etc was well known historically, but the underlying reasons were obscure. Saussure's approach was to sidestep such questions and simply look at how languages operate today. Words, he claimed, derive their meaning from the part they play in a whole system of signs, not by reference to the outside world, either directly through sense impressions or via mental operations. To repeat: there were the signified (what the words pointed to: the actual sky, tree, cloud, etc.) and the signifier (the words themselves: 'sky', 'tree', 'cloud', etc.) — and nothing else

beyond grammar and social habit. New words appear as needed, but only as the system allows them, i.e. by being *different* from pre-existing words. Immense philosophical problems attend this happy conjecture (which this book goes into) but the approach, sometimes called linguistic determinism, allowed literary theorists to argue that words are the prime reality, or even the only reality.

This seeming innocuous proposition underlay the French *structuralism* of the 1960s and 1970s, and the reaction in *post-structuralism*, which is still with us. To the first belongs the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss. (6.3) All objects and rituals in primitive peoples constitute a sign, he claimed, and one which drew its meaning from its relationship to other signs, a vast, largely hidden structure of binary opposites: man-woman, sky-earth, right-wrong, etc. So arose the myths and native beliefs that seemed strange to us: that human beings have a kinship with the non-living world, for example, or that the tribe was specifically related to animals or birds.

That the structure of language was the carrier of meaning, not how the outside world was constituted, or the intention of authors, also featured in the work of Roland Barthes (1915-80). Texts wrote themselves, i.e. were beyond the control of their author, and many aspects of contemporary life are better understood through this cultural symbolism, or semiotics as it came to be called. (7) Terms of address, clothes and social habits — all had an underlying structure. Michel Foucault also wrote with great brio and belligerence on power, its hidden workings in the state, in sexual norms, in normality and even academic discourse. (9) Society's attitude to lepers and plague victims, for example, which was to keep them isolated and under constant supervision, had parallels in the contemporary treatment of political

dissidents, and indeed ourselves under surveillance of the modern state.

More literature-orientated was the work of Tzvetan Todorov (38) on the structure of narrative (*The Grammar of the Decameron*) and of Claude Bremond where he distinguished three phases all stories, books and films. First was virtuality, which simply set up the possibility of action. Then came actualisation where various additions will set the narrative in motion, though often in an oblique manner. And third was realization, where the expected dénouement arrived, or did not arrive. Most courses in novel writing will set out something similar, but Bremond applied the approach much more generally. Narration itself became a topic of interest, from Wayne Booth's (40.3) *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) to the much more theoretical Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1972/80), which looked at multiple points of view, both visible and interior to the text.

Jacques Derrida, (8) though writing around the same time as the French structuralists, was a post-structuralist writer. He became famous for deconstruction, an analysis of texts that shows us where writer has chosen one word in preference to others of similar meaning, suppressing or hiding these from us — either deliberately, or by thoughtless immersion in the suppositions of his time. Whence comes the author's authority to make this choice? Not from any conception of 'what he meant', as this has no existence outside words. Nor from any unvoiced, inner intention, which is again without any final determinant of meaning, being just the product of repeated suppressions of other thoughts. The double bind is complete. There is no underlying structure to our literary creations, nor an end to that creation and interpretation. All we can do is point to their workings.

But Derrida's attack went even deeper. Knowledge, identity, truth, meaning — all the great concepts of western thought — achieve their status by delaying or repressing other elements in their derivation. Not only do they push themselves forward as self-sufficient, giving themselves a presence that doesn't exist outside philosophic discourse, but they replace other usages. Hence Derrida's verbal acrobatics — puns, quibbles, equivocations, neologisms, subterfuges, conflation, allusions and playful digressions — masterful or tedious according to viewpoint — all focusing attention on what Derrida claimed is everywhere important in language: its opacity to the world beyond itself and an astonishing fecundity in its own creation.

In that more general setting, the political and social setting of literature also became a study in its own right. Marxist criticism makes social class and economic relations central to literary analysis. It was not man's consciousness that defined his nature, argued Karl Marx (1818-83), but his social position in the exploitative system of capitalism. Our understandings of law, religion, philosophy and the arts were not only coloured by capitalism, but also often served as fig leaves for a system that necessarily sets one class against another. It's true, of course, that communist systems have not been a success, but they were parodies of Marx's hopes, often more repressive than the capitalist systems he denounced. And where they have been successful, as in communist China, party control has been leavened by private enterprise.

The overarching belief of communism is that work as organised today alienates man from his better nature, and that literature has a role in correcting matters. (41) By that light, much of western literature is simply entertainment, a diversion from realities, which makes the earnest moralising

in Solzhenitsyn's novels, for example, not a stylistic flaw but a continuation of the great 19th century Russian belief in man's common humanity. Citizens of western societies may well believe themselves free, moreover, or more free than their counterparts in China or Russia, but that freedom can be illusory, an ideology that is constantly being reinforced by the western media. The need to put bread on the table, survive downsizing in the workplace, repay loans for education, car and house, bring up children and provide for old age keeps all but the wealthiest toiling at their work bench. Communist critics of *Middlemarch*, *Jane Eyre* and other 19th century novels have likewise found no difficulty in questioning their heroine's apparent freedoms.

Feminist theory marks out similar ground for gender studies, most notably the way women have been marginalized, not only in the socio-economic areas of home and work, but in literature. (43) Women have a distinctive voice, or more exactly, voices, as feminine characters and outlooks are as varied as men's. But what of women in such popular fiction as Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*? In Catherine Belsey's reading, they are largely invisible, opaque and mysterious. They do not have a voice of their own, and certainly not that plurality of voices that Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) regarded as natural and spontaneous. Poetry did have a unity of style, but novels, in narrative and dialogue, spoke a strange hybrid artificially composed to give some artistic unity. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) found men's attitudes in 'progressive' writers like D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller, celebrated for their frank portrayal of sex, were far from satisfactory, being too often exploitative, repressive and denigrating. Many attitudes in later fiction (and advertising) were socially constructed stereotypes, moreover: the dangerous seductress, the pouting innocent, the self-sacrificing helpmate, and so on. The barriers women writers faced in overcoming those stereotypes, and having

their own writings published, became much more challenging when those women were not Caucasian, but Black or Hispanic.

Those disadvantages were also apparent in the field of post-colonial studies, where writers in newly independent countries found themselves not only using the language of their colonial oppressors, but the same European publishing houses. (44) How is an authentic voice achieved that is not complicit with past injustices and demeaning outlooks? No doubt Foucault's criticisms of the insidious power of institutions were overdone — they hardly inhibited his own career — but the world of sex was certainly under strange taboos. The classical world cared very little about how citizens used their private parts, and indeed a good deal of Greek and Roman literature is openly homosexual. There is also a good deal of the bawdy in Shakespeare and other Renaissance writers, but not in Victorian literature. With a worldwide empire came a need to keep up standards, aided by a muscular Christianity and a host of reforming movements. Was this not hypocritical or even dangerous? Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) had shown how pervasive was the sex drive, (19) and literary theorists like Jacques Lacan (1901-81) suggested that the unconscious was structured like a language, (21) thereby giving a key role to semiotics and dissolving the usual boundaries between the rational and irrational. To novelists wanting a more fluid representation of life, and to literary theorists escaping compartmentalized thinking, Freud and Lacan were especially attractive, as to postmodernism generally. How these notions contrast with modern views of brain activity is covered later in this book.

Postmodernism, then, was a sprawling concept of varying beliefs and affiliations, championing the local and particular

against past generalisations, which it termed meta-narratives. (5.9) In Francois Lyotard's *La Condition Moderne* (1979) and the work of Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), the contemporary world was seen as threatening but also hyperreal, i.e. real to the parties concerned but also unreal in the sense that the surrounding world was no longer real. To many readers of the time, those depictions seemed far-fetched, but their dystopian visions have become more plausible as individual freedoms have been rolled back with the cooperation of big business, science, media and government in the war on terror, on covid, and the like. (26.2)

Art has a habit of anticipating nature, and postmodernist views appear early in literature. Contemporary poetry rarely deals with 'the human interest angle' of traditional work, which it has relegated to amateur poetry, but does adopt a neutral and prose-like attitude in questioning the minutiae of everyday existence. Serious fiction also occupies shadow worlds where everyday attitudes are suspended or challenged. The real and the fictional are interwoven, and well-known stories and genres are recast into flat and fragmentary narratives that do not 'close', i.e. do not have a single ending.

1.3. Assessment

Several points should be made.

1. Literary theory, the approaches and parent philosophies by which we evaluate literature, has practical limits. English departments and writing schools generally provide their students with a theoretical background to their future labours. But once exams are over, most students happily

dispense with theory and take to the practical application of what has been taught them, i.e. the craft that will earn them standing in their community and a modest (usually very modest) income. Good writers are intuitive creatures, and they come to know instinctively when something has to be recast, shortened or bolstered with argument. Theory is there to help them should they need it, but its wider reaches and philosophical implications are not generally of interest.

2. Theory does not deal with absolutes but with ideas, interpretations, speculations, and elusive chains of thought. Those who write 'now Derrida has shown that . . .' or 'with our better understanding of post-colonial issues . . .' are laying claim to what does not exist in the everyday sense of the word. These are philosophical positions, with insights and modes of argument. It is perfectly possible to believe that the senses consistently deceive us, for example, and to argue that this world is a delusion. And that position, respectable and with a long history behind it, brings certain consequences that philosophy explores. But the issues remain speculative, and expounding Berkeley's theories to the magistrate's bench will not get us off a speeding fine. Much in life is conducted by shared values, tacit assumptions, unsupported codes of behaviour, and these are only dug up and examined when the unexpected happens.

The progressive arts do wish to be challenging, of course, free to represent the world in their own way. Sometimes their explorations are guided by theory, or by deductions from current theory, but more usually the theory acts in a consulting or supporting role. To explain themselves, obtain employment and get their work sold, their protagonists extract what they can from notions and fashionable opinions that float round the art world. The result may be a patchwork

of inconsistent ideas imperfectly understood, but critics, gallery owners and writers of concert notes ask for these viewpoints, and artists find it comforting to have them.

3. Many twentieth-century movements boil down to very dubious notions, as they have over the centuries. Poets issue statements which are vague, wildly inconsistent and hardly followed through. Manifestos urge crusades to claim aesthetic new ground, which exists only through their own misunderstandings. Critics announce new associations of poets, who themselves deny such a movement exists. More vexing still is radical theory. Even if largely a tangled mass of assertions and misunderstandings of technicalities, it is still necessary reading. For all its deficiencies, theory can focus attention on what writers should be trying to do, act as a prophylactic against the false and stultifying, and open up disciplines that support writing and are fascinating in their own right. As simple introductions, I hope these pages will help readers navigate contested waters and select the areas most useful to them.

4. Is there now a generally correct theory of literature? No. Is there a body of thought that is broadly accepted? Far from it: the scene is a battlefield of opinions and assertions, with little supporting thought or experiment.

What then? First we shall find that matters are not much better in other disciplines, though the battle is more discretely conducted. And second we should note the particular value of literature, which is so often lost sight of in the uproar. Logic (32) and mathematics (33) seem more worthy contenders for truth (31), and science (34) is more practical. But by investigating the alternatives, meeting them on their own ground, we find that logic and science have enormous shortcomings. Both work towards abstraction, but

cannot find bedrock for their beliefs. Indeed there are several types of logic and mathematics, and each is not wholly compatible with others. Science in the end comes down to procedures which long experience has found to work.

In contrast, the arts have a different conception of truth, and aim at fullness and fidelity to human experience. By a twist of fate, science itself (36) — through complexity theory (36.3), research in brain functioning (23), and in some aspects of linguistics (37) — is now suggesting that literature is not simply a viable alternative, but in some ways closer to how human beings really function.

In the following chapter I summarize the findings of a popular and thoughtful account of literary theory (Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today*.) and show that her various interpretations of *The Great Gatsby* are not only a cause for celebration at theory's fecundity, but raise some troubling questions over their currency in the outside world. These are philosophical issues, and have to be dealt with by philosophy. Chapter Three therefore looks at concepts of truth and relativism, to what extent matters can be true in one world but not another, and suggests alternatives.

This present Chapter One is thus an introduction to literary theory. Chapter Two shows literary theory in action, and Chapter Three explores the philosophic foundations of literary theory. Thereafter the book is grouped around topics as the Preface indicates.

References

My prime source in writing this chapter is Hans Bretons' *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 3rd Edition. Routledge 2017, supplemented by material found in later chapters. A more general background is also provided by the following:

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

2. LITERARY THEORY IN ACTION

Lois Tyson's exceptionally candid, clear and attractively written *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide* {1} shows how literary theories can variously illuminate the same work of fiction, here F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The exercise illustrates the fascinating scope of literary theory today, and makes its practical consequences strikingly plain. I shall briefly summarize those findings in the present chapter, both to show the fecundity of literary theory, and to illustrate the problems it poses to traditional concepts like truth and fidelity to experience. In the interests of space, I don't generally elaborate the theories {2} (which are anyway considered later in this book — except black American literature) but readers should know that they are presented in considerable detail in Tyson's book, making the book a very accessible introduction to literary theory.

2.1. The Great Gatsby

Scott Fitzgerald's novel is well known, but a brief summary is this: {3}

The *Great Gatsby* is set during the roaring twenties, and tells the story of one man's pursuit of the American Dream. The narrator, Nick Carraway, is an upper-class American who moves from the West to New York to try his luck as a bond trader. He meets his wealthy neighbor named Jay Gatsby, and becomes involved in Gatsby's plan to rekindle a lost love with a woman named Daisy Buchanan, who happens to be Nick's cousin.

Jay Gatsby, is involved in illegal activities, but throws lavish parties, hoping thereby to meet the long lost Daisy. Meanwhile, however, Daisy's husband, Tom, is carrying on an affair with a garage owner's wife; a woman named Myrtle

Wilson. Driving home from New York, Daisy unknowingly runs over and kills Myrtle while driving Gatsby's car. Grief-stricken, Myrtle's husband, George Wilson, tries to find out who was responsible, and is directed by Tom to Gatsby's house, where George shoots and kills Gatsby, leaving only Nick to appreciate the ironies and moral consequences of the affair.

2.2. Psychoanalytic Criticism

The Great Gatsby is not the great American love story supposed by its fans, but a sombre account of dysfunctional loves. Through fear of intimacy, Tom is a serial philanderer. Daisy was not in love with Tom when she married him, but becomes so as she discovers Tom's infidelities, suggesting that Daisy too fears commitment and intimacy. Both are emotionally insecure, Tom when he flaunts Myrtle in fashionable restaurants, and Daisy when she takes up with Jay. Daisy even flirts with Nick at the Buchanans' party on Long Island, where Jordan Baker appears, a childhood friend to whom Daisy seems not particularly close. Myrtle married George because he was a step up the social ladder, and sees Tom in the same light. For his part, Tom has no real interest in his mistress's life. Nick is drawn to Jordan because of her sporty image and cool independence, but ends the affair when he is most needed, after Myrtle's death, a pattern that echoes past relationships. Even the central romance, of Daisy with Jay, is based on false understandings, and her feelings evaporate when she learns that Jay has not come from the 'right side of the tracks'.

Daisy would be the trophy wife for someone who came from 'shiftless and unsuccessful farm people'. Far from being life's Holy Grail, the affair was a psychological defence against life's larger issues, and it's not coincidence that Jay is killed by Tom as surely as Daisy kills Myrtle, and as carelessly:

Daisy doesn't intervene to save her lover from the hit-and-run accusation, which indeed leads to his death.

Psychoanalytic theories of denial and displacement peel off the superficial glamour to reveal destructive tendencies and loneliness in all members of the cast — which perhaps accounts for the uncertain response to the novel in poor early sales and reservations among critics. (19) (22) (26)

2.3. Marxist Criticism

Though film makers have been drawn to the lavish social settings and material extravagance of the book, *The Great Gatsby* is in fact a savage indictment of moral decay. Everything can be traded in the roaring twenties, as it was by Jay Gatsby with his bootlegging friends and worthless bonds. Tom Buchanan buys Daisy for her youth, beauty and wealth, celebrating the engagement with the \$350,000 string of pearls, but still continues his affairs with less demanding working-class women. Under the capitalist ideology, 'you are what you own', and Tom takes great pleasure in showing off his house, luxury cars and the conspicuous consumption of his life style. But though he went to Yale (as Fitzgerald went to Princeton) he was never really 'old money' and, by compensation, is often rude and abusive to those he sees as commodities that can be manipulated at will. He slyly suggests to Myrtle that he might marry her one day, and has no compunction in directing the murderous George Wilson to Gatsby's house.

Nor are Myrtle and Daisy any more starry-eyed towards Tom. Indeed all the characters have their own mercenary agendas, and are apt to 'smash up things' when things go wrong and 'retreat back into their money.' Only George and Myrtle live in the 'valley of ashes', that grim reality behind the American dream, which they will never leave. Unrepentant and uncaring, the Buchanans move on with their lives. Nick

in the end rejects Jordan, and returns west, free of responsibilities, to the 'snobbishness' of family and local connections. Gatsby, the self-made millionaire, is even more a fabrication, designed to impress Daisy, and callously removed by her husband.

But if *The Great Gatsby* is a critique of capitalism, it is a subtle one. Myrtle and George are not attractive members of the working class, simple and hardworking, but exploiters of the system. Nick is seduced by Jay's generosity and strange innocence to overlook his criminal activities. Fitzgerald's lush language portrays Jay's and even the Buchanan's world in loving detail. (41)

2.3. Feminist Views

The roaring twenties emancipated women considerably: they had the vote, could dress more casually, attend bars and nightclubs as they pleased, and follow their own vocations in employment. Daisy, Myrtle and Jordan are all versions of this new woman, but many other party creatures flit through Fitzgerald's pages, where they are commonly described as shallow, rowdy and exhibitionist. Even Nick, the only character to have a moral conscience, and who acts as the reliable narrator, can be chauvanistic: 'dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply,' he remarks. The only two minor women characters described in some detail, Mrs. McKee and Myrtle's sister Catherine, are both unattractive: shrill and languid in the first case, and showily vulgar in the second. Why is this? And why are the Daisy, Myrtle and Jordan so determined not to be role models as they drink, smoke, party and are unfaithful or (Jordan) engage in premarital sex?

Fitzgerald's views are clearly ambivalent. Daisy comes over as a spoiled brat, who doesn't bother to stop and see who she has injured with her drunk driving, or intervene when Jay will take the blame for her actions. She doesn't merit the adoration Jay lavishes on her, and has no further interest in him once his socio-economic class is revealed. Jordan is a liar and cheat, jauntily masculine, and frankly doesn't care if her driving injures the lower orders. Myrtle is middle-aged, fat, loud and obnoxiously affected. Worse, she enjoys cheating on the husband who adores her. Why has Fitzgerald assembled such an unlovely cast, and why do they have to be so summarily punished? Daisy goes back to a loveless marriage. Jordan gets dumped by Nick. Myrtle is more woman than George can handle, but first her nose is broken by Tom for mentioning Daisy in the same breath, and then she is run down and killed by the same Daisy. Sexual independence was not acceptable in women, and certainly not the sexual aggressiveness that men bragged about. (43)

2.4. The New Criticism

Though *The New Criticism* has not been academically interesting for fifty years, it has left a lasting mark on literary craft and classroom teaching. Close reading will accept many of the interpretations we have noted for *The Great Gatsby*, but the most striking finding is the beauty of description, of things seen with great freshness though surrounded by moral indifference or decay. With that innocence comes an unfulfilled longing for a better world, which has always been part of the human condition, and for which Fitzgerald's novel remains perennially attractive. It is a young man's novel set in a new America, or one striving to be new. There are three aspects of Fitzgerald's imagery: nostalgia for a lost past, dreams of a future fulfillment, and an undefined longing that has no specific goal.

Daisy and Jordan's past in Louisville is crisply touched in: golf courses, white dresses and handsome young officers. Nick remembers his Midwest childhood, its Christmases, expanses of clean snow, and train rides back from college. Jay remembers Daisy's departure, and even Tom sees life as an unrecoverable football game. Lost youth, lost love, lost enchantment with the American continent itself — throughout the novel there is a larger world of hope and disappointment that is too detailed to be described here. Both the 'valley of ashes' and Port Roosevelt in Nick's ride into town speak of future riches, enjoyment and change. Such imagery, its refinements and its contrasts, are woven into the fabric and give the novel an invigorating vitality amidst the tawdry reality that make up its protagonists' lives.

The same air of unfulfilled longing pervades the imposing residence that is Jay's house, and it faces the bay, on far side of which lives Daisy. The careless behaviour of the party guests is contrasted with the haunting beauty of the setting, Jay's imagining Daisy's first kiss is contrasted with Daisy and Tom's violent quarrels, the young clerks' solitary dinners is contrasted with the poignant splendour of another day departing . . . and so on. Many pages of details would be needed to prove the point, but it is this quality that has kept the novel alive when the roaring twenties disappeared into the great depression. Unlike other forms of literary theory, *The New Criticism* requires no leap of faith or clever invention, but its apparent straight-forwardness does overlook the varied motives of readers.

2.5. Reader Response Criticism

Unlike the *New Criticism*, where informed, intelligent and honest readers could be expected to come to much the same evaluations of a piece of literature, the focus in reader response criticism is on the readers' responses, the differing values and tacit understandings every individual brings to a reading. The text is not inert, moreover, but varies, according to school of thought, from something lightly guiding readers to something wholly constructed by them. {4} (26)

Similar is the way guests build their picture of Gatsby, recounting the tittle-tattle and wild rumours about the host they never meet. Gatsby was a German spy; he murdered a man; he was a rich imposter. Tom Buchanan employs a private detective to find out the damaging truth, but the guests enjoy themselves with shocking speculations. All characters have their motives. Daisy naturally wants to see Gatsby as the knight in shining armour. For Wolfsheim, Gatsby is a man of fine breeding whose contacts he can put to good use. George Wilson wants Gatsby to be the man who murdered his wife, which will justify a need for revenge. Even Nick interprets Gatsby through the lens of his own projections, as someone he doesn't like, does like, is fraudulent, could teach him something about bond trading . . .

On actually meeting him, Nick observes: 'It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it . . . precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. Precisely at that point it vanished — and I was looking at an elegant rough-neck . . . whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd.'

That ambiguity persists on leaving the party. 'A sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host who stood on the porch, his hand held up in a formal gesture of farewell.'

So Nick constructs his picture of Gatsby, first discounting the seeming falsehoods about an Oxford education, jewel and painting collecting, big game hunting, and then being pulled up short by being shown a war medal, Oxford snaps and the deference by a police officer. That picture evolves in the various scenes and plot developments through the novel, shifting in response to Nick's approval and non-approval, and so in the puzzled gaze of the reader. Gatsby become the hero but also the crook who will do anything to get what he wants — both at the same time, but in the end justifying Nick's assessment as 'worth the whole damn bunch put together'. As with Nick, who has yet to find his way in life, and for whom Gatsby acts as knight errant, we also project our hopes and contradictions into the imagined lives of a world now closed to all but the very rich. (45.2)

2.6. Structuralist Criticism

Many structures are only too apparent in *The Great Gatsby*: the contrasts between the present and the past, between material affluence and moral shabbiness, between current wealth and poverty (the Buchanan's world versus the Wilsons' life in the 'valley of ashes'), and between appearance and reality (Jay's parties versus his illegal activities, Tom's society marriage versus his sordid philanderings), and so on. But the larger structure can be summarized by three verbs: to seek, to find and to lose.

Jay seeks, finds and loses Daisy twice in the novel, first in his early impoverished days as Lieutenant Jay Gatsby and eventually as the self-made millionaire. Daisy sought emotional security, apparently found it in Tom Buchanan, only to lose it in a loveless marriage. Tom sought ego gratification as a college football star but lost it on graduation, for which his continual affairs are no lasting

substitute. Myrtle Wilson seeks escape from boredom and poverty with George, finds it with Tom Buchanan, and loses it to Daisy's intoxicated driving. George has dreams of economic security, just as Jordan looks for social security in the winning putt, which continually eludes her. McKee is not successful as a photographer, and Catharine seems to be permanently disappointed in her social forays. Gatsby's party guests are continually wandering on to new extravagances.

Jay Gatsby is emblematic of the American dream, not only the rags to riches story but the lost paradise that he concocts with an Oxford background and vague family riches. Some of that adventure is real: he was promoted from lowly lieutenant to decorated major in the war. He gained a military scholarship to Oxford. He sailed three times round the world on Cody's yacht. With that superficial polish he rose rapidly through Wolfsheim's organization to a wealth exceeding Buchanan's. But the wealth is acquired through bootlegging and illegal bond-trading, and patina of assured breeding is never convincing, to himself or Nick Carraway. Jay may well be the mythic hero destined to give his life for spiritual revival of his people, and indeed in Nick's eyes remains the one character true to a worthwhile dream, but there is no revival, no rebirth of innocence. Gatsby, Myrtle and George leave this world. Nick goes back home. Worldly success belongs to the Buchanans and Wolfsheims, to the brutal and seedy aspects of American life.

The Great Gatsby supports many different views. Critics indeed have varied in their judgement of Gatsby, but some do see him as the 'representative American hero', the romantic who 'transcends the limiting glamor of the Jazz Age'. Others have noted not only Tom's sexist and racist expressions, but Nick's too, his unsympathetic view of the

less well-off, and his escapist character. He came back restless from WWI to his family roots, went east to escape a woman he didn't wish to marry, spent a summer trying, unsuccessfully, to become a bond-trader in New York, and will go back to his home town with a darker and more despairing view of human nature. It was an outlook common to inter-war writers, but is certainly not to be envied. (6)

2.7. Deconstructive Criticism

Just as deconstruction undermines the truth of any statement or belief system, so the characters in *The Great Gatsby* find their hopes and observations undermined by troubling inconsistencies. {6} Society, the goal of upwardly mobile Americans, is not peopled by edifying and worthy characters but more by the irremediably grasping, vulgar and selfish. The Buchanans exhibit none of the comfortably-off and respectable family life that Nick knew when growing up in Minnesota, or that Daisy and Jordan enjoyed in young womanhood. The middle and working classes, the Catherine's, the Myrtles and McKee's of this world, are only concerned to ape their richer cousins, avid for social status and empty diversions. The Blacks whom Nicks sees on his way to New York are no better but roll their eyes in 'haughty rivalry' at Jay's chauffeured luxury car. George Wilson and his neighbors in the 'valley of ashes' are the only characters that seem free of these empty aspiration, but they are too busy just surviving, and even George in selling the car Tom promises hopes to escape to modest prosperity.

Jay himself 'breaks like glass against Tom's hard malice'. Nick has soon had enough. He arrived full of innocent hopes: 'the city seen from Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and beauty of the world'. He decamps in the autumn of the same year, returning to dwellings that are 'still called

through decades by a family name' from New York's bonfire of vanities, 'when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and the wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line.'

The clean and bracing Minnesota sky that was to prepare Nick for manhood instead deliver him to the sullen and overhanging eastern prospects, to images of human alienation, grotesque houses, and drunken women with mislaid names delivered to the wrong address. The very concept of innocence exposes him to danger, and George Wilson, the only character who trusts everyone, has no personality at all but 'stared at the cars and people that passed along the road. When anyone spoke to him he invariably laughed in an agreeable and colorless way.' His was a blameless life, but he had no friends, and the novel suggests that the decadence of New York is infinitely more to be preferred than uneventful innocence. (8)

2.8 New Historical and Cultural Criticism

We have looked at *The Great Gatsby* through various lenses of literary theory, but the views are not distinct but somewhat overlapping, apt to coalesce into vague generalities. Marxist oppression merges with feminist views. Deconstructive disappointments merge with psychoanalytic hints of personal shortcomings and loss. Identities thus depend on the viewer. Power is also diffused through societies in changing ways. No account can be final, therefore, or all-embracing. Fact and fiction are necessarily interwoven in any human world. Even standard histories, once seen as compilations of incontrovertible facts, are also not fully objective, not wholly representative of their contemporary world-views, and not proof that events were indeed strictly linear, progressive or causally linked. Like novels, historical studies will be 'thick' with fact and interpretation, and only be in some ways true, or persuasive up to certain point.

Literary texts are cultural artifacts that tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place where they were written. {7}

As the title indicates, the social context for *The Great Gatsby* is the self-made man, the folk hero of early 20th century American life. Self-made men dominated the oil, steel and even the banking industries. Some, like Carnegie, wrote self-help manuals where they emphasized the personal qualities that had brought them success, usually hard work, sobriety, clear objectives and risk-taking, i.e. recognizing opportunities when they presented themselves. Leaving the parental fold early also helped, making them more independent and self-directed. Boys from impoverished backgrounds even had advantages over wealthier cousins: they were inured to hard work earlier, and less likely to waste time and money on acquiring fine clothes and manners. Most importantly, they had not been contaminated with false values by a college education. Social polish could be acquired later, by the exercises the manuals laid out.

To the self-made class clearly belonged Jay Gatsby: indeed he was still following the daily self-improvement exercises when Nick meets him, and declares later that he had earned Daisy, unlike Tom Buchanan whose love 'was strictly personal', i.e. something simply purchased as he bought everything else with his inherited wealth. Unfortunately, of course, the biographies of self-made men were not wholly reliable. The school of hard knocks had not necessarily made them loveable human beings, and success stories papered over questionable dealings and business practices. So it was with Gatsby and his dubious associates, people who 'fixed' financial events and sold worthless bonds to

trusting illiterates. Even the history of the Civil War and the 'manifest destiny of the north', which gave a *raison d'être* to men like Jay Gatsby was somewhat simplified if not downright sentimental. What galvanizes a novel's characters may not always be true.

In reading a literary work, the new cultural criticism will therefore ask such political questions as: what models of behaviour are being enforced? How would they be seen by readers? Are there wide differences between obvious and implicit values? On what social understandings does the work depend, and are they still valid? What possible freedoms of thought are being constrained or repressed? What are the larger social settings? (18)

2.9. Lesbian, Gay and Queer Criticism

LGBTQ people probably make up 10% of the population, but are still stigmatized, and their insights unacknowledged in writers. Outwardly, *The Great Gatsby* is about heterosexual loves, abundantly so, but the setting is more ambiguous. It's possible to wonder if Nick Carraway is not a closeted homosexual. He accepts the louche atmosphere of Jay's parties, without taking advantage of what's on offer, and even facilitates the adulterous triangles that make up the affairs of Jay and Daisy, and of Tom and Myrtle. He sees nothing odd in Mr. McKee's feminine passivity, even when the man lies in bed in nothing but his underclothes, and he happily accepts McKee's invitation to lunch. Jay clearly enjoys his impeccable grooming and sports a wardrobe rich in pinks and purples, matters Nick comments favourably on. Tom is unnecessarily and aggressively heterosexual as though over-compensating for contrary inclinations and much of the décor of Jay's house is extravagantly feminine.

Nick also likes looking at the ‘hard, jaunty body’ of Jordan, who is described as a ‘slender, small-breasted girl with an erect carriage which she accentuated by throwing her shoulders back like a young cadet’. She makes her living in the male world of golf, and ‘instinctively avoided clever shrewd men . . . because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible.’ And though Nick constantly stresses (perhaps too constantly) that he is one of the few honest people he has met, it is Jordan who disabuses him by remarking “Well, I met another bad driver, didn’t I? . . . I thought it was your secret pride.’

All these are small matters hinted at but not explained by the novel, which thereby suggests the categories of sexual inclination and behaviour are not fixed for Fitzgerald, who was indeed fascinated by transgressive sexual behaviour. If the three affairs portrayed by *The Great Gatsby* are not unsatisfactory enough by conventional standards, there is the troubling afterthought they may screen even less acceptable behaviour. {8}

2.10. African American Criticism

Harlem is next door to Manhattan and would have been frequented for its jazz nightclubs and freely flowing liquor stores by members of the Buchanan set, but *The Great Gatsby* makes no mention of the place. Racist remarks are personified by Tom, moreover, with his dark references to alarmist accounts of a threatened white race, but there is nothing in the novel about the black culture that featured so prominently in leading magazines and newspapers of the period. In fact, Fitzgerald knew black celebrities in New York

and Paris very well, but the novel deals only with occasional stereotypes, a limousine occupied by 'two bucks and a girl', for example. Where Blacks do appear in Fitzgerald's works, they are referred to in disparaging terms and generally introduced for comic effect. Why? Was black culture something Fitzgerald feared would overtake his own achievements? {9}

2.11. Concluding Remarks

Given Lois Tyson's exceptionally clear and sensible account, why does literary theory need the mountains of erudite and rarified theory common in other academic accounts? Because Tyson's account, though much to be applauded for clarity, is also, unfortunately, rather limited. Matters are not so clear-cut and self-evident when her principles of literary theory are pursued in context, i.e. come to be seen as only a small and rather arbitrary part of a much more fascinating if demanding intellectual enterprise.

It is not simply that current theory turns up political issues that question our earlier assumptions, nor even that it is also secondary, perhaps parasitical on the creative ability needed to write works of art in the first place. {10} Literary theory as packaged today has in fact its own serious philosophical problems, as later sections of this book will show.

Is Freud's psychoanalysis valid, for example, and how does psychiatry stack up against psychology? What is the academic status of Marxism? If Black American criticism belongs to post colonial theory, is that theory sound in itself. If not, if these contemporary approaches rest on very disputed ground, then unwelcome uncertainties extend to the 'findings' of these approaches.

For the present, we might note that literary theory as presently conceived has little to say on art as art, and

therefore fails to illuminate literature in one crucial aspect. Nothing is said by Tyson about the literary quality of Fitzgerald's writing, which is clearly of a high order if the novel has remained a popular choice among lay readers for almost a century now.

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Contents Index

3. THEORY IN CONTEXT

3.1. Which Approach is Best?

We have seen how the different literary theories greatly expand what we can say about a specific work, in this case F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. But are these viewpoints or specific lenses giving us a sound and mutually reinforcing picture? And which, if they conflict, should we take as the more helpful or illuminating?

It all depends on what we're trying to do is one answer. Psychoanalytic criticism won't tell us much about the exploitative capitalist system that favours the Buchanans over the Wilsons, for example, nor does deconstructive criticism shed much light on feminist issues. It's 'horses for courses', as engineers tend to say: the approaches we choose will determine what we find.

Knowledge then becomes not only what is found, but *how* it is found: the two become interdependent. (36) More importantly, every finding will be relative. Philosophy, which seeks the most general and unambiguous truth across all possible worlds, pounces on the difficulties of relativism. If we say that all knowledge is a matter of perspectives, then even this statement is a matter of perspective, and therefore not necessarily true. Relativism undermines itself. But, as we shall see, even logic is not free of such paradoxes, (32) and there are many underdetermined scientific problems (fluid flow, ac current analysis, etc.) that cannot be solved analytically but only by successive approximation. {1}

3.2. History and Historiography

But suppose we move to the less contentious ground of history in its various guises. {2} The social historian will

describe the socio-economic groupings in a country, their aspirations and beliefs, and how they were satisfied in the patterns of their everyday lives. The economic historian will be more concerned with the underlying patterns of rising population levels, dwindling productivity of land, pressure on migration to industrial cities or the search for new opportunities in distant colonies. The political historian may elaborate on the kings and battles fought, laying stress on the aims of personalities concerned, their strengths and weaknesses. The three approaches call on different evidence and present their findings differently. The first would draw on social documents like letters and contemporary paintings. The second might analyse treasury figures and tax returns. The third could lighten the narrative with amusing anecdotes about the leading players. But all would be relevant to a rounded picture of the past, and be somewhat interdependent. A profligate ruler might be just what was wanted in an era of abounding confidence and prosperity, but quite disastrous in times of economic hardship.

History, moreover, has its own fashions, when certain approaches seemed the most fruitful. Historiography {3} is indeed the study or history of these differing approaches, to what extent they succeeded, and why they were superseded. In a similar way, the first chapter in this book has summarized the changing nature of literary theory, though we should note that the interrelation of approaches is less evident in literary theories and their overthrow generally the more uncompromising.

There are also issues of respectability in history, and the acceptability of findings to the dominant beliefs of the time. We still tend to dismiss the importance of tsarist armies in WWI, for example, and lay the blame for WW2 squarely at the door of Germany. But it can be argued that, by maintaining a second front in the east, the tsarist armies prevented Germany victory in the west and so kept the war

going until America joined the Allies in 1917. {4} America's entry may itself have been promoted by financial interests, anxious to recover bank loans that would have been lost on German victory. {5} Even Hitler's ill-advised attack on Russia may have forestalled a planned invasion by Stalin. {6} However horrific were German concentration camps before and during the war, an equally odious treatment was meted out to German troops and civilians by the allies after the war, with a death toll also in the millions. {7}

Some of these views are on the edge of mainstream respectability, and some lie deep in alternative history. All need to be thoroughly documented and weighed against more conventional views, of course, but that they will be novel or offensive to many readers suggests that even the freedom-loving western press suppresses alternative readings, just as deconstruction alleges for texts generally.

Students meeting literary theory for the first time may indeed decide that truth is relative, and find the depth and subtlety of analysis an eye-opener, believing Postmodernism has overturned the sober catalogue of 'facts' they learned at school. In fact, it hasn't, or should not have done. A school science course on physics should have taught Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and explained how the properties of particles like the electron depend on how we measure them. (34) Social history projects like 1619 will have demonstrated how important is black history and culture to America, but also that it's not the whole picture. Blacks were enslaved by their own people before being shipped to America, and many of the earliest slaves on the continent were in fact white, blatantly swept up from the poor quarters of British cities, or combatants captured in Cromwell's Irish wars. Inhumanity is unfortunately common to us all. {8}

3.3. Are Approaches True in Themselves?

Careful readers of the previous chapter will also have noted some unsupported generalisations. Do philanderers really fear personal intimacy, or are they simply risk takers who enjoy the pursuit of variety? Is exploitation only a feature of capitalism, moreover, absent from previous societies? Do the ambiguous attitudes scattered through *The Great Gatsby* represent the suppressed LGBTQ yearnings present in any society, or more F. Scott Fitzgerald's well-known obsessions? Moreover, turning the matter round — i.e. reader's response theories notwithstanding — we note that readers of Lois Tyson's book will need to have come to a broadly similar understanding of her text if that understanding is to be tested in essays and end-of-term examinations.

Why do we read *The Great Gatsby* at all, or see it as a cultural landmark, if did not also possess a literary appeal that current theory seems not to address? No doubt the day of the 'world's great books' has long passed, but it's worth remembering that the past canons of literature were never seen as representing *everything* that was worthy of appreciation and study, but they were inspiration and touchstone, something against which we could measure other works. To count all works of literature as merely 'texts' certainly widens course material, but if no independent standards exists then that material can quickly become efficiently-written exemplars of current fashions, to be astutely marketed as everything else in our consumerist society.

Is that why so many now teaching English seem not to have a developed a literary sensibility? And why the examples Lois Tyson quotes approvingly of black and transgender writers seem not to be very good poems? Many poetry anthologies today tend to be disappointing, and the cynical

may wonder if the prizes the literary world hands out to itself haven't more to do with membership of the right clubs than genuine merit. Has theory become an exclusive game, unconcerned with larger matters?

Post-modernism may well assert, for example, that all truths are relative, but that conjecture is emphatically not true in the everyday world. Most of us want a fairer, more tolerant and diversified world, but assertions that gender is a social construct independent of biology leads to unwanted problems in schools and on sports fields. Moreover, despite the difficulties of language, we do generally make ourselves understood, and through a variety of means. Clearly, if words were the only reality (and not visual memory) we should not recognise our loved ones nor probably find our way back home every night. Similarly, aircraft don't fall out of the sky because maintenance manuals are simply texts like all others at the mercy of deconstructive games. Nor do English professors suddenly find themselves penniless because their terms of service can at some time mean something quite different to university administrators. Everyday reality places limits on theory. (8.3)

There are two ways of assessing literary theory. One is to see it in action, consider the practical consequences. Does it illuminate literature as never before? Are its new readings convincing? Do those readings enable us to understand the larger, everyday world better? Here readers must make up their own minds: the bulk of today's writing on theory has been academic and speculative. Even an Internet search may locate articles with a deeper and more sensitive understanding of *The Great Gatsby* than Lois Tyson's text.

The second is analytical. Does the theory seem to be true, to have made the right deductions from the evidence? And do those deductions fit into a larger framework of

understanding? Scientists (and mathematicians) commonly talk about a theory being concise, elegant and illuminating, giving us a better grasp of kindred subjects, and while literary theory is not science, it too needs to be seen in context. The remainder of the book attempts to do that.

3.4. Underlying Issues

Current literary theory may be logical continuation of issues that have underlain European thought for centuries. Most fundamental was a divorce between the emotional and rational in human nature. Galileo and Descartes mark the decisive western shift, but the split is an age-old dispute: the Academy versus the Sophists, Legalism versus Daoism, and Sufism versus the Sharia. Literature has naturally championed the instinctive, imaginative and emotional side, as it shares with music and some painting the distinction of being the pre-eminently creative art. Even behind the decorum of Augustan poetry, in the themes and the lives of its better writers, there was a strong current of dissatisfaction with the politeness of the age, and this repressed energy welled out in Romanticism and then into the various strains of Modernism and Postmodernism. All are protests against excessive rationalization. The Romantics sought new areas of feeling — in the past, wild landscapes, and the hallucinations of drugs. The Symbolists cultivated unusual states of mind with a fluid and often-musical allusiveness. Imagists pared down poetry to a few striking pictures. The Futurists were stridently iconoclastic. Dadaists and Surrealists extended the irrational. The Modernists turned themselves into an exclusive caste — since taken over by academia — who intellectualised their superiority over the conventional majority. The New Critics concentrated on how intricately a poem worked, and were largely unconcerned about what was meant or said about the larger context.

Postmodernists have retreated further, and claimed that poems exist — and perhaps even reality itself — only in the words themselves.

Such extreme views are hard to credit, but popularity is not what the avant-garde craves. Perhaps the linguistics (37), anthropology, Marxist economics (41), psychoanalysis (19-21) and continental philosophy (15) quoted has not been properly understood, still less practised in any formal or practical way, but the overriding purpose has been to keep out mathematics (33), science (34-36) and the commercial world (26.6). If literary theory is not true, then it ought to be true, and by refashioning language that happy state of affairs can be brought about. If Coleridge was confused over German metaphysics, and the Symbolists espoused some very nebulous theories, no one doubts the role played by these ideas in the rich poetry that resulted. The end will justify the beliefs.

Much was made of semiotics, particularly the theories of de Saussure (6.2), without it being realized that the profession had long ago absorbed the approach, that Anglo-American philosophy (29) deals with reference and meaning much more comprehensively, and that all too often an elementary confusion existed between ends and means. Structures of language do not constrain our view of the world in any simple binary fashion, any more than a computer's hardware exactly predetermines what text, graphics or sound will be produced. In fact, the world's four thousand languages exhibit diverse grammars and vocabulary groupings, but they do not carve up the world so differently that translation is impossible.

But the second trend, of making the study of literature more systematic and rule-based, naturally followed the example and prestige of the sciences. Once literature became an academic subject, the need arose for a body of information to impart, and practical skills to deploy that information. With specialization came terminology, very dense indeed in

medicine and the descriptive sciences, and literary study in its turn have developed a vocabulary to rival that of Renaissance rhetoric. But there was a difference. Whereas terminology is closely policed in the sciences, and offending papers returned to their authors, a much more creative attitude prevails in literary studies.

And the terminology? Do the words refer to real things? Ultimately such questions are ontological, calling on philosophy to spin its demanding skeins of thought, but the matter can be pursued into rules of communal behaviour. Much in linguistics is descriptive, but the Chomskians (39) in particular have tried to formulate rules to explain how children acquire language, and adults instinctively fashion alternative sentences. Deep mental processes are thought to exist beneath our surface facility. Unfortunately, and despite an immense amount of work, deep grammar has fragmented into rival schools and approaches, so that a theory of meaning cannot now be built by such means. But the questions raised are important. What are these rules, and in what sense do they exist? Are they hardwired into the brain, innate pre-dispositions, or cultural habits that shift with usage?

Historians talk soberly about trends and movements, and literature itself came to be regarded as the surface expression of deep social structures. The Russian formalists argued that fairy tales, and probably also novels and poems, had a small number of simple underlying plots. Jung envisaged archetypes around which man's instinctive and intellectual nature coalesced. Northrop Frye categorized literary genres as the product of man's primordially mythic nature. And Lévi-Strauss (6.3) discovered binary codes under kinship and marriage acts in primitive societies, perhaps in all societies whatsoever.

Much was greatly overstated, and some plainly false. The Poststructuralist (8) counter-reaction demoted language to tenuous systems that referred only to themselves. Words

bred more words, and there was no final interpretation. No evidence for such a striking reinstatement of man's irrational and playful nature was provided because language itself effaced any evaluation by outside reference. If circumstantial matters are allowed, then psychoanalysis could be called to the stand, or a rich body of existential thought (15). Both demonstrate that reason is subsequent to feelings, that we act on impulse as entities whose full nature is hidden from us, though we may rationalize our actions later with high-sounding justifications. Indeed, to act instinctively is to behave authentically, bravely accepting that there are no moral prescriptions or guiding principles. Surely our bloodstained twentieth century has shown us the real nature of man, and literature is not valued for being more skilled, or by attempting more lofty aims, but for seeing through the bewitchment of words and facing truth.

But many things can be perverted. Language is not a hermetic system of self-reference, but something constrained by reality and serving human needs. We often act in thoughtless and perplexing ways, but Freud's (19) unconscious does not exist. Still less is there any evidence for Lacan's (21) view that the unconscious is structured like a language, or that its natural state is a libidinous fantasy only partly reined in by the superego. Psychologists (22) and linguists (37) dislike these views very much, and the popularity that attends them. Of course the unconscious is a useful scapegoat, and the deity of an immense therapy industry, but the notion is a reductive and trivializing myth. Freudian analysis does not combat serious mental illness and is no better than countless others of differing conception in the alleviation of minor mental dysfunction. Psychoanalysis reflects Freud's own paranoid nature, just as Foucault's (9) later attacks on the bourgeoisie were self-defence. Language carries authority, but it is not riddled with state repression, indeed cannot be or none of the Poststructuralists would have risen in their professions.

Even the continental philosophers need to be seen in context. Hegel (14) is a subsuming reaction to Kant (13) and the Enlightenment. Kierkegaard (15.3) and Nietzsche (16) had passionate natures, which their societies could not accommodate. Husserl (15.1) is a strikingly original thinker, but his pupil Heidegger (17) went off in a contrary and much more predictable direction, for all that Heidegger is cited as the Poststructuralist champion. Intellectual systems are no different from social: they arise in response to perceived needs and take on the character and conflicts of their time. Extract them from that context, apply them to other matters and other disciplines, and their urgency fades: they become as Aristotle in medieval scholasticism: an authority to be quoted but not properly read or understood.

Does that lessen their importance? If linguistics, for example, helps little with theories of meaning or literary aesthetics, should we not write off the discipline and look elsewhere for the philosopher's stone? Why? It is natural to wonder how language developed, what mechanisms, physiological and social, are employed, and how those mechanisms may assist in the creation and learning of new languages. Linguistics provides structures of understanding, and through stylistics the discipline brings a powerful lens to bear on the detail of individual poems. What linguistics cannot do, and does not attempt to do, is provide recipes for the writing of literature. Nor its evaluation, as both require, first and foremost, a highly developed literary sensibility. Art is something larger and other than its constituents. It helps not at all to lump plot, tone, imagery etc. in broad generalizations, as it is precisely that acute subtlety which makes for aesthetic success. Exhaustive analysis does not provide a final answer. Poetry may be an emergent property of various procedures, for instance. Certain themes, styles and working methods are more likely to produce the required result, but the matter is never certain, which indeed distinguishes poetry from versified prose.

3.4. Language of Literary Theory

Learning is meant to be difficult, and academics do not like seeing their subjects popularised. Perhaps there is little advantage in writing in a clear, cogent and engaging manner, and a good deal to be risked — attacks from rivals, ready assessment from other disciplines, astonishment among the laity that these matters need such protracted treatment. And given the extent of knowledge today, and the pressures on tenure, each work is no doubt advancing over minefields imperceptible to the common reader. But to the usual grey language, hair-splitting and endless qualification, an altogether new tier of difficulty has been added by current theory. Is it truly written to defeat summary, analysis or even comprehension?

It is written to keep understanding within rules of its own devising. All professions have their defensive terminologies, their jargon to keep out questions of the emperor's new clothes variety, but literary theory aims at a metalanguage, a newspeak, that will render impossible any troublesome reference to practical examples, or to other authorities.

And if so, then far from protecting the arts, theory may be helping their decline. Ever since the medieval corpus of the humanities was fragmented by the new philosophy, and then overridden by commercial interests, literature has been playing wallflower in the great spectacle of life. Gradually it relinquished its claim to truth, handing this over in the eighteenth century to philosophy. Then it gave up its modest claims to make imaginative recreations of the human affections. Modernist poetry does not deal with the everyday triumphs and afflictions of the human heart, and the mood of most contemporary poetry — the little that is good, and some is very good — is quiet, arcane and self-posing. Generally, leaving aside performance poetry, current literary theory allows the overwhelming emotions and commonplaces that carry the great majority of plain folk

through life to be approached only ironically, obliquely, and with pastiche. Not for real poetry are articulating rhythms, compelling imagery or serious treatment of popular issues.

3.5. The Postmodernist Response

What is the public to do with some of the thinner examples of contemporary artworks? Or older scholars faced with articles bristling with jargon, non-sequiturs and name-dropping? Perhaps to accept that Postmodernism was inevitable. The Modernists championed the individual, the difficult, the iconoclastic, and their poems are still taught at high school and university. What is Postmodernism but a natural progression, an argument taken to absurdity? Modern literature had a hard time establishing itself as a serious university discipline, and so constructed a small, over-defended canon of good taste. It never professed to have any utilitarian purpose — indeed scoffed at the notion that it might teach the crafts of writing — and some time in the 1960s, the inevitable arrived. Practically everything noteworthy and praiseworthy had been said. A new range of books, or new ways of talking about them, had to be found.

Is Postmodernism much out of kilter with the contemporary world? Look at television, advertising, even the Internet. What is presented are billboards, images of no depth or substance, but vivid, up-to-date and immediately appealing. Postmodernism is simply deploying what is already given. Consider the critics. Do they speak with knowledge, taste and authority? We hope so. They take the appropriate university course, attach themselves to some institution, write a book or two, and then enter the swim of instant opinions with a gallery directorship or newspaper column. And we accept their opinions, at least until we happen to know well what is under review, or see some particularly atrocious piece of writing held up for approval. Then perhaps the penny drops. Reviews are not to evaluate or provide a guide to the best. They are to provide an insecure and hard-

pressed middle class with literary chit-chat, something with which they may pay their entrance into intelligent society. The literary production of the world is enormous, staggering, but only the smallest amount is needed to act as the lingua franca of the media world.

We shouldn't be surprised. We all need badges of membership, and there are duplicities everywhere in modern life. Politics is increasingly stage-managed, and no one gets to the top in public life, in high finance, in the big companies or even in academia without cultivating the correct impression amongst those who count. Unswerving ambition and an innate feel for advantage are essential. Yet in a world that devalues honesty, sensitivity and a sense of proportion, there are still more fruitful alternatives to today's narrow conceptions of literary theory, which I touch on below to forestall despairing cries of, 'Well, if all the current approaches lead us into intellectual cul de sacs, why should we bother at all?'

3.6. Alternatives: Aesthetics

We do not expect to find, outside the pages of a very amateur poetry periodical, such remarks as: 'poetry is essentially self-expression,' or 'the mark of good writing is the ability to show, not to state.' An evening spent with an introductory account of aesthetics (4) will show that these remarks do not take us far. But much of what appears in leading periodicals, though phrased more astutely, displays a similar ignorance of the appropriate literature. Perhaps linguistic philosophy is dry and technical, and few home-grown theories of reference (29.8) are going to hold the interest of professionals. But the wholesale neglect of aesthetics suggests either that something is very wrong with the educational system, or that sounder views are being suppressed. No doubt principles are subsequent to response: we need to appreciate a poem before we can refer it to broader issues. No doubt judgement and

experience also enter into the picture: no piece of writing is entirely without some autonomy, structure, emotive expression and significance. But aesthetics does map out the ground of our responses, and suggests why we like or do not like a particular piece. It protects us from the merely fashionable or fraudulent, and opens doors to work of other epochs and cultures.

By asking general questions: What is art or beauty? (5.2) What do we mean by aesthetic distance? In what sense does emotional content enter into music or painting? and so on, aesthetics also draws the various arts closer together. Educationalists lament literature's fall from pre-eminence, and much that passes for writing today is certainly not attractive or encouraging. But music and the visual arts have also been woefully overshadowed by the printed word, by a commercial attitude that links texts to facts, and facts to earning money — in short, to art as entertainment when the more important tasks of the day are over.

Philosophy is the fabric of ideas, which grows richer and denser as we take more into consideration. There is no end to their study, which is why we make travel notes and try to pass on the geography of our route to others before we quit this world. Aesthetics is a particularly difficult branch of philosophy, but now may be the time to look again at the work of Cassirer and Susanne Langer (11.5). Feelings as symbolic objects seems a very abstract approach, but abstractions are powerful tools in many disciplines, from science (34) and mathematics (33) to musical theory. The square root of minus one may be an imaginary number, for example, but is nonetheless vital to many branches of mechanics and electrodynamics: complex numbers do help to predict tangible things.

3.7. Alternatives: Experimental Psychology

What is literature? Current theory, to its credit, does indeed try to answer the question. And a similar attempt to find the unique ingredient, the clarifying definition, the quintessential essence of things is seen in the twentieth century's analysis of truth (31), meaning (29), mathematics (33) and science. (34-6) Search has been very long and very perplexing. At the heart of all such disciplines lies an immense mystery. Each approach fulfils its duties, often amazingly well, but also resists a more fundamental formulation.

But then no system starts out afresh. Hermeneutics studies (18) the dialogue between present needs and past contexts: how we inherit attitudes, expectations, meanings of words and social behaviour. Historiography studies the different schools of history, how historians can arrive at quite different interpretations of the same historical event. Anglo-American philosophy (29) attempts to use a small part of our faculties to understand the whole, and has largely failed. The sciences of chaos and complexity (36.3) show the interdependence of small and large, and how the smallest change can have enormous and unexpected consequences. Our brains (23) function through complex linkages. Everywhere there are ramifications and complicated feedback systems, the nervous systems being intimately connected with bodily tissues. Humans are emphatically not reservoirs of psychic energy under the cold repression of the ego. Nor are they puppets jerked into life by the brain's activities. Body and brain and consciousness are partners in an entity whose behaviour is partly innate and partly socially conditioned. And this unremarkable observation has a crucial bearing on academic study. Much of our thinking sinks into unconscious bodily behaviour, and some indeed takes a long journey through society before returning to us, making a total understanding by our rational faculties difficult or impossible. We know very well that appreciation is a learned skill, that our own response to what we have read or

written shifts as we work on the drafts, that some pieces work well on the page but never rise to public performance, that we are affected in our responses by moods, personal circumstances, the most irrelevant details, and yet we still believe that the whole situation can be represented in simple strategies. The very different contexts or structures of experience being invoked should caution us against believing that a literal language will encompass the whole.

But the more crucial consideration is this. Even the human brain, disregarding the bodily and social contexts, does not operate in invariant, sequential procedures that logic, linguistic philosophy, Structuralism, semiotics and a whole host of academic disciplines have supposed. Computers can be made to mimic human thought, but the brain is not a computer. The brain is larger and more elusive than any conception we can form of it, and its interactions with the world are not to be contained in abstract conceptions. Models are useful, but in all branches of thought there appear gaps and paradoxes that tell us the full picture is something else. Science advises that its powers are limited, though eminently practical, and not to be misused.

3.8. Alternatives: Metaphorical Language and New Science

Language, for example, though we pretend otherwise, is metaphorical at base. (24) We do not think entirely by logic, but also by analogy, vague association, by unconscious responses, learned or innate. If Wittgenstein (28.1) thought the task of philosophy was to see through the bewitchment of words, we need very much to see through the imposing specializations of the modern world. Science works unexpectedly well, but its practice is very far from the logical and objective activity of the popular imagination. The deep strangeness of its conceptions is no longer restricted to the very large or the very small. Theories of complexity (36.3) apply to all our lives, and have put an end to determinism.

Computers and their codes will play an increasingly role, and no one should underestimate their power, but the language that most closely reflects our essential natures, with all their reflections, responses and oddities, is that which makes sense of the world and gives us a place in it.

3.9. Alternatives: The Irreducible Mind

Idealism — that thoughts and not sense impressions create reality — has made a comeback in the irreducible mind concept of Kelly and fellow researchers into the paranormal. (23.10) But with a difference. The brain is not now to be seen as simply organising sense impressions into coherent mental categories, but as a receiver that samples only part of an exterior and all-pervading consciousness. It selects, organises, and shapes a narrow spectrum of a larger consciousness that exceptional individuals — including poets — have occasionally glimpsed. Poets are therefore seers, and (with mystics and holy men) the diviners of a larger, more spiritual domain.

3.10. Conclusion

Much can be understood in the squeeze on academic tenure, take-overs in the publishing trade, pre-packaging by the culture industry, widening social inequalities, deepening distrust of big business, politics and public life, a general downgrading of intellectual standards and the difficulties most writers currently experience in making even a modest living. But very much better theory has been available in aesthetics for some fifty years, and advances in our understanding of metaphor, hermeneutics, brain functioning, the paranormal and complex systems are underlining these earlier insights. Scientific theories — abstract, objective, seeking exterior regularities — do not make good models for literature. They work badly for the social sciences, and entirely overlook what is essential for art: a specially thickened and enriched language that models itself on the whole human functioning, in all its aspects: physical, social,

historical. Literary theorists tried to make their own theory by borrowing some of the scientific approaches — the search for laws, derivation of context-less generalities of depth and power, the development of a thin, abstruse language that modelled itself on logic and mathematics — but the venture was not only optimistic, but wholly wrong-headed. Mathematics, Anglo-American philosophy and science will continue to explore the abstract and general, even though their hopes of finding bedrock of logic and unquestionable procedures have been widely disappointed. Art should return to understanding that the intellect does not give the whole picture. The language closest to what we essentially are, with all our bodily responses, infatuations, fears and inchoate thoughts, is literature, not by ancient edict but by the findings of contemporary science. Other languages are less authentic, less precise and less encompassing — are an abstraction for mental reckoning, or an abbreviation for practical purposes. Long ago, Aristotle grasped the essential greatness of literature, and that insight has been enriched by the newer sciences.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

4. AESTHETICS

Aesthetics is the philosophy of art. Though not amenable to definition, art can be analysed under various headings — representation, coherent form, emotive expression and social purpose.

4.1. Introduction

Aesthetics analyses and attempts to answer such questions as: What is art? How do we recognize it? How do we judge it? What purposes do artworks serve? {1}

Why should we want to ask such questions at all? Well, firstly there is intellectual curiosity. Other professions are clear about their aims, so why not art? And if, as we shall see, there are no definitive answers, nothing that does not beg further questions, we may nonetheless gain insights into an activity that is human but very perplexing. Moreover, there are practical considerations. Daily in magazines, performances and exhibitions the frontiers of art are being extended, and about some of these efforts hangs the suspicion of a leg-pull, empty pretension, fraud on a long-suffering public. {2} If we ask: Is this really art, very often we are met with the retort: prove otherwise. Art is as it is, and you are just too dumb, bourgeois or ill-educated to understand that. If we could somehow draw a line, a cordon sanitaire, around true artistic expression, we could ensure that the lion's share of art-funding went to the better candidates — the sincere, the dedicated and the gifted who made a contribution to society. Surely real artists would not object, when the blind seem sometimes to be leading the blind?

Art is vastly oversupplied. Only the smallest percentage supports themselves solely through their work, leaving the great majority to teach, review, or take menial part-time jobs. Such a situation would be monstrous in other professions.

Lawyers, scientists, doctors, etc. have organized themselves into guilds with career structures, rates of pay, and a clear articulation of their public roles. Their communities share knowledge: the fruits of countless lifetimes of effort are tested, codified, and made ready for immediate application. Not for them to reinvent the wheel, or to venture forth without traditions, working practices and the helping hand of master to journeyman right to the base of the tree. Art may be marginalized in today's technological and consumerist society, but a clear notion of its objectives might help it back into the fold. {3}

4.2. Definitions of Art

So, what is art, then? What (to adopt the philosopher's approach) are its necessary and sufficient conditions? Many have been proposed — countless, stretching back to ancient Greece — but one of the most complete is that of Tatarkiewicz. {4} His six conditions are: beauty, form, representation, reproduction of reality, artistic expression and innovation. Will that do? Unfortunately, it is difficult to pin these terms down sufficiently, to incorporate them into necessary and sufficient conditions — do they all have to be present? — and to cover the aspect of quality. Even in the most hackneyed piece of commercial art we shall find these conditions satisfied to some extent. How do we specify the sufficient extent? By common agreement, a consensus of public taste?

Take a less time-bound view and consider art down the ages? Then we have problems of shifting boundaries and expectations. The Greeks did not distinguish between art and craft, but used the one word, *techné*, and judged achievement on goodness of use. In fact not until 1746 did Charles Batteux separate the fine arts from the mechanical arts, and only in the last hundred years has such stress been laid on originality and personal expression. Must we then abandon the search for definitions, and look closer at social

agreements and expectations? That would be a defeat for rationality, philosophers might feel, it being their role to arrive at clear, abstract statements that are true regardless of place or speaker. But perhaps (as Strawson (28.4) and others have remarked) art may be one of those fundamental categories which cannot be analysed further, cannot be broken into more basic terms. And there is always Wittgenstein's (28.1) scepticism about definitions — that terms commonly have a plexus of overlapping applications, meaning lying in the ways words are used, and not in any fiat of God or philosophers.

4.3. Aesthetic Qualities

Suppose, to take Wittgenstein's scepticism further, we dropped the search for definitions but looked to the characteristics of art, the effects and properties that were needed in large measure for something to establish itself as 'art'. What would they be? One would be beauty, surely — i.e. proportion, symmetry, order in variety that pleases. Beauty therefore comes down to feelings — not individual and transient feelings necessarily, but matters that ultimately cannot be rationalized? Yes, said David Hume and George Santayana. But then, said Wittgenstein, we should have to deny that aesthetic descriptions had any objectivity at all, which is surely untrue. We may not know whether to call some writing 'plodding' or simply 'slow-moving', but we don't call it 'energetic'.

Very well, do we need to enquire further into beauty? Probably, since it is a term useful and universal. {5} But contemporary philosophers have great difficulties in analysing the term properly — i.e. into abstract, freestanding propositions that are eternally true. Art certainly speaks to us down the ages, and we should like to think it was through a common notion of beauty. But look at examples. We revere the sculpture of fourth century Athens, but the Middle ages did not. We prefer those marbles in their current white purity

whereas in fact the Greeks painted them as garishly as fairground models. We cannot, it appears, ignore the context of art, and indeed have to show how the context contributes. Clearly, beauty is not made to a recipe, and if individual artworks have beauty, they do not exemplify some abstract notion of it.

4.4. Dangers of Aesthetics

Artists have therefore been somewhat chary of aesthetics, feeling that art is too various and protean to conform to rules. Theory should not lead practice, they feel, but follow at a respectful distance. Put the cart before the horse and theory will more restrict than inform or inspire. Moreover professionals — those who live by words, and correspondingly have to make words live for them — are unimpressed by the cumbersome and opaque style of academia. Any directive couched in such language seems very dubious. For surely literature is not made according to rules, but the rules are deduced from literature — rationalized from good works of art to understand better what they have in common. And if theorists (philosophers, sociologists, linguists, etc.) do not have a strongly-developed aesthetic sense — which, alas, they often demonstrate — then their theories are simply beside the point.

But theory need not be that way. Rather than prescribe it may clarify. No doubt, as Russell once wryly observed, philosophy starts by questioning what no one would seriously doubt, and ends in asserting what no one can believe, but creative literature is not without its own shortcomings. Much could be learnt by informed debate between the disciplines, and a willingness of parties to look through each other's spectacles. Obtuse and abstract as it may be, philosophy does push doggedly on, arriving at viewpoints which illuminate some aspects of art.

4.5. Art as Representation

What is the first task of art? To represent. {6} Yes, there is abstract painting, and music represents nothing unless it be feelings in symbolic form, but literature has always possessed an element of mimesis, copying, representation. Attempts are periodically made to purge literature of this matter-of-fact, utilitarian end — Persian mysticism, haiku evocation, *poésie pure*, etc. — but representation always returns.

How is the representation achieved? No one supposes it is a simple matter, or that codes, complex social transactions, understandings between speakers, genre requirements etc. do not play a large if somewhat unfathomed part. Our understanding is always shaping our experiences, and there is no direct apperception of chair, table, apple in the simple-minded way that the Logical Positivists (29.2) sometimes asserted. Words likewise do not stand in one-to-one relationships to objects, but belong to a community of relationships — are part, very often, of a dialogue that writing carries on with other writings. Even when we point and say ‘that is a chair’, a wealth of understandings underlies this simple action — most obviously in the grammar and behavioural expectations. The analytical schools have investigated truth and meaning to an extent unimaginable to the philosophically untutored. They have tried to remove the figurative, and to represent matters in propositional language (31.2) that verges on logic. Very technical procedures have been adopted to sidestep paradoxes, and a universal grammar has been proposed to explain and to some extent replace the ad hoc manner in which language is made and used. Thousands of man-lives have gone into these attempts, which aim essentially to fashion an ordered, logically transparent language that will clarify and possibly resolve the questions philosophers feel impelled to ask.

Much has been learnt, and it would be uncharitable to call the enterprise a failure. Yet language has largely evaded capture in this way, and few philosophers now think the objectives are attainable. Even had the goals been gained, there would still have remained the task of mapping our figurative, everyday use of language onto this logically pure language. And of justifying the logic of that language, which is not the self-evident matter sometimes supposed. There are many forms of logic, each with its strengths and limitations, and even mathematics, that most intellectually secure of human creations, suffers from lacunae, areas of overlap and uncertainties. But that is not a cause for despair. Or for embracing the irrationalism of the Poststructuralists who assert that language is a closed system — an endless web of word — associations, each interpretation no more justified than the next. But it does remind us that language becomes available to us through the medium in which it is formulated. And that literature of all types — written, spoken, colloquial, formal — incorporates reality, but also partly reconstitutes it according to its own rules.

4.6. Art as Emotional Expression

Suppose we return to simpler matters. Art is emotionally alive. (11) We are delighted, elated, suffused with a bitter sweetness of sorrow, etc., rejecting as sterile anything which fails to move us. But are these the actual emotions which the artist has felt and sought to convey? It is difficult to know. Clearly we can't see into the minds of artists — not in the case of dead artists who have left no explanatory notes, and not generally in contemporary cases where artists find their feelings emerge in the making of the artwork. Then, secondly, we wouldn't measure the greatness of art by the intensity of emotion — unless we accept that a football match is a greater work of art than a Shakespeare play. And thirdly there is the inconvenient but well-known fact that artists work on 'happy' and 'sad' episodes simultaneously. They feel and shape the emotion generated by their work,

but are not faithfully expressing some pre-existing emotion.
{7}

Some theorists have in fact seen art more as an escape from feeling. Neurotic artists find their work therapeutic, and hope the disturbance and healing will also work its power on the audience. And if Aristotle famously spoke of the catharsis of tragedy, did he mean arousing emotions or releasing them — i.e. do artists express their own emotions or evoke something appropriate from the audience? Most would say the latter since raw, truthful, sincere emotion is often very uncomfortable, as in the brute sex act or the TV appeal by distraught parents. Whatever the case, art is clearly a good deal more than emotional expression, and at least requires other features: full and sensitive representation, pleasing and appropriate form, significance and depth of content.

4.7. Form and Beauty: The Autonomy of Art

And so we come to form. Beauty we have glanced at, but if we drop that term, so troublesome and unfashionable today, there remains organization: internal consistency, coherence, a selection and shaping of elements to please us. (5.2) And please us the art object must — genuinely, immediately, irrationally — by the very way it presents itself. How exactly? Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hume, Kant (13), Hegel (14), Croce, and dozens of contemporary philosophers have all made important contributions, but the variety of art makes generalization difficult, and explanations are naturally couched in the philosophic concerns of the time.

But something can be said. Art presents itself as an autonomous, self-enclosing entity. The stage, picture frame, etc. give an aesthetic distance, tell us that what is shown or enacted serves no practical end, and is not to be judged so. We are drawn in — engrossed, enraptured — but we are also free to step back and admire the crafting, to exercise our imagination, and to enjoy disinterestedly what can be

more complete and vivid than real life. {8} Is this autonomy necessary? Until the present century most artists and commentators said yes. They believed that harmony in variety, detachment, balance, luminous wholeness, organic coherence, interacting inevitability and a host of other aspects were important, perhaps essential. Many contemporary artists do not. They seek to confront, engage in non-aesthetic ways with their public, to bring art out into the streets. Successfully, or so the trendier critics would persuade us, though the public remains sceptical. Modernism is taught in state schools, but Postmodernist has yet to win acceptance. {9}

4.8. Art as a Purposive Activity

Art, says the tax-paying citizen, is surely not entertainment, or not wholly so. Artists aim at some altruistic and larger purpose, (40) or we should not fete them in the media and in academic publications. We don't want to be preached at, but artists reflect their times, which means that their productions give us the opportunity to see our surroundings more clearly, comprehensively and affectionately. And not only to see, say Marxist and politically-orientated commentators, but to change. Art has very real responsibilities, perhaps even to fight male chauvinism, ethnic prejudice, third-world exploitation, believe the politically correct. {10}

4.9. Artist-Centred Philosophies

With the advent of psychology, and the means of examining the physiological processes of the human animal, one focus of attention has become the artist himself. Indeed, Benedetto Croce and R.G. Collingwood (11.1) felt that the work of art was created in the artist's mind, the transposing of it to paper or music or canvas being subsidiary and unimportant. But the transposing is for most artists the very nature of their art, and few conceive work completely and exactly beforehand. John Dewey (11.2) stressed that knowledge was acquired through doing, and that the artist's intentions were both

modified and inspired by the medium concerned. For Suzanne Langer (11.5) the artist's feelings emerged with the forms of expression — which were not feelings expressed but ideas of feeling: part of a vast stock which the artist draws on, combines and modifies. Of course there is always something inexplicable, even magical, about good writing. It just came to me, says the writer: the words wrote themselves. That and the intertextuality of writing — that writing calls on and borrows from other pieces of writing, establishing itself within a community of understandings and conventions — led Roland Barthes (7) to assert that the writer does not exist, that writing writes itself. Certainly writing is inextricably part of thinking, and we do not have something in our minds which we later clothe in words. But most writing needs shaping, reconsidering, rewriting, so that the author is not some passive, spiritualist medium. Moreover, though we judge the finished work, and not the writer's intentions (supposing we could ever know them exactly) it is common knowledge that writers often have a small stock of themes which they constantly extract and rework: themes which are present in their earliest efforts and which do indeed reflect or draw substance from their experiences. Biography, social history, psychology do tell us something about artistic creations. {11}

4.10. Viewer-Centred Philosophies

Given that artists find themselves through their work, and do not know until afterwards what they had in mind, it may be wiser to look at art from the outside, from the viewer's perspective. (5.4) We expect literature, for example, to hold something in the mind with particular sensitivity and exactness, and to hold it there by attention to the language in which it is formulated. Special criteria can apply. We feel terror and pity in the theatre, but are distanced, understanding that they call for no action on our part. We obey the requirements of genre and social expectations, making a speech on a public platform being very different

from what we say casually to friends. We look for certain formal qualities in art — exactness, balance, vivid evocation, etc. — and expect these qualities to grow naturally from inside rather than be imposed from without. We realize that art produces a pleasure different from intellectual or sensuous one — unreflective enjoyment, but one also pregnant with important matters. Change one feature and we know instinctively that something is wrong. How? Perhaps as we instinctively detect a lapse in grammar, by referring to tacit rules or codes. Nelson Goodman (5.5) argued that art was essentially a system of denotation, a set of symbols, even a code that we unravel, the code arbitrary but made powerful by repeated practice. {12} Edwin Panofsky suggested that symbols could be studied on three levels — iconic (the dog resembles a dog), iconographic (the dog stands for loyalty) or iconological (the dog represents some metaphysical claim about the reality of the physical world). {13} Hence the importance of a wide understanding of the artist and his times. And why no appeals to good intentions, or to morally uplifting content, will reason us into liking something that does not really appeal.

4.11. Art as Social Objects

But can we suppose that content doesn't matter? Not in the end. Art of the Third Reich and of communist Russia is often technically good, but we don't take it to our hearts. Marxist philosophers argue that art is the product of social conditions, and John Berger, for example, regarded oil paintings as commodities enshrining the values of a consumerist society. {14} Hermeneutists (18) argue that the art produced by societies allows them to understand themselves — so that we have devastating judgements skulking in the wartime portraits of Hitler, and in scenes of a toiling but grateful Russian proletariat. They are untrue in a way obvious to everyone.

But if society ultimately makes the judgements, who in society decides which artistic expressions it will commission and support? Not everyone. Appreciation requires experience and training, in making quality judgements, and in deciding the criteria. Some criteria can be variable (subject matter), some are standard (music is not painting) and some are decided by the history of the art or genre in question (paintings are static and two-dimensional). But additionally there are questions of authority and status. Institutionalists like George Dickie say simply that an object becomes art when approved sections of society confer that status on it. {15} But that only shifts the question: how can we be sure such sections are not furthering their careers in the cosy world of money, media and hype? Ted Cohen could not really find such rituals of conferral, {16} and Richard Wollheim wanted the reasons for such conferral: what were they exactly? {17} Arthur Danto introduced the term 'artworld' , but emphasize that successful candidates had to conform to current theories of art. Individual or arbitrary fiats were not persuasive. {18}

But are there not more important considerations? However portrayed in the popular press, artists lead hard lives, for the most part solitary, unrecognised and unrewarded. What drives them on? Vanity in part, and deep personal problems — plus, it may be, a wish to overcome feelings of inadequacy deriving from youth or the home background. But artists are not always more febrile or bohemian than others, or at least the evidence of them being so is open to question. {19} When asked, artists usually speak of some desire to make sense of themselves and their surroundings. They feel a little apart from life, and do not understand why the public can skim over the surface, never troubling itself with the deep questions that cause elation, anguish and wonder. Literature, say writers, brings them experiences saturated with meaning, in which they perceive the fittingness of the world and their own place within it. The

concepts of their own vision are inescapable theirs, and they can only hope these concepts are also important to the society from which they draw their support and inspiration.

4.12. Conclusions

We have come a long way, but only scratched the surface of aesthetics. Large sections (the non-representational arts, the ontology of art objects, the history of aesthetics) have not received even a mention. But here are the starting points at least for further reading in the difficult but rewarding original sources. Also the beginnings of answers to questions that surface continually in the writing and appraisal of poetry: What do poems attempt? Why don't the strongest feelings produce the best writing? Why is originality important, but not all-important? Why is poetry so marginalized in contemporary society, and what can be done to correct matters?

The answers will not be definitive. Philosophy does not finally settle anything, but can untangle the issues involved, suggest what has to be argued or given away if a certain position is held. Philosophical questions pass ultimately beyond rational argument (the finding of bad reasons for what we instinctively believe, one philosopher called his subject) into preferences, outlooks, experiences. It would be surprising if they didn't. And more surprising if we could use one small part of our faculties to explain the rest, though that is very much what mathematics, science, logic and linguistic philosophy have attempted. But if reason has its dangers, the sleep of reason may be worse.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

5. ART AS AUTONOMOUS

Today's art can seem so suspect that some touchstone is needed. Beauty is a term difficult for philosophers to handle, and is generally replaced by 'aesthetic qualities'.

5.1. Introduction

What makes something a work of art? How do we distinguish literature from everyday prose? What exactly is poetry? Habermas's (18.4) distinction between problem-solving (science) and world-disclosing (art) takes us only so far. {1} Scientists and mathematicians also see themselves as making sense of the world, and equally employ the gifts celebrated of artists — passion, creativity and imagination in pursuing the work, clarity and persuasiveness in reporting the results. Nonetheless, science (34) is a practical activity, a means to an end. We do not read scientific papers for the pleasure in seeing something well done, or place their mathematical expositions as a self-sufficient object on the wall.

Art, however, seems to present itself as an autonomous, self-enclosing entity. Immediately, before we have grasped its full nature, it seizes our attention. We find it arresting and engrossing, but also separate from us. Though we cannot master or possess it, art stirs us as other things cannot. And not always by argument since there can be few arguments to follow. Not wholly by truth, or accuracy of depiction, since we can be delighted by manifest absurdities. Not by its potential applications, as art is not generally useful in any direct way. By what then? The way it presents itself — by its coherence, balance, shape, rightful order: what an earlier age called 'beauty' and we call aesthetic qualities. {2}

5.2. Beauty

What is the first characteristic of a work of art? That it pleases us. Whatever else it does, be it interesting, informative, supportive of many worthy purposes, please us

it must. And genuinely: we cannot be reasoned into subverting our emotions. But since many things give us pleasure — gratification of the senses, winning an argument, the sunlight on an early summer morning — we have also to ask what is specific about aesthetic pleasure. No one has been wholly successful in answering this question, but several attempts are still important. The chief forms of beauty, said Aristotle, are order, symmetry and definition {3} Beautiful things please by proportion, said St. Augustine. {4} Harmony in variety is beauty, suggested the painter William Hogarth. {5} A close association between perception of an object and the feelings it arouses in the mind, decided Hume. {6}

Kant (13) went further. He distinguished three types of pleasure — in the agreeable, in the good and in beauty. The first was a matter of gratification, and here our preferences were simply matters of taste. Our pleasure in the good was important but not disinterested. Beauty, however, was an immediate and disinterested pleasure. To find something beautiful we must respond to it as it presents itself, without reasoning or analysis. There is nothing more fundamental we can appeal to, though we justify our feelings by pointing to aspects of that beauty.

And beauty is not mere feelings. Kant believed that, though the sense of beauty was grounded in feelings of pleasure, this pleasure was universally valid and necessary. Other people ought to feel as we do. Kant also stressed the disinterestedness of that pleasure. Just as human beings should never be treated as merely means to an end, so aesthetic pleasure comes from the sheer joy of deploying our imagination: not for reasons of morality or utility or any other purpose at all. In a free play of our imagination we bring concepts to bear on experiences that would otherwise be free of concepts, thereby extending our pleasure in the world.

But the pleasure does not bring understanding. Art objects are valuable for their beauty and as sensory embodiments of ideas, but they do not convey what Kant was disposed to call knowledge. Yet Hegel (14) disagreed. Knowledge appears through our immersion in the world. We know when we see into, through and around, and it is these actions that give us knowledge. Like Kant, Hegel based freedom on human reasoning and self-restraint, but felt that Kant's categories of thought were a new Cartesianism, which separated man from his emotional nature. By a dialectic of reasoning, Hegel attempted to build on the inherent meaning of words, to argue that terms like 'Mind' and 'Being' represented reality because man over the centuries has found them indispensable.

The twentieth century has generally been hostile to these approaches. Philosophy naturally wishes to reduce judgement to reasoning, and the analytical schools have tried to further reduce reasoning to logic, and to replace private thought by measurable external actions. From this standpoint, the difficulties with 'beauty' are these: How is the term to be defined? Given that beauty is an individual response, not a propositional (32.1) statement, how can the term be given objective existence? And if we accept Hegel's notion that works of art express the 'spirit of the age', and need an understanding of that age for their appreciation, how is 'beauty' to be established as a timeless entity?

Many philosophers believe these questions can't be answered. They regard 'beauty' as a standing concept, like truth, which cannot be based on grounds more fundamental. {7} They follow Wittgenstein (28.1) in thinking definitions are futile, that instances of 'beauty' are like those of 'games', with no common characteristic but only an overlapping plexus of resemblances. {8} 'Beauty', they say at last, is merely a vague term of approval for feelings, nature and works of art. {9}

But why then is beauty of such fundamental importance? Women, clothes, stately homes, works of art are all celebrated for this quality. We don't think beauty is their only excellence, or that works of art cannot include something of the difficult or harrowing — Beethoven's late quartets, or Grunwald's 'Crucifixion' — but beauty does serve us as no other term will. Aquinas's definition as 'that which pleases in the very apprehension of it' expresses a universal experience, and if philosophers have been unable to say something deeper, then the fault may lie at their door. Their language, with its crude reduction to utilitarian concepts, is unequal to the task. It is writers themselves — poets, essayists, art historians — who have generally furnished the useful insights and reflections. {10}

5.3. Aesthetic Qualities

But artists are not philosophers, and their insights do not add up to a coherent view. If we are concerned to understand art better, perhaps we should drop the term 'beauty' and talk instead of aesthetic qualities? There is no essential, defining characteristic of art, let us say, but there may be several ingredients vital to all works of art. We could note that artworks are man-made, and that we contemplate or enjoy them in a special, somewhat disinterested way. We could agree that appreciation calls both on personal experience and social customs. And we could accept that in losing ourselves in artworks we also gain a sense of wholeness and reconciliation with the world. {11}

How persuasive is that? Paintings and sunsets give us similar feelings of pleasure, but sunsets are not man-made. Do we really approach works of art with disinterestedness, an amalgam of detachment and imaginative involvement that Kant insisted should contain no tinge of possessiveness or desire? What is the personal experience that music calls on, and what are the social customs we need to understand in a Greek sculpture, uprooted from its temple and bleached of

its original bright colours? What possible sense of reconciliation and wholeness with the world did the music of Beethoven give Nazi concentration-camp commandants returning nightly from the systematic slaughter of their fellow human beings? And so on. To any simple list of aesthetic qualities the exceptions and qualifications are formidable. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Schopenhauer, Dewey (11.2), and Wittgenstein have added richness to our intellectual understanding of art, but their views conflict and diverge. Abstracted from our individual experience of art, do not our generalizations dwindle into contention? {12}

Perhaps there is another way of approaching aesthetic qualities. We know very well that a Russian icon or an African tribal mask were not primarily created as works of art, though they often appeal as such now. Perhaps we could discount their extrinsic aspects — the social context, the artist's intentions, their magical properties — and concentrate on what is left, on the intrinsic aspects, which must surely be their aesthetic qualities. But the aesthetic qualities may depend on the non-aesthetic. Harmony, balance, power, sensitivity, etc. — all these are perceived through extrinsic particulars: this story, this prevailing tone, these patches of colour. We can recognize the intrinsic qualities, and explain our liking for an artwork in these terms, but attempts to isolate the essentially aesthetic end in circular arguments. {13}

But then all philosophic arguments run into difficulty if pushed far enough. Perhaps we should simply note the attributes of aesthetic experience and attempt some practical description, realizing that words are imperfect instruments for conveying truth and meaning? Monroe Beardsley {14} offered five such attributes: object directness, felt freedom, detached effect, active discovery and wholeness. The first is a willingness to be absorbed and guided by the artwork — not only by its immediate features, but by deeper matters: plot, symbolism, social attitude, etc. The second is release

from extraneous circumstances. The third — ‘detached effect’ — is similar to Bullough's ‘psychic distance’ but not a necessary condition for aesthetic experience, simply a usual one. ‘Active discovery’ is a central requirement, however, and refers to the cognitive element of aesthetic experience, our willingness to sort things out and make sense of the experience. By ‘wholeness’, Beardsley originally meant completeness and coherence in the aesthetic experience, but later emphasized the coming together of intellect and emotion in an experienced continuum of the aesthetic experience, many works being too large and complex to be taken in at once glance, or even held in the mind as a unified aesthetic experience.

5.4. Genre and Social Expectations

Though contemporary art is often innovative and iconoclastic, it cannot be completely novel or it would not be understood. Challenging articles require references, and even the most outlandish installations and events grow out of previous exhibitions. Social convention therefore plays a large part in what counts as art. Similarly with judgement, perplexity disappearing when we recognize a play as a black comedy rather than a true-to-life tragedy. Perhaps we should look for the characteristics of art in what knowledgeable people say, rather than anything we can find ourselves. In other words — to adopt an influential theory of George Dickie's {15} — art is a status conferred by the ‘art world’.

But of course new difficulties appear. What are the artworld's qualifications? Even if we overlook the commercial links between critic and gallery, the suspicion that the art-market's promotions too often have profit in mind, we must still ask for the grounds of selection. Why is this object a work of art, and that not? And can something natural or utilitarian — driftwood or a public urinal — suddenly change into an artwork when members of the art-world decree it so? {16}

5.5. Aesthetic Distance

Let us backtrack and follow Kant's observation that our response to art is disinterested. The aesthetic response relies on a certain attitude, a detachment that Schopenhauer (12.3) saw as loss of the individual will or self, and which Edward Bullough {17} called the detachment or 'psychical distance'. This 'distance' removes the practical side of things, erects as it were an invisible frame round artistic expression, and makes aesthetic contemplation possible. Very likely, but what does the expression explain? Is it not simply an alternative to 'attending', i.e. an unnecessary expression which overlooks the parts played by object and spectator in the experience? {18} We suspend belief. We know from the picture frame, stages, story title that these are not 'real life' but something where greater wholeness and clarity will provide a more than compensating aesthetic pleasure? Very well, but then we have to look more closely at 'attending', which involves us in further problems. Not only do the picture frames, stage, etc. signal to us that the art-object is 'not for real' but the elements inside, the whole matter composing the object, are not representations of the real, but a complex series of codes that we learn to interpret and apply. This view, developed by Nelson Goodman, {19} links traditional aesthetics with linguistics and Structuralism, and questions any naive view of art as representation.

5.6. Intention and Artefact

What of the imitation or forgery made so skilfully that it is indistinguishable from the original? If the essence of art lies in its outward form, what is there to say that the imitation is not as fully a work of art as the original? Unless we know the object to be a forgery, i.e. we judge on other, privileged grounds, our aesthetic response will be the same. But we are not happy with the situation. The Chinese take a more tolerant line, but the west insists on having the original, rejecting the imitation out of hand. If there were no other way

of demonstrating the point, it is clear that art does not depend entirely on form: other elements — expression and intention — also play their part.{20}

But some art-forms are always reproductions. Drama, music and dance become alive and accessible only in performance. What then is the ‘real’ work of art, the script or the performance, the modest amateur production or the glittering Broadway production? Richard Wollheim suggested grouping matters differently, distinguishing ‘types’ from ‘tokens’. {21} Particular examples are tokens, i.e. both script and performances. The generic unit is the type, of which all tokens are examples, but which cannot be reduced to them. The terminology is useful, and has been widely adopted, but the treatment ramifies into the questions that perhaps only philosophers enjoy discussing.

5.7. Form as Argument

If form is not a container but a shaper and organizer, then all it can arrange, surely, is aesthetic response? No, said the classical world. Form was an argument, something which led to assent rather than truth. {2} There were two ways of arguing: with dialectic and rhetoric. Dialectic was the private style, the discourse used by philosophers who live apart from the crowd, systematic reasoning for an expert audience. It was spare, lean and tough, the very style used later by the Royal Academy and then science. Rhetoric was the public style, expansive argumentation for a mixed audience, and therefore the instrument of practical wisdom. Dialectic was not superior to rhetoric, quite the contrary. The wellsprings of rhetoric lay in ethos, a demonstration of the refinement of moral character that was the goal of a liberal education. Philosophy was not based on unquestionable truths, but on implicit opinions which rhetoric attempted to extract and formulate more precisely. In all discourse - dialectic and rhetoric — there were five offices to fulfil: invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. Form

applied to each: there were well-trying, demonstrable ways of bringing about the effects required, these appealing as much to the mind as the ears. 'The truth of the poet', said Cicero, 'is a very near kinsman to that of the orator, rather more heavily fettered as regards rhythm, but with ampler freedom in its choice of words, while in its use of ornament it is oratory's ally and almost its counterpart.' {23}

5.8. Art as a Communal Learned Activity

The invention of printing reduced the importance of memory and delivery in literary production, only invention, arrangement and style remaining of the classical mores. Perhaps until the sixties in England, when emphasis shifted to uninhibited 'free expression', the artist was seen as his own severest critic, shaping his work with unremitting labour to a worthy if unattainable standard of perfection. Modernism notwithstanding, the glories of English literature suggested no great need for radical invention. Henry Newbolt said: 'The more a writer struggles to invent the less he is likely to create. His true way is a different one; he finds his material among the accumulated stories of the race, whether ancient or modern; he sets to work to reject all that he judges unnecessary or unfit, to add all that is lacking; and finally, without effort, almost without consciousness of his power, he endows his work with his own personal quality in the act of making it serve his own purpose.' {24}

Newbolt's patriotic outpourings soon fell from vogue, but sober craftsmanship continues to be an important theme in many of today's do-it-yourself guides to art, both books and courses. {25} Dance, painting, creative writing, drama — a glance through any adult education prospectus will show the popularity and astonishing range of courses offered, where a generally older generation is introduced to the rudiments of the art in question by tutors who are often artists themselves. Quality varies, and tutors have learned not to expect the dedication, the developing imagination, the willingness to

learn, and go on forever learning and improving, that marks out the true professional. But the results express the individuality of the participants, and bring undoubted pleasure to themselves and family. Given the ease of word-processor, and speed with which it may be written, poetry is especially popular.

5.9. Anti-aesthetics of Postmodernism

Very different is the professional art scene. We are often uncertain at a poetry reading as to whether the introduction is continuing or the poem begun. And exhibits in galleries have become so inconsequential as to be sometimes thrown out by cleaners, gallery staff or even fellow artists. {26} Clearly, much of contemporary art is non-aesthetic. It aims to broaden the concept of art, to make it an everyday, democratic and unsettling experience. If the specific pleasures of art disappear, so be it. Those pleasures were often elitist, calling on a privileged education to appreciate previous art-forms and an unearned leisure to indulge their further development. And where art leads, philosophers, critics and social commentators must follow. It is extraordinarily difficult to discern the significant in the diversity of contemporary activity, and theories which attempt to do so are often unconvincing or parasitic. The 'But is it art?' jibe may linger, but the artists themselves are serious, as must be the gallery-owners and publishers to induce a sophisticated public to part with hard-won cash.

Art at the cutting edge today, whether the performing, visual or literary arts, seems a rejection of much of what previously characterized the enterprise. Meaning is indeterminate, fragmented or shifting. There is no message as such, or even subject matter beyond what the artwork creates. Previous art-forms, concepts and terminology are combined playfully, as a collage or montage of images that are not required to make sense of the outside world. Even the artist is self-effacing, leaving his productions to speak as their

audience pleases. But if such art appears democratic, inviting audience participation, its appeal is nonetheless to a fashionable minority who have the use of wide cultural reference. {27}

Does this reduce art to entertainment, a distraction for a restless, easily-bored urban society? Possibly so, but art is only reflecting its times, the plurality of a consumer society. Does this not make artists into performers? Inevitably so, but how could it be otherwise? A few artists — initially fortunate perhaps, but then increasingly driven by commercial pressures to water down and repeat their work — do reap success, if success means money, critical acknowledgement and social prominence. They use, and indeed have to use, the promotion of the art markets — the official media, the establishment, the various underground movements of competing cliques — since independence threatens the system and invites reprisals. Those not so fortunate in the first place, the great majority of artists, must stay ever-hopeful or marginalized. Art, both for its creation and appreciation, requires exorbitant amounts of time, and time in bustling western democracies is a scarce commodity. Naturally, with so much on offer, the public needs guidance — hence the streamlined criticism, shallow advertising, artistic fads and fashion. Thousands of man-hours go into a film's production, but that film is written off by its audience in a few minutes of predictable comment in the foyer afterwards. No more is wanted, as there beckon a dozen new ways of filling time.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

6. ART AS NOT AUTONOMOUS

Most see art as something distinct from life, with its own procedures and rules. A minority, however, significant because their theories influence contemporary writing, wish to bring art closer to life. Structuralists view art, language and society as expressions of deep structures, often binary codes, that in fact express our primary natures. A systematic study of such codes is called semiotics, which was later hijacked by Poststructuralists as evidence that language alone provides a true reality.

6.1. Introduction: Pierce

Ferdinand de Saussure was not the first to propose a science of signs: the American Charles Pierce (1839-1914) independently {1} developed semiology within the context of pragmatism. Pierce side-stepped Descartes' scepticism, observing that we are persuaded by the number and variety of arguments supporting a conclusion, rather than by the meditations of one individual, even ourselves. 'The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed upon by all who investigate is what we mean by truth, and the object represented in this opinion is real.' Pierce examined these investigations (methods of inquiry, standards of inference, ways of clarifying, identifying hypotheses, etc.), classifying them by the number of relations they exhibit. Meaning and understanding involve threefold relations, and as such constituted signs. Semiotics is a theory of how we are guided and constrained in interpreting signs, and some of Pierce's terminology is still widely used: iconic (sign resembles referent), indexical (sign is causally associated with referent) and symbolic (sign has an arbitrary relation to referent). Indeed, most things ultimately could be seen as signs: mathematical and logical symbolism, even science itself.

6.2. Saussure's Semiotics

Saussure worked on a much smaller canvas and devised a semiology that properly applied to linguistics. Certainly the signified (concept) and signifier (sound or letter group) were connected only arbitrarily, as had been noted since Aristotle. But Saussure made it a cardinal feature of his system: the principle of arbitrariness, he said, dominates all linguistics. The English call their faithful friend 'dog' and the Spanish 'perro'. Historically, there are reasons for the difference, but Saussure's approach removes history from consideration: we look only at language as normal speakers use it now.

Binary opposition is a common feature of the western intellectual tradition (e.g. individual versus society, true versus false) and Saussure writes this opposition into his system. No particular unit (word, sound, concept) has any intrinsic value beyond what it derives from the presence of other units in the system, similar or dissimilar. Any unit (and that includes larger elements of syntax and meaning) can substitute for any other, or be compared to another. Words acquire their values in two ways. One is by virtue of being strung together in sentences: their syntagmatic relationships. The other is paradigmatic, associative, from experience of the world outside, whether directly through sense impressions or via mental operations. This paradigmatic way is not logical: we build up chains of associations — school, playtime, games, competition, etc. — where the end members have no obvious connection with each other. {2}

Two points need to be made. Firstly, language can be studied from many aspects (as individual expression, social need, aesthetic shape, etc.) but Saussure's approach cuts these off, treating language as a self-contained system of signs. The arbitrary nature of signs is a product of that approach: it is not proved by his system but presupposed by it. Secondly, the binary opposition is a structuring device: a conscious choice. Formal logic has a stronger case for the

opposition (true or false) but has in practice an imperfect grasp on the world, commonly uses more than two values, and has branched into deontic, modal etc. forms.

6.3. Lévi-Strauss

Structuralism originated in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss on pre-literate peoples. Lévi-Strauss {3} was a contemporary of Sartre and French existentialism, but his thinking went back to the collectivist notions of the sociologist Emile Durkheim, who saw society as the determining force. Societies controlled the reasoning and morals of their citizens, and it is therefore societies as a whole that should be studied, in a rational, secular and scientific manner. In this spirit, Lévi-Strauss analysed the kinship and myths of Brazilian peoples, deriving sets of rules or structures that represented them in a quasi-mathematical terminology. His doctoral thesis, published in 1949 as *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, described marriage in preliterate societies as an exchange between social groups, an expression of a universal 'reciprocity'. Feminists were attracted to this explanation of the subordinate role of women. Grander still was the claim that Structuralism disclosed the foundations of society, and therefore the true meaning of human existence.

Literary critics didn't go that far, but they did seek to understand the rules by which we interpret a piece of writing. Jonathan Culler remarked in 1970 that 'the real object of poetics is not the work itself but its intelligibility. One must attempt to explain how it is that works can be understood; the implicit knowledge, the conventions that enable readers to make sense of them must be formulated. . .' {5} Of course the readers has to be competent, skilled even, but Culler did not elicit structures independent of social class and period, as Structuralists would.

Lévi-Strauss was a theoretician par excellence. He drew widely on the work of others, but had only six months of

practical field experience to his credit. His writing was very technical, and couched in a style unusual in science, with gnomic, metaphorical, abstractions to illustrate the practical. 'If birds are metaphorical human beings and dogs are metonymical human beings, cattle may be thought of as metonymical inhuman beings and racehorses as metaphorical inhuman beings' is a typical example.

Though his writing brought Structuralism to public notice, and was hailed as important for that reason, many anthropologists now think the approach unnecessary. {4} All the same, Lévi-Strauss's novel insights range over an astonishingly wide field, and his analysis of unsuspected relationships in myths, totemism, and kinship, together with his demonstrations of ways that natural and social behaviour lend themselves to cultural elaboration, were important contributions in their own right.

Language theorists were more critical. {6} Lévi-Strauss's theories were vaguely expressed or tautological: i.e. not scientific, couldn't be falsified. Individuals become symbolic concepts, lacking existence outside these conceptual schemes, which is a useful notion for theorists like Foucault and Althusser, but hardly credible to the workaday world. What, moreover (to press the questions that plague Chomsky's deep grammar: 39) was the status of these structures? It is one thing to identify underlying structures in the mythology and social behaviour of illiterate peoples, but something else to suppose that such structures really exist, that they find expression in language and unconsciously control action.

Anthropologists themselves are currently much divided, even as to whether Lévi-Strauss properly collected the evidence {7} Being visible to none but the specialist, can these structures really influence the laity? Abstracted in a simplistic, reductionist manner, perhaps these structures are simply be taxonomic systems, useful for classifying, but hardly providing man with his *raison d'être*? Certainly they

employ a mathematical notation, but that does not guarantee that mathematics adequately represents the situation. The controversy surrounding Eynsenck's introversion-extroversion axes of personality theory, and more particularly Cattell's trait theory, demonstrates how variously human behaviour can make fun of mathematical treatment. {8}

Perhaps the proof is in the eating. Has Structuralism provided interpretations that more exactly describe our aesthetic responses to literature? Are we clearer why we like some works and find others wanting? Can we look deeper and with a more generous discernment at novels, plays, poems? Not generally. As with myth analysis, results have been very disappointing. Structuralism does not illuminate the work so much as substantiate its own models. {9} Or illustrate them, might be fairer, since substantiation calls on evidence that Structuralists and Poststructuralists have generally disdained to produce.

The last is worth stressing. Historians commonly use a structuralism when they talk of underlying trends and social movements: the growth of secular power in Tudor England, the loss of spiritual confidence in thirteenth century Islam, etc. But the structures they adduce are not simple and universal, but complex and empirically derived. Evidence is collected, reasonably interpreted, and findings defended against alternative views. Much the same applies to Chomsky's (39) grammar, which also employs deep, largely hidden structures.

Whatever the shortcomings, the movement soon branched into new areas: ideology and Poststructuralism (7-9). Books continue to appear, which literature students must include in their reading, but Paris grew bored with Structuralism after the middle seventies. {10} The theorists undermined their own precarious assumptions. Foucault (9) adopted the looser, anti-rationalist approaches of Lacan (21). Derrida (8)

attacked the very notion of structure, or of language saying anything definite at all.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

7. ROLAND BARTHES

Roland Barthes was a gifted member of the Parisian intelligentsia, famous for his left-wing attacks on the bourgeoisie in which he blended existentialism (15), semiotics (16.2) and linguistic hedonism. Barthe's thesis that the author is dead — i.e. that writing is beyond the control of the individual author — greatly overstates the case, but introduces an important theme of Postmodernism.

7.1. Introduction

Anti-bourgeois, standing apart from the French academic scene, initially an existentialist and always anti-essentialist, Roland Barthes (1915-80) came to prominence with the 1957 publication of *Mythologies*, a ferocious attack on French society. Barthes was a hedonist, and argued for fluidity and plurality, in outlook and social behaviour. Contemporary criticism was ahistorical, he complained, psychologically naive and deterministic, covertly ideological, bovinely content with the one interpretation. In works which followed, Barthes claimed to have unmasked the pretensions of Romanticism and Realism. If the first overlooked the sheer labour of writing, aiming for an art that conceals art, literature in the second becomes a servant of reality and therefore anti-art. Barthes distinguished the clerkly *écrivain* (who uses language to express what is already there, if only the contents of his thoughts) from the nobler *écrivain* (who is absorbed into the activity of writing, labouring away towards new elaborations and meanings). In practice a writer might express both aspects, but the more honest and important writer was the *écrivain*, whose incessant labours did not adopt the ideologies of the bourgeoisie, but bridged the gulf between intellectuals and the proletariat. Writers worked as everyone else worked, and their efforts should not be smoothed over as inspiration of a favoured spiritual class. {1}

7.2. Écrivain and Écrivain

The *écrivain* is a materialist, a worker with language, one who uses its signifiers to create what had not existed before. What he writes comes not from his mind or subconscious, but from the psychic case-history of his body, which is the medium through which language expresses itself. The author is not a self-conscious, crafting entity: that does not exist, or is immaterial. The author is simply the means by which a text emerges, something which we should enjoy as a linguistic spectacle, and not view as a mirror to the world. Certainly the text will lack finality, and possibly shape as well, but it will be authentic, preserving what actually happened. The text which the lover weaves in Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* (1978) does not have narrative or purpose but becomes a 'brazier of meaning' as the ambiguous signs of the loved one's behaviour are interpreted. Such behaviour is 'scriptible' — is rewritten by the lover as he reads them, just as we rewrite a text in reading it.

S/Z (1970) was based on an untypical novella by Balzac: *Sarrasine*. Barthes chopped Balzac's text into 561 units and then dissolved the story further by treating it under five codes: actional, hermeneutic, semic, symbolic and referential. The last code, the references the story makes to 'reality out there', was the most controversial. Barthes argued that this 'reality' was only the glib commonplaces and accepted wisdom of Balzac's own time: not insights but stereotypes. As a Structuralist, he suggested that there was no author but rules, no expression but only technique. In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) Barthes went further. Here the body of the writer (his personal and secret mythology) speaks to the body of the reader — by disconcerting him, rocking his cultural and psychological foundations, bringing him to a crisis in his understanding of language.

Barthes was against doxa, conformism, the status quo. He set no great store by his own work, which was a stick to beat

the present with and make it more reflective. In writing a text, any text, the writer himself comes undone, remaining only as devices within the text, appearing perhaps in the third person as he does in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975). In his own way, Barthes was a moralist, a hedonistic materialist, arguing that we must surrender our individuality whenever we enter language, which cannot belong to us. {2}

7.3. Critique

Barthes's flirtation with the scientism of the 'Nouvelle Critique' — that literary criticism should be a scientific discipline, and therefore follow in the steps of structural anthropology and model itself on linguistics — was very brief. By *Michelet* (1954) Barthes had absorbed the pessimistic and irrational outlook common in the years following W.W.II. He became familiar with the work of Mallarmé (de-realization: the poetics of silence and negation), Kafka (ceaseless struggle with inexhaustible riddles), Blanchot (helplessness and dark pathos of literature) and Bataille (Nietzschean violence and a surrealist eroticism). {3} Through these influences Barthes ushered in what is most distinctive of Postmodernism — the indeterminacy, self-irony, and critical vagueness {4} that were fashioned by Derrida into deconstruction. Initially at least, Barthes was very much a left-wing intellectual. Hence his interest in myths, which are the products of social groups using an unexamined social code. He excoriated the bourgeoisie in his *Mythologies*, but overlooked partial demolition of his own position in Camus (15.4), Merleau-Ponty and Aaron. {5} By 1960 he was more concerned with writing itself, promoting the priestly écrivain above the subservient écrivain, and in 1963 he extended his stylistic analysis of Michelet to Racine's world of stifled erotic violence. In *Sur Racine* the plays are studied like primitive societies, their underlying themes and mechanisms receiving a well-publicized Structuralist interpretation.

But the structures were not the 'rules of functioning' that Barthes claimed for them, and his novel use of Saussurian categories did not convince the master's pupils. Merquoir calls him 'a very gifted semiologist who had no clear idea what he was doing.' {6} Barthes had confused matters. He made everything endowed with meaning into a sign, collected such signs into a system, and called this system a language. Where was the demonstration that Saussure's categories could be applied here? Barthes did not trouble to provide one, either for *Sur Racine* or his later analysis of fashion, *Système de la Mode* (1967). In his *S/Z*, Barthes loosened his Structuralist interpretation and turned instead to narration and its analysis by the Russian formalists. Most notable about *S/Z* was its attack on the 'illusions of realism'. Unfortunately, Balzac is not a realistic writer in the sense envisaged by Barthes, who overlooked a generation of scholarship in this regard. {7} Nor did the 'innocent eye' of realism apply. {8} But for Barthes, realism came with a stereotyped moral vision, and all strategies were fair in a war against repressive dogma — including Barthes' use of a crude Freudianism, a far-fetched reinterpretation of the plot, and a bullying of Balzac into meaning what he did not say. {9} More than that, claimed Barthes, the better, writerly (scriptible) texts call for a playful reinterpretation of the signifiers. We should not be bound by what the author said, or thought he was saying, but cede authority to the reader. The New Critics may have dethroned the author's intention, but Barthes is not arguing for close textural reading. Interpretation for him must be creative and individual, for how else can we make ourselves free creatures of impulse?

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

8. DERRIDA

Since all attempts to ground meaning in more fundamental entities have failed, perhaps we should conclude that sentences have no meaning at all, no final, settled meaning that we can paraphrase in non-metaphorical language. That is the contention of Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction is the literary programme that derives from this approach, though Derrida himself does not see deconstruction as a method, and still less an attack on the western canon of literature, but more a way of investigating the textural contexts in which words are used. The social, cultural and historical aspects of that context, and how we interpret a text from our own current perspective, are the concerns of hermeneutics. Derrida's view goes deeper. There is no 'thought' as such, he argues, that we create in our minds and then clothe with words. Words are the beginning and the end of the matter, the only reality. They refer only to other words, not to things — be they 'thoughts' in the mind, or 'objects' in the world. By looking carefully at a text we see where the writer has chosen one word in preference to others of similar meaning, and these choices tell us something about what the writer is trying not to say, i.e. is suppressing or hiding from us — either deliberately, or by thoughtless immersion in the suppositions of his time. In this sense, texts write themselves. Context and author are largely irrelevant. And not only texts. Institutions, traditions, beliefs and practices: none of these have definable meanings and determinable missions. All dissolve into words, whose deployment it is the philosopher's task to investigate. {18}

8.1. Overview

Derrida was the best known of the Poststructuralists, a playfully knowledgeable writer who attacked 'logocentrism', the view that ideas exist outside the language we use to express them. Derrida believed that words refer only to other words, not to things or thoughts or feelings.

His 'deconstruction' is employed by radical critics to question or undermine the canon of western literature, but Derrida himself was often a good deal more astute and learned than his followers.

8.2. Introduction

Derrida took an hermetic view of language. Words refer to other words, not to things or thoughts. His quarrel was with 'logocentrism', that assumption (as he saw it) that we have an idea in our minds which our writing or speaking attempts to express. That is not at the case. No one possesses the full significance of their words. Texts in some sense write themselves: i.e. are independent of an author or his intentions.

Derrida was famous for deconstruction, the claim that texts subtly undermine their ostensible meanings. Texts (all discourse altogether, from a transient remark to the most pondered philosophy) are open to repeated interpretation. His first demolition job (*L'Origine de la géométrie*: 1962) was on Husserl, whose paper on the origin of geometry was shown by Derrida to compound more problems than it solved. In 1967 came the three books that made Derrida's name: *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, *Speech and Phenomena*. Six years later he brought out three more controversial works (*Marges de la philosophie*, *La Dissémination*, *Positions*) which continued his attack on 'logocentrism', what Derrida called the western preconception with truth as a presence (essence, existence, substance, subject). {1}

Derrida is commonly explained by developing a concept of Saussure's (16.2). Just as phonemes derive their significance from their ability to contrast recognizably with other sounds, and to replace other phonemes in words, so our understanding of a word depends on other words — on an endless chain of signifiers, pointing to nothing beyond themselves and developing out a history of usage entirely

lost to us. In short, language depends on nothing, no fundamental ground of logic, science or society. But though signifiers continually defer to each other (*différance*), they may leave a trace of their deferments (discernible through Derrida's deconstruction) where the author of the text in question has suppressed meaning by choosing one word in preference to another. Whence comes the author's authority to make this choice? Not from any conception of 'what he meant', as this has no existence outside words. Nor from any unvoiced, inner intention, which is again without any final determinant of meaning, being just the product of repeated suppressions of other thoughts. The double bind is complete. There is no end to interpretation, and no escaping it, says Derrida. All we can do is point to its workings.

But Derrida's attack went deeper. Knowledge, identity, truth, meaning — all the great concepts of western thought — achieve their status by overlooking or repressing other elements in their derivation. Not only do they push themselves forward as self-sufficient, giving themselves a presence that doesn't exist outside philosophic discourse, but they replace other usages. Writing is often seen as less immediate and authentic than speech, but that is not necessarily the case. The early Christian Church made logos into the Word of God, i.e. fought the pagan classical world by borrowing the Greek word for wisdom and rationality. There is no end to such strategies, and no centre. Hence Derrida's style, a new Joycean farrago without the humour. His verbal acrobatics — puns, quibbles, equivocations, neologisms, subterfuges, conflation, allusions and playful digressions — masterful or tedious according to viewpoint — all focus attention on what Derrida claimed is everywhere important in language: its opacity to the world beyond itself and an astonishing fecundity in its own creation.

As to be expected from its approach, Derrida's terminology shifted over the years: new words were coined and old words given new meanings. Concepts don't have settled

definitions, indeed can't have, but assume new shapes depending on what deconstruction is 'reading' at the time. That opens new possibilities as Derrida, for example, built on Kierkegaard's leap of faith, distinguishing decision from undecidability. Since the effect or significance of some decision is never wholly known, but refers to some future event (which is undecidable in its turn), every decision must to some extent be an act of faith. This is the feature that makes it a decision, rather than a mechanical follow on from the facts. Responsibility comes in acknowledging the undecidability, which is often a decision between the particular and the universal, between this and the 'other' — between, for example, wishing to protect someone and the general need to be truthful. One side inevitably suffers. When that 'other' is religious injunctions — what Derrida called the 'wholly other' — the decision is even more indeterminable, becoming indeed a paradox or 'aporia' (religions have to be lived, with unforeseeable results). Among such 'aporia' for Derrida were 'gift' (how to be genuinely a gift without leading to some recompense), 'hospitality', 'forgiveness' and 'mourning' (successful bereavement would remove the loved one from consciousness: Derrida borrowed and undermined the Freudian concept of the introjection of the other).

8.3. Evaluation

Derrida has been called philosopher, anti-philosopher, literary theorist, literary subverter and intellectual joker. {2} But his central tenets are clear. Once we use language (speech or writing) to refer to reality, that reality is linguistically formulated and therefore indeterminate. Meaning is not something pre-existing in the mind that we struggle to express. Like the main analytical schools of language philosophy from Hume onwards, and contrary to Saussure, Derrida does not regard words as the expression of ideas.

Derrida's second tenet was that words rest on nothing — not on speech (Austin: 28.3) or intention (Grice: 28.4) or naming (Kripke: 29.8) or deep grammar (Chomsky: 39) or metalanguages (Davidson: 30) or social usage (Wittgenstein: 28.1). We cannot define a word except in relation to other words, and these in turn call on other words, and so on. Analytical philosophers are much exercised by meaning, truth and belief, and Derrida studied some of them. {3} But analytical philosophy he saw as much too narrow and self-centred. Derrida's mission was to show that texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs and practices do not have definable meanings, and will always exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. He took it as self-evident that language is a closed system of signs, without a centre, that logic, perception or social behaviour cannot provide the grounds for language, which is the primary reality. No arguments can counter this assertion. Derrida didn't construct any philosophic system, was opposed to such systems, and indeed disliked the inbred world of academia. In his celebrated exchange with John Searle over Austin's book *How to do Things with Words*, he was more concerned to score debating points to illustrate that narrowness than to seriously discuss the issues on academic grounds. {5}

Derrida asked some important questions, and no doubt widened the remit of academia, probably for the better. But his central assertion is false. Words don't write themselves. Our understanding of brain functioning allows words and ideas have an existence independent of their author, but that existence is not beyond the control of other parts of the author's mind, or society at large.

8.4. Derrida's Style of Argumentation

As practised by his many disciples, deconstruction has become method of reading a text: interpreting it (or misinterpreting it, as critics would say). Reading should be a free, joyous, creative performance, and literary

deconstruction does just that — encourages texts to undermine themselves, subvert any settled or sensible meaning. The strategies are simple. First comes the all or nothing demand for clarity. If, as is generally the case, given enough ingenuity, some shade of uncertainty or ambiguity can be teased out of a passage, then the meaning is declared to be undetermined. Second is equivocation, the double meaning of words exemplified in: ‘The trouble with political jokes is that they so frequently get elected.’ The critic burrows through, subtly evading argument or coming to perverse conclusions by continually shifting the senses in which words or phrases are being employed. Third is the strategy of artificially isolating a word, removing it entirely from the context of its deployment, and then declaring the word ambiguous by showing it now capable of being used variously. Fourth is opacity, constructing arguments that peter out because constructed at key points with words whose meaning is left entirely obscure. Coupled with this — a fifth strategy — is a pretentious use of word or phrase which the struggling reader can only ascribe to profundity. Sixth is the use of abstraction, strategies that replace the ‘who, how, when’ with impersonal, intercultural forces. Seventh, and finally, is extended reflexiveness, entangling meaning in words which need further analysis in words which also call for further analysis, and so on. {6} Most find this detestable, a grotesque parody of the academic style, wildly unreadable and all too easy to mimic, hopefully not seriously. {7}

8.5. Wider Philosophic Perspective

Yet Derrida was serious, and not entirely as literary critics interpret him. Certainly he did not sharply distinguish between literature and philosophy. Nor did he like the specialization of ivory-tower philosophy. Like Foucault and Lacan, Derrida belonged to the intelligentsia, and would have been failing in his social responsibilities not to have

demonstrated how words are used for political ends, often to intimidate and repress the less-advantaged communities.

But the matter needs to be seen in wider context. The analytical schools base their case on closely reasoned argument and evidence. The continental schools do not. Following Nietzsche (16), they distrust reason, retorting that the clever lawyer can prove anything. The grounds of their approaches are linguistics, sociology, psychiatry, politics — grounds shadowy and secondary to the analytical schools, but to the continentals vital and basic. There the debate ends. If, to the satisfaction of the analytical schools, the grounds for the continental's case are shown to be without foundation, to be only myths, the response comes that all fields of intellectual activity are ultimately myths. The correspondence theory of truth does not apply, so much as the consistency and completeness of the coherence theory. It is in the fields of linguistics (37), sociology (26), psychoanalysis (19) and politics (41) that the battle needs to be fought.

Yet these are old arguments. {8} At best, reality can only partially circumscribed by words, and what we know of brain functioning would make it highly unlikely than anything as complicated as consciousness could be governed by the small areas responsible for linguistic skills. Only the weak form of the Sapir-Whorf (37.4) hypothesis is generally accepted: i.e. that language influences but does not control perception. Mostly we learn by seeing and doing, and there are many types of knowledge — riding a bicycle, developing a taste in painting, social interaction — where words take us only so far. We remember places and faces without preserving them in words, obviously so, or we wouldn't recognise our family, homes or places of work. But what of more abstract concepts like truth, honesty, kindness: how do these have existence outside words? Because we need them in our everyday lives. Societies have codes of conduct, and that means we privilege (to use Derrida's term) good

over evil, truth over falsehood. Language is mysterious in its operations, but we don't have to deny the existence of what we cannot yet explain. Many philosophers do indeed believe that meaning precedes expression, and that we can to some extent think without possessing a language. Idiot savants, for example, have amazing mathematical abilities, but often have only a few words at their command. Even Derrida rewrote his paragraphs, and in doing so acknowledged that the first drafts did not fully express what he meant. That meaning need not have final or complete expression, and probably never can have. Hawkin's (23.7) theory of brain functioning accommodates degrees of precision. Philosophers are always finding exceptions, qualifications, further considerations. Language is constantly modifying and being modified by our need for a consistent understanding of ourselves and our place in the scheme of things. Perhaps what Derrida attacked is the common pursuit of philosophy. He knew very well that language cannot escape social customs, linguistic codes, tacit assumptions, etc., all of which shift in time and between communities. He knew too that even at its most stringently analytical, in the Anglo-Saxon schools, philosophy is not opposed to drawing closer to the arts or to embracing social issues. But what can this bare, abstract, context-less generality really lay claim to? Too often it is merely word spinning, and by being a good deal more learned, subtle and inventive, Derrida outrageously sent up the whole process.

But philosophy is still philosophy, employing different approaches and providing different insights. Philosophy uses language certainly — a more logical and scientific language in the analytical schools, and more imaginative in the continental ones — but to see philosophy as simply another literary activity is not to understand its problems or achievements. Literary theorists may well need some grounding for their speculations, but concepts cannot simply be borrowed with no thought of underlying differences in

procedure and assumption. Literature students very much need to understand the differences, perhaps even submit to a short undergraduate course in logic and European thought. Derrida's strategy was not new (is indeed all too familiar from the Sophists' days) and this spinning and unspinning of dense textural webs may prepare students for nothing more useful than climbing their own academic ladder. Derrida didn't want that. {9} Philosophy requires arduous training, he asserted, and he did not believe that 'anything goes'. {10} Why was he so popular? Because his views, incompletely understood, furnish grounds for rewriting the canon of western literature. If everything is merely interpretation — individual, shifting, groundless — there are no reasons for preferring Jane Austen to a slush romance. But Derrida is then being misinterpreted. Certainly he understood the irony, if not absurdity, of employing as weapons the very words he criticized. But Derrida's was guerrilla warfare, attack and retreat, with no ground held. {11} Awareness of the fundamental problems is what he aimed at — problems which persist even if we ground understanding in brain processes and regard words as articulations of behaviour which is largely instinctive and unconscious. Derrida's revelations were not revelations at all, only late and perhaps sensible reactions to the overblown claims of philosophy. So he is read with amusement by pragmatists like Rorty and Margolis. {12} Flight from all-embracing reason, moreover, is not without its precedents. Nineteenth-century figures like Fichte rejected the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and the certainty of discourse has been doubted by philosophers of science impeccably part of the empiricist tradition. {13}. The irreducible mind theory of brain functioning (23.10), and idealist philosophers generally, oppose Derrida's arguments altogether, of course: our words do express pre-existing thoughts, though in an individual and imperfect way.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

9. MICHEL FOUCAULT

Foucault welded hermeneutics, Freudian psychiatry (19) and Saussurian semiotics (16.2) into a powerful and idiosyncratic attack on rationalism. Though Foucault overstated the case for political repression through language, metaphor theory has independently developed some of his insights — how language colours and partly controls our outlooks, how social attitudes may be regulated by binary opposites.

His work, which has great brio and belligerence, is very much in the French intelligentsia tradition.

9.1. Introduction

Michel Foucault wrote challengingly on psychiatry, medicine and the human sciences. Despite the width of reference, his subject is discourse, which he regarded as the only reality. His baroque, glittering, and apocalyptic style is unconcerned with referents (the signified) or the usual narrative of explanation. Also immaterial is the author, Foucault himself, who is generally regarded as a Poststructuralist but in fact rejected all such labels. The text writes itself. Driven by the power and sexuality inherent in all human beings, text wells out of any gaps in discourse, creating itself in a free play of words that is only constrained by what society will permit. Society is the law-maker. Its power permeates all levels and all discourse, showing itself in such distinctions as sane-insane, natural-unnatural, sickness-health, truth-error. In *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *The Order of Things* (1966) Foucault claimed that it was modes of discourse, rather than any interchange between observation and hypothesis, that positioned and maintained these distinctions.^{1}

Also important were figures of speech, the tropes that control discourse, which dominated certain epochs of intellectual behaviour. Underlying our historical view of madness we have successively metaphor (resemblance), metonymy

(adjacency), synecdoche (essentiality) and irony (doubling). Madness in the sixteenth century loses its sign of sanctity and becomes identified with human wisdom, the Wise Fool. Two centuries later, madness is set against reason, and the insane are incarcerated with paupers and criminals. Come the nineteenth century and madness is regarded as part of normal humanity, a phase in its development, and the insane are given special treatment in lunatic asylums. Today, after Freud, the similarities with the sane are stressed, and the mad are encouraged to understand the sources of illness, under the watchful control of a psychoanalyst.

9.2. Details

Though Foucault originally saw sexual desire as a determining feature, he came in his multi-volume *The History of Sexuality* (1976) to cede priority to power: power of the State and its institutions. If sex is afforded greater metaphysical status in the west than elsewhere, and has spawned a science of its own, sex has now been made desirable by a society that needs to discipline its members. Love in the family can fall into perversion, and then to degeneracy, and so to loss of racial power, wealth and status. The racial conditioning of the Nazis is nothing to the bio-politics that threatens on the horizon. About these, and society in general today, Foucault was gloomy: he had no liking for western civilization, nor anything to put in its place.

Foucault began with hermeneutics. (18) {2} The madness described in *Madness and Civilization* (1961), was real, but not properly understood, being refracted through contemporary concepts, just as our own must be when we study a period. Then came three books (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, *The Birth of a Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*) which concerned themselves with systems of knowledge. Strictly speaking, this is not Structuralism: Foucault was not interested in sign systems or

social codes, nor in myths, kinship patterns or the unconscious. He studied only discourse, and discourse out of context. Moreover, unlike the historian, Foucault did not attempt an exegesis of these ideas, or explain how one led to another. He investigated the structural regularities that underlay them. What are these regularities? Not descriptions simply, said Foucault, but prescriptive rules. Yet they weren't timeless or universal. What then? Foucault didn't say. {3}

In the seventies, Foucault turned to the themes which made his name: sexual repression and the relationship of power to knowledge. His findings were very radical. Conventional wisdom saw sexual desire as an inherent but largely negative component of human nature, which social repression is needed to control. According to Foucault, however, western societies have become increasingly obsessed with sex, inciting discussion of it, even if veiling it with secrecy at the last moment. And it is repression that paradoxically creates the sexual obsession, encouraging talk in the interests of liberation and self-understanding, creating new sexual practices and so providing new foci for oppression. {4}

Society is a mosaic of power relationships, with multiple points of resistance and competing strategies of resistance. What these strategies were, Foucault did not explain, though much of his life was spent fighting for various social and political causes. {5}

But power also suppresses truth, or at least controls the truths that we can recognize. Knowledge and power are therefore inextricably enmeshed: truth, like sexuality, is historically conditioned. Hermeneutics returns: there is no privileged position from which to obtain an objective view of truth, and we are inside any society we choose to study. Practices that use truth as a weapon against power — e.g. Marxism (41) and psychoanalysis — should beware: their procedures may be self-defeating. The 1968 students strike in Paris, which brought Foucault to prominence, and

bewildered the French Communist Party, showed only that Marxists were no different from the ruling elites in falsely viewing society as one unified whole. {6}

9.3. Evaluation

Where was the evidence for such a devastating critique of western society? Foucault didn't provide one. He sought to unsettle, make people think for themselves, transforming themselves in the process. Foucault was a polemicist, a splendid polemicist, and it was change rather than truth he sought.{7}

Of course there were grave weaknesses in Foucault's position. If power subverts everything, even reason itself, what are Foucault's assertions but one more manifestation of power, no more cogent than any other: bourgeois, psychoanalytical or Marxist? Foucault realized this, and accepted that he described society not from the 'outside' but from some position within it. But the prize was not deliverance but understanding, ultimately self-understanding and transformation.

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10. MIKAIL BAKHTIN

Bakhtin's views anticipated the analytical school of linguistic philosophy, and emphasized the vitality of language. Speech and writing come with the viewpoints and intentions of their authors preserved in the multi-layered nature of language, and heteroglossia is therefore an effective argument against some of the more extreme views of Postmodernism.

10.1. Introduction

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) had to survive the turmoil of the Russian Revolution, the Stalinist purges, and the hardships of the second world war before receiving even modest recognition. He was born in Orel, south of Moscow, and educated at the universities of Odessa and St. Petersburg. In 1918 he graduated, and was drawn into the literary freedom and experimentation of the early years of the Revolution, making friends with its writers and critics, and perhaps writing parts of works by Medvedev and Volosinov. {1} Bakhtin's first acknowledged book, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, had the misfortune of appearing in 1929, during Stalin's clampdown, and earned its author a banishment to Kazakstan. He was later allowed to move to a small town near Moscow, where he supported himself by clerical and teaching jobs. Bakhtin eventually defended his doctoral thesis on Rabelais in 1946, and in the sixties and seventies saw his work published in Russia and translated abroad. {2} Always a socialist, Bakhtin was committed to change, though he never abandoned his Greek Orthodox faith. He finally obtained a post at the Saransk Teachers Training College, from which he retired in 1961, becoming well known and respected in Moscow literary circles.

10.2. Details

Whereas the Russian formalists drew their inspiration from Saussure (16.2), seeing language as a system of signs, Bakhtin took a sociological line similar to that later developed

in Austin's speech acts (29.5). The spoken word is primary, and words in conversation are orientated towards future words — they stimulate and anticipated replies, structuring themselves to do so. Many genres (e.g. epics, tragedy, lyrics) overlook or even suppress this natural feature of language to present a unified world-view. But the novel accepts, and indeed makes use, of many voices, weaving them into a narrative with direct speech, represented speech, and what Bakhtin called doubly-orientated speech. Four categories make up the latter: stylisation (a borrowed style), parody, skaz (oral narration) and dialogue (a hidden shaping of the author's voice). {3}

Bakhtin stressed the multi-layered nature of language, which he called heteroglossia. Not only are there social dialects, jargons, turns of phrase characteristic of the various professions, industries, commerce, of passing fashions, etc., but also socio-ideological contradictions carried forward from various periods and levels in the past. Language is not a neutral medium that can be simply appropriated by a speaker, but something that comes to us populated with the intentions of others. Every word tastes of the contexts in which it has lived its socially-charged life.

Bakhtin's concepts go further than Derrida's (8) notion of 'trace', or Foucault's archaeology of political usage. Words are living entities, things that are constantly being employed and partly taken over, carrying opinions, assertions, beliefs, information, emotions and intentions of others, which we partially accept and modify. All speech is dialogic, has an internal polemic, and this is most fully exploited by the novel, particularly the modern novel. {4}

10.3. Evaluation

Bakhtin's work anticipated many concerns of Modernist and Postmodernist writing, most notably that of viewpoint. Sociologists recognize communities of discourse — overlapping groupings with common beliefs, interests and

styles of expressing themselves. The groups have no sharp boundaries, and indeed individuals may belong to several such groups. A white, middle-aged literary critic may be a member of the local Church and produce articles of a New Criticism orientation, differing from a work colleague who espouses a feminist viewpoint and attends political rallies. Their active vocabularies will be slightly different, and many words will evoke different experiences and carry different connotations. Repression for the first will conjure up third-world police brutality, while the second may find repression voiced in speech all around her.

To what extent do they really understand each other? Many analytical philosophers would argue that understanding was potentially complete — beliefs, emotions, experiences must be particular to individuals, but statements otherwise can be converted into an objective, literal language, and checked against the facts. Conversely, some literary critics (e.g. Stanley Fish) would argue that understanding was inherently incomplete, or perhaps a meaningless term. Fish's interpretative communities have different paradigms or frames of reference, and cannot be compared except to some universal frame of reference, which does not exist.

Bakhtin's work allows us to recognize both views as extreme. There is no purely literal language, and concepts of truth and meaning have finally to be treated as ways of reacting to experience rather than as logical concepts applying across all possible worlds. Fish's paradigms overlook the ways we reach understanding, that we are constantly checking and adapting our paradigms against our understanding of the world. Paradigms which fail to fully make sense of our surroundings are dropped, or held by very few people. {5} And this, very naturally, is how communities evolve, even the poetry community. There is no centralizing programme or policy, but a network of alliances, overlapping and shifting frames of reference which are constantly being modified — by chance, ignorance,

experiences, conversations, by television, newspapers, magazines and books.

It was Bakhtin's achievement to formalize this approach, and show how the variety of voices (each with their different community of discourse) make up a modern novel. Novelists have long realized that even if a single viewpoint is adopted — first person narrator or omniscient author — all characters nonetheless have to act consistently, according to their inner motivations, speaking a language that convincingly expresses their goals and characters. But Bakhtin devised a terminology which serves Postmodernist fiction with its multiple or indeterminate endings, and so goes further than many western commentators on the novel — further than Percy Lubbock, Cleanth Brooks, Mark Schorer, David Lodge or Wayne Booth. {6}

Bakhtin's work also provides an answer to Foucault and others who see language as an instrument of state repression. There is no common viewpoint in modern writing, any more than literature can be written to order, by following some blueprint or recipe. Writing of any length inevitably contains what Bakhtin called the carnivalesque — the expressive, random, individual viewpoint. Language may be saturated with ideology, but it never represents the one, monolithic viewpoint.

Bakhtin's approach illuminates not only politics and the novel, but many aspects of poetry creation and interpretation. Words in a poem naturally arrive with their past usages and intentions, but become hybridised in the good poem — i.e. partly taken over by the poet, losing their many worlds of reference. Intentionally and consciously by the poet, and so understood by the reader, the polyglot social contexts are fused into the one horizon. Inevitably this must be so, or the poem would lack autonomy or artistic unity. {7} And so the way lies open to an authoritarian, fossilized diction, and to poetry as the preserve of a priestly class, matters which Bakhtin deplored.

But neither is inevitable. Poetry in the past drew on a wide range of social registers, which are more apparent to the history scholar perhaps than to the casual reader, but exist nonetheless. Much of Postmodernism poetry tries very hard not to be literary, to incorporate the raw material of colloquial speech and writing into its creations. Indeed some contemporary poetry openly exploits heteroglossia — the poetry of Larkin, Tony Harrison and Brecht, for example. {8}

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

11. ART AS EMOTIVE EXPRESSION

Works of art so often arise from some deep personal feeling or crisis in the lives of their creators that emotion itself is commonly taken as the defining characteristic of art. Tolstoy (1828-1910) thought that art caused its audience to experience certain feelings, was art to the extent that it did so, and that its creator should have lived through those feelings to express them properly. Of course he also demanded that art express worthy feelings, preferably promoting the brotherhood of man, but even without its moral tag, Tolstoy's views raise enormous problems. Do we know exactly what an audience experiences during a play? Hardly, to judge from the comments of the audience making its way home from the theatre, or even from theatre critics, whose judgements are notoriously at odds with each other. Then, to take Tolstoy's second point, there is the question of great political orators whose words may work audiences into frenzies far exceeding those a Shakespearean play. Is theirs the greater art? Thirdly comes the inconvenient fact that composers frequently work simultaneously on 'happy' and 'sad' passages of music. Insincere? We should need to see inside the heads of all artists in the toils of creation if art were to be the expression of feelings actually felt. And that we cannot do — with dead artists obviously, nor even with those still living, whose reports on the creative process are unreliable but generally suggest something different. {1}

11.1. Croce and Collingwood

Nonetheless, suppose we pursue the assumption further. Art as emotional expression finds its greatest exposition in the work of Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) {2} and R.G. Collingwood (1889-1943) {3}. Both ranged widely: Croce into practical criticism, Collingwood into other areas of philosophy. Both could write with subtlety and insight. But both also believed in the mental nature of art, that it exists

fully fledged in the originator's head before being put on public display.

Croce starts with 'intuitions', which are the immediate knowing of impressions and their transformation by the active imagination into unified images or organic wholes. The two (knowing and expression of those impressions) were linked, were indivisible indeed, and couldn't be encompassed by purely intellectual criteria. But Croce was not preaching 'art for art's sake'. Art was no more important than logic, economics, ethics and history. Indeed it was not even possible without a richness of the human spirit in all its manifestations.

Croce was influenced by Hegel (14) and developed his thought somewhat analogously. Initially, Croce regarded intuition as expression of emotion ('lyricism', he called it) which was not simply letting off steam, or imitating actual feelings, but expressing the personality of the artist as it evoked some larger 'soul' of man. By 1918 Croce was arguing for an intuition that included something common to all humanity, though still something individual to the art concerned. By the mid-twenties, Croce's intuition had expanded to include moral ideas and conflicts. Finally, in 1936, Croce returned to his distinction between art and non-art, 'poetry and literature'. Only intuition-expression was art, and its externalisation was a secondary, practical matter. Of course that externalisation assists the communication of art, and is what the audience and critics must use to recreate the original artistic experience.

The first part of Croce's position was familiar enough. Even Aristotle had argued that poets should handle themes so as to bring out universal characteristics that are necessarily constrained and confused in historical actuality. {4} But how was communication as a secondary activity to be understood when most artists have no conception of their finished work until it is completed in their chosen medium? Croce's ideas were developments of a nineteenth century mentalism and

only Collingwood in the Anglo-Saxon world continued their drift — but then Collingwood did not share in the beliefs of his contemporaries: in the primacy of logic, or the resolving powers of linguistic philosophy. For him art, religion, science, history and philosophy were separate activities of mind, with different objectives and methods.

Art for Collingwood was the originating experience. Transferring the conception to paper, dance, music and stone came later. Such fabrication of course took skill, but couldn't reach back into the imaginative experience itself. 'The aesthetic experience, or artistic activity, is the experience of expressing one's emotions; and that which expresses them is the total imaginative activity called indifferently language or art.' {5}. Art made no assertions, but was simply the unconscious becoming conscious. We cannot ask if an artistic conception is historically true, because such questions come afterwards, when the art is transferred to the public domain, when indeed it is no longer art as such. Art either has the emotions expressed (good), or repressed (bad), so that criticism is rather beside the point. But no matter: art is something we all do, and serves no end beyond itself.

11.2. Influence of the Medium: John Dewey

Collingwood's views seem preposterous. They omit to tell us why art is important. They succumb immediately to Wittgenstein's attack on private languages, and indeed run contrary to the attempts over the last hundred years to move philosophy from private mental events to observable human activities.

But the greatest shortcoming is surely that the theory is contrary to the actual experience of artists. A few have appeared to dash off masterpieces as though they were transcribing what was already given them. Mozart had astonishingly facility, scribbling as fast as he could take the notes down. Racine claimed that a play was finished once

he had every detail clear in his mind. But both had supreme mastery of their craft, the means of expression guiding and encouraging their creations. Most artists are not so fortunate. Studies and reminiscences show that there are golden moments of inspiration, but also long, long periods of working and reworking the material, struggling, despairing, succeeding in some ways but not knowing whether more or better isn't possible. {6}

The American pragmatist John Dewey (1859-1952) {7} understood this interplay of medium and imagination but took a broader view of artistic activity. Even 'experience' for Dewey means 'a shared social activity of symbolically-mediated behaviour which seeks to discover the possibilities of our objective situations in the natural world for meaningful, intelligent and fulfilling ends.' {7} Dewey was not opposed to the deification of artists, or even to the self-serving circle of dealer, critic and museum curator, but he did stress that great works of art were essentially examples of a common human pursuit. We are constantly making sense of ourselves and our surroundings, using our senses to maintain and develop our material and aesthetic needs. Experiences come to us in the light of half-remembered events, of mental and sensory constructions, of expected consequences. Art reveals to us how those experiences may be profoundly meaningful.

Art is not therefore the expression of emotion or even of the creative impulse. It arises from the interaction of many things — the artist with his medium, individual experiences with the cultural matrix, artwork with its audience. Art is a dialogue, and an artwork draws its life from the cultural life of the community. There is no one, settled interpretation, and the greatness of an artwork may lie in its profound appeal to many different groups and societies. All art has form, but that form is not something unchanging and abstract, but the way the work gives organization to experience. Art shapes by its own rules: 'the working of the work', Heidegger (17) put it.

And because aesthetic experience is the most complete and integrated of our responses to the world, it is central to Dewey's philosophy. {8}

11.3. Catharsis

But art does somehow involve emotion and — perhaps to modify Plato's {9} condemnation of the pernicious effects of poetry — Aristotle introduced his famous 'katharsis'. {10} The term means cleansing, removing the bad and leaving the good, and by its associations includes ritual purification, medical purges and bowel movement. In Aristotle's view, an audience is brought to feel fear, pity and even frenzy in public performances of religious ceremonies, of plays (comedies and tragedies, but particularly the latter) and of music. Those feelings are resolved in relief at the conclusion of the performance, so that the audience comes away with heightened emotions and sharpened aesthetic judgements.

Do they? Catharsis from the first has been a troublesome term. Since Aristotle did not describe art in terms of emotional expression, purgation of emotions seems somewhat subsidiary (the more so since we lack Aristotle's explanation in his second book on 'Poetics': the book has been lost). Perhaps he meant only that art raises emotions in an intense and justifiable form. Raising or releasing them? The two are very different. And cannot playwrights raise emotions without personally espousing them? As Eliot dryly remarked, 'poets do not express themselves in poetry but escape from themselves by a continual extinction of personality.' {11} But catharsis may well have been a principle behind bloodstained Jacobean tragedy, and which today continues in art therapy. Even Schopenhauer (12.3) associated art with the purgation of the aimless, self-perpetuating desire he called 'will'. Hans Robert Jauss has made catharsis an element of his aesthetic theory, though here it approximates to communication. The essential point is surely this: whatever may be claimed, the emotional

resolution of aesthetic experience is clearly something more penetrating and finely wrought than the voiding of pent-up feelings.

11.4. Aesthetic Detachment

Indeed purgation may not enter into art at all. Emotions when real are often painful. We look with embarrassment at the parents of the missing child giving their television appeal. We feel voyeurs at the raw sex act. Not art, we say, which really needs some element of aesthetic detachment or make-believe in the experience. In art we suspend belief: we feel horror in a murder depicted in a film but do not call the police.

Why detachment? Because art involves emotions different from those evoked by real life. Kant (13) called the detachment 'aesthetic disinterest', distinguishing by it beauty and sublimity from mere pleasantness. Schopenhauer (12.3) saw art as withdrawal from practical application of the will into contemplation. Edward Bulloch spoke of 'psychical distance'. {12} Phenomenologists (15.1) argued that detachment made scenes into 'intentional objects' divorced from everyday considerations.

Much has been made of the aesthetic attitude. Formalists (38) have reified the detachment into a complete divorce from feeling: true art does not express emotions, and should not attempt to. Abstract artists have turned their back on representation: since art does not employ our everyday, practical uses for objects, it should not depict them. Art for art's sake theorists denigrated art that served ends beyond the satisfaction of aesthetic contemplation: no matter how bestial the characters of a novel appear, or how subversive the attitudes depicted, none of this matters to true artistic enjoyment. {13}

The difficulties and fundamental untruths of these developments are obvious enough. Art that arouses no emotion is of no interest to us, remains only clever exercises

or dry theory. Abstract art employs elements — forms, colours, compositions — that must somehow owe their appeal to our sensory equipment, either through experience or physiological inheritance. Films of Nazi war atrocities are not enjoyed as pure aesthetic contemplation. But the nature of aesthetic attitude nonetheless remains elusive. What is this detachment, distance, attitude? Perhaps it is not a simple thing, but a bundle of expectations and cultural suppositions that vary somewhat with the art form and the period? Certainly there are certain attitudes we need to adopt with art — openness, sensitivity, a willingness to enter imaginatively into the experience — but they come from us rather than from the art or artist concerned.

11.5. Emotional Representation

Perhaps art is not an expression of emotion, but a *representation* of that emotion. Since books, paintings, music etc. cannot express emotion as originally present in the artist's mind (supposing we persist with this approach) but only as conveyed in and with the medium concerned, art cannot in some sense escape being representational. But there is another view of representation: that art is emotion objectified in symbolic form: a philosophy developed by Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945: 35.1) {14} and Susanne Langer (1895-1985). Cassirer extended Kant's a priori categories so as to represent language, myth, art, religion and science as systems of symbolic forms. These forms are mental shaping of experience. They are culturally determined and are created by us. But they also and wholly constitute our world: all 'reality' is a reality seen and understood through them. Outside lies Kant's noumenal world, about which there is nothing we can really say.

These systems of symbolic form are not arbitrary creations, but have grown up to answer human needs. Each system carries its own particular enlightenment. Langer {15} ranged over the whole field of artistic expression, though is best

known for her theories of music. She rejected outright the Logical Positivist (29.2) position that meaning was either tautological or statements in literal, propositional language verifiable by science. Art has its own meaning or meanings. Even in our simplest observations we transform a manifold of sensations into a virtual world of general symbols: a world with a grammar of its own, guiding our ear and eyes, highly articulated in art. In music we have a symbolic expression about feelings. Music has a logic of its own, expressing the forms of human feeling, and creating an inner lives. Certainly music does not denote as propositional language must, but it conveys knowledge directly, 'by acquaintance' rather than 'knowledge about'. Feelings are therefore symbolically objectified in certain forms, with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.

What did the philosophic community make of this? Very little. {16} Symbolic forms, particularly 'significant forms' remained very vague. How could the claim that music objectifies feeling with great truth and detail be assessed? By their influence on other musical compositions — music calling to music, no doubt Langer and many musicians would reply. But no philosopher will allow that. Philosophy (or at least analytical philosophy) requires close argumentation, and that is only possible in literal, propositional language (32.1): the very language that Langer stigmatised as inadequate. And linguistic expression is inherently ambiguous, thought Cassirer (35.1), a view which links him to Lakoff (24.3) and Derrida (8).

But if art expresses only the forms of feeling, why does it seem so emotionally alive? Artists extract what is significant from experience, Langer argued, and then use that form to create an object which directly expresses that significance. The 'meaning' of an artwork is its content. Through their symbols, great works of art powerfully express highly significant feeling, even if this feeling is only intuitively grasped, unfolding very slowly as we become familiar with

the work. In this way feeling and creativity occupy a central position in Langer's philosophy, as they do in the work of many contemporary psychologists.

11.6. Ineffability

Once they became more than efforts to please and entertain, it was natural for works of art to make large claims of autonomy. The Romantics called art ineffable: it expressed what could not be expressed in any other way. Artists might start with some feeling they wish to express, but that feeling was only realized through the creation of the work: its form precisely articulates what was not expressed before. But larger claims are often made for metaphor — that they open up the world in ways we had not appreciated before. Metaphors become, in Paul Ricoeur's words, 'poems in miniature'. Of course to see that world in the manner suggested by the metaphor means approaching the world in the right spirit ('comporting' ourselves, Heidegger puts it), when poems become the intellectualised registers of such 'comportments'. {17}

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

12. 19th CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

Nineteenth century thinkers both developed from and reacted against the Enlightenment's notion of progress. Herder, Madame de Stael, Burke and Chateaubriand spoke vaguely of a Volk, a people — something that was not rationally grounded or justified, but grew from feelings and traditions previously overlooked. From Jean Jacques Rousseau they understood that the opposite of refinement need not be not crudity but simplicity, and that sensibility was not a product of cultivation but an intense expression of man's passionate nature. The unique, individual and spontaneous were more valuable than that which conformed to any intellectualised canon of taste. In place of enlightenment versus darkness came intensity versus superficiality.

Society was no longer to be based on the single hypothetical citizen. The social contract was abandoned, and states were viewed as natural growths with roots in the common nature of man. The life of a people was a unitary thing, springing out of traditions and needs, expressed in its laws, institutions and artistic accomplishments. Social life was indeed analogous to organic growth, and aspects of social life were related to each other like functions of a living body. Herder developed this notion, relating earth to the cosmos, man to earth, man as a social and historical being. History was the growth of a single, marvellous tree whose branches were the cultures of mankind.

If all reality is fundamentally one, and the Divine is present in all its manifestations, then what occurs in history is Revelation. Individual conscience may be fallible, but it is the role of man's moral sense to penetrate deeper into the nature of all that exists. The sense of the dark and hidden, the feeling of dependence and awe, and a worshipful acceptance of the fullness of being, are the attitudes which

put religious man in touch with the Divine. German romanticists and idealists felt that the laws of physics were inadequate to comprehend the great World Spirit. Ultimate forces were living things, and every thing had its own value. {1}

12.1. Kant

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) — a liberal in the best Enlightenment manner — wrote on a huge variety of subjects, including physics and geology. He recognized the force of Rousseau's irrationalism and of Hume's (1711-76) scepticism, and stressed the organizing power of human perception. He distinguished knowledge that derives from experience (a posteriori) from that which is independent (a priori). Causality for Kant was an a priori category, something inescapably imposed on experience by our mental natures. Other a priori categories were quantity, quality (+ve or -ve), relation, modality (possibility & impossibility; existence & non-existence; necessity & contingency). Space and time were other a priori notions, requiring Kant to hold that Euclid's geometry was unassailable correct. The sources of experience Kant called noumena, and these we cannot experience directly, or even be sure they really exist. (13)

Kant's Critique of Pure Reason set the limits to cognition. In his *Critique of Practical Reason* and his *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant enquired into God, ethics and value judgements. How we ought to act cannot be derived from outside authority, but only by accepting that the principles guiding individual conduct must apply to everyone. This good will must be noumenal, and so be free-will, i.e. not bound by cause and effect. God cannot be proved to exist, but He imposes himself as a consequence of Practical Reason.

12.2. Hegel

For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), knowledge appears through our immersion in the world. We know when we see into and act in the world. Knowledge touches Being when it achieves full completion. What this Being achieved always involves others (the Other) so that for full existence (Being-for-Itself) we need both Being and Other, which is also called Ideality or Absolute Being. Finally, Being-for-Itself is reflexive, bends back into and realizes Absolute Being, thus becoming both the object seen and the seer — i.e. total self-recognition. How is this effected without infinite acts of self-recognition and recall? Through Freedom, which is what the world is aiming at. But this idea is both concept and clothing, which for Hegel is History, the merging of individual identity in National and finally Absolute Mind. Mind through history is the Absolute Mind's own march towards itself, towards self-realization of freedom. (14)

12.3. Schopenhauer

Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) {2} ideas were formed early, largely in his *World as Will and Representation*, published in 1818. Despite the originality of thought, acute reading and a magnificent prose style, recognition came late. When 45, Schopenhauer settled in Frankfurt, lived quietly, won a gold medal from the Norwegian Royal Scientific Society, and published *Parerga and Palipomena* (1851) whose favourable review in England led his becoming better known: for fifty years after his death Schopenhauer was one of the most influential of European writers.

Though he had great respect for Kant, Schopenhauer nonetheless believed we gained some conception of things-in-themselves by understanding our own Will to Live. We strive for physical satisfaction, blindly very often, being at war with ourselves and others. Happiness is illusory, but two escapes are possible: aesthetic contemplation and unselfish compassion for others. In art we put aside our struggle for

individual pre-eminence and directly apprehend the types and principles with which the Will manifests itself. In seeing the misery around us, and in helping our fellow unfortunates without consideration of our concerns, present or future (Schopenhauer was an atheist) we learn to evade the wretched futility of life.

Schopenhauer's philosophy is part and parcel of the man: gloomy, immersed in Indian thought, highly cultured, fiercely individual, not given to making friends. After Plato he has perhaps the best literary style of philosophy, and his work has always commanded respect by its sympathetic knowledge of the arts. Not only disinterest (escape from the wheel of suffering) marks the aesthetic attitude, says Schopenhauer, but a clarity of vision. We see things as they really are, as embodiments of essential Ideas. Poets, for example, use the power of imagination to reveal what is directly given to us when we surrender our individual desires and struggles. And the gift has an inner truth, deeper than the 'facts' of history, since it represents more fully than nature can what is significant and everlasting in us.

What does this mean? Schopenhauer hardly belongs to the analytical school of philosophy, and large gaps and difficulties appear when his views are examined. Certainly our human bodies are part of the physical world, and their makeup must indeed incorporate something of that physicality, but it is a large step indeed to postulate a universal, cosmic Will that pervades and animates all things. And what essentially are these 'Ideas'? Not the syntheses of Hegel, whom he detested. Perhaps the eternal Forms of Plato? No, thought Schopenhauer. Ideas are timeless and objective, but are not found by cogitation. They are directly given us. Such fundamental and deeply significant parts of nature are discovered by aesthetic contemplation — of the world around, and more so in the works of great artists who have realized what nature represents partially and fleetingly.

12.4. Phenomenology

As practised by Edmund Husserl (1889-1937), phenomenology argued for categories of understanding that were self-validating, timeless and necessary elements of experience waiting for realization in human activity. Not a priori categories, however: they arise out of man's interaction with the world, which is real, and which we understand to some extent. Husserl was only partially successful, but others continued his work. Max Scheler (1874-1928) extended Husserl's phenomenology to larger themes of value, man, world and God. Values were imperatives in their own right. Personhood is constituted by values: persons do not exist per se, but become as they concretely realize values. Personality is accessible only by intellectual voluntary affective participation. Personal acts are basically acts of love, which is the heart's intimate disposition, and this love is a share in the world of values, of the Primordial person, who is God. Scheler felt each religion had its own absolute, but this absolute or God comes to self-possession only after trials and afflictions: a sort of evolutionary pantheism.

Nicolai Hartman (1882-1950) accepted Kant's view that things in themselves (noumena) were unknowable, but divided the phenomenal world into levels, modes and categories of being. Higher levels were less powerful than lower, but derived from them, and could not be reduced to them. These higher levels were not goals of human striving, however, and there was no God. Each man must be his own god in miniature, a demiurge. Hartman was a realist in the sense that he thought knowledge was a receptive grasp of something that is independent of our knowledge and pre-existing, but the concepts we derive must remain hypothetical. There were no forms, no inner nature or essences lying behind the phenomena. We act as though purpose were a constitutive category of nature, but there is ultimately no reason to think it is.

12.5. Nineteenth Century Trends

Two great streams of thought run through the nineteenth century: idealism and materialism. The first argued that we can understand the ultimate nature of reality only through and within natural human experience, especially through those traits which distinguish man as a spiritual being. It is thought that provides the categories to experience sensations. Idealism was somewhat hostile to Kant's views, and did not accept the easy optimism of the Enlightenment. Hegel, Schopenhauer, Lotze and Fechner were all Idealists in this sense, and their influence increased as attempts were made to bring philosophy and science closer together.

Materialists held that there is an independently existing world, that human beings are material entities like everything else, that the human mind does not exist independently of the human body, that there is no God or other non-material being, and that all forms and behaviours are ultimately reducible to general physical laws. With Feuerbach, existence is prior to thought, which grows out of existence and its problems. Marx rejected Feuerbach's religious concepts and his ethics of love, and applied the approach of science to society — in a dialectic and not mechanistic way. Moleschott, Vogt and Buchner held to a more conventional materialism and, like Duhring, continued an 18th century position.

Science opposed theology but not religion. Schleiermacher, Carlyle, Arnold, Huxley and Clifford felt they were freeing faith for a nobler and more adequate conception. But Hegel's unity of art, religion and philosophy developed into dualism. Schleiermacher gave precedence to religious experience, its intellectual expression in theology being an interpretation. Strauss and Feuerbach saw theology as projections of religious feeling, a mythological or psychological matter. Others regarded theology as reflections on knowledge and experience of religion in history, and so undergoing change

of necessity. Feuerbach had intense religious feeling, and believed this necessary for society, but still denied that there was anything outside man that corresponded to God. Carlyle, Arnold and Tennyson (and later Spencer and Bosanquet) found God in nature, at its heart, even as an immanent power that evolved and brought man out of crudity, ignorance and selfishness into altruism. But religion had to renounce its claim to literal truth and content itself with shaping feeling. Gradually, therefore, religion became compartmentalized. Positivism merged with idealism to limit the domain of science. Science dealt with literal knowledge; religion dealt with feeling and moral aspirations.

But perhaps the most significant development of century was historicism, the belief that something could only be understood, and its significance assessed, by seeing it within the stream of history. Historicism drew strength from notions of an organic unfolding, and from nineteenth century hopes of a science assisting social change.

12.6. The Positivists

The positivists returned to the Kantian concept of knowledge based on senses, but considered knowledge to be ordered by experience rather than a priori categories. For Dubois-Raymond all phenomena should conform to fundamental principles of mechanics. We can only know matter and force through their manifestations, not in themselves, at least until we understood nerve processes in psycho-mathematical terms. Helmholtz wouldn't reject theory that couldn't be verified directly by sense-experience, but did believe that knowledge of material objects is a reliable system of signs which reflect the relationship between the entities signified. He distinguished between sensations of sight (which could be misleading) and perceptions of sight, which were judgements based on experience. What was certain, then? Helmholtz argued that 1. knowledge lies not in accumulations of observations, but in regularities or laws

within experience, 2. repeated observation and experiment, if systematized objectively, results in a law of nature, 3. that Hume's objection can be evaded by simply saying that force is regularity rather than cause, 4. that the regularities we call forces are matters outside our wills, and 5. that to bring a phenomenon into a law of nature is to understand it. There is no other understanding. We only know nature through its effects.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) tried to correlate outward phenomena with inward experience through our nervous system, but argued that there is no necessity for the two to be similar in kind or degree. Ernst Mach (1838-1916) aimed for economy of explanation. We should concentrate on the physiological stimulation of the organs concerned and leave out of account brain action. How man organizes his perception was not the interest of science.

12.7. The Idealists

Whereas Kant had denied understanding access to reason's demand for God, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) thought that man had a sensibility — faith, feeling — which cannot be argued away. Contrasted to faith, understanding lacked immediacy, proceeded deductively through use of concepts, and could not be used to cast doubt on the intuitions of faith. He accepted Spinoza's view that nature is entirely deterministic, negating teleology therefore, and freewill. Philosophy was a game of the intellect, whereas reality comes alive in so far as we are able to experience it for ourselves. Understanding is a reversal of natural knowledge, which is not established by proof but by inner awareness.

Different again, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) made moral affirmation and assertion the source of spiritual truth. Faith is a form of action, and is self-justifying: an inner, moral necessity of an individual's own being. Only in commitments can we establish the freedom we wish to affirm. Spinoza's

world denied man's dignity and freedom, and was therefore false.

12.8. Concluding Thoughts

Though some of these philosophers are mere footnotes to the history of nineteenth-century European thought, they illustrate an honest working out of themes which are still important in current aesthetics and literary theory. Central today are the questions of knowledge, of grounding and of authority. On what do our judgements ultimately rest? On sense data and logic, say the materialists. On the principles and presuppositions that we acquire through living in society, say the idealists. Already the cleavage is apparent, and the unbiased reader will appreciate the claims of each approach. To the first belong the Anglo-Saxon analytical schools (28) and the early Wittgenstein. To the second belong the existentialists (15), the hermeneutists (18), the later Wittgenstein (28.1) and the schools of speech-acts (28.4) and linguistic psychology. Structuralism (6) and Poststructuralism (7-9) crossed the divides. Structuralism sought a conceptual structure as comprehensive as Hegel's, but derived it from anthropology and linguistics, disregarding the assumptions inherent in these disciplines. Poststructuralism is a stance against tradition, authority and measurement. Stressing the individual and spontaneous response, it returns to the early thinkers of the nineteenth century who reacted against the shallow conformism of the Enlightenment. But its view of the world is darker. Wars, genocide and economic exploitation have destroyed any comforting faith in God, in man's inherent goodness, or in the healthy outcome of his passions.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

13. IMMANUEL KANT

Much of nineteenth century philosophy, as indeed our own, is a development of Kant's insights into the nature of reality and human reasoning. Beauty as disinterested pleasure is broadly accepted by the Anglo-American schools of aesthetics, but not by the continental, which stress intention and so the wider social and political dimensions.

The divide is fundamental, and underlies the war that Postmodernism wages on the settled categories of academic thought.

13.1. Introduction

Immanuel Kant was born in Königsberg, East Prussia in 1724, the son of a saddle-maker. From 1740 to 1746 he studied philosophy at the University of Königsberg, worked afterwards as a private tutor, and then returned to the University where he stayed until retirement in 1796. He died in 1804, universally admired as among the greatest of modern philosophers, a reputation not seriously questioned since. Throughout his university life, as lecturer and professor, Kant gave lectures on a wide range of subjects — not only philosophy but political theory, natural sciences, law and history: a true son of the Enlightenment. He was also keenly interested in the events of his day, and a staunch advocate of liberalism under a constitutional monarchy. Kant's career is commonly divided into three periods. Between 1747 and 1770 he published a number of solid, conventional works on science and the methods of metaphysics. In the so-called silent decade, 1771-80, he published practically nothing, devoting his time to thinking out what was published as the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This slowly made his reputation, and the spate of works that followed till 1797 extended and consolidated his fame. {1}

13.2. Critique of Pure Reason: 1781

Though Kant's writing is in places obscure and inconsistent, giving rise to varying interpretation, his main arguments are readily grasped. The central concern of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is metaphysics: how we can know things that lie beyond the bounds of experience? Kant's answer lay through what he called 'a priori synthetic' concepts. To take a familiar example: mathematics is both a priori (logical) and synthetic (based on our sense perceptions). So with other things. The mind is always organizing impressions so as to make sense of its surroundings. Indeed the organization is already built into our impressions, presupposed by them. And since the organization is not provided by the world itself, it must come from us. In short, we do not see the world as it really is (noumena) but as the mind filters, combines and represents it to us (phenomena). Our concepts of causality, symmetry, number, etc. — all these unchanging features of experience are examples of the ways our senses are regimented by the mind.

Nothing if not comprehensive, Kant organized concepts into categories of understanding, which he grouped under quantity (unity, plurality and totality), quality (reality, negation, limitation), relation (inherence and subsistence, causality and dependence, and reciprocity) and modality (possibility and impossibility, existence and nonexistence, and necessity and contingency). How did Kant arrive at these categories? By various routes. He respected the traditional categories of logic. He incorporated the science of his time. And he tackled antinomies or intellectual contradictions. Consider the start of the universe in a modern view like the big bang theory. What created that initial big bang? What existed before it? Surely there must be answers to these questions if the whole edifice of cause and effect upon which science rests is not to have limits? In Kant's view we would be using 'pure reason' from which all empirical content had been removed, and such thinking ends

in illusions. We err if we think we can escape the actual. Time and space were not categories of understanding for Kant, but the very medium in which we live and through which we which we receive our impressions of the world around us. Independent of us? Probably. Kant was not clear on this point, nor on the status of noumena. Are they entities conceived by the mind but not grasped by the sense? Are they invisible extensions of phenomena, beyond our means to perceive and understand? Or are they 'things-in-themselves', whose nature is entirely unknown to us? Kant used the terms somewhat inconsistently.

What then of the order and regularity that we see in nature: is that real or only what the mind imposes? Both. What Kant called 'imagination' synthesizes our sense impressions with our concepts of understanding, and does them harmoniously, so that we have confidence in the reality of ourselves and of the outside world. How can we be sure that the categories are correct, i.e. necessary and sufficient? Kant laid down the principles by which we arrive at them. And they differed according to grouping. Kant looked at causality. Hume was right to say that connection is not demonstrable by reason: there is no logical connection between cause and effect. But neither was it a matter of habit. Causality is a category of understanding (relation, in fact) and everything we perceive or can reasonably expect to perceive has a cause simply because our understanding is so constituted. It can't be otherwise. We notice a speeding car at various points along a road, not random positions but progressive, all in the same direction, if the car has not radically changed speed or direction. Unless our understanding corresponds to something beyond ourselves (i.e. is in some ways objective) the world would not cohere into an intelligible whole. {2}

13.3. Critique of Practical Reason: 1788

By his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had removed the grounds for belief in large parts of traditional metaphysics: immortality of the soul, existence of God, the freedom of the will. But these are important to us, not matters to be easily set aside. Well then, if Kant had shown the impossibility of proving their existence, he had not actually disproved their existence. Progressively, through his *Principles of Morals* (1785), his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (1792) and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) Kant came to argue that we should act as though morality, justice, God, our duties and responsibilities to others were realities even though we can't prove them.

An act of faith? Not at all. Kant attempted to map the area beyond the boundaries of his first *Critique* with a new type of reason: practical reason. Unlike pure reason, which aims at truth, practical reason simply tells us what we must do. Its principles were again synthetic a priori, but applied to action. Practical reasoning concerned ends and means. Unlike Hume, who held that passions motivate us, and reason can only restrain or guide, Kant believed that reason was part and parcel of will. Freedom was the power to will an action for ourselves. Essentially, and more importantly, freedom was the ability to be governed by reason. And we were free only to the extent that we are governed by reason — not driven by our passions, not coerced by outside pressures. An 'autonomous agent' was one who acted according to the principles of practical reason, not blind passion nor the calculations of enlightened self-interest.

What were these principles of practical reason? Kant accepted that freedom was problematic, perhaps even an antinomy. It was something we must take on trust. But we know that freedom must exist, or our beliefs, actions and social institutions will rest on nothing. Here Kant introduced his notion of 'imperatives': two in number: either hypothetical

(necessary to some end: e.g. work hard to prosper) or categorical (when necessary in themselves: e.g. do not tell lies). Categorical imperatives made real and unconditional demands. They were impersonal: laws emptied of desires, ambitions, personal interests, social expectations and context. They applied universally to all rational beings. Kant had five such laws, of which the first two are the most famous. Act only in a manner that can be made a universal law. Act so as to treat humanity always as an end and never simply as means. Moral judgement was directed to the intention of an action, not its consequences. 'Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a good will.'

{3}

13.4 Critique of Judgement: 1790

Kant's first two *Critiques* had examined the questions: What must a self-conscious being think? and What must such a being do? The third addresses the question (in a repetitious and muddled way) of what must a human being find agreeable? And in this seemingly innocuous way Kant attempted not only to harmonize his two reasons, pure and practical, but to deal with the fundamental notions of purpose, theology, beauty and the sublime.

Kant proposed that aesthetics should have its own faculty, that of judgement, which would mediate between the other two faculties. And because judgement had both an objective and subjective aspect, Kant divided his third *Critique* in two. The first part considers the objective finality of nature, why it is ordered so as to be intelligible. Undoubtedly we find it so, and that surely hints at a supreme intelligence, and some divine purpose. Of course God is a transcendental being, an entity that entirely escapes rational description, and Kant had already disposed of the traditional arguments in his first *Critique*. Scriptures, and the religious doctrines that conflict with reason, must be treated as allegory, as moral insights

that gain vivacity but not validity by their religious expression. But we are moved by God's creation, by the limitlessness of our surroundings which the eighteenth century called the 'sublime': mountain landscapes, nature in all her moods, the vast expanse of the starry heavens. We cannot translate our feelings into reasoned arguments without falling into contradictions, but to believe that our understanding adequately represents the world in all its immensity, beauty and complexity is surely unjustified. Just as practical reason suggests a moral purpose to the world, so does the sublime point to something transcendental.

Kant was notoriously indifferent to music and painting, but his views on art are an important and enduring contribution to aesthetics. He distinguished three types of pleasure: in the agreeable, in the good and in beauty. The first was a matter of gratification, and preferences were simply matters of taste. Our pleasure in the good was important but not disinterested. Beauty, however, was an immediate and disinterested pleasure. To find something beautiful we must respond to it as it presents itself, without reasoning or analysis. Aesthetic judgement derives from experience (the beautiful is an harmonious union of our understanding and imagination) but it is not conceptual: no amount of argument can talk us into liking something which doesn't appeal. What such liking or disliking consists of may be very difficult to explain. There is nothing more fundamental we can appeal to, though we give grounds for our feelings by pointing to various features of the object represented. Surely something like this happens when we contemplate the majesty of the world around us? We find a unity between our rational faculties and what we observe that invites a belief in, though it does not prove, some divine purpose underlying natural appearances.

But beauty is not mere feelings. Kant believed that though the sense of beauty was grounded in feelings of pleasure, this pleasure was universally valid and necessary. Other

people ought to feel as we do. What did he mean by this imperative? Not that we could ever establish principles to compel admiration, but that we must think of our pleasure as validated by the beauty of the art object. An inconclusive argument? Many have thought so. But Kant also stressed the disinterestedness of that pleasure. Just as human beings should never be treated as merely means to an end, so aesthetic pleasure comes from the sheer joy of deploying of our imagination. Not for reasons of morality, or utility, or any other purpose. In a free play of our imagination we bring concepts to bear on experiences that would otherwise be otherwise free of concepts, thereby extending our pleasure in the world. But the extension does not bring understanding. Art objects are valuable for their beauty and as sensory embodiments of ideas, but they do not convey what Kant was disposed to call knowledge. {4}

13.5. Assessment

Contemporaries thought Kant had set philosophy on a new course, and they were largely right. Continental philosophy is heavily indebted to the nineteenth century thinkers who either developed or more commonly reacted against Kant's ideas. Nonetheless, there were and remain specific difficulties. Kant's twelve categories of understanding now look dubious: sufficiently obvious to Kant's contemporaries not to require extensive justification, but now overtaken by later work. Logic has expanded enormously in the twentieth century. Kant's account of space and time (fixed and universal) does not square with relativity, and modifications by Cassirer (35.1) and others have not been widely accepted. Euclidean geometry fails over cosmic distances. More important, there are several geometries, all logical proceeding from slightly different axioms, where choice depends on the task in hand. Mathematics seems now to offer a less certain knowledge. For many mathematician, indeed, the subject represents the free creations of the human mind. So with aesthetics. Are we necessarily so

disinterested in beauty? And can we really demand of others (Kant's distinguishing feature of beauty as opposed to taste) that they too find something beautiful, i.e. is beauty a categorical imperative? Many have doubted so. {5}

But Kant's preoccupation was with knowledge: what can be known, and what cannot be known. He attempted to bring certainty by combining the approach of empiricists and idealists. All knowledge comes ultimately from the senses say the empiricists. Not so, say the idealists: the senses mislead and only the mind confers certainty. By welding the two, Kant argued for the active part played by the brain, a view repeatedly demonstrated by the sciences of cognition. But the price was high. Large areas of traditional knowledge were ruled out of court. We may suppose, we perhaps should suppose, that the maxims of religion, art and morality are true, but we cannot prove so.

So be it, then. Kant's boundaries of knowledge are very much those of Anglo-American philosophy. That we use categories at all, and that they give us a generally coherent view of the world, means that the world exists. It must exist. Our understanding has to be through words (or art or mathematics or morality) but these shapings of experience must have something to consistently engage with and shape. This argument, together with Wittgenstein's arguments against a private language, is usually taken as the decisive refutation of Derrida and others who claim that words are the only reality

Compelling? In some ways. Close reasoning, supported by a literal view of language, makes the conclusion inevitable. But not all areas of life are so governed: not aesthetics, literary theory, sociology and politics. But surely even here contemporary theories should show how close reasoning fails, in particular instances, and the precise consequences of taking alternative routes. Global judgements can only muddy the water.

But it was global judgements elaborated in the nineteenth century that laid the foundations of much theorizing today (12). Fichte (1762-1814), Schelling (1775-1854) and Hegel (1770-1831) accepted Kant's view of the organizing activities of the mind but built philosophies on thought alone. Nietzsche moved to aesthetics and dispensed with logic. And though taken as self-defeating by the analytical schools, the wider scepticism of the continental schools has shown how immense difficulties with truth, meaning and logic can arise from simple assumptions.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

14. GEORG HEGEL

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born in 1770, studied at the Tübingen theological college, worked as a private tutor and high school headmaster, lectured at Jena and Heidelberg, and died as Professor of Philosophy at Berlin in 1831. An academic but practical man, he was also someone closely linked with the Romantic Movement, opposed to Kant's categories of thought, and concerned to heal divisions in the emotional and social fabric of his time.

Hegel's first major work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in 1807, traces the development of thought and consciousness from historical glimmerings to 'absolute knowledge'. Civilizations progressively assess and find wanting each stage of their theoretical and practical viewpoints, synthesizing new on the ruins of the old. Such evolution comes not through some mystical law of history but from dissatisfaction with the contradictions, one-sidedness and shortcomings in current consciousness. Issues of individualism, ethics, political and religious philosophy need all to be resolved and transcended for the society or civilization to understand itself.

This outline Hegel proceeded to develop in his *Science of Logic* (1812-16) and the continuing *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. His *Philosophy of Right*, published separately in 1821, became and continues to be a central document in the history of political thought (26.6). Left wing theorists — Marx (41), Feuerbach and Engels — thought it supported their views of community and individual liberty. Right wing theorists thought it supported an absolute monarchy and the Prussian state. In fact it does neither: Hegel accepted modern civilian states, with market economies and possibly a constitutional monarchy, but disliked the irresponsibilities of individual freedoms as much as the dehumanising effect of the capitalist market. {1}

14.1. Hegel's Mode of Reasoning

Hegel was a phenomenologist. {2} He thought that categories of being must be developed directly from what appears in our experience (i.e. rather than from supposed a priori structure of the human mind) and he dealt with the antinomies differently from Kant (13). The latter said these problems arise because we confuse categories of mind with things in themselves. But we can't conceive a finite body, for example, without at some time thinking of an infinite one which forms its boundary, said Hegel, and then we're stuck with an infinite body being limited to a location, which is a contradiction in terms. But it is the mind which conceives of an infinite body, said Kant, and which imposes on nature its own categories of thought. No, thought Hegel: there are many antinomies, which are real but capable of being resolved by combination in a higher category, in this case Being. But since Being is everywhere in one sense, but is by the same token absent everywhere as a distinguishing feature, we must also talk of Nothing. Combining Being and Nothing generates Becoming. So, whereas Kant allowed a rational faith in God who is the author of the world and phenomena as a transcendental hypothesis — hypothesis only, note, since we could never prove His existence — Hegel argued that the transcendental was known to be true.

Knowledge appears through our immersion in the world. We know when we see into, through and around, along with the act by which we know. Knowledge touches Being when it achieves full completion. What this Being achieved always involves others (the Other) so that for full existence (Being-for-Itself) we need both Being and Other, which is also called Ideality or Absolute Being. Finally, Being-for-Itself is reflexive, bends back into and realizes Absolute Being, thus becoming both the object seen and the seer — i.e. total self-recognition. How is this effected without infinite acts of self-recognition and recall? Through Freedom, which is what the world is aiming at. But this idea is both concept and clothing,

which for Hegel is History, the merging of individual identity in National and finally Absolute Mind. Mind through history is the Absolute Mind's own march towards itself, towards self-realization of freedom.

Just as observation needs an object to be observed, Absolute Mind had to eternalise to know itself, to become itself, which turned empiricism inside out, making the truth or essences of objects but aspects of the Absolute Mind. But Mind had to include itself in the whole of its own activity of grasping the whole, i.e. become totally self-reflexive. Hegel's philosophy is therefore not a construction built on clearly-established truths, but a comprehensive view of everything. The world was to be understood as Mind endeavouring to know or recognize itself by first objectifying itself as nature or matter, and then returning into itself as consciousness comprehending itself.

14.2. Critique

Does this make sense? Many have doubted so. But Hegel's argument is very simple. Truly free, self-determining logic observes a rigorous, pre-suppositionless logic of its own. We begin by trying to think of something entirely indeterminate. We cannot do it: we always think of something. If we abstract from a thought all content we end up with nothing. Now this thinking of nothing is not the same as not thinking: we are actually thinking. But we cannot think of pure, indeterminate being without thinking of its opposite, nothing, from which it is indistinguishable. One merges with the other, is indeed the necessary part of the other. By similar means are other terms arrived at. {3}

How valid is this dialectic? Many were unconvinced, though it is fairer to see the resolution of thesis and antithesis, the synthesis, not so much as transcending the contradiction as carrying in suspension and preserving both, a view that anticipates schema. The German word commonly translated as transcending is *emporheben*. {4} Furthermore, which is

easily forgotten, Hegel always stresses the concrete: spirit in German is a masculine noun, and suggests someone actually and creatively at work. Reason for Hegel is not a substance but a subject, i.e. reason conscious of itself or spirit. The revelation of the spirit is the world order and its highest stage is the representation of the divine or absolute as religion.

14.3. Contra Kant

Kant allowed God as a hypothesis, to reconcile the categorical imperative (treat men as ends rather than means) with the goal of happiness (complete satisfaction of all our inclinations.) An all-powerful and all-knowing God will cause happiness to come to the morally worthy — in time of course, making a soul and/or immortality clearly necessary. Immortality becomes a practical postulate. Soul is the ground of our active and phenomenal life, though we cannot prove its existence. From this we must go on to make the whole of nature purposive. Man alone can act on the conceptions of principles, i.e. direct his behaviour to his own ends, by rules of his own devising. As a moral being man might be the final end of nature, thus acquiring dignity and self-respect which protected him from mere materialism. It was a hypothesis only, but one that captured the imagination of Romantic artists and writers.

Hegel disagreed. He claimed to have shown that the world was teleologically ordered, not as hypothesis but necessarily, logically. How else could the marvellous complexity of the world have originated? But then came evolution, natural selection of the fittest. Hegel had foreseen this, arguing that nature is conditioned by outward circumstances, contingency losing itself in vagueness. But the damage was done: evolution was a much simpler way of looking at things, and idealism gradually faded from the Anglo-Saxon scene, disappearing in England around the time of WWI.

14.4. Hegel and Contemporary Philosophy

In Europe, however, Hegel continues provides the starting point for many of the twentieth century schools of thought. Before Nietzsche (16), and perhaps more broadly, Hegel understood the fragmentation and alienation of modern societies. He sympathized with Hölderlin and the classical revival, but also saw that the aesthetic harmony of the Greek city state was not to be recaptured. Like Kant, Hegel based freedom on human reasoning and self-restraint, but felt that Kant's categories of thought were a new cartesianism, which separated man from his emotional nature. Thought in Hegel is rather abstract, and in reaction to this developed the ideas of Kierkegaard, Heidegger and the French existentialists (15). But man's outlook is also a product of his society, and the means by which it supports itself: an outlook Marx was to develop. And in thinking we need to examine our individual consciousness, striving to overcome its ingrained prejudices — a phenomenological line of thought that passes through Husserl (15.1) to Heidegger (17) and Gadamer (18.3). {5}

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

15. EXISTENTIALISM

Outside Nietzsche and Heidegger, existentialism is not much read today, but its concerns with spiritual loss and alienation are still relevant to contemporary literature. Here lie the roots of much literary theory — most notably the hostility to mathematics, science, rationalism and to the notion of a literal language.

15.1. Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) belongs to the continental philosophical tradition — was indeed the forerunner of many schools antagonistic to the analytical tradition. But whereas Austin recognized intention in speech acts, Husserl had already gone further to include intention in consciousness. {1} He developed a view of Franz Brentano's whose 1874 *Psychology from an Empirical Point of View* suggested that psychological acts are directed towards an object in a way that the empirical observations of science are not. The view in fact derives from medieval scholasticism (intentional inherent existence of an object) and Brentano went on to find ways of eliminating nonexistent objects we might conceive of (e.g. the present king of France), thus anticipating Russell's Theory of Descriptions.

But Husserl was not interested in language, but in the contents of consciousness, and attempted to make his phenomenology a rigorous science, one that cleared away misconceptions and started with things as they really present themselves. {2} To achieve that end, we had first to suspend (Husserl called it bracketing) the Cartesian distinctions of mind and body, the separation of things are 'really out there' from a stable viewing entity which is 'ourselves'. Consciousness is always consciousness of something, and not an abstract state of mind. With this misconception removed, we then made another bracketing, an eidetic reduction, which revealed the common form of objects. We try to isolate and then to group what is common in our

perceptions. As such we are simply distinguishing essences — ‘whiteness’ and ‘hardness’ and ‘roundness’ and ‘receptacle’ of a white porcelain cup. But Husserl's approach of parts and wholes is very different from the analytical approach of set theory. Intuition is employed to imagine both how things are and how they could be.

Husserl developed a very technical vocabulary to ensure that his distinctions were maintained: terms like noesis, noemata, horizons of possible experience, absolute experiences and the transcendental ego, which make translation into other philosophical systems very difficult. But he was also concerned with everyday experiences and perceptions. He stressed the complexity of the structure of experience, providing a stimulus to cognitive science. And this interaction of possibility with structure in perception foreshadowed causal theories of reference. {3}

But intentionality was a central concern to Husserl, and here he did not mean conscious purpose, but how knowledge is co-created with its objects. We see three sides of a cube, for example, {4} and expect a fourth. Perception is an active process. We project assumptions, and fit perspectives into patterns undisclosed from any one viewpoint to make sense of life. And because we may be wrong in our expectations, there exists a wide area of possibilities, what Husserl calls ‘an horizon of experiences’. {5}

15.2. Heidegger and Existentialism

How do we include the experiences of other people if we bracket off experience in this way? Husserl never fully answered this question, {6} which found expression in existentialism and hermeneutics. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), {7} Husserl's assistant and then successor at Freiburg, wrote the difficult and unfinished *Being and Time* {8} which shifted emphasis from Husserl's interest in perception to something overlooked since the pre-Socratics: the fundamental nature of existence itself. Besides everyday

unreflecting beings that we refer to (the ontic mode), there is Being-in-the-world (Dasein), the primordial individual nature of our existence, the wonder of being here: Heidegger's ontology. Because existence is willy-nilly given to us, and is an active process (we project ourselves into possibilities, merging the horizons of the actual and potential) Heidegger called our existence 'a thrown project.' {9} Meanings are structures we live before we think about them. We press on in our expectations and then interpret that world in the light of our beliefs and assumptions, repeating the process endlessly until we die.

Being and Time is a self-involved and anguished work, but the concern for others emerges from Heidegger's ontology: we are automatically born into a world of relationships to people and things. Certainly Heidegger's style becomes freer and less academic in later works where he discusses truth, art and language, even matters of science and technology. But if Heidegger is sometimes read as saying that poetry comes closest to allowing Being to emerge from the rift between the ontic and ontological (reference and fundamental being), {10} Heidegger in fact analyses Hölderlin, Mörike, Rilke and Trakl largely to illustrate his own conceptions. {11}

15.3. Precursors: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche

By turns courageous, proud and perverse, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard appears a textbook existentialist. He was born in Copenhagen in 1813, the youngest of seven children to a man Søren described as afflicted by frightful depression. The son entered the University of Copenhagen, completed his degree in theology in 1840, prepared for the church, broke off his engagement and then began a long period of private study and personal isolation. He travelled to Berlin to hear Schelling, studied Hegel, and between 1843 and his death in 1855 published a series of books which had little effect beyond making him thoroughly unpopular with everyone.

Kierkegaard's quarrel was with Hegel and orthodox Christianity. Hegel had attempted to encompass religion with philosophy, appropriating the realities of faith (which for Kierkegaard mean ever-present terror, perplexity and despair) in anodyne conceptual thought. But Christianity wasn't rational. The early Christian Church may have taken over the Greek term *nous* — that divine part of human beings that linked them to God and allowed them to appreciate His handiwork — but the appropriation seemed an absurd presumption to Kierkegaard. Man was a particular existing being who inevitably saw the world from his own perspective. Moreover, quoting the story of Abraham, Kierkegaard argued that the intended sacrifice of Isaac could not be squared with ethical conduct: religion was a paradox. Philosophy merely glosses over the real texture of human life, our fears and perplexities. Ultimately, we are forced to accept that there is nothing with which to ground ourselves: we live by an act of faith, a leap into the dark. {12}

Friedrich Nietzsche was an atheist and stressed the irrational basis of our beliefs. Law, religion, philosophy, culture were all were fictions which a free man rejects. Truth varies with viewpoint, ultimately reduces to convention and personal interpretation, so that the dispassionate search for knowledge is better seen as a will to power. Indeed, power is very much the ultimate reality, and one which the aristocratic individual will boldly grasp. Human beings do not seek knowledge: they want life in all its strength, abundance and variety.

Nietzsche was looking across the homilies of the Enlightenment, out of the petty hypocrisies of his time, to a sun-drenched vision of the ancient world. There men lived nobly, with a deep knowledge of the precariousness and tragedy of the world. Full understanding was beyond them, but they acted with dignity and accepted the consequences. Equally abhorrent was a world tamed by Kantian imperatives and given historical necessity by Hegel. Man does not grow

in moral stature as he submits to reason or social convention. Man is an individual, free to the extent that he has the courage to assert his independence. {13}

15.4. French Existentialists

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1907-61), the co-founder of French existentialism, {14} drew on Husserl, Heidegger and contemporary physiology and psychology to develop being-in-the-world as a field of experience. Perception was primary (a view that won him a sympathetic following among Anglo-Saxon philosophers) but it could also be mistaken. He opposed Cartesian dualism, and its investigations of sensations and qualities, proposing his own reflective and unreflective experience. Merleau-Ponty turned to painting for evidence of the body's attitude to the world, and then to Saussurean linguistics, but reached no firm conclusions.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80) covered a wider field, not only in philosophical interests, but as playwright, novelist, political theorist and literary critic. Like Michel Foucault, he was also very anti-bourgeois, and had to reconcile Marxism with individual freedom.

Sartre studied philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, became a teacher in Le Havre, returned to Paris and published *Nausea* in 1938. He was mobilized the following year, served as a meteorologist, was captured and, while in prison, read Heidegger and wrote his first play. Upon release he devoted his time to writing the important but very difficult *Being and Nothingness* (1943). International fame came soon after when his plays and lectures captured the public imagination. He refused an academic appointment and threw himself into international issues, briefly joining the Communist party but leaving and denouncing communism after the 1956 suppression of the Hungarian uprising. He espoused Algerian nationalism, opposed the American involvement in Vietnam, and was still a potent voice in the events of 1968.

Sartre's philosophy is difficult and perhaps unsatisfactory. Extending an approach of Husserl's, Sartre made imagination an intentional mode of consciousness, and one which escaped causal necessity. Such freedom also applied generally to consciousness, which, moreover, was always aware of itself: Sartre took issue with Freud's view of the unconscious. Aspects of life which involve consciousness Sartre called 'for itself' (pour-soi), and these he distinguished from 'physical facts' (en-soi). Physical facts obey the ordinary laws of logic, but in consciousness things 'are what they are and are not what they are' — a view that introduces Sartre's rather baffling notion of 'Nothingness' whereby self-consciousness both creates and annihilates itself. Self appears as a set of commitments and aspirations that give a projective unity to acts of consciousness. How a person regards himself is often formed in childhood (the 'fundamental project') but Sartre replaces Freud's causal laws with teleological ones: the person strives for some particular end.

How? Sartre argues that identity partly depends on others recognizing us, but this 'being for others' is also alienating, and not easily integrated into self-consciousness. He says 'respect for Other's freedom is an empty word' but also 'I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine'. How are these to be reconciled? Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is incomplete, and his later works adopt a more Marxist perspective ('I have said, and I repeat, that the only valid interpretation of human History is historical materialism.') Sartre develops a more impersonal and holistic view of society where human affairs are conducted under conditions of scarcity and therefore competition. So arises alienation, reinforced by the material conditions of life — houses, cars, machines — which keep men apart. In this *Critique of Dialectic Reason* Sartre records his final disillusionment with communist politics.{15}

15.5. Critique

Existentialism is not a philosophy so much as a protest against certain features of contemporary life. God has disappeared. Nature is governed by abstract laws. Man himself has dwindled to a statistic in the state bureaucracy; even his inmost thoughts and feelings are matters of psychology, physiology, ultimately of chemistry. Man's dethronement has been going on for three hundred years ago, ever since the advent of science in the seventeenth century, but it has taken a century's wars, depressions, concentration camps and wholesale state engineering to bring matters to a head. Existentialism champions what has been overlooked in man's one-sided desire to intellectually comprehend and to control the uniqueness of human life: its variety, its need for personal validation. Hence the irrationalism of the movement, its partisan nature, its willingness to dispense with reason or close argumentation, even to denigrate custom and logic as fiction.{16}

We lose ourselves in universal objective systems, said Kierkegaard, and are less than men if we submit to the fear of being different, claimed Nietzsche. To confront the absurdities of existence is to know anxiety, dread and ambiguity, but dread is also 'the dizziness of freedom which gazes down into its own possibilities, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself.'

Because it stresses the individual, and has an ecstatic quality, recognizing the temporal and the historical context, existentialism has been attractive to the arts. Many of its philosophers were indeed excellent writers, Nietzsche and Sartre in particular. But the artist who reads existentialist philosophy to understand more clearly what his work is attempting to achieve will generally be disappointed. Contrary to popular claims, the existentialist view is not liberating. Nor does it champion the aesthetic outlook: it uses that outlook to examine various contemporary issues that

defy reasoning. So much the better say its advocates. Not philosophy at all, say its critics, but an investigation better served by other disciplines — sociology (26), politics, literary theory, aesthetics (5) in general.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

16. NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche was a splendidly impassioned writer who denounced social beliefs as empty fictions. Much of the work may have been a reaction to cramped personal circumstances, but the brilliance of Nietzsche's insights, and his championing of aesthetics as an alternative to pallid rationalism continues to be influential in continental thought, not least in literary theory.

16.1. Introduction

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) had no formal philosophic training but was a philologist — a brilliant philologist, becoming professor of philology at Basle when 24. He published *The Birth of Tragedy* in the year of his retirement from the university on the grounds of ill-health in 1879, and then a handful of subsequently very influential books until madness overtook him in 1889.

Nietzsche was not an philosopher on the Anglo-American pattern. He set out no carefully-argued position, nor composed any all-embracing system. His writing, with its cultural preoccupations, sweeping generalizations and attack on rationalism, is as much psychology, social comment and literature as philosophy. His first book distinguished two strains in Greek art, the reflective Apollonian and the rhapsodic Dionysian. *The Human, All Too Human* of 1878 was a volume of aphorisms and reflections. This style of thinking he developed further in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) and finally a great mass of work in 1888 that were subsequently published as *The Will to Power* {1}

16.2. Nietzsche's Thought

Nietzsche came of age in the disillusion that followed the failure of the 1848 revolutions. Philosophy had lost its direction, failing to emancipate European thought from eighteenth century dogmatism, and Nietzsche was not

content to seek consolation in academic study. He had either to make rationalism more cogent and persuasive to a capitalist society, or reject rationalism altogether. He chose the latter, championing the wild, the irrational, the aristocratic individual with strength to follow his impulses. Given the autonomous, threefold categories of post-Kantian thought — art, knowledge and morality — Nietzsche inflated art, making an aesthetics to challenge logic and the slave mentality of the masses. {2}

Many of society's deepest beliefs in law, religion, philosophy, and culture are fictions, declared Nietzsche. Possibly necessary for society's sense of well-being and common purpose, they nonetheless rest only on convention. The strong man will reject such second-hand notions, fashioning his own morality and purpose. No one can establish everything for himself, and the authentic man will take responsibility for what he does accept — rather than excuse himself by quoting authorities or pointing to the incomplete nature of his investigations. The search for knowledge is commonly a search for power, and absolute truth is unobtainable, a dream of academic establishments. Mathematics and science in particular led to barbarism, and the twentieth century would exact a terrible price for the unexamined optimism of its promoters.

Like Schopenhauer (12.3), whose will to live he made into his *Will to Power*, Nietzsche was a pessimist. Life was boring, trivial, shallow, and had been since Greek rationalism and Christianity forgiveness. Greek tragedy had once given a deep-rooted sense of significance to life. By combining the terrifying Dionysian aspect of lawlessness with Apollonian control, the Greeks had created great works of art that enable societies 'to look into the abyss'. Socrates and Plato had destroyed all that, promoting reason as one true panacea, and pushing music, poetry and drama to the background as entertainments, dangerous if regarded as more than artisan skills.

This subterfuge we should attack, thought Nietzsche. Reasoning has its uses, giving us advantage in the competitive struggle for life, but it is a fiction all the same. Each individual has his own perspective, making truth relative. And if there are many truths, there cannot be one truth, so that truth as we commonly conceive it is an illusion. A logical disaster of an argument? Well, then, logic itself was a fiction.{3}

That being the case, thought Nietzsche, the language of the Enlightenment with its pious hopes of a social order without oppression or dogmatism — egalitarian, cooperative and consensual — is a fraud. The weak live in fear, and their beliefs and value systems were only pitiful attempts to outlaw the vigour and moral superiority of the more splendidly endowed. The practical consequences of Nietzsche's *Will to Power* weren't precisely spelled out, making links to Nazism a pointless debate, but the real world where free aristocratic beings moved and had their being was not adequately represented by the pallid language of academia. Hence Nietzsche's aphoristic brilliance, which served as a model for Freud's self-aggrandizement and for Foucault's glittering style. Breathing passion and poetry, they can afford to ignore exact, humdrum sense.

16.3. Critique

First Nietzsche's equation of truth with power. Many are tempted to agree: the disadvantaged, social minorities, those who read Foucault rather than political theory. {4}. But how can societies progress if they cannot distinguish ends from means? Both Stalin and Hitler wielded extraordinary power, but few now accept their entitlement, or the justifications offered.

Then the anti-rationalism generally. If the language of civilized discourse — one that aims at clear exposition, respect for opponent's arguments, scrupulous attention to the evidence — is simply wishful thinking, then languages

that overcome these shortcomings and carve psychic matter at the joints, will be irredeemably subject to the subterfuges, the deceits and misrepresentations of ill-thought-out desires: a Pyrrhic victory. For if language makes itself true to such working then it conveys no reliable information. Ultimately, as Nietzsche himself realized, the view saws off the branch on which it sits.

Perhaps that's to misunderstand Nietzsche. {5} He opposed traditional metaphysics, a belief that philosophy or any other intellectual enterprise could encompass truth. We can only interpret, from a certain position at a certain time, and therefore never finally or for sure. So Nietzsche's approach, which often appears unsystematic, drawing at random on the models and terminology of literature, social and natural sciences, economics and psychology. The search is not for truth, but for life — in strength, abundance and variety. We all of us achieve some measure of understanding and knowledge, and are obliged to do so, following and expanding whatever line of enquiry seems appropriate.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

17. HEIDEGGER

Heidegger came to regard language as the ultimate reality, and so is much quoted (but perhaps not read: he is phenomenally difficult) by literary theorists. But though he might appear to be calling poetry the most authentic language, Heidegger in fact writes an idiomatic prose, the poetry merely serving illustration purposes.

17.1. Introduction

Martin Heidegger was born in Baden-Württemberg in 1889, and studied initially for the priesthood. In 1909 he entered the University of Freiburg to read philosophy, receiving his lectureship in 1915. After military service, Heidegger returned to Freiburg as Husserl's Assistant, and in 1923 moved to Marburg, where he wrote *Being and Time*. He returned to Freiburg in 1929, became Rector in 1933, when he also implemented Nazi policies and made his notorious pro-Hitler radio broadcast. The following year Heidegger resigned as Rector, and took no further part in politics. His activities were not forgotten after the war, however, and the French occupying powers banned him from lecturing until 1950. But the following year Heidegger was granted Emeritus status, and indeed continued writing till 1961, when he published his two-volume *Nietzsche*. He died in Freiburg in 1976. {1}

Heidegger's star waned in the sixties, along with those of other existentialists, but has risen again with current interest in hermeneutics (18), Poststructuralism (7-9) and green politics. Until 1927, Heidegger studied the philosophy of Husserl, the hermeneutics of Dilthey and the anthropology of Scheler, but wrote modestly and conventionally. All this changed with *Being and Time*, which dealt with an unfamiliar subject in a ferociously difficult manner. Heidegger never completed this work: the third section of Part One, and the whole of Part Two, which was to have examined Kant, Descartes and Aristotle remain unwritten. Heidegger

gradually widened his areas of interest, and backtracked from *Being and Time*, but the difficulties with this notorious publication were real and unavoidable. Heidegger was attempting to find a new way of regarding the world, and to forge a language to match. {2}

17.2. Being and Time

What is 'being?' asks Heidegger. His answer was to distinguish what it is for beings to be beings (Sein) from the existence of entities in general (Seindes). Seindes was 'ontic' — i.e. makes reference, allows us to talk about things. It was simply a 'place holder' and applied to relations, processes, events, etc. Sein was more fundamental: Heidegger was concerned with something he felt had been overlooked since the pre-Socratics. Descartes, for example, simply sidestepped the problem of ontology (philosophy of being) by dividing the world into three (God, the exterior world, and mental processes) and depicting the essentials of the exterior world in terms of time and the three spatial dimensions. This leads him in all kinds of difficulties, and evaded the question we must ask as to what being really is.

Heidegger was very idiosyncratic. He indulged in extended word play, and employed his own spelling, vocabulary and syntax. One famous coining was Dasein: literally 'to be there'. Dasein has no essence beyond what it can make itself be — i.e. no fixed nature or inveterate tendency. Man alone has Dasein, and he cannot escape it. Nor is there anything more fundamentally human, to which he can dedicate his life. The world is disclosed to us through and in Dasein: disclosed without mediation by concepts, propositions and inner mental states. Truth is Dasein's disclosedness. We are 'thrown' into the world. Heidegger rejected the correspondence theory of truth (31.4), and regarded as a scandal the continual attempt by philosophy to centre knowledge on mental processes.

What is this Dasein? Start with things in the world, said Heidegger: everyday things like tools, materials, workspace. Are they not there for a purpose, to do something? They do not exist in isolation, waiting for the philosopher to extract the essence 'tool', for instance, and then worry about enclosing and defining the term properly. Their complex relationships with other things (people and material objects) is what is most relevant about them, and this cuts across the usual boundaries of objective/subjective, animate/inanimate, or past/present/future. Time is not an abstract entity, something in which we are borne passively along, but an opportunity to do something. Or it is for us human beings who have Dasein (choice) and we therefore owe things in the world a duty of care (Sorge).

But if we continually define ourselves, we also change the way we regard the world. And that in turn redefines us. Nothing is innate, not even Dasein. Other things in the world (Seindes) may be relatively fixed but man is different. Above all he faces conscience, dread, awareness of death, all of which call man back to himself, to question his authenticity. Hence the importance of these in Heidegger's writings, which he viewed ontologically, not merely matters of psychological or sociological explanation.{3}

17.3. The Later Heidegger

Heidegger's interests shifted after *Being and Time*. He left some of the ontological questions, and retracted criticisms of Kant (13) and others. His style became less academic, more impressionist. He concerned himself with art, truth and language. And while there was no ultimate reality for the early Heidegger, beyond what we consciously choose for ourselves, the later Heidegger came to reify language, i.e. make material what was conceptually abstract. Language became a quasi-divinity, the ultimate medium which explains the world to us. Social custom for Heidegger was originally custom: no more than that. But in attempting to get back to

positions prior to Plato, Heidegger also dug down to find a more authentic base. Though Nietzsche had dismissed a need for grounding, Heidegger continually sought for something more primordial, turning to the German poets who had felt most keenly this loss of primary dwelling place. {4}

Metaphor came to play a central role. Philosophy traditionally regards non-metaphoric language to be primary, and Heidegger did not deny that reference (ontic explanation) could be useful within a conceptual scheme. But to escape that scheme (what would be called by Poststructuralists the 'prison house of language') we needed to use language more reverently and receptively. Hence Heidegger's interest in the poets, Greek and German. {5}

17.4. Ethics

Heidegger was originally destined for the priesthood, and a religious intensity characterizes all his writing. In his early work he regarded logic and mathematics as not so much resting on the psychological make-up of the human mind as taking on the medieval conception of a living faith. In 1919 Heidegger broke with Catholicism, so that his *Being and Time* can be seen as an attempt to demythologise theology. During the Nazi years Heidegger became an atheist, reading Nietzsche rather than Aristotle or Eckhart. Subsequently he turned to psychology and environmental issues, developing his own approach and terminology. But the earth that Heidegger sacralizes remained German. Heidegger was a nationalist, concerned with things German: landscape, peoples, their destiny, writers and philosophers. {6}

Heidegger was originally regarded as an existentialist, with the common desire to shock people out of their purposeless, 'inauthentic' existences. Being human is the point of our existence, the opportunities we are given of fulfilling possibilities. Nothing is preordained. But nor is it unconstrained: we are rooted in our times and its social preoccupations. But to live properly we need to discover our

uniqueness, and act as we consciously desire to. Doing so may bring alienation. It will certainly bring anxiety as we understand that we ourselves make the reality of the world around us. And there will be an element of negation, since much lies in the future, which we cannot see at present. Moreover, we all die, and die on our own, each person turning towards his eventual nothingness. In anguish we realize that we are propelled into the world by chance, and are removed equally blindly. Beyond realizing our own potential, there is no purpose to life.

17.5. Aesthetics

Disillusioned with National Socialism after his 1933 doctoral address, Heidegger turned to Hölderlin and Sophocles, but did not publish his lectures *The Origin of the Work of Art* until much later. Poetic language has the unique capacity to produce and preserve novelty, and Heidegger therefore viewed language and the arts through poetry, reversing the usual standing of poetry to philosophy. Heidegger's interest was in the work of art itself, not the artist or the audience. Art means know-how: not technique as such, but the means of 'bringing forth'. And when, as at the present time, the gods have fled and there is no world to open up, great art was no longer possible. Heidegger indeed felt that great art was already on the wane when aesthetics appeared with Plato and Aristotle. {7}

But too much may be made of Heidegger's affiliations. Certainly his style becomes freer and less academic in later works where Heidegger discusses truth, art and language, even matters of science and technology. But if Heidegger is sometimes read as saying that poetry comes closest to allowing Being to come forth, Heidegger in fact deals largely with a particular strain of German poetry — Hölderlin, Mörike, Rilke and Trakl, and then so as to find illustrations of his own concepts. He does not follow his own advice, which is to listen to the poet and let thinking be disturbed by the

poetry, but seems to overlook their pain, alienation and desperation in his desire to hear his message confirmed. {8} Most frustrating of all, Heidegger does not provide an aesthetics as such: he believes art has a unique relationship to truth, but that relationship is not spelt out. No doubt Heidegger felt that his philosophy went beyond aesthetics, but then the larger political arena is not without its problems: Heidegger came to despise Nazi propaganda, but never renounced his allegiance to National Socialism.

17.6. Critique

Martin Heidegger was very prolific: his writing is packed into some 70 dense volumes. The secondary literature is enormous and is fast expanding. {9} This, and the unsystematic nature of Heidegger's thought (not to mention the obscurity of style) makes assessment very difficult. Certainly Heidegger has been very influential and is much quoted, though generally by literary and media theorists without philosophical training. Professional philosophers are more divided in their opinions. A devoted band see him as an inspirational and truly original thinker. The great majority find his work muddled, opaque and fraudulent: 'verbiage' is a term not infrequently used.

The central problem is reasoning. Whereas Husserl (15.1) had looked into intentional consciousness to find certain categories that might serve as foundations to our knowledge of being, Heidegger widened the categories beyond conscious thought to include human activities in general, including mood and emotion. Can this be done? Heidegger claims that logos is a concept constructed by the post-Socratics to evade Dasein, but the terminology is beside the point. Logos is logic, the science of reasoning. If poetry can be written without logic, philosophy cannot, or at least not philosophy as generally understood.

Heidegger discovers unusual associations and coins new words, but the philosophic problems remain. Language is

historically shaped, Heidegger claims, no doubt correctly, but his own shaping lacks even the sanction of social use. And for many philosophers Heidegger's shaping is a fraud, a play on words, a monstrous etymology that makes only partial sense in German and none at all in translation. {10} Heidegger has many striking turns of phrase, and Poststructuralists have naturally treated him as evidence in their claim that reality is made through novel use of language. But the claim is only an assertion, an undemonstrated assertion, and in fact Heidegger has very different objectives. Art may allow Being to come forth, but does not constitute Being as such.

Heidegger undertook interpretations of Kant and Plato, but these are anti-interpretations, constructed to oppose previous interpretations, to cast doubt rather than illumination on his forebears. Modernity doubtless faces extreme problems, but few think nothingness is the primary reality in a current 'world-night' (Weltnacht). Death comes to us all, and in that sense nothingness is universal, but to equate this with reality is to play fast and loose with levels of meaning.

Heidegger was also provincial and almost nineteenth-century in his reading. He seemed unaware of the development of twentieth-century logic, and often proposed a conundrum that Russell (32.3) and others had disposed of. Non-existing objects like 'the present King of France' have a special mode of existence, said Heidegger. Human beings are aware of their eventual death, so that death is 'a way of being which a human being takes on as soon as it is'. Heidegger showed a rare willingness to confront the great commonplaces of life, but shifting them to new categories did not necessary make them more real or comprehensible. {11}

But this doubtless would be to miss what Heidegger was trying to say, perhaps would only emphasize what Heidegger contended: that logic has limits, and that our sense of

wonder at the world is not to be captured in the abstract meditations of traditional philosophy. Who would deny this? The difficulties of aesthetics, which has to deal with what is not entirely a reasoning matter, are very well known. Contemporary theories of brain functioning (23), and the metaphor theories of Lakoff and Johnson (24.3) also stress the non-rational basis of thought. But who supposed otherwise, that philosophy encompassed all we needed to feel, know and understand of the world? What philosophy did hope to provide, however, was a rational understanding, however limited, and that is something not easily found in Heidegger. Indeed he resists easy formulations: philosophy is thinking, hard thinking, and Heidegger is always more concerned to make us vividly aware of existence, and of the fundamental problems, than find intellectual solutions. Is this philosophy? Yes, say Heidegger's supporters, which explains his fascination for contemporary theorists. No, say traditional philosophers: Heidegger's concerns are best treated in art or theology.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

18. HERMENEUTICS

How do we escape our current viewpoint and see a piece of literature as its author intended? We can't: our views are always bound up with our present concerns, just as those concerns are themselves coloured by past traditions.

Hermeneutics began as the science of interpreting ancient documents, making a consistent picture when the parts themselves drew their meaning from the document as a whole, but has become important to Postmodernism and literature in general.

18.1. Introduction

Though hermeneutics came to prominence with the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, a pupil of Heidegger's, we need to go back to Schliermacher to understand its aims and methods. In the difficult task of deciphering ancient manuscripts, Friedrich Schliermacher (1768-1834) {1} came to realize that one needed to get beneath the plain understanding of a document and divine something of its author: his insights, prejudices, reasons for writing. In each part of the document the author was obviously represented. To make a fully-rounded character, each represented part had therefore to be assembled into an internally consistent whole, and this whole checked with the constituent parts — a continual adjustment and readjustment that constitutes the hermeneutic circle. Schliermacher suggested various approaches, but it fell to his admirer Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) {2} to offer more objective ways of doing this, and of interpreting the human sciences at large. Mindful of both Kant and Hegel's work, Dilthey first drew a line between science and the humanities. Science aimed to explain, and did so by recognizing laws exterior and indifferent to man: invariant, mathematical, ahistorical. The humanities aimed to understand, and retained what was relevant to the individual man: his life experiences, affections, character, social and historical setting.

But how could such understanding be objective, or at least methodical? The matter came to a head with Carl Hempel's 1942 article: *The Function of General Laws in History*. {3} True to its Logical Positivist (29.2) spirit, Hempel's article denied Dilthey's distinction and argued that causal laws should operate in history, i.e. deep in enemy territory. Professional historians {4} were quick to point out the difficulties, theoretical and practical, but the notion persisted that understanding in the humanities (and this included aesthetics and sociology) must be causal if it was to be more than fanciful reconstruction.

18.2. Analytical Hermeneutics

Now it is perfectly possible to construct a logic to span the two worlds of scientific explanation and cultural understanding, at least in limited areas like historical or sociological explanation. Georg Henrik von Wright's logic of action {5} (not to be confused with his deontic logic) employs cause and effect and distinguishes sufficient from necessary conditions. The logic, set out in *Explanations and Understanding* (1971) and *Causality and Determinism* (1974), is quite straightforward: a two-valued propositional logic with tense modifiers. A sufficient condition means that p will be followed by q. A necessary condition means that q has been preceded by p. This simple expedient (the sufficient is not the necessary turned around, and one does not imply the other) eliminates the need for overarching historical laws, which are unwieldy and probably unworkable. Sufficient conditions tell us something is bound to happen. Necessary conditions tell us how an event is possible. Beneath events lies this logic, latent as it were, ready to operate when opportunity arises. The Archduke Ferdinand is assassinated at Sarajevo. Austria issues an ultimatum. Serbia hesitates. Russia feels threatened and starts mobilizing. Strengthened by the expectation of Russian support, Serbia defies the ultimatum. Encouraged by Germany, Austria declares war on Serbia. The First World

War starts. Unforeseen developments satisfy the necessary conditions and push events in directions not covered by the sufficient conditions.

Von Wright's logic does not legislate for all areas of action. But nor is it psychological, depending on intuitions of correctness. That understanding is a form of life, and a social form of life at that, and so the essence of another logic. In his 1958 book *Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, Peter Winch {6} proposed a logic that rises out of and is made intelligible by society. After all, Winch argues, understanding other people is not based on sympathy but on knowledge and expectations — on rules, in short, which the sociologist attempts to understand and assess. Of course we do not generally think of logic in this way, nor recognize a 'grammar of societies', but that is our shortcoming, a cultural limitation of our Anglo-Saxon thought patterns.

18.3. Hans-Georg Gadamer

Though von Wright and Winch do fashion a bridge between continental and Anglo-American analytical philosophies, fundamental differences remain. Generally the analytical schools describe where the continentals prescribe, i.e. remain academic where the continentals embrace social causes. Differing schools of philosophy represent for Anglo-Americans just different choices in the starting presuppositions, about which nothing can be done: the reason cannot be 'grounded' further. In contrast, the continentals do wish to ground their philosophies further — in language and the continuance of the historical past (Gadamer) or labour and shared expression (Habermas) or cultural artifacts and shared ways of understanding (Ricouer). {7}

Gadamer, {8} for instance, takes issue with the prevailing Enlightenment view that man would live happily and at peace if old prejudices and superstitions were swept away.

Inevitably, if only in part, we live on our historical inheritance, in a dialogue between the old traditions and present needs. And there is no simple way to assess that inheritance except by trial and error: praxis: living out its precepts and their possible reshapings. Rationality of the scientific or propositional kind is something we should be wary of. It evades what seems to Gadamer important: our direct apperception of reality, the 'truth that finds us'. But if the flow of existence is a continuing disclosure of meanings, {9} how are we to recognize these meanings and know they are correct?

Gadamer asks us to think of the law courts, where rulings represent not rubber-stamped social conventions but a process of continuing refinement and modification as the old rulings meet difficulties — the hermeneutic adjustment between the particular and the general. Validity comes from a communality of practice and purposes, not by reference to abstract theory. Similar considerations apply to aesthetics, a field notoriously resistant to objective approaches. Artworks are not only bearers of the self-image and moral dimensions of the society that produces them, but a product of the resistance exerted by the individual circumstances of creation to wider truths. And these wider truths are the truths inherent in society, what it lives by, explicitly or not. The natural world may be beautiful, as Kant acknowledged, but an artwork includes the play of the mental faculties of the artist concerned, its own kind of truth, therefore, which Kant did not acknowledge.

Experience, said Dilthey, involves immediacy and totality. Immediacy gives meaning without ratiocination. Totality requires the meanings have sufficient weight and significance to unify the myriad moments of a person's life. {10} Dilthey was talking about historical experience, but both factors apply to artworks. In place of Kant's appeal to the synthesizing role of individual judgement, Dilthey appealed through individual creations to concerns of the community at

large, even if these concerns were to be verified by the narrow procedures of the natural sciences. Gadamer urges a wider concept of verification, for which he turns to games. Games have autonomy: they absorb the players, and have rules and a structures of their own. Art similarly absorbs both artist and viewer. Also like games, art does not permit unlimited free expression. The 'right' representation has to be respected — 'right' for the medium, and also representing something lasting and true, self-verifying though not self-evident, continuing through the changing circumstances of a man's life, showing itself in continually being re-experienced. 'Right' does not come about through pouring effort into a certain conception of art, nor in slavishly following certain rules, but something which emerges in the hermeneutical struggle of artistic creation, the continual adjustment and readjustment of concept with medium, and of individual view with the wider social truths. {11}

Artworks, like historical documents, are creations of a certain time and place. As such, they are replete with the presuppositions (the prejudices as Gadamer calls them) of those circumstances. How can we filter out these prejudices, and ensure we do not replace them with prejudices of our own? We cannot, says Gadamer. We must allow the two sets of prejudices to confront each other, when we shall find a meaning is disclosed that often goes beyond what the originator of the artwork intended. Doubtless there will be ambiguities, inconsistencies, particularly with a major thinker. But these hermeneutic adjustments — of our own presuppositions with those of the author or artist — are unavoidable, and indeed essential. They make interpretation and appreciation an ongoing act of understanding, a enlargement of ourselves through a fusing of horizons.

Like Heidegger (17), Gadamer sees language as the house of Being. He is also pleased with Wittgenstein's (28.1) picture of language as social games. Through playing (i.e. using language) we acquire an understanding of the world.

And that applies to any language. It is the learning process which is important: it mimics and provides an exemplar for human experience. And whereas Habermas sees language as a sedimented ideology, full of undisclosed corruptions and prejudices that analysis must bring to light, Gadamer finds these corruptions and prejudices as constitutive of understanding. There is no language free of them. Nor can we get outside language to some purer mode of understanding. No doubt words mirror objects imperfectly, but it is on their multiple reflecting surfaces that truth become visible. {12}

18.4. Jürgen Habermas

It was the review by Jürgen Habermas (1929 -) of Gadamer's *Truth and Meaning*, and the extended debate which followed, which brought hermeneutics to widespread notice. The two thinkers have much in common, but Habermas was a Marxist colleague of Adorno at Frankfurt, and saw tradition as a distortion of the human spirit. He stressed the liberating function of communication far more than Gadamer would allow, and has been tireless in freeing Marxism (41) from Stalinist corruption, and in battling against the nihilism of Poststructuralism. {13}

Though the Frankfurt school has traditionally been empiricist, Habermas criticized the rationality of mathematics (33) and science (34) as effectively placing judgement in the hands of specialists, an undemocratic procedure. Man is entitled to his freedoms — from material want, from social exclusion, and from perversions that alienate him from himself {14} So his interest in Marxism, not to justify Marxist prophecies, but to rationalize and update Marx's criticisms of societies that force men to act contrary to their better natures. Labour is not simply a component of production, but how men are forced to live. Class ideologies that reduce liberties are perversions of language which we need to exhume and examine.

Habermas has profited from his reading of C.S. Pierce and Dilthey. But for all their stress on the communicative function of language, Pierce adopted semiotics and Dilthey a scientific rationalism. Habermas initially grounded language in psychoanalysis, {15} as this was the most primitive and least mechanistic of possibilities. Subsequently (and Habermas has always shown an admirable courage in changing his mind) he adopted a linguistic model similar to, but more fundamental than, Chomskian (39) language competence. {16} What the model attempts is to show that truth, justice and freedom are interwoven at a fundamental level in language.

Or can be. There are many prejudices (e.g. anti-Semitism) which issue in obvious absurdities that experience corrects. But there are also distortions of language that are not falsifiable by demonstration, woven so deep that experience is imperceptibly coloured by them. How can language so tainted cleanse itself? Habermas has developed psychological suggestions of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg that man has levels of cognitive and moral development latent within him, which wait for the right environment for their activation. {17}

Ultimately, truth cannot be grounded in evidence, but in consensus, though the two draw together in Habermas's 'ideal speech situation'. Here the participants are won over by force of argument, not by internal distortions of language or external pressures. Contrary to the Poststructuralists (7-9), Habermas believes that its very claim to universality allows 'truth' to escape charges of repression and paranoia. We cannot entirely eliminate distortions of language, but we can be aware of them, which is sufficient.

18.5. Hermeneutics and Literary Interpretation

Not so, argues Albrecht Wellmer. Habermas's 'future logos of final and absolute truth' is unattainable, clearly in practice, but also in theory if (as it must be) communication is

between people with slightly different viewpoints. {18} Though cultural objects are shared ways in which a community understands itself, communities change. How do we arrive at a proper interpretation of objects from past civilizations? Gadamer, according to the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, does not explain. All things are relative: no one interpretation is to be preferred over another. {19} Habermas is more concerned with method, but doesn't bring praxis and theory together, and is therefore far from achieving Husserl's hope for a rigorous science. Ricoeur's suggestion would be to search the text itself for the complex relationship between explaining and understanding.

Intention is central to Roman Ingarden's concept of the literary work {20}, because texts preserve the acts of consciousness on the part of their writer, which are then reanimated in various ways by the reader. One can distinguish four levels in a text {21} — word sounds, meaning units, perspectives controlling states of affair, and represented objectivities. Particularly prevalent in the last two levels are gaps or indeterminacies, which the reader fills with his own creations. But such gaps are not filled in an uncontrolled fashion, argues Wolfgang Iser {22}, but through a process of retrospection and anticipation that can overturn the text's 'prestructure', the coding of the reader's usual habits and expectations. Reading indeed is a variable, complex business, which accepts the disruptions and dissonances to be expected in a modernist work. Hans Robert Jauss {23} stresses change. Since we absorb a work only when we enlarge the horizon of our understanding, the accepted canons of literature that no longer shock and challenge may not be relevant. Meaning emerges in interaction between text and readers, often in societies very different from the writer's expectations, and so largely out of his control.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

19. SIGMUND FREUD

Freud popularised a contemporary view of the unconscious, and developed various treatments. His work liberalized attitudes to sex, and that influence continues in today's vast therapy industry.

Unfortunately, though much invoked by literary theory, Freud's views are without foundation — are no more than a trivializing reductionism that offers therapies that do not work, and notions of mental activity now superseded by experimental psychology and more generous conceptions of the unconscious mind.

19.1. Art

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) founded psychoanalysis. The unconscious was a concept familiar in nineteenth century thought, and there were many attempts to both to study and treat its supposed ailments by hypnosis, electrotherapy and narcotics, but Freud was the first to draw these together and devise procedures of treatment. Freud was an ambitious man, paranoid at times, and he wavered until the 1890's between an academic career and private practice, and between psychiatry and neurology. In 1885 he studied hypnosis under the celebrated Charcot in Paris, and for twenty years was materially assisted by Josef Breuer, with whom he published a paper on hysteria in 1897. But recognition did not arrive until the 1900 publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which represented dreams as wish-fulfilment and probably resulted from his own self-analysis and the death of his father. In 1909 he spoke at the Clark University in the USA and his fame grew steadily thereafter, though his last years were made difficult by cancer of the mouth and the Nazi invasion of Austria.

As is well-known, Freud divided the human psyche into three interactive components. Wholly unconscious and the seat of powerful, instinctive drives, many of them sexual, was the id.

The largely conscious component attempting to reconcile the id to the world outside was the ego. The third, relatively independent component, was the superego, which internalised parental and social demands and acted as censor over the ego's activities. Disharmony between the three components led to mental disorders, which could be investigated in dreams, free association sessions and art.

Freud based his theories on clinical observations. His concept of transference (the patient transferring feelings for others to the therapist) grew out of Breuer's experiences with Anna O, for example. That psychic energy had a sexual basis was also suggested by patient's reports of traumatic sexual experiences which had possibly never happened. Psychic energy which served the life instinct he called the libido, and supposed it to originate in stimulation of erogenous areas of the body. The libido's reservoir was the id, from which it tried to find outlets and reduce its pent-up tensions by the pleasure principle, i.e. blindly, without knowing or caring how the energy was used. In the ego there is greater contact with reality, and the libido sometimes postpones immediate gratification to serve larger ends. There was also a death instinct, in which the individual strove to destroy itself and return to its former non-living state. The superego, however, does not operate under the pleasure principle, but serves a conscience (which punishes) and an ego ideal (which rewards).

The ego attached itself to psychic representations of external reality: cathexis. A young boy cathected onto his mother, whom he loved, growing jealous and resentful of his father as a rival for his mother's affections. His incestuous expressions were blocked and repressed into the unconscious as a fear of castration by the father — to emerge again at puberty and sometimes in symptoms of mental disturbance. Treatment of the latter lay in bringing to the surface the repressed contents of experience or imagined experience. And this was very difficult. Even the

outermost rim of the unconscious (the preconscious as Freud called it) would resist probing. Freud's approach was to employ hypnosis, analysis of dreams and free association so that patients themselves would open up their unconscious to healing. Since the childhood years were critical to personality development, the patient had to dig deep into memories: a process that was lengthy and painful, required a great bond of trust between patient and analyst, and often involved transference of libidinal energy, with results that should not be misunderstood or abused. But once the patient had dug out the splinters of traumatic childhood experience they were on the road to understanding themselves, of bringing the libido under the control of the ego, and effecting a cure. They could still be unhappy, but not inappropriately so.

19.2. Art

Freud did not have a high opinion of artists. {1} They were 'people who had no occasion to submit their inner life to the strict control of reason' — i.e. immature and narcissistic individuals. Whereas adults satisfied their erotic urges in private imagination, the artist flaunted his in public fantasies. Art was sexual sublimation, and only bold technique hid the flagrant egoism from public affront. Freud did not analyse these artistic techniques as such, but suggested that four principles operated in the formation of similar dreams and jokes. First was condensation, whereby two or more elements combined into a composite image. Second was displacement, whereby an image is replaced by a psychologically more significant one. Third was representation, whereby thoughts took on the form of images. And finally, there was secondary revision, whereby the disparate elements of a dream were combined into an intelligible, coherent whole. {2}

19.3. Evaluation

Charges of mendacity, plagiarism, false accounting, dogmatism and paranoia have been laid at Freud's door. {3} And as far as therapy is concerned, the record is now clear: it doesn't work. {4} The treatment is expensive, lengthy and usually less effective than other forms of therapy. A cure is not made permanent by analysis: however much is claimed for entrance by free association into the patient's unconscious, remissions occur. {5} Schizophrenia and psychosis may be ameliorated by therapy in combination with drugs, but drugs may be effective on their own. {27} The less severe mental disturbances are made more bearable by both drugs and therapies, and possibly cured — though many such illnesses cure themselves spontaneously in time. {6} There is little evidence that psychotherapies of any description — there are over one hundred competing schools in the USA — appreciably speed up recovery, and there is some evidence that psychoanalysis itself delays recovery or makes the patient worse. {7}

19.4. The Unconscious

What then of the unconscious? In some sense, perhaps that envisaged in medical circles of Freud's day and before, when E. von Hartman wrote his 1100-page *Philosophy of the Unconscious* in 1868, the unconscious clearly does exist. Much of the brain's functioning (23) is hidden from us, beyond our awareness or understanding (23.10. {8} Certainly mental operations are not rational in a scientific or logical sense. {9}

But Freud's unconscious is both a good deal more and a good deal less than this. In the larger sense, the unconscious is possession by the Devil, an entanglement with the guileful serpent, the seat of neuroses and desires repressed in childhood: a mendacious, fearful and deceptive entity writhing with sexual longings and forbidden desires. But in the smaller sense, the unconscious is a human world,

a private party in someone's lockup to which the free association of psychoanalysis alone provides the key — a party attended, moreover, by beings very recognizably ourselves and friends, albeit unusually drunk, resentful and uninhibited.{10}

However much a pseudo-science, psychoanalysis has been very persuasive. Any criticism from the patient is seen as resistance: the evidence can always be reinterpreted, and the theory made to escape refutation. High fees and the arcane initiation of its priesthood command respect. Our lusts, deceits and our terrible inhumanity are no longer our fault but crimes of the unconscious. And from the malevolence of this unconscious, and the general malaise of living, psychoanalysis offers salvation: pastoral care in a world where personal attention and significance are not easily won. The intense, prolonged encounter of analysand with analyst generates deep bonds of affection and mutual dependence. What is offered and to some extent given is a new outlook, an attitude the analysand can grasp with certainty, a core belief in a society that has long forgotten the old verities. The unconscious is a means of understanding ourselves, not explaining matters (*Geistwissenschaft* rather than *Naturwissenschaft* as the German puts it). Scientific evaluation is therefore irrelevant, perhaps impossible, and the client's treatment continues until he has understood and come to terms his unhappiness, which may take years: firm promises are not usually made. And if the client breaks off treatment before completion it is clearly the client who is to blame in his failure to work through the treatment and face the realities disclosed.{11}

But is such a concept true? Is this an adequate description of the deep physiological roots of our mentality and behaviour? Experimental psychologists say no. They call it not only a vast confidence trick but a serious hindrance to a proper understanding of ourselves.{12} Some argue that psychoanalysis is more the problem than the cure. {13}

Phenomenologists like Brentano and Husserl (15.1) call an unconscious mental event a contradiction in terms. {14}

But are the alternatives, in the thin, jargon-ridden, tentative rationalisms of science, any more palatable? Possibly Freud built a theory on his own paranoia, creating out of his morbid suspicions a self-sustaining drama from the everyday frailties of society: their self-deceptions, hypocrisies, resentments, posturings and furtive lusts. His emphasis on the libido perhaps reflected the sexual puritanism of Vienna, itself a reflection of the widespread prostitution that came with rapid industrialization. {15}

19.5 Gender Differences

Very different is gay literature and theory, where its different aspects (gay, lesbian, transgender, cross-dressing) are often defined as much social as sexual dissonance and given a political orientation. Foucault's theories of hidden power are often relevant, even to the ways by which male-female roles can reinforce male dominance, when heterosexuality may represent a fear of male homosexuality where men reroute their desire for each other through women. {16}

Heterosexuality is far from being a natural state for Judith Butler, but something acquired by self-repression in infancy. {17} Indeed our very sense of self is created by repetition of social acts, including sexual acts, which gradually creates the 'other' at odds with our more instinctive and happier natures. Cross-dressing indicates that sexuality is far more than a desire for procreation, and so calls for a more generous and intelligent vocabulary. {18} Lesbianism alone comes in many varieties, of course, and has an enormous literature. {19}

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

20. CARL JUNG

Jung's psychiatry may be as much a myth as Freud's, and no more successful in treating mental illness (i.e. beyond providing a listening ear), but does provide a broader perspective. Artists are not seen as neurotics, and Jung's archetypes resemble Lakoff and Johnson's schemas. (23.9)

20.1. Introduction

Carl Jung (1875-1961) rejected the mechanistic and reductive aspects of Freud's work (19) and broadened psychoanalysis to include art, mythology and the thought processes of native peoples. He was much closer to common sense than Freud, and gradually moved away from a causative model of personality. Psychic energy was not entirely or even fundamentally sexual in origin. Not all neuroses were rooted in childhood development: one needed to consider the present circumstances, and what hopes the client entertained towards the future.

Jung saw the psyche or total personality as several interacting systems. In place of Freud's superego, ego and id, Jung recognized an ego, a personal unconscious and a collective unconscious. In the personal unconscious were to be found various complexes, and in the collective unconscious were archetypal dispositions to think, perceive and act in a certain way.

20.2. Details

Jung {1} regarded the psychic energy as a basic life-force which would manifest itself as needed (eating, moving, thinking, sex, remembering, etc.) not concentrating through childhood in various body zones (oral, anal, genital) as Freud envisaged. The psychic energy resembled physical energy: it could be exchanged with the external world in muscular effort or ingestion of food, but otherwise remained as a reservoir to be used for thought, sexual activity, artistic creation and so on.

The ego was a person's conception of himself: his sense of identity, his memories, his understanding of his physical and mental makeup. The personal unconscious is interior to the ego, and corresponds to a mix of Freud's unconscious and preconscious. Containing elements of the outside world and of personal experiences repressed by the ego, the contents of the personal unconscious can be accessed by therapy, art and cultural expression. Beneath the personal unconscious lies the collective unconscious, an obscure region inherited as a race memory and peopled by archetypes that appear in the same form in cultures widely separated in time and space: the child, hero, birth, death, numbers, God, etc. But the most important archetypes were the persona, animus, anima, shadow and self. The persona is the mask presented by each individual to society: it may or may not conceal the real personality. The anima is the feminine part of a man, which evolves as a result of a man's experience with women but also recognizes the bisexual nature of all human beings. The animus is the masculine part of a woman. The shadow is the reverse of the outward personality we show to the world. The self is the most important archetype and holds all the other systems together. Achieving oneness and self-realization (individuation, Jung called it) is a long process and one not reached until middle age, if at all. Usually we avoid matters by projecting the contents of our personal unconscious onto other people or events. But first we have to confront and assimilate the shadow archetype, and then the anima (animus if we are women). The anima may have a positive or negative influence on us, but is always difficult to accommodate. Indeed there are stages, perhaps symbolized by Eve, Helen, the Virgin Mary, and the transcending wisdom of Sapientia. Few reach the last stage. {2}

An attention predominantly directed towards the outside world is termed extroverted, and when directed towards the inside is termed introverted. But the personality is always made up of exterior and interior elements, as the ego and

personal unconscious operate in opposite directions. Elements which are not directed outwards are repressed into the personal unconscious, so that a strong extrovert attitude will be balanced by a strong growth in the repressed elements, which may become sufficiently extreme to escape and overwhelm the dominant attitude. The functions of thinking, feeling, sensing and intuiting have their everyday meanings, though two generally predominate, the other two being repressed. A prophet therefore might be a feeling-intuiting introvert, and a politician a intuiting-thinking extrovert. But all functions and attitudes are needed to live successfully, and there are no pure types.

20.3. Art

Jung had a much more optimistic view of mankind than Freud, and of art in particular. {3} Not all was rooted in sexuality, or in personal experience and psychological difficulties. One type, psychological art, certainly drew on the assimilated experience of the psyche, creating work generally intelligible to the community. But there was also another type, visionary, which drew on the archetypes of the collective unconscious, creating work of a deeper and less individual nature. Appearing in dreams, mythology and art, these patterns took the form of images — self-originating, inventive, spontaneous and fulfilling images. In some respects archetypes could be viewed as metaphors which held worlds together and could not be adequately circumscribed.

But they were also emotionally possessive, organizing whole clusters of events in different areas of life, ascribing to us our place in society, controlling everything we see, do and say. Because their work drains energy from the conscious control of personality, artists may be more susceptible than others to psychological illnesses, but their creations should not be written off as individual or infantile aberrations. Art is crucial to society, giving life and cohesion to its fundamental beliefs.

20.4. Evaluation

Jung has received less criticism than Freud: his theories are more positive, less reductive and mechanistic, not sexually-based, and accord religion, art and cultural expression a value in their own right. They receive support from the irreducible mind concept (23.10), and benefit from contemporary interest in alternative medicines, oriental religions, mysticism and existentialism. Jung's own writings are somewhat nebulous, however, and would probably evade scientific testing. {4} As a therapeutic technique, Jungian analysis suffers from the drawbacks of Freudian, but has greater appeal to artists since its practices occupy familiar ground.

Jungian psychology's interpretation of mythology can be short-circuited by a more direct treatment of myths: historical, cultural, economic and Structuralist (6). Depth psychology (42.3), a branch of Jungian psychology, is close to that of the classical world, and indeed uses its mythology to personalize archetypes. Minor psychiatric illness is often treated by art therapy, which uses many of the techniques of Jungian therapy without making overt reference to its theories.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

21. LACAN

Lacan refashioned Freudian psychiatry, and suggested that the unconscious was structured like a language, thereby giving a key role to semiotics and dissolving the usual boundaries between the rational and irrational. Though without foundation, the view supported many aspects of Postmodernism, and is therefore attractive to those fighting repression in western society.

21.1. Introduction

Jacques Lacan (1901-81) tried to give Freud (19) a contemporary intellectual significance, extricating his thought from the gloss of later commentators, and extending it in ways suggested but not achieved by Freud himself. The unconscious was not Freud's great contribution to European thought, but his contention that the unconscious had a structure. That structure, continued Lacan, is a discourse that operates across the unconscious-conscious divide. Lacan's terminology is fluid, not to say elusive, but he adopts Freud's trinity of id, ego and superego. But Lacan argues that our continual attempt to fashion a stable, ideal ego throughout our adult lives is self-defeating. Certainly we can recognize a 'subject', ourselves, provided we remember that this centre of our being is not a fixed entity, but simply something that mediates our inner discourses. That 'subject' is made and remade in our confrontation with the Other, a concept which in turn shifts with context. The Other is the father within the Oedipal triangle who forbids incest. The Other is ourselves as we accept the restraints of adulthood. And the Other is also that which speaks across the schism we carry within ourselves between the unconscious and conscious — naturally: it is bound up with language itself. {1}

Lacan's theories are difficult to grasp, but extend psychoanalytical thought in several directions. Lacan's unconscious is structured like a language, which gives language a key role in constructing our picture of the world,

but also allows the unconscious to enter into that understanding and dissolve essential distinctions between fantasy and reality. There are no primordial archetypes (Jung) or entities beyond the reach of language (Freud) or logical-sensorimotor structures (Piaget). As do other psychoanalysts, Lacan sees mental illness as a product of early childhood difficulties (notably imbalance between the Imaginary and the Symbolic) but children progressively gain a self-identity by passing through pre-mirror, mirror and post-mirror stages of development. {2}

More importantly, Lacan's language referred to itself and was to be read by Saussurean semiotics. To the extent that Lacan sees language, and indeed all discourse, as permeated by the unconscious and so lacking in truth or stability, he is a Poststructuralist.

From his first work (*De la Psychose Paranoïaque dans ses Rapports avec la Personnalité*: 1932), Lacan represented psychological illness as something manifested by the whole person rather than as a distinct pathology. Continuing this approach, Lacan adopted a style which resists any neat summary of concepts. His prose may often resemble the speech of his patients: a free association of ideas, meanings that change with context, and an unwillingness to group under broader categories. Lacan's concepts do not condense into doctrines. However confusing, the intention is to draw in and implicate the reader in the suggestions that Lacan is drawing from Freud's work and patient behaviour. {3}

Lacan also had a trinity of his own: the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Real is the un-nameable, the outside of language. The Imaginary is the undifferentiated early state of the child, a fusion of subject and parent, which remains latent in adult life, manifesting when we falsely identify with others. The Symbolic is the demarcated world of the adult with its enforced distinctions and repressions. The unconscious is not simply reflected in the language we use,

but is equally controlled by it. Discourse, including social, public language, shapes and enters into the structure of the unconscious, and is inextricably mixed with the unsatisfied sexual desire that emerges disguised in dreams, jokes and art. {4}

21.2. Details

Lacan replaced Freud's postulated oral, anal and genital stages of child development with his own pre-mirror, mirror and post-mirror stages. During its first six months of existence, the child gradually fills the gap between bodily sensations and its perceptions of the outside world with symbols: fantasies with which its consciousness is merged. Then, over the next year or so, the child begins to recognize the outside as an extension or mirror of its own bodily image, absorbing at the same time an awareness of outside language: the meaning of the Other. But in the next, post-mirror stage, when the child begins to speak for itself, these traces of meaning are repressed because they represent something from the child has separated. But desire remains, hedged about by prohibitions and compromises, into adulthood, and provides the id with its own logic, language and internality. From this early stage too comes any neurosis or psychosis that the adult may subsequently suffer from, these resulting from imbalances between the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real. {5}

Dreams (and by extension the matters that control art and our emotional processes) form a system of signs which we can read as any other text. We analyse them in Saussure's manner with signified and signifier. We use Jakobson's system of metaphor to understand the frequent combination of dream images, and metonymy to characterize displacement, the process by which images shift laterally in their significance. But whereas for Saussure the sign was culturally fixed, bonding signified and signifier, for Lacan the language of the unconscious (dreams, verbal plays and art)

lacked any such stability. Language does not mimic the psychic processes of the unconscious, any reference it makes being entirely arbitrary. Language does not represent the exterior world, moreover, though of course we pretend otherwise. Words as patients use them in Freudian analysis take on multiple meanings, reach back to a plurality of determining factors, and are available permanently for new uses. So is language, our everyday social language. We cannot understand it from the outside, in terms other than language. And we cannot insulated it from the discourse of the unconscious. By its very nature, language forms a web of ever-elusive meaning, a free creation which provides no stability, ground or ultimate truth, even for itself. {6}

But that is not unexpected, thought Lacan. We can hear the polyphony of contexts when we listen to poetry, a discourse where the words or signifiers align vertically and horizontally as musical notes along a score. The overlapping and knotting together of its signifiers provides the reader of that text with an enactment of the unconscious. We cannot ultimately separate them, but poetry and the unconscious do support each other. Lacan had many contacts with Surrealism, and perhaps the exhibitionism, circularity and even charlatantry of his writings witness more truth to the unconscious than are to be found in the sober reflections of his contemporaries.

21.3. Evaluation

Lacan was a perplexity, even to his own profession. {8} The mirror stage is pure supposition. Speech, according to Freud, appears with the Oedipus complex, and thus much later than Lacan's model would allow. Tallis, whose training is in medicine, is very dismissive. {9} The unconscious is not structured like a language, not on the evidence to date. {10} There is no room in Lacan for individual experience, and documentation by case history is very poor. {11}

Lacan's thought as summarized above is very much a simplification, with many inconsistencies and obscurities removed. But Lacan's concept of a split in consciousness as we enter adulthood was attractive to those contesting the 'closure' and single viewpoints of traditional literature. {12} Lacan's unconscious, which permeates all discourse, and thus undermines all the supposed stabilities of social and public life, was employed by left-wing thinkers viewing modern capitalism as repressive and irrational. Much has passed into history, and we should see Lacan in context — in flight from a Catholic background, friendly through his wife with the Surrealists, applying his own brand of Freudianism to the events of May 1968 and beyond. But despite the dubious nature of Lacan's concept, his influence lives on. Alienation in modern life, it is argued, comes not only from capitalism, but because we are inevitably alienated on entering the Symbolic realm of public language. In the deepest possible way, we were split at the source of gender. The Imaginary realm of the fused and fluid corresponded to the feminine, but once we employ public language we are thrown into a masculine world of order, identity, coherence and prohibition, a theme taken up by feminist critics. {13}

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

22. PSYCHOLOGY

Experimental psychology is beginning to understand the mechanisms of human thought and behaviour. The more literary language — that which employs metaphor, mental imagery, synaesthesia, etc. — seems not to be simply more picturesque, but to reflect actual modes of brain behaviour.

22.1. Introduction

Psychology is the science of thought and behaviour. Experiments are set up so that the clearest and most significant generalizations are possible from the results. The work aims to be replicable, so that other researchers with different expectations and cultural backgrounds get the same results. Validity is equally important: the work must ensure that it is indeed measuring what it claims to measure. Control is therefore vital for experiments — either in a single-blind manner (subjects do not know the object of the work and so cannot selectively cooperate) or double-blind manner (object is not known to the actual experimenter, so that unconscious clues cannot be passed on). Very elaborate precautions are commonly taken to ensure that the setting is as naturalistic as possible, and that other factors do not unduly influence the result (differences of age, cultural background and family history). {1}

22.2. Fields of Psychology

Psychology has very diverse aims, and is commonly divided into overlapping but fairly distinct fields. These include the areas of genetic inheritance, child development, maturation, socialization, intelligence, language development, perception, learning, emotion, concepts of self, psychology in the home and workplace, sexual differentiation, life changes, ageing and bereavement. The list is almost endless, but our concern here is with language and cognition (perceiving, knowing and conceiving) as they are relevant to literature and literary theory.

First a warning. This page generally adopts the scientific approach: it treats mind and body as different categories of being, not in any way interconnected. It is also mechanical — the brain not only drives the body, but is ultimately reducible to chemical and physical processes: these are the bedrock of reality. For analysis on other planes of understanding see the psychoanalysis and schemas sections.

22.3. Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is not a science, and not a branch of psychology, though often regarded so in the popular mind. Though now fragmented into many competing schools, psychoanalysis was founded on the attempt by Sigmund Freud (19) to treat behaviours that were thought to arise from illnesses or malfunctionings of the unconscious. Freud developed a talking cure that supposedly allowed him to enter into that part of the patient's mind that is normally hidden, and effect a cure. Freud also believed that the first five years of a child's life were crucial for later development, and identified three stages. In the oral stage the libido (the free-floating sexual energy, which was the essential motivating force behind thought and behaviour) was focused on the mouth, and a person who did not develop properly beyond this stage remained somewhat gullible in later life. In the second, anal stage the child takes a keen interest in defecation, and failures to progress from this stage may also mean that the person doesn't strike the right balance between generosity and self-interest in later life. In the phallic stage the child becomes aware of sexual differences between its parents. A girl realizes she hasn't a penis, feels that she has been castrated and so identifies with the mother who has been similarly mutilated. The boy however sees himself in competition with his father for his mother's love, and may develop feelings of hostility to authority figures. Conflicts are repressed into the unconscious, to emerge in social or sexual problems in adulthood.

Little of Freud's work survives scientific investigation. His unconscious is an elusive concept, of doubtful existence. The first five years are not as crucial as Freud believed. {2} Freud's investigations were not properly controlled, and for all his explanations there exist much more plausible and testable alternatives. There is no clinical evidence for repression. {3} Psychoanalysis is lengthy, expensive, and works no better than other therapies, which also converse with the patient but assume very different theories.

Freud's approaches were developed further by other psychoanalysts, notably Jung and Lacan. Jung's archetypes operate as schemas, and usefully account for religious and cultural symbolism. Lacan's psychoanalysis has become the mainstay of some contemporary literary theory, but seems a myth without supporting experimental evidence.

22.4. Mental Representation

How do we represent things in our minds: is it with propositions, or with images? The two are very different. Propositions are language-orientated: they employ symbols which are somewhat abstract, explicit, combine by rules and stand for things (make reference). Images, on the other hand, are analogical: they are more concrete, implicit, without clear rules of combination and can stand alone. If this sharp distinction is wanted, then the answer is that we use both. By many techniques — laboratory experiments, introspection, examination of brain-damaged patients, study of brain physiology — psychologists attempted through the 1970s and 1980s to argue that images were only vacuous representations of propositions. This view has been abandoned. Both are needed for cognitive richness, and images are now seen to be mental constructs in their own right. The most widely-accepted theory, that of Kosslyn and his co-workers, envisages images being represented in their own spatial medium, which holds images in the greatest detail near the centre of view, is dependent on graininess for

resolution, and which cannot prevent images fading in time. Long-term memory holds two types of files, image and propositional, which are nonetheless linked together. Both are processed by the brain to generate, interpret and transform images. {4}

Another approach altogether, connectionism, employs the concept of information-processing networks that partially resemble the brain's own neural networks. These computer models are far simpler, of course, and use a weighting mechanism rather than the firing or non-firing at synapses. But they do give results in line with empirical evidence, and have two strong advantages. They model complex behaviour without recourse to explicit propositional rules (they program themselves from the inputs supplied), and they represent memory as predispositions distributed throughout the network (the predispositions also programme themselves, like an artificial intelligence programme deriving and then applying rules once it is fed the data.) The networks can be extended, when memory and rules are indeed widely distributed. Or they can be more modular, with local areas operating somewhat independently of others, though carrying their results through to the larger network. {5}

22.5. Concepts, Categories and Schemas

How do we group observations and thoughts to give something a name and category? Psychology has been much influenced by Anglo-American philosophy, and its first investigations accepted the approach of Frege (32.1), the founder of its twentieth-century development. Intension was the set of attributes that define a concept, and extension was the set of examples. A name or concept was therefore the conjunction of defining attributes, all of them equally representative and providing clear-cut boundaries. Is this realistic? People tested remarked that it was sometimes difficult to be sure: are portable oil-heaters to be regarded as

furniture, for example? And then there was Wittgenstein's concept of games. An alternative approach was sought.

One which became popular was that of prototypes: find a characteristic example, make this the core concept, allow the concept to have typical but not necessarily delimiting attributes, and link other instances to it by degrees of typicality. But there are still problems. Some concepts are not amenable to the approach: religious beliefs, for example. Some attributes are held to be more important than others. And concepts have to be natural and coherent, to serve some larger end. {6}

Consider a motorcar. We can study it as an example of the internal combustion machine, or as a system of inter-linked systems, electrical and mechanical. But for most of us the car serves as a means of transport — safe, speedy and convenient — and we tend to judge it by these criteria. Transportation is the overarching concept, called in psychology frames or scripts or schemas. Such schemas are naturally rather fluid and ad hoc. Many more schemas have also been proposed than have been adequately tested. {7} But even at a more primitive level, that of simple concept combination, psychology adds useful empirical ballast to arcane theorizing. One repeatedly tested model is that of Tversky which states that the similarity of two concepts A and B is quantitatively given by the number of concepts shared less the sum of the attributes distinctive to A and distinctive to B. If this is so — and it does seem to be — then the theories of Poststructuralism (7-9) are seriously open to doubt. {8}

22.6. Speech and Reading

Experimentation becomes even more useful when applied to speech and reading. It shows that syllables (and to some extent phonemes, which tend to overlap and become blurred in rapid speech) are the basic elements of comprehension. Nonetheless, word recognition (bottom up processes) and

context (top down processes) are both necessary, and there are indeed two theories to model this. The cohort model argues that the initial sounds or syllables throw up various word possibilities, which are then whittled down to the correct candidate as the context is grasped and more of the word is read or heard. The process is quite complicated, with various knowledge sources — lexical, syntactic and semantic — being accessed by the brain. The TRACE model assumes that processing units at different levels — manner of production, phonemes and words — operate in proportion to their activation and strength of interconnections. Both give reasonable matches to experimental evidence, though refinements are necessary. Words read are recognized partly by sound and partly by appearance. {9}

Schemas are obviously important when it comes to making sense of text, but the models proposed so far tend to be over-simple and not easily tested. Comprehension does seem to involve parsing, analysis of literal meaning and then an interpretation of its intended meaning. Inner speech can be important, both subvocal articulation and phonological coding, probably because it facilitates transient knowledge storage. One influential theory by Kintsch and van Dijk distinguished between a microstructure of a text (set of propositions representing meaning) and macrostructure (gist of the story) and appears to be generally correct. {10}

Though good speakers are usually good writers, the difficulties experienced by brain-damaged patients show that very different processes are involved. Grice's cooperative principle appears to be broadly true, and has been extended by the spreading activation theory of Dell and others. Though writers often say their sentences to themselves before writing them down, perfectly adequate sentences are written by patients who lack this facility. Expert writers differ from non-expert markedly in two respects: they spot more errors and know how to put them right, and they organize their scripts much more effectively. {11} Certain languages

facilitate thought in certain directions, but the Sapir-Whorf (37.4) hypothesis has been verified only in its weak form — i.e. that languages influence but do not control perception.{12}

22.7. Puzzle-Solving

For some thirty years, psychology has intensively studied the ways problems are approached and solved. Many of the results confirm intuitive expectations. Experts are better than novices because they have more knowledge and experience, can chunk steps, and have devised forward-looking strategies. As in anything else, practice makes perfect, but the expertise diminishes rapidly with increasing effort (is commonly a power law: logarithm of time spent learning is inversely proportional to the time needed to solve a problem.) Creativity in the more demanding of scientific and artistic activities is indeed analogical and often ad hoc, but few problems are actually solved by the flash of inspiration. It is much more usual to seek general strategies, break a problem into sub-problems, recall past successes and modify what worked then. Interestingly, most scientists do not try to disconfirm hypotheses in the Popper manner (34.3), but rather the opposite.{13}

22.8. Reasoning

Whatever the philosophic difficulties, people must surely use deduction in their everyday lives: to plan, make sense of surroundings, to interpret their experiences. But how exactly? Psychologists have investigated four possible approaches — by employing abstract logic, context-specific schemas, models that represent possible states of affairs, and reasoning swayed by emotional bias. Others have some share of the truth, but it is the model theory which seems most fully to represent how people really do perform. They seem to first extract the premises involved, often by analogy, taking into account what they know of comparable situations. They then combine these premises to form an integrated

model or sets of models. Finally they validate their model by looking for alternatives. If no satisfactory alternatives exist they conclude that they have properly represented the situation. Though they make their model the simplest possible — describe it in the most parsimonious fashion — they generally find the reasoning easier if the situation is one that appears sensible or familiar to them. {14}

22.9. Literature and Emotion

Given that we are affected emotionally by what we read or hear, what has cognitive psychology to tell us about the link between cognition and feelings? Not a great deal at present. Various models have been proposed, the most successful of which — Bower's semantic network theory — does correctly predict that material is learnt better when it is congruent with the subject's mood. Other predictions of Bower's model are less supported, however. Undoubtedly anxiety and depression affect performance, and a famous law of Yerkes and Dodson (1908) that performance is best at intermediate levels of arousal or anxiety has been substantiated by recent work, but not fully explained. {15}

22.10. Synaesthesia

Some people hear in colour. Others find that some words bring up specific tastes or smells. Though developed only weakly in most people, the correspondence of the sensory modalities is recognized in literary and 'colourful' writing, and was exploited by the Symbolists. Though little employed by contemporary writing, there is nonetheless a great deal of scientific evidence for this phenomenon. When the interrelationships of size, space, intensity and duration are investigated for the specific senses, they not only show common patterns but a good deal of equivalence. Visual estimates of size correspond with tactile skills. The perceived duration of a sound and image correspond in the same way to duration measured by the stopwatch. Brightness applies equally to light, touch, sound and odour.

Sensory inhibitions caused by abrupt intensity changes is seen in visual and tactile experience. Moreover, there is every reason to expect these results. In the first place, those parts of the cerebral cortex specifically associated with each of the senses are somewhat adjoining: their neural systems inevitably interpenetrate. Secondly, the brain as a whole operates in a diffuse cooperative way, which further serves to link the sensory functions. Metaphor, which portrays these correspondences, is a feature of brain functioning. {16}

22.11. Concluding Remarks

Cognitive science is a fast-growing area of research, and promises to shed much useful light on mental processes. Two words of caution, however. Experimental results and their interpretations are not as clear cut as this survey suggests. {17} Secondly, there have been many theories of brain functioning, and are likely to be still more in future.{18}

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

23. BRAIN AND SPEECH

23.1. Introduction

This chapter is somewhat technical, but demonstrates that a. psychoanalytical theories are a woefully inadequate basis for literary theory and b. that widely different vistas are offered by current theories of brain functioning.

What can science tell us of the brain and its speech-generating powers? Can it resolve the long-standing disputes of philosophy: that thought cannot be independent of language, that each person creates their own worldview, that private languages are impossible? Much has been done — indeed an enormous amount, impossible to summarize here {1} — but only in broad outlines is brain functioning understood, and then not unequivocally.

First there is the complexity of the human nervous system. Though the greatest mass of nerve cells is collected in the brain, the nervous system links all parts of the body, in a most intimate way, the nerve cells ramifying into and connecting the cells in the bone, skin, organs of digestion, perception, respiration, etc. That needs emphasizing. The body is not a puppet jerked into life by the nervous system: the two are thoroughly interconnected, with multiple feedback systems continually in operation. Literary critics and linguists overlook what is obvious from a biological point of view, that language is only one activity of the human organism. Nonetheless, it is one that (by involving the brain, the local nervous systems and the hands, mouth, throat, etc.) necessarily implicates the whole body in its activities. Body language is a cliché, but describes a blatant truth. Speech causes body changes, and vice versa. Philosophy, science and literary theory that attempt to build rational

systems independent of how the body actually operates may not be helpful. Much of bodily activity is instinctive, or hidden from consciousness, but drugs, brain injury and mental illness each demonstrate that physiology affects understanding. Lacunae or opacities in our intellectual constructions are only to be expected in an organism that does not operate like an extended computer. {2}

Then there is the brain itself, an enormously complicated organ with one hundred thousand million nerve cells, and some thousand million million connections. Man's brain is considerably larger than those of chimpanzees or gorillas, and this fact no doubt explains our superior skills in what is specifically human: language, tool-making, consciousness. Some doubt whether the higher primates possess these skills at all, but the arguments turn on definitions. (Chimpanzees, for example, can be trained to speak, but don't seem to engage in spontaneous conversation.) {3}

Though there is considerable overlap, parts of the brain appear to have their own responsibilities. The overarching cortex deals with motor functions — the cells controlling speech, vision and hearing being concentrated in certain areas. The hippocampus is responsible for long-term memory. The basal ganglia act with the cortex in choosing between plans of action. The cerebellum smooths gestures. The limbic system generates emotions. The reticulate formation (RF), situated at the top of the brainstem, but with nerve cells (RAS: reticulating activation system) reaching into the limbic system and cortex, is responsible for three matters. The first is consciousness: what part of sensory input reaches the brain. Second is control of the sleep/wake cycle: damage to the RF results in coma. Third is the level of activity in the brain — when stimulated, the RF generates neurotransmitters like dopamine, excess levels of which are

associated with schizophrenia. {4} In fact, all parts of the brain are interconnected, and all are subject to multiple feedback. Nerve cells connect in synapses, in a multiple fashion, and these synaptic connections seem able to re-pattern their activities. Memory, therefore — apart from that of DNA replication, and possibly of antibodies formed by cell action — lies in the reflex actions of neurons, i.e. in re-categorization under the stimulus of the body as a whole and stimulus from the world outside. {5}

The brain is also divided vertically into right and left hemispheres, the two being connected medially by the thin corpus callosum. The vertical symmetry is continued through the body but reversed, so that the nervous system of the right half of the body connects to the left brain hemisphere, and vice versa. But there is a fundamental difference when it comes to further processing of information. The left hemisphere is more concerned with matters of logic and perception. The right hemisphere controls imagination, art, speech and language. {6} When the corpus callosum is cut and the two hemispheres separated — as happens occasionally as a treatment for epilepsy — it becomes possible to test perception independent of language. The results are startling. A patient instructed by information fed into the right hemisphere to perform an action (e.g. scratch himself) will oblige, but not know why he has done so. More than that, because the human organism is always seeking to make a coherent whole of its thoughts and actions, the patient will come up with some plausible but quite spurious reason for his actions ('I scratched because it itched'). {7} Linguistic skills are not only somewhat independent of skills in perception and reasoning — which intelligence testing has long known {8} — but of a different character. Indeed it would seem that the fundamental issues of ontology (the philosophy of being: self-awareness, consciousness of identity, knowledge of the self) that reasoning has struggled

with for centuries are not matters to be resolved by this type of mental investigation. Language is essential to self-understanding, but that understanding is necessarily different from — on the evidence of scientific testing itself — the clear-cut categories of science and logic. And since language develops to understand and regulate our interactions with other people, that language automatically includes the social dimension.

This conclusion is obvious and disconcerting. Mankind since the collapse of the medieval world-picture has attempted to find something more fundamental on which to base knowledge, truth and belief. Success has been patchy. Science is not independent of human understanding because theory and concept are threaded into the act of observation. Languages can be studied by scientific procedures, but not encompassed by reasoning. Mathematics (33) is not reducible to logic (32), and even logic ramifies into probabilities and competing schools. Man is a social animal and his speech reflects this fact. There are few limits to what man can examine and discover in and through language, but he cannot escape what is presupposed by that language: the context of his times and the basic physiology of his make-up. What was known to the ancients has been underlined by the most successful of western achievements: science itself.

23.2. History of Approaches: William James

The approach of William James was 'top-down', i.e. matters of habit, will, emotion and consciousness were the starting points, and not the physiological details of brain processes (though James trained as a doctor). His monumental *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) made contributions to physiology, psychology and philosophy, and the book not only influenced thinkers like Edmund Husserl (15.1),

Bertrand Russell (31.5), John Dewey (11.2), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (28.1), but gave rise to pragmatism (31.6) and phenomenology (15.1). James's religious concerns became more prominent in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897), *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine* (1898), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909). James suggested the religion could be studied scientifically, but he also believed that religious experience involves an altogether different, supernatural domain. His 1904-5 writings (collected in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912) set out the metaphysics of 'neutral monism', advocating the existence of something neither material nor mental, inaccessible to science but sensed by the individual human being. {9}

James saw consciousness as a stream of sense impressions, emotions and ideas, which are active in us, over which we have some control. We also seek the rational in our professional and everyday lives, he thought, but our own temperaments may as much determine our philosophic preferences as rigorous argument. Habits are useful to us, as they are to nature: indeed the laws of nature are nothing more than the immutable habits which the different elementary sorts of matter follow in their actions and reactions upon each other. Habits in brains are paths of nervous energy, but emotions commonly follow physiological changes rather than cause them. Religious and moral questions are momentous, and not likely to be accessible to sensible proof: we are entitled to hold strong opinions on them, regardless of the evidence. Morality rests on sentience, and once that sentience exists, morality gets 'a foothold in the universe'. We often hold conflicting views, and that plurality commands us to tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible these may be to us.

Neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands. {9}

James was not interested in religious institutions, rituals or ideas per se, but in 'the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine'. The healthy-minded religious person had a deep sense of 'the goodness of life'. Four features marked out the mystical experience: ineffability (directly experienced but defying expression), noetic quality (presenting itself as a state of knowledge), transience and being beyond our control. Perhaps these are 'windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world'. {9}

James did not like the divisive intellectualism of Josiah Royce and Hegel, but admired Gustav Fechner (12.5) for holding that 'the whole universe in its different spans and wave-lengths, exclusions and developments, is everywhere alive and conscious'. He agreed with Henri Bergson in thinking that 'the concrete pulses of experience appear pent in by no such definite limits as our conceptual substitutes are confined by. . . They run into one another continuously and seem to interpenetrate.' Pure experience is neither mental nor physical, but 'the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories.' Certain sequences of pure experiences constitute physical objects, and others constitute persons; but one pure experience may contain sequences of both. {9}

We should not set up a sharp distinction between what is necessary and what is impossible, James argued, but rather accept a pluralism which depends on choices we freely make. Pluralism calls for our trusting in and cooperating with one another in order to realize desirable possibilities that are not assured. We never experience mind in separation from body, and consciousness is not a substantive matter. {10}

23.3. Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947)

Whitehead made his name as a mathematician (33.1), but his philosophical outlook was always prominent, and continued after he semi-retired to Harvard in 1924. His *Science and the Modern World* offered a careful critique of orthodox scientific materialism and a worked-out version of the fallacies of 'misplaced concreteness' and 'simple location'. The first is the error of treating an abstraction as though it were concretely real. The second is the error of assuming that anything real must have a simple spatial location. More important were his *Process and Reality* of 1929 and his *Adventures of Ideas* of 1933. The first analyses the problem of the one, and provides a logical system of internal and external relations. The second is philosophy of history and culture within the framework of his metaphysical scheme. {11}

Physical objects like electromagnetic phenomena may be simple matters but are spread out across the cosmos. Scientists, driven by their materialism, tended to think of points in time and space as real objects, when they could only be concepts in a web of relationships. {11}

Whitehead's 1926 *Religion in the Making* looked at questions of history and value. Religion was 'what the individual does with his own solitariness', where solitariness is a multi-

layered relational modality of the individual in and toward the world. Inescapably part of that modality (including religion but not arithmetic) is history. Yet arithmetic has its purposes, as does God, the latter needed to attain value in the temporal world. {11}

Process and Reality is an exceptionally difficult work, dense with technical terms of Whitehead's own coining, but trying to push beyond the inherited concepts to a comprehensive vision of the logical structures of becoming. Time should be seen as 'actual occasions', 'drops of experience', which relate to the world into which they are emerging by 'feeling' that relatedness and translating it into the occasion's concrete reality. By 'feeling' is meant an immediacy of concrete relatedness, which nonetheless exists in a relational spectrum where cognitive modes can emerge from sufficiently complex collections of occasions. Involved in that spectrum are concepts of infinity and paradoxes of the Zeno type: i.e. there exists an unbounded infinity of other occasions, each changing it in undeterminable ways. Continuity is not therefore something to be taken for granted, but something achieved. How? By each occasion being informed by a densely teleological sense of its own ultimate actuality, its 'subjective aim' or what Whitehead calls the occasion's 'superject'. Once fully actualised, the superject becomes an objective datum for those occasions which follow it, and the process begins again. {11}

Reality for Whitehead is not material substance, therefore, as it is (in various forms) to orthodox scientists, but changeable entities. Those entities are at once both temporal and atemporal. God, for example, is objectively immortal, and immanent in the world. He is objectified in each temporal actual entity; but He is not an eternal object

as such. Other, temporal entities Whitehead calls 'actual occasion', of which there are four grades.

The first grade comprises processes in a physical vacuum such as the propagation of an electromagnetic wave or gravitational influence across empty space. The second involve inanimate matter. The third are living organisms. The fourth involve presentational immediacy, the qualia of subjective experience. Mind is simply an abstraction from an occasion of experience which has also a material aspect, which is yet another abstraction from it. The mental aspect and the material aspect are thus abstractions from one and the same concrete occasion of experience. {12}

23.4. Behaviourism

These intriguing if somewhat nebulous approaches to psychology were overtaken by behaviourism, which became the dominant theory from 1920 to 1950 in America (39.1). The brain became a 'black box', something whose internal workings were unknown, and which simply operated under Pavlov conditioning. Behaviourism became a proper science, where theories were supported by empirical data obtained through careful and controlled observation and measurement of behaviour. People have no free will: a person's environment determined their behaviour. Our mind is 'tabula rasa' (a blank slate) when we are born. There was little difference between the learning that takes place in humans and that in other animals. Behaviour is the result of stimulus-response. All behaviour is learnt from the environment through classical or operant conditioning. {13}

Under its later development by Arthur W. Staats, {14} individuals were seen to acquire three repertoires — sensory-motor, language-cognitive and emotional-

motivational — all of which could be studied systematically. Whatever its philosophical limitations, behaviourism supported a vast array of useful tests and measurements, personality, IQ, learning, etc: it was a pragmatic approach to psychology.

23.5. The Brain As Computer

The behaviourism dominating the first half of the 20th century eliminated the mind entirely: everything was reduced to directly observable input-output responses. The approach coincided with the Logical Positivists (29.2), who saw the mind as unnecessary, the 'ghost in the machine'. But pain and pain behaviour are not the same thing, and logical behaviourism gave way in the 1950s and 60s to identity theories. Mental states correspond to brain states or neural processes.

With advances in computers, brains came to be seen as information processing machines, which are bound by rules. Turing, for example, proved that a machine could be constructed to give a required output by following algorithms, even a universal one. John von Neumann (1947) invented the basic architecture of the stored program digital computer, and Chomsky linguistics (39) introduced transformational grammar, which is again rule-based. Higher level programming languages were devised, which further suggested the brain was a super computer (CTM). Computer simulation (CS) and artificial intelligence (AI) became exciting possibilities. Nonetheless, even simple translation machines were limited and 'brittle'. The brain operates on something other than rules: it is more creative, and reacts to the total context. Cognitive Neuroscience became important from the 1970s. Biological processes could accept both information processing and pictorial representation as important. Scientists studied the effects of physical and mental damage to brains, aided by neuroimaging

technologies (electric and magnetic fields and metabolic processes). {15}

Neural nets made a comeback with the connectionists. But there are problems as networks are scaled up, and such nets are not good at capturing characteristic human cognition. They have been joined or replaced by complex systems theories, which the brain must certainly be in many respects, with its time-dependent states and feedback processes. Contemporary theories therefore combine several approaches in a 'global operation room' where different actions of the brains disparate functions are bound together by gamma bands of frequencies. {15}

23.6. Consciousness: Edelman, Pinker & Shea

Little is settled in a discipline as young as brain science, and there is no shortage of conflicting evidence. What, for example, is consciousness? There are several views. Gerald Edelman {5} distinguishes primary from secondary consciousness. The first encompasses feeling and intentions, being aware of the world, and having mental images of the present. It depends on specific areas of the primary and secondary cortex for the functions of sight, touch, hearing, etc., which are all linked together through a complex system of neural loops and feedbacks. There is also a re-entrant loop to category memory that uses the frontal, temporal, parietal cortex, and further loops to functions of correlation sited in the hippocampus, amygdala and the septum. All respond to signals from the primary and secondary cortex, and from the brain stem, the hypothalamus and the autonomic centres.

Higher consciousness Edelman regards as primary consciousness plus the ability to construct a socially-based

selfhood. Only man has this ability, which is much bound up with speech and language. Speech came with developments in the mouth and larynx, and specific areas of the cortex: Broca's and Wernicke's areas. Sounds were linked by learning with concepts and gestures to give meaning. Syntax emerged to connect concepts with words. In this T.N.G.S (theory of neural group selection) the world is real, governed by the laws of physics, but qualified by the way concepts arise. Mind is an emergent property of brains, and all knowledge — philosophical, mathematical, scientific, artistic — is inevitably fragmentary and discontinuous. Since he adapts physically to stimuli, man is not a computer, and the theories of Chomsky and Structuralism fall short of the facts.

Stephen Pinker {3} takes a more orthodox, hard-science line. Though stuttering, dyslexia and specific language impairment does run in families, there seems to be no language gene as such. Language is instinctive — witness the ease with which children learn. Contrary to Edelman, he believes that Chomsky's transformational grammar is supported by laboratory testing, grammatical complexity being reflected in response times. As with scientists and philosophers generally, Pinker does not like cultural relativism, and believes that basically we are all the same. Hopi Indians are not less aware of the passage of time than Europeans, and the Eskimo do not have hundreds of words for snow, just the odd dozen that we use. Human nature is not infinitely malleable, and Pinker's model of human behaviour employs heredity, environmental factors, skills, knowledge and innate psychological mechanisms that include learning.

What part of the brain is responsible for consciousness? All of it, say most authors, with the cortex in the leading role but profoundly influenced by operations in the limbic system (emotions) and the reticulate formation (RF: attention, sleep-wake cycles, control of the body's physiological functions).

{16}. But Eugene Shea {17} places consciousness in the reticulate formation, which he views as a servomechanism for the brain, and an interface between the brain and the organs of perception. By regulating sensory input through the reticular activating system, the RF decides which inputs need to be processed in consciousness, which should be inhibited, and which can be handled by unconscious stock responses. Indeed, it is these inhibitions and stock responses developed to meet our social and animal needs, and now remaining as outmoded value and belief systems, that need to be unlearned if we are to capture the saintly bliss of mystics and see God as an abiding presence in the world. Shea pictures a hierarchy of more elevated needs, which he terms the love/belief system, but in contrast to Maslow, has them controlled by an individual and indeed immortal 'I', which includes a human soul, both in the Christian sense and as recognized by the perennial philosophy {19}.

On a more mundane level, of what exactly are we conscious when we read a poem? Thoughts, perceptions and emotions that seem exact, certainly, but which are difficult to pin down further. We surrender to their particular fusion, but do not regard them as calls to action. Treating a poem's element of thought as a separate entity can indeed produce statements that are not strictly true, or not true in a wider context. Aesthetic response seems a special sort of consciousness, and it may well be that this consciousness is not a generic one, but specific to individual poems, or even to individual readers, if the differing brain activities of experimentees watching the same film are to be believed. {20}

23.7. Brain Cell Hierarchies: Hawkins

Jeff Hawkins addresses the memory problem with brains: what is the nature of memory and where is it stored? {21} He starts with the neocortex, that crumpled, outermost layer of the brain. It is 2 mm thick and about the area of a large

dinner napkin. Six layers can be distinguished, which Hawkins enumerates as L1 (top) to L6 (bottom). All layers in all areas perform the same function, though different areas show small differences because they're connected to different organs.

The first key feature of Hawkins' hypothesis is memory. These are the key features of invariant representation:

1. Memories are sequences of patterns.
2. They are recalled auto-associatively.
3. Storage is in invariant forms.
4. The store is ordered hierarchically.

Second comes prediction, which is the primary function of the neocortex, and the foundation of intelligence.

Thereafter, the matter becomes rather technical, the important points being as follows:

1. The neocortex is adaptable in its functions, but in an undamaged brain there are areas set aside for various functions (visual processing, motor functions, etc.)
2. These areas (though laterally arranged over the cortex) are functionally hierarchical. Biologists label them IT (top) down through V4 and V2 to V1 (bottom) when applying to visual processing. The most primary sensory information arrives in area V1, and is processed upwards into increasing invariant representations.
3. The areas are interconnected, so that layer L6 of one area will connect to the L1 layer of the area immediately below (in hierarchy). IT connects upwards to the hippocampus (important for new memories).
4. Information flows in both directions through layers: upwards to create representations (patterns) and downwards to check that the representations match the inputs. If they

do, the representations handle the response (understanding and/or action). If they don't, the input is passed progressively upwards until a representation is found that does. In fact the V1, V2 and V4 areas consist of sub regions interconnected at higher levels, but invariant representations become progressively more general.

5. Cells fire if they receive the right combination of inputs. In general, information flowing up is transferred by nearby synapses. Information flowing down is often via dendrites far from the centre.

6. The composition of layers is important:

L1 is a mat of axons running parallel to the cortex surface (allowing different columns to connect).

Layers 2 and 3 have closely packed pyramidal cells (axons to neighbours)

Layer 4 has star-shaped cells (converging connections).

Layer 5 has pyramidal and extra-large pyramidal cells (last having a wider role).

Layer 6 has pyramidal cells that project to L1 of the next area down, or to inner brain organs.

7. Information generally passes vertically, up and down columns. Firing of the synapses strengthens connections. Those patterns can change-decay with disuse or develop with new inputs: i.e. we forget and learn. Before learning, a column can fire only if driven by a Layer 4 cell. After learning, levels 2, 3 and 5 can anticipate based on layer 1 pattern, and will fire on only partial input from layer 6 — i.e. the column anticipates. Layer 1 also takes input from layer 6 in the next area up, so that e.g. phonemes become words become sentences becoming understanding. Input that is not required, i.e. usual patterns already covered by invariant representations, is blocked from firing by inhibitory cells. (Layer 2 cells may also be controlled by invariant representations in higher areas: pp.154-5 of Hawkins).

8. Motor and sensory perception are closely interdependent. We learn to anticipate from context. Predicting, thinking and behaviour are all a hierarchy of invariant representations.

9. Only the most novel information reaches the hippocampus. Cells in layer 5 also project to the thalamus and thence to the next higher area. Information passed upwards between two areas also passes indirectly through the thalamus. (The thalamus is part of the sub cortical, inner brain and so can add emotional colouring.)

10. Each cortical area creates predictions, which are sent down the hierarchy: Imagination simply turns this around and lets predictions be input.

What does this mean? That we sidestep the all or nothing position of Derrida (8), just as evolution overcomes the 'which came first, chicken or egg?' conundrum of biology. Being stored in increasingly precise form as invariant representation, words, phrases and their associations do have an independent existence, but authors also have control in rearranging and extracting them for thought and expression. Vague ideas give way to more precise formulations, and these can be tested against experience.

We also sidestep the homunculus problem, {22} that infinite regress created by asking *who* is actually viewing of the mind's contents.

23.8. Metaphor

In one sense, all language is metaphorical, since meaning is developed through approximate family resemblances and what is literal is only that which no longer calls attention to itself, the metaphors (extended, literal, longer, calls, attention) being dead (another metaphor). {23} To understand the meaning of metaphors we have to recognize

the referent in context, i.e. use words appropriately, but also call to mind the ideas, linguistic and empirical, that are embodied in mental schemas and social practices. And we have to find meaning in metaphors, their frames of reference interacting and combining so as to make sense to us. And that sense is further constrained by cultural expectations. The metaphors of science are mechanical and developed rationally. Literary metaphors are more matters of analogy, chosen for expressive vividness.

23.9. Schemas: Theories of Lakoff and Johnson

Schemas are constructions of reality using the assimilation and association of sensorimotor processes to anticipate actions in the world. They are plural: our minds are a richly connected network of schemas by which we perceive, act, react and consider. Of course we use logic, but more often our view of the world is through the analogical frames of schemas, where representation can only be partial and approximate. Clearly, metaphors and schemas are closely associated, and the theories of schemas by Lakoff and Johnson grew out of their 1980 work on metaphor. {24} Far from being mere matters of style, metaphors organize our experience, creating realities guiding our futures and reinforced interpretations. Lakoff and Johnson (24.3) were relativists. There was no absolute truth, but only truth relative to some understanding. And that understanding involved categories which emerged from our interaction with experience. They were neither fixed nor uniform, but defined by prototypes and family prototypes, both being presented by metaphors.

Metaphors were matters of thought and action, then, not simply of language. This view Lakoff and Johnson independently took further in books published seven years later. {25} {26} Human beings created cognitive models that

reflect concepts needed for interaction between themselves and their surroundings. Such concepts are made by bodily activities prior to language. The cognitive models proposed were very varied, with the most complex being radial with multiple schema linked to a common centre. Language was characterized by symbolic models (with generative grammar an overlying, subsequent addition) and operated by constructing models — propositional, image schematic, metaphoric and metonymic. Properties were matters of relationships and prototypes. Meaning arose through embodiment in schemas. Schemas could also be regarded as containers — part-whole, link, centre-periphery, source-path-goal, up-down, front-back.

Schemas recognized the different languages of human expression. Linguistic functions were propositional and symbolic. Propositional logic used basic-level concepts only — entities, actions, states, properties — and meaning was built with link schemas. Complex propositions were built from simple propositions by modification, quantification, conjunction, negation, etc. Scenarios were constructed through an initial state, sequence of events, to a final state with source-path-goal. Syntax was simply idealized cognitive models (part-whole, centre-periphery, link, container schemas). Knowledge and truth, however, were radial concepts depending on basic-level concepts and social context — these indeed being the only grounds for certainty. Objectivity was never absolute, and we could only look at a problem from as many aspects as possible.

Though schemas were hypothetical, and lacked the analytical power of other approaches, {25} Lakoff and Turner have enlarged their potential. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* {26-28} attempted to refound philosophy on cognitive science. It

employed three premises: that mind is inherently embodied, that thought is mostly unconscious, and that abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. Out went Platonic Idealism, Cartesian Dualism, and much of the Anglo-American analytical philosophy. As ever, the concepts were intriguing, indeed liberating, but the empirical evidence was not compelling, and the arguments advanced did not fully engage with those of different intellectual tribes (mathematicians, philosophers, scientists in general). Mark Johnson had independently extended the notion of metaphor to parables {29} — not a word standing for something else, but a whole story standing for a particular description of the world. Narrative imaginings allow us to understand and organize experience. We project one story onto another, language emerging to allow this process. Again, a useful top-down alternative to the bottom-up (and not over-successful) approach of traditional linguistics, but still only straws in the wind. Then came *Where Mathematics Comes From: How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics into Being* by Lakoff and Núñez, {30} that did build rigorously on two decades of cognitive science. Arithmetic arises from four metaphoric processes: object collection, object construction, using a measuring stick, and moving along a path. Three difficult problems could be examined in depth: 1. the grounding of arithmetic, logic and set theory, 2. infinitesimals, hypereals and transfinite numbers, and 3. e to the power ix , with its application to Euler's equation. None of this makes for easy reading, but metaphor theory and schema now have to be taken seriously.

23.10. Irreducible Mind

Entirely different is the approach of Edward F. Kelly {31} and co-workers who build on the psychology of William James and the research of F.W.H. Meyers (1843-1901) into the paranormal. On this evidence, the mind is not generated by

brain activity, but is merely part of an exterior, pre-existing and all-pervading consciousness, a consciousness that is selected and shaped by the brain into an individual awareness — much as the radio set selects and makes audible some frequency in a broad spectrum of radio waves.

Most scientists are adamant that psi activities cannot occur, and that the evidence must therefore be nonexistent or fraudulent. Yet the evidence does exist. {32} Many thousands of well-documented studies are available in the following areas: psychosomatic medicine, psycho-neuro-immunology, bereavement and mortality, sudden and voodoo deaths, influence of mind on health, postponement of death, positive effects of religion, healing with meditation, faith healing, placebos, false pregnancies, stigmata, non-religious skin wounds, hysteria, multiple personality disorders, yogi accomplishments, effects induced under hypnosis (analgesia, bleeding, healing, burns, warts, skin disease removal), sympathetic symptoms, maternal impressions, suggestion at a distance, distance healing by prayer, birthmarks in reincarnation, extrasensory perception, psychokinesis, telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, prodigious memories, automatic writing, near-death (NDE) and out of the body (OBE) experiences.

The better-investigated cases are persuasive individually, and compelling en masse. Fraud is an ever-present danger, but the great majority of cases cannot be written off so easily. {33} Scepticism probably thrives because mainstream writers have not investigated the literature properly, and because the paranormal questions the materialism of contemporary science.

Kelly places the irreducible mind theory against the history of twentieth-century psychology. {25} The behaviourism dominating the first half of the 20th century eliminated the

mind entirely: everything was reduced to directly observable input-output responses. Mental states correspond to brain states or neural processes.

The brain is very plastic, however, and high IQs are sometimes found in individuals with very incomplete brains.

John Searle's (28.4) Chinese room thought experiment shows that semantics is more than syntax. In the absence of consciousness, the brain can turn out the right answers without understanding a thing. Searle in fact believes consciousness is simply the low-level activity of the brain: no more and no less. But it certainly does not seem that way: mind has integration and intention. In William James's view, matter did not create consciousness, but consciousness shaped and limited matter. Psi phenomena seem real if intermittent, moreover, and are inexplicable in orthodox physical terms, particularly post death survival. {31}

F.W.H. Meyers wanted to unite materialism and philosophy in a 'tertium quid'. His terminology (subliminal and supraliminal) was unfortunate and inconsistent, but in his view our everyday waking states occupy just a narrow band of the individual's potential. Some gifted individuals, especially under trauma, illness and certain states of consciousness, can access other bands: the 'lower' automatic body processes or the 'higher' ones like telepathy. That is the only way the well-documented psi experiences can be explained and incorporated into a broader and more honest view of consciousness. Consciousness is therefore incorporeal, larger than individual brains, and may to some extent survive physical death.

Contra Hawkins, Kelly argues that no currently accepted medical view of memory really meets the facts. Episodic memory (of an event involving us) has a personal element:

we were there. Who is the 'we' observing the memory? Early theories of memory supposed that 'traces' were laid down in parts of the brain, and that they involved the hippocampus in converting short term to long-term memory. The hippocampus is certainly involved, it seems, but also surrounding brain areas, and other quite distant parts of the brain. Brains don't have anything like the data stores of computers. Neurons do grow new spikes, but too slowly to 'contain' or cope with memories', which are in fact diffusely spread throughout the brain, in different patterns in different people. That' provides some support for connectionists, but is still a long way from explaining matters, especially recall. Episodic memories have 'warmth and intimacy'. But they are recalled in a context of events: which also need to be explained, and cannot simply be a faded photograph of an event. Some memories have an hallucinatory vividness, moreover, without being genuine. Matters apparently long forgotten may sometimes be accessed in dreams and under hypnosis. Remembering is different from reliving, because we are conscious of looking back on memories. Memories of people, landscapes, objects, emotions, etc. are shaped by human agencies, moreover: they are not passive snapshots. Nor are they inner representations, or prepositional tokens in languages of thought (LOT): context and the vague web of associated memories is important: we understand memories. In short, an enormous amount of data has been acquired on brain operations, but memory remains as puzzling as ever. Neuro-imaging adds to the complexity: the same part of the brain may be involved in several functions concurrently, and 'subtraction' results in false pictures. Physical damage usually results in memory etc. impairment, but a few individuals can operate quite normally, even well, on 95% removal of brain material. {31}

People in somnambulistic states can have access to extraordinary abilities. Multiple personalities sometimes

alternate and sometimes coexist. Each may or may not know of the others. Brain scans and other imaging techniques show the personalities to be distinct. Similar tests on mediums also show distinct personalities, which they do not with a skilled actress playing several roles. NDEs, OBEs and similar experiences often bring enhanced consciousness the very time the brain should be at its least functional: indeed the anaesthetics effects entirely rule out brain waves in the gamma frequency binding together disparate parts of the brain in the 'global operating room' manner. No physiological processes — low oxygen, high carbon dioxide levels, stimulation of temporal lobes, neural transmitter levels, etc. — can account for the usually reported feelings of vivid contentment, bright light, surpassing peace, separation from the body, life reviews and appearance of the previously departed dead. These last only the short duration of the NDE, not the usual hours of medication. A few OBE details can be independently verified: details of the operation, conversation between surgeons, etc., but mostly not. Approx 10% of death-threatening operations are accompanied by NDEs, but such experiences can occur in other situations, often when the patient is expecting death. Curiously, the extra effects (faces of the dead, etc.) are more common when the patient really is near death or clinically dead, i.e. when the brain is most incapacitated. Many NDEs are transformative, profoundly affecting lives thereafter, and lessening the fear of dying. Similar are death-bed experiences, occasionally collective (i.e. witnessed by others too), and visitations when loved ones have just died: in many of these it can be verified that they did indeed die then, which the experiencer could not otherwise have known about. As in other psi experiences, the documentation is extensive, and NDEs in particular have become the subject of popular treatments. {31} Many are backed by solid experimental evidence. {34}

Genius is the happy cooperation of subliminal with supraliminal consciousness. That genius, particularly in poets, is more likely to suffer pathologies, but it also exhibits greater mental health. Genius is something exceptional, more than greater creativity, The usual picture of creative breakthrough arriving in stages — preparation, incubation, illumination and verification — is correct, but the process is also much more confused, mysterious and fluid. It involves elements of dissociation, automatisms and even hysteria, expressing an indwelling and general perceptive power. There is a self surrender to something larger than the ego, and taking precedence over the established order. Skilled and voluntary effort is necessary, and the products of inspiration generally have to be evaluated and further shaped. Many writers depend on dreams and sleep processes, and admit that their creations are not constructed but given to them, as though dictated by other agencies. Some astonishing works have been produced by the ouija board or automatic writing, quite beyond the author's usual personality, knowledge or range. As Kant put it: genius is a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given: it itself gives the rule to art. Creativity is not necessarily pathological, and where the insane are overwhelmed by subliminal upsurges, genius retains control. Many creative geniuses were clearly sane and balanced individuals, moreover, and if many geniuses suffer neuroses and periods of depression, only few of the mentally ill are artists. Poets and writers often unbalance themselves through their activities, of course, and then use those insights in their work. Both creativity and psychosis tends to run in families, but schizophrenia and depression extinguish creativity, at least for a time. Artists of all types feel they are exploring self-knowledge, and hope that self-knowledge illuminates others' lives. Artists indeed find themselves in their work, what Jung calls individuation. {31}

However implausible the irreducible mind approach must seem to scientists and lay opinion, it is an approach with a long philosophical history, from Plato, Plotinus, through Berkeley, Leibnitz (33) and Hegel (14) to nineteenth-century idealists. Its champions did not generally derive their theories by argument (though Berkeley thought God had to exist to give the world a reality beyond our fallible sense expressions), but by rationalizing what they had actually experienced. Even today, writers on quantum mechanics have to accept the existence of some sort of over-reaching mind or universal consciousness to explain the behaviour of particles that react instantaneous with each other (i.e. faster than the speed of light), and in some cases, with pre-knowledge. {31}

But how can mind and matter interact, non-physical with physical matter? Because mind and matter are connected on the quantum mechanics level, believes Henry Stapp, essentially by ion channels, so narrow that quantum mechanics effects must operate at nerve terminals in the brain. {35}

Stapp's views have naturally been contested, {36} but are based on a thorough understanding of quantum mechanics and Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. {12} Indeed the emergence of complexity, {40} consciousness {37}, networks {38} and optical biochemistry {41} has greatly changed our view of the universe, and given back to human beings some control over their thoughts and actions, as common sense has always supposed, but behaviourism {39} and recent literary theory have denied.

23.11 The Biology of Belief: Bruce Lipton

Bruce Lipton brings our earlier notes up to date, but in a remarkable way. His claim, backed by innumerable peer-reviewed studies, is firstly that much of our 'intelligence'

operates at the cell level, not the brain, and that, secondly, those cells learn from the environment, and pass those learned changes on to our children, a modern, modified Lamarckism {41-2}. In summary: a cell's life is controlled by its physical and energetic environment, and only a little by its genes. Genes are molecular blueprints for cells, tissues and organs, which the environment reads and follows. But it's the cell's awareness of the environment that sets life in motion. In short, each of us is made up of 50 trillion single cells that cooperate to make a collective amoebic consciousness.

Cells are indeed 'intelligent' and behave as miniature human beings. Cells have organelles suspended in jelly-like cytoplasm, i.e. have a nucleus, the mitochondria, a Golgi body and vacuoles. Every eukaryote (nucleus-bearing cell) possess the equivalent of our nervous, digestive, respiratory, excretory, endocrine, muscle, skeleton, circulatory, integument, reproductive and immune systems. Cells learn the appropriate response to their environments, and pass these responses on to their offspring. An immune cell will create an antibody protein out of protein snippets, so-called affinity maturation, by which antibody proteins perfectly match the virus. Each repetition mutates slightly, but undergoes many rounds to make the perfect antibody, ready and waiting for new attacks. These antibodies are passed on to daughter cells. Cells gradually formed organisms, which have more awareness of the environment and more specific functions to hand. Some cells simply connect different functions.

Lamarck was not entirely wrong, therefore: animals cooperate to live together. Genes are not only reproduced, but shared between different species, which speeds up evolution. Survival is of the fittest *groups* of species. Mutations may not be natural errors but more adaptive,

producing what is needed by the body. Bacteria in our gut, for example, which are ten times as numerous as the cells making up our body, are essential, to life, and antibacterial agents can be harmful. In many ways, we have the wrong model: it is our own ecosystems that are under threat. Many ailments (cancer, diabetes, heart disease) result from multiple genetic and environmental interactions.

Cells are composed of four types of large molecules: polysaccharides, lipids, nucleic acids and proteins. Of the last, the body has some 100,000 different types of proteins, all of which it needs. Each is a linear string of amino acids joined by flexible peptide links. Amino acids also have electromagnetic charges, which influence how they fold up, proteins also use helpers, chaperones, in this process. The final shape, or conformation, reflects the balanced state of em charges, and can be altered with hormones, enzymes and em interference. Changing conformations do the work of respiration, digestions and muscle contraction. Proteins fit together and cooperate in assemblies called pathways, and it is these movements, working at thousands of times a second, that propel life.

The human genome project expected to find at least 120,000 genes in 23 chromosomes, but found only 25,000 (now reduced to 19,000), no more than have many other organisms. Genetically, we are not fundamentally different from worms, and human engineering is limited. The nucleus is not the 'brain' of a cell, moreover, and not the driver of life. Removing the nucleus does not kill the cell, for example, though it cannot afterwards reproduce by division. Emotion, stress and nutrition can alter genes, and those alterations are passed on: the science of epigenetics. The classic DNA->RNA-> proteins should be: Environment <-> DNA <-> RNA <-> proteins. In making a copy of itself the DNA/RNA is

influenced by the environment, creating 2,000 or more protein variants. Most cancers, 95% of them, in fact, are not due to inherited genes. Diets can impede and/or control cancers. Cells change with environment, even with the nucleus removed. Identical twins thus gradually differ over their lifespans. Genes are versatile, moreover, and the same gene will create hair, nails and horns, for example. Over 80% of 'junk DNA' regulates production and assembly of proteins that read environmental factors. Mutations of junk DNA cause cancers and other illnesses. 2% of DNA (telomeres) prevent the DNA from fraying, and provide the physical platform for DNA replication. Stress, violence, lack of love, and poor diet can all adversely affect the telomeres, and so the life span.

The membrane (which Lipton calls 'mem-brain' to emphasize the matter) comes closest to being the 'brain' of cells. It is a three-layered envelop and very thin. Prokaryotes like bacteria have just a membrane enclosing cytoplasm, but nonetheless carry out all the normal processes of cells. They can even sense food or predators and/or toxins, and propel themselves to or away from accordingly. Most of the membrane is composed of impermeable phospholipids of polar (+-) and non-polar molecules, but woven through the three layers at intervals are integral membrane proteins (IMP), of many types, which can be grouped as receptor proteins and effector proteins. Receptors respond to signals from the environment (and interior of cell) and effectors shuttle molecules and information across the membrane, usually by molecule 'goodness of fit'. Sodium-potassium ATPase is particularly useful effector protein, creating electrical charges across the membrane: the outside is positive and the interior is negative, thus discharging electricity. Cytoskeletal effectors regulate shape. A third type of effector protein, enzymes, break down or synthesizes molecules. IMPs and their byproducts, provide signals that

control the binding of the chromosomes, and so form a sleeve to the DNA that is responsive to the environment.

The cell dies if the membrane or the IMPs are removed. The IMPs act as 'switches' and there are hundreds of thousands in larger cells, each group having their own specific functions. Gradually in evolution, portions of the membrane (membranous organelles) retreated inside the (eukaryotic) cells to extend their functions. Since cells do not have the strength to increase beyond a certain size, cells began forming multicellular communities.

The membrane is a liquid crystal semi-conductor with gates and channels. Like silicon chips, they are programmable. Membrane research is an exciting field. Changing membrane potential in tadpole backs and tails will produce eyes, for example, an approach that could be used to overcome birth defects. Cholesterol has a bad press, but is essential to 'stiffen up' membranes. Histamines may play a larger part in cardiovascular disease, and statins have only a limited use here.

The universe is an integration of interdependent energy fields entangled in a meshwork of interactions. That integration applies to body processes and the biology of living organisms: all the processes are interconnected. For that reason, a drug may have complicated 'side effects'. Gene proteins can also play many different roles: hence their limited numbers in our chromosomes. Under stress, histamine, for example forms gaping holes in the cells lining our blood vessels in our legs and arms (sites of potential infection) but enhances the flow of nutrients to our brain neurons, i.e. the same protein can produce different effects. Similarly, estrogen inhibits reproduction but can also cause strokes. All drugs have to be used with care, and indeed

illness resulting from medication (iatrogenic) is the leading cause of death in the USA.

Quantum mechanics applies at all levels throughout the universe. QM controls the folding of proteins. Energy signals (em radiation) is a hundred times more efficient than hormone etc flow. The interconnectedness of illnesses is becoming better appreciated, and in fact some 50% of Americans use alternative medicine. Scans reveal the specific signals of diseased tissue, etc. Each is different. The frequencies can be used for non-invasive surgery: kidney stones, etc. Similarly for chiropractic. Transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) can help depression. Plants are influenced by neighbours. Photosynthesis involves electron transport through a web of pathway tunnels created by constructive and destructive interferences of quantum waves. Microwave em radiation of mobile phones can disruption the natural processes of the body. Cancer causes changes in a patient's energy field, and the cancer can be ameliorated by altering that energy field. Optogenetics studies how em fields alter the body's molecular makeup, and homeopathy does indeed have some scientific (i.e qm) basis.

Hypnosis can cure illnesses: warts and even congenital ichthyosis, but patient and doctor have to fully believe in what they're doing. Doubt is fatal to those walking on live coals. Bacteria and viruses may indeed cause illnesses, but can sometimes be overridden by belief. The HIV virus can live in the body for years without causing the disease. Spontaneous remission of cancer cases is rare, but documented. But more is needed than 'positive thinking' of the conscious mind: it needs the full cooperation of the much more effective unconscious mind. The brain coordinates the behaviour of the body's cells, all of which have neural

receptors. Reflex actions can be passed onto offspring as genetic-based instincts. Self-conscious people can reason and choose, however, though belief to some extent controls biology. The placebo effect is real. In knee treatment, for example, placebo effects are twice as effective as standard surgery. 80% of antidepressants effectiveness comes from the placebo effect. Similarly, negative beliefs are also strong, and can cripple a person's emotional life.

Research shows that brain cells translate the mind's perceptions or beliefs into chemical profiles that, when secreted into the blood, control the fate of the body's cells. Blood not only nourishes cells, but its neurochemical components also regulate the cell's genetic and behavioural activity. 'A cell is a machine for turning experience into biology.' When we change our perception of the world, we also change the blood's neurological composition, so that the mind's purpose becomes one of creating coherence between our beliefs and the reality we experience. To some extent, the body's autonomous functions can be overridden by the mind, as they are by yogis and persons in a trance state. Stress, particularly that of social isolation — not only experienced, but *also* perceived as unwelcome — has negative effects on the body, which is then reflected in their gene structure. But note that success does not bring happiness generally, but the other way round: happy, optimistic and socially-connected people are the more successful.

The body has two protection systems: the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenaline axis (HPA) and immune system to deal with bacteria and viruses. Both are affected by fear and stress. Stressed and fearful employees don't perform well, and indeed their cell division is slowed down. Chronic stress

encourages and accelerates cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Parents have a large influence on their children, even from before they are born — in mood behaviour, psychoses and medical health. Brain size is not the key factor: many animals have greater cerebral surface than we humans do, and human beings with hydrocephalus still function though most of the cerebral cortex is missing. In growing to adulthood, human beings become susceptible to different frequencies of brain waves, and these can have positive or negative effects, depending on whether parents are supportive or critical at the time. Much of this influence is on the subconscious mind, important for everyday activities like driving a car. Only some 48% of IQ may be genetically determined, and even less when other aspects of the parents are factored in. Maternal smoking and drinking are detrimental. Affection is important. The brain adapts: London taxi-drivers have enlarged hippocampi, for example. Most drugs have some side effects, and Americans are generally overmedicated. Breast-feeding is usually best, and much of the environment is chemically toxic, now a growing concern to doctors. Children exposed to human interaction learn foreign languages more easily.

We thus need a more inclusive view than traditional science provides. Aboriginal cultures believe everything, even inanimate nature, is imbued with spirit, and something of the donor's character or identity can indeed come over with a transplant. Communities are becoming divided, and therefore cancerous. It's the subconscious that governs the 'will to survive'. People with spiritual beliefs generally lead healthier lives. There's considerable, if anecdotal, evidence for an afterlife.

23.12 The Physics of Organisms: Mae-Wang Ho

Unlike the irreducible mind concept, where the mind is a passive receiver, Mae-Wang Ho {43} saw the brain as fully active, but only as one component of living organisms. The heart, for example, generates by far the most powerful and most extensive rhythmic electromagnetic field in the human body. The voltage generated is some 60 times larger in amplitude than the brain's and permeates every cell in the body. Its magnetic component is also larger, by some 5000 times, and the combined electrical magnetic field (emf) is immediately registered as brain waves.

Life for Ho is organized diversity, maintained in states far beyond equilibrium, and she used rigorous thermodynamics and some aspects of quantum theory to demonstrate how and why this must be the case. Energy is trapped directly at the electronic level, being stored not only as vibrational and electronic bond energies, but also in the structure of the system: in gradients, fields and flow patterns, compartments, organelles, cells and tissues. Mitochondrial and chloroplast membranes, for example, are closely analogous to the pn junction, a semiconductor device that facilitates the separation of positive and negative charges, and is capable of generating an electric current when excited by heat or light. The phenomenon of electricity arises from the movement of outermost electron in atoms or molecules, of course, but this process operates in complex, cascading fashions throughout living entities. More precisely, it is the quantum wave-function of each electron that is actually spread out over the whole system, so that any particular electron has only some probability of being found operating at any place in the body.

Some scientists even suggest that a 'protoneural' network links up the entire cell, regulating and coordinating its

functions. Large electric fields are certainly found in tissues and whole organisms, fields that also change with injury and anaesthesia, incidentally. Proteins act as giant dipoles, and these can undergo coherent excitations over the entire molecule. In dense arrays of giant dipoles, such as those making up muscles and the cytoskeleton, the excitation may be rendered coherent throughout the array, thus accounting for the kind of long-range coordination of molecular machines required in biological functioning. RNA, and especially DNA are also enormous dielectric molecules, and through their coherent excitation may determine which genes are transcribed or translated in the transcriptosomes and the ribosomes. In short, a coherent electrodynamical field makes the organism into a vibrant, sensitive whole.

To summarise, organisms mobilise their energies coherently over the whole system, employing their myriad em fields to directly interact with the necessary organs, functions and structures. Organisms are not closed to outside influences, it was important to note, but continually open systems. Energy and materials flow in, and degraded matter and less organised energy (entropy) are expelled, making life a local departure from the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Organisms exhibit self-similarity, i.e. are fractal in their internal functions. The heartbeat, for example, makes broadly but not exactly similar repetitions, and in fact a healthy heart shows more variability than one diseased. Researchers have also found that different emotions are associated with distinct patterns of heart rate variation, each in turn reflecting a particular physiological state. The patterns are an interdependent, two-way process. Emotions trigger changes in both the autonomic nervous system and hormonal systems. Equally but in reverse, specific changes in those features generate emotional experience. At least six

distinct heart rhythms can be recognised, each associated with a different emotional state, though only one reflects an ordered, harmonious pattern. Others, more disruptive, are associated with frustration, resentment, hatred, fear and rage.

Also fractal are the features of living systems: from compartments in each organ, through micro-compartments and micro-domains, right down to molecular machines, protons and electrons. Each is functioning autonomously, doing very different things at their own rates, generating flow patterns and cycles of different spatial extensions, yet all are coupled together, syncopating and harmonising in complex rhythms, a 'veritable quantum jazz of life'.

Living systems are thus 'excitable media', where cells and tissues are poised to respond disproportionately to specific weak signals. Large amounts of energy stored everywhere automatically amplify these weak signals, often into visible, macroscopic actions. Synchronisation is a feature of animal behaviour, where each interacts with every other via the absorption of the energy of oscillation. Birds and fish flock together. Large populations of fireflies flash as one in various parts of south-east Asia, and crickets behave similarly. So it is with the human body: the pacemaker cells of the heart, the networks of neurons in the circadian pacemaker of the hippocampus, and the insulin-secreting cells of the pancreas — all show synchronised electrical activities. Even when we smell something, oscillations in the olfactory bulb in the brain remain in phase with the rhythmic movement of the lungs.

Because living organisms generate weak electric and magnetic fields, they are also sensitive to external em fields, with obvious health implications. Conversely, many organisms remain in tune with those fields, and indeed

employ them. Birds may navigate through the light-sensitive rhodopsin molecules in their eyes, for example, and these are affected by the earth's magnetic field.

Ho's approach is largely holistic, or top-down, but her concern is with principles correctly applied, that employ the latest advances in biochemistry and quantum theory. Many organic actions factorise, i.e. divide into self-correlations at two or more separate points, enabling coherent functioning throughout the body. That factorisation firstly concentrates the highest amount of energy of the field in localised zones by constructive interference, as well as creating effectively field-free zones within the field by destructive interference. Secondly, that factorisation allows the effective transfer of the tiniest possible amount of energy among an arbitrarily large number of space-time points in the field with the minimum loss. The coherent fields that arise are thus 'noiseless' — not through compliance to a single frequency but by being phased to different frequencies coupled together. Efficient energy transfers thus operate over a wide spectrum, in space and time, from cell rhythms to terrestrial and lunar rhythms.

Organism are indeed organized in ways similar to those of the liquid crystalline state, where, unlike normal liquids with little or no molecular order, the crystals have molecules aligned in common directions. These crystals are also flexible, malleable, and responsive to em fields. In this way are electric, electromagnetic and electro-mechanical actions coordinated throughout the body. Being on a quantum level, moreover, such excitations have all the oddities of quantum behaviour: the wave-particle duality of atomic particles, the phenomenon of non-locality, and entanglement.

Connective tissues form the bulk of the body of most multi-cellular animals, and collagen is indeed the most abundant protein in the animal kingdom. There are many kinds of collagens, but all share a general repeating sequence of tripeptides. Many also possess a molecular structure in which three polypeptide chains are wound around one another in a triple-helix. These molecules aggregate into long fibrils, and bundles of such fibrils in turn form thicker fibres, sheets or other more complex three-dimensional liquid crystalline structures. The structures are formed by self-assembly, incidentally, needing no specific 'instructions' other than certain conditions of pH, ionic strength, temperature and hydration.

Associated with collagens are three populations of water molecules. One is *interstitial* water, tightly bound within the triple helix of the collagen molecule, and strongly interacting with the peptide bonds of the polypeptide chains. Another is *bound* water, corresponding to the more loosely structured water-cylinder on the surface of the triple helix. The third is *free water* filling the spaces between the fibrils. The collagen-rich liquid crystalline make semi-conducting, highly responsive networks extending throughout the organism, in which subtle changes correlate with growth and movement.

Consciousness is thus distributed throughout the entire liquid crystalline matrix. Brain consciousness associated with the nervous system is embedded in body consciousness and is coupled to it. The bound water plays a crucial role in conscious experience, therefore, and anaesthetics indeed act by replacing and releasing bound water from proteins and membrane interfaces.

Water is in fact a strange molecule, with many properties unexpected of its simple composition: temperatures of phase

changes, densities, super-cooled properties. As noted, there are several forms of water, and no less than 13 of ice. One important form has an icosahedron structure involving 280 water molecules, a structure which can change from a low-density fully expanded structure (ES) to a high-density collapsed structure (CS) by simply bending the hydrogen bonds. Water binds to the large surfaces of proteins and membranes inside cells, and these convey electric charges in special ways, most particularly by what is called 'jump' conduction, faster than the usual conduction of electricity.

There is no clear separation in space and time in quantum physics, and the predominant cell mechanisms may not be accomplished, or not entirely accomplished, by migrating hormones and other chemicals (the mainstream view), but much faster and more focused electric, electromagnetic and electro-mechanical forces. Consciousness — the faculties of sentience, responsiveness and memory — is not a feature only of the mind/brain, Ho argued, but should be understood as a macroscopic quantum wave function inhering in the liquid crystalline continuum that makes up the organism. Organisms are best seen as quantum assemblies of coherent activities.

Organisms like humans obviously experience themselves as a unity, and not as a collection of disparate parts. For one thing, our organs work together. We have a self-image of our body that is located exactly where our body indeed is. We can reach out instantly to touch our face or scratch our ear. The self-image or memory of our body could thus exist in some form of quantum hologram-like interference pattern. An ordinary hologram is an interference pattern produced by two intersecting, coherent beams of light, where each part holds some low-density image or memory of the whole. A quantum hologram involves quantum processes, however,

and human beings may well have memories distributed over the entire liquid crystalline medium.

We would then escape the mind-body problem, of explaining how some something non-material (mind) can act on something purely material (brain). We could also see that subjectivity versus objectivity is a false dichotomy. The very act of obtaining information on quantum processes alters the outcome: the observer necessarily participates in the experiment. From this perspective, organisms are not composed of interacting chemicals, of otherwise lifeless materials, but nested hierarchical systems, all of which, even down to the elementary particles, have some aspects of life.

Every organism, thought Whitehead, was 'a locus of prehensive unification', this prehension being a field of coherent activities sensitive to the environment and drawing on its experience of the environment to make itself whole. There are gradations, of course, but Whitehead in fact saw the fundamental particles as organisms, and a similar organisation extended to planets and galaxies. The individual is a distinctive enfoldment of its environment, so each individual is not only constituted of others in its environment, but also simultaneously present (delocalised) over all individuals. Equally, society is a community of individuals mutually delocalised and mutually implicated. Individuality is also relative, because an organism can be part of the life history of some larger, deeper, more complete entity.

The advances in neuroscience over the past two decades have borne out Bergson's intuition of inner organic time or 'pure duration' as a dynamic heterogeneous multiplicity of succession without separateness. The latest version of Bohm's theory pictured the universe as a continuous field

with quantum values for energy, momentum and angular momentum. Such a field will manifest both as particles and as waves emanating and converging on the regions where particles are detected. The field is organised and maintained by the 'superquantum potential', a function of the entire universe: 'What we have here is a kind of universal process of constant creation and annihilation, determined through the superquantum potential so as to give a world of form and structure in which all manifest features are only relatively constant, recurrent and stable aspects of the whole'.

We might then 'represent consciousness as a wave function that evolves, constantly being transformed by experience and creating experience in overt acts. The issue of quantum indeterminism is a very deep one, but the picture of a wave function — a pure state — consisting of a total interfusion of feelings each of which occupying the whole being — is very much like what Bergson describes. It must also be noted that the wave function encompasses infinite potentialities, and so the future is radically indeterminate. Thus, the overt act, or choice, does follow from the antecedent, but it cannot be predicted in advance. One can at best retrace the abstract "steps" and represent the evolution of the conscious being as having followed a "trajectory". In truth, the so-called trajectory has been traced out by one's own spontaneous actions, both overt and covert up to that point. When one reinstates the full quality of our consciousness, we can see that there can be no identical or repeatable states, which, when presented again at any time, will bring about identical resultant states.'

The 'wave function' that is consciousness never collapses, but is always changing, and always unique, as it is 'coloured' by all the tones of our personality and experience. There may even be no resolution of the wave functions, which thus remain entangled and delocalised over past experiences. Some interactions may have long timescales, where

resolution of the wave function of interacting parties will also be long, thus explaining inherited communal activity.

‘Reality is thus a shimmering presence of infinite planes, a luminous labyrinth of the active now connecting “past” and “future”, “real” with “ideal”, where potential unfolds into actual and actual enfolds to further potential through the free action and intention of the organism. It is a sea awash with significations, dreams and desires. This reality we carry with us, an ever-present straining towards the future. The act is the cause; it is none other than the creation of meaning, the realisation of the ideal and the consummation of desire.’

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24. METAPHOR THEORIES

Metaphor commonly means saying one thing while intending another, making implicit comparisons between things linked by a common feature, perhaps even violating semantic rules. {1} Scientists, logicians and lawyers prefer to stress the literal meaning of words, regarding metaphor as picturesque ornament.

But there is the obvious fact that language is built of dead metaphors. As a traditional critic put it: 'Every expression that we employ, apart from those that are connected with the most rudimentary objects and actions, is a metaphor, though the original meaning is dulled by constant use.' Consider the words of that very sentence: an 'expression' is something squeezed out; to 'employ' something is to wind it in (implicare); to 'connect' is to tie together (conectere); 'rudimentary' comes from the root to root or sprout; an 'object' is something thrown in the way; an 'action' something driven or conducted; 'original' means rising up like a spring or heavenly body; 'constant' is standing firm. 'Metaphor' itself is a metaphor, meaning the carrying across of a term or expression from its normal usage to another.' {2}

Metaphors are therefore active in understanding. We use metaphors to group areas of experience (life is a journey), to orientate ourselves (my consciousness was raised), to convey expression through the senses (his eyes were glued to the screen), to describe learning (it had a germ of truth in it), etc. Even ideas are commonly pictured as objects (the idea had been around for a while), as containers (I didn't get anything out of that) or as things to be transferred (he got the idea across). {3}

24.1. Metaphors in Science

How does science and scientific prose deal with this most obvious of facts? By stratagem and evasion. The scientific style aims at clarity, objectivity and impersonality —

attempting to persuade us that the reality depicted is independent of experimenter and reporting. The key evidence is that laid out in the scientific paper, which, though purporting to be a plain account of what was done and observed, is in fact {4} a carefully tailored document making a bid for personal recognition. The abstract allows the significance of the work to be modestly hinted at. The passive voice makes appear inevitable and impersonal what was often achieved only after great effort and skill by the experimenter. Stylistic devices like metaphor, irony, analogy and hyperbole that might call attention to the staged nature of the reporting are muted or banned. Where descriptive, the language employs figures drawn from physics: inert and mechanical. Sentence structure is simple, not to say barbaric: commonplace verbs linking heavy noun clusters. References pay homage to previous workers in the field, implying familiarity with procedures and therefore professional competence.

24.2. Linguistic Philosophy

Can metaphors be paraphrased in literal terms? Many philosophical schools supposed they could, perhaps even needed to do so, particularly those of the Logical Positivist (29.2) approach who stressed the rational, objective aspects of language. But influential papers by Max Black showed that readers come to metaphors armed with commonplace understandings of the word employed, understandings which enter into how we read the passage. In 'When sorrows come, they come not in single spies, but in battalions' both 'spies' and 'battalions' have different connotations that interact and shape our understanding in ways that escape a literal paraphrase. {5}

Not everyone agrees. As would be expected from a theorist who needs a logically transparent language, Davidson denies that metaphors have a meaning over and above their literal meaning. They may point to some resemblance

between apparently dissimilar things, but they don't assert that resemblance, and do not constitute meaning. {6}

24.3. Lakoff and Johnson

Metaphors are much more powerful instruments in the eyes of Lakoff and Johnson. {7} Metaphors have entailments that organize our experience, uniquely express that experience, and create necessary realities. Lakoff and Johnson attacked the two commonly accepted theories of metaphor. The abstraction theory — that there exists one neutral and abstract concept that underlies both the literal and metaphoric use of word — failed on six counts. The abstraction doesn't apply throughout, in height, emotion, future, etc. We can say A is B, but the reverse, B is A, is not equivalent. The theory doesn't account for the structuring of different aspects of a concept, nor with the fact that when we say A is B, the B is always the more concrete and clearly defined. The systematic way in which metaphors apply is not explained, nor how metaphors are made to fit the occasion. Equally, on several counts, the homonymy theory — that the same word may be used for different concepts — also fails. In its strong form the theory cannot account for relationships in systems of metaphors, nor for extensions of such metaphors. In its weak form the theory doesn't account for categories of metaphor. In addition to the above-mentioned difficulty that B is always more concrete and clearly-defined than A, it is to be doubted that statements like 'I'm on a high' really involved similarities at all.

Previous theories derive, Lakoff and Johnson believe, from a naive realism that there is an objective world, independent of ourselves, to which words apply with fixed meanings. But the answer is not to swing to the opposite and embrace a wholly subjectivists view that the personal, interior world is the only reality. Metaphors, for Lakoff and Johnson, are primarily matters of thought and action, only derivatively of language.

Metaphors are culturally-based, and define what those with certain assumptions and presuppositions find real. The 'isolated similarities' are indeed those created by metaphor, which simply create a partial understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience. They are grounded in correlations within our experience.

24.4. Evidence of Psychology

If metaphor permeates all discourse, it necessarily played a large part in the history of psychology, particularly in generating fruitful ideas. But metaphor does not simply express, it conditions thought. Psychologists at the turn of the century (and Freudians even today) tended to picture psychic energy as steam in a pressure-boiler. Mind is subsidiary, something brought to life by the energy of the instincts. {8} Deviant behaviour has also been seen as spirit-possession, a pathology, dementia, hallucination, inappropriate response, mental imbalance, spiritual and intrapersonal poverty — views which have not only coloured society's views of the 'afflicted' but also guided treatment. {9}

The process continues. Neurological discourse employs metaphors from telecommunications, computer science and control systems. Analysis of emotions revolves round metaphors of inner feelings, driving forces, animal instincts, etc. Motivation looks to metaphors of vigilance and defence. Perception oscillates between mirrors of reflection and moulders of experience. Social analysis uses the concepts of laboratory work, mechanical regulation, meaningful relationships and systems theory. What is the 'correct' view? There isn't one. Yet metaphor is not an empty play of words, or even free play of ideas. Metaphors need to be in harmony with the social and historical setting, with the beliefs and personal constructs of the society or micro-society of the time. {10}

24.5. Sociology and Anthropology

Sociologists and anthropologists are much interested in metaphor — because of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis (37.4), the supposedly primitive thinking of some tribes, and the clash of cultural contexts implicit in translation. Equally important is the light thrown by the study of native people on our own western cultures and unexamined assumptions. Sociologists remember what Vico said long ago: ‘man, not understanding, makes his world.’ Much of man's reasoning is vacuous, simply transferring meaning from intimate, domestic surroundings to the unknown. {11} In less picturesque terms, metaphor is a mapping from source (familiar, everyday) to target domain (abstract, conceptual, internal, etc.) But, contrary to Lakoff and Johnson's view that metaphor represents something fundamental to brain functioning, many sociologists regard the target domain as culturally determined. In describing their marriages, speakers choose models (target domains) that provide a helpful match (‘we made a good team, I'd be lost without her’). {12}

How do sentences in different languages have the same meaning? Rationalists assume that there is a universal base of shared semantic primitives (just as Chomsky's grammar once supposed there were syntactic universals) but fail to explain how this base came about. Empiricists argue for some body of shared experience that arises from contact with the real natural world, but can't explain why language takes the form it does. Linguists like Jakobson suppose that language grows out of perceptual structures — meaning is part of the meaningfulness of experience — but then need to forge detailed links between the two. {13} Jardine believes that all objects are intentional objects — i.e. that our human senses and intelligence are conditional, and restrained by our biologic make-up. Words become components of experience. {14} Alverson {15} considers the preposition ‘over’ from Lakoff's perspective {16} and accepts that

schemas are not reducible to propositions, are the core-meanings of words, enter into syntax, are ideal in origin and partly predictive, enter into networks with other schemas, and enter into metaphorical and conventional extensions. But they are not brain-based as such, or primitive. Languages contain codings of universal schemas, but their partitioning into words varies with cultural context. Schemas remained as symbols for categories of sense as intention-and-significance-bestowing devices, not abstract configurations.

24.6. Literary Use

For writers and critics, metaphor is simply a trope: a literary device deriving from the schools of classical rhetoric and intending to put an argument clearly and persuasively. Boundaries are not sharp, but devices are commonly grouped as schemes and tropes. Schemes, which include alliteration, chiasmus, etc., have more to do with expression. Tropes, which include metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, are more powerful and deal with content. {17} Metonymy entails using a name to stand for the larger whole: 'Whitehall intended otherwise' where Whitehall stands for the British civil service. Metonymy does not open new paths like metaphor, but shortens distance to intuition of things already known. {18} Metaphor therefore involves a transfer of sense, and metonymy a transfer of reference. {19}

There are larger considerations. Kenneth Burke thought tropes were ready-made for rhetoricians because they describe the specific patterns of human behaviour that surface in art and social life. {20} Hayden White sketched a theory of history which bridged the claims of art and science by defining the deep structures of historical thought in terms of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. {21} For Derrida, the inevitable clash of metaphors in all writing shows only too well that language may subvert or exceed an

author's intended meaning. Like Derrida, Paul de Man saw language as an endless chain of words, which cannot be closed off to a definitive meaning or reference. The literal and figurative meaning of a text are not easily separated, and the realities posited by language are largely those accepted by the dominant ideology as truthful representations of the world. {22}

24.7. Rhetoric of Science

Alan Gross goes a good deal further than most literary critics in his *Rhetoric of Science*. {23} Truth in science, he argues, is a consensus of utterances rather than a fit with evidence. Whatever scientists may assert — and they very much resent any reduction of science to a form of persuasion — philosophers have long known that the claim of science to truth and objectivity rests on shaky foundations. Knowledge does not exist independently of conceptual schemes, or even perhaps of linguistic formulation. Indeed, as the contemporary logician, W.V.O. Quine (28.6), has shown that science is under-determined by experience: the edges may square with experience but the interior cannot be more than a coherence view of truth? Perhaps it comes down to practicalities. The sheer bulk of 'scientific findings', its dependence on certain procedures and assumptions, not to speak of vetting and reviewing procedures, all of which ensure that the reality which science portrays exists as statements which are now too costly to modify. Of course science 'works', but then so does mathematics, which has largely relinquished claims to logical foundations or transcendent truth. {24}

24.8. Translation

What are Lakoff and Johnson saying but that there is no one central interpretation? Use different turns of speech — as we do naturally in our everyday lives — and the 'meaning' alters. Without thinking twice we translate from one mind-set to another. We have probably always done so. {25} Speech

started as a primary function in oral societies. There was no 'content' behind the expressions. Hieroglyphics were not word pictures but mnemonic devices initially, becoming logograms in Egypt and Mesopotamia in third millennium BC, and only later denoting a syllable sound. It was the North Semitic Byblos alphabet of BC 1400 that the ancient Greeks adapted, turning four of the consonants into vowels that allowed entire speech to be placed on the page, when the focus passed from words to invisible ideas.

What of the Iliad and Odyssey? Parry and other scholars showed that Homer's productions were improvisations to music of a vast collection of stock phrases — a procedure still used by Serbian Guslars who can improvise tens of thousands of lines in this way. Plato preferred the new written procedures (castigating poets of the old oral tradition in *The Republic*) but also worried that the very process of writing and learning from texts imprisoned speculation in authoritative interpretations. Meditation was needed to bring the past into the presence, and this may also explain Plato's desire for eternal forms. Classical rhetoricians developed mnemonic devices but it was the north European scholastics who made memory a record of doings that could be examined under confession. In twelfth-thirteenth century Europe the validity of an oath (symbolically the Word of God) is transferred to documents that have legal force.

Translation was not an issue in the classical world: the literate spoke several languages and could interpret (i.e. recast) from one to another. The Christian Church became monolingual to incorporate Greek and Hebrew into the culture of late Antiquity. Indeed, for long centuries, the vernacular spoken by all classes in Europe was a romance language pronounced differently in different places, none of the pronunciations being close to classical Latin. It was never written down, and only in ninth century Germany was an attempt made to create a 'German grammar'. Charlemagne accepted a uniform pronunciation of official

Latin, but this was incomprehensible to his subjects and was therefore repealed. Depositions were taken from the vernacular and written in Latin, and Latin creeds were rendered and remembered in the vernacular. Elio Anonio de Nebrija attempted in 1492 to create a Spanish that was not spoken but served to record speech, his grammar and argument for a standardized Castellano being intended to curb the publication of literature inimical to the crown.

Until comparatively recently — continue Ilich and Sanders {26} — there was no self as such, but only an ‘I’ that glowed into life as it recounted its adventures or told its autobiography. Chaucer claimed a fantastic memory to avoid the Church's injunction against invention, employing also a complex syntax so that listeners were compelled to imagine the page. The first novel to ‘make up facts’ was Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, which undercut the dependence on written testimony to which the work alluded. The work was fiction dressed up as fact, just as Huckleberry Finn asks the reader to believe in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by an illiterate Tom. But his misspellings and incorrect expressions do all the same evoke the great openness and freedom of the meandering Mississippi River, which implies that we are imprisoned by our own mannered language. Coming to modern times, we note that Orwell's Newspeak served as a mechanical substitute for thought, and was therefore a parody of the ‘Basic English’ promulgated in the thirties. And today of course we have the impersonal language of science and business.

24.9. Concluding Thoughts

Where is metaphor grounded? Not in logic, nor literary theory. There is no purely literal language in terms of which metaphor may be evaluated and objectively assessed. Along a broad front in cognitive psychology and social anthropology, metaphor is currently subject to extensive analysis, but the findings can only be partial, and relative to

the discipline involved. What is becoming clearer is that metaphor — like linguistic theory and theories of speech acts — is rooted in the beliefs, practices and intentions of language users.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

25. BIOLOGICAL MODELS

Living organisms may provide better models for artworks than current philosophical concepts or the reductionist approaches of the physical sciences. Living models display two important characteristics. One is a nonlinear nature: their structures are not fixed but continually build on previous states. The other is structural discontinuities: organisms operate on different levels (chemistry, cell metabolism, organ cooperation, interaction with environment, etc.) that are not directly linked.

25.1. Comparisons

Because they evolve and influence later artists, we sometimes talk about the 'life' of a work of art or art movement. Before dismissing this as a figure of speech, we might compare the two: {1}

characteristic	poem	living cell
autonomy	artistic autonomy	discrete entity
reproduction	multiplies through reading and printing	multiplies by breeding
respiration	controls reader expectations	controls energy transfer
nutrition	converts reader interest into fascination	converts food into energy
excretion	suppresses inappropriate meanings	ejects waste products
growth	understanding of reader shifts in time	grows into maturity
responsiveness	changes with appraisal and context	reacts to changes in its surroundings
movement	expands in consciousness of reader	exhibits motion at some level

interaction	interacts with and modifies social environment	interacts with and modifies environment
evolution	movement evolves with new writings	population evolves over time
information content	increases local organization/information content	forms local centre of negative entropy

:Modus Operandi

How, in the mainstream view — i.e. not Mae-Wang Ho's approach (23.11) — do cells carry out their complex processes? Although extraordinarily complicated in detail {1}, the molecular processes have simple strategies. They employ chemical interactions and goodness of molecular fit to create their necessary constituents.{2} When, for example, an enzyme creates a compound from two constituents, A and B, it does so in specific steps. Through its shape and the attraction of surrounding weak forces, the enzyme first induces two molecules to 'dock' on its surface. One is the constituent A; the other is an ATP (adenosine triphosphate) molecule. By careful positioning, the enzyme transfers one of ATP's phosphates to the A constituent, and then discards what remains of the ATP molecule. The enzyme then takes the second constituent B into a nearby docking site, breaks off the phosphate joined to the A molecule, and transfers the energy created to a bond between constituent A and B. The spent phosphate is then discarded (to form another ATP molecule in time), and the new compound, A-B, is released by the enzyme. The process repeats with another AB creation, conducted mindlessly but efficiently by the laws of physics.

Communication between cells proceeds in much the same way, involving interactions between compounds that obey the laws of game theory, and which are governed by flow of

information considerations. There is no 'invisible hand' operating at cell level: molecules have simply 'learned' to operate together through trial and error over the eons of geological time. Success on the molecular level is explained by the laws of physics. Success on the species level is explained by the theory of evolution. No other process is needed.

Essentially, we don't know how poetry makes its appeal, or why we find certain things beautiful. We can name certain characteristics that make a poem successful — originality, deep feeling, masterful expression, etc. — but we can only frame these characteristics in words than are used more generally than their deployment in poetry.

Moreover, we cannot by logic convince a sceptical reader that they apply in a particular case, nor use these characteristics to directly build a poem. Composition is invariably by trial and error, the 'rules' of prosody, rhyme, stanza shape, imagination, freshness etc. being applied later to understand why the piece is not fulfilling its potential. As is said in poetry workshops: ' what works, works.'

We respond mentally to poems, through brains that operate through loosely connected units with multiple feedback {3}. Brains evolved like other organs, and natural selection no doubt played its part. It is therefore very unlikely on principle that reductive laws will provide the appropriate model for consciousness, aesthetics and social interaction, living organisms in fact providing closer parallels. Life accepts discontinuities, partial interactions, diversity in representation and chaotic behaviour.

This indeed is what close textural readings of poems disclose. They don't entirely exhibit the organic unity that the New Criticism wanted. Too much can be made of difficulties, but some elements are often discordant, or can only be made harmonious by following cultural expectations. It's at least to the credit of deconstructive critics that we realize

how poems can be misunderstood if the social or cultural contexts are removed, or we are wilfully perverse in our readings. Appreciation of poetry comes slowly, moreover, and the enthusiasms of youth have to give way to a more measured and generous assessment that gradually involves our whole social being.

:Organization

Living things are marvellously organized. Hormones, for example, secreted by specific glands, carry instructions to all parts of the body through the blood stream. The pituitary gland receives signals from the brain, and in response sends out its own hormones, which turn on or off the hormone production in other glands. In the growing foetus, compounds called morphogens affect cells over a wide area, directing the preferential growth of limb, nerve or skin cells in accordance with the concentration of those morphogens. These different cells then migrate to their various sites by following chemical pathways, just as ants do to reach a food source. Organization indeed operates at all levels, but is not centrally directed according to some prepared blueprint. The DNA in chromosomes carries detailed instructions, certainly, but these are codes that create proteins, which then cooperate mechanically.

Crucially, DNA also controls what is not produced. Much of the coding produces proteins that switch off other production processes, either altogether or when the right level is reached.

So it is in poetry. No one supposes that even the perfect lyric has an equal organization, but poems do carry instructions for appropriate reading. We see short lines on a page, and do not read them as prose. We hear the rhymes that mark the line endings, and expect the line entity to bear some relationship to the poem as a whole. Many of the instructions use social and cultural codes, but poets often have to attend

readings and workshops to ensure that the piece is performing as planned. Proof is in the eating.

:Energy Considerations

Life is a local exception to the Second Law of Thermodynamics {2}, which states that the entropy (disorder or uncertainty) {3} of a system can never decrease. {4} But if life creates local knots of greater organization, the Second Law ensures by way of compensation that by-products are dissipated more widely. Animals and plants are eaten, their living matter broken down into simpler constituents, which are then absorbed as food, the unwanted parts excreted.

In this connection we note that poetry, and great art generally, is often a wasteful process produced in times of great personal and social upheaval. Chaucer lived through murderous court intrigues. Shakespeare wrote against the deep divisions in the religious and political fabric of his age. In contrast, tutors at adult education classes have learned not to expect masterpieces from law-abiding folk retired on comfortable pensions. Good work usually draws on dangerous matters and entails a high personal investment.

:Information Considerations

Information theory is a branch of mathematics that deals with the problems of transmitting information efficiently. Shannon's famous entropy function {5} represents the least number of symbols required to code for the outcome of an event regardless of the method of coding. It is therefore a unique measure of the quantity of 'information', this 'information' being a decrease in entropy.

Originally developed at the Bell laboratories for electronic transmission, the function has been widely applied to computer science, linguistics, cryptography, cognitive psychology, the biological sciences and sociology. Information approaches can be used to solve hermeneutic problems of manuscript authorship {6}, for example, and to

provide measures of the surprising precision of molecular events.

Seen through information theory, living things incorporate an enormous amount of 'information' into their tiny cells. Life seems one of the most information-laden forms in the universe, and it would be laughable to claim the same for poetry. But if poems are seen as knots of higher 'information' content in the web of language then many of the troublesome issues of aesthetics can be sidestepped. We don't have to arbitrate between intellectual content and emotion in a poem, or assess the shaping power of metre and imagery, etc. True, 'information' in this sense is hardly useful to the literary critic, particularly as information theory has nothing to say on the meaning or interpretation of the message transmitted, but the approach does open the door to the questions mathematicians like to ask of life processes — e.g. how is the 'information' content of cells to be measured? why is the metabolism so efficient?

Shannon's key entropy function is fairly straightforward. The entropy is proportional to the negative product of p and $\log p$, where p is the probability that the event observed is purely a matter of chance. How that applies in individual cases can be immensely complicated, but for our purposes we see that lines written in tight rhyme and metre are far less likely to arise by chance than lines of simple prose. Vocabulary is also important. Something like 'I was at the President's this afternoon' is less common in everyday conversation than 'I was at the drugstore this afternoon'. And being less likely, it conveys more 'information'.

Looked at this way, the unexpected vocabulary and fractured syntax of Modernist poetry may be trying to push more 'information' into poetry. When successful, Modernist poems made sense as words on a page, and as references to a wider and more contemporary world. (Green ideas sleep furiously, for example, makes sense in one way but not the other.) They organized on both levels, a difficult undertaking

that we applaud with such approbations as freshness, convincing originality, and telling authenticity.

But only on one level do strict verse forms convey more 'information', and allow the better poetry to be written. We have also to consider a second level, that of vocabulary and contemporary relevance. If the besetting sin of free verse is the prosaic, poetry in strict forms tends continually to lapse into hackneyed verse. Free verse may convey less 'information' on the rhythmic level, but its aims are larger at the level of context. Accordingly, it is judged not on its craftsmanship (which is often elementary, despite protestations to the contrary) but on its organization of everyday language. Tone, naturalness, aptness to the occasion, expression of emotion and motive — traditional aspects of the novelist's and the playwright's craft — become more vital. Done well, free verse comes over better in readings, particularly in our informal age.

Postmodernism is a natural progression. To repair free verse's deficit of 'information' at the rhythmic level, Postmodernist poems may be using a richer rich bric-a-brac of contemporary images. A larger vocabulary, therefore, even if the 'information' concept requires that vocabulary to say something relevant. When it doesn't — and that is often the case in amateur work — then the poet is forgetting that originality is only a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Is 'information' a valid concept in literature? Probably, and for this reason. Seen as biological entities, human beings are animals that use language as guides to action. Information is essential to us, and we dislike lies and misrepresentation. Poetry is not exempt from 'Information' demands, though we may look for a tighter fusion of text and context.

: Operation Levels

Is evolution purely blind, just random mutations filtered over time by breeding advantage? Reductionists believe so, but

must allow a caveat. At the molecular level (the blind watchmaker view {7}), the process is purely mechanical. Thousands of processes take place every minute in and around the cell, with only the rarest mistake benefiting the organism and so being retained by evolution. But at higher levels the process is a different one, with natural selection applying to the interaction of organism with environment. The two processes operate independently — a point worth emphasizing because current thinking in the humanities has blurred the distinction.

Consider literary theory. Prior to Saussure (6.2), linguistics could not account for the random nature of linguistic change, in which there seemed no pattern or purpose. After Saussure, the puzzles remained, but the emphasis was on how languages actually functioned in practice. Like pieces on a chess board, words simply fulfilled certain rules and functions. A language may well have mutated by chance, such random changes being retained because they served useful purposes, but that was beside the point: linguistics did not need to speculate on matters for which the evidence was largely missing.

Unfortunately, Structuralism (6) then applied the reductionist approach, and tried to subsume language under extended binary codes, lumping together the very different modes of communication between human beings as 'texts'. Predictably, Poststructuralism (7-9) overreacted, still keeping the simplification to texts, but denying that words could have any referential function at all. They argued that Saussure had shown that words fulfilled certain rules and opportunities, and these rules and opportunities were the only reality. But Saussure had not shown this. Like the molecular biologist focusing on cell operations, he had simply concerned himself with how language operates on the level of language. That he had largely left out account the social purposes of language does not mean that those purposes do not exist, and indeed the games that

deconstruction can play with meaning show their importance.

Perhaps it wasn't science that inspired the radicals. The Russian formalists (whose concepts were adopted by Jakobson and Structuralism: 38.4) studied the ways in which literary language differed from speech and normal prose, but it suited the polemics of the Poststructuralists to ignore those differences. Once flattened into texts, literature belonged to the people and could be removed from privileged groups. From the rules governing all texts could be deduced ways of detecting social, racial and gender discrimination in individual cases, allowing guidelines to be established for political correctness in publishing and the media.

Consider a less contentious example: rhythmic analysis. The aim of Cureton and others is to distinguish between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable as verse. The approach derives from Chomsky's universal grammar (39), and the end product is rules: the elegant and comprehensive rules that science requires, mathematically expressed if possible. Yet the science here is again reductionist. The life sciences are not exempt from the laws of physical science, but the laws operate differently — over time, with elements of randomness and selection by distinct levels of criteria. Cureton's approach may or may not be successful, but is of limited use to the practising poet. Good lines are not created by rules, but out of the auditory imagination, the rules serving later to check what the ear discerns.

:Feedback and Interaction

Viewed as populations, organisms do not simply occupy an environment, but operate as complex systems that interact with and modify their surroundings {7}. Nowhere is this more obvious than with human beings {8}. And unlike other animals, humans have language and consciousness: they create concepts that modify their behaviour.{9}

That is the view of biologists like David Sloan Wilson, {10} who have criticized the 'tough-minded' approaches of recent years that would make genes, and genes only, the determining factors. We should then expect human beings, the most complex of animals, to have the largest number of chromosomes. But they don't, far from it. {13} Even the simplest organisms, bacteria, can cooperate so closely that the colony is the only meaningful unit. Altruistic behaviour in groups is also well documented — the lookout animal that gives the warning cry though putting itself at risk by attracting the predator's attention. Reductionist theories provide neat solutions, but life is not so tidy.

It was for this reason that Edwardian literary critics studied poems in the contemporary setting. To judge a particular work, something had to be known of the poet's life, circumstances, and aims. Understandably, perhaps, given the science of the day, the New Critics wanted sharper rules, and appealed to psychology to remove the larger considerations. But whatever the justification, the analyses were not wholly successful, becoming only more ingenuous and artificial. Poems grow in the interconnecting web of words used by living people, and that must always involve issues beyond the mere complexities of language itself.

If poems resemble living organisms, where's the evidence that poems do indeed interact with and modify their environment? First there is the phenomenon of artistic movements: formality in eighteenth century poetry, reflected in architecture, painting and private correspondence, a twentieth century preoccupation with the common man, seen in the debunking of idealism and the preference for the demotic voice in literature. Today we find an eclecticism in architecture, collages of received images in contemporary painting, the abrupt juxtaposition of styles and unliterary elements in Postmodernist poetry.

But if broad artistic movements need no amplification, interaction of those movements with other events is harder

to document. Contemporary poetry has become a coterie interest, and we have to go back to Tennyson to see how his *Idylls of the King* influenced the Pre-Raphaelites, and through them not only styles in interior design but the high-mindedness in civic life brutally extinguished by the First World War.

:Community Considerations

Limited space and food supplies ensures that only a few species will occupy any given ecological niche, and in fact evolution often proceeds by fits and starts. For millions of years species remain unchanged, but then suddenly evolve to take advantage of changed conditions. But though life may repeat itself in general (insects, bats, pterodactyls, and birds all developed flight) the exact same forms do not reappear. New species face new types of competition, and have inevitably to be slightly different.

Literary genres and examples also have their ecological niche. The public has limited time to appreciate an incessant supply of artwork, and the artwork itself must also join a community of interests: what doesn't illuminate that community's beliefs is not accepted. Poems written in outmoded forms may be aired in workshops but are not easily published. There may be nothing intrinsically wrong with them, and it's unhelpful to call them passé or pastiches, but they simply don't draw on the communality of interests and expectations that make up the contemporary literary scene. The literary community is every bit as conservative as the scientific, moreover, and for the same reason. To accept the aberrant poem risks undermining the paradigm of 'right thinking' that presently holds sway, and so weaken the standing of work in which authors, critics and the reading public have invested a good part of their lives.

:Rate of Change

But why are there shifts in taste at all? Why do we value the poetry of Góngora, say, or César Vallejo, far more highly

than did their contemporaries? What causes such an evolution in taste?

From a reductionist perspective, no foresight enters into evolution. Populations evolve as genetic variations appear and the ecological niches to be exploited. Nothing more is needed. Each individual of a particular species has its own set of genes, moreover, which permit variety within the general need for interbreeding. The sum of all genes in a population is the gene pool, and it is the change over time of the gene pool that constitutes evolution.

Now the key point. Small gene pools are more readily influenced by genetic change than are large ones — obviously, as the changes are not so easily swamped by others. And since it is overall change in the gene pool that counts, evolution naturally proceeds faster in small populations, which is a theoretical deduction supported by the facts.

That may explain the dizzy rate of change in the twentieth-century. By rejecting the conventional, avant-garde artists forced the pace. They restricted what could be accepted, and what sectors of society could be served. Most importantly, they restricted membership, thereby diminishing still further the 'gene pool' of beliefs or practices. It was the very thinness of the work, and its limited appeal, that fostered novelty, therefore, not simply a 'necessary response to a changing world'. Sometimes the movements espoused change for change's sake, when they rapidly burned themselves out. Sometimes they found a congenial niche — generally helped by the media and consumerism — when they became a dominant style, ruthlessly destroying the remnants of earlier standards. In the visual arts the process is much clearer, of course, and critics developed a plethora of labels to protect movements from 'unenlightened' criticism. The work was insubstantial? — minimalism. Only raw daubs of emotion? — expressionism. No focus or seriousness — all over art or Postmodernism. Modernism's

aristocracy of taste was extended to the informed gallery-going public, provided that public was ready with its cheque-books.

25.2. Philosophical Dimensions

The above is a straightforward reductionist account — though we should note many different views on entropy. Nonetheless, the sheer scale of complexity in metabolism has encouraged the search for alternative outlooks. Some biologists, influenced by complexity theory, see life as an emergent form. Others, usually Catholic philosophers building on the work of Thomas Aquinas, go back to Aristotle's notion of 'substantial form'. {11} The notion is difficult for the modern mind to grasp, but 'substantial form' is the primary actualisation of a substance, which combines with 'primary matter' to give the 'unified actual substance'. Substantial form is what makes the substance the kind of thing it is and so act the way it does. And where the reductionist method breaks a substance into simple parts that can be represented mechanically, 'substantial form' takes the complex operating substance (e.g. cell, organism, community) as the primary, irreducible entity.

Of course that helps a rapprochement between religion and science, and there is indeed some awareness that cell operations cannot be understood in isolation. {12} Their individual processes depend on the processes surrounding them, and so on the unified operation of their enclosing cell. The DNA of a dinosaur could be unravelled, for example, but a dinosaur couldn't be grown by inserting manufactured DNA into the cell of a living animal, but only into the cell of a living dinosaur. More prosaically, genome studies have learnt that genes operate in tandem with each other, requiring cells to be studied in their life operations, and computer models built to capture the ciphered text that genes follow. Nonetheless, the individual components, structures and dynamics of

genes have also to be identified, so that genomics is not adopting substantial form exactly.

The importance for poetry? Perhaps that the approach of the New Criticism was not essentially wrong, but only much too simple. Living cells are not harmonious structures throughout, but have time-dependent elements that operate in odd ways that can be disruptive. We need to appreciate how and why exactly the various elements of a poem pull together, and for this we need a better understanding of brain physiology, human communication and social behaviour. Nonetheless, until then, we can still grant autonomy to a poem, and perhaps be more cautious in believing that quality is the sole reason for a poem's survival.

25.3. Conclusions

These are speculative suggestions, but important ones. As noted in complex systems (36.3), sociology (26), metaphor research (24), and brain functioning (23), literature needs to understand the sciences (34) better if it wishes to borrow its methods and kudos.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

26. SOCIOLOGY OF POETRY

26.1. Introduction

The arts, being social activities, have naturally attracted sociological analysis. {1} Long ago, Max Weber regarded art as a substitute for religion in advanced bourgeois societies, and that claim is often repeated in public funding of theatres, galleries, workshops and the like. Culture, if not art, {2} is a desideratum of western societies, and the boundaries between art, culture and entertainment are not easily drawn. And if art is not justified as a spiritual good, then it should at least improve the quality of life. {3} Money is not only a claim on services, but the final arbiter in free markets, so that even the most talented artist must find a commercial standing in a society not becoming noticeably more egalitarian or intelligent. {4}

26.2. Fashion

And what of fashion? It is idle to deny that even the most demanding of the arts escapes the stock-market of intellectual fashion, or that what we profess to read does not reflect our education, social aspirations, perhaps even the sort of people we shall eventually become. Since we cannot read more than the smallest fraction on offer, we increasingly rely on reviews, which can be anything but fair or thorough. Indeed, some schools reject the whole notion of quality, seeing it as an elitist straitjacketing by a dominant, white, middle-class society. {5}

What makes something catch on? Post your answers to MGM or HarperCollins. Everyone wants to know. {6} Certain ingredients need to be present, but their mix is uncertain. Films are enormously expensive, and have to score with the public within a few days of release: hence the 30% of budget devoted to publicity. Publishers research the market, but are often surprised by the runaway bestseller which taps into something that has escaped analysis.

Could epidemiology help? An enormous amount of public money has been poured into studying the spread of disease and its prevention: {7} {8} {9} could not those findings be applied to the fashion industry in all its forms? Only a few anthropologists seem to think so. {10}

Is there any further point to fashion? That question has often been asked of the clothes industry, which seems increasing to parody the serious arts. By contemporary standards, the sixteenth-century poem is ridiculously overdressed: made of the finest material (deep argument), elaborately and painstakingly finished (craft), the product of a leisured (elitist) education that emphasized the social divide (client-patron). Poetry today is equally functional, but serves a wider spectrum: the decently churchgoing (Patience Strong style), the busy middle-class consumer (journalistic styles), ethnic minorities (rap and performance poetry), the socially committed (agi-prop poetry), the older generation (traditional), the trendier intellectual elite (Postmodernist) and so on, each with subdivisions blurred by continual social change. But note the word 'serves'. The poetry does not merely reflect sectional interests, but furthers them, gives them representation, allows symbiosis between groupings and their literary representations.

And that may explain the sometimes odd results of poetry festivals, competitions and publications. The Patience Strong school is often versified platitudes, inspiring little homilies that are not untrue but repeat what has been said in church magazines so many times before. The journalistic styles seem often no more than pleasing flippancies, a breezy reassurance that the world is indeed wholly contained in clichés taken from the Sunday supplements. Poetry of the ethnic minorities, though aggressively individual, often descends to a doggerel crude even by Victorian standards. The socially committed poetry has no answer to the world's manifest cruelties and injustices but to sweep away all the structures that give society its functioning purposes.

Traditional poetry aspires to the graces of an Edwardian country house party but sees no need for its verities to earn their living in the harsh contemporary world. Postmodernist poems too often avoid all commonplaces of thought and diction to arrive at the merely vacuous and arbitrary.

What do people find in all this? each school asks of its competitors. But no matter how glaring to outside observers may be the shortcomings, each of the various poetries has its devotees and cheerleaders. Not simply the best, but the only poetry worth the name. Why is this? Why can an audience come away from a poetry reading full of enthusiasm without having understood more than a few phrases? Why are poetry magazines purchased when the work commonly lacks the elementary skills demanded by a local newspaper? Why are large prizes awarded in poetry competitions for offerings that seem not only bad but hardly a poem at all? The general public may shrug their shoulders and say 'that's modern poetry for you' but practitioners need answers.

Because these matters have little or nothing to do with literature as such. Poetry schools and movements are communities. They offer companionship, reassurance, common purpose and social identity. Is that so unexpected or reprehensible, or so different from any trade or business convention? The quality of presentations varies, but no one seriously questions their value, or indeed the underlying articles of faith. Participants come to have their beliefs elaborated, extended and strengthened. They do not come to have them questioned by Jeremiahs or doubting Thomases.

Moreover, these events offer material rewards. The purchasers of little books of heart-warming verse can sit down to tea afterwards and discuss ways of mutually assisting in sales of each other's collections. Adjudicators rightly see competitions as the community's seal of approval on their literary standing. Perplexities over Postmodernist

poetry are needed for literary theorists to spin their webs of abstruse conjecture. And so on. Promotions may be temporary and unjustified, but staying-power is not an issue, as today's prize in a consumerist society is tomorrow's throwaway. More poets may have a shorter burst of recognition, but the show is always moving on. And since quality is a bourgeois conception, that is indeed how it should be. Live in the moment, enjoy it, and then do something different.

But what precisely determines the direction fashion takes? There have been many theories, none very helpful. Veblen and (much later) Baudrillard saw women's fashion as dysfunctional, pointless, conspicuous waste. Carlyle regarded them as extensions of the primitive's practice of body decoration, to which anthropologists added a progression from ritual to religion to secular seriousness and finally to hedonism. For Roland Barthes (7), fashion was a system of signs devoted to naturalizing the arbitrary. For René König fashion obscured the body's regression into age and ugliness. {11} Naturally, fashion had a sexual element, but that says very little as sex is itself a multifaceted and somewhat cultural phenomenon. Clothes may be sexual fetishes, into which both sexes project magical properties. Or they may be vehicles for creations of more varied kinds, i.e. art, when we return to the initial enquiry. {12}

Given academia's tendency to be over-clever, if not waywardly ingenious, the argument has force. But of course, as with the institutional theory of art as a whole, the art for artists approach doesn't protect us from charlatans, or from a cosy mafia of interested parties. But then neither do the more traditional approaches. Academia has its own careerists and factional infighting, and hasn't been too good at recognizing quality or originality: most writers in its literary canon are safely dead. Perhaps we should simply accept that academia and the arts are different communities, with different approaches, skills and ambitions.

Could we not go further — give up any search for intellectual foundations, and simply study how the relevant communities actually arrive at their judgements? Academia's claim of disinterested enquiry and evaluation may only be the rules by which the game of power and status is played, or at least constrained. Bishop, knight and pawn all have their rules of movement, but no one supposes that correctly moving the pieces is the sole object of chess. Study of scientists at work has indeed shown how research really operates, which is not entirely as claimed or written up in scientific papers. {13}

26.3. Art as Knowledge

Does art give us knowledge of the world? Most would emphatically say yes. Not intellectual knowledge, exactly, not knowledge as a construal of relations between abstract entities representing human experience, but something more authentic, immediate and sensory. Art is surely the great peacemaker, moreover, bridging ideological differences and making real our common humanity. When we remember how bitter and bloodstained have been the wars between religions, each claiming knowledge of unknowables, should we not be wary of the whole process of abstraction from experience, of what really constitutes knowledge? Could we not say that logic and argument were human propensities, something essential to us, but not wholly so transcendent that we must follow them regardless of other perceptions and inclinations? And if we look at what arguments must derive from, intellectual foundations, do we not find, even in the most abstract of disciplines — mathematics, philosophy, mathematics, science — eventually only lacunae, paradoxes, matters resolved in working agreements between practitioners? In short, rather than dress up knowledge in high-minded principle and rarefied abstraction, should we not look closely at how the communities creating knowledge do in fact go about their business? Possibly knowledge is not ultimately decided on argument and

abstraction, but on the varied operation of many human needs and desires.

No doubt there are problems. Knowledge becomes not only what is found but how it is found: the two become interdependent. Worse still, it may be relativist. Philosophy, which naturally abhors the sociologizing of knowledge, pounces on the difficulties of relativism. If we say that all knowledge is a matter of perspectives, then even this statement is a matter of perspective, and therefore not necessarily true. Relativism undermines itself. {14} But even logic is not free of paradoxes, and there are many underdetermined scientific problems (fluid flow, ac current analysis, etc.) 'solved' by successive approximation. Certainly, if social, religious and political communities differ in what they regard as true — or even what counts as knowledge — the academic communities are also exclusive and partisan, operating like private clubs.

The sociology of knowledge was inspired by the work of Karl Mannheim who tried to reconcile the clash of ideology that was so obvious and distressing a feature of interwar European politics. Subsequent workers have been happy to document the ways knowledge can be perverted or manipulated by social pressures, but Mannheim's central thesis, that knowledge largely is a social phenomenon, has not won acceptance. Doubtless knowledge takes place in discursive contexts with shared intellectual histories. And there may indeed be spheres of reality (religious, professional, everyday life) in which knowledge is shared and a common language helps to crystallize and stabilize subjectivity. {15} But sociologists are also scientists of a sort, and generally embrace a realist philosophy: that the outside world exists and its hard, brute facts cannot be explained away or absorbed by our responses to them. Social activities, like language, may mediate in and colour how we see that world, but they do not entirely create it. Some physiological processes are basic to all of us. What we call

'red' differs between races — the words and where the boundaries are drawn — but red and blue are not used interchangeably.

But knowledge is still authenticated in and by social practices, so that the point at issue may be how knowledge gained by individuals and communities is conveyed to other individuals and communities. Language is not an inert medium, and many complicated procedures operate in reducing observations to logic and mathematics. Even observation is never raw, moreover, but mediated by training and cultural presuppositions. In short, what needs to be studied is how we translate between spheres of reality, realizing that truth is not the residuum of argument but the totality of experience, a totality of which all languages must be an incomplete expression.

26.4. Art as Persuasion

That totality is recognized by art. But since the arts are given different expressions from one society to the next, should we not regard art as a shaper of human response, but deny it any larger claims — i.e. insist that the exterior world and how we respond to it are two distinct entities? Science would be happy with the division, which is also strengthened by the eighteenth century and continuing distinction between the fine and applied arts. The fine arts do not serve any end beyond themselves, and are simply called upon to exhibit beauty, expressive power, organic unity and aesthetic independence. We can enjoy the beauty of *The Divine Comedy* without accepting the medieval world-view, just as we appreciate Eliot's greatness as a poet without subscribing to his condescending and occasionally anti-Semitic views. {16}

But the division is unreal. What we know of the exterior world is through our responses, inevitably so. Even logic and mathematics may derive from our constitutional inability to accept concepts like something being x and not-x at one and

the same time. What the exterior world is really like, beyond our senses and understanding, we cannot know, though quantum physics, chaos theory and cosmology all suggest that the full picture would defeat imagination. And concepts like beauty, consciousness, knowledge seem neither to be wholly 'out there', nor wholly subjective. If we wish to see art as a shaper of responses, then we shall have to specify which responses we are talking about.

Those left over after science (34) and mathematics (33) have made their selection is one answer. The responses of science are repeatable observations. The responses of mathematics are cerebral, synthetic a priori, non-sensory. But that solution, obvious and true to a large extent, still overlooks many difficulties. Considerable training is needed for scientific observation, not amounting to indoctrination, but very much more than we remember from our school science days. And mathematics in its higher reaches needs unusual gifts and long, long practice. Are equivalent gifts or training absent from the humanities? Clearly not, but there may still be one crucial difference. Decision procedures in science are much more categorical and straightforward. Experts may initially disagree, but there exist other experiments and understandings that may settle the matter in a way not possible for critics arguing, say, the merits of Henry James's novels. Scientific answers do not finally rest on personal preferences.

But that is only because of gross simplifications, retort the humanities. The larger, more human and significant elements have been ignored. Consider the scientific revolution. Its roots were natural magic, and none of its great originators — Copernicus, Kepler, Newton — entirely banished occult properties from their concepts. What are the fundamental forces of physics but the old sympathies and antipathies of the medieval world view given mathematical expression, marvellously refined and extended, subjected to rigorous testing, but still, however substantiated, however

neatly applying in mathematical formulae, entities which remain hidden and without reason for existing? And isn't the quantum view of matter also occult in the extreme, counterintuitive, impossible to conceive outside its mathematics expression, reached by thousands of arduous man-years of investigation and thought? Very well: the basic building blocks of reality may be inert matter, without purpose or reason for existing, but is that not an inheritance from the early days of the Royal Society: {17} a gentlemanly disdain for the simple beliefs of the poorer classes, the adoption of an unadorned, masculine style of exposition which reflects the no-nonsense styles of the up-and-coming merchant classes, one which drives a wedge between facts and emotions, and which is still regarded as objective and selfless, though in fact anything but? The limits of reductive approaches are clear in the new science of complexity, but the aberrations have long been obvious. Rather than regard animals as simpler human beings, science turned evolution on its head. Animals evolved from complex, purposeless assemblies of inert matter that suffered random mistakes in inheritance. Human beings are merely more complicated assemblies.

Consider the effect on poetry. Contemporary schools of literary theory borrow this regressive approach of science, and build language from simple codes, fruitless attempting to find the characteristics of literature in what they have already excluded. As we progress from physics through to biology, psychology, sociology to politics and literature we find an increasing weave of complication, interpretation and social commentary that fulfils our human need for place and understanding, but the two ends of the spectrum are very different. Only a little in science is reflexive. A chemical substance does or does not boil at a certain temperature under certain conditions, and that is a fact which can be unambiguously verified in a way not open to a Marxist or New Criticism reading of a poem. No amount of tampering

with evidence, procedures and viewpoint will discount the experimental result. Or, put another way, the amount of tampering required amounts to a complete rewriting of the western intellectual tradition, with nothing obvious to replace it with.

All observations, interpretations and outlooks may be culture-laden, but that culture is not arbitrary or crudely imposed. We arrive at viewpoints by complex routes, and we shift our viewpoints as experience requires. Which comes first, outlook or observation? The chicken and egg dilemma that literary theory makes so much of is a problem which living creatures do not actually face. Nor, biologically, could they. The insistence that the process of literary evaluation be logically transparent, or it be discarded altogether, seems sometimes to border on the either-or outlook of religious fanaticism. To the extent that literature differs from everyday discourse, it is in its larger significance and greater self-knowledge. Both of these ask for a healthy knowledge of how language is actually used in wider departments of life. Deny that, and poetry slides into what it may already be becoming: thin entertainment in dispersed intellectual ghettos.

26.5. Wider Issues

Why doesn't poetry come more centre stage? The former queen of the arts is not noticeably bashful. No indeed: like dethroned royalty, poetry is very concerned that the deference be kept up, that the world meet poetry on poetry's terms. Perhaps there's nothing behind the elaborate facade of Postmodernism (7-9), but, paradoxically, having disdained to give any proper account of itself, {18} its poetry may be sharpening the divide between the intellectually rich and the less endowed. It may be that, with the collapse of communism, the world is indeed being restructured on ideological lines. {19} Why, in the current flood of literary theory, are the obvious needs not being addressed? Why is

there little or no justification for the extreme views being adopted — no casework, proper surveys, impartial reviews of the evidence, studies to work out the practical consequences of the ideologies? Not, surely, that the works are essentially pamphleteering. Or that some hard work would be required of their authors. No, but because proper scholarship might open the door to rapprochement, and so weaken the whole Modernist stance of lofty independence. Having been marginalized by unthinking, crass market forces, the arts will narrow discussion still further by rewriting the ground rules of debate.

26.6. Literature As Money

We often speak of the currency of ideas, and literature is indeed something created by labour and imagination from the raw material of words. In fact the closer parallels are between capitalism and Modernism. Both have transformed the world, and remain the dominant theories in their respective fields. And both can have dangers if pursued in a ruthlessly ideological fashion, to the exclusion of everything else.

Neo-liberal policies have brought stunning improvements to third world countries, notably China and India, but they have also widened social inequalities abroad and destroyed middle class jobs at home. {20} Even the market or profit motif is not the final arbiter to those who have studied economics beyond business school persuasions. {21} Companies use selling strategies that have little to do with the clearing price, {22} and there are fundamental problems in the familiar supply and demand curves, most notably the wholly artificial manner the demand curve is derived. {23} In short, economics is far more complex and fascinating than is assumed by the popular press, and — to the extent that there exist parallels between money and language: both are enabling and valuing mechanisms — its study offers some insight into how critical theory might be more constructively

approached. What follows is a digression, which unfortunately must be rather long and detailed if it is to have any substance.

Far more than is generally realized, the arguments for and against capitalism have been extensively debated in three centuries of European thought. {24} Though his own business activities were often deplorable, Voltaire (1694-1778) did much to make trade respectable. Commerce encouraged men of widely different faiths and political opinions to cooperate peacefully for the good of all, and the merchant was more conducive of public virtue than kings, courtiers, prelates and generals. Adam Smith (1723-90) detailed the advantages of free markets, whose 'invisible hand' (through multiple divisions of labour impossible to entirely follow or legislate for) led self-interest to produce efficiently what was most needed by society — a society that nonetheless required wise government with social cohesion, equitable laws and the protection of property. {25}

Critical theory has also given poetry the freedom to escape from rigid forms inherited from history and social convention.

Justus Möser (1720-94) was an early critic of what is now known as 'globalisation'. Rather than facilitating diversity in goods and customs, the market *destroyed* local cultures. Standardized laws in Europe — needed if the merchant was not to simply move to the most advantageous countries for his particular trade — meant doing away with local laws and customs that gave countries their individual well-being. Honour, property, livelihood and political participation were intertwined in Europe, and their weakening must also weaken the status quo. Sweeping rationalisation, however worthy, overlooked how people actually conducted and saw themselves. A person's status, largely hereditary, depended not only on his occupation, but his sense of who he was, his duties and obligations. In Osnabrück, where Möser spent his life, the town council comprised merchants, lawyers, clergymen and government officials. Guilds controlled a wide

variety of skills and trades. Nobles could not engage in trade but lived on their rural estates, drawing their income from feudal dues from serfs and independent peasants, both of whom were largely self-supporting. All that was threatened by the merchant class who encouraged a taste for fashions and unnecessary luxuries. Because status was essentially based on land-owning — from nobles, who governed their estates, to serfs, who were tied to the soil — wage labour was a particular threat to Osnabrück. Every year saw 6,000 peasants leave the bishopric for work in nearby Holland, and their wages helped many marry at 20 rather than the customary 30, so leaving them exposed to the whims of a changing labour market. Many lived on the edge of subsistence, and only harsh laws would keep them from thievery and begging. Osnabrück also had its cottage industries, notably linen weaving and dyeing, and the wages of this winter work again caused distortions in the social order. {26}

Men became vulnerable to changing economic conditions, just as contemporary poetry has become dependent on changing literary theory.

Edmund Burke (1729-97) also sought to conserve society, but his England was already highly trade-orientated, and dominated by a commercially-minded landed gentry. Throughout his life he championed the profit motive, but also campaigned against intellectuals with an exaggerated conception of reason, and against money men unrestrained by legal or cultural responsibilities. Burke was an Irish intellectual who, through patronage, entered and greatly influenced Parliament, which he saw as a deliberative body not representing constituents but governing for the country as a whole. His speeches, carefully drafted, were delivered in the House, and then published to influence public opinion further. His main targets were an abstract reason shorn of social context (which led to 'the Fairy Ground of Philosophy') and financiers in the City of London who made money to the

exclusion of all else, i.e. were socially irresponsible. Burke believed in the free market, and fought against all restraints, even those intended to provide relief for the poor, against profiteering, for example, and international trade restrictions. Prices should be negotiated between employers and the employed, for example, and not set by well-meaning but uninformed justices of the peace, who generally made matters worse. No doubt the poor envied and resented the rich, but acted against their own interests in overturning societies that accumulated needful capital and made everyone richer. His greatest invective was reserved for the British East India Company, which ruled large areas of the subcontinent, exercised a monopoly on its trade, and purchased blatant influence in Parliament. In a similar vein was his great polemic of 1790, *Reflections of the Revolution in France*, which charged lawyers and speculators with promoting abstract principle to destroy the social fabric of the country and expropriate church property. The cold calculations that made for success in finance were disastrous for government. The protection of property was an important function of a state, and the new French government should be a balance of the new and old. Otherwise (as Burke correctly predicted) the government would lack authority and, failing to raise taxes, would quickly descend to anarchy — leading to the massive use of force and eventually military rule. Almost everything that makes life worthwhile, he argued, is a result of society, its inherited codes, knowledge and institutions. 'The restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights.' Culture is then a means of sublimation, diverting the passions to more elevated goals, and creating restrictions on the expression of domination and self-gratification. Society is not a contract between its members, moreover, but an inherited complex of duties and obligations. {27}

Poetry is also a complex matrix of old and new, and it too has duties and obligations.

Far from being a pure theoretician, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1823: 14) was a practical philosopher, educator and administrator, taking a key role in the modernized Prussian state created after its defeat by Napoleon in 1806. Hegel accepted Burke's conservatism, but examined more closely the institutions needed for an ethically-ordered society. How is the natural self transformed by historically-developed social and political structures through which the cultural norms are conveyed to individuals and internalised by them? What was the ethical order that created our habitual dispositions to act well towards one another, so that duties coincided with feelings? Unlike the Romantics, Hegel did not view duties and obligations as limitations on the real self, but as a means of giving the turbulent inner life a rewarding sense of direction. He welcomed the bourgeois society where everyone is treated as self-sufficient individuals but that society also included property rights, the market, the judiciary and police to enforce the law. The rights to control one's own person and property are essential, but they are not innate, growing rather from evolving cultural understandings. State administration requires taxes, but no citizen pays taxes willingly, i.e. naturally. Private property allows for the expression of individual preferences and personalities, but the term 'private' also implies that no one has rights over other peoples' property. That was the merit of the modern age: rulers could not confiscate property or exact arbitrary taxes. The market was a social institution, and because an individual's need can only be met through the work of others, the individual must orientate himself towards others and make his actions consonant with their needs. Beyond supplying basic wants — food, housing and clothing — the market created products answering to man's imagination and historical evaluation. This ever-increasing refinement of wants was open-ended, and ever evolving. Entrepreneurs were a major force in expanding the imagined wants of consumers: the market not only satisfied wants but

created them too. The search for markets to meet products in oversupply led to ventures abroad. {28}

Poetry, like all literature, is also a social institution.

Karl Marx (1818-83) is the best-known critic of the market, which he based on ethical considerations. (41) Marx rejected Hegel's view of mediating institutions, and envisaged a society in which money making and religious and national differences were all abolished. When an academic career seemed untenable, Marx turned to journalism, which enabled him to travel and see society as it really was. He was soon horrified. Capitalism was built on avarice and selfishness. Competition set everyone against everyone else, and society was a fraternity of thieves. Prices were continuously fluctuating because supply and demand also fluctuated, turning everyone into speculators who profited by betting on the misfortunes of others. Markets, even the stock market, were war by other means. Capitalism came down to mindless production governed by the chance nature of supply and demand: the two rarely came into balance, spelling frequent ruin for entrepreneurs and misery for workers. The repetitious, culturally numbing nature that the division of labour called for — so compendiously championed by Adam Smith and others — in fact alienated man from his better self. As the successful bought up the less successful, the rich grew richer, the poor grew poorer and the middle class faced extinction. {29}

Money made from money, however indirectly, was usury, which Marx stigmatised as 'vampirism'. Labour alone mattered, and the quantity of labour accounted for economic value. Profit was surplus value, the difference between selling prices and wages paid, and was therefore 'exploitation'. Of course the factory owner also had other costs to meet: rent — interest on money borrowed, payment for machinery and raw materials — but these were all the result of past labour, what Marx called 'congealed' or 'dead labour'. But as companies reduce costs by investing in more

capital-intensive machinery, they employ correspondingly fewer workers — indeed must to remain competitive and avoid being bankrupted or swallowed up by more profitable concerns. More workers are thrown out of work, and wages inevitably decline with the labour surplus. Marx documented in horrifying detail the wretched lives of the industrial workers in England, though it was not always a balanced picture. Real wages of factory workers rose 17% between 1850 and 1865, for example, and hours worked continued to fall. However hard the immediate prospects were for factory workers — and they were exceptionally hard — Marx's theory of labour blinded him to the long-term prospects. {30} Throughout Europe, in fact, 'marginalist' economists like Menger, Jevons and Walras attacked the very foundations of his theory (though marginalism has its own problems {23}), and Marx himself in his expanding *Capital* never quite answered his critics. Advancing technology in fact opened up new industries — chemical, electrical, communications — which employed more workers rather than fewer, and increased demand for better skills and further education. {29}

Marx's theories were no doubt over-simple, but he documented the exploitation inherent in capitalism, from which Modernism has not escaped. Poetry has many and varied purposes, and surely needs to do more than simply serve as ammunition for the more ideological strains of 'make it new' propaganda. Nor should the purpose of critical theory be to create yet more critical theory, increasingly jargon-ridden and difficult to grasp.

Rather than group contemporary society into two classes à la Marx — business owners versus workers — German political economists of the later 19th century examined how capitalism worked in practice. German society in the last two decades before W.W.I. had grown enormously complicated and prosperous. Helped by state-funded universities and research institutes, German production had increased six-

fold between 1871 and 1914 (Britain only two-fold), and these vast, competitive enterprises had been achieved by mergers, vertical integration and diversification into new products. Division of labour extended into management itself as owner-managed companies became large bureaucracies of skilled administrators. Railroads, mines, steelworks and industrial plant had capital requirements far beyond what was possible with share-owning partnerships, moreover, and joint-stock companies became the rule. By the 1890s, Germany had important commodity exchanges for grain, flour, coffee, cotton and sugar, and the country was importing bread, meat and sugar from Australia and the America at prices European suppliers couldn't match. Commodity futures could also be traded, providing more financial stability, and the practice of arbitrage (buying at one place to sell for a profit at another) was becoming common. The fortunes made in this way were naturally resented by the land-owning and working classes, but Max Weber (1864-1920) argued that the future lay in more of such enterprise. The 1896 controls and restrictions Act (later repealed) were unhelpful, and to call stock exchanges (where 2 million of Germany's 50 million citizens held shares) a modern example of usury was antiquated nonsense. {30}

We should also examine how each poetry community works in practice, how it values and promotes its products.

Georg Simmel's (1858-1918) *The Philosophy of Money* argued that the abstract nature of modern money in fact created an extended web of social and commercial interests, achieving 'what usually only love can do: the divination of the innermost wishes of others, even before he himself becomes aware of them. Antagonistic tensions with his competitor sharpens the businessman's sensitivity to the tendencies of the public, even to the point of clairvoyance, responding to future changes in the public's taste, fashions, interests . . .' Everyone became conscious of everyone else, but the bonds of occupation and social class were loosened

because the individual played a role in multiple and overlapping circles — cultural, social, commercial, scientific, religious and so on, all infinitely subdivided and so impossible to dominate. Indeed the modern citizen was spoilt for choice. Money, moreover, had a 'surplus value', representing not only what is bought with it, but what *could* be bought. Nonetheless, as Matthew Arnold in Britain had argued, acquisition of money was still only a means to an end, certainly not a sensible end in itself. {30}

We should not treat poetry in isolation, but also ask what ends it serves.

In contrast, Werner Sombart (1863-1941) viewed modern capitalism with despair. It destroyed the soul, robbed men of inner peace, soiled their relationship to nature and to the religious faiths of their fathers. In this he saw the hand of Jews with their egoism, self-interest and capacity for abstraction. By these wholly false accusations he prepared the way for Nazi anti-Semitism, itself fuelled by the preponderance of Jews in the leading professions of Weimar Germany. {30}

A persistent anti-Semitism runs through the early Modernist poets.

Nonetheless, In their different ways, Weber, Simmel and Sombart all welcomed W.W.I, which they saw as a 'spiritual turning point', where individual doubts and interests were subsumed in duties to the fatherland. Equally dramatic was the effect of German defeat, of course, when capitalism was largely abandoned, and the country fragmented into extreme versions of left- and right-wing politics. In his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Georg Lukács (41.3) reversed the claims of Marxism to be a strictly scientific analysis of social and economic change, recasting it as a fundamentally different and irreconcilable worldview. Even if Marx's predictions were false, Marxism would still be a valid perspective on life and culture, and should support the

doctrine of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union. {30} Modern life no longer formed a 'totality', and a meaningful existence was impossible in what had become a self-made prison more than a home. Throughout his life, Lukács espoused Marxism in place of the emptiness and moral inadequacy of capitalism, however illogical that position might be, or the reality of life inside the Soviet Union. Workers under capitalism became a mechanical part of the system, unable to see its evils and too willing to compromise their rights for small improvements in pay and conditions. Only thorough and steadfast rejection would serve. From the beginning, he hated the war, which only demonstrated the fundamental inhumanity of nationalism and capitalism. Enraged by four years of senseless slaughter, soldiers and workers had set up revolutionary councils in the major cities of central Europe — Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Budapest — and though they were ultimately unsuccessful in challenging the Social Democrats, Lukács sympathized with their movements, joining the Hungarian communists, and editing their paper. An uncompromising egalitarianism was imposed on Hungary by the Béla Kun government, and after the 'red terror' (which drastically reduced productivity and alienated everyone) came the repressive 'white terror', which obliged Lukács to leave Hungary for Vienna. Thereafter, Lukács went to Berlin, Moscow and finally back to Hungary, where he became the leading exponent of Marxist thought and a major figure in the Hungarian uprising. {31-32}

Modernism also has its irrational aspects, alienating man from his fuller nature.

The same retreat from reason marks the writings of Hans Freyer, but here the flight was towards the political right. Freyer was neither an anti-Semite nor a racist, but came to see the National Socialists as an escape from the dead end of capitalism (as did many intellectuals, including Heidegger, who distrusted language complicit with the social order). In

his student years, Freyer identified with the youth movement, which had thrown off materialistic values, looked for a revitalising relationship with country life, and yearned for a deep community of purpose that was missing from Wilhelmine Germany. For Freyer, the war was an unusually uplifting experience. He emerged a hero, and in later years looked fondly back on his years of command and camaraderie, where he served the people en masse (the Volk). He returned to university life, holding Germany's first chair of sociology at Leipzig in 1925, and writing memorably for a wider audience. Like Hegel, Freyer believed that all human communities, values and natures are products of history, but that history now, he felt, no longer had discernable direction or purpose. There were many such Volks, and none was superior to others because no independent standards existed. But to be born into a particular Volk was nonetheless to be elevated into a consciously affirmed fate, which in turn bestowed purpose on a selfish and otherwise aimless capitalist society. Those Volks coalesced into a resurgent 'total state', a Germany that would wipe out W.W.I defeat and its imposed reparations and trade treaties. That Germany would be all-powerful, a closed, self-sufficient and self-affirming community, and would not avoid war. So Freyer came to advocate the fascist state, to support the rise of Hitler whose autocratic methods cut unemployment and made Germany the first economic power of Europe again. After W.W.II, a deradicalised Freyer rethought his political outlook, but he never embraced capitalism. Institutions were now to provide meaning and purpose, including those of the family, religious traditions and the professions. {32}

Many of the early Modernists espoused autocratic, all-embracing views of literature.

Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) began his teaching career in the final years of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Like many in upper-class circles, he was attracted to the

Nietzschean idea that social development depend on the exceptional individual — the far-sighted, strong-willed and original entrepreneur who will not be understood by the dullard majority, and will inevitably suffer their resentment. Schumpeter taught at the universities of Czernowitz, Graz, and Bonn, served briefly as Minister of Finance in the Austrian government in 1919, and joined the faculty of Harvard University in 1932, teaching there till 1950. He left a Europe falling to socialist ideas and governments, and came to an America in the throes of the Great Depression. Yet capitalism was dynamic, thought Schumpeter, not something resulting from inevitable, abstract laws but created by individuals with a 'will to power'. True leadership demanded not only energy, intelligence and vision, but the ability to inspire, manage and lead men. Socialism was irrational, and could only be seen as a religion. Where was the incentive to strive without vast profits falling to the successful and destitution hounding the unsuccessful entrepreneur? Deprived of property to call their own, or any incentive for social or material betterment, citizens would not maintain the previous production levels, and some coercion would doubtless become necessary. {33}

Nonetheless, socialism might well happen: confiscation and redistribution of consumer goods had an irresistible attraction to the disadvantaged, and more so to intellectuals without practical experience of life. Being concerned with power and status, intellectuals — and here Schumpeter included all who earned their living by thinking: teachers, those over-educated for modest jobs, journalists and moulders of public opinion — might well use the rational enquiry that capitalism encourages to undermine what had been extraordinarily successful. US agricultural output had increased by 50% between 1900 and 1926, and industrial output by 400%. Where the rural worker had languished in poverty, the urban worker could afford canned foods, washing machines, refrigerators, telephones, radios and

even motorcars. Thanks to contraception, upwardly mobile families had sensibly limited their offspring, and spent their earnings on educating them better. True, that prosperity had vanished in the Great Depression, triggered by the October 1929 Stock Exchange crash, but reflecting the reduced buying power of farmers, and the interlinked banking scandals that spread their damage round the world. In Germany, unemployment rose from 4.4 million in 1930 to 5.6 million at the end of 1931. Even in America, unemployment reached levels of 10 million, or nearly 1 in 5. Many blamed the devious selfishness of banks, with which Roosevelt concurred, capitalising on public disaffection to introduce the New Deal, a popular but unsuccessful set of policies. He increased taxes on the rich, and put a surtax on undistributed corporation profits, which was counterproductive. Business cycles were inevitable, and discouraging investment with high taxes only delayed recovery. Through his influential *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* of 1942, Schumpeter looked to a bright future for capitalism, which would rise to its challenges and find new ways of exploiting new resources. Though this would happen (Schumpeter was proved abundantly right, of course: people's lives did improve markedly on both sides of the Atlantic from the 60s) capitalism could well perish of its own success, giving way to some form of public control or socialism. As companies became larger and more complex, the dynamic owner-manager would also give way to armies of managers and the internal politics of bureaucrats, none of whom would be more than wage-slaves to the comfortable status quo. {33}

Some proponents of radical theory deny the whole concept of quality in the arts.

John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) believed the state should be the employer of last resort. His was the most influential economics in the 1930-70 period because Keynes gave economics a high moral purpose and advocated

measures that politicians could profitably use. As the Great Depression only too plainly showed, markets were not self-correcting, and during long slumps the state should find work for the unemployed. Their wages would pay taxes and increase consumer demand, thus encouraging businesses to invest again and take on more people. Though that case was argued in his *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, Keynes was not always clear or consistent. Anticipating Modern Money Theory, he suggested that wage reduction would not reduce unemployment, which was best tackled by increasing government spending (even on projects that gave minimal returns) and running a budget deficit. He was optimistic about capitalism, but hoped it would give rise, in a few generations, to more sensible lives — which he modelled on Bloomsbury Society: an active interest in the arts, cultivated friendship and public service (not unlike the scholar-administrators of imperial China, incidentally). Simmel's view that money had a surplus value he called the 'marginal propensity to save', linked it to usury and thought it primarily responsible for the Great Depression. {34}

Keynes' vision was vindicated by events. Post-war European countries became as prosperous as America had been before the Depression. College education exploded, and new technologies and materials of every sort were the result of free trade, free capital movements and stable currencies. The market ruled, but it was a market guided by governments where corporations compromised with trade unions to ensure affluence for all. {34}

Modernism has triumphed in all areas of poetry. Older, traditional styles are found only in amateur poetry sites and magazines.

Like Lukács, Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979: 41.4) was radicalised by W.W.I., but his ideas found their seedbed in the west. Marcuse was a socialist sympathizer in the Weimar Republic, but he neither joined the Socialist Democratic

Party or the Communist Party, disdaining the last for its authoritarian Stalinist organization. Instead he worked for the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, where he studied the policies of the National Socialist regime. Most observers stressed its repressive nature, but Marcuse was struck by how enthusiastically people embraced the Nazi party and its policies — it advocated premarital sex, a cult of nudity in art and entertainment, more tolerance for illegitimate children and their mothers, and less emphasis on the family for protection, nurture and education. Marcuse continued studying the phenomenon when the Institute moved to America, and his services were sought by the government. The Nazis, he thought, had liberated individuals from social restraints, but also encouraged expression of more sinister instincts. {34}

Marcuse left government service after W.W.II, and taught at Brandeis University from 1954 to 1965, and then at the University of California at San Diego to 1969, when the publication of his *One-Dimensional Man* made him the darling of the New Left. Though better jobs and material improvements had prevented the proletariat uprising — as Marcuse suggested in his *Eros and Civilisation* of 1955 — the larger dimensions of life were unfulfilled by capitalism. In the psychoanalytical language of the time, he explained that man's necessary erotic energy had been reduced to genital sexuality, leaving the rest of the body available for the unpleasant task of earning a living. Certainly there were compensations, but work for many was meaningless, and what should have been a serious drive for change was blunted and diverted by advertising and mass entertainment. The great artists and thinkers of the past were studied as never before, but their challenge was absorbed and neutralized in a welfare state. Even the Soviet Union and communism was a threat largely manufactured to sell the American dream. Indeed his *One-Dimensional Man* saw western society as under slavery to materialist and stultifying

concepts, and the book soon became the bible of hippy drop-outs, students demonstrating against the Vietnam War, and socialist movements in France and Germany. Marcuse's astonishing influence waned after America's withdrawal from Vietnam, but continued quietly among younger academics, who saw politics everywhere and disputed the university ideal of disinterestedness. The anti-capitalist strain further ramified into new fields: radical critical theory, feminism and colonial studies. Thence it spread to modern management manuals that advocated creative and self-organising work groups in place of the older authoritarian and hierarchical structures. {34}

A playful, 'anything goes' attitude is the dominant strain of Postmodernism.

Friedrich August von Hayek (1899-1992) came of age in the anti-capitalist cultures of a 1920s Vienna menaced by both communism and fascism. Though he published his most seminal work in the 1930-70 period when living under western governments that regarded increased social planning as both desirable and inevitable, it was from his native Austria and to two decades of life in Britain, that Hayek drew his outlook and theories. The 1944 *The Road to Serfdom* defended individual freedom against 'collectivism' of all persuasions. With his comrade in arms, Milton Freeman, his was the most important influence on the neo-liberalism movement of the 1970-90 period, but he also concluded that modern liberal societies must be bound together by more than shared cultural commitments: democracy could be a potent threat to social well-being. {35}

Capitalist economies were resourceful and dynamic in the way central planning could never be. Certainly capitalism was unfair: a large number of men worked for a talented few in what they did not want to do — work harder, change their habits and think beyond the immediate present. Prices did not reflect certain knowledge, but were the subjective

evaluations of informed individuals. Markets were based on self-interest, but that interest could be altruistic or selfish. Adam Smith's conception of freedom was too narrow: freedom is the state where everyone uses their knowledge for their own best purposes. Restrictions arose inevitably, and there was no economic realm distinct from those of politics, religion and culture. Nor could government planning avoid impinging on and restricting those freedoms, however well intentioned. Except perhaps in time of war, the state had no overall or moral purpose: it was simply a piece of utilitarian machinery intended to help individuals develop their gifts, ambitions and personalities for themselves. {35}

Heretical and alarming as these thoughts seemed in the 1960s, they became orthodoxy as stagflation afflicted western democracies with rising inflation and declining output. Keynesian policies no longer seemed to work, and taxpayers began to mutiny at high levels of government spending. Strikes swept Ronald Reagan to power in the USA and Margaret Thatcher to Conservative victory in Britain. Entrepreneurship was again encouraged. The state enterprises were reined back, and trade union power curbed. Tariffs were reduced to encourage international trade. The Soviet Union dissolved when no longer held together by military repression: the truth of the socialist system, its falsification of output statistics and lack of incentive, could no longer be hidden. {35}

Postmodernism in poetry also stresses an individual outlook free of social obligations.

As {24} many have noted, academic thought has little influence on the political scene, and what was illuminating, subtle and qualified in books and articles is commonly flattened into simplistic slogans for everyday use. We live today in societies under many tensions, pulled conflicting ways by our jobs, professions or trade unions, our religions, political beliefs, family needs, and personal aspirations. None of the thinkers summarized here, even the most

enthusiastic champions of capitalism, viewed the market as other than a social institution representing ethical, cultural and political needs, and therefore quite unlike the mantras repeated by the business press.

Mankind now faces many problems: environmental degradation {36}, climate change {37}, looming shortages of land and water {38}, corporation takeover of government {39}, rising levels of global debt {40}, debt peonage {41}, offshoring {42}, surveillance and erosion of civil liberties {43}, the threat of world war as Russia and China challenge American hegemony {44-45}. Modernism overthrew traditional poetry for many reasons, but one was its claim to represent the contemporary world better, not only in its sensibilities and diction, but in its larger concerns. Yet none of these problems is addressed or even acknowledged by 'serious' poetry today. Or by critical theory, which sometimes seems an abdication of academic responsibility, of escape into excessively theoretical issues. Such sophistry is hardly needed. If the alternative press's coverage of banking, terror attacks, Greece, Syria and Russia is to be believed, governments and the mainstream press do very well with omissions, misrepresentation and downright lies. {46} Whatever the difficulties, truth still exists, and must exist, at least in useful approximations, for societies to function properly.

Because chapter 45 is so gloomy, I will end on a more optimistic note, and suggest that poetry will also recover faith in itself and common sense by realising how resourceful are human beings when freed from restrictive outlooks.

Matt Ridley's {47} superficial, selective but persuasive defence of free enterprise suggests that the world will go on getting better for everyone. Climate change can be accommodated. Poorer countries have made great strides towards material prosperity in recent decades, and will continue to do so, even in Africa. Much remains to be done

— a truly enormous amount — but there is no cause for the pessimism so prevalent today (as it was in the past.)

Many of the views are contentious — that labourers left the land willingly to escape rural poverty, that threats to species and the environment are exaggerated, that fossil fuels and nuclear power are still the best if not the only power options, that British cotton goods undercut Indian supplies by fair competition, that economic divides are deepening only in the US, that GM crops are beneficial — but the central message is clear: successful societies exchange products and ideas, learning from each other and mutually improving themselves if not prevented from doing so by church and state (i.e. excessive regulation, patents, etc.) Need is the mother of invention, and innovation comes more from shop-floor pressures than fundamental scientific research. High debt levels, contracting world trade and financial instability will be overcome by ad hoc adjustments just the same, though asset markets, i.e. banks and currency flows, do need to be regulated. In the last 50 years, people (practically everywhere but not in the USA, North Korea, or presumably in the middle east) have come to enjoy greater choice, greater material prosperity and more freedom to go their own way. The world is not about to run out of water, oil or food. There were food shortages that created the unrest of the Arab Spring, certainly, but a contributory factor was foodstuff farming diverted to create biofuels. Again in the last 50 years, GDP per capita has become lower only in Afghanistan, Haiti, Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia. Life expectancy is lower only in Russia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Child mortality has declined. People live longer and enjoy better health. Living standards fell only in China (1960s) Cambodia (1970s) Ethiopia (1980s) Rwanda (1990s), Congo (2000s) and North Korea throughout. The rich got richer, but the poor did even better (except in the USA). Even those designated poor in the USA generally have electricity, running water, flush toilets, refrigerator, TV,

telephone and even a car and air conditioning (the last two in 70% of cases.) Absolute world poverty might well disappear around 2035. Declining inequality stalled in the UK and USA in the 70s, and increased in China and India, but only because the really rich got even more so. Measured in terms of labour needed to produce the item, everything has got much cheaper. Competition creates millionaires but also affordable products. Housing is an exception — because of government policies: restricting supply, tax relief on mortgages and preventing property busts. People richer materially are also happier, on balance, but more important is social and political freedom. Of course there are black spots: war, disease, corruption and the continuing post-2008 recession. Debt levels are high, but increased productivity will see them brought down to manageable proportions. The curse of resource-rich countries is not the resources themselves but rule by rent-seeking autocrats. GM crops bring better productivity. {47}

Large companies are commonly inefficient, self-perpetuating and anti-competitive, but not do generally survive for long. Trust, cooperation and specialization (not self-sufficiency) are the key. Agrarian societies spent much of their income on food (e.g. 35% in modern Malawi), which today takes only 14% of the average consumer's take-home pay. And life for modern hunter-gatherers around the world is not idyllic: two thirds of their time is spent under the threat of tribal warfare. 87% experience war annually. Disease, starvation, murder and enslavement are never far away. Homicide rates in Europe fell from a medieval 35% to 3% in 1750 to under 1% in 1950. World population is increasing, but at declining rates: it will probably stabilize at 9.2 billion in 2075, allowing all to be fed, housed and given worthwhile lives. {47}

Rome's energy source was slaves, supplemented by water-power, animals and simple machines. Windmills became important in Europe, and peat fuelled Holland's success. Britain's industrial revolution was made possible by coal and

America. The country got sugar from the East Indies, timber from Canada, cotton from the southern American states, and power equivalent of 15 million acres of forest from her coal. However unpleasant the life in industrial cities, it was far worse in the countryside. Birmingham began as a centre of metalworking trade in the early 1600s, helped by being free of a civic charter and restrictive guilds. Success bred success. A disposable income enabled a consumerist society to begin here in the 18th century, well in advance of France and other European countries. American land open to settlers prevented the division of holdings between multiple heirs – the problem in Japan, Ireland, Denmark and later in India and China. Later planned parenthood is counter-productive and unnecessary. Mothers automatically limit their families when the child mortality rate declines. They turn to education, improve the lives of their families, follow individual inclinations and take a paying job. Over half the world now has a fertility rate below 2.1, which in some countries places a strain on loan repayments and pensions. {47}

And these are not Pollyanna hopes. Mankind now has the technologies to purify saline and contaminated water for US 0.2 cents/litre, to generate biofuels from algae, to make alternative energy sources competitive with oil, gas and nuclear energy, to grow food more cheaply in ‘vertical farms’, to replace meat sources by artificial protein growth, and to bring health care to the poorest by mobile phone technology. {48} All that is missing is the political will to abandon ruinous resource wars, and engage in more equitable and fruitful dialogue.

What conclusions can we draw from an exceptionally long digression? That:

1. Movements and theories are generally children of their time and perceived problems.

2. There are social repercussions to the most abstract of theories, many of them unexpected and unwanted. We have to continually test theories against experience, and learn from their shortcomings.

3. Critical theories are generalities and models that become more thorough-going and seductive the further they depart from reality.

4. Successful societies need diversity in thought, principles and employment.

When capitalism, often regarded as simply the overriding need for profit, is in fact so complicated, is it any wonder that theories of literature are equally diverse, not only co-existing but drawing on each other for their strengths and diversity? The more radical of critical theory is surely only one of the many fascinating ways in which we understand language and our place in the world.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

27. FAITHFUL REPRESENTATION

Whatever else it may do, art must represent something of the outside world. That something cannot be the whole world, of course, but we often feel that the part represented should be made intelligible, memorable, and important to us. Even the abstract arts, music and modern painting, involve the emotions, and must in some way re-present them. And if representation then fidelity, truth of some sort. 'Life isn't like that' is a damaging criticism to make of a play or novel. {1}

27.1. Plato and Reality

But how much of life should art represent? That which educates us in moral truths, said Plato. Children (i.e. boys) were to learn the great poets and dramatists by heart, appropriately, with gesture and feeling through imaginative identification with their parts. Thereby they would gain a true perspective on the world — true being for Plato, as no less for Aristotle, not matters of opinion. Behind the shifting appearances of things, argued Plato, lay the eternal Forms, of which everything we apprehend with our senses are imperfect copies. Only intellect and scrupulous morality will guide us to the truth, and Plato elaborates in *The Republic* the ways these should be strengthened by State and individual. {2}

Plato's ideal state seems joyless to us, but comparisons with totalitarian regimes are overdone. No dictator would have survived the rigorous education and training Plato envisaged for his Guardians, and of lawless freedom Plato had already experienced too much at first hand. But his view of art is certainly restrictive. Evil may be depicted in drama only to condemn it, and then not too often. Painting and sculpture require knowledge, but this is mere knowledge of appearances, allowing the visual arts to only copy what were already poor copies of the true Forms. And music has to be socially responsible. Indeed all the arts must serve a larger

end, which is to teach us to love 'beauty', a term that for the Greeks included the fine and the honourable.

Does that mean total state control? Not in a contemporary sense. The state is its people, or at least its Guardians, who have been rigorously educated and trained in selfless administration. Authority is not blind, but rather the ceaseless application of educated thought and moral judgement. Nor is it a self-perpetuating, since Guardians are chosen on merit and continuously assessed. But the Guardians do have the final say. Poets are a powerful force for moral education, and should be prevented from prostituting their gifts in cheap satire or sensationalism. They may be divinely inspired — and Plato writes from the inside, from personal knowledge — but their pronouncements do not in themselves guarantee truth. Art is not a self-sufficient pursuit, nor even a faithful representation of the world, but only a reflection of moral beauty.

27.2. Aristotle and Mimesis

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was more systematic and down to earth. All the arts have their own techniques and rational principles, and it is through mastery of these that the artist/craftsman brings his conceptions to life. Yes, the arts do copy nature, but their representations are fuller and more meaningful than nature gives us in the raw. That is their strength. We do not therefore need to insist on some moral purpose for art, which is thus free to represent all manner of things present, past, imagined or institutionally required. Correctness in poetry is not correctness judged on other grounds like politics or morality. The artist's task is to create some possible world that the audience will grasp and evaluate much as they do the 'real' world outside. The artwork needs to be internally consistent, and externally acceptable. {3}

Form and content cannot be entirely separated. Plays should have a beginning, middle and end because life itself has

these features, but they should also possess a larger significance that endows the individual representation with deeper human meaning. Where Plato castigated poetry for bewitching the senses, Aristotle praises it for catharsis and healthy psychological balance. Both in its creation and reception, art is mode of understanding, and so a civilizing influence.

27.3. Genre and Expectations

How is the world presented to us in art but through the medium concerned? Oils, watercolour, gouache, etc. — every artist knows how the choice controls what he can make successful, both in subject matter and how he chooses to represent its features. Equally in literature the genre, that amalgam of style and subject matter, lays down certain rules of treatment. {4} The serious literary novel is not a mass market thriller, for example, and readers become confused and angry if the conventions are flouted. We should not want to say that all literary productions are written to formulae, but professional writers recognize that the great bulk of stories are elaborations on a small number of themes. {5} To the extent that literature — in all categories, from tabloid comment to arcane poetry — helps us to see and make sense of the world, that understanding is coloured and to some extent organized by the expectations and prejudices of the great mass of the reading public.

What then is ‘real life’? Perhaps what we describe informally to ourselves and friends. But that description is not without its expectations and correct forms. The yarn we spin in the pub is very different from our statement in the witness box. And when speech carries an additional burden — developing character and plot in a novel, for example — very formidable skills are required. Authors and actors in their quest for the seemingly natural, fresh and inevitable have indeed long understood what stylistics and sociology are now uncovering. {6} The most artless expressions make use of a

complex web of verbal skills and social expectations. Neither in art nor in real life is there a simple 'naturalness', but only a familiarity born of practice.

27.4. The Individual Contribution

Does this make the artist simply a repacker of old goods in the bright wrappings of current fads? Commercial writing does need to be very aware of shifts in public concern, and every course in journalism will list the angles that need constantly to be borne in mind. But writing is not entirely made to order, and certainly not by fleshing out the usual checklists. Slant becomes important later, as a tool for analysis, when the writing will not gel, or requires reshaping for a different market. Moreover, for writing to be convincing there needs generally to be a personal element, something the writer believes in and makes his own. Intellectual slumming in writing for the trade paper or women's magazine is immediately detected, by the readership if the editor has not spiked the piece first. {7} Even Wittgenstein (28.1), not usually seen as a popular writer, felt that one must 'philosophise with one's whole body', and he criticized the painless juggling with words in arguments created independently of their author. {8}

That there are no surefire recipes for success is obvious to anyone who has worked in the arts, from scriptwriter to media tycoon. Books, films, sitcoms are constantly being analysed for market appeal, but the smash hit takes everyone by surprise. The work was expected to do well, but not that well. One small feature happened to hook into the public interest, and the thing snowballed. Or the work dropped into a vacant niche, unrecognised at the time. Or it was the artist, working beneath current conventions, who found his own concerns, honestly portrayed, were also those of the wider community. The error of the theory of artistic and literary kinds, said Benedetto Croce (11.1), begins when we try to deduce the expression from the concept. Every

original work of art has upset the ideas of some critics, who have been obliged to widen their use of the term. {9}

27.5. Against the Tide: Modernism

Not all writers have consulted the market. Some indeed have done the very opposite, producing work so different that all established conventions of style and subject matter seemed thrown to the winds. The avant-garde prized originality above all things, and zealously guarded their work from acceptance by the profane majority. {10} Modernism was highbrow, and though it presupposed familiarity with the great works of the past, it consciously set out to overturn traditional values. Art was not to serve society, but the self-admiration of small but prestigious cliques. Modernist literature fractured syntax, and replaced plot and character by myth and psychoanalysis. As a logical extension of 'art for art's sake' Modernism clearly drew on itself, seeking an existence outside time and context, with no clear boundary between the public and private worlds. Genre boundaries were shifted, and autonomy secured by fragmentation and montage.{11}

How did it become so successful? By the ruthless self-promotion of its practitioners. Much of the financial support came from wealthy patrons, particularly women, and afterwards from small magazines who had a name to make. But the establishment was hostile for decades, until iconoclasm combined with the interests of the young escaping from the restrictions and hypocrisies of their elders. {12} Thereafter, in the thirties and forties, proselytising was carried out by the educational establishments, notably Oxbridge and Ivy League universities, where it still holds sway.

27.6. The Hermetic View: Postmodernism

Being avant-garde, Modernism had always to move on. Already absolved from any responsibility to tell the truth, or even to represent the outside world, art looked into the

tortuous paths of its own thought processes, coming finally to question its own status. {13} Art was not representation, but a reflecting mirror of codes that had to be deciphered. And not only had each art-form its characteristic codes, but each artist played them slightly differently: Cezanne's language was not Matisse's. {14} But the Poststructuralists went much further. (7-9) Words refer only to themselves, said Derrida, and there is no final interpretation, only an endless chain of deferring. The artist does not exist, declared Barthes (7), and the meaning of texts are simply what their readers choose to read into them. {15}

What's to be made of this? Firstly there are the counter-arguments of the embattled literary establishment, who attacked the self-admiring rhetoric of these audacious theorists, showing that many did not understand the authorities quoted. {16} Then there is the work of the Anglo-American schools of philosophy — Quine (28.4), Searle (28.6), Davidson (30), — who acknowledge the difficulties in pinning down truth and meaning, but don't find that an argument for junking all reasoning. {17} And then there are the Marxist (41) writers who see a sick society reflected in a sick literature: in fragmentation, alienation, disenchantment. With common purpose removed, man has struggled to find reasons for existence. The meaning of life has seeped from politics and public life, taking a niggardly refuge in the private world of abstruse thought and material consumption. {18}

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28. ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY

A short introduction to the philosophies that study how language is actually used — i.e. not the words only but the social context and intentions behind the utterance. Such philosophies do not provide an all-embracing, unequivocal answer to ‘the great questions’, but they do illuminate and resolve many perplexities.

28.1. Wittgenstein's Theory of Games

If language is not a self-sufficient system of signs without outside reference, nor a set of logical structures, what else could it be? Social expression. Rather than pluck theories from the air, or demand of language an impossibly logical consistency, we should study language as it is actually used. So suggested Wittgenstein. {1} Much that is dear to the philosopher's heart has to be given up — exact definitions of meaning and truth, for example, and large parts of metaphysics altogether. And far from analysing thought and its consequences, philosophy must now merely describe it. But the gain is the roles words are observed to play: subtle, not to be pinned down or rigidly elaborated. Games, for example, do not possess one common feature, but only a plexus of overlapping similarities. Not all words have such subtleties, and physical objects we can name and employ in simple contexts — fetch the hammer! etc. But troubles arise when we make hammer the subject of a more complicated situation. Employ abstract words like ‘events’ or ‘public’ and the complications multiply. Go one step further and talk of ‘knowledge’, or ‘meaning’ or ‘truth’ and we have created the elaborate mystifications that philosophers have hitherto revelled in — i.e. rather than getting on with the job of sorting out the confusions. To see through the bewitchment of language is the task of philosophy.

Words may be simple in the context of a sentence, but they are not simple in the sense of being given to us directly. Philosophers have championed the ostensive definition —

the pointing and saying: that is a hammer — but a wealth of understandings and assumptions underlies this simple phrase. And what is understanding, moreover? A mental process, that feeling of bafflement and then relief when we grasp the point? Wittgenstein thought not. Such feelings are not essential, nor the visual images that may accompany thought. We should avoid any notion of an interior, private language, an impossibility once we realize that language is a consistent, shared activity. We may 'know' our own inner experiences, but that knowledge has to be through concepts that gain and keep their meaning through public usage. Anyone who used the word angry, for example, in a private way to refer to mild feelings of euphoria would soon find himself in difficulty: synonyms, experiences and social contexts would not cohere.

28.2. Gilbert Ryle and Common Sense

Wittgenstein left no fully worked-out system behind him, but his subtlety and stringency of thought were very influential. Gilbert Ryle, as early as 1931, called philosophy the task of detecting of the sources in linguistic idioms of recurrent misconstructions and absurd theories. {2} His 1949 book *The Concept of Mind* attacked the Cartesian notion of a disembodied mind in a physical body, the 'ghost in the machine'. We should not worry how an elusive mental entity could control a physical object. Men were not machines but clever animals, and their thinking is only a more subtle form of animal intelligence. And as for asking what thinking is — that was a 'category mistake', since thinking is an activity, not an entity. If propositions have something in common — thinking intelligently, let us say — then the concept of thinking intelligently is simply a handy abbreviation for a family of propositions.

We should also respect the everyday distinctions of words. Knowing how is quite different from knowing that, and we learn to ride a bicycle without knowing the mechanics

involved. When we judge mental activities in others we are not making untestable inferences from private streams of consciousness, but drawing conclusions from their public behaviour. Seeing and achieving are achievement, rather than process-words, and when we imagine something we are not seeing some inner picture but using our knowledge to 'think how it would look'. Many conundrums are resolved if we think what we are actually doing. A scientist's view of matter may very different from the man in the street's, but they are both valid, concentrating on different aspects.

28.3. J.L. Austin and Intention

Common sense will resolve many difficulties, thought Ryle, and we do not need detailed linguistic analysis. But his part-contemporary, J.L. Austin, {3} looked at language more closely, though without reducing everything to linguistics. Even though 'Our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth making, in the lifetimes of many generations' {4} philosophy was compelled to straighten out usage to some extent. Austin analysed with great subtlety the philosophical distinctions between could and should, knowing and promising, and what we mean by real or corresponding. He did not accept Russell's view that sense data are the foundations of knowledge, the starting points from which true propositions could be built. His best-known contributions came in his William James Lectures *How to do Things with Words* {5} where he distinguished utterances by the acts they performed. Locutionary acts conveyed meaning (e.g. tell us the storm is coming), illocutionary acts conveyed force (e.g. warn us that the storm is coming) and perlocutionary acts produced a certain effect (e.g. succeed in warning us that the storm is coming). The terminology has not caught on, and indeed Austin died prematurely, without substantiating these approaches, but his work unsettled many easy assumptions — distinctions between stating and describing, the factual and the

necessary, is and ought. Meaning lies in the total speech act, said Austin, and not in the constituent propositions abstracted from context and intention.

28.4. Strawson, Searle and Grice: Speech Acts

Along similar lines P.F. Strawson {6} renewed the attack on Russell's theory of descriptions. Since the sentence: 'The King of France is bald' could be used variously — as a statement about a past king of France, to make a joke, tell a story — its meaning does not depend on whether there actually exists a present king of France. Sentences do not consist of propositions, each one assigning predicates to logically proper names, and logicians who ignore context produce statements that are unreal and irrelevant.

Such views brought common sense to vexed questions, and indeed many branches of logic (modal, deontic, free-value) have attempted to overcome the limitations of formal logic, if limitations they are. {7} But the view persists that philosophers should be able 'to give philosophically illuminating descriptions of certain general features of language such as reference, truth, meaning and necessity.' Without disposing of the problems, John Searle {8} does not ally himself with linguistic philosophers in supposing the great questions of philosophy are artefacts of language used to express them: indeed he characterizes the school as too often having a nice ear for linguistic distinctions but not the theoretical machinery to arrive at sound conclusions. And in building on and systematizing Austin's work, he emphasizes that meaning includes both what the speaker intended and what he actually said — i.e. the function of a sentence and its internal structure.

Searle built on Austin's view that speech is rule-governed and that we should understand those rules. But he also recognized a greater number of different types of speech act (perhaps exceeding ten thousand) but grouped them under five general categories — assertives (stating, reporting),

directives (requesting, ordering), commissives (promising, offering), expressives (thanking, apologizing, congratulating), declaratives (correspondences between propositions), and categories of content & reality (sentencing, christening). {9}

Paul Grice was more concerned with differences in intention between the said and the meant, and in analysing conversational situations. {10} Implication was conveyed by general knowledge and shared interest. And an action intended to induce belief would have to a. induce that belief, b. be recognize as such by the hearers, and c. be performed with every intention of being recognize as such. His cooperative principle introduced maxims of quality (things are not said which are known to be false or for which there is no evidence), quantity (appropriately informative), relation (relevant), and manner (brief, orderly, not obscure or ambiguous). {11}

What is the standing of these IBS (intention-based semantics) theories? Perhaps the current favourites, but not winning the assent of all. The devil is in the details. Logically set out, an early IBS theory might look like: {12}

Speaker S means m in uttering expression x, iff for some listener L and feature F, S intends:

1. L to think that x has this feature F,
2. L to think (at least partly on the basis of thinking x has this F, that S uttered x intending L to think m),
3. L to think (at least partly on the basis of thinking that S uttered x intending to think m) that m.

Where iff is 'if and only if'. The feature F (which might be, say, that it's snowing) then has to be defined in wholly psychological terms. This can be done, but F then makes further claims on S and L. The matter becomes increasingly complicated and the expressions can be stymied by ingeniously devised questions.

28.5. Michael Dummett's Theory of Meaning

But we shouldn't suppose that context altogether alters understanding. Whatever the intent — request, excuse, reminder — we understand the sense of close the window, and this sense must call on some principles, thought Michael Dummett. {13 } We show our understanding by using a word or phrase properly. Dummett's approach would have a core of reference, a shell of sense and a supplement of force or intent. It would apply to any expression, basic or derived, and include some understanding of the conditions that need to be satisfied when we say, for example: 'this is London'. But these are not truth conditions in Davidson's (30) sense, nor of the Logical Positivists (29.2) in resting on sense data. Moreover, Dummett argued, we cannot always know the real or full situation, when sentences may not be simply either true or false.

28.6. Ad Hoc Study of Language

Perhaps we should put away grand theories and study language on an ad hoc basis, as a scientist does, making as few assumptions as possible. Of all the schools of analytical philosophy, the pragmatic is the most arbitrary and heterogeneous. Included are philosophical contributions by Rorty, Quine and many others, aspects of sociology theory, and some branches of linguistics (phonetics, laboratory analysis of verse metre, psycho-linguistics, etc.) Many workers in this group are realists: they believe that the world exists independent of our minds or senses. The methods of science therefore apply — i.e. objective analysis, observation, deduction of laws that hold independent of the investigator and his society.

W.V.O Quine, {14} for example, disputed the traditional distinction between analytic (i.e. true logically) and synthetic (true by reference to experience), arguing that logic has just the same status as empirical science. The world is a world of physical facts, and any statement could be made true if

enough adjustments were made to the procedures through which we arrive at judgement. Nothing systematic could be said about the meaning of individual sentences as such. Nor could we be certain of making a translation between different languages by simply pointing to the common object named: the very action of coupling word and object calls on more (untranslated) language than the one naming word.

A deeper scepticism informs the work of Richard Rorty, {15} who concludes that philosophy has no more finality than literary criticism or cultural theory. He attacks the correspondence theory of truth (that truth is established by directly comparing what a sentence asserts to the 'facts applying'), and indeed denied that there were any ultimate foundations for knowledge at all. No belief is more fundamental than any other, and philosophy should liberate itself from its traditional occupations with the 'great questions'. In place of adversarial analysis we should instead try to create an edifying theory of understanding, one that is socially based, combining scientific and cultural understanding with the traditions that provide our shaping perspectives. Truth is not a common property of true statements, and the good is what proves itself to be so in practice: pragmatism, in short.

The last are somewhat nihilistic views, critical of philosophy's aspirations. Davidson, Kripke and Dummett, to mention only the most distinguished contemporary philosophers, very much disagree, and any picture of scientists as isolated and disinterested gatherers of experimental data is a naive one. Observations come theory-laden, and scientists are guided in their procedures by the theories they wish to test, by tradition, peer competition, institutional pressures and the encouragement or otherwise of the state.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

29. THEORIES OF MEANING

A brief introduction to a difficult subject. Although many of the approaches are not much pursued now, or have developed far from their original intentions, philosophies of meaning add a good deal to literary matters, for good and ill. Meaning is not a self-evident matter, and the Postmodernist 'prison-house' concept of language is unhelpful.

29.1. Meaning

What is meaning? Philosophers have struggled hard these last hundred years to arrive at a something that will tell them where and how meaning is to be obtained. They have sought some theory that would encompass requirements like: There are sounds or marks on paper that possess meaning. They refer to things and can be true. Meaning is given in specified ways by the words themselves and syntax. Sentences should be composed of smaller units (propositions), each of which indicates the conditions to be satisfied to make each sentence true. There should be rules governing sentence composition. Language occurs in some context, and must express beliefs, hopes, intentions, etc. While these beliefs and hopes, etc. are no doubt states of the speaker's nervous system, the sentences should also relate to exterior objects and situations. Believing something is a relation to what is being believed: this relationship should be capable of being treated in some systematic way. Ultimately, though we cannot do so yet, semantics and psychology should reduce to physical acts and entities.

Has such a theory been found? No. Some requirements are satisfied by one theory, and some by another, but there is no single encompassing theory that commands general acceptance. Nor does one seem likely now. {1}

29.2. Logical Positivism

Why is that? Let us look at the various attempts to say something philosophically interesting and non-circular about

meaning. An early attack on the problem was made by the Logical Positivists. Either, they said, sentences are statements of fact, when they can be verified. Or they are analytical, resting in the meaning of words and the structures that contain them. All other sentences — i.e. metaphysical, aesthetic and ethical statements — are only appeals to emotion, and therefore devoid of intellectual content. {2} Logical Positivists supposed that language had simple structures and that the facts they held were largely independent of that language. They supposed that matters which inspired the greatest reverence in individuals and which united communities could be dismissed as meaningless. And they supposed that verification, for which mathematics and science were the admired paradigms, amounted to no more than reference to straightforward, immediately-given sense data. {3} None of these is true, and the approach was not pursued much after the 1960s.

29.3. Linguistic Philosophy

Logical Positivism had nonetheless done good work in clearing away the tangle of philosophic argument. Perhaps more could be done? The later Wittgenstein (28.1) argued that the purpose of philosophy was to clarify issues, to see through the bewitchment of language, to demonstrate that many conundrums of meaning arose through words being used beyond their proper remit. {4} In short, rather than immerse ourselves in abstruse theory, we should study language as it is actually used, by everyday people in everyday situations. Philosophy should not be the final arbiter on use, but more the humble investigator. Much had to be given up, but the gain is the roles words are now seen to play: subtle, not to be pinned down or rigidly elaborated. Games, for example, do not possess one common feature, but only a plexus of overlapping similarities.

What happened to such a modest programme? It was not modest at all, but proved on investigation to ramify into

further difficulties, which only increased with greater depth of investigation. Gilbert Ryle and J.L. Austin were among many creating what came to be called linguistic philosophy. (28.4) But clarification did not arrive, only a gradual realization that the problems of philosophy, meaning included, remained on the far side of linguistic analysis. {5}

29.4. Meaning as Propositional Calculus

Suppose we broaden its scope a little, but still require that meaning be as simple and transportable as possible. We can break a sentence into simple units (propositions) that conform to a simple assertions of fact. And we can remove the context: the who, why, how, etc. of its application. The result will assuredly be simplistic, but the sentences will rest on assured foundations and can be built in logically correct ways. The matter is often put in terms of two concepts: intension and extension. Intension is the meaning achieved by the words in the sentence. Extension is what the sentence refers to. In 'The moon is a planet', intension is whatever defines planets, and extension is what is referred to by the sentence, i.e. the moon. The extension is therefore the state of affairs to which the sentence refers, and the intension is that which allows us to pick out the extension of the sentence in all possible worlds.

The approach derives from Gottlob Frege who founded modern logic. (32.1) Simple sentences are built of propositions connected by logical constants like 'not and or', and 'and' and 'if – then'. More complex sentences arise when 'there exist', 'some', 'supposing', 'all' are employed. But the meaning is brought out by the logic of the connectives and the truth values of the propositions — i.e. what needs to be the case for the proposition to be true. {6}

There are many advantages in this approach: clarity, certainty, universality. Once expressions are reduced to propositions with truth values, it becomes harder to dally with

relativism. Truth and falsity are universals, and apply across the different worlds of individuals, cultures and times.

But matters are a good deal less clear-cut when metalanguages (30) and different logics are involved. {8} And, even without such complications, there is Quine's objection that translation is underdetermined, that we inevitably make assumptions in translating from one language to another which must undermine any claim that truth is universal. {9} There is Hacking's objection that style of reasoning is important, there being no one true, fundamental language in which reasoning should be conducted. {10} And there is the question whether such a logic properly represents meaning. Are all sentences assertions of fact, and do we always intend to be so logical? More damaging still is the observation that language is not the self-evident and unmetaphoric entity that propositional calculus assumes. Arguments are commonly not matters of fact but rhetoric. {11} And finally there are the facts themselves. Even in science, the most objective of disciplines, facts are not matters immediately given but arrived at through a communality of practice and assumption. {12}

29.5. Intention-Based Semantics

Perhaps we should start from another direction altogether and ask why human beings use speech. What are their purposes and intentions? J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* was the seminal work, and his approach was extended and systematized by John Searle and others. (28) Meaning is real and includes both what the speaker intended and what he actually said — i.e. the function of a sentence and its internal structure. Speech, moreover, is rule-governed, and we should be able to spell out these rules. {13} Paul Grice concerned himself with differences in intention between the said and the meant, and in analysing conversational situations. Implication was conveyed by

general knowledge and shared interest. And an action intended to induce belief would have to a. induce that belief, b. be recognized as such by the hearers, and c. be performed with every intention of being recognized as such. His cooperative principle introduced maxims of quality (things are not said which are known to be false or for which there is no evidence), quantity (appropriately informative), relation (relevant), and manner (brief, orderly, not obscure or ambiguous). {14} Intention-based semantic theories are still popular and are actively pursued. But they have not entirely succeeded in reducing meaning and psychology to actions and utterances. If meaning is defined as acting so as to induce belief and action in another, theories of meaning must be grounded in non-semantic terms to avoid circularity. And there is some doubt whether this can be done. Individuals act according to beliefs, and the communication of these beliefs eventually and necessarily calls on public beliefs and language. {15}

29.6. Meaning as Truth Conditions

Is there another way of cutting through the tangle of belief and language-dependence? One very influential programme was that of John Davidson, (30) which made the meaning of the sentence simply its truth conditions. The meaning of a trivially simple example: 'The moon is round' are the conditions that the sentence is true, namely that the moon is indeed round. No more than that. The programme sidesteps troublesome philosophical issues — the mind-body problem, problems of knowledge, deep grammar, social usage — to state 'facts' in a logically-transparent language. {16}

But is this really what is meant by meaning? Philosophers have not generally thought so, still less linguists, sociologists, and literary critics. And even by its own lights the programme was unsuccessful. Its logical consistency was weakened by the need for two assumptions — that translation from natural to logical metalanguages was never

with mishap, and that meaning was a holistic phenomena, i.e. that texts as a whole bestowed meaning on individual words rather than the other way about. Moreover, and despite employing the powerful resources of symbolic logic, the programme proved unable to deal with many everyday expressions or sentences. {17}

29.7. Deconstruction

Since all attempts to ground meaning in more fundamental entities have failed, perhaps we should conclude that sentences have no meaning at all, no final, settled meaning that we can paraphrase in non-metaphorical language. That is the contention of Jacques Derrida. (8) Deconstruction is the literary programme that derives from this approach, though Derrida himself does not see deconstruction as a method, and still less an attack on the western canon of literature, but more a way of investigating the textural contexts in which words are used. The social, cultural and historical aspects of that context, and how we interpret a text from our own current perspective, are the concerns of hermeneutics. Derrida's view goes deeper. There is no 'thought' as such, he argues, that we create in our minds and then clothe with words. Words are the beginning and the end of the matter, the only reality. They refer only to other words, not to things — be they 'thoughts' in the mind, or 'objects' in the world. By looking carefully at a text we see where the writer has chosen one word in preference to others of similar meaning, and these choices tell us something about what the writer is trying not to say, i.e. is suppressing or hiding from us — either deliberately, or by thoughtless immersion in the suppositions of his time. In this sense, texts write themselves. Context and author are largely irrelevant. And not only texts. Institutions, traditions, beliefs and practices: none of these have definable meanings and determinable missions. All dissolve into words, whose deployment it is the philosopher's task to investigate. {18}

Who believes this? Very few in the workaday world. As a philosophic position it can be defended by making certain assumptions — that words predate thought, are beyond our control, and do not make reference. But the cost is very high. Jettisoned are investigations into the linguistic development of language, the social purposes it serves, its aesthetic aspects. Political injustices — which Derrida cares passionately about — are only personal views, mere words at last. Derrida is a subtle and learned writer, vastly more accomplished than the majority of his followers, but deconstruction severs language from its larger responsibilities.

29.8. Reference

And do words make only reference to themselves? Ultimately they make sense of our thoughts, our emotions, our sense impressions. We register something as loud, heavy, yellow, pungent, etc. and no amount of word shuffling can set these impressions aside. We expect objects to retain their properties, just as words retain their meaning, the two being locked together and finally cohering in a world we understand. No one supposes that words do not mediate in the way we use our senses, and that complex chains of understanding do not underlie the simple statement ‘that is a chair’. Or the power of ideology to evoke violent reactions to concepts that are not experienced and may be largely abstract: ‘communist’, ‘terrorist’, etc. But the culprit is the tangled chain of reference, the spurious associations and the procedural sleights of hand that demagogues employ.

Certainly we can declare: ‘Aha! See, words always enter into things.’ But that is the source of their power and properties. Words cannot generally be entirely divorced from context, any more than things can be handled at any length without words. Yet even this power of language can be exaggerated. Many skills are learnt by watching and doing. Painters learn from each other's paintings, not from the clever words of art

critics. Musicians discussing a tricky bit of interpretation will demonstrate what they mean. In all of these cases the verbal explanation comes belatedly, and is accepted to the extent it expresses what has already been intuitively grasped. Literary critics, philosophers and academics naturally exalt the power of language, but many things in this world run perfectly well on a very slender vocabulary indeed — as driving a car, house-building, and lovemaking amply demonstrate.

Be that as it may, reference is clearly an essential part of linguistic philosophy, and the literature is extensive. One popular approach, deriving from Wittgenstein (28.1) and developed by Peter Strawson and John Searle, (28.4) is to establish name and reference by a cluster of descriptions. Unfortunately, however, references may be borrowed without being properly understood, and names may not require descriptions: the Cataline Plot is simply what Cicero denounced and thwarted. A second approach developed by Saul Kripke is therefore gaining ground. Naming is introduced by dubbing (ostensively, i.e. by pointing). People not present at the dubbing pick up the word, and others use it. This theory of designating chains (d-chains as they are called) has several advantages. The chains are independent of their first use and of those who use them, and they allow name substitution. Identity is speaker-based. We accept the linguistic and non- linguistic contexts, but understand that the speakers' associations forge the link between language and the world. And speakers can be precise, unclear, ambiguous and/or plain wrong. D-chains can designate things meaningless and false, as well as things meaningful and true.

Gareth Evans looked at how change of reference is possible. Sometimes we muddle up the references and then have to ground names in another way. Sometimes we can use names knowing next to nothing about their meaning, but realizing nonetheless that the category still has to be right —

nouns used as nouns, lakes used in geographical and not psychological description. But what happens when we move to more abstract terms? Then matters become much more contentious, several workers arguing for reference fixing and reference fixing theories. {19}

29.9. Hermeneutics

Do we have to understand the cultural aspects of reference? Undoubtedly, say the hermeneutists. (18) There is no final, unchanging, ahistorical basis for interpretation. Language is not neutral, but needs to be understood through certain filters — the continuance of the historical past for Gadamer, through labour and shared expression for Habermas, and through cultural artifacts and shared ways of understanding for Ricoeur. We live on our historical inheritance, says Gadamer, in a dialogue between the old traditions and present needs. And there is no simple way to assess that inheritance except by trial and error: praxis, living out its precepts and their possible reshapings. Rationality of the scientific or propositional kind is something we should be wary of, since it evades any direct apperception of reality, the ‘truth that finds us’. Validity comes from a communality of practice and purposes, not by reference to abstract theory. {20} Habermas is a Marxist and criticizes the ‘rationality’ of science as too much placing control in the hands of specialists, an undemocratic procedure. Man is entitled to his freedoms — from material want, from social exclusion, and from practices that alienate him from better nature. Labour is not simply a component of production, but how men are forced to live. Class ideologies that reduce liberties in this way are perversions of language, which we need to exhume and examine. {21} Cultural objects are shared ways in which a community understands itself. But communities change. How we arrive at a proper interpretation of objects from past civilizations is something, says the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, that Gadamer does not explain. All things are relative: no one interpretation is to be preferred

over another. Habermas is more concerned with method, but has also failed to bring praxis and theory together — i.e. is far from achieving Husserl's hope for a rigorous science. Ricoeur's own suggestion is to search the text itself for the complex relationship between explaining and understanding. {22}

29.10. Relativism in Social Context

Societies have very different customs, particularly those of native peoples isolated by history and terrain from contact with others. Anthropologists have found much that is puzzling in their myths and social practices. (6.3) Some tribes claim a close kinship with the animal world, even to the extent of believing themselves to be red parakeets, etc. So there grew up a notion that the 'primitive' mind was somehow different from its western counterpart, a notion strengthened when it was found that some native languages attribute gender to inanimate objects, or have no past or future tense. {23} Much of this can be discounted. Though their language may not have a past tense as such, Hopi Indians have no difficulty working to western schedules. *Cerveza* is feminine in gender, but not otherwise regarded as female. Native peoples live too close to extinction for them to indulge in mystifying beliefs, and no doubt anthropologists would impute primitivism to a Roman Catholic mass. Indeed, later investigations showed that red parakeets were being used metaphorically, or partly so. {24} But are languages (and hence meanings) culture-dependent? We can translate between different languages, but is what comes over an adequate transcription? In one sense the answer must be 'yes'. It remains a possibility that a native speech will one day be found expressing concepts so entirely foreign to us that translation is impossible. But none of the 4,000-plus languages has yet done so. Many examples of the native's 'irrational mind' prove to be misunderstandings, or words used in a non-literal way. All the same, in another sense perhaps, the answer may be

'no'. Polyglots can switch languages easily, but the switch is into a paraphrase rather than a word-for-word transcription. What is given in translation is a guide to a different linguistic terrain, to a world recognized slightly differently. So with jargon and styles within a particular language. Vocabularies change, and so do syntax and metaphor. Human beings create models of cognition that reflect concepts developed in the interaction between brain, body and environment. Such models, called schema, may provide our five different conceptual approaches — images, metaphors, part for whole, propositional and symbolic. Linguistic functions are propositional and symbolic. Grammatical constructions are idealized schemas. And so on. Much remains to be done, not least to convince the many specializations involved, but language is not the unambiguous, neutral medium that literalists have supposed. {25}

29.11. Religious Meaning

What is the meaning that religious adherents derive from their faith? (42) Certainly it seems compelling, even if not communicable to those who have not experienced that reality. Wishful thinking, hallucination? No. It is not possible to prove them to be false or logically incoherent. Theism is rational within a given conceptual system, such systems being judged on their match with the evidence, on their explanatory or transforming power, on their consistency, coherence, simplicity, elegance and fertility, and on the rules that arise out of the system rather than a-priori. {26} Religion can be seen as the sacralization of identity, which presupposes order and consistency in our views of reality. It becomes meaningful in acts: ritual, prayer, mystical encounters. As in myth, the language of religion is closed and self-supporting, not easily translated or transferred from one culture to another. Meaning is formed by acts of communication and has to be recreated in those acts time and again. It is always possible to reduce religion to anthropology or social science, but such explanations are

ultimately unsatisfying, lacking the emotion-laden demonstration of a man's place in a meaningful world. {27}

29.12. Conclusions

Semiotics is still an obsession of literary theory, but clearly only one of many approaches to meaning, and may indeed be fading now from the American philosophy scene. {28} Very few of its ten thousand professional philosophers are rattling the bars of the prison cage of language. Linguistic philosophies continue, but in addition to the traditional fields — philosophy of existence (ontology), meaning (epistemology) art (aesthetics), morals (ethics) and political history — there is increased emphasis on new fields: computer issues, applied ethics, feminism, rights of parenthood, etc. Though most philosophy is still written by academics for other academics, an applied philosophy is being attempted, even if its impact on public opinion is still very small.

The upshot for the arts, and poetry {29} in particular? We surely now have a richer understanding of the resources and shortcomings of language. Inspired by the example of science in its search for objective and fundamental knowledge, philosophy and its kindred disciplines have attempted to ground language in something incontrovertible, free of individual and cultural suppositions. They have failed. And even if cognitive science should one day be able to explain language in terms of the chemical or physical processes of the brain, those very processes would rest on findings produced by the shared beliefs and practices of the scientific community. There is no escaping the human element. Even if expressed entirely as mathematics, the processes could not escape the lacunae discovered by human beings at the heart of mathematical logic. But this is no cause for dejection. The various disciplines of art, philosophy and science each make their own starting assumptions, and consequently map the world differently.

And surely each is appropriate in its own sphere: composing a poem will not mend a broken leg. But the spheres are not wholly distinct and detached from each other, so that better understanding and cooperation between the disciplines could be immensely enriching.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

30. DONALD DAVIDSON

A greatly simplified introduction to one influential theory of meaning: its approach, successes and difficulties. Provided language is seen as non-metaphorical (i.e. there is an essential skeleton of meaning regardless of how expressed), and the logical formulation is not expected to be entirely comprehensive and watertight, then Davidson's theory refutes the wilder speculations of Postmodernism.

There are certainly shortcomings (exceptions, qualifications, alternative formulations are the bread and butter of philosophy) but there are no grounds for asserting that language is an endless web of self-referencing signifiers.

30.1. Introduction

Davidson's theory of meaning begins with Alfred Tarski's approach to logical paradoxes like 'All Cretans are liars'. Tarski's solution was to consider the primary sentence as written in an object language, and to propose another, higher level, metalanguage that could handle object languages without being tangled up in paradoxes of self reference. {1} Superficially, the two may seem the same — both are formal and not natural languages — but only the metalanguage could incorporate and refer to the object language.

30.2. Tarski's Concept of Truth

Consider an example: It is true that 'snow is white' iff snow is white - where iff stands for if and only if . There is nothing objectionable or difficult here, but what's the point? Even if the opposing sides are in two languages, object and metalanguage, the statement — called a T sentence — seems practically tautological. It doesn't tell us how the truth of the proposition snow is white was arrived at, the least we might expect. Agreed: but let's push on, and turn this apparent shortcoming into an asset, making the correspondence between two languages the point of interest.

Take a simple proposition. {2} It consists of a name (N - e.g. Lenin, which refers to something in the outside world) and a predicate (P - e.g. is bald, which describes the name in some way). Let us suppose that this proposition can be represented as NP in language L. Now take another proposition, completely different, in another language altogether. Represent this as np in language I. Both languages are formalized in Tarski's terminology, though we are not distinguishing here between object and meta-language. Our concern is with the translation process when we run the two languages together. Let us list the components of the two propositions, and how they appear when rearranged between the languages:

N in L refers to Lenin: N in I refers to Paris

n in L refers to Marx: n in I refers to Rome

P in L refers to bald things: P in I refers to French things

p in L refers to pink things: p in I refers to warm things.

Using Tarski's procedures we can say: PN is true in L iff Lenin is bald. PN is true in I iff Paris is French. pn is true in L iff Marx is pink. pn is true in I iff Rome is warm. And that is all we can say. That exhausts the possibilities.

What do these T sentences say? They are partial definitions of the languages L and I. They spell out what we first asserted, namely that: Any sentence PN in a formalized language will be true if, and only if, the predicate applies to or is satisfied by whatever it is that the name refers to. Very well, but what now?

The next step is twofold. Firstly, and crucially, we shall regard the full definition as the total of all these partial definitions. Secondly, we shall consider six partial concepts: reference-in-L, satisfaction-in-L, truth-in-L, reference-in-I, satisfaction-in-I, truth-in-I. What does Tarski mean by these partial concepts? Here is the answer in our language L:

reference:

X refers-in-L to Y iff: X is N and Y is Lenin, or X is n and Y is Marx.

satisfaction:

Y satisfies-in-L iff: X is P and Y is bald, or X is p and Y is pink.

truth:

S is true-in-L iff: S is PN and Lenin is bald; S is pN and Lenin is pink; S is Pn and Marx is bald; S is pn and Marx is pink.

A similar list appears for reference-in-l, satisfaction-in-l, and truth-in-l. So? We have reached the end of our quest. This is how Tarski defines reference, satisfaction and truth — by the totality of these partial definitions. That is all. Of course our example is simple, even trivial. More useful sentences would generate very long lists — impossibly long of course, and Tarski devised recursive procedures to eliminate that need. He starts with sentential functions, which resemble sentences, but have gaps or free variables in which suitable terms and expressions have to be inserted. While the gaps or free variables are unfilled there is no sentence as such, and no certainty that the expression is true or false. But once the gaps are filled, a sentence is formed, and is either true or false.

Turned around, this requirement becomes a definition: a sentence is a sentential function containing no free variables. Consider the sentential function: x was the teacher of y. This is satisfied by Socrates was a teacher of Plato, i.e. by {{Socrates, Plato}}. The order in the multiple brackets is important; Socrates substitutes for x and Plato for y. It would also be satisfied if any number of other objects following Plato in the multiple brackets — but only the first two are needed to correctly substitute for the variables and make a true sentence. So truth will be defined as being satisfied by all such {{Socrates, Plato, P, Q, R...}} sequences, and its falsity defined as being satisfied by none. That, in essence,

is the procedure, though it clearly becomes more difficult in sentences that are not straightforward assertions. {3}

But Tarski's stance should be clear. These are his definitions of reference, satisfaction and truth. Are they enough? Tarski thought so. If he hadn't strengthened the correspondence theory of truth, he had at least laid it out more plainly. Logicians, Logical Positivists (29.2) and grammarians tend to agree, but most philosophers see the procedures as an evasion of the real problems. Tarski's truth is grounded in languages: it ends in or is lost in the logical procedures by which sentences are put together. Fine, but such an approach tells us nothing about the truth of the individual propositions themselves, the judgements we make in asserting such things to be the case. Nor anything about how language is used in real societies: how, to what ends, with what assumptions.

30.3. Davidson's Concept of Meaning

Can anything further be done? The American philosopher Donald Davidson made an enterprising attempt. His goal is meaning, a clear, unambiguous concept of meaning, and this he defined (audaciously) as the truth conditions of a sentence. Meaning becomes what needs to be true of its constituent parts if the sentence as a whole is to be true. Quite apart from such a novel redefinition {4}, Davidson has two difficulties to overcome. One is that Tarski's approach applies only to formalized languages, not to imprecise, ambiguous and elliptical natural languages. The second is that Tarski assumed identical meaning in making the translation from object to metalanguage, i.e. assumed the very thing that Davidson wishes to establish.

Davidson adopts Tarski's method, but relies on two supports: the top down approach and use of the radical interpreter.

By top down, Davidson is arguing for an approach that starts with the language as a whole and moves progressively into smaller components. 'We can give the meaning of any

sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in that language,' says Davidson: a holistic view of language. A sentence has meaning only because of what its constituent words mean, and words only have a meaning by virtue of the contributions they make to the sentences in which they occur. According to Davidson we cannot give the meaning of one word without giving the meaning of all.

In the radical interpreter Davidson is looking for the means of translation between mutually incomprehensible languages. Quine's view was that, ultimately, we couldn't be sure of success in translation. Simply pointing and uttering the word was not sufficient: we needed other words to be sure that 'sheep' indicated an animal and not wool-provider or grass-trimmer or mutton or part of a sheep. These other words would not be available prior to translation. Davidson finds something of a way round this, but has to accept a less demanding (charitable) view of the radical interpreter: that the native speaker is rational, not aiming to deceive us, and has a set of beliefs largely consistent with our own.

Given these two assumptions, however — top-down approach and radical interpreter — Davidson's approach is this: Suppose we have two languages, one natural and one formalized. We say in our natural language, to a logician speaking the foreign formalized language: snow is white. That is true in our language. He replies in his language: sun glare causes snow-blindness. That is true in his language. Since both sentences are true they could be assembled in a T sentence:

Snow is white-in-natural language is true iff sun glare causes blindness-in-formalized language.

Our interpreter is charitable. Both logician and natural language speaker are standing in a snow-draped mountain landscape, so that the two assertions presumably have something to do with each other. Without further

conversation, we might suppose that sun-glare is the translation of snow, just as the predicate causes blindness is a translation of is white. That is what Tarski's partial definition listed above would suggest. S is true-in-L iff... But further conversation would soon disabuse us. Using snow in some other context would not return sun-glare but something very different. Eventually, a long time later, given sufficient exchanges involving words relevant to the context, and a well-intentioned interpreter, we should arrive at: Snow is white-in-natural language iff Snow is white-in-formalized language. No other result would avoid ludicrous mismatches somewhere along the line. And having made the translations of snow and white, we should go on with other words relevant to the situation — fresh falls, clean air, clear sunlight, etc. Our activities would gradually widen until we had made all the links between the two languages. At very long last our translation would be complete, and would indeed be able to express a natural language in a transparent, logical formalized language.

30.4. Conclusions

Is this achievable? Davidson has made great strides but the enterprise has hit snags with indexicals (pronouns and related expressions of time and place) and other complications. The programme has spread, ramified, and regrouped as new objectives, but none of these have been fully achieved. Davidson and his followers remain hopeful, but onlookers are less convinced.{5}

But even if success were to come, is this concept of meaning — the truth conditions in a formalized language — how we generally use the term? And what of the difficulties noted before with Tarski's definition? Davidson's approach counters the Poststructuralist (7-9) view that language is an endless self-referencing web of signifiers, but does not correspond to how language is always used, either in literature or the everyday world.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

31. THEORIES OF TRUTH

What do we mean by calling something true? Most obviously we mean according with or corresponding to ‘the facts’ — whatever those facts might be, or how we arrive at them. Logicians, however, would insist on being more specific, and in two ways. Given a sentence, they would first strip out the context, and then ensure that the remaining propositions could be simply true or false. Two simplifications, therefore. First the context is set aside: the who, when, how, why that every journalist covers is removed. Then the proposition itself is made to conform to a simple assertion of fact: expressions of belief, hope, wish, intention, etc. are ruled out of court. Such an approach may be remorselessly simplistic, reducing sentences to their simplest components, but the sentences then rest on assured foundations and can be built upon in logically sound ways.

The matter is often put in terms of two concepts: intension and extension. In a sentence They were marsupials. intension is whatever (anatomy, etc.) defines the set of marsupials, and extension is the set of entities referred to by the expression (what the sentence was talking about). The two concepts are clearly not the same, and one set can be full and the other empty: ‘The marsupials that walk on the moon’. The distinction is a convenient way of avoiding paradoxes, of avoiding contradictory statements about the same thing — the famous morning and evening star problem — different words for the same object — but its larger use is in tying together sentence and the outside world. The extension is the state of affairs to which the sentence refers, and the intension is that which allows us to pick out the extension of the sentence in all possible worlds (the propositions). The world can then be viewed in the articulation of language. {1}

31.2. The Building Blocks: Propositions

So runs the theory, entirely necessary if logic is to prevail. If sentences (rather than propositions {2}) are to be made the carriers of truth then a statement true today may not have been so a year ago, or if spoken by someone else. A sentence like: 'he believed her' makes its appeal not to logic but the common understanding of the human heart, the novelist's province. But 'he believed p', where p is some proposition that is either true or false, does make itself amenable to treatment.

Logical Operators

What treatment? Take a sentence like: 'John exists'. We recast that as : There is something that is John, and that something is identical to John. Expressed symbolically that becomes: $(\exists x) (x = \text{John})$. Everything is green becomes: $(\forall x) (\text{Green}(x))$. Using the negative \sim we can express: everything is green as: it is not the case that everything is not green: $\sim (\exists x) (\sim \text{green}(x))$. Is this helpful? Immensely so. Numbers can be defined in this way. Perplexing sentences like: 'The present King of France is bald' can be re-expressed as a conjunction of three propositions: 1. there is a King of France, 2. there is not more than one King of France, and 3. everything that is a King of France is bald. Put another way, this becomes: there is an x, such that x is a King of France, x is bald, and for every y, y is a King of France only if y is identical with x. In symbols: $(\exists x) (K(x) \& b(x) \& (\forall y)(K(y) \supset (y = x)))$. {3}

Using connectives like (&, \sim , \exists , \forall , InvertedA, and, not, some, supposing, all) very complex sentences can be built up where the truth value of the whole sentence is dependent only on the truth values of its components. And by that we arrive not only at secure judgements, but see clearly how the individual propositions systematically play their part in the overall truth or falsity of the sentence.

31.3. Metalanguages

But how do we handle logical paradoxes like the following statement by a Cretan: 'All Cretans are liars'. If asserted by a Cretan, all of whom are liars, the statement must be false — which must mean that Cretans tell the truth. How can we stop sentences making these problems? Alfred Tarski's solution (30.2) was to consider the primary sentence as written in an object language, and a sentence which asserted truth or falsity of the preceding sentence as written in a metalanguage. The sentences in the two languages look the same — 'All Cretans are liars' — but the metalanguage includes the first statement and naturalizes its self-destructing form. The languages are not operating on the same level, and the object language cannot refer to the metalanguage. {4}

But dealing with such paradoxes is only one aspect of Tarski's theory of truth. The theory deals with two matters: the materially adequate and the formally correct. For the first he proposed that any acceptable definition of truth should have as consequence all instances of the schema (called a T schema) that: S is true iff p (S is true if and only if p is true). By this Tarski meant that p can be replaced by any sentence for which truth is being defined, and S is to be replaced by the equivalent sentence in the metalanguage. For example:

'snow is white' is true iff snow is white

The essential point is this: the schema is extensional, is looking outward to the material conditions that satisfy it. And it rules out many (but not all, and not always as expected {5}) other definitions of truth.

Now the formal correctness, a much more demanding matter. Tarski was trying to avoid semantic circularities — words calling on other words ad infinitum — and also the notorious vagueness of natural language with its metaphoric equivalents and partial paraphrases. Both languages, object

and metalanguage, therefore had to be logically formulated, but the metalanguage was further obliged to follow the usual rules of definitions.

Is the T schema the definition of truth? No. The languages of the two sides are separate. Moreover, we should avoid anything that involved the meanings of the constituent words, which are not primitive, i.e. do not rest on things self-evident. Tarski's approach is through 'satisfaction', which is a relation between open sentences and ordered n-tuples of objects. (30) Open sentences are those with free variables. In the open sentence: 'A is south of B', we can replace A by London, and satisfy the sentence by replacing B with any town in southern Europe. What we are looking for, in short, are pairs of locations: the n of n-tuples here is 2. True sentences are therefore those satisfied by all just such sequences, and false sentences are those satisfied by none. That is the end of the matter. And a very short matter it is. Though Tarski sets out formally the concepts of reference, satisfaction and truth, the method seems somewhat as a stratagem to evade what philosophers have generally expected of truth.

31.4. Correspondence Theory of Truth

Let's turn to easier matters. We would agree with Ramsey and Russell {6} that nothing is gained by adding 'It is true that....' to some proposition. The phrase is transparent, adds nothing. If we call 'b' the sentence It is true that 'a' , and 'c' the sentence It is true that 'b', and so on round the alphabet, the original proposition 'a' will not be one iota different. Sentence 'z' will be equivalent to sentence 'a', would it not? But suppose each 'It is true that' is added by a different person, with different expertise and/or motivations, would we not be a little less confident? And, even if assured on this point, would we not feel that truth does not apply in equal force to all judgements, that it is not a property common to

all true sentences, i.e. external to them and independent of the route taken to arrive at propositions?

Such doubts introduce the notion of judgement. Many philosophers dislike the correspondence theory — that truth is something that corresponds to the facts — precisely because of this naive acceptance of ‘the facts.’ Even at its basic level, things in the world are not directly given to us: we make interpretations and intelligent integrations of our sensory experience, as Kant claimed and extensive studies of the physiology of perception show all too plainly. {7} Scientists make observations in ways guided by contemporary practice and the nature of the task in hand.

31.5. Other Theories of Truth: Coherence

What does this mean? That truth and meaning are mere words, brief stopping places on an endless web of references? No. If we want a truth and meaning underwritten entirely by logic — completely, each step of the way, with no possible exceptions — then that goal has not been reached. The match is close enough to refute the extravagant claims of Postmodernism, but not complete.

But perhaps the enterprise was always over-ambitious. After all, Russell and Whitehead's (33.1) monumental attempt to base mathematics on logic also failed, and even mathematics can have gaps in its own procedures, as Gödel (33.2) indicated.

So what other approaches are there? Two: the theory of coherence and that of pragmatism. The first calls something true when it fits neatly into a well-integrated body of beliefs. The second is judged by its results, the practical ‘cash value’ of its contribution. Theories of coherence were embraced by very different philosophies, and pragmatism is currently enjoying a modest revival in the States.

Stated more formally, {8} the coherence theory holds that truth consists in a relation of coherence between beliefs or propositions in a set, such that a belief is false when it fails

to fit with other mutually coherent members of a set. Though this concept of truth may seem more applicable to aesthetics or sociology, even a scientific theory is commonly preferred on the grounds of simplicity, experimental accessibility, utility, theoretical elegance and strength, fertility and association with models rendering such processes intelligible, on the very attributes of the coherence theory.{9}

But if the set of beliefs needs to be as comprehensive as possible, what is to stop us inflating the system with beliefs whose only merit is that they fit the system, to make a larger but still consistent fairy-tale? Appeal to the outside world — that these new beliefs are indeed ‘facts’ — is invalid, as our measure of truth is coherence within the set of beliefs, not correspondence with matters outside.{10}

Given that there will be more than one way of choosing a set of beliefs from the available data, and no external criteria help us decide, Rescher {11} suggested using plausibility filters. We select those beliefs which seem in themselves most plausible, reducing the short-list by further selection if necessary. But how is this plausibility to be decided? If beliefs resembles Euclid's geometry, we might indeed accept some of them — that parallel lines never meet, for example — by an appeal to sturdy common sense, but most beliefs are not of this nature, and even Euclidean geometry has its limits. How can we be sure — a further problem — that our set of beliefs is the most comprehensive possible if new investigations may yet turn up data that is better incorporated in another set of beliefs?

Idealists like Bradley {12} argued that reality was a unified and coherent whole, which he called the Absolute. Parts of the whole could only be partly true, and even those parts were doubtfully true given the uncertain nature of our sense perceptions. Better base truth in our rational faculties, he thought, and look for consistency and interdependence in what our thoughts tell us. But again there are difficulties. How much interdependence? If everything in a set of beliefs

is entirely interdependent, then each one belief is entailed by each other belief, which leads to absurdities. If the interdependence is loosened, then the requirements for inclusion become less clear. {13}

Some Logical Positivists (29.2) tried to get the best of both worlds. Incorrigible reports on experience, which they called protocol sentences, were based on correspondence of knowledge and reality, but the assemblage of protocol sentences as a whole depended on their consistency and interdependence, i.e. on coherence theory. But even this happy compromise was dashed by Neurath who pointed out that protocol sentences were not then the product of unbiased observation as required, but of investigations controlled by the need for coherence in the set of protocol sentences. What controls what? We are like sailors, he said, who must completely rebuild their boat on the open sea. {14}

31.6. Other Theories of Truth: Pragmatism

What then of the third theory of truth: pragmatism? In its crudest form, that something is true simply because it yields good works or congenial beliefs, the theory has few adherents. But its proponents — Pierce (6.1), James (23.2), Dewey (11.2) and latterly Quine (28.6) — put matters more subtly. Reality, said C.S. Pierce, constrains us to the truth: we find by enquiry and experiment what the world is really like. Truth is the consensus of beliefs surviving that investigation, a view that includes some correspondence theory and foreshadows Quine's web of beliefs. William James was not so committed a realist, and saw truth as sometimes manufactured by the verification process itself, a view that links him to relativists like Feyerband. John Dewey stressed the context of application, that we need to judge ideas by how they work in specific practices. But that makes truth into a property acquired in the individual circumstances of verification, perhaps even individual-dependent, which has obvious drawbacks. {15}

But 'The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it', wrote James.^{16} 'Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process, the process namely of its verifying itself, its verification...Any idea that helps us to deal, whether practically or intellectually, with reality, that doesn't entangle our progress in frustrations, that fits, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement. The true, to put it briefly, is only the expedient in our way of thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in our way of behaving.' Expedient in almost any fashion, and expedient in the long run and on the whole, of course. But what of inexpedient truths, don't they exist? And what of truths as yet unverified, but nonetheless truths for all that? Truth as something active, that helps us deal with life, is an important consideration, but pragmatism ultimately affords no more complete a theory of truth than those of correspondence or coherence.

31.7. Conclusions

Firstly we see the Anglo-American approach to philosophy in action, put very broadly and simply. And we appreciate something of the power and the limitations of modern logic. But could we not have been barking up the wrong tree? Language is not a matter of logic but of codes and social customs. Certainly the large though now somewhat defunct school of linguistic philosophy thought so. And perhaps life and literature is not to be grounded in logic at all, as the continental schools of philosophy have contended all along?

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

32. TRUTH IN LOGIC

Though literature is commonly thought to tell some kind of truth, it is surely not one comparable to logic. A time-honoured example: {1}

Socrates is a man

All men are mortal

Therefore Socrates is mortal.

Given the premises, we intuitively grasp the conclusion as true. How could it be otherwise? It offends some sense of rightness to deny it, just as we cannot assert that something is at once the case and not the case, p and not- p . But what is this intuitive sense?

32.1. What Is Logic

Broadly, there are four views. {2} The first is that the laws of logic are generalized, empirical truths about how things in the world behave, like the laws of science, but more abstract. Few believe this. That 'ravens are black' is not an inevitable truth in the way 'all bachelors are unmarried' necessarily must be. We accept that ravens are indeed black, but could conceive of some being not so. But a married bachelor is a contradiction in terms, something we can't seriously entertain.

A second theory is that the laws of logic are not given to us by experience, but are true in ways more fundamental than our sense impressions: they are true because that is how the world is. The mind's power of reason gives us insight into the inherent nature of things: truth is a property of the world rather than our reasoning processes. But what is this property? There are sufficient conundrums in the physical world (e.g. quantum mechanics where an electron is sometimes a particle and sometimes wave occupying a position with some percentage of probability) for us to doubt if logic can be safely grounded in the outside world.

A third view is that logic is isomorphous with mind functioning, that humans by their constitutions are unable to entertain contradictions once they become apparent. Our brains are simply constructed ('hardwired') so as to reject logical inconsistencies. But logic is not a branch of psychology or physiology; and we have as yet only a rudimentary understanding of brain functioning. A theory so dependent on unknowns is not one securely based.

The fourth view is simpler: the laws of logic are verbal conventions. We learn through social usage the meanings of and, and not, true and false. In one, trivial sense this is undeniably true. But if the terminology is arbitrary, we still cannot rationalize away our sense of truth and correctness in this manner. The sentence 'p and not-p' remains a contradiction, whatever term we give it.

32.2. Sentential Logic

Let's move on, difficulties notwithstanding. Logics that aim to represent situations in simple, context-free sentences are called sentential (also propositional, or propositional calculus), after Gottlob Frege (33.1) who founded modern mathematical logic. Sentential logic is built with propositions (simple assertions) {3} that employ logical constants like not and or, and and and if - then. Such logics cannot deal with expressions like 'he believed her' (which appeal to the common understanding of the human heart) but are very powerful in their own field.

32.3. Symbolic Logic

Indeed, once connectives are used (&, ~, &Exist, &Sup, InvertedA, and, not, some, supposing, all) very complex sentences can be built up where the truth value of the whole sentence is dependent only on the truth values of its components. We arrive not only at secure judgements, but see clearly how the individual propositions systematically play their part in the overall truth or falsity of the sentence. Symbols are commonly used. Take a sentence like: John

exists. We recast that as : There is something that is John, and that something is identical to John. Expressed symbolically that becomes: $(\exists x) (x = \text{John})$. Everything is green becomes: $(\forall x) (\text{Green}(x))$. Using the negative \sim we can express: everything is green as: it is not the case that everything is not green: $\sim (\exists x) (\sim \text{green}(x))$.

Is this helpful? Immensely so. Numbers can be defined in this way. Perplexing sentences like: 'The King of France is bald' can be re-expressed as a conjunction of three propositions: 1. there is a King of France, 2. there is not more than one King of France, and 3. everything that is a King of France is bald. Put another way, this becomes: there is an x , such that x is a King of France, x is bald, and for every y , y is a King of France only if y is identical with x . In symbols: $(\exists x) (K(x) \& b(x) \& (\forall y)(K(y) \supset (y = x)))$. {4}. (31)

32.4. Metalanguages

But how do we handle logical paradoxes like the following: { What is written between these brackets is false.} If what is written between the brackets is false, it is also false that What is written between these brackets is false - i.e. the sentence must be true. But we have accepted it as false. How can we stop sentences referring to themselves? Alfred Tarski's (30.2) solution {5} was to consider the primary sentence as written in an object language, and that commenting on the primary sentence is in another language altogether, a metalanguage. Both languages had to be logically formulated to avoid the tangles and vagueness of everyday speech, but only the metalanguage could refer to the object language, not the other way about. (30.2)

32.5. Many-Valued Logics

Are these the only categories of logic? Not at all. There are three-valued systems that operate with true, false and possible/indeterminate. There are systems that use more than three values. And there is a large branch of logic (modal logic) that deals not with simple propositional

assertions, but with concepts like possible, impossible, contingent, necessary and absurd.^{6} And since what is true today may not have been so yesterday, some have argued that time should come into logic, ^{7} either by changing our understanding of logical operators, or by extending standard logic. Why have these alternatives been developed, and how do they modify a search for an ideal, logically transparent language?

A two-value system of logic is unsatisfactory in some areas of mathematics on two counts. Certain propositions cannot be declared true or false because that truth or falsity hasn't been demonstrated. Secondly, the adoption of either true or false values for a proposition may lead to contradictions in the mathematical treatment of quantum mechanics and relativity. As an alternative to standard logic, Jan Lukasiewicz developed a three-valued system of logic: true, false and possible, usually denoted as 1, 0 and $1/2$ - where the possible was defined by his pupil Tarski in 1921. ^{8} Once the possible was denoted as $1/2$ the way was open to many-valued logics, and such logics are indeed used to solve problems associated with independence, non-contradiction and completeness of axioms.

Much richer than these is the practical or deontic (normative) logic developed by G.H. von Wright, ^{9} who recognized two aspects of knowledge: theoretical and practical. The last he divided into logics of values, names and imperatives. Four modal categories applied to each of these three logics — truth (necessary, possible or contingent), knowledge (verified, falsified or undecided), obligation (compulsory, permitted, forbidden) and existence (relation of modal logic to quantification). The matter is technical, of course, and contested, but has been applied to legal issues.

If nonstandard logics like modal and the many-valued escape the restrictions of standard logic, are they more widely applicable? Surprisingly, the answer is no. They apply more cogently in certain specific areas (in quantum

mechanics, in computer circuitry, or the problems of relay and switching circuits in electrical theory) but lose their universality because the two-valued tautologies no longer apply. {10} Many workers regard them as degraded systems, no more than interesting novelties.

32.6. Role of Logic and Its Limitations

So where does logic fit into philosophy? Mostly as a means to an end, i.e. to thinking clearly, and expressing that thought succinctly. The psychologist Jean Piaget certainly regarded thinking as secondary to the actions of the intelligence. For him — as it was for Cassirer (11.5) — logic was a science of pure forms, structures simply representing the processes of thought. Logic was too narrow, arid and mechanical to properly represent human thought processes. René Poirier argued for an organic logic where modalities operated on various levels: symbolism, experience and mental certitude. Symbolic logic was only the syntactical manipulation of signs empty of content. Logic should start further down, thought Petre Botezatu, by studying the structures of thoughts themselves. Above all, thought Anton Dumitru, we must know directly the fundamental ideas and principles of logic. {11}

32.7. Reference and Naming

How could we know these principles? Moreover, to take something more straightforward, how do we even make reference to objects that form the subjects of simple two-value propositions? There is more to it than pointing and uttering a name. Many words denote things abstract, or never seen, or possibly not even existing. And the matter is crucial. However logically transparent the sentences, they will not make sense unless they hook up to the world beyond. How is this done? What is the answer to literary critics like Derrida who claim that words point not to objects, but to other words, and these to yet more, and so on endlessly?

At their simplest, prior to their use in propositions and sentences, words refer to things. But do they need to have meanings, or can they simply denote things — i.e. do they describe or simply point? Russell opted for both {12}: his theory of descriptions combined sense and reference: F denotes x iff F applies to x. (Additionally, there was a special category of logically proper names that denoted simple objects, these simple objects being the results of direct acquaintance, i.e. of sense impressions.) But in general Russell's ordinary proper names were identified with description, even though different speakers might carry around different descriptions in their heads. And where the simple object denoted did not exist (the present King of France) then matters could be arranged so that one at least of the propositions was false.

We can therefore speak meaningfully of things that do not exist. The sentences are simply false, as would be those employing a fiction like Sherlock Holmes. But since there is a distinction between 'Sherlock Holmes was a detective', and 'Sherlock Holmes was a woman', subsequent philosophers have often preferred to use a formal language in a domain of fictional entities: the so-called free logics. Many things are not determinable in fiction, moreover (did Sherlock Holmes have an aunt in Leamington Spa?) so that these logics are often multi-valued. {13}

Since a name might not be acceptable to everyone, or might conjure up very different descriptions in different minds, Strawson and Searle (28.4) suggested that name and reference should be established by a cluster of descriptions, most though not all operating at any one time. {14} But what do we understand by: 'The man who murdered Sadat was insane?' — insane because he murdered Sadat, or insane anyway? To distinguish, Donnellan {15} used the terms attributive and referential respectively.

Saul Kripke is critical of description. Descriptions may fix a reference, but do not give it sense. Some may even turn out

later to be false. To preserve a reference from these mishaps what we should employ are rigid designators, entities which have the same reference in all possible worlds. {16} Remember, says Kripke, that references are often borrowed without being understood, and that we may have only the haziest notion of Cicero and the Cataline plot but still wish to refer to them. Let us therefore adopt a causal theory of reference. {17} A name is introduced by dubbing: ostension. People not present at the dubbing can pick up the name later, and in turn pass it on to others: the reference chains are called designating or d-chains. The name thus becomes independent of its first use or user, allows substitution by other words, and needs no elaborate descriptions. No doubt this mimics what actually happens in the world. But each speaker is now responsible for the reference: his meanings, and associations in using the name can all be referred back and checked. Words other than names are more difficult: they require reference fixing and theories for reference borrowing, which is where a good deal of contemporary work continues.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

33. TRUTH IN MATHEMATICS

Though mathematics might seem the clearest and most certain kind of knowledge we possess, there are problems just as serious as those in any other branch of philosophy. What is the nature of mathematics? In what sense do its propositions have meaning? {1}

Plato believed in Forms or Ideas that were eternal, capable of precise definition and independent of perception. Among such entities he included numbers and the objects of geometry — lines, points, circles — which were therefore apprehended not with the senses but with reason. ‘Mathematicals’ — the objects mathematics deals with — were specific instances of ideal Forms. Since the true propositions of mathematics were true of the unchangeable relations between unchangeable objects, they were inevitably true, which means that mathematics discovered pre-existing truths ‘out there’ rather than created something from our mental predispositions. And as for the objects perceived by our senses, one apple, two pears, etc. they are only poor and evanescent copies of the Forms one, two, etc., and something the philosopher need not overmuch concern himself with. Mathematics dealt with truth and ultimate reality. {2}

Aristotle disagreed. Forms were not entities remote from appearance but something which entered into objects of the world. That we can abstract oneness or circularity does not mean that these abstractions represent something remote and eternal. Mathematics was simply reasoning about idealizations. Aristotle looked closely at the structure of mathematics, distinguishing logic, principles used to demonstrate theorems, definitions (which do not suppose the defined actually exist), and hypotheses (which do suppose they actually exist). He also reflected on infinity, perceiving the difference between a potential infinity (e.g.

adding one to a number ad infinitum) and a complete infinity (e.g. number of points into which a line is divisible). {3}

Leibniz brought together logic and mathematics. But whereas Aristotle used propositions of the subject-predicate form, Leibniz argued that the subject 'contains' the predicate: a view that brought in infinity and God. Mathematical propositions are not true because they deal in eternal or idealized entities, but because their denial is logically impossible. They are true not only of this world, or the world of eternal Forms, but of all possible worlds. Unlike Plato, for whom constructions were adventitious aids, Leibniz saw the importance of notation, a symbolism of calculation, and so began what became very important in the twentieth century: a method of forming and arranging characters and signs to represent the relationships between mathematical thoughts. {4}

Mathematical entities for Kant (13) were a-priori synthetic propositions, which of course provide the necessary conditions for objective experience. Time and space were matrices, the containers holding the changing material of perception. Mathematics was the description of space and time. If restricted to thought, mathematical concepts required only self-consistency, but the construction of such concepts involves space having a certain structure, which in Kant's day was described by Euclidean geometry. As for applied mathematics — the distinction between the abstract 'two' and 'two pears' — this is construction plus empirical matter. {5}

Kant, in his analysis of infinity, accepted Aristotle's distinction between potential and complete infinity, but did not think the latter was logically impossible. Complete infinity was an idea of reason, internally consistent, though of course never encountered in our world of sense perceptions. How consistent? Every schoolboy knows that infinity is something to which special rules apply. You cannot use simple mathematics to argue: $\text{infinity} + 1 = \text{infinity}$, so that

(subtracting infinity both sides) $1 = 0$. But what actually is infinity — something actual or potential? It matters very much. Some schools of mathematics avoid actual infinity because of the contradictions or antinomies that arise. Others are reluctant to do so as it bars them from many powerful and fascinating domains, from what Hilbert called ‘the paradise which Cantor has created for us.’ {6} Of course that paradise is somewhat counter-intuitive. There are hierarchies of infinite sets, infinite ordinal numbers, infinite cardinal numbers, etc. And mathematicians will take up different attitudes to such notions. A finitist like Aristotle would have accepted the existence of growing or potential infinities, but not complete ones, which would lack content and intelligibility. Transfinitists like Cantor, however, ascribed intelligibility and content even to complete infinities. And methodical transfinitists like Hilbert admitted transfinite concepts into mathematical theories because they were useful in simplifying and unifying theories, but did not believe the concepts fully existed. {7}

33.1. Mathematics as Logic

Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and their followers developed Leibniz's idea that mathematics was something logically undeniable. Frege used general laws of logic plus definitions, formulating a symbolic notation for the reasoning required. Inevitably, through the long chains of reasoning, these symbols became less intuitively obvious, the transition being mediated by definitions. What were these definitions? Russell saw them as notational conveniences, mere steps in the argument. Frege saw them as implying something worthy of careful thought, often presenting key mathematical concepts from new angles. If in Russell's case the definitions had no objective existence, in Frege's case the matter was not so clear: the definitions were logical objects which claim an existence equal to other mathematical entities. Nonetheless, Russell carried on, resolving and side-stepping many logical

paradoxes, to create with Whitehead (23.3) the monumental system of description and notation of the *Principia Mathematica* (1910-13). {8}

Many were impressed but not won over. If natural numbers were defined through classes — one of the system's more notable achievements — weren't these classes in turn defined through similarities, which left open how the similarities were themselves defined if the argument was not to be merely circular? The logical concept of number had also to be defined through the non-logical hypothesis of infinity, every natural number n requiring a unique successor $n+1$. And since such a requirement hardly applies to the real world, the concept of natural numbers differs in its two incarnations, in pure and applied mathematics. Does this matter? Yes indeed, as number is not continuous in atomic processes, a fact acknowledged in the term quantum mechanics. Worse still, the *Principia* incorporated almost all of Cantor's transfinite mathematics, which gave rise to contradictions when matching class and subclass, difficulties that undermined the completeness with which numbers may be defined. {9}

Logic in geometry may be developed in two ways. The first is to use one-to-one correspondences. Geometric entities—lines, points, circle, etc. — are matched with numbers or sets of numbers, and geometric relationships are matched with relationships between numbers. The second is to avoid numbers altogether and define geometric entities partially but directly by their relationships to other geometric entities. Such definitions are logically disconnected from perceptual statements, so that the dichotomy between pure and applied mathematics continues, somewhat paralleling Plato's distinction between pure Forms and their earthly copies. Alternative self-consistent geometries can be developed, therefore, and one cannot say beforehand whether actuality (say the wider spaces of the cosmos) is or is not Euclidean.

Moreover, the shortcomings of the logistic procedures remain, in geometry and in number theory. {10}

33.2. Mathematics as Exposition

Even Russell saw the difficulty with set theory. We can distinguish sets that belong to themselves from sets that do not. But what happens when we consider the set of all sets that do not belong to themselves? Mathematics had been shaken to its core in the nineteenth century by the realization that the infallible mathematical intuition that underlay geometry was not infallible at all. There were space-filling curves. There were continuous curves that could be nowhere differentiated. There were geometries other than Euclid's that gave perfectly intelligible results. Now there was the logical paradox of a set both belonging and not belonging to itself. Ad-hoc solutions could be found, but something more substantial was wanted. David Hilbert (1862-1943) and his school tried to reach the same ends as Russell, but abandoned some of the larger claims of mathematics. Mathematics was simply the manipulation of symbols according to specified rules. The focus of interest was the entities themselves and the rules governing their manipulation, not the references they might or might not have to logic or to the physical world.

In fact Hilbert was not giving up Cantor's world of transfinite mathematics, but accommodating it to a mathematics concerned with concrete objects. Just as Kant had employed reason to categories beyond sense perceptions — moral freedoms and religious faith — so Hilbert applied the real notions of finite mathematics to the ideal notions of transfinite mathematics.

And the programme fared very well at first. It employed finite methods — i.e. concepts that could be insubstantiated in perception, statements in which the statements are correctly applied, and inferences from these statements to other statements. Most clearly this was seen in classical

arithmetic. Transfinite mathematics, which is used in projective geometry and algebra, for example, gives rise to contradictions, which makes it all the more important to see arithmetic as fundamental. But of course non-elementary arithmetic is not straightforward, and a formalism had to be developed. H.B. Curry was stricter and clearer than Hilbert in this regard, and used (a) terms {tokens (lists of objects), operations (modes of combination) and rules of formation} (b) elementary propositions (lists of predicates and arguments), and (c) elementary theorems {axioms (propositions true unconditionally) and rules of procedure}. But Volume I of Hilbert and Bernays's classic work had been published, and II was being prepared when, in 1931, Gödel's second incompleteness theorem brought the programme to an end. Gödel showed, fairly simply and quite conclusively, that such formalisms could not formalize arithmetic completely.

What does this mean? Suppose we postulate an arithmetical expression called X . Traditional mathematics would prove X to be either true or false. If different mathematical routes taken within the system proved that X was both true and false, however, then the system was inconsistent. If X could neither be proved as true or false within the system — and the emphasis is crucial, as the consistency could be proved in other ways — then the system is incomplete. Gödel showed that there would always be propositions that were true, but which could not be deduced from the axioms.

But perhaps even before Gödel, there were difficulties papered over. The relationship between empirically evident statements of pure mathematics and the empirically not evident statements of applied mathematics was unclear. Actual infinite sets were not used, but their symbols did appear in metamathematics, these being likened somewhat implausibly to stroke expressions. And then there was the question of the correctness of constructions, which involved an outlawed logic, if only minimally.{11}

33.3. Mathematics as Intuition

For intuitionists like L.E.J. Brouwer (1881-1966) the subject matter of mathematics is intuited non-perceptual objects and constructions, these being introspectively self-evident. Indeed, mathematics begins with a languageless activity of the mind that moves on from one thing to another but keeps a memory of the first as the empty form of a common substratum of all such moves. Subsequently, such constructions have to be communicated so that they can be repeated — i.e. clearly, succinctly and honestly, as there is always the danger of mathematical language outrunning its content.

How does this work in practice? Intuitionist mathematics employs a special notation, and makes more restricted use of the law of the excluded middle (that something cannot be p and not- p at the same time). A postulate, for example, that the irrational number π has an infinite number of unbroken sequences of a hundred zeros in its full expression would be conjectured as undecidable rather than true or false. But the logic is very different, particularly with regard to negation, the logic being a formulation of the principles employed in the specific mathematical construction rather than applied generally. But what of the individual, self-evident experiences which raise Wittgenstein problems of private languages? Do, moreover, we have to construct and then derive a contradiction for a proposition like a square circle cannot exist rather than conceive the impossibility of one existing? And wouldn't consistency be more easily tested by developing constructions further, rather than waiting for self-evidence to appear? {12}

33.4. Mathematics as Free Expression

Social constructivists took a very different line. {13} Mathematics is simply what mathematicians do. Mathematics arises out of its practice, and must ultimately be a free creation of the human mind, not an exercise in

logic or a discovery of pre-existing fundamentals. True, mathematics does tell us something about the physical world, but it is a physical world sensed and understood by human beings, as Kant pointed out long ago. Perhaps, somewhere in the universe, evolution has made very different creatures, when their mathematics will not resemble ours at all: it is surely possible.

Morris Kline {14} remarked that relativity reminds us that nature presents herself as an organic whole, with space, matter and time commingled. Humans have in the past analysed nature, selected certain properties as the most important, forgotten that they were abstracted aspects of a whole, and regarded them thereafter as distinct entities. They were then surprised to find that they must reunite these supposed separate concepts to obtain a consistent, satisfactory synthesis of knowledge. Almost from the beginning, men have carried out algebraic reasoning independent of sense experience. Who can visualize a non-Euclidean world of four or more dimensions? Or the Shrödinger wave equations, or antimatter? Or electromagnetic radiation that moves without a supporting ether? Modern science has dispelled angels and mysticism, but it has also removed intuitive and physical content that appeals to experience. 'We have seen the truth,' said G.K. Chesterton, 'and it makes no sense.' Nonetheless, mathematics remains useful, indeed vital, and no one despairs because its conceptions do not entirely square with the world.

33.5. Mathematics as Embodied Mind

Jungian (20) psychiatrists regarded numbers as archetypes, autonomous and self-organizing entities buried deep in the collective unconscious. Scientists and mathematicians have found that approach much too shadowy, lacking real evidence or explanatory power. But numbers as predispositions of inner body processes have reappeared in

metaphor theory, this time supported by clinical study. Lakoff and Núñez (24.3) analyse the mathematical metaphors behind arithmetic, symbolic logic, sets, transfinite numbers, infinitesimals, and calculus, ending with Euler's equation, where e , i and π are shown to be arithmetisations of important concepts: recurrence, rotation, change and self-regulation. Mathematics is thus a human conceptualisation operating with and limited to the brain's cognitive mechanisms. We cannot know if other (non-human) forms of mathematics exist, and mathematics is the language of science because both disciplines are mappings of source observations onto target abstractions, i.e. brain operations that employ innate and learned understandings of the world around us. Despite the variety and profundity of mathematics, the metaphors involved are surprising simple (if largely unconscious): object collection, object construction, measuring stick, motion along a line, container, boundary, source-path-goal, repetition (leading to models of infinity), etc. The abstract is apprehended in the concrete by conceptual metaphors, and metaphorical blends allow us to combine two distinct cognitive structures through a fixed correspondence between them: thus angles as seen as numbers in trigonometry, etc. Mathematical closure, which requires mathematical operations on numbers to always generate numbers, introduces concepts like zero, negative numbers and Boolean sets. {15}

33.6. Conclusions

As the embodied mind theory has yet to be widely accepted, there flourish today the four interpretations of mathematics: Platonism, formalism, intuitionism and social constructivism. All have their advocates, but practising mathematicians often have mixed views. A mathematician may be fortified by the Platonist view, for example, but also regard mathematics as an communal activity, one which generates deep relationships that are sometimes applicable to the 'real

world', a view that brings him close to social constructivism.
{16}

But most mathematicians do not fish these nebulous waters. The theoretical basis of mathematics is one aspect of the subject, but not the most interesting, nor the most important. Like their scientist colleagues, they assert simply that their discipline 'works'. They accept that mathematics cannot entirely know or describe itself, that it may not be a seamless activity, and that contradictions may arise from unexpected quarters. {17} Mathematics is an intellectual adventure, and it would be disappointing if its insights could be explained away in concepts or procedures we could fully circumscribe.

What is the relevance to poetry? Only that both mathematics and poetry seem partly creations and partly discoveries of something fundamental about ourselves and the world around. Elegance, fertility and depth are important qualities in both disciplines, and behind them both lurks incompleteness and unfathomable strangeness. {18}

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Somewhat simplistic, but with examples taken from eastern and western traditions.

[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

34. TRUTH IN SCIENCE

34.1. Introduction

To the ancients, *scientia* meant knowledge and experience: wisdom, in short. But science today implies something else: knowledge collected by following certain rules, and presented in a certain way. Scientists are realists: they believe in the existence of an external reality which philosophers have never been able to prove. The point is worth stressing. Science attempts to make a sharp distinction between the world out there, which is real and independent of us, and the individual's thoughts and feelings, which are internal and inconstant and to be explained eventually in terms of outside realities. {1}

Scientists therefore look for external testimony: they study those aspects of knowledge where there can be overwhelming agreement. That knowledge they group under laws, which are invariable relations and regularities. Laws of substance are the more descriptive: certain plants have a certain structure: water boils at 100 degrees Centigrade. Laws of function concern cause and effect, the invariable relations that hold between the properties of materials and systems. The social sciences do not have the precision of the physical sciences, of course, and the part played by chance and irreversible processes is being increasingly recognized in all areas of science. {2}

Laws are invariable relationships universally accepted in the relevant scientific community. Theories are more open to doubt and refutation. Hypotheses are tentative theories. But laws do not provide explanations: they simply state the relationship between the relevant variables. Theories give more of a picture, some insight into how it is that a law holds. What then are these theories? Two views. One is that they are convenient fictions, compact reformulations of laws. The other is that they refer to real things — quarks, electrons, gravitational force — that exist independently of us and our

sensory equipment. Scientists themselves tend not to worry about these problems, but if pressed might regard theories as compelling understandings of the world, which correspond with observations, fit in broadly with other theories, and make sense. {3}

Must science rest on strong logical foundations? Probably not. Much in quantum theory is contra-intuitive. {4} Randomness enters into relatively simple systems. {5} We deduce consequences from theories so as to check them. And we induce theories from observations, which Aristotle called generalizing. Scientific laws are often best expressed in mathematical form — giving them precise formulation and prediction — but mathematics does not rest on logic: the attempts last century by Russell and Whitehead ended in paradoxes, and the formalist approach of Hilbert was overthrown by Gödel's incompleteness theorem. {6}

34.2. The Problem of Induction

Many problems were noted long ago. How much evidence needs to be assembled before a generalization becomes overwhelmingly certain? It is never certain. David Hume (1711-76) pointed out that no scientific law is ever conclusively verified. That the sun has risen every morning so far will not logically entail the sun rising in future. Effect is simply what follows cause: laws of function are only habit. {7}

There are further difficulties with induction. Scientists make a large number of observations from which to generalize. But these observations are made with a purpose, not randomly: they are selected according to the theory to be tested, or what the discipline prescribes as relevant. Then the eye (or any other organ) does not record like a camera, but interprets according to experience and expectation. Theory is to some extent threaded into observation. Finally, there is the reporting of observations, which must be assembled and

regimented in accordance with the theory being advanced or refuted.

Does this worry scientists? Not at all. Whatever the philosophic difficulties, science works, and its successes are augmented every day. Besides, the problem can be circumvented by employing statistical relevance. We assemble the factors that might be relevant and see how probability changes as a result. For example: if the probability of Event E given Cause C is changed by Factor A, then A is relevant — matters which can be set out in probability theory. {8}

34.3. Karl Popper: The Falsifiability Thesis

But if induction is the weak link in science, why not remove it altogether? Science, claimed Karl Popper (1902-94), proceeds by guesses that are continually tested, i.e. by conjectures and refutations. {9} That is the real essence of science, not that its conclusions may be verified, but that they can be refuted. Metaphysics, art and psychoanalysis can not be so falsified, and they are therefore not science. {10}

An admirable distinction, but is it true? Are scientific theories really formulated so as to expose their potential grounds of weakness? Are they ditched when contrary evidence appears? And is the scientific enterprise conducted this way? The answer to all three questions is generally no.

34.5. How Science Works

The first point to be emphasized is the diversity of science. All sciences are objective and empirical, presenting results that can be independently verified by a qualified practitioner. But each discipline in practice, and sometimes each sub-discipline, has its own traditions, ethos and procedures. And these in turn are the product of long training and a communality of views, even to some extent of mentalities: good botanists do not make good astrophysicists.

Then, contrary to Popper's view, most biologists and psychologists do believe that animals form mental pictures, practical working models to guide their activities. They may suffer surprises, and have to adapt and extend their models, but no living organism could survive a flux of continuous uncertainty. {11}

Are scientists objective, carefully considering theories on the basis of evidence, and that alone? Only to some extent. Scientists are human, and their work is fuelled by their interests, career needs and animosities like everyone else's. {12} But independence is claimed for the end product. The scientific paper may not represent the twists and turns of thought and experiment, but aren't the final results objectively presented, earlier workers acknowledged, and arguments for acceptance soberly marshalled? Not really. Papers do not let the facts speak for themselves. The evidence is persuasively presented: there is a rhetoric of science. {13} Papers are refereed, and maverick views excluded. Vetting by peer-groups discounts or expunges work that starts from different assumptions or comes to fundamentally unsettling conclusions, as Velikovsky {14} and Gauquelin {15} both found.

34.6. Kuhn's View: The Scientific Paradigm

Science, postulated Thomas Kuhn, employed conceptual frameworks, ways of looking of the world which excluded rival conceptions. These paradigms, as he called them, were traditions of thinking and acting in a certain field. They represented the totality of background information, of laws and theories which are taught to aspiring scientist as true, and which in turn the scientist has to accept if he is to be accepted into the scientific community. Scientific enterprise is conservative. The paradigm legislates. What lies outside its traditions is non-science. And for long periods science proceeds quietly and cumulatively, extending and perfecting the traditions. Anomalies, even quite large anomalies, are

accepted for the sake of overall coherence. But when the anomalies become too large, and (crucially) make better sense in a new paradigm, there occurs a scientific revolution. The old laws, the terminology and the evidence all suddenly shift to accommodate the new paradigm. {16}

Kuhn propounded his theory by referring to the history of science, and that history has been much pored over since. The jury is still out. Working scientists are largely happy with Popper, but historians and philosophers of science are less so. Popper didn't deny that much of science proceeded mechanically, but argued that this was bad science. To some extent, scientists do act in the appearances-saving manner that paradigms portray, but change is more gradual than Kuhn supposed. Mary Hesse in particular examined the part played by analogy, metaphor and imagination in the creation of theories — none reducible to a method — and was familiar with continental hermeneutics. But science was different, she concluded, though there is space in our mental activities for art and religion. Religious and scientific cosmologies are 'collective representations'. {17} The controversy has been bitter, but largely restricted to the esoteric areas of theory. Working scientists still broadly see themselves as extending the boundaries of knowledge and are very disinclined to engage in Jesuitical debates on philosophical matters. {18}

34.7. Imre Lakatos

The second challenge to Popper came from Imre Lakatos, who grouped theories into 'research programmes' and made these the deciding mechanism. Each such programme possessed a hard core of sacrosanct information established over a long period of trial and error. Round the core was a protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses and observations that were being constantly tested and modified. Programmes guided scientists in their choice of problems to pursue, and were attractive ('progressive', Lakatos called them) to the

extent that they accumulated empirical support and made novel predictions. Above all, programmes protected scientists from inconvenient facts and confusing observations — necessarily, or many eventually successful theories would have been strangled at birth.

Though the auxiliary belt served to protect the research programme core, and was constantly being modified, these modifications could not be made ad hoc, devised simply to get round a particular problem. They had to be falsifiable: Lakatos agreed with Popper that sociology and psychoanalysis were unscientific on this basis. But how is the progressive research programme to be distinguished from the degenerating one, except by hindsight? Kuhn accepted a leap of faith, an intuitive feel for where the future lay, but Lakatos did not. {19}

34.8. Paul Feyerabend

Paul Feyerabend initially {20} won a considerable reputation as an historian of science prepared to get down to precise scientific detail. He was a realist in the Popper sense, and argued that science progressed through proliferating theories, rather than coalescing into a prevailing Kuhnian paradigm. Subsequently, to the horror of colleagues and friends, he took a sociological and anarchistic line, arguing that true science was being stifled by the scientific establishment, an institution as self-serving and undemocratic as the medieval Church. {21} Orthodox medicine, for example, tries to put obstacles in the way of alternative medicine, regardless of the facts. There are no methodologies, he claims, and indeed 'anything goes'. Feyerabend has been scathing of the philosophy of science, remarking that 'almost every journal in the philosophy of science deals with problems that are of no interest to anyone except a small gang of autistic individuals.'

34.9. Implications

Kuhn's views, and more particularly Feyabend's, were seized upon as evidence that the scientific world-view was simply one paradigm amongst many. Despite its prestige and practical triumphs, science was as much a myth as art or literature or psychoanalysis. Kuhn hotly denied this, and backtracked very much from his earlier position. Both he and Popper were dismayed to see their views hijacked by the relativists, as support for the view that each person makes his own reality or concept of truth. {22} Relativism is disliked by philosophers, and the refutation is straightforward. If something is true only within a confined system — one world-view, one person's consciousness — how are we to know whether this has any currency in time or space? Even to record our observations needs a language, and languages cannot be wholly private. {23}

But non-relative truths also have their problems, most notably with language, which is not transparent or logically consistent, as difficulties with meaning all too readily show. We have different conceptions of what we call 'truth', moreover, and for Rorty truth is not a property common to true statements. {24} But if Rorty is a maverick despairing of traditional philosophy, Margolis has argued for a relativism involving three-value logics, though not supplied convincing applications. {25} Goodman suggested that artists construct their own worlds, which are 'true' when they offend no unyielding beliefs and none of their own precepts. We accept them not by their correspondence to reality, but 'rightness of description' — which leads to the question of rightness by what standard, and the usual paradoxes of relativism. {26}

34.10. Some Concluding Thoughts

Those who attack science for its remote and reductive nature, its cold-blooded efficiency and elitist decision-making should not forget how well science actually works. Scientific observations may be theory-laden, but those theories are

tested in a communality of practice. If once depicted as mechanical and predetermined, science appears less so now that quantum and chaotic processes have been more widely recognized. Science does bring great operational efficiency, and its findings cannot be called myths in the sense understood in anthropology or literary criticism. {28} Science attempts not only to understand nature, but to control nature, and there is hardly an aspect of life today that could be conducted without its help. In short, science does seem essentially different from the arts, and its successes would be miraculous if there was not some correspondence between its theories and 'reality', whatever that 'reality' may be.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

35. THE MYTH OF SCIENCE

If, as some literary theorists assert, science is a myth, then we need to understand what myths are, and how science could be limited in this way.

35.1. Introduction: Ernst Cassirer

Religion, science and art are all pictures of experience, symbolically created to give meaning to life. So thought Ernst Cassirer. {1} They were the emotion-laden, unmediated 'language' of experience, which couldn't be interrogated for a more primary intellectual meaning. And as to where they came from, the ultimate ground of their representation, one couldn't ask: that was extending everyday attitudes into areas where they didn't belong. Cassirer's thought returned to Kant, whose terminology was inconsistent and misleading but whose central thesis he extended — that the ideal was not something exterior to man but a regulative principle necessary if sense experiences were to be integrated, completed and given systematic unity. Our picture of the world today is very different from Kant's, but Cassirer argued that the great philosopher's categories could be modified to take account of such modern notions as quantum theory and relativity.

Galileo believed the world should be understood in mathematical terms alone, not through commonsense notions or sense experiences. Men produce these concepts to verify and correct these mathematical principles, which are objective and real in a conceptual sense. Whence come these concepts? From mind, said Descartes, attempting to make mind an equal partner with God. {2} These concepts have substance, moreover: extended space and time are real things existing independently of us. Objects themselves furnish the simple ideas in which mind conceives them, said Locke. {3} Impossible, retorted Berkeley. They are creations of the mind, fictions, or would be if they were not in the language through which God speaks to man. {4} But Hume

did away even with God. The origin of impressions can only be attributed to unknown causes external to us. Imagination produced concepts like consistency and coherence. The self was only a bundle of sensations. Knowledge may be certain (geometry) or probable (facts of the world) but comes down at last to psychology. {5}

Scientists joined the debate. Zeller denied the Hegelian view that knowledge could be swooped upon from above: its construction had to be taken into account. Helmholtz equated knowledge with signs brought to our awareness through perceptions, so that lawful order pre-existed in our perception, even if matter was a fundamental reality. For Mach a thing was a thought symbol, standing for a complex of sensations of a relatively fixed nature. He emphasized the need for links between theories and perceptions at every level and turn. A physical law had no more factual validity than the individual facts combined. Hertz saw the fundamental concepts of theoretical physics as patterns of possible experiences and not copies of actual experiences. Duhem regarded theories as deductive abstractions of individual laws that were characterized by mathematical elegance and simplicity. {6}

Without much influence — Susanne Langer may be his only important follower — Cassirer fought against metaphysical notions of ultimate reality on one hand, and reductionism on the other. Gödel (33.2) showed the impossibility of any intellectual system judging itself. Tarski's (30.2) 1931 incompleteness theorem drew on the interconnectedness of matter, which cannot be imagined in axiomatic systems. To that extent, no axiomatic system, no formal language, is ever final. Kuhn argued that science does not progress towards truth but undergoes revolutions in which one pattern of thought (paradigm) is replaced by another less complicated or unwieldy. Elsasser regarded biological systems as open and non-deterministic, allowing them in some ways to be self-directing. {7}

35.2. Myths

What are myths? The word comes from *mythos*, Greek for story, and is commonly taken to mean fictions or fabrications. Some anthropologists were inclined to rationalize away myths as memories of some historical figure, or as crude, pre-scientific accounts of natural phenomena by native peoples. {8}

But that didn't explain their power or significance. In his studies of native peoples, Claude Lévi-Strauss (6.3) argued that the meaning of myths lay not in their surface content but in their underlying structure, an idea which combined with ideas of Saussure (6.2) and Jakobson (38.4) to produce Structuralism and good deal of other literary theory. Isabel MacCaffrey, for one, interpreted the Christian myth in Milton's *Paradise Lost* not as representation but the 'rendering of certain stupendous realities now known only indirectly in the symbolic signatures of earthly life.' {9}

In a similar way, the psychoanalyst Jung (1875-1961: 20) had postulated shapings of psychic energy or archetypes that emerged into human consciousness in dreams, mental illness and art. Of course, archetypes were not structures, being processes or perspectives rather than content, but they dealt with number and rationality as much as with artistic and emotional expression.

From this meeting of philosophy, anthropology and psychiatry, several new schools of literary theory emerged. Perhaps the best known is that of Northrop Frye, whose *Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths* in his *Anatomy of Criticism* {10} brought individual, apparently unrelated archetypal images into an hierarchical framework of myths which could be seen to organize the whole of literature. Myth theory has its shortcomings — the myths 'revealed' can be somewhat arbitrary, and have little to say on the quality of a work under review — but the approach does recognize structures that can be studied.

Rather more individual has been C.L. Barber's examination of Shakespearean comedy: the release achieved by the plays leads to social clarification that was related to the ceremonial, ritualistic and mythic conception of human life evolving into a psychological and historical understanding among Shakespeare's contemporaries. {11} René Girard looked at ritual sacrifice and myth in ancient Greek drama, suggesting that the violence inflicted on the victim is a metamorphosis of a communal violence more deeply-rooted in the human condition than we are willing to admit. {12}

35.3. Science

Many of the commonplaces of science (34) are difficult to understand in everyday terms — even the simplest, probability, tossing a coin. If we obtain one hundred heads in succession, what are the chances of the next throw producing heads. Fifty-fifty, says the statistician. Less than that, says the layman, or the chances of heads and tails equalling out over a long experiment will not be achieved. But that means the previous results will affect the future, says the statistician, which clearly cannot be. And what of bizarre accidents for which actuaries have calculated the probabilities? What makes horses throw and kill their mounts at a certain statistical level? And how do they consistently achieve that level? {13}

In nuclear physics we have Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in which the position and velocity of a particle cannot both be precisely determined: define one more accurately and greater uncertainty attaches to the other. No doubt any attempt to measure a property of something so small will have an effect on its properties, but there are more difficult matters. The Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen thought experiment of 1935, and J.S. Bell's theorem of 1964 both ask how, if we have a two particle system of zero spin — meaning that particle A has spin up and particle B spin down — changing the spin of one particle automatically and

immediately (faster than the speed of light) changes the spin of the other. Bell's theorem has been tested and shows quite conclusively that if the theory of quantum mechanics holds (which no sensible scientist would question) then the principle of local causes fails. Events are necessarily connected through space. That is a conclusion indicated by Thomas Young's experiment of 1803. With two slits open a characteristic interference pattern is obtained, which demonstrates the wave nature of light. But if just one photon at a time is fired at the slits, the photon will change its position of impact on the screen behind the slit to accord with whether one or both of the slits are open. And it will not land on a strip that would be dark if the other slit were open. How does the one photon know of the larger circumstances? {14}

Einstein's General Theory of Relativity postulates that the velocity of light is constant (in a vacuum) across space that is curved and non-Euclidian. In classical causality an event can only be influenced by events in its past (Minkowski) light cone. But for quantum mechanics we have events outside the light cone, where indeed information between them can be transferred faster than the speed of light (tachyonic). Breakdowns in classical causality indeed occur elsewhere. Background microwave radiation, for example — three degrees above absolute zero, the remnant of the cosmic bang — must have light-waves coming from different directions that do not overlap and could not have influenced each other. It is in fact possible, as Carter showed in 1968, for a super-intelligence to create its own appearance by influencing the past. Josephson proposed that knowledge alters physical reality according to equation: increase in minimum amount of free energy = Boltzman's constant x absolute temperature x bit of information. {15}

What do orthodox scientists themselves make of these conundrums? Not much. Most would agree with Feyerabend (34.8) that the philosophy of science is of little use to them. A

theory is simply a proposition, which may be expressed in several ways, for example as wave or matrix mechanics. A theory is always provisional, and the world a good deal stranger than we can intuit or even imagine. {16}

But these puzzling phenomena are not restricted to the physically very large (cosmic spaces) or very small (atomic nuclei). Two matters are becoming increasingly clear. Firstly that the line between living and non-living is not so easy to draw: Prigogine's experiments have shown that even simple inorganic substances will set up cyclic systems which mimic the rhythms of nature. {17} Secondly, many events in the real world are nonlinear, so that unpredictability and randomness is built into life at an elementary level, spelling the end of most hard determinism. Fractals have recognized in a wide variety of things — from brain waves to river drainage patterns — and objects very easy to conceive mathematically can have puzzling fractional dimensions (e.g. not 2 but 2.24 dimensions, etc.) {18} More recently, biologists have begun to construct computer models of societies, finding that systems can have unexpected properties (emergent properties) which are not to be deduced from the simple properties of their components. Such systems are not only dynamic, but creative. When such modelling is applied to living organisms, it appears that species may not be free to evolve randomly (mutation shaped by natural selection) but are controlled by the system, by interaction between animal and environment: order is inherent in the system. Species can only adopt the 'ghost species' already given by the system: strange attractors in effect. {19}

How do scientific laws capture significant features of the universe? Because we are built to see the world in its terms. At base, the world may certainly be infinitely complex and random (the reductionist nightmare), but it also and ineluctably produces higher-order features. To explain the process, Cohen and Stewart coined the terms simplicity (a

process whereby a system of rules can engender simple features) and complicity (a coming together of features that enlarges the space of the possible, where the patterns created cannot be deduced from the features of the components.) {20} Scientists therefore conceive generalized models (features) and test them against instances (serviceable approximations), but neither features nor instances are arbitrary figments of our imagination. Both arise inescapably (though mathematical proof is still awaited) from the way the world actually operates, and we recognize them because our brains/minds are also congruent with such processes. We therefore, they speculate, share a dynamic with the world that is both comforting and awe-inspiring, being at one with its warp and weft in a way that Spinoza would have recognized.

35.4. Conclusions: Is Science a Myth?

If science, the most prestigious achievement of western civilization, is largely an autonomous system (self validating, regulating and reporting), is it therefore a myth? Some speculative literary theorists have gleefully thought so, arguing from Kuhn (34.6) that science is merely one paradigm among many. But there are important differences. The research findings of one specialization interlock with those of another, and theories lead on to other theories, which are themselves consistent with matters yet more fundamental. Science is broadly successful in presenting a world that is coherent and consistent, if sometimes by repressing alternative views and presenting research findings with practiced rhetoric.

Science is a practical matter, and modern life is increasingly dependent on its results. Science resolves, explains and predicts matters to a degree difficult for the non-scientist to appreciate. An enormous number of highly intelligent and independent individuals — laboratory workers, researchers, theoreticians — are every day toiling away to test, refine and

extend our understanding. At base, science rests on consensus — about what is relevant, how the work should be carried out, and how reported — but the methods have stood the test of time, and the experiments or observations can always be repeated and validated. In this there is little room for widespread collusion, or for the vagaries of personal response that typify the reading of a novel or poem. {21}

Science is not the only world view, of course. The aesthete Stephen Pepper recognized five ways of dealing with reality: formism, mechanism, 'contextualism', 'organicism' and 'selectivism'. {22} These root metaphors, as he called them, were the use of one part of experience to illuminate another, to help us understand, comprehend, even to intuit, or enter into the other. Each was a distinct and perfectly plausible way of making sense of the world, but they were independent, and couldn't be mixed. Pepper formulated each root metaphor in his own way, but 'formism' broadly corresponded to Platonism, 'contextualism' to Dewey's pragmatism and 'organicism' to Hegel. 'Mechanism' corresponded to the Anglo-American empiricist tradition: general laws that explain a world ultimately made up of sense impressions. 'Selectivism' was introduced later, in Pepper's *Concept and Quality* of 1966, as the purposive act.

But if science carves nature at joints of real importance, it still has enormous difficulties in answering simple philosophic questions — the reality of quarks, the nature of scientific laws, and so forth. Moreover, it deals with the morally neutral, and with abstractions amenable only to advanced mathematics. Nonetheless, science is distinctive in two respects. Broad agreement does exist as to how theories should be tested, refined and refuted. And science is much more objective and comprehensive.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

36. THE NEW SCIENCE

Paradoxically, now that literary criticism is adopting many of the previous methods and outlooks of science, science itself is moving on. The newer sciences recognize the role of scientists in their experiments, the pervasiveness of chaotic systems, and the complex nature of brain functioning. Science is an abstraction, and for all its astonishing success, can only make models that leave out much that is important to human beings.

36.1. Introduction

What does the word 'science' conjure up? (34) Slow advances by an established routine of observation and experimentation, the careful testing of hypotheses, publication of results in respectable journals, the findings validated by other workers? Certainly a good deal of science does progress by agreed procedures. Objectivity is stressed and rigorous procedures are adopted to remove experimenter bias. Whatever the field, the experiment or observations may be repeated and the same results obtained by anyone with the correct equipment and training. {1}

The end result is theories, which are independent of context. In the most compressed form, often mathematical, the theories state the relationships holding between external realities: temperature, mass, plant type, age, location, etc. {2} Much depends on the science concerned — the descriptive sciences of botany, geology and palaeontology are obviously different from chemistry, astronomy and physics, but there is general feeling that the more abstract and reductive the theories the better: the greatest number of phenomena are covered in the most elegant and fundamental fashion.

And whatever the discipline, the method certainly works. Progress in the last hundred years has been staggering, and

now even psychology, medicine, sociology and anthropology strive to emulate the hard sciences, even if at long removes. Sometimes the context cannot be entirely squeezed out of the algorithm: it is important which illness, where and affecting whom is being studied. And though physics is pushing on to theories of everything {3} — which can only be mathematical notations impossible to conceive — this option is clearly not open to the human or descriptive sciences. Indeed the human sciences are particularly resistant to a reductive approach (or, to put it another way, fail to be fully science). Anthropology employed a mathematical notation during its Structuralist (6.3) phase, but the equations were soon recognized as empty window-dressing. And mundane psychology experiments are still notorious for ‘proving’ the obvious. {4}

But even in the hard sciences, the methodology has its problems. What exactly are electrons? They behave both as particles and a wave action. Perplexingly, they disappear when they meet their opposite number, the positron. Worse still, they obey statistical laws, the Schrödinger wave equations only indicating the percentage likelihood of an electron being in a certain position with a certain speed. Of course we can rationalize the situation, say that an electron is like nothing else but an electron, and that the very act of observing upsets its speed and position. But that is not the orthodox view, or very comforting. The electron is a lepton, one of the fundamental building blocks of matter, and if these blocks do not have solid objective existence, what does? {5} The building blocks seem inter-linked in a way they should not be, moreover, seeming to communicate instantaneously — faster than the speed of light, which the General Theory of Relativity declares impossible. {6}

And matters at the other end of the scale, in astrophysics, are equally baffling. The universe may have originated out of nothing, a false vacuum collapse, which co-created other universes that will always remain outside our detection. And

the fabric of the universe may be constituted by superstrings, loops of incredibly small size. Originally these superstrings had 26 dimensions, but 6 have compacted to invisibility and 16 have internal dimensions to account for fundamental forces. {7} Is this credible? The theory is contested, and may indeed turn out to be pure mathematics — which is shaky in places, not only in superstrings, but generally. {8}

But if the world is stranger than we can conceive it, it is no longer in areas we cannot enter anyway, the very small or the very large. Science has traditionally dealt with reversible, linear situations: small causes that have small effects, and are totally predictable. But most of the world is not that way at all. The cup slips from our grasp at breakfast, we have a row with our partner for spoiling the new carpet, go late to the office in a foul temper, fall out with the boss, are fired, lose the home and partner and indeed everything from the most insignificant incident. And that is by no means an exceptional, one-off situation. Non-linear situations are common enough in scientific investigations but were blithely ignored. Scientists only reported the experiments that worked, that provided the simple relationships they were looking for. {9}

36.2. The False Picture of Science

That does not imply that the investigations were cooked, though certainly the scientific paper does give a strange notion of how experiments are conducted, and perhaps even a false one. {10} But the main objection is that the idealizations represented by cause and effect models become abstract, remote and artificial. Life simply isn't as science depicts. {11} Science works very effectively in some ways, but these ways are not the natural habitat of human beings. Indeed, as we move from physics to the life sciences and then to psychology, sociology and economics, the reductionism of science increasingly fails to adequately represent matters. The current models of economics and

psychology are not only much too simplistic, but tend to illustrate and take for granted what at base are only assumptions and shared procedures. A notion like 'marginal utility' can never have the objective existence of the volt or an oak tree. The notion is largely an artefact of the conceptual system, and attempts to prove the notion soon dissolve into arguments about the foundations of economics itself. {12} {19}

Are the hard sciences that much better? Certainly their predictions are clearer-cut and more successful. Psychological theories are notoriously ambiguous, and economics is more trotted out for justification in business and politics than rigorously applied. But at base (though a good deal deeper down and more secure) the hard sciences themselves rest on the assumptions and procedures that form the long apprenticeships of scientists. The very building blocks of nature are nebulous concepts, and there bristle immense philosophical problems with theories, objective reality, truth, logic and mathematics. Sometimes there seems to exist no unquestionable bedrock of experience or knowledge on which science or anything else can be ultimately grounded.

Suppose that is so. Instead of continually seeking what does not exist, can we not accept that we live in a web of mutually supporting beliefs, assumptions, ways of looking at and responding to things. Does that open the floodgates to wild irrationalism, or rule out objectivity? Not at all. Derrida's deconstruction may seem to argue so, but the world still has to make sense through language, and some things cannot be argued away. Whatever reality we may chose to accord it, the world 'out there' — and the way others see and respond to that world — very much constrains our own beliefs and actions. Most of what we read we have to take on trust. Private languages are unworkable, and life is much too short to investigate everything. We are born into a web of

understandings, make a few modifications as need dictates, and hand the web on much as we found it.

36.3. The New Science of Complexity

A new science accepts this web-like view of the world. Called by a variety of names — study of dissipative structures, complex systems, life systems {13} — it has grown from the unexpected fusion of two very different fields. One is computer simulation of complex systems that hover on the border between chaos and regularity. The other is the behaviour of living organisms.

Complex systems are now an immense field of study, difficult to summarize briefly, but their essential feature is non-linearity. The future behaviour of the system depends on its prior behaviour and through feed-backs has an inbuilt element of randomness. Such behaviour is seen in very simple systems (e.g. one represented by $X' = k x(1 - x)$ where x is the value initially, and X the value at a later time) but real-life examples are usually much more complicated, often resulting from the interaction of several such systems. The system will exhibit areas of simple behaviour: movement towards a single point, or oscillation between two or more points, but there will also be areas of chaotic behaviour where the smallest change in prior conditions causes wild fluctuations later on. But even more characteristic of these systems are strange attractors. The system revolves round certain points, continually tracing trajectories that are very similar but never exactly identical. {14}

What has this to do with life? Certain chemical reactions behave in a similar way, and their behaviour mimics those of living systems, even though the reactions involve non-organic compounds that would individually behave quite straightforwardly. Given feedback mechanisms — and many chemical reactions are reversible — there arise areas or islands of order on the very edge of chaos. Most importantly, the systems organize themselves, automatically, out of the

web of interacting reactions. They have emergent properties where behaviour is different and not to be predicted from the behaviour at a lower level.

And the significance? Living creatures may owe their structures to such self-organization of their constituent chemicals: in the metabolism of cells, brain functioning, even the way the DNA code is interpreted to produce the right sequence of cells in the growing animal. On a broader field, that of ecosystems and natural selection, it may be that species themselves represent strange attractors, with parallel evolution in the likes of whales and marsupial wolves. {15} Indeed the theory of networks (23.5) can be very generally extended. Life, according to the Santiago school of Maturana and Varela, is characterized by two features: cognition and the ability to reproduce. Cognition means making distinctions and is shown by all forms of life, even the lowliest. But only man, and possibly the higher primates to some extent, know that they know, i.e. have self-awareness and an inner world. Self awareness is closely tied to language, which is not a mental representation or a transfer of information, but a coordination of behaviour. Language is a communication about communication, by which we bring forth a world, weaving the linguistic network in which we live.

At a stroke, a good deal of philosophy's aims are thrown away. Mental states embody certain sensations. Cognitive experience involves resonance — technically phase-locking — between specific cell assemblies in the brain: e.g. those dealing with perception, emotion, memory, bodily movement, and also involves the whole body's nervous systems. Attempts to define, or even to illuminate, such concepts as consciousness, being, truth and ethical value are no more than knottings in the web of understanding. Words lead back to physiology and bodily functioning, not to any abstract notions based on irrefutable logic. {16}

36.4. Poems as Strange Attractors

And the relevance to literature? It may be that poems themselves are strange attractors. There are many similarities. Poems organize themselves. The writer submits words to the embryonic arrangement of the poem — a phrase, a conjectured verse form, intellectual argument, controlling emotion — but thereafter the poem takes over, creating an arrangement of words that is not easily changed. Poets often produce cycle of poems, recognizable in theme and form, but differing slightly from poem to poem. Literary periods also see these cycles of creation: a common technique or subject matter or Zeitgeist. Strange attractors have exactly these properties: similarities but not repetitions, an independence, a reluctance to shift far from their previous shape and position.

Certainly these are conjectural matters. But consider the complex systems of brain functioning, the schemas that may operate to create our sense of reality, the part which metaphors and other tropes play in literature, and there arises a possible explanation of the enormous power of poetry: its ability to recreate experience with startling vividness, to evoke deep emotions, to condense large areas of thought in compelling arrangements of a few words. And note too how the features of artworks — pleasing shape, autonomy, emotional appeal and significance — arise out the materials themselves. The artist may guide and judge, but there are no stratagems or recipes, no foolproof procedures for success. Note also that strange attractors develop on the edge of chaos, as do artistic creations, with the artist is not wholly in control. None of these is conclusive, even when taken together, but the parallels are obvious and intriguing.

36.5. A Word of Caution

What is the scientific evidence for any of this? Only a little at present, but growing fast. {17} Neural nets already have

important applications. Very large computer networks can be programmed with a few simple rules, told the 'correct' answers to an input problem, and be expected to automatically solve future problems. How they amalgamate their simple rules into powerful problem-solving algorithms is not entirely understood, but the systems perform reasonably well in areas as diverse as predicting airline seat demand to screening cervical smears for cancer. {18}

But the importance of these approaches should not be overestimated. Science is an intensely conservative activity, and most science is and will be conducted along previous lines. Neural nets may give the right answer, but most scientists insist on knowing why. Many of these so-called approaches seem only vague analogies, and scientists will not abandon tried and tested methodologies for unquantifiable speculation. Philosophy itself will continue to probe the bases of science. Neural scientists may see meaning and truth and representation as artefacts of language, but they are nonetheless concepts we are accustomed to using. Many of the Santiago school and their popularisers seem philosophically naive, unaware of the problems met and unresolved by linguistic philosophy.

36.7. Some Concluding Thoughts

Nonetheless, there are now grounds for hoping that the three-century-old split between the arts and sciences may slowly be coming to an end. No fundamental divide separates reason and emotion, and poetry cannot be written off as emotive expression. The figurative nature of language, which the Royal Society and later science ignored, is once again emphasized by the new science and by metaphor theory. How we express something is part of its content, as surely in science as in literature. Quantitative methods will continue in literary and historical studies, but their 'objectivity' may be no more than a local knotting of common beliefs and practices.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

37. LINGUISTICS

Linguistics is the study of language, sometimes called the science of language. {1} The subject has become a very technical, splitting into separate fields: sound (phonetics and phonology), sentence structure (syntax, structuralism, deep grammar), meaning (semantics), practical psychology (psycholinguistics) and contexts of language choice (pragmatics). {2} But originally, as practised in the nineteenth century, linguistics was philology: the history of words. {3} Philologists tried to understand how words had changed and by what principle. Why had the proto-European consonants changed in the Germanic branch: Grimm's Law? Voiceless stops went to voiceless fricatives, voiced stops to voiceless stops, and voiced aspirates to voiced stops. What social phenomenon was responsible? None could be found. Worse, such changes were not general. Lines of descent could be constructed, but words did not evolve in any Darwinian sense of simple to elaborate. One could group languages as isolating (words had a single, unchanging root), agglutinating (root adds affixes but remains clear) and inflecting (word cannot be split into recurring units), but attempts to show how one group developed into another broke down in hopeless disagreement.

37.1. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)

So linguistics might have ended: documenting random changes in random directions. But that was hardly a science, only a taxonomy. When therefore Ferdinand de Saussure (6.2) tentatively suggested that language be seen as a game of chess, where the history of past moves is irrelevant to the players, a way through the impasse was quickly recognized. Saussure sketched some possibilities. If the word high-handed falls out of use, then synonyms like arrogant and presumptuous will extend their uses. If we drop the final f or v the results in English are not momentous (we might still recognize 'belie' as 'belief' from the context), but not if the

final s is dropped (we should then have to find some new way of indicating plurals).

Saussure's suggestion was very notional: his ideas were put together by students from lecture notes and published posthumously in 1915. But they did prove immensely fruitful, even in such concepts as *langue* (the whole language which no one speaker entirely masters) and *parole* (an individual's use of language). Words are signs, and in linguistics we are studying the science of signs: semiology. And signs took on a value depending on words adjacent in use or meaning. English has sheep and mutton but French has only *mouton* for both uses. Above all (extending the picture of a chess game) we should understand that language was a totality of linguistic possibilities, where the 'move' of each word depended on the possible moves of others.

Saussure had a theory of meaning. He envisaged language as a series of contiguous subdivisions marked off on the indefinite planes of ideas and sounds. A word (sign) was a fusion of concept (signified) and sound-image (signifier) the two being somehow linked as meaning in the mind. Both signifieds and signifiers independently played on their own chess board of possibilities — i.e. they took up positions with regard to other pieces, indeed owed their existence to them. Though championed by the Structuralists, this theory of semantics was a disastrous one, raising the problems recognized by linguistic philosophy. But that was not Saussure's fault. He was not a philosopher, but a philologist, one whose simple idea, though much anticipated by Michel Bréal and perhaps Franz Boas, largely recast linguistics in its present form. {3}

37.2. The Structuralists

Saussure's ideas spread first to Russia (38.1), being brought there and developed by Ramon Jakobson (1896-1982). Strictly speaking, the product was not Structuralism, which dates from Jakobson's acquaintance with Lévi-Strauss in the

1960's, but formalism: study of the devices by which literary language makes itself distinctive. Poetry was the great love of the Russian formalists (who knew personally the revolutionary poets) and they looked intently and dispassionately at the structures and devices that literature employs, whether in Pushkin's or seemingly artless fairy stories. But as Marxist ideology tightened its grip, the members of the Russian school, never a very tightly knit group, either recanted or fled abroad. Jakobson went to Czechoslovakia and then to the USA, but took with him the very speculative nature of Russian formalism: brilliant theories, but poor documentation and few laboratory studies.

Jakobson made little impact in Prague, which had its own traditions, but in America was able to draw on and develop the ideas of structural anthropology: that the behaviour of societies is governed by deep, scarcely visible rules and understandings. As such, Jakobson's views merged with those of continental philosophy and sociology — with Althusser's reinterpretation of Marx (41), that language was ideology, a hidden reality, an alternative source of state power. Also with Barthes's (7) attempt to explain the multiplicity of French society from a few underlying suppositions. And with Foucault's (9) genealogy. Meanwhile, Emile Benaviste had rewritten Saussure (6.2) (as most Structuralists and Poststructuralists were to do) to conceive the signified as not inside individual minds but part of any ever-present social reality. Gradually it is not the individual, nor the society, but language itself that becomes the defining reality, a view that leads on to Postmodernism.

Jakobson had some novel ideas of his own. There was, he proposed, a relatively simple, orderly and universal psychological system underlying the three to eight thousand odd languages in the world. Despite the many ways phonemes (basic units of sound) are produced by human mouths, all could be represented in binary structures (open-closed, back-front, etc.) governed by 12 levels of

precedence. Binary structures are written into Lévi-Strauss's views, and these notions fitted with information theory and sound spectrography. But languages in fact use a good deal more than two of any 'mouth settings', phonemes do not have an independent existence, and 12 levels will not serve. Chomsky (39) and Halle (1968) proposed 43 such rules, often complex, before abandoning the approach. Jakobson also defined poetic language as the projection onto the horizon syntagmatic axis (how words fit together in a sentence) of the vertical paradigmatic (how word are associated and can replace each other), another audacious theory that proved largely vacuous. {4}.

37.3. Descriptionists

The besetting sin of Structuralism (as of current literary theory) is its want of evidence: theories are dreamt up in the study rather than fashioned to meet field observations or laboratory experiment. That criticism cannot be laid at the door of Boas, Bloomfield and other American researchers (23.4) who in the first half of this century went out to closely observe languages as native speakers use them. Indeed, so concerned were they to avoid the strictures of Logical Positivism (29.2), that they adopted a behaviourist approach, excluding mind altogether. Language was simply inputs and outputs: how the brain handled its data was not something one could observe, and was therefore not science. Huge dossiers of information were built up, particularly on native American languages, but little that resolved itself into laws or general principles. {5}

37.4. Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

One exception was an hypothesis of Edward Sapir (1884-1934) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941). Man's language, they argued, moulds his perception of reality. The Hopi Indians of Arizona pluralize clouds as though they were animate objects, do not use spatial metaphors for time, and have no past tense as such. Do they not view the world in

these terms? And there were more spectacular examples. The Bororó of northern Brazil believe they are red parakeets — evidence, said anthropologists, that primitive societies were not aware of logical contradictions. Modern Europeans have words for the seven basic colours of the rainbow, whereas other societies have from two to eleven.

The matter is still debated. {6} The Hopi Indians do not seem to be poor timekeepers, and the Romance languages have a feminine gender for objects not seen as animate: *la cerveza* for beer, etc. Parakeets is no doubt used metaphorically by the Bororó. Even the evidence of colours, subject of a massive study by Berlin and Kay, {7} seems now not so clear-cut, since language may reflect purpose more than perception. Lakoff, however, (see below) has indeed resurrected Whorf's hypothesis through the concept of commensurability, adducing some striking if limited experimental evidence. Understanding, our ability to translate between diverse languages, is not the only factor. Equally important are use, framing and organization {8}, and behaviour here can be governed by different conceptual systems. Languages widely employ spatial conceptions, for example, and these conceptions differ between cultures.

37.5. Functional Linguistics: The Prague School

As early as 1911 in Czechoslovakia, and independently of Saussure and Jakobson, Vilém Mathesius (1882-1945) founded a non-historical approach to linguistics. The Prague School looked at the structural components as they contributed to the entire language. There was a need for a standard language once Czechoslovakia had acquired independence, and Czech had the curiosity of being very different in its colloquial and literary forms. Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890-1938) investigated paradigmatic relations between phonemes and classified functions on the purposes they served — keeping words apart, signalling stress, etc.

Like the Russian Formalists, members of the Prague School were keenly concerned with literature, but they were not hermetic in their approach — i.e. did not see literature as a self-enclosed, stand-alone entity, but something reflecting social and cultural usage. That was also a view developed by the American anthropologist William Labov in investigating the colloquial language of New York. He found that listeners to tape recordings could very accurately place speakers by geography and social stratum. As both reflected social movement in the recent past — i.e. history: this was one rare exception to Saussure's assertion that language speakers do not take past usage into consideration. {9}

37.6. The London School

The London School of Harry Sweet (1845-1912) and David Jones (1881-1967) stressed the practical side of phonetics, and trained its students to perceive, transcribe and reproduce each minute sound distinction very precisely — far more than the American behaviourists, for example, and of course the Chomskians, who are extending models rather than testing them. And this phonetic competence was much needed when J.R. Firth (1891-1960) and others at the School of Oriental and African Studies helped to plan the national languages and their writing systems for the new Commonwealth countries. Overall, the School has been very far ranging — noting, for example how stress and tone co-occur with whole syllables, and developing a terminology to cope: a basis for poetic metre. Firthian analysis also finds a place for aesthetic considerations and develops a system of mutually exclusive options, somewhat like Saussure but more socially and purposively orientated.

Firth himself tried to base a theory of meaning on such choice-systems, but the approach has not been generally accepted. Not only was it rather simplistic, but confused the scientific invariance of linguistic rules with the unregimented

and creative way that human beings get their meaning across. {10}

37.7. Noam Chomsky and Generative Grammar

Avram Noam Chomsky (1928-) and his followers have transformed linguistics. Indeed, despite many difficulties and large claims later retracted, the school of deep or generative grammar still holds centre stage. Chomsky came to prominence in a 1972 criticism of the behaviourist's B.F. Skinner's book *Verbal Behaviour*. Linguistic output was not simply related to input. Far from it, and a science which ignored what the brain did to create its novel outputs was no science at all. Chomsky was concerned to explain two striking features of language — the speed with which children acquire a language, and its astonishing fecundity, our ability to create a endless supply of grammatically correct sentences without apparently knowing the rules. How was that possible? Only by having a) an underlying syntax and b) rules to convert syntax to what we speak. The syntax was universal and simple. A great diversity of sentences can be constructed with six symbols. Take 'A cat sits on the mat.' Older readers will remember their parsing exercises at school: indefinite article, noun, verb, preposition, definite article, noun. Chomsky uses a similar approach but his 'parsing' applies to all languages. But how we convert to 'The mat was sat on by a cat'? The answer, argued Chomsky, were innate transformation rules by which a fundamental deep structure is converted to the surface sentence. Matters are not usually so straightforward, of course, and the rules can be very complex indeed, but Chomsky and his co-workers have now provided them.

If many languages are now classified along Chomsky lines, why hasn't the approach entirely swept the board, bringing all linguists into the fold of orthodoxy? First there are procedural problems. The American behaviourists, and more so the London school, had a very thorough training in

gathering field evidence. Speech was what native speakers actually spoke, not what the anthropologist thought they might accept as correct usage. The Chomskians use introspection (i.e. the linguists themselves decide whether a sentence is good grammar), an approach which can allow 'facts' to be fitted to theory and which has somewhat restricted application to the European languages that Chomskians regard themselves as familiar with. Then there is the matter of laboratory testing. Surface sentences that are generated by the more convoluted transformation rules should take speakers longer to produce. The evidence is somewhat contradictory.

But more important than these are the theoretical issues. What are these deep structures and transformation rules — i.e. are they something 'hardwired' into the brain or simply a propensity to perform in ways we can view along Chomskian lines? Chomsky is undecided. And, if the structures are real, is this the philosopher's goal: we can base semantics on deep grammar? Some have done so, though Chomsky himself has now abandoned these hopes. Chomsky is not a Structuralist, and there is more to understanding than the ability to recast sentences — an appreciation of the world outside, for example, which we perceive and judge on past experience. {11}

37.8. Relational Grammar

One interesting development from the London School was that of Sydney Lamb and Peter Reich. Lamb charted language as networks of relationships. By using a very simple set of 'nodes' he was able to represent phonology, syntax and semantics, and to explain linguistic patterning at various levels. Reich used computer modelling to simulate this approach and explain the difficulties we experience with multiply embedded sentences — 'I spoke to the girl whose mother's cat which I didn't know was run over when she wasn't looking.' sort of thing. But neither approach coped

properly with the prevailing Chomskian structural picture, and wasn't pursued. {12}

37.9. The Contemporary Scene

What's the scene today? A very lively but confused picture of new dimensions, difficulties and antagonisms. One comparatively new approach is that of brain physiology. Much, perhaps the greater part, remains to be understood of precisely how the brain functions. But it is clear that consciousness (being aware of the world, having mental images, and feelings and intentions) proceeds by a complex system of neural loops and feedbacks. Speech comes with the development of the mouth and larynx, concomitantly with the growth of the cortex and its networks through to the hippocampus, amygdala and brainstem. Sounds are linked by learning with concepts and gestures to give meaning. Syntax emerges to connect conceptual learning with lexical learning. Language allows us to elaborate, refine, connect, create and remember. All this happens together. {13} Animals learn as they need to. Dogs, for example, reared in total isolation, have no understanding of pain and will sniff repeatedly at a lighted match. And for human beings the sense of self comes through the joint development of social and linguistic behaviour, each operating on the other, so that attempts to study speech in narrow disciplines — physiology, psychology, linguistics, information theory, Structuralism , etc. — are doomed to failure. {14}

What is to be done, given the mountain of complex and technical data each discipline brings to the total picture? One promising start is the hypothesis of Lakoff and Johnson, sometime students of Chomsky's but working more from their studies of metaphor. Human beings, they suppose, create models of cognition that reflect concepts developed in the interaction between brain, body and environment. These models, which they call schemas, operate through bodily activities prior to speech development, and are very various,

if not amorphous. Very tentatively, they suggest that the schema may operate so as to provide our five different conceptual approaches — through images, metaphors, part for whole, propositional (32.1) and symbolic. Linguistic functions are propositional and symbolic. Grammatical constructions are idealized schemas. And so on. The approach is technical and preliminary, but overcomes some of the difficulties noted above. {15}

Is this optimism widely shared? Not at present. Scientists and academics have invested too much in chosen disciplines to lightly abandon their positions. Nor perhaps should they. But what is emerging is the folly of believing that any one approach provides all the answers. Or that any simplistic, navel-gazing theory like Structuralism (6) will serve. As with linguistic philosophy, more problems emerge the deeper we look, which is perhaps not surprising given the creative, ad-hoc way language develops and our use necessarily of one small part of it to investigate the whole.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

38. FORMALISTS

Saussure's ideas caught on most rapidly in Russia, where of course the Revolution had overthrown bourgeois lifestyles and conceptions. Many of the Russian critics had already been moving in a similar direction, encouraged by the acute consciousness of craft which Symbolist poets exhibited, and by technical studies of Pushkin's art. {1} Very obliquely, the Formalists also drew sustenance from the Art for Art's Sake movement that swept Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Both movements were anti-realist, denying that morality, philosophy or subject should be the concern of a poem. What did matter were verbal qualities: the evocative power of words for the Symbolists, their strident novelty for the Futurists.

But whereas the Italian Futurists strove for a new diction to express a new age, the Russian Futurists believed that poetic speech should be an end in itself, not a medium for conveying ideas and emotions. Many schools of poetry would be extinguished by such a conception, but the Russian Futurists were iconoclasts and lived dangerously. Many poets experimented wildly, arbitrarily using words for their form and texture rather than any communicative value. {2} Mayakovsky wrote: 'Art is not a copy of nature, but the determination to distort nature in accordance with its reflections in the individual consciousness'. {3}

Much that the Russian Futurists bequeathed was very valuable. They made countless studies of rhyme, metre, consonantal clusters, etc. of the Russian classics and of poems by contemporaries. They claimed, contrary to Symbolist assertions, that words and their connotations are not the most important ingredient of poetry. They replaced loose talk about inspiration and verbal magic by 'study of the laws of literary production'. In regarding literary history as successive revolts against prevailing canons, the young Futurists embraced a rather crude relativism, however, with

results apparent even to them: Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy continued to be read for all that Mayakovsky called them period pieces.

Shklovsky was not consistent in asserting that the poet's art lies in deforming reality to make it fresh. Nor did Brik really believe that the author is immaterial, that Eugene Onegin would have been written anyway had Pushkin not lived. {4} Much of the writing was cavalierly provocative, originating in café talk, sharpened by youthful high spirits into polemic.

The Russian Formalists were materialists and anti-traditionalists, who tried to reach some rapprochement with social and political concerns. At first their approach was somewhat mechanical, treating literature simply as an assembly of literary devices. Subsequently they investigated the interrelated of parts, an 'organic' approach. {5} Finally, in 1928, Tynyanov and Jakobson recast literature as a system where every component had a constructive function, just as the social fabric was a 'system of systems.' {6} But the short period of comparative tolerance of the early twenties changed as Stalinism tightened its grip, and the Formalists were obliged to recant, turn to novel writing, or flee abroad. That literature should not be subordinated to narrow Marxist concerns is a theme to which Russian authors occasionally returned in the succeeding thirty years, but an aesthetic divorced from socialism remained a heresy in the Soviet Union.

38.1. Russian Formalism: Achievements

The Russian Formalists tried to explain how aesthetic effects were produced by literary devices, and how literary writing differed from non-literary. Literature, as they saw it, was an autonomous product, and should be studied by appropriate methods, preferably scientific. The literary was not distinguished from the non-literary by subject matter, poetic inspiration, philosophic vision, or sensory quality of the poetic image, but by its verbal art. Tropes, particularly

metaphor, were the key, as they shifted objects to a new sphere of perception, making the familiar strange, novel and exciting. Of course Aristotle had accepted unusual words as necessary to poetic diction, and the Romantics saw novelty and freshness as one of the hallmarks of true poetry. Surrealists made poems as a renaissance of wonder, an act of renewal. {7} But Jakobson deepened the interest. 'The distinctive feature of poetry lies in the fact that a word is perceived as a word and not merely a proxy for the denoted object or an outburst of emotion, that words and their arrangement, their meaning, their outward and inward form acquire weight and value of their own'. {8}

Now if rhythm, euphony and startling word order should converge on a word so as to throw into relief its complex texture, its density of meanings and associations, that was nothing unusual. {9} Few conscientious writers would disagree. Words, and the meanings and emotions they carry, are the material assembled into a poem by the usual devices of this art form. Exactly in the same manner, a painter takes the outside world as his raw materials rather than the given 'content' which he must faithfully reproduce. But Jakobson and Zirmunsky equated this 'material' with the verbal. {10} That was the crucial difference. Words for them drew their meaning from their arrangements within the poem, not their outside referents, an attitude analogous to Saussure's closed system of arbitrary signs.

38.2. Russian Formalism: Social Aspects

Formalism of a sort was already in existence before Saussure's ideas arrived, and the critical establishment were not slow to ask such questions as: Is literature the same as literariness? Is art no more than the sum of its devices? And is the greatest art that which employed the most devices and/or deployed them with the greatest skill? The older ideas lingered on and even as late as 1923 Shklovsky, who had brilliantly applied the concept of defamiliarization to Tristram

Shandy, was warning that formalist criteria should not be applied too mechanically. {11} Devices obtruded in Sterne's novel or Byron's *Don Juan*, but *The Divine Comedy* was not an extended device on which to hang irrelevant theological considerations.

Perhaps we should say that 'poetry is the world transformed into language' {12} — recognizing that elements of biography, psychology, philosophy, emotion and reference to the outside world are not so much incorporated as recreated in the artistic process. Style is the means a writer employs in coming to terms with the world, but his created world is not a reliable guide to the world disclosed by historical or biographical research. The Formalists stressed the autonomy of literature, the devices it employed, the need for systematic study of those devices, but even Jakobson, the most provocative of thinkers, did not generally deny that literature was in some ways a reflection of life. But how should we compare the two worlds, of life and art? Possibly by seeking in the semantic shifts occurring on the level of the sign for some correlation to the complex and bewildering nature of reality itself.

The readiness with which poets could find an enthusiastic audience among the proletariat (and indeed the shortage of paper itself) made poetry the most popular literary form during the early years of the Revolution. The Formalists were among its enthusiastic champions. Verse, they emphasized, was speech organized in its entire phonetic texture. {13} Image was downplayed as a device that involved only one level of poetic discourse, but rhythm was soon seen as crucial. And Formalist analysis of Russian, Greek and Serbo-Croat poetry went far beyond the usual metrical studies. Included were studies of sentence structures, consonantal arrangements, phrasal melody, syntax, rhyme, sound with sense — all of them drawing closer to linguistics. Narrative poetry led them to study

literary language, and from stylistics they went on to problems of composition, plot, genre and character.

38.3. Russian Formalism: Assessment

But how sensible was the Formalist's emphasis on continual innovation? Possibly art does grow stale and needs renewal, but change cannot be solely directed by literary features, argued Zhirmunsky. There may be an internal dynamism, but also important will be the social and political context. {14} Nor did literature evolve steadily as though it were a self-contained object: there were twists and complications, with influences from unlikely side-branches, as the art of Pushkin or Tolstoy illustrated.

Arguing for *ostranenie* or defamiliarization, Shklovsky wrote in 1917 that 'Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.' {15} So extreme a position he did not maintain, but the opinion, still rehearsed today, that art should give us back a fresh view of a world grown dull by habit begs important questions. What is art? The geographer and social historian look with a keener eye on a landscape or portrait than ever the painter can, but we do not call their observations art. Consciousness-altering drugs also vivify our perceptions, but those perceptions are private and evanescent. And if novelty of outlook is the end of art, then we shall be dulled by even the latest of art's achievements and demand even greater novelty. Perpetual aesthetic revolution breeds not excitement but eventually weariness and indifference.

Perhaps this was already apparent in the critics who tried in the later twenties to accommodate art in Marxist thought. Mikhail Bakhtin (10) and others of his 'school' drew literature into the social and economic sphere. Language was a socially-constructed sign system and thus a material reality. Words are the weapons of class struggle, with the ruling classes ever concerned to narrow their meanings to support the status quo. Bakhtin stressed the ways language may

disrupt authority and release alternative voices. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* of 1929 he contrasted the diversity of viewpoints in Dostoevsky's novels with the authoritarian viewpoint of the author in Tolstoy's novels. This 'carnivalization', as Bakhtin called it, became important to later theorists (particularly left-wing and psychoanalytic critics) who wished to see art as multi-levelled, resistant to any unified meaning, particularly to bourgeoisie ideology.

38.4. The Prague School

From Russia, Saussure's ideas spread to Prague, where Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), arriving in 1919, publicized theory and Russian futurist poetry. But Prague already had a proto-Structuralist objectivism, deriving from J.H. Herbart's (1776-1841) writings, and this aesthetic included social values. Under Jan Mukarovsky, who took the Herbartian chair in 1938, the aesthetic object (artwork as sign) was regarded as the signified of its material signifier (artwork as thing). Art could be complex or difficult even, but its essence did not lie in deviation and distortion. What should be studied was aktualisace — 'foregrounding' as it came to be translated: how certain elements or features came to be emphasized or brought to the fore from the background of more normal usage. Notably these included tone, metaphor, ambiguity, patterning and parallelism in poetry, and diction, character, plot and theme in prose works. {16}

Jakobson, the harbinger of futurism, advocated a more self-contained, Saussurean view, and continued to classify artistic styles by formal qualities, much after the manner of Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945), but employing a terminology more drawn from figures of speech, especially metaphor (ascribing a property of one thing to something else) and metonymy (using the property of something to stand for its whole). Studying aphasia and child speech development while exiled in Sweden in 1941, Jakobson found that metaphor and metonymy were indeed fundamentally

different. He therefore recast Saussure's basic structures in two terms — a vertical axis where phonemes can be replaced, and the lateral where they are combined in words. Metonymy, he announced, refers to the combination of linguistic units on the horizontal or syntagmatic axis. Metaphor operates by selection and therefore belongs to the vertical or paradigmatic axis. Poetic, i.e. predominantly literary language, projects the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic. {17} On this simplistic notion, quickly taken up from its 1958 Pittsburgh launch, Jakobson conceptualized literature as essentially a play on words. Reference — to society, life, thought, history, society, anything outside language — was irrelevant, if not a distraction.

Linguists in Czechoslovakia and Poland did not agree. Literature should include non-literary elements, and not be reduced to its verbal substratum. {18} Gradually, in both countries, as psychoanalysis permeated European thought in the thirties, Formalism began to incorporate both psychological and structuralist ideas. In Poland, where aesthetic purity was not so insisted on, the influence of Husserl (15.1) also began to make itself felt, {19} a situation not unlike that of Paris thirty years later.

38.5. Prague School: Assessment

The critical theory of the Prague School is rich, diverse, and difficult to evaluate. Many of its approaches have become commonplaces, even among traditionalists. But one criticism that is often levelled at the school, and at the Russian Formalists, is the lack of testing, authentication.

Consider 'foregrounding', a device widely recognized in Modernist and pre-Modernist writing. How valid is it? Certainly emphasis on these and other literary devices will provide new readings of texts, {20} increasing the depth and diversity of interpretation, but are these interpretations any more than artefacts of the interpretative method? Do readers actually take these features into account? How do they affect

their aesthetic response? The evidence is equivocal. Very little has been done to test even foregrounding, and that testing has given very uncertain results. {21} Literary theory is often seen as an end in itself, {22} but if literary criticism has no larger aim than to give employment to academic critics and their students, then academia has indeed become the self-contained system that Saussure proposed for language itself.

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3. p. 46 *ibid.*
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5. Peter Steiner's *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (1984).
6. p. 134.134-5 *ibid.*
7. p. 179 *ibid.*
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9. pp. 184-5 *ibid.*
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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

39. CHOMSKIAN LINGUISTICS

Chomsky's deep grammar and its various offspring are the best known of current linguistic theories. Developed to explain the ease with which children learn a language, and adults produce correct sentences, the theory envisages a common underlying structure to all languages, and a complex set of rules to generate individual utterances.

The school was never without its critics, however, and matters have lately become very complicated.

39.1. Introduction

Noam Chomsky {1} claims not to be a Structuralist (6) — is indeed sharply critical of all attempts to exclude the individual — but his deep grammar grew out of the argument between behaviourists like Bloomfield (23.4) and Structuralists like Zellig Harris (under whom he trained). Chomsky's linguistics is a 'top down' approach, starting from syntax and competent speech rather than individual phonemes. Bloomfield (1887-1947) and his fellow behaviourists held that the sign (which for Saussureans was a concept) meant simply the non-verbal activity that it substituted for. We couldn't say more. The activities of the brain were inaccessible to us, and we shouldn't theorize about what we can't observe. Phonemes (the elemental, recognizable sound unit) were neither an acoustic entity nor a determinate of meaning, but simply how we divide up language.

Chomsky, in contrast, argued that our astonishing creativity with words, and the phenomenal ease with which children learn a language, meant that language users employed and intuitively recognized an underlying structure. Not a structure, moreover, resting on phonemes or individual words as Ramon Jakobson (38.4) would have it, but a sort of fundamental, proto-syntax. Any well-formed sentence, for example, contains a noun-phrase (NP) and verb-phrase

(VB). From this we could create all possible sentences: 'The old tutor well described the difficulties.' Or: 'The difficulties were well described by the old tutor.' By transformation rules the deep structure can be converted to surface sentences with the correct syntax. But what of: 'The old tutor elaborated the difficulties?' The meaning is practically the same: we might choose either. But is this a different transformation or a different deep structure? And how do we make the choice or substitution? Critics say that Chomsky's grammar is simply formalizing what is still a mystery. {2}

Deep structure is the abstract underlying form, which determines the meaning of a sentence. Surface structure is what we write or speak. The two are connected by transformations like combination, addition and deletion. Or so Chomsky first argued. But in his *Reflections on Language*, Chomsky drew up something much more complicated. There were two structures or trees: one for deep and one for surface sentences. Transformation rules linked the two. Ambiguous sentences had two deep structures. Now the sequence was: The base tree was constructed with building rules and a lexicon. The transformation component mapped deep structures onto surface structures. A phonological component intervened to convert surface structures to surface sentences.

39.2. Difficulties

Thereafter matters grew more complicated still. Grammarians needed a further subsystem to convert deep structures via semantic components to semantic representation. Why? Because grammarians were concerned with problems of their own — synonymy, similarity of meaning, redundancy, ambiguity and entailment. {3}

Further problems arose over quantifiers, negation and movement rules. Chomsky's initial assumptions were fourfold. Firstly, that transformations preserved meaning, i.e.

that surface structure was linked to meaning only by deep structures. Secondly, that transformational rules were simple and did only one thing at a time. Thirdly, that the deep structures were similar to surface structures. And, fourthly, that transformational rules were the only rules needed to link surface and deep structures. Now it appears that all four cannot be held jointly. Generative Semantics holds to the first but not the third or fourth. Extended Standard Theory holds to the second, third and fourth. Trace Theory holds to the second, third and fourth again, but claims that all information on the deep structure is to be found in the surface structure. It envisages this generation sequence: deep structure to transformational component to surface structure to semantic component to semantic representation. Trace theory seems to be better supported by phonetic evidence, though complications arise with ambiguous sentences, which require two surface and two deep sentences. {3}

Leaving aside such professional disputes, what exactly can we say of these structures and procedures? In what sense are they real, existing in our brains, our innate behaviour, our social training? Just as with Structuralism (6), very different interpretations have been advanced. Do we (a) behave as if we follow rules, i.e. simply know how? Do we (b) actually know the rules as rules and blindly follow them? Or do we (c) recognize the rules and conscientiously apply them, i.e. know that something is actually the case? Philosophers insist on pursuing such distinctions, and of course disagree.

39.3. Achievements

Chomsky, and grammarians in general, dislike the whole tenor of that debate. Their job is simply to identify grammatically correct sentences, and display linguistic competence as a characteristic of the human mind. Some philosophers are satisfied with (a), saying that human beings simply have an ability to learn languages, about which little

more can be said at present. We can all ride a bicycle without knowing the mechanics involved. Other philosophers, adopting (b), regard the rules as psychologically real, even though they are hidden from all but professional (Chomskian) grammarians, and laboratory testing has not found that response times necessarily reflect rule complexity. {3} And some, examining option (c), ask in what (simpler) language we can 'see' the rules — without starting an infinite regress in asking how that simpler language is in turn 'seen'. Perhaps we do have some basic, innate language hardwired into our brains, a *mentalese* as Jerry Fodor terms it. {4}

At this point comes a parting of the ways. Logicians have tried to represent the structures in symbols of formal logic and arrive at the truth conditions of sentences. In many cases, notably those involving quantifiers, this has proved very difficult. Grammarians, however, have simply concerned themselves with the structures of natural languages, mapping sentences on 'semantic representations'. Being possible interpretations of sentences, rather than meanings as such, these 'semantic representations' do not give logicians what they want. The latter see the relationship between the word and the world outside as the central problem of meaning. The grammarians see language as a self-contained global system, and are concerned largely with synonymy, similarity of meaning, redundancy, ambiguity and entailment.

39.4. Significance

Where does that leave us? Several points need to be made. Firstly that an enormous amount of effort has gone into Chomskian grammar: thirty years of work by thousands of linguists. Some of their approaches are open to criticism — the introspection, and the emphasis on model-building rather than model-testing. There is also doubt among some linguists whether languages like Chinese really fit the

Chomskian model. {5} But no one should underestimate its achievements, which belong to a league quite different from the speculative works of the continental Structuralists (6). Chomskian documentation is extensive, and the reasoning carefully argued through.

Notwithstanding, the connection of language with meaning has proved more complicated and elusive than was originally hoped. Agreement is as difficult to reach as in linguistic philosophy. Difficulties continue to appear the deeper we look.

What constraints does Chomskian grammar place on what we can do with language? Literary theorists of many persuasions see language as mediating between ourselves and reality: the Sapir-Whorf (37.4) hypothesis indeed proposed that language actually shaped our perceptions. Again, there is no real consensus. Grammatical competence is not meaning necessarily: 'green ideas sleep furiously', to quote a famous example, is grammatically correct but nonsense all the same. Do the innate structures of language, to the extent that they exist, place filters on our understanding in the way argued by Kant? Is perhaps Chomskian linguistics a brake on creativity even, telling us that there are limits to what we can think or imagine, limits just as powerful as those imposed by society, and arising from the same reasons: social activities reflecting our basic makeup?

It depends. {6} Realist, who believe that language develops and adjusts to our interactions with real things in the world, argue that there can be no language that allows us to see the world in radically different outlines. Chomsky's work in this case is simply concerned with syntax, correct grammar. Even philosophers like Heidegger, (17) they would argue, who fashion their own language to evade the limiting categories of current thought, still need the conventions of syntax to make themselves understood. Poststructuralists, in contrast, who argue against the view that language is

constituted by its external relations, and believe that meaning is isomorphous with language, make strenuous efforts to escape the 'prison bars of language': the playful anti-rationalism of Foucault (9) and Derrida (8). The more widely read among them might even argue that the non-literary arts each have their own language {7}, not readily inter-translated (the problems of hermeneutics) and that Kuhn (34.56) and others have shown that scientific revolutions not only change our view of the world, but the very meaning of our terms. {8} Debate continues, though more within disciplines than across this fundamental philosophical divide.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

40. PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY

Most societies seek to control art. The means may be overt, through censorship and repression in totalitarian regimes, or the more subtle ways of the western democracies through the artist-critic-outlet chain, school and university curricula, and selective public support. To many, the control is scarcely evident, just the purchasing power of public taste refracted through beliefs and social presuppositions. {1}

Perhaps that applies to art with a capital 'A', fine art. But the distinction between the fine and the practical is a recent development, originating in the Renaissance and finding expression as 'aesthetics' with Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in 1735. {2} Neither the ancient nor the medieval worlds recognized the difference. Artists were simply craftsmen, producing goods that were useful and pleasing. The end product was obvious, and could be easily appraised. Plato believed that art should convey intellectual insights into reality. Aristotle, on the contrary, accepted art as imitation, provided this imitation brought out the universal character of the experience. The medieval Church employed art to narrate the gospels and celebrate God's glory.

Today we are less happy with such ulterior purposes. We set them aside and insist that art is that which remains when social expectations, patron's instructions, effect of the medium employed, etc. have all been removed. Fine art, we say, serves only itself. Wider issues are no doubt involved — market forces, psychic health, social representation — but such issues should not control art. To view a good book or film exclusively through its social message is to behave as a provincial philistine. Fine art has its own criteria, its terminology and aesthetics, which we must learn if we are to be admitted into the circle of a cultured elite. {3}

40.1. Art as Social Engineering

Karl Marx (1818-1883: 41) argued that all mental systems (ideologies) were the products of social and economic realities. To these realities he ascribed religious beliefs, legal systems and cultural expression. Marx emphasized that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being, but the other way about. And whereas philosophers have interpreted the world variously, the important need was to change it.

But if art, philosophy and literature are ultimately determined by economics, they also possess some autonomy. The connection of art with social order was indirect and complicated, or we should not understand how the great art of fourth century Athens came from a slave-based society. And Marx, moreover, was concerned with not any society, but one based on the equality of true economic principles. Art should both reflect economic realities and further the aims of that society. If citizens of western liberal democracies find such views coercive or simplistic, Marxists retort that the so-called art of the free west only legitimises and promotes a system based on yawning gaps between classes, which derived from inherited privilege more than individual merit or service to the community.

Art therefore changes. It makes no eternally valid statements of the human condition, but reflects the society in which it finds itself. And to be part of the political struggle, socialist art must make sacrifices. It must be accessible to the masses and promote their needs. It must exemplify and instruct. Entertainment is escapism, which only puts back the day of victory. Sometimes art must descend to propaganda to put its point across. Even censorship, self or imposed, may be required. Mistakes need to be pointed out, but political leaders should not be undermined, nor Marxist principles thoughtlessly discredited.

Such attitudes go far to explain Marxist criticism in communist countries. To the party faithful, the strident exhibitionism of artists like Stravinsky and Kandinsky could only be the decadent products of late bourgeois society. Modernist novels fell into similar categories: explorations of trivial and sometimes sordid inner worlds through a technique inexplicable to the greater public, and perhaps intentionally so. Not so the great realist writers of the nineteenth century: Stendhal, Tolstoy, Dickens, Balzac and George Eliot. These the Marxist critics praised for their explorations of society, for being — to quote a phrase of Stalin's — 'engineers of the human soul'.

A socializing view of literature has a distinguished ancestry. Plato banned poets from his Republic. The Elizabethans were addicted to didactic poetry, Shakespeare in his early play stressing the benefits of Tudor absolutism over the preceding feudal anarchy. The Enlightenment sought to root out ignorance and superstition. Tolstoy removed the title of art from anything not serving the brotherhood of man.

Of course there are critics who ask how Marxism can be so self evidently true. And how Marxism manages to continue in its old form when it developed from nineteenth-century exploitation, which has largely disappeared, at least from European societies. These and other problems have been addressed by literary theorists of communist regimes — Lukács and Brecht (41.3) — by French left-wing intellectuals — Sartre (15.4) and Barthes (7) — by members of the Frankfurt school — Althusser (41.4) and Adorno (41.5) — and by Structuralist Marxists in the west — Eagleton, Jameson (41.6). Though all accept the fundamental principles of Marxism, if sometimes with great difficulty, each has its characteristic concerns and point of attack.

Louis Althusser, for example, spoke of ideology, by which he meant prevailing relationships towards society that were false but promoted by the capitalist system. Here the individual freedoms were a myth, though not obviously so

because of subterfuges built into common language — a language more pervasive, real and influential than any individual utterance. Nonetheless, despite its tainted character, that same language could be used to expose its own gaps and contradictions, and so arrive at a truer picture. Reality, a complete picture, was unattainable, but reflection and analysis would disclose injustices and argue for social change. {4}

40.2. Feminism

But practically all these theorists were men, adopting typically masculine attitudes — i.e. were competitive, objective and unaware if not indifferent to the real needs and struggles of one half of mankind. Feminists (43) sought to redress the balance, first by re-examining the difficulties that women writers like Virginia Woolf had complained of — subordination to the needs of family and husband — and then by attempting to find a more generally female approach: fluid, sympathetic and supportive. Much of the subsequent debate was one-sided and unnecessarily strident, but a male bias in the vocabulary that society uses for the most mundane of descriptions was not hard to find, and study has moved on to the cultural presuppositions that divide the sexes.

40.3. Art in a Pluralist Society

Suppose we sever art from politics? In orchestrating public opinion behind some policy or other, politicians must appeal to emotional stereotypes, simplify positions and present one-sided arguments. Something more relevant to a pluralist society was developed by Stanley Fish. His reader-response approach to literary criticism saw the value of a literary work as the sum total of its individual values to its readers, i.e. its relevance to them. Such readers varied greatly in their literary and social experience, of course, but Fish argued that the matrix of interpretations was indeed what the text

meant: there was no definitive interpretation that could then be extracted and taught. {5}

What happens when a class of thirteen year olds reads Spenser's *Faerie Queen*? How will they cope without a glossary and some grounding in Renaissance attitudes? Hermeneutists like Gadamer (18.3) and Ricoeur (18.5) accept that we can never escape our current prejudices, but argue that the worlds of past writers are partially re-enacted in our reading of them. Artworks are the shared ways in which a community understands itself, and our view of the past is not wholly distorted by our understandings of the present.

But must we relinquish the notion of a public morality? Not necessarily, but what we should avoid, argues Wayne Booth {6}, is blanket judgements. Works of art should not proselytise, but they can assess matters of social concern by looking sensitively at events and relationships. One choice is certainly not as good as any other, and we can explore the consequences of choice by writing a literature that grapples with real dilemmas. What could better employ the devices of the modern novel than an investigation of the moral choices we are all of us called upon to make in our workaday lives?

Why use an imaginative medium rather than a factual survey? No doubt both are needed. But objects and events become available to us through the medium we are using {7}, in life as in art, and to employ 'factual' surveys is to suppose that public attitudes are more objective than the novelist's. Yet public attitudes are created and fostered by the media in all its forms, most of them with commercial interests. In our deeper reflections, we draw very much from literature, which represents the world with more discrimination than our self-seeking and bustling existences will allow. True, in imaginative literature we see the world only through eyes of its creator, which need not indeed be representative, but the views are worthy of respect if the novelist has done his job properly.

40.4. Art as Moral Agent

What job? Presented the honesty, good humour, anger, clarity, breadth of vision, warmth of imagination, vitality and sensitivity etc. that we expect in imaginative writing, and essential in writing of any description, said the traditional critics. {8} Good writers in time become old friends, with gifts and failings that we value and make allowances for. Indeed, say moralists, artists should not only display but promote these qualities. Art must make the world a better place. It should further the brotherhood of man thought Leo Tolstoy, {9} or educate the sensibilities of the reading classes argued Lionel Trilling (1905-75). {10}

That's nonsense, replied the Modernists (7-9). Art has no purpose. It is not reality explored through the potentialities of language, but a reading of codes, a construction whose meaning if anywhere lies in underlying social structures. Supposing there is a meaning at all, add the Poststructuralists, who see only chains of words endlessly deferring to each other. Texts are undermined by their latent meanings, and the author does not exist. Art may seem to pick out and concentrate patterns of experience that are diffusely present in our lives, but there is effectively no life to refer to: art is something we look at, not through.

Why then make art? Because it is in our natures to do so, how we function, perhaps even a psychological need. Poetry tells us nothing, thought the critic I.A. Richards (1893-1979), but simply provides a psychological adjustment to our nervous system. Literature consists of pseudo-statements, but nonetheless orders, controls and consolidates our experience. Many New Critics took this further, representing the complexities of poetry as 'tensions' and 'resolutions' of emotive content. {11}

40.5. Art as Pure Discovery

But if these views are right — and they rest on doubtful foundations — then artworks are not representations but

experimentations, things created by inspired play that eventually become significant to the artist and then society. There is no simple representation in music, and 'music' said the critic Hoffmann reviewing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, 'opens up an unknown realm to man...in which he leaves behind all the feelings which are determinable by concepts in order to devote himself to the unsayable.' {12} Art is discovery. By a system of skilled experimentation with the medium, the artist finds his way to saying things not communicable in other ways. What things? The unsayable of course, what is lost in translation or description. And that is the difficulty. Two renderings of the same sonata are perfectly distinct to a trained ear, and can be fairly described as 'sparkling' or 'wooden', but the precise way in which they differ can perhaps only be expressed by performance. Describing has to give way to doing.

40.6. Art as Religion

But is the moral view so ridiculous? In a country of enormous injustices and suffering, it is not surprising that the Russian novelists, from Pushkin to Solzenitsyn, have often presented themselves as social commentators, teachers or prophets. How else, asked Tolstoy, could the prestige of artists be justified? Not for their productions of beauty, but for the astonishing sincerity, individuality and lucidity of their expressions. Unfortunately, *King Lear*, Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, and even his own *Anna Karenina* are damned on these criteria. Indeed, hardly anything survives. But the real objection to a crude moralist view is not the resulting bonfire of vanities, or its indifference to aesthetic form, but the difficulties that underlie the expressive theory of art generally.

Perhaps art is its own religion? {13} It is not absurd to concert-goers or visitors to major galleries to talk of spiritual nourishment. The later Collingwood (11.1) appears to have thought art superior to religion, essentially because it affirms

nothing in particular. More particularly, to critics like Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis, art points beyond itself, but also respects the limits of its powers. It makes sense of things, it reconciles us to life, without requiring that we make assertions about a God we cannot believe in or understand.

But the religious do believe. (42) They know God in a way not answered by art. Worshippers in the higher religions all believe they can sense a transcendent, divine Being: a God that is immanent in human hearts, representing the highest in goodness, truth and beauty. He reveals himself in love and mercy and grace, and is to be sought in sacrifice, renunciation and self-discipline. {14} Art is an important element of life, but it cannot supersede religion, and only those blinded by spiritual pride would confuse the two.

40.7. Art as Significance

But the above ends are still somewhat specific. Is there not something more general, which better reflects the importance of art? Take the Greek, Chinese and Islamic civilizations: their history is for specialists, but we can all admire their painting, architecture, music and literature, if only through the distorting glass of current preoccupations. But could we not say that art should serve something that is fundamental to our natures, which lasts, which gives shape and significance to our lives?

Many art-historians and aestheticians believe so. For if art intended only sensory pleasure or self-expression we should do better to opt for a good meal or convivial evening with friends. But art, argued Tilghman, is about the depth and mystery of life, about relationships, and about conflicts within the human soul. Any theory of art which did not recognize these features would be a mistaken theory. {15} Is this an article of faith? Certainly by contemporary standards, by the anti-aesthetic and iconoclastic nature of much of what passes for art today, though not by the testimony of history. Art we prize above craft for its greater significance — as we

do Shakespeare's *Tempest* more than some TV soap, however engrossing may be the latter's treatment of contemporary issues.

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41. MARXIST VIEWS

Marxists believe that economic and social conditions determine religious beliefs, legal systems and cultural frameworks. Art should not only represent such conditions truthfully, but seek to improve them.

Marxist aesthetics is not flourishing in today's consumerist society, but continues to ask responsible questions.

41.1. Introduction

Karl Marx (1818-83: 26.5) turned Hegelism on its head. Far from making thought govern the world, and seeing history as the gradual unfolding of Reason, Marx argued that all mental systems (ideologies) were the products of social and economic realities. To these realities he ascribed religious beliefs, legal systems and cultural expression. Marx emphasized that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being, but the other way about. And whereas philosophers have interpreted the world variously, the important need was to improve it.

But revolution did not come where the flaws in capitalism were most evident, in Germany or Britain, but in Russia: an agrarian, perhaps even medieval country bankrupted by war and economic mismanagement. Marx had not foreseen nor made provision for the increasing bureaucratic and centralized control of industrialized societies, but this was precisely what Lenin and then Stalin were obliged to create. The democratic and practical politics of Marx became abstract under Engels (dialectic materialism), and then centralized under Lenin. The extreme poverty and backward nature of Russia, together with the wars the fledgling Bolshevik state fought against Tsarist and capitalist armies, called for extreme measures. Art, philosophy and literature, which have always possessed some autonomy, were brought into the war effort. They had to be accessible to the masses and promote their needs: the arts had to exemplify

and instruct. Entertainment could only be escapism and divert the proletariat from their task. At times the arts must descend to propaganda to put their points across. Even censorship, self- or state-imposed, could be required. Mistakes need to be pointed out, but political leaders should not be undermined, nor hard-won Marxist principles be thoughtlessly discredited. {1}

41.2. Marxist Economics

The poor economic performance of rigidly communist countries, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, were hailed as a victory for freedom, a triumph of democracy over totalitarianism, and evidence of the superiority of capitalism over socialism. Unfortunately, as always, the truth is a little more complicated.

Economic progress in the USSR was certainly lost in the 1970s and 80s, and for reasons inherent in the communist system: the lack of proper incentives, inability of citizens to criticize and/or improve the system, an unaccountable management divorced from everyday needs, and the wilful ignorance of more successful political and economic models elsewhere. Some injuries were more self-inflicted: Afghanistan, the arms race, the excessive focus on Siberia, and the disillusion as Stalin's actions became better known through Khrushchev's speech and some lifting of censorship. But also restricting were western actions: trade embargoes and the ban on transfer of technology to the USSR. {2-4}

The change from a communist centrally planned economy to one market led was exceptionally traumatic, {5} and saw all the worst excesses of local corruption and western financial plunder. Under Washington-led gurus, large sectors were privatised to oligarchs, whose influence then became politically important in former Soviet satellites. Economic problems of the 1990s included difficulties in raising government revenues, a dependence on short-term borrowing to finance budget deficits, lower prices for its oil

and mineral exports, and capital flight exacerbated by the Asian crisis. The rouble declined 60% in value, foreign investment fled the country, payments on private and sovereign debt were delayed and the commercial banking system broke down. The economy recovered quickly from the 1998 crisis, however, and achieved 9 years of sustained growth averaging some 7%/year, a success helped by a devalued rouble, reform in tax, banking, labour and land codes, a tight fiscal policy, and favourable commodities prices. {4-9}

In short, western practicalities trounced old ideas, but Marx's 'dialectic materialism' (as it came to be called) was a good deal richer than market theory as commonly (26.6) understood. {10} Marx thought:

1. All phenomena are interrelated and interdependent: Marxism is not reductionist.
2. All societies are in a state of change, and even markets do not tend towards equilibrium.
3. Change is evolutionary: primitive communism evolved into ancient civilizations, and these into feudal Europe and then capitalism, which in turn will evolve into communist societies.
4. Change is driven by contradictions or tensions between classes.
5. The basic reality for men is not ideas but material existence: food, housing, fighting ill-health, struggling with others, etc.
6. From these material phenomena come men's ideas of himself and his purpose in the world.
7. Relationships between these material phenomena are regular, and may be studied in a scientific way, though the approach must be holistic and the underlying forces need some ferreting out: people's lives are often driven in certain directions while they themselves are preoccupied with trivial matters.

8. The scientific approach must combine theory and practice: detached observation lacks the essential contact with reality.

9. Capitalists make their profits from 'surplus value', the difference between the sale price of an item and the average socially necessary amount of labour time spent in bringing it to market: that labour time included creation of food and housing, construction of plant and marketing, etc.

10. Workers own only their labour, and are locked in a continual struggle with capitalists for a share of the latter's profits.

11. Though the extraction of surplus value from labour would drive wages down to subsistence levels, the inevitable shift to using less labour and more capital would lead to business cycles and eventually the destruction of the capitalist system.

12. Money is a commodity. Precious metal becomes a measure of value because mining and minting employ labour. That labour (or, more exactly, 'congealed labour time') is the basis of money's ability to act as a universal measure of value.

The opposing, western economic concepts originated in a pre-industrial, mercantile society — and were indeed a self-justification of *laissez-faire* capitalism against the medieval condemnation of usury. The greatest originator was Sir William Petty (1623-87), but his ideas were codified by Adam Smith (1723-90) whose 'invisible hand' nonetheless stressed the need for banking regulations and progressive taxation. {161} Much was subsequently a campaign against a socialist view that workers should partly own the product of their labour. William Stanley Jevons (1835-82) introduced marginal costs, and John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) tried to adapt the concepts to deal with widespread unemployment.

Because critical theory tends to foist theory on practice, it is worth following parallels in politics, law and economics. Both

economics and law are branches of ethics, but the motive, so central to law, is missing from economics, which aims to be an impersonal 'science'. But man is also a social, emotional and spiritual animal — aspects entirely overlooked by practical economics. The enlightened self-interest of economic man is too often assumed than demonstrated: in a complex, interrelated society men rarely know where their best interests lie, particularly in a world saturated with advertising and stage-managed politics. Economic laws reflect relationships between groups of people and so vary with societies and their history: again all ignored by classical economics. The attraction, and probably the success of market economies, lies in the freedom afforded societies from officialdom and subsistence living, though neither is guaranteed. In 1900, for example, when the British Empire ruled one person in five of the world's population, a third of London's population lived in direst poverty, {11} a situation accepted as natural by mainstream economics and the social order of the day. Neoliberalism has culminated in globalisation, bringing astonishing growth to China, India and other countries previously languishing under socialist economies, {12-14} but the theory is also quixotic.

Neoliberalism can be logically disproved in its own terms. {15} The supply curve doesn't exist, for example, because the concept of marginal cost of production on which the supply curve is built (the additional expense incurred in producing just one more item of production) rests on the error of supposing that a small figure equates to zero. Correct that error, and a competitive market will set a price above the marginal cost, which makes it impossible to draw a supply curve independent of the demand curve. {16}

Other Neoliberalism suppositions fare equally badly. The distribution of income is not meritocratic, nor determined by the market, but reflects the power of various classes and professions. {17} Money traders, bank and managerial staff do not have their high wages because they are more

productive in real goods and/or contribute more to the marginal product of labour and capital, but because their high wages are part of an accepted socio-economic structure, a circular argument for the status quo.

Contemporary Marxists in fact have a long catalogue of social ills, even for a rich country like the USA. Only a minority of workers belong to a trade union, or have health insurance. Ideology is propagated throughout society by advertising, education and the media. Capitalists employ divisive social issues in political campaigns to divert interest from more fundamental issues: abortion, immigration and same-sex marriage. The rich get richer at the expense of other classes in America and elsewhere. {18-21}

As in any other branch of economics, Marxism is not without its theoretical problems. {22} If expended labour is the common denominator of price, how are land, labour and capital to be equated? Clearly they are different: capital is mobile, labour much less so and land not at all. Capital can be seen as congealed labour, perhaps, but not land. Always there are problems when complex social matters are reduced to simple notions.

41.3. Theorists in Communist Regimes

Georg Lukács (1885-1971: 26.5) attempted a philosophical justification of Bolshevism in his 1923 *History and Class Consciousness* and became the leading Marxist theoretician of literature, writing from the Soviet Union and his native Hungary. {23} In Lukács's view, realism meant more than rendering the surface appearance: it meant providing a more complete, true, vivid and dynamic view of the world around. Novels were reflections of life, and therefore not real, but they nonetheless involved the mental framing that eluded photographic representation. Writers created an image of the richness and complexity of society, and from this emerged a sense of order within the complexity and contradictions of lived experience.

Lukács also adopted the Hegelian dialectic in stressing the contradictions of class struggle. Capitalism had destroyed the feudal order, replacing it by more efficient production. Yet the private accumulation of capital was in its turn a necessary step to factory production, and from the consequent exploitation of labour came social protest and finally communism.

Given this nineteenth century viewpoint, Lukács had little patience with modernist experimentation. He criticized the techniques of montage, inner monologues, streams of consciousness in writers like Joyce, Kafka, Beckett and Faulkner, and saw these narrow concerns with subjective impressions as a contribution to the angst and alienation prevalent in western societies. Capitalism deprived workers of a common purpose, and the ideology of modernism then emphasized the triviality and impoverishment of such isolated lives.

Bertolt Brecht, in contrast, was a maverick. He fled Germany when the Nazis came to power in 1933, wrote in exile during the war years, continued in America before being hauled in front of the McCarthy Committee, and finally settled in East Germany where his prestige was a mixed blessing for the authorities. Social realism was his detestation, and his famous technique of 'barring the device' derives from the Russian Formalist concept of defamiliarisation. Actors in Brecht's plays express emotion, but only by gestures which the audience can understand but not identify with. Improvisation is used extensively, plus anything else that came to hand: Brecht rejected a formal construction of plays and was constantly attempting to unmask the disguises of an ever-devious capitalist system. {24}

41.4. The Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse (26.5) went further than Brecht in rejecting social realism altogether and by giving a privileged

position to art and literature. These alone can resist the domination of a totalitarian state. Popular art inevitably colludes with the economic system that shapes it, whereas Modernism has the power to question. Art acts as an irritant, a negative knowledge of the real world. Built of Freudian and Marxist elements, their Critical Theory advocates an art that makes the down-trodden masses aware of their exploitation and helplessness. Absurd discontinuities of discourse, the pared-down characterization, the plotless depiction of aimless lives — all these are needed to shake audiences from the comfortable notion that the horrors and degradations of the twentieth century have left the world unchanged. Commercial exploitation of music in advertising and films, for example, forces serious composers like Schoenberg to produce fragmental atonal work. Each note is cut off from harmony with its neighbours and thus proceeds directly from the unconscious, much as individuals are forced to fend for themselves in monolithic free-market systems. {25}

Walter Benjamin, though associated with Marxism and Surrealism, adopted various positions at first, most of them subtle, not to say ambiguous. Art, he thought, occupied a fragile place between a regression to a mythic nature and an election to moral grace. After his reading of Lukács and meeting with Brecht, he saw art as a montage of images specifically created for reproducibility. Stripped of mystique and ritual awe, the artist had now to avoid exploitation by revolutionizing the forces of production. Technique was the answer. Innovations arise in response to the asocial and fragmented conditions of urban existence, and mass communications should be harnessed to politicise aesthetics. {26}

41.5. European Structuralist Marxists

Both Marxists and Structuralists see society as the fundamental reality. But where Marxists believe that society

is a historical entity, evolving out of contradictions, Structuralists believe that societies are underlain by deep, self-regulating and unchanging rules. The Rumanian critic Lucien Goldman used Structuralist ideas in his study of Racine's tragedies, finding similarities of form between the tragedies, Jansenism and the French nobility. In his *Pour une sociologie du roman* of 1964, Goldman looked at the modern novel, again finding elements that reflected the market economy. Just as the state and the big corporations increasingly turn values into commodities, so we see objects in contemporary novels being given a status formerly enjoyed by individuals.

Louis Althusser foreshadowed Poststructuralism (7-9) by regarding society as decentred, without overall structure or governing principle. Levels exist, but in complex relationships of inner conflict and mutual antagonism: a far cry from the economic foundations of simple Marxism. Art is something between science and ideology, the latter being 'a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence'. Art is therefore not entirely a fiction, nor simply the view of its author. {27}

Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* regarded a text not as an autonomous or once-created object, but an assemblage of material unconsciously worked over. Ideology may be lived entirely naturally, but once ideology enters into a text all its gaps and contradictions become exposed. The author attempts to cover them up — the very choice of saying something means that other things cannot be said — and the critic attends to the repressed and unspoken: a theory with obvious psychoanalytic ramifications. Recently, Macherey has placed more emphasis on the educational system, and removed art from the privileged status it enjoyed under Goldman and Althusser. {28}

41.6. Poststructuralist Marxism

The English Marxist Terry Eagleton took over the Althusian view that literary criticism should become a science, but rejected the hope that literature could distance itself from ideology. Literature is simply a reworking of ideology, by which Eagleton means a reworking of all those representations — aesthetic, religious, judicial — which shape an individual's mental picture of lived experience. With the arrival of Poststructuralism, Eagleton shifted from studies of the English novel to a reappraisal of Walter Benjamin, employing Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis to undermine certainties and fixed forms of knowledge. {29}

The American Frederic Jameson sees ideology as strategies of containment which allow societies to explain themselves by repressing the underlying contradictions of history (in a Hegelian sense.) Texturally, these containments show themselves as formal patterns. Some are inescapable. Narrative, for example, is how reality presents itself to the human mind, in science as well as art. And reality still exists, exterior to human beings: Jameson does not accept the Poststructuralist (7-9) view that everything is just a text. Indeed, in his reading of Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Jameson shows how past interpretations — impressionist, Freudian, existential, etc. — both express something in the text and describe the demand for capital in the modern state. {30}

41.7. Critique

Though the Marxist is one of the more interesting of twentieth century schools of aesthetics, its bases of evaluation are difficult to establish. {31} Neither Marx nor Engels supposed that the superstructure of the state — political, legal, artistic — simply reflected its economic constitution, but insisted that such a constitution was still the ultimate reality. How men worked defined their existence and aspirations. All other aspects of human life — love, fraternity,

nationalism, honesty, etc. — had eventually to be translated into economic terms, and these judged against Marxist orthodoxy.

Then there is the cultural life of communist countries. Marx stressed praxis, the practical, relative and culturally determined. Regardless of what liberalism claimed in theory, the reality in nineteenth century Europe was inequality and exploitation. Lenin, who had spent long years in exile struggling with the theoretical aspects of Marxism, had clear notions of what theory implied and needed. Artistic freedom may have been equated with social liberation in the heady days of the Bolshevik (45.15) take-over, but cultural diversity would only weaken a state fighting for its life. Experimentation was stigmatised as decadently bourgeois, and the debate polarized between communist (good) and non-communist (bad). Artists were either for or against progressive ideology: there was no in-between.

So came social realism. Yet the trouble was not the stereotyping — the tireless factory manager, the smiling peasants — but the falsity of the stereotyping. The communist world was very different from what artists were allowed to show. Control was very crude. Art must provide appropriate models for behaviour since what people read they would act upon, and criticism had therefore to be curtailed or stifled. And art which the west might appraise on several grounds — flowering of tradition, depth of feeling, subtlety and expressiveness, keenness of observation, wealth of inventiveness — came to be judged on one criterion alone: political correctness. {32}

But there are more fundamental problems. Literature is broad and richly diversified: Marxism is not. How can the second encompass the first? Of course if Marxism were a scientific theory, a small number of laws would serve to explain a wide range of effects. But Marxism is not a scientific theory. Deductions from its generalizations have been spectacularly inaccurate. The rise in living standards of

capitalist working class; revolution in Russia of all places; the Russian-Chinese conflict; the repression under Lenin, Stalin and all Soviet leaders to Gorbachev himself, the uprisings in Berlin, Budapest, and Prague. Marxist theory 'explained' all these events, but only by cooking up suspect subsidiary hypotheses. If Marxism fails intellectually, do not its aesthetics fall to the ground? {33} Similarly, where supported by them, is not Marxist aesthetics open to the objections levelled at Structuralism and Lacanian theory?

Not so, say modern Marxists. Possibly, at least outside China and North Korea, the communist world has crumbled away, but events do not necessarily invalidate Marxism. We should study political thought and the circulation and reproduction of capital in the modern state without the presuppositions of class struggle. Moreover, totalitarian Russia under Stalin was very far from anything Marx envisaged, {34} and it has seemed to some western economists that market economies succeed in spite of the farrago of unproved and mutually conflicting theories they are taken as representing. {35}

Perhaps there is no one, coherent Marxist philosophy. The attempts outlined above to rehabilitate Marx have drastically revised or even rewritten him. The same can be said of analytical Marxism, which has combined analytical philosophy with economics and game theory. Both it and Marxist thought generally (i.e. produced in western bourgeois societies: little was allowed inside communist countries) is excessively theoretical and rarefied. It thrives in university departments of literature but not in the workplace. Prominently, it fails in its first requirement, which is not simply to analyse society, but to change it. {36}

But western apologists have answers. One is to take the line of Terry Eagleton's: 'When Shakespeare's texts cease to make us think, when we get nothing out of them, they will cease to have value. But why they 'make us think', why we 'get something out of them' (if only for the present) is a

question which must be referred at once to the ideological matrix of our reading and the ideological matrix of their production. It is in the articulation of these distinct moments that the question of value resides.' {37} Unfortunately, the unspoken assumption is that the ideological matrix will endorse the Marxist view. Certainly Shakespeare's plays offer abundant material for analysis in terms of social history, late Renaissance thought, hermeticism, Tudor political theory, etc., but such analyses would start from assumptions very different from Marxist, and reach different conclusions.

A second line is to postpone aesthetic discussion until bourgeois society is replaced by a more egalitarian, Marxist society. Then perhaps the arts can enjoy a more independent role, and questions of political subservience will fade away.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

42. RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

What has religion to say about poetry? Obliquely, a good deal. Poets need a vision of the world, and for long centuries the Christian church provided precisely that, not only in doctrine but in revelation, experience and inspiration. A poet's religious affiliations were not merely reflected in the semantic core of his work, but conditioned the vocabulary, the structure of his arguments and patterning of his Christian outlook.

The great figures of Elizabethan art {1} were united in holding with passion and assurance to a medieval world modified by the Tudor regime. The poet was most original when most orthodox and of his age. And in that world, far from being a sign of modesty, innocence, or intuitive virtue, not to know oneself was to resemble the beasts, if not in coarseness at least in deficiency of education. Self-knowledge was not egoism but the gateway to all virtue. Of the heroes in Shakespeare's four tragic masterpieces two, Othello and Lear, are defective in self-understanding, and two, Macbeth and Hamlet, in will. The conflicts in mature Shakespearean tragedy are between the passions and reason. But Shakespeare animates these conflicts with unique intensity. Sir John Hayward:

'Certainly, of all creatures under heaven which have received being from God, none degenerates, none forsake their natural dignity and being, but only man. Only man, abandoning the dignity of his proper nature, is changed like Proteus into divers forms. And this is occasioned by his liberty of will. And as every kind of beast is principally inclined to one sensuality more than another, so man transformeth himself into that beast whose sensuality he principally declines. Thus did the ancient wise men shadow forth by their fables of certain persons changed into such beasts whose cruelty or sottery or other brutish nature they did express.'

42.1. Religious Experience

God for adherents is an experienced reality. The reality is personal and not repeatable for others' benefit. Nonetheless, despite recent attempts, it is not possible to prove traditional Christian beliefs are true or even probable. Nor, equally, is it possible to show them to be false or logically incoherent. Theism is rational within a given conceptual system, such systems being judged on a) their match with the evidence, b) their explanatory or transforming power, c) their consistency, coherence, simplicity, elegance and fertility, d) the rules which arise out of the system, not a priori.^{2} Men become committed to religions which involve their whole personalities, and they will not readily them give up. Differences are to be expected if we accept that God reveals himself through men of different cultural practices and intellectual casts of thought.

Most adherents follow in the faith of their parents and community. Of those who change allegiance, not all undergo sudden conversion, many being persuaded by example and reflection. There comes a time in many lives when the truth becomes apparent and people believe they see realities that were previously hidden or existing merely as reports or faith. Considered carefully, such mystical experiences can be distinguished from numinous (awe-inspiring, indicating presence of a divinity), visionary and occult experiences, and from ordinary religious affections. Primarily they are noetic (intellectual). ^{3} Their recipients may be conscious of more than an undifferentiated unity, or of an immediate and loving awareness of God. They may also be pantheistic: within and without seem as one; the world has a marvellous and extraordinary beauty; space and time are transcended. Though contradictory if put into words, common to all these is an experience of the world as alive and filled with joy and blessedness.

Religion is not reducible to social function, {4} though many seek faith because ultimately men are failures. Without sin, suffering and evil there cannot be free will. Guilt is our response to evil. We do not deduce evil from standards, but as a violation of the taboos which make possible our cultural and social life. Religion becomes meaningful in acts: ritual, prayer, mystical encounters. Meaningful is not equivalent to the empirical, to universally accessible acts of perceiving. The Eucharist is understandable to believers within the framework of an entire system of ritual symbols. Moral content is given in the very act of perceiving and understanding. As Plotinus remarked, 'God is only a name if spoken about without true virtue'.

The language of myth is closed and self-supporting, not easily translated or transferred from one culture to another. Meaning is formed by acts of communication, and has to be recreated in those acts time and again. It is always possible to reduce religion to anthropology or social science, but such explanations give no abiding satisfaction.

Religion is the sacralization of identity. {5} Whereas identity in animals is rank or territory, in humans it is more often symbolic: in terms of class, sex, attitudes to money, beauty, equality. Sacralization is an emotionally welding of an identity which, sudden or not, consolidates and stabilizes that identity: certain patterns of symbolic systems acquire a taken-for-granted, eternal quality. This identity is also crucial to societies: alienation and marginalization occur if changes in society stake out identities before the originals adapt sufficiently.

It is worth noting that :

Identity presupposes order and consistency in our views of reality.

Religion so outlined applies to all religions, to Humanism, scientific neutrality, indeed to all types of human commitment.

Commitment anchors the system of meaning in the emotions, and generates awe.

Ritual maximizes order, reinforcing the sense of place or identity in society, especially after the important events of marriage, birth and death.

Sacrifice is a form of commitment that clarifies priorities.

Morals are what guarantees order in a society.

Myth is the emotion-laden assertion of a man's place in a meaningful world. {6}

42.2. Platonism

Many readers will have grave difficulties with the irreducible mind concept of consciousness (23.10). Here consciousness is not created by the brain, but that physical organ simply *tunes into, selects and gives some individual shaping* to an all-pervading, universal consciousness. Yet the concept has a long and distinguished history. Plato, the Neoplatonists, Leibnitz and nineteenth-century Idealists, (12) {7} have believed something similar. Even nuclear scientists must recognize some ordering field at the quantum level that eludes everyday concepts. (35.3) But the Neoplatonists certainly, and Plato possibly, were not setting out their beliefs by argument, but attempting a rational explanation for their own experiences. Plotinus goes beyond pantheism in seeing plants, animals, ourselves and even the earth as engaged in contemplation of the Unity when he uses the image of a choir whose singing improves each time it turns back to its director. Many Neoplatonists stressed prayer, rituals of devotion and purity in living — as do Indian and other mystics — because their goal was not intellectual understanding but a transformed sense of the world around them. {8} That feeling of 'blessedness' when the words will come, or be given them under inspiration, is one attested to by many poets, but it is not prevalent today, in critical theory or serious poetry.

42.3. Gods as Archetypes

Depth psychology {9} is not a new concept: the same thoughts can be traced through Heraclitus, Plato, Plotinus, Ficino, Vico, Schelling, Coleridge, Dilthy to Jung and others. Nor is it an unusual activity: every day we are undertaking analysis and therapy of the soul, this being the psyche of the Greeks or anima of the Romans. The soul indeed:

Is a perspective rather than a substance, a perspective mediating and reflecting on the events we are immersed in all the time.

Forms a self-sustaining and imagining substrate to our lives.

Deepens events into experiences, making meaning possible, communicating with love and religious concern.

Derives significance from its association with death and psychoses.

Includes dream, image and fantasy in its operation, recognizing that all realities are primarily symbolic and metaphorical.

Depth psychology does not begin with brain physiology (23) or with structures of language (37) and society (26), but with images, these being the basic givens of psychic life: self-originating, inventive, spontaneous and complete, organized in archetypes. It is archetypes, the deepest patterns of our psychic functioning, that are the roots of our souls, governing our perspective of ourselves and the world. Fundamentally, they are metaphors — God, life, health, art — which hold worlds together and which cannot be adequately circumscribed. Other examples can be found in literature, scientific thought, rituals and relationships. Archetypes are emotionally possessive. Organizing whole clusters of events in different areas of life, ascribing the individual his place in society, and controlling everything he sees, does and says, they naturally appear as gods. Plural, note. Depth

psychology is polytheistic because in every one individual many different viewpoints are possible, making for a radical relativism.

Depth psychology is therefore neither a religion, nor a humanism, but a non-agnostic psychology. In religion Gods are taken literally, and approached with ritual, prayer, sacrifice and worship. In Humanism man is the measure of all things and Gods do not exist. In depth psychology the Gods are real but exist only as myths. Recall that it was Mersenne (1588-1648) who led the campaign against paganism (as against demonism, astrology, alchemy, allegorical painting and poetry) which the Enlightenment continued in Christianity's monotheism of consciousness. Multiple personalities were seen as possession, nowadays schizophrenia. Equally suspect today is eloquence, especially words whose power over us cannot be curtailed by philosophy and semantics. Yet in many ways the individual, the person who acts rationally and individually, is himself a mythical creation. The accompanying self-determination or free will, the central preoccupation of western theology, is likewise a product of the monotheist viewpoint. Though the later Greeks offered prayers to many gods (while imagining monotheistically the One), the moral codes of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are literalisations of the Hero image, the Ego, the subdivision into light and dark, producing a moralizing that infects psychology even now.

Never in Greek drama were human relationships an end in themselves, and even the best-regulated families were struck by tragedy. By denying the gods we commit many crimes. By seeing ourselves as god, we commit to ideologies and commit atrocities in their name. We look to other people for our salvation, and are continually disappointed. Psychologising cannot be brought to rest in science or philosophy. It is satisfied only by its own movement of seeing through, during which it a) interiorizes, moving from data to personification, b) justifies itself, even hinting at a deeper

hidden god, c) provides a narrative, told in metaphors, d) uses ideas as eyes of the soul. Literalism or monotheism of meaning is the greatest enemy today, and we should remember that definitions outside science, mathematics and logic are elusive things. Enigma provokes understanding. Myths make concrete particulars into universals. Vico remarked that metaphors (24) 'give sense and passion to insensate things'. Archetypes are semantically metaphors and have a double existence, being a) full of internal opposites, b) unknowable and yet known through images, c) congenital but not inherited, d) instinctive and spiritual, e) purely formal structures and contents, f) psychic and extra-psychic. Every statement concerning an archetype is to be taken metaphorically, prefixed with 'as if'.

Psychological insights have traditionally been obtained from souls in extremis (23.10), from patients no longer in control of themselves: the sick and suffering, given to fantasies and abnormal behaviour. Yet there is often very real doubt over the diagnoses. Indeed the label is generally the meeting of four sets of circumstances: nomenclature, milieu, doctor and patient. Sharp classification (medical approach) is one way to deny the soul. Another is to call the society sick — Foucault (9), Laing, Szasz — as this overlooks the ugliness and misery of its victims. A third is by transcendence (the pseudo-Oriental), the positive emphasis of Maslow, which is often too simplistic, innocent and romantic. But pathologies are authentic, and we do not need to reduce them to medical complaints or exaggerate them as spiritual suffering. In antiquity it was thought that the god constellated in the illness was the one who could take the illness away. Today that god is the professional analyst who 'creates' the illness by naming it, locking patient and therapist into endless power and erotic struggles in sadomasochistic therapy. Within each affliction is a complex, and within the complex is an archetype, which in turn refers to a god. Such gods, as in Greek tragedy, force themselves symptomatically into

awareness as some force within us. Pathology therefore is the single vision, the reduction of the polytheistic consciousness to a monotheistic one, to the identification with one and the suppression or ignorance of the others. But just as pathological experiences give us an indelible sense of the soul, so there is psychological acuity and richness of culture in periods of historical decay, as individually in neurosis and depression.

42.4. Eros

The elements of the classical world are resurrected in depth psychology, in the soul, divine possession, and so forth. What of Eros? The Greeks had many words for love and they didn't confuse Eros with maternal love or sexual pleasure. Today many aspects of Eros are debased or impoverished, especially in the commercialisation of 'explicit' films and novels, where sex appears squalid, banal and vulgar. {10}

But man has constantly tried to understand the secret and essence of sex in divinity itself. Through sacred prostitution, possession by incubus and succubus, and by secret societies, the gods of sex were manifest on earth. The male appears as logos or principal or form, the female as the life force, each with different attitudes and objectives. And if the sex drive is not to be repressed, it must be asserted — in profane or sacred love — or transformed by tantric practices, by the Cabbala or Eleusinian mysteries. Eros is not an instinct for reproduction, nor a pursuit of pleasure, but a deep attraction that causes fundamental changes in the partners. Erotic experience transforms the habitual boundaries of the ego, a dis-individualizing exaltation by which one temporarily escapes the human condition. Indeed, worldwide, humanity has recognized:

The overpowering nature of the sexual experience

Its possession and abandonment

The ever-present danger of loss

The heart as the seat of consciousness

Its roots in love, pain and death

Its pleasure and its suffering

The ecstasy

The incommunicable experience of coitus

Its modesty and associated fear of falling

Its cathartic and cleansing properties, often promoted by orgies

Its part in adulthood, initiation ceremonies and social behaviour.

42.5. Pagan Inheritance

Many of the ideas popular in the English Renaissance lingered on into the nineteenth century.^{9} In the classical world, myths describe the behaviour of gods to each other, their treatment of human beings and their adventures on this earth and beyond. In spite of their immortality, the gods are anthropomorphic, exhibiting human passions and sometimes acting immorally by human standards. Overwhelmingly, man's place is insecure, and the universe is not ordered according to a morality he can easily accept.

For monotheistically or scientifically-inclined philosophers, the gods were a serious obstacle. Plato in his Republic attacked them outright, though Socrates argued that they were not responsible for human evil. Epicureans removed them from human affairs altogether. The most popular way of dealing with them was by allegory, however, and of these there were three kinds. a. physical: to account for natural phenomena: Proserpina and the seasons: popular with stoics. b. historical euhemerism: gods were once earthly rulers deified in some distant past. c. moral: gods were personifications of human virtues and vices. Devout Greeks and Romans regarded the gods as the creations of poets, as rationalizations of the philosophers, and as poetic fictions necessary for civic functions and ceremonies.

Though the Roman world became officially Christian in AD 324, and pagan worship was banned in AD 390, the gods were too intimately part of the fabric of social life to be discarded. Four approaches suggested themselves: a. gods were demons: the orthodox Christian view, b. gods were the stars and planets of astrology: a physical view, c. gods were early kings and benefactors: the euhemeristic view, and d. gods were moral allegories of human conduct and therefore foreshadowings of Christian truth.

Renaissance poets used myths in five ways. a. as a story told for its own sake (Hero and Leander), b. to embellish and enrich the meaning (much Elizabethan work), c. as allegory (*The Fairie Queen*), d. as mock-heroic, to expose the subject to unfavourable comparisons (late sixteenth-century satire) and e. negatively: gods were fallen angels (*Paradise Lost*).

42.6. Irreducible Mind

The view of Kelly and co-workers, {12} who see the brain operating as a 'radio receiver' that confines, collects and shapes a universal consciousness into an individual one (23.10), offers a different view of religious phenomena. Organised religion is generally hostile to the paranormal, as is mainstream science. Moreover, the world suggested by near-death, reincarnation and similar experiences seems more one of pantheism than that of orthodox faiths. But the insights of paranormal experience are generally the same across the world, in time and space, at least when cultural differences are taken into account. Doctrinal differences become unimportant. The common experiences suggest that we should care for fellow human beings, and be honest with ourselves. {13}

The paranormal visions {14} granted (if only briefly) to exceptional individuals — luminous, uplifting and unifying — were once the field of poetry. Poets were the seers, the sages and the legislators of the larger, spiritual world, and perhaps could be so again if trained properly. {15-17}

42.7. Significance

Poetry is made from words, but it also expresses an outlook or vision. The world through art appears sharper, fuller, more intense, real and significant. So it does to the religious believer. Poetry makes experiences out of events, and such experiences are also real to believers. Equally obvious are parallels of a less attractive kind: the single vision of current schools of literary theory, the zealotry of poetry movements, and intolerance, not to say, paranoia with which each group regards the literary productions of others. All human consciousness can be regarded as mythic, but myths vary widely in their compass and persuasiveness.

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

43. FEMINISM

Feminism has gradually become more far-ranging and subtle in its attacks on male-dominated society. Many injustices still need to be corrected, but equally necessary is a more down-to-earth, tolerant and compassionate view of fellow human beings.

Many feminists dislike theory. Sharp intellectual categories, argumentation, seeming objectivity, and the whole tradition they grow out of are just what feminists are seeking to escape. And if their reasoning seems unsystematic they can draw support from the psychoanalysis of Lacan (21) and Julia Kristeva, from Derrida's deconstruction (8), and from Rorty's (28.6) view that philosophy should model itself on an edifying conversation seeking rapprochement rather than no-holds-barred gladiatorial combat. {1}

43.1. Androgynist Poetics

Critics, being generally male, had not generally concerned themselves with gender issues. Most of the world's great literature had been written by men. Sappho, Austen, the Brontës and Emily Dickinson apart, it was difficult to think women really had it in them to write at the highest level. Literature was literature, and critics saw no need to distinguish a specifically feminine way of writing or responding to a text.

Virginia Woolf was herself a refutation of that thesis, though her mental breakdown was perhaps brought on by the strain of balancing male self-realization with female abnegation. But in her essay *Professions for Women*, Woolf complained only that women's social obligations hindered a writing career. Their lives gave them a different perspective, but women were not fundamentally different from men in their psychological needs and outlooks.

43.2. Gynocriticism

The gathering feminist movement very much disagreed, and argued that women's writing expressed a distinctive female consciousness, which was more discursive and conjunctive than its male counterpart. Such consciousness was radically different, and had been adversely treated. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* documented the ways 'Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth.' Women had been made to feel that they were inferior by nature and, though men paid lip-service to equality, they would resist its implementation. Some men might be sympathetic to women's issues, but only women themselves knew what they felt and wanted. {2}

And perhaps they always knew. The essays collected in Susan Cornillon's 1972 anthology *Images of Women in Fiction* all suggested that nineteenth and twentieth century fiction was simply untrue to women's experience. Rather than search for the essentially feminine, critics now turned to the social context of women's writing, to the ways a male-orientated society had formed or deformed individual novels, plays and poems written by women. Adventure and romance, whoever written for, seemed to stress the male competitive element, and even the submissive partner of gay literature only imitated the female stereotype.

Not all agreed, of course. Norman Mailer's *The Prisoner of Sex*: disliked the blanket criticism of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, arguing its examples were too selective chosen. {3}

43.3. Gynesis

Nonetheless, by the early eighties, feminists had advanced to a much more confrontational attack on male hegemony, advocating a complete overthrow of the biased (male) canon of literature. French feminists argued that women should write with a greater consciousness of their bodies, which

would create a more honest and appropriate style of openness, fragmentation and non-linearity. Parallel studies in the visual arts stressed a feminine sensibility of soft fluid colours, an emphasis on the personal and decorative, and on forms that evoked the female genitalia.

And the problem lay deeper still, in the language itself. Words had been coined to express a male point of view, and that was indeed misogynist. Some 220 words exist in English for the sexually promiscuous woman, but only 22 for promiscuous men. And in the sexual matters that really concerned them, the vocabulary was hopelessly restricted. {4} Discourse was power, said Foucault. (9) Psychoanalysts like Lacan (21) and Kristeva stressed the liberating role that literature should play, particularly to allow the semiotic flux of the unconscious in early childhood, i.e. before the symbolic world of public discourse imposed its male-favouring rules. Poets worked on the boundaries of the two realms, and Kristeva urged them to engender political and feminist revolutions by dissolving the conventions of normal discourse. {5}

43.4. Gender Theory

Five years later the debate had moved on, from exclusively feminine concerns to the wider issues of gender in social and cultural contexts. Patriarchy and capitalism should be examined more closely, perhaps as Althusser (41.5) had attempted, and sophisticated models built to integrate the larger web of economics, education, division of labour, biological constraints and cultural assumptions.

Michèle Barrett demanded facts, i.e. research. How does gender stereotyping arise in various social contexts? How are the canons of literary excellence actually established? What is the practical effect on literature? Shouldn't we remember that attitudes are struck within a fictional framework, and can't be simply pulled out and convicted by a kangaroo court of feminist morals? {6}

43.5. Critique

Literature will often reflect the cultural assumptions and attitudes of its period, and that of course includes attitudes towards women: their status, their roles, their expectations. But a literature doctored of male-orientated views would be failing in its first requirement, to present a realistic or convincing picture of the world. Moralizing, which includes political correctness, has its dangers.

Feminists have argued for positive discrimination as the only way to correct centuries of bias. Nonetheless, the consensus emerging among black Americans is that positive discrimination is counter-productive. Disadvantaged minorities desperately need the odds levelled, but not patronizingly tilted in their favour. {7}

Psychoanalysis has little scientific standing, and Lacanian theory is further disputed within the psychoanalytical community itself. Feminism does itself few favours by relying on these supports.

A more damaging criticism is the concept of the feminine itself. Does it really exist? There are very real differences in the psychological make-up between the sexes, {8} but testing also indicates what anthropologists have long accepted: the expression of those differences is more determined by cultural factors than sexuality per se. Feminists who argue for a more understanding, fluid, and delicate attitude are not so much advocating qualities native to women but for attitudes still repressed by society. That in turn suggests society itself needs exploring rather than sex differences per se, which is indeed a view more recognized in contemporary feminist studies. {9}

Marxist feminists stress the unsung role played by women in the growth of capitalism, and the resistance by feudal and more communal societies to land enclosure and waged employment. Throughout the Middle Ages there were repeated uprisings and attempts to create more equitable

societies, many of them religious or utopian, but all put down with great savagery. Sometimes the repression was directed at women alone, however, as in the great witch hunts, where tens of thousands of souls perished. Seen in this light, capitalism (26.6) did not arise as a natural progression to a better social order, but was imposed by the emergent merchant classes allying themselves with the church and powerful nobles. {10}

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

44. POST-COLONIAL STUDIES

Post-colonial studies apply the insights of hermeneutics (18) and left-wing political theory (41) to the literature of countries emerging from colonialism. {1} Equally pertinent is the literature of the colonizing power — the unspoken and sometimes superior attitudes of European writers take towards the culture of countries they control or once controlled. {2}

Now a complex and a rapidly expanding field of study, post-colonialism was largely initiated by Edward Said {3}, a Palestinian writer concerned about what he saw as the subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arab-Islamic peoples and their culture, something he called 'Orientalism'. Though his work was one-sided, encumbered with jargon, and involved some subterfuges on its author's part, Said raised matters important in literature, international relations, trade agreements and third world aid.

44.1. Theory

Everyone has their own view of themselves and their surroundings, a view into which is mixed a good deal of unexamined prejudice, self-worth and popular mythology. And doubtless the language in which we write or talk supports and perpetuates those views. Post-colonial studies go further than simply documenting the unavoidable, however: they use the strategies of hermeneutics (18), Bakhtin (10), Derrida (8), Foucault (9) and others to discern and often denounce such harmful prejudices. Post-colonial studies overlap the concerns of feminism (43) {4} and political correctness, and are couched in the language of radical theory, dense with reference and specialized terminology.

Researchers point out, uncontroversially, that the west tends to:

1. View matters wholly through their own culturally-determined and often limited historical perspectives. {5}
2. Lump countries together in geographical or economic blocks, which overlooks vital differences in history, outlook and cultural practices.
3. Oblige writers to adopt the language of the former colonial power, for practical convenience and/or economic control of the media or publishing houses. In many cases, the foreign language has traditions, social structures and textures that are not appropriate to what the new writers wish to say. {6} {7}
4. Apply economic or political coercion. Countries are often given or denied aid on the basis of democratic assessments that are very simplistically applied. {8} Worse, countries often need aid only because they are denied a proper market for their goods by trade organizations that perpetuate the old colonial rule. {9} {10} {11} {12}

Post-colonial studies use Said's 'Otherness' {13}, a somewhat flexible concept, deriving from Freudian psychiatry, which argues that human beings inevitably define themselves against what they are not: the 'other'. Inevitably, given that resistance to a colonial past helps define new writers, the unwanted colonial attitudes reappear, even if as despised negatives. In short, there is no privileged viewpoint, nothing that is free from earlier prejudice or subsequent reaction. We work within an horizon of understanding, which itself shifts as we think more deeply, and the age itself moves on.

44.2. Critique

Post-colonial studies have some telling points to make. For all its humanity, the poetry of Jonson, Pope, Byron, Kipling, etc. has views that we wouldn't expect to read in contemporary work. However enlightened by the standards of their day, the attitudes are dissonant now, perhaps even offensive, and they intrude in any possible reading. We have

to isolate and take them into account, just as the prejudices in today's literature will be picked over by later generations.

That said, post-colonial studies can also be one-sided, ignoring the obvious, that:

1. However distorted the image the west imposes on the third world, an equally distorted view of the west prevails in many third world countries: perception is a larger problem than colonialism. {14}

2. Governments in third world countries often show colonial attitudes to their own peoples: blaming their colonial history is not the answer to more complex problems. {15} {16}

3. The European colonizing powers are unfairly singled out. As self-perpetuating, and sometimes as coercive, for example, were the Chinese and Ottoman Empires. {17} {18}

4. The record of colonialism is more mixed than many theorists allow, with some good and some bad. {19} {20} {21} {22} {23} {24} {25}

5. Theorists enjoy an intellectual freedom unknown in the countries before their 'occupation' by the colonial powers — one that has sometimes disappeared after Independence. {26}

6. Study is excessively theoretical, reliant on Marxist ideology, and can be imperialistic in its turn, setting itself up as the ultimate (and necessarily western) vantage point. {27} {28}

7. Theory becomes an end in itself. In general, the immense problems of the third world do not need such sophistry: they need action. {29} {30} {31} {32}

8. Argument have been pushed to extremes, which has given the whole subject a bad name, perhaps as a ready way of securing tenure in difficult academic times. {33} {34} {35}

It may well be true that history is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many

meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as our perceptions and knowledge. {36} But it is another matter to posit a wholesale, deep-seated and entirely European failing, and fasten the blame on the colonial record. History is complex, and the Marxist thesis of exploitation (41) doesn't fully meet the facts.

The real difficulties arise when we look for evidence. Said's 'Orientalism' made three assertions. Firstly, that oriental studies functioned to serve political ends. Secondly, that 'Orientalism' has produced a false description of Arabs and Islamic culture. And thirdly, that 'Orientalism' helped define Europe's self-image. None seems to be true. {37} Colonial rule was not justified in advance by oriental studies but in retrospect. Second, if the views of oriental scholars were so wrong, it is hard to see how their adoption by the colonizing powers proved so successful, or why they are still used by native academics. Finally, Europe did not define itself against an oriental 'other': Europeans may well have thought themselves superior, but they did not construct an 'other' and define themselves against it. The accusation indeed commits the same stereotyping, now of the Europeans powers, that Said himself castigates. Matters are much more complicated, varying with period and countries concerned.

The issues are contentious, and it is difficult to find a balanced position. The overarching faults of post-colonial studies are those of radical theory generally: belief in simple answers to complex matters, disdain for evidence, and a prose style {38} that obscures the issues and sometimes prevents discussion altogether.

44.3. A Little Detail: The Muslim World

Foreign literature is often better understood against the histories of the countries concerned than through the common lens of post-colonial attitudes.

The decaying Ottoman empire, for example, was split into French and British protectorates in a highly artificial manner,

which led to much ethnic and religious strife. {39} Egypt was invaded by the French and then by the English in the Napoleonic wars, became only semi-independent from the British under Mohammad Ali and his heirs, {40} though more so under the charismatic Nasser in 1952. The west-leaning Mubarak government was overthrown by Arab Spring movements, but the corrupt and repressive army has again seized control. The Jewish return to ancestral homelands, accelerated after the holocaust, added a further component to the explosive mix. Expulsion of Palestinians after abortive wars waged by Arab neighbours added yet more fuel to the flames, {41-42} and Israel is now a US ally and dependency in an oil-rich region where major powers (US, Russia, Britain) have interests that operate through armaments supply and covert resistance groups. {43} The overthrow of middle east governments by the western powers {44} has produced a predictable 'blowback' in Muslim extremism, a never-ending spiral of violence that now justifies increased spending by the military and intelligence services. {45-46}

Even in business, the Muslim world followed rather different principles. Property was sacrosanct, being a way for Muslims to fulfil the obligations of their faith. Theft, fraud, and injustice (i.e. taking unfair advantage) were prohibited by the shari'ah, the Islamic law, which was studied by legal scholars who stood apart and independent of government. Man was not naturally wicked, moreover (i.e. not born into sin), but was sternly tested in life, where *falâh* (prosperity) refers to this life *and* the next. Though usury was forbidden, banks in practice charged an arrangement fee, and initiated many modern practices, including cheques, and credit payments, practices that were introduced into Europe through the Knights Templars. Merit was not measured in terms of wealth or prosperity, however, but as to how that wealth was acquired and used. {47} Ethics indeed guided all aspects of life. {48-49} Because integral to Muslim society, merchants were widely respected — not relegated to the lower orders

as in imperial China, nor seen as parvenus beside the landowning classes of western Europe. Naturally, there were darker aspects: slave-trading, aggressive wars, oppressive treatment of religions other than the Christian and Jewish faiths, but commerce was not at odds with the spiritual life.

Today there are many issues, some arising from the nature of Islamic societies, some arising from their history, which has been no less troubled than that of the Christian west. But three differences may be crucial: {50}

1. Muslim society is based on the just and caring community, not the free individual. There is no Church as a separate entity, but only institutions of scholars who continually interpret and reinterpret the Prophet's teachings for modern times and specific occasions. Islam therefore permeates all levels of life, and is not something set aside for Sunday church going or private belief.

2. Men and women live in separate spheres of life, only freely intermixing in the privacy of the home. Women's subjugation should not be exaggerated, however. Mohammad laid down strict instructions on the respect and rights of women, and indeed women played a larger part in early worship, as they did in early Christianity. Women have also entered universities and the workplace in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, at least until western-funded religious fundamentalism overthrew these more secular societies.

3. As do Jews, though with less of an ethnic base, Muslims believe in a destiny. Faith gives them the status of a chosen people, and the shock of the Crusader and Mongol victories has not been forgotten. Equally disturbing were 'democratic' western concepts, which insensitive officialdom imposed on societies governed by different rules.

The Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires were gradually infiltrated by western ideas as their rulers acceded to western attractions of power and wealth. English, French, German, Dutch and other adventurers sold manufactures

and armaments to the Ottomans, advising on modern approaches, as they did to the Safavids. Modernizations were made, often for good reason — better representation, education, health and industry — but also introduced too quickly, for the benefit of an increasingly secular elite, and blatantly in the interests of western powers and businesses. Monopolies given to western companies with valuable technical know-how naturally antagonized local opinion, making it more difficult to introduce universities, factories and parliaments in Qajar Iran, for example, which was nominally independent but became a pawn in power games of Britain, Russia and then America. {51-52}

The west colonized the Muslim east in stages. First came trading posts along the Indian Ocean coast: unthreatening outposts operating under the license of the local ruler that made little impact on Muslim customs but provided welcome silver for local manufactures. The English, French and the Dutch each had their East India Companies, jockeying for position in Iran, India and south-east Asia, and were not too scrupulous in their methods. Often, as in India, these trading posts expanded to small communities, whose militia supported disputes between rival trading powers. In this way the Portuguese were gradually ousted by the Dutch, and these by the French and finally by the English. These foreign communities would also meddle in local politics, backing one side against another, advising rulers, collecting tax revenues and supplying model armies to local sultans. Gradually their ways prevailed: they rarely interfered with life at the village level but advised rulers on overseas trade, diplomacy and western notions of industry. Their armies, composed of local levies, were often better trained and notably less corrupt. The East India Company finally took over most of India, which was annexed to the Crown after the 1857 Mutiny. Sons of rulers and wealthy businessmen went to school in Europe, gradually developing into a social elite that assumed government when Independence was granted. The elite

lived a western style of life, and felt closer to world events than the Islamic societies that operated on town and village level. Oil wealth has accentuated these differences in the middle-east, and it is with these elites that foreign governments and companies prefer to do business, leaving the great mass of the population unrepresented. {50}

Even the Muslim religion is by no means a simple unifying faith, and Muslims reacted to western ideas by some mixture of: {50}

1. Fundamentalism: a return to a pristine and often intolerant version of Islam. (Wahhabi Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite Iran).

2. Aligarh secular modernism that regards Islam as a moral code rather than a social blueprint for life: religion and politics become separated, as they are in the Christian west. (Turkey)

3. Islamic modernism: Islam has been reinterpreted for the contemporary age, but is still the source of social and political authority. Sayyid Jamaluddin Afghan founded no party in his peripatetic life, nor left any authoritative and considered book, but his charismatic personality inspired many Muslim revivals (including the Muslim Brotherhood) and reinvigorated the concept of 'jihad' or holy war among Muslims oppressed by western governments or their puppet states.

Yet the Muslim countries, once so prosperous, {51-53} have not fared well in recent centuries, and their adoption of western concepts has been slow and difficult, with many now accused of harbouring religious fundamentalism, or even promoting terrorism. {54} How has this happened?

By failing to modernize and apply the scientific approach to large-scale production might be one answer. Neoliberalism goes further, and insists on the unrestricted flow of goods, ideas and money across national boundaries, something difficult for the ethical Muslim concepts of business to accommodate. Many countries in these regions are under

repressive dictatorships, moreover, and education of their peoples often does not advance beyond memorizing the Quran. Commerce is hindered by unnecessary and complex bureaucracies, where haggling and bribery are part of a social fabric that reinforces the status quo. Women are kept out of the workplace, and unavailable for the factories that have transformed the economies of south-east Asia. {45}

Islam countenances jihad, {55} but not terrorism, which is the work of a marginalised minority in response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and then the Iraq invasion. {56-57} In both conflicts there are many, probably a majority, who wish to see peace and restitution, {58} but the matter is bedevilled by oil, {59} American corporations {60} and regional politics. {61}

Even the symbiosis of Big Oil, Big Money and Government was anything but simple. Western concerns did not take out concessions to exploit middle-east oil, but to *postpone* development and protect the high-price oil monopolies elsewhere: in the USA (Standard Oil), Mexico (Mexican Eagle), in Sumatra (Royal Dutch), Baku (Nobel Brothers) and Burma (Burma Oil). Demands for self-rule broke out across the former Ottoman territories after W.W.I., but were suppressed by France and Britain working through local rulers maintained in power by western interests and governments. Oil companies got tacit and sometimes military support from their governments for several reasons. One was the need to protect the oil supplies, particularly after W.W.II., when the Soviet Union threatened to support nationalist movements. Oil also powered the British navy, and a cheap supply was also needed to maintain the high-energy consumption of the American way of life. Oil indeed was an attractive alternative to coal — easier to transport and less subject to miners' strikes, some dangerously protracted (France 1895, Belgium 1902, Russia 1905, West Virginia 1919, Germany 1920, Britain 1926). France snuffed out nationalist movements in Syria. Britain put down

uprisings in Iraq, Egypt and Palestine, and encouraged Jewish settlement in Palestine to offset Arab nationalism. Britain and the USA overthrew the Mossadegh presidency in Iran through a 1953 CIA coup. Until the 'war on terror' (i.e. western attacks on Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and the Yemen) the Muslim world was largely ruled by repressive regimes whose lavish purchase of 'security' brought good profits to western armament manufacturers. The area was stable, but far from the ideals of a democratic or Islamic society. Naturally, given the high capital investment required, oil company interests involved the large banks: the Deutsche Bank in Berlin, Rothschild's in Paris, the Mellon family in Pittsburgh, and the Rockefellers with their oil production and refinery interests. Oil indeed came to support the American dollar, because (excepting Iranian oil that briefly used sterling) all importing countries had to pay for that oil in dollars. {62} Syria currently finds Turkey, Saudi Arabia and NATO fighting a proxy war against Russia, Iran and the Assad government. {63-64}

Afghanistan came several times (if briefly) under British attempts to protect India from Russian encroachment, and had its secular government overthrown by Islamic fundamentalists encouraged and partly funded by Americans in their constant attack on Soviet power. The country suffered a Russian invasion, a protracted civil war, a US-led overthrow of the Taliban, and a corrupt US-installed government whose authority barely extends beyond Kabul, and now overthrown. {65}

Muslim north Africa became French and Italian colonies, into which poured tens of thousands of European settlers, buying up much of the better land and imposing alien concepts of government. Independence has been marked by bitter sectarian wars and (in Libya) the overthrow of a national government by US and European forces: the once richest country in Africa is now a failed state torn apart by civil war. {66}

Saudi Arabia, a Wahhabi fundamentalist state, is supported by America in exchange for unrestricted access to its oil wealth. {60, 67-68}

Each country had its own history of colonialism, and literary reaction to it, which was anything but simple or consistent. Egypt, for example, remained largely unchanged until the nineteenth century. The medieval Islamic dynasties came and went, and the Ottoman empire crumbled away, but the peasant societies remained self-supporting, dependent on the annual flooding of the Nile. But once the Suez Canal opened in 1869, and controlled the passage to India, the country became of strategic importance to Britain. Equally important was its potential for cotton, whose supply to English mills had been threatened by the American Civil War. To expand cotton production, the khedive Ismail rapidly developed his country, building railways, canals, telegraphs and extensive docks at Suez and Alexandria. Because British banks funded the enterprises, the indebtedness of Egypt steadily mounted, reaching £80 million in 1876. The annual interest alone amounted to £6 million, which had to be extracted from state revenues of £10 million. The peasants were heavily taxed to meet these sums, and in 1875 the khedive was obliged to sell his Suez shares to Britain. 1878 saw a cattle plague and widespread famine. As the machinery of government broke down there was agitation to grant a constitution and more independence from Britain, a situation that endangered banking interests. Britain therefore replaced Ismail by the more compliant Tewfik. Nationalism grew just the same, and in 1861 army officers led by Arabi seized control of the government. Britain responded by sending warships to Alexandria, where they employed Bedouin assassins to murder Christians, landed forces to deal with the 'emergency', and defeated Arabi at Tel-e-Kabir. The country was placed under British military control, a 'temporary' measure that lasted 25 years. Under Sir Evelyn Baring, more land was irrigated and brought

under cotton cultivation — exports rose from £8 million/year to £30 million/year in 1907. Food had now to be imported. Egyptian society was no longer self-sustaining, and the opposition was such that the country had to be placed under martial law for the duration of W.W.I. A nominal independence was granted in 1919, but the reality of British rule continued through the occupation of the Suez Canal and the Sudan. {69}

Much of British rule was therefore fiercely resented, though there were westernised elements of Egyptian society who remained more noncommittal: civil servants, for example. Boys at elite public schools modelled on British lines were also as apt to question traditional, parental authority as British rule. {70} A British education was clearly of benefit to Ahmed Lutfi, who brought centuries of European political thought to his campaign for Egypt nationalism. {71} Tawfig el-Hakim's novels did express an anti-western sentiment, of course, {72} and many in the rising middle classes turned in the 1930s from a belief in western values to more traditional, Islamic views. {73} But Egyptian novelists were also less than happy with Nasser's government, and then that of Mubarak. {74} In short, an anti-colonial sentiment is no more simple and unmixed in Egypt's post-colonial literature than would be the 'loss of empire' or similar themes in post-war British novels. Post-colonialism is an engrossing field of study, but needs to read against the individual social and cultural histories of the countries concerned. {75-81}

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[Contents](#)

[Index](#)

45. THEORY AT WAR

Here we look at critical theory as practised today, not the general aesthetics reviewed by this book, but the strands of Modernism and Postmodernism (6-9) that make contemporary poetry resemble the visual arts — exploratory, theory-based, and appealing only to well-informed, narrow sectors of the public. Indeed, as though recognising these limitations, the number of students enrolling for English literature courses has now fallen, research funding has been cut back, and critical theory papers and their attendant poetry enjoy only a sporadic readership outside academia and the small presses.

45.1. Perpetual Revolution

'Make it new', said Ezra Pound, and twentieth-century poetry successively discarded a need to speak to the common man (Symbolism), to represent truth (High Modernism/New Criticism) or bear witness (Imagism), to make sense (Surrealism, Dada) or use the law courts of language (Postmodernism). Each purge produced a poetry thinner and more fractious than before, which sharpened the need for even more extreme measures. Purity of abstruse doctrine became the aim of poetry, which insensibly merged with literary criticism and then theory.

The result has been a local thickening as one aspect or another is taken up, but also an overall impoverishment of theme and language, with poetry dividing into coterie groups each claiming the sole truth.

45.2. Death of Truth

Much in contemporary poetry is odd, irrational, perhaps even preposterous. Pride in country and community, a wish to explore, develop and identify with the aspirations of one's fellow citizens, an abiding interest in the larger political and social issues of the day and a commitment to the moral and religious qualities that distinguish man from brute animals

are all aspects of modern democratic life, but they find scant expression in its poetry. Wordsworth's broodings on the ineffable are preferred to his patriotic odes, {1} and Swinburne's {2} urgent rhetoric is no more read today than William Watson's high-minded effusions. {3} Even the Georgians {4} with their innocent depictions of country life were decried by the Moderns, though what was substituted was a good deal less real and relevant to the book-buying public. {5} The New Criticism ushered in by Pound {6} and Eliot, {7} finding in the admired poetry of the past so much that was no longer true, declared that truth was not to be looked for in poetry. All that mattered were the words on the page, and the ingenious skill with which they deployed. The experience of historians was set aside, as was indeed that of readers of historical romances, both of whom can remain happily suspended between the past and present.

45.3. Rejection of the Past

Challenge is healthy, but the new practitioners rewrote the rules altogether. Poetry had always been contemporary, they argued, and that now meant being direct, personal and American. Poetry had in fact been more than that, but the proponents of popular Modernism — William Carlos Williams, the Black Mountain School, Beat Poets and the San Franciscans — had answers ready. Poetry must be unmediated if sincere, and the techniques of verse were a handicap to expression. They remembered Pound's 'make it new', and asserted that a more democratic age must have a more democratic poetry. And lest anyone think their work trivial, they wrapped matters up in a complex phraseology, redefining the elements of verse in startling ways. {8} Theoretical scaffolding became a necessary part of contemporary poetry, {9} the more so as the floodgates were soon to be opened in schools and writing classes throughout the country. Excellence lay in what authorities could be

quoted, and the theoretical considerations accessible in a poem. {10}

45.4. Poetry is a Local Currency

The rich vocabularies of Romanticism and nineteenth-century medievalism have been dropped, perhaps wisely, but twentieth-century replacements have not been widely accepted. The high-flown rhetoric of patriotism fitted ill with the realities of modern warfare, and radio and then television have replaced colourful local expression with an impersonal and often bureaucratic language. Advertising has destroyed sincerity, and politicians, in striving to remain ahead of an increasingly sceptical electorate, have made even well-meaning generalities sound calculating. The average citizen devours yards of newsprint every day, and remembers not a word of it.

No longer is language a mark of class, and therefore an incentive to employ idiom appropriately. Cinema and to some extent the theatre, perhaps radicalised by what they see as big-business imperialism, prefer words close to vulgarity, even though the resulting dialogue only stereotypes characters. Bluntness is seen as honesty, and one obvious difference between amateur and serious poets is the words the latter do *not* use.

Try this experiment. Which of the following snippets of poetry appeared on popular sites, and which in serious poetry outlets?

One: I Miss You All

*It's been thirty years
Different times then
Same man, I think
Couple of stone
Bit of a stoop
Less hair
Greying
Quieter*

*Funny eye
Gammy leg
Not much wiser
I remember that time
That night in Samantha's
'Twenty-one-today' and all that
All you guys not in my life anymore
Whatever happened to you big Dave?
Best scrapper I ever came across
Really just a daft, friendly giant
You saved my ass a few times
Glad you were on my side
And Jenny, my first love
You broke my heart {11}*

Two: Red Poppy

*That linkage of warnings sent a tremor through June
as if to prepare October in the hardest apples.
One week in late July we held hands
through the bars of his hospital bed. Our sleep
made a canopy over us and it seemed I heard
its durable roaring in the companion sleep
of what must have been our Bedouin god, and now
when the poppy lets go I know it is to lay bare
his thickly seeded black coach
at the pinnacle of dying. {12}*

Three: The Twittering Machine

*Frozen bright without praise or imitation, rather omniscient and silly
but lit by flagpoles luminescent from the belly up, the machine is
wired like spaghetti.*

*Around it truck fenders slam and spin, galoshes jostle in front-loaded
washers, chevy doors clink glasses together in some sort of toast.
Ambassadors grill each other, expressionless.*

*Nimbus blue, the red freighter (sailing under the accidental flag of
America) burns. The toy is hung on its own hinge, chance and wind
revolve it.*

*The gunman aims, toy ducks, the colorful regardlessness of blood.
{13}*

No prizes for guessing the obvious: exhibits two and three were from serious poetry outlets, and exhibit three was in fact a Pushcart Prize nominee. But what about their language? Suppose you receive exhibits one and two as

private letters: which would be the more natural? Number one. The second seems so odd — and remember it appeared in *The Academy of American Poets* — that readers might find themselves ringing its author to check that all was well. Who uses phrases like ‘durable roaring’, ‘companion sleep’ or ‘pinnacle of dying’, and what would they accomplish in the larger world of language in a letter to a bank manager or local newspaper? The currency has very restricted use.

45.5. Civil War

Once academic careers could be carved from contemporary poetry, critics proselytised for their movements, seeking to place candidates in the apostolic succession from the founding fathers, who were de facto great poets. Some ingenuity was needed to make Hardy and Yeats into Modernists, and even more to shield Frost from the sort of criticism that damaged the enemy, but academics dug deeper into the fissile nature of language. They researched the bases of criticism, and developed a literary theory based on continental philosophy. Unless we think the critical studies unbalanced, or that they adjusted the criteria according to the poet or movement under consideration, we have to accept that there are now no common values, only a civil war between communities who choose not to understand each other.

First some uncomfortable facts. British poetry declined in importance from the eighteenth century, and had ceased to be the most important literary genre by the mid nineteenth. From the end of that century to the 1930s, only some 15 poetry books of any significance were published each year in England. Seventy percent of borrowings from public libraries were prose fiction, and not much of the remaining thirty percent was poetry. The 10,000 copies subscribed before publication of a new volume by Stephen Phillips were a

publishing phenomenon, but still only a tenth of those achieved by *Lorna Doone* in 1897. General periodicals like *The Cornhill*, *The Nineteenth Century*, *Longmans* and *Murray's Magazines* published a little poetry, and new literary magazines like *The Yellow Book* generally had limited circulations and short lives. Poets could support themselves on their poetry even less than they do today, there being no poets in residence, public readings or interviews on the radio and TV. {14}

What did spring up were coteries of poets and writers, more in England than the USA, and particularly in London. There were the usual disagreements but the Moderns were not personally at odds with the Georgians: they mixed with them socially and found much to admire in their work. Pound was asked to contribute to *Georgian Poetry*, and Eliot's poetry was liked by Munro and others. {15} We should not paint too rosy a picture, but exchanges like this were not published:

'Why is that?

— Because most mainstream poetry today is simply unreadable, and people quite sensibly ignore it. For example, intelligent readers skip past the poems in *The New Yorker* in order to peruse the much more inviting articles and advertisements.

It seems that you dislike the poetry in *The New Yorker*.

— They haven't published an interesting poet since Dorothy Parker and Ogden Nash.' {16}

Or:

'When he was a young man, Ezra Pound scribbled a sonnet every morning before breakfast. He had the good sense to throw the whole lot in the fire. A poet doesn't have to believe the Muse keeps appointments to see the virtues of regimen; and yet there's something pillowy and fin de siècle in Robert Bly's self-imposed discipline, to write a poem every morning before rising. *Morning Poems* has a dozy complacency (you feel some of it was written before waking). The book is composed in simple, declarative sentences, full of "wisdom" and "sentiment," as if these were ingredients found in any supermarket; and like a Disney cartoon they're full of talking

mice, talking cars, talking cats, talking trees. The poems peter out at sonnet length, the appetite for poetry exhausted where the appetite for breakfast begins.

One day a mouse called to me from his curly nest:

'How do you sleep? I love curliness.'

'Well, I like to be stretched out. I like my bones to be

All lined up. I like to see my toes way off over there.'

'I suppose that's one way,' the mouse said, 'but I don't like it.

The planets don't act that way, nor the Milky Way.'

What could I say? You know you're near the end

Of the century when a sleepy mouse brings in the Milky Way.

This could hardly be more winsome or sickeningly ingenuous. After a few such trifles, just Aesop without his dentures (I'm especially fond of the talking wheat), a reader might feel he had wandered into a children's book by mistake.' {17}

Or this:

'Let me be specific as to what I mean by "official verse culture" — I am referring to the poetry publishing and reviewing practices of The New York Times, The Nation, The American Poetry Review, The New York Review of Books, The New Yorker, Poetry (Chicago), Antaeus, Parnassus, Atheneum Press, all the major trade publishers, the poetry series of almost all of the major university presses (the University of California Press being a significant exception at present). Add to this the ideologically motivated selection of the vast majority of poets teaching in university, writing and literature programs and of poets taught in such programs as well as the interlocking accreditation of these selections through prizes and awards judged by these same individuals. Finally, there are the self-appointed keepers of the gate, who actively put forward biased, narrowly focused and frequently shrill and contentious accounts of American poetry, while claiming, like all disinformation propaganda, to be giving historical or nonpartisan views. In this category, the *American Academy of Poetry* and such books as *The Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing* stand out.' {18}

Underneath there were many reservations, but it took the ascendancy of Modernism to get Robert Graves in his 1965

Oxford Addresses on Poetry, to talk openly about 'the foul tidal basin of modernism.' {19} Even before that battle was joined, literary appreciation had begun its drift into academia, possibly with *Scrutiny*, where F.R. Leavis applied the approaches of T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards and William Empson in a more sustained manner.

'For Leavis and his followers, analysis was not merely a technique for precise description of literature, but a process whereby the reader could "cultivate awareness", and grow towards the unified sensibility. Analysis was necessary because a poem resulted from a complex of associated feelings and thoughts. A great poem was not a simple, forceful statement of some well-known experience, "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd", but a profoundly original creation only fully comprehended after close textual analysis. Because of these attitudes, the practical critic spent his time discovering complexities, ambiguities and multiplications of meaning. He was attracted to irony and wit, because a poem with these qualities offers different layers of effect for interpretation. Long, discursive poems, such as *Paradise Lost*, which depend for much of their organisation on rational analysis, were undervalued, and the critics tended to treat all poems, and even plays and novels, as akin to lyric poetry in their structure of imagery.' {20}

Many critics disliked the approach. 'Helen Gardner and C. S. Lewis have pointed out that a student can be taught a technique of analysis, and do well in examinations, without any real appreciation of poetry whatsoever.' {21}

'Kermode's book is particularly famous for its attack on Eliot's dissociation theory. . . the whole theory has no historical justification. The theory was produced by Eliot as an attempt to define what he himself was trying to achieve in verse; it should never have been used as an historical truth determining the way in which poems are analyzed.' {22}

But poets kept up the running.

'Literary critics are rarely under fire and never tested by the high seas of artistic creation. Instead, as John Updike puts it when titling his own collected essays and reviews, they "hug the shoreline" of accepted practices and ideals. Their potshots are taken from behind the cover of their age's standards, and the long progress of the history of ideas.' {23}

Academics needed a substantial body of new critical theory, and poets to exemplify its revitalizing insights. W. B. Yeats was clearly one of the greatest of twentieth century English poets, and a spate of books and articles sought to bring him into the fold. {24-26} But if Yeats knew Pound well, he didn't fully sympathize with his work, or always understand it. {27} Yeats's writing grew terser as he emerged from the Celtic twilight, and his interests widened to include the problems of contemporary Ireland, but still his preoccupations remained very un-Modernist: Symbolist images of swans, water, moon and towers, a brooding on the imaginative, inner life, a mannered style with uncontemporary diction.

Perhaps Thomas Hardy, whose style had hardly changed from the 1870s, could be repositioned? {28} David Perkins, whose survey of a hundred years of poetry on both sides of the Atlantic is truly admirable — well-researched, generous and perceptive — did his best, but found himself in difficulties. Writing of *The Dynasts*, he says:

'Later he speaks of the "smart ship" and "smart" may be pejorative, but he also calls it a "creature of cleaving," responding positively to this adventurous swiftness. Throughout the poem his attitude is never settled, but wavers and hovers, balancing one phrase against the next. Many phrases are of the kind readers find "trite" and "awkward", but they are not less effective for that reason. Triteness and awkwardness are here felt as reassuring human ordinariness, a plain honesty of utterance as Hardy records an almost mute depth of feeling and groping uncertainty what to think.' {29}

But surely triteness is triteness: why not accept that Hardy was an imperfect craftsman, both in prose {30} and verse? The comment of the *Saturday Review* on the first appearance of *Wessex Poems* — 'As we read this curious and wearisome volume, these many slovenly, slipshod, uncouth verses, stilted in sentiment, poorly conceived and worse wrought, our respect lessens to vanishing point' {31}

— was harsh, but indeed how they measured up to the expectations of the day.

Modernism was a jealous god, however, and made standards of its own. Hardy refused to lose himself in conventional sentiment or well-turned phrases. Hardy was deeply hurt and perplexed by life, and such honest doubts and comfortless broodings represented the age. Hardy's poems were simple and direct, written without classical trappings or Romantic attitudinising. We understand Hardy more through biography than his poetry or novels, and no doubt all poets would be closer to us if textbooks included their less admirable aspects: Hardy's misogyny, {32} Yeats's calculated affectations, {33} Eliot's ambition that encouraged his wife's association with Russell but had her committed when his career was threatened, {34} Pound's philandering and anti-Semitism, {35} and so forth.

So what happened to the broad church of Modernism? Perhaps there never was a movement as such, but only poets reacting in their own ways to individual circumstances. Perhaps poets remained unconvinced by the theory created to help them, finding it abstruse and over-ingenious: many are the stories of Eliot bemused and chuckling over Ph.D. theses on his work. And perhaps the subterfuges that critics adopted to fight a worthy cause came back to haunt them. Which of these passages do we prefer?

*It is the time of tender, opening things.
Above my head the fields murmur and wave,
And breezes are just moving the clear heat.
O the mid-noon is trembling on the corn,
On cattle calm, and trees in perfect sleep.*

Or:

*A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight
And turns to the wind to unruffle a plume,
His song so pitched as not to excite
A single flower as yet to bloom.
It is snowing a flake; and he half knew
Winter was only playing possum.
Except in color he isn't blue,
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.*

I have some doubts about both, but the first seems marginally better in its rhythmic fluency. But of this piece David Perkins says:

‘The poems of both Phillips and Field have been completely forgotten; to recall them may seem unkind, almost gloating. Nevertheless, since they were once esteemed, they show what, at a level of taste and intelligence below Watson's, the middle class assumed “poetry” to be. One can find in Phillips the plaintive “simple,” mealy-mouthed style that has been fondly read for at least the last two hundred years.’ {36}

The second comes from Robert Frost's *Two Tramps In Mud Time*, which appeared in his 1936 collection *A Further Range*. {37} Stronger writing, and more original, but nonetheless a bad poem, it seems to me: galumphing metre, unabashed clichés (cloven rock, poised aloft, hulking tramps), contrived rhyming, and a moralizing tag to boot. But in discussing Frost generally, Perkins says:

‘When in the twenties and thirties the Modernist tide came in, Frost remained prominent. The excellence of his performance ensured that. But most of the contemporaries with whom he had been and should be associated were lost from view. As a result, when we look back on twentieth-century poetry, Frost seems a relatively isolated and inexplicable figure.’ {38}

Is Perkins arguing something like the following: Modernism was a healthy reaction to the badness of late nineteenth-century poetry. As Stephen Phillips was popular at the time, his poetry must be bad. I will show that to be the case by selecting some particularly egregious example.

I do not know, of course, but the approach is common and unhelpful. Could we gain a proper idea of Yeats's 1933 collection *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* from this snippet? {39}

*Greater glory in the sun,
An evening chill upon the air,
Bid imagination run
Much on the Great Questioner;
What He can question, what if question I
Can with a fitting confidence reply.*

At Algecirus — A Meditation Upon Death is a fragmentary piece where Yeats's legendary playing of sense against the metre ends up with an over-pat phrase. A failure, but no reason to deny the stunning accomplishment of the collection as a whole.

Poets need to be judged on their best work, when most will declare for Frost. But unless we think the Phillips piece that Perkins chooses to single out for attack is self-evidently bad — and it doesn't so seem to me — we must wonder why the standards that apply to one poet do not apply to another. If we don't stigmatise a leading academic as incompetent or dishonest, what is left us? That the literary scholar's task is perhaps not to review, which is a matter for the small presses and their endless squabbles, but to:

1. Explain and find an audience for the poet or poets under study.
2. Research into the bases of criticism, recreating literary theory and its contemporary philosophy.
3. Dethrone the elitist and monolithic criticism of the past with its lofty and supposedly universal standards.

45.7. Contemporary Battles

In a widely-read study of contemporary poetry, Vernon Shetley quotes a passage from Gjertrud Schnackenberg's *Supernatural Love*, a poem that appeared in her apparently 'highly praised' volume *The Lamplit Answer*. {40}

*I twist my threads like stems into a knot
And smooth "Beloved," but my needle caught
Within the threads, Thy blood so dearly bought,
the needle strikes my finger to the bone.
I lift my hand, it is myself I've sewn,
The flesh laid bare, the threads of blood my own,
I lift my hand in startled agony
And call upon his name, "Daddy daddy"--
My father's hand touches the injury*

*As lightly as he touched the page before,
Where incarnation bloomed from roots that bore
The flowers I called Christ's when I was four.*

criticizing it for rhythmic monotony and triviality, adding:

‘Good metrical writing involves a great deal more than filling out a pattern of accented and unaccented syllables with occasional variation.’

And:

‘New Formalist partisans often accuse free versers of being obscure or inaccessible, but readers also turn away from triviality, and one may be trivial (as indeed one may be obscure or inaccessible) in measured as well as free verse.’

True enough, but why is such a large argument being built on one poem or book of poems? Little of New Formalist work is as over-written as this. Vernon Shetley goes on to say ‘. . . the connection between using conventional verse forms and these various populist impulses seems even more elusive. Poetry is not likely to regain its lost popularity, much less its lost cultural authority, by attempting to compete directly with popular culture, or by attempting to match the accessibility of popular cultural goods. And in a world where younger professors of literature, not to mention younger poets, often appear to be only hazily informed about the principles of versification, it's difficult to see how metrical composition will, by itself, engage the interest of a broad, nonspecialist public.’ {41} True again, very probably, but poetry by those of whom Vernon Shetley approves — Elizabeth Bishop, John Ashbery and James Merrill — has been no more popular.

45.8. New is Better

Axiomatic in many books and articles is that poetry must move on, that newer is necessarily better, an assertion clearly at odds with the historical record. Did Aeschylus, Euripides or Sophocles {42} improve on Homer, {43} and did the Alexandrians {44} improve on those playwrights? Antiquity did not think so. Did the Latin poets of the Silver

Age {45} improve on Virgil, Lucretius or Catullus? {46} Again the answer is obvious, and European poetry did not achieve real splendour again until the Renaissance. {47} Sanskrit literature saw a great flowering in Kalidasa and Bhartrihari, both of whom wrote with moving simplicity, and then grew increasingly clever and ornate until it became unreadable to all but a small caste. The great poetry of the Chinese was written in the Tang dynasty, and these poems were still serving as models a thousand years later. No one has written better Arabic than al Muttanabbi {48} or better Persian poetry than Ferdowsi or Rumi. {49} We don't have to believe in Spengler's {50} or Toynbee's {51} cycles of history to see how assiduously the second-rate has been promoted as answering to contemporary needs. Science, industry, governance and host of other disciplines do make progress, but the arts deal with the more permanent aspects of human nature.

Whenever there is evidence to judge, we find that great poets develop, widening their themes and improving technique so as to deal with more taxing themes. In general, however, the Moderns have not developed in this way, but simply switched from one approach to another. Lowell's confessional mode may have been a relief from his high formalism phase, but the poetry wasn't better. Larkin, {52} Hughes, {53} Hill, Ginsberg, Merrill, Heaney and others have not become more accomplished, but somewhat repeated themselves: distinctive work, but not sufficient to place their later collections among our treasured books.

Anyone frequenting workshops and writing circles will know that writers are overwhelmingly sincere, and many readers, their heads filled with modern theory and reviews, will probably not grasp what this book is trying to say — perhaps any more than did readers of Dana Gioia's essay a decade back, {54} the extended controversy notwithstanding. {55}

Even well-known poets can seem confused. James Fenton's *God, A Poem* includes: {56}

*'I didn't exist at Creation,
I didn't exist at the Flood,
And I won't be around for Salvation
To sort out the sheep from the cud—
'Or whatever the phrase is.
The fact is in soteriological terms
I'm a crude existential malpractice
And you are a diet of worms.*

Or perhaps the confusion is deliberate. Wendy Cope's *Engineer's Corner* has her parodies of contemporaries and a tongue too sharp to be mistaken for light verse. We have returned to formal poetry, only we haven't: {57 }

*Yes, life is hard if you choose engineering —
You're sure to need another job as well;
You'll have to plan your projects in the evenings
Instead of going out. It must be hell.
While well-heeled poets ride around in Daimlers,
You'll burn the midnight oil to earn a crust,
With no hope of a statue in the Abbey,
With no hope, even, of a modest bust.
No wonder small boys dream of writing couplets
And spurn the bike, the lorry and the train.
There's far too much encouragement for poets --
That's why this country's going down the drain.*

And with Tony Harrison's *Long Distance II* we have emotion kept at bay by the deliberate ineptness of the verse: {58}

*Though my mother was already two years dead
Dad kept her slippers warming by the gas,
put hot water bottles her side of the bed
and still went to renew her transport pass.
You couldn't just drop in. You had to phone.
He'd put you off an hour to give him time
to clear away her things and look alone
as though his still raw love were such a crime.*

By posing as amateur poetry, Tony Harrison's piece is having its cake and eating it. Formal poetry is back, but only teasingly, with lines to make us wince if the poet were serious — *as though his still raw love were such a crime.*

Of course, such strategies did not go unchallenged:

'Nonetheless, the work of both Bloom and Perloff have circulated academically in ways that may legitimize and exclude certain writers and modes of writing. Both have their limits. Bloom reductively dismisses much 20th century writing, while Perloff tends to claim that certain tendencies in poetry are specifically 20th century creations. In Jed Rasula's *The American Poetry Wax Museum* (1995), we see a hyperbolic example of a good-guy/bad-guy account of the poetry field. As a historical narrative of how power circulates in the poetic community, this book is highly useful. He traces much of the division in the American poetry scene of the last 50 years to a split over who was heir to the Pound throne — on one side there's Berryman and Lowell and on the other there's Olson, Zukofsky and Duncan. This division can be traced through the battle of the anthologies in 1959-60, and many of the "big names" of the last 35 years, in their official pronouncements at least, have thrown their chips either on one side or another (despite the calypso singers laughing at them).' {59}

'But Perloff wants to bastardize the considerable musical achievement of John Cage, rendering it a theoretical referendum on the agenda of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets. Perloff's dependence upon the critical dimensions of Cage's work seems to be the problem endemic to all L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry — their criticism IS more interesting than the poetry (music) itself. Their attempts to blur the distinction between poetry and criticism acknowledge as much. L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry as well as most post-modernist poetry is dissipative — entropic would be a borrowing that would get Gross and Levitt's blood boiling (which reminds me of the funny story of how John von Neumann convinced Claude Shannon to make a trope of the term, entropy, in Shannon's foundational paper on Information Theory.)' {60}

'Related to the fetish of "imagery" is another phobia, the

phobia against abstraction. "No ideas but in things." This is someone's provocative flash which has somehow turned into a dogma, and as such is just as onesided and dangerous as the kind of abstraction gone berserk whose consequences we all know. Unless we allow ourselves a certain degree of abstraction we are faced with a series of unrelated concrete phenomena which we cannot put together. Unless we put things together we cannot comprehend them. The obsession with the concrete can mean a suppression of thought. Indeed, in the obsession with "imagery" one may discern an unconscious parallel to the state of mind which the visual media work hard to induce. There, too, and increasingly in recent years, viewers are bombarded with sequences of images that never add up to anything. One knows for what purpose this is done.' {61}

'According to the typical academic understanding of the work of poets since the 1960s, both the critic and the poet have been freed from the restrictions of craft; the poet, they seem to say, is no longer a liberator, but the liberated. Thus ironically contrary to what Heidegger and Rorty have recently hoped, today's poets are not liberators; many of them claim instead what appears to many to be nothing more than a petulant personal liberation, which they fail to understand is their historical birthright. It is almost now a standard chapter of a poet's life that she or he describe some struggle and eventual emancipation from the constraints of form or the confines of a particular verse-genre or critical ideology, whether imagism, formalism, new-formalism, new criticism, or the local dogmas of a university workshop.' {62}

'Free verse is another loaded term. Again, one might ask: free from what? . . . Timothy Steele, in his masterful study *Missing Measures*, points out that Eliot, Pound, Ford & Co. confused idiom with meter in ways previous verse revolutionaries such as Dryden and Wordsworth did not. One wonders how tools which had assisted in producing the riches of the English language suddenly came to be seen as constraints; this would be similar to a carpenter seeing nails as constraints because they keep the house from falling apart. Regardless, the term soon came to imply freedom from verse. . . Initially, this definition sounds nonsensical: free verse claiming to be free from verse while still asserting it is poetry. . . . By the time one reaches the Nineteenth Century one can find as fine a thinker as Matthew Arnold

making the imbecilic statement that Dryden and Pope were masters of English prose rather than poets. . . Therefore something written in verse is not necessarily poetry. It is not that large a leap to hold that if something written in verse is not necessarily poetry, poetry does not need to be written in verse.' {63}

'Timothy Steele in his book *Missing Measures* has traced the process by which the understanding that poetry was something more than language arranged metrically turned into the belief that poetry was something quite other than language arranged metrically, and meter, which until the late nineteenth century had been a sine qua non of poetry, was thrown out of the window. The same thing seems to have happened to paraphrasable meaning: the recognition that poetry was something more than its language's paraphrasable meaning has become the dogma that paraphrasable meaning is unpoetic, or at least that a poem approaches the poetic in so far as it is unparaphrasable. This would have been a very weird doctrine to anyone before 1800, and to almost anyone before 1900 (that is, in those now almost unimaginable days when large numbers of people besides poets bought, read, and cared about poetry). Even Coleridge, who was hardly the most stalwart advocate of poetic clarity, is on record as saying (in his *Table Talk*) 'Poetry is certainly something more than good sense, but it must be good sense at all events; just as a palace is more than a house, but it must be a house, at least.' {64 }

45.9. Theory Apparatchics

Modern poetry and literary criticism feed off each other, and to invalidate doubts about quality has grown an elaborate defence that serves to outlaw dumb questions, to make poetry valuable to the extent it exemplifies theory, and to issue patents of use. The originating concept is now the defining point of excellence, something that cannot be reproduced without charges of plagiarism. Poetry is drawing closer to conceptual art, where ideas precede technique, and the critic's task is to create new areas of debate.

All art forms have their theory, revisited when the public is faced with something unusual, or when the usual bases of

criticism seem to founder. But though recent years have seen an explosion in publications in this field — books, journals, magazine articles, references in poetry reviews — starting perhaps in the late 1960s, when it started making inroads on literary criticism in many university departments — theory has always been with us. What is different today is its fragmented and strident nature, and its use in justifying work that would have seemed thin or incompetent to earlier generations.

Marjorie Perloff, for example, in her own writings and those of writers she champions, questions these assumptions, expecting them to be squarely faced. Because her arguments are spelled out, and because her articles are readily available on the Internet, {65} with those of commentators {66} I will look in some detail at one of her expositions.

First, we should note the many perceptive articles on her site: notably those on John Ashbery, {67} Tom Raworth {68} and Language Poetry {69}. But if little explanation is needed for these entertaining and undemanding pieces, the same can't be said for the work of Kenneth Goldsmith and John Kinsella. {70}. First an example of Goldsmith's work:

Fidget

Walks. Left foot. Head raises. Walk. Forward. Forward. Forward. Bend at knees. Forward. Right foot. Left foot. Right foot. Stop. Left hand tucks at pubic area. Extracts testicles and penis using thumb and forefinger. Left hand grasps penis. Pelvis pushes on bladder, releasing urine. Stream emerges from within buttocks. Stomach and buttocks push outward. Stream of urine increases. Buttocks push. Sphincter tightens. Buttocks tighten. Thumb and forefinger shake penis. Thumb pulls. Left hand reaches. Tip of forefinger and index finger extend to grasp as body sways to left. Feet pigeon-toed. Move to left. Hand raises to hairline and pushes hair. Arm raises above head. Four fingers comb hair away from hairline toward back of head. Eyes see face. Mouth moves. Small bits of saliva cling to inside of lips. Swallow. Lips form words.

'Why is this description of the most ordinary and trivial of human acts so unsettling?' asks Perloff. {70} Her response is to invoke Swift ('the inherent hideousness of the human body by means of gigantism') and Wittgenstein ('Goldsmith defamiliarizes the everyday in ways that recall such Wittgensteinian questions as 'Why can't the right hand give the left hand money?') Well, yes, anything pressed so closely against us can be unsettling — peer at an insect through a magnifying glass — and language can be defamiliarised easily enough. But the human body is not inherently threatening, and Wittgenstein is not celebrated for elaborating difficulties but for showing how to sort them out. Then comes Whitehead: 'the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, whose famous Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness (e.g., if a tree falls in the forest when no one is there to hear it fall, does it make a sound?) is apropos to Goldsmith's narrative.' And then Joyce and Beckett: 'Here, then, in Beckett's words about *Finnegans Wake*, "form is content, content is form. [The] writing is not about something; it is that something itself."'

I find the poem interesting, up to a point, but wonder if the parade of names is necessary. Whitehead is known for many things, {71} but his Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness relates to degrees of abstraction, to the dangers of taking the words about something for the object itself. {72} I suspect Perloff is thinking in her tree in the forest example of the 'God in the quad' limerick {73} on Berkeley's philosophy. {74} But she may well be right in believing that the poet wants us to understand his work through Wittgenstein and Whitehead's philosophy, and certainly any responsible critic must follow up the pointers left for readers.

Perloff's articles are notable for their close attention to the text of poems, and she is prepared to work at an understanding where many reviewers will not. David Zauhar, in his review of her books, remarks:

'Perloff's guiding assumption in *Radical Artifice* is that poetry most suitable in an age dominated by the mass media is the radical artifice of avant-garde poetics, as opposed to the reactionary artifice of neo-formalist poets and the cataleptic artifice of workshop lyricism (neither of which is overtly conscious of itself in relation to a larger social and political world). This radical poetry foregrounds its production on the workings of syntax and diction rather than on the fabrication of the image and creation of the personality of the poet (the "voice" in other words). Such poetry requires its readers to explore the language on the page immediately in front of them, and to contemplate the relation of language in general to the world. Thus, such poetry simultaneously invites the reader's participation in the construction of meaning, while also alienating readers who are (not unreasonably) put off by the violation of conventional modes of communication.' {66}

Perloff indeed notes in Goldsmith's poem:

'The more the language of description breaks down into nonsense and neologism, the greater, ironically enough, the need to make value judgements. The hand is now unaccountably "sad," the "eye," missing, the "crease" (between fingers?) "unnaturally lumpy." One cannot, it seems, remain detached from one's body, from one's own reactions. "Slight pleasure gained from dig into finger and then pleased by sharpness," remarks the narrator (*Fidget* 59), now wanting to put his stamp on events as they occur. The language becomes his language.'

So far, so good. We can see why, of Whitehead's many contributions, the *Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness* will be interesting to Perloff. Initially the poet's body is presented in matter-of-fact detail, and now that presentation is undermined by a breakdown of language. That could be unsettling to Postmodernists who believe that language is the primary reality. Zauhar on Perloff's books again:

'There are three main ways in which this [critique of the image] has occurred: (1) the image, in all its concretion and specificity, continues to be foregrounded, but it is now presented as inherently deceptive, as that which must be bracketed, parodied, and submitted to scrutiny — this is the mode of Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery, more recently of Michael Palmer and Leslie Scalapino and Ron Silliman; (2) the Image as referring to something in external reality is replaced by the word as Image, but concern with

morphology and the visualization of the word's constituent parts: this is the mode of Concrete Poetry extending from such pioneers as Eugen Gomringer and Steve McCaffery, Susan Howe, and Johanna Drucker; and (3) Image as the dominant gives way to syntax: in Poundian terms, the turn is from phanopoeia to logopoiea. "Making strange" now occurs at the level of phrasal and sentence structure rather than at the level of the image cluster so that poetic language cannot be absorbed into the discourse of the media: this is the mode of Clark Coolidge, Hejinian, Charles Bernstein, Rae Armantrout, and Bruce Andrews among others; it comes to us from Gertrude Stein, from whom image was never the central concern, via Louis Zukofsky and George Oppen.'

More heroes of contemporary Modernism, but we do learn how poetry has moved on from Pound's imagism. Before commenting further, however, let's look at the second work Perloff is reviewing: John Kinsella's *Kangaroo Virus*. {70}

*They might call it Erail country'
as the tell-tale signs are there
immediately the skin deeply
scraped, the bones grey and strewn about. (KV 20)
Imprint: like they've seen it before,
these old-timers, cast in plaster,
referencing the direction of a roo,
even so, the forest thinner, shrinking. (kV 62)*

Perloff introduces this section with:

“If literature is defined as the exploration and exercise of tolerable linguistic deviance,” write Jed Rasula and Steve McCaffery in the introduction to their new anthology *Imagining Language*, “the institutional custodianship of literature serves mainly to protect the literary work from language, shielding it from the disruptive force of linguistic slippage”. Such slippage has increasingly become a poetic norm, creating a poetry that serves as a new conduit for communication. My second example of what Joyce referred to as the verbovisivocal or “vocal scriptsigns” is a recent collaboration between two Australians, the poet John Kinsella and the sound artist/ photographer Ron Sims, called *Kangaroo Virus*. Like *Fidget*, *Kangaroo Virus* exists in electronic form, like *Fidget*, it has a performance score this time on a CD that accompanies the book and, like *Fidget*, it is a documentary, informational poem that relies heavily on

empirical observation. But unlike Fidget's reliance on the tape recorder, Kangaroo Virus is made up of short free-verse lyrics by Kinsella, each of which has an accompanying photograph by Sims.'

Yes, but *is* 'literature defined as the exploration and exercise of tolerable linguistic deviance'? Some poetry by some poets does use language in unusual ways, but much does not, even that by great poets. We can't define poetry by a feature that is not invariably present, and doing so would make literature of any 'tolerable linguistic deviance' whatever — an intolerably easy thing to achieve.

It's also difficult to see how if 'the institutional custodianship of literature serves mainly to protect the literary work from language, shielding it from the disruptive force of linguistic slippage' how such 'slippage' has become a 'conduit for communication'. For non-communication, it might be thought. The malicious may even feel that 'the institutional custodianship of literature' has become invested in theorists, who shield it from the disruptive need to say something intelligible.

The plain truth is that Kinsella's work doesn't need such treatment. The poem is perfectly understandable, if somewhat prosaic. Why such critical erudition that doesn't actually describe what is going on? Perhaps Zauhar and Perloff have done their best with the review assignments given them, but there must also be the suspicion that poetry has discounted craft for ill-understood theory. Rather than state the obvious and say that the poem is experimental, something that has deliberately distanced itself from 'discredited' styles of poetry — and describe what's been achieved as a consequence — Perloff has mounted an unnecessary show of erudition. Also suspect is the strategy, which would base literary quality on the wealth of scholarly references a critic can make to the work, enlightening or not. But with the claims of Postmodernism so overblown — see sections on Barthes (7) Derrida (8), and Davidson (30) —

there are more sensible approaches to fall back on, by which the poem does not fare too well.

And this is a great pity. We would welcome poems with more depth and intellectual bite. Suppose, instead of a teasing allusion to Whitehead, Kinsella had followed through the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. To quote from the Stanford Encyclopedia entry: {71}

'Whitehead's basic idea was that we obtain the abstract idea of a spatial point by considering the limit of a real-life series of volumes extending over each other, for example, a nested series of Russian dolls or a nested series of pots and pans. However, it would be a mistake to think of a spatial point as being anything more than an abstraction; instead, real positions involve the entire series of extended volumes. As Whitehead himself puts it, "In a certain sense, everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus every spatio-temporal standpoint mirrors the world."

'Further, according to Whitehead, every real-life object may be understood as a similarly constructed series of events and processes. It is this latter idea that Whitehead later systematically elaborates in his imposing *Process and Reality* (1929), going so far as to suggest that process, rather than substance, should be taken as the fundamental metaphysical constituent of the world. Underlying this work was also the basic idea that, if philosophy is to be successful, it must explain the connection between objective, scientific and logical descriptions of the world and the more everyday world of subjective experience.'

Whitehead is not making a simple point about language. He is wondering how we arrive at a sense of external reality, the abstractions we make to conceive of space and time, and how objects we place in that space/time framework have a reality outside those abstractions. How do we avoid chasing our tails — the hermeneutic circle — and what is the nature of reality itself — questions Kant (13) and Heidegger (17) came to very different conclusions about. Whitehead's (23.3) solution was not to have Berkeley's God {74} enabling reality, nor even a substratum of substance, but something living and evolving: process, he called it. Whitehead's

enduring work was *Principia Mathematica*, which he wrote with Russell, and *Process and Reality* {75} may be now more of interest to theologians and philosophers of religion. But the attempt to unify space, matter, time and purpose is surely a more fruitful approach than Postmodernism's despair with language, which it declares to be only deceptive. Whitehead tried to accommodate a new view of science with traditional human needs, and his 'permanence amid change' has affinities with Chinese poetry that continues to be read.

Whitehead's philosophy is not for bed-time reading, but if we take just one of his paragraphs —

'Philosophy is the self-correction by consciousness of its own initial excess of subjectivity. Each actual occasion contributes to the circumstances of its origin additional formative elements deepening its own peculiar individuality. Consciousness is only the last and greatest of such elements by which the selective character of the individual obscures the external totality from which it originates and which it embodies. An actual individual, of such higher grade, has truck with the totality of things by reason of its sheer actuality; but it has attained its individual depth of being by a selective emphasis limited to its own purposes. The task of philosophy is to recover the totality obscured by the selection. It replaces in rational experience what has been submerged in the higher sensitive experience and has been sunk yet deeper by the initial operations of consciousness itself. The selectiveness of individual experience is moral so far as it conforms to the balance of importance disclosed in the rational vision; and conversely the conversion of the intellectual insight into an emotional force corrects the sensitive experience in the direction of morality. The correction is in proportion to the rationality of the insight. Morality of outlook is inseparably conjoined with generality of outlook. The antithesis between the general good and the individual interest can be abolished only when the individual is such that its interest is the general good, thus exemplifying the loss of the minor intensities in order to find them again with finer composition in a wider sweep of interest.' {76}

— we can see just how much more interesting Goldsmith's poem might have been if it incorporated such ideas.

Confucians would particularly enjoy the first sentence. {77} and the second is not far from Pound's objective in the *Cantos*. Even the last points out the difference between the perfection of minor art and the wider effect of great art.

45.10. Propaganda

Many features of contemporary poetry are those of a failed state: a country of revolution and civil war, assailed by corruption and ever-increasing emergency measures, where an intelligentsia without experience of life or any skill beyond writing a dense prose bristling with non sequiturs controls the media, where new developments are referred back to the writings of the founding fathers whose inspiring struggles for liberty make the foundations of its citizen's training programme, where the government proclaims an age of universal plenty invisible to its inhabitants or to those in surrounding countries, and where all offers of outside aid are rejected as attempts to suborn the inviolable integrity of the state.

But how could such a 'failed state' view, so at odds with the inspiring view fostered by the poetry press and mainstream media, be anything like the truth?

Because the media — all media {78} — are quietly managed, and have to be. Thomas Jefferson may well have said that the public's right to know the facts they need to govern themselves is more important than the official's right to govern, but realists (or realists with no high hopes of human nature) generally see survival as the first duty of a state — to maintain its constitutional, judicious and effective use of power, without which no institution, large or small, can function properly. Since power will often favour some communities or classes at the expense of others, and since democracies — and to some extent all states — ultimately govern with the assent of their citizens, the temptation is always to mask that power in more attractive guises,

presenting idealizations or 'necessary fictions' that governments not resting on naked coercion have long employed.

Is that a conspiracy theory? To most middle-of-the-road readers, their favourite newspaper's articles will seem appropriate and sensible, reaffirming that America is indeed the world's much-needed policeman.

Yet these same Americans, among the most generous and hospitable of people, would be {79} bewildered to find their government detested abroad — for its increasing violation of US and international law, for supporting repressive governments in the middle east and Latin America, for imposing coercive economic policies, and for the many coups and invasions {80} that have removed 'unfriendly' governments. {81-82} The one essential and beneficent nation, the defender of democratic freedoms, is widely seen as the greatest threat to world peace. {83}

Foreigners blame Washington, of course, realizing that citizens' views are not properly represented by their governments, and that citizens are anyway fed a pleasing image of themselves {84} through a media controlled {85} by a few large and self-serving corporations: in films, TV and newspapers. {86} Most Americans take their news from the TV, and even quality newspapers provide very little in-depth reporting. Foreign news coverage is partisan, generally no more than Reuters' feeds with slant added to make it more palatable to the target audience. {87-91} Newspapers cultivate links with government and the CIA. {92-94} Journalists who stray off message are marginalized or fired. {95-96} The alternative media, whose articles are often more detailed and better-researched, is bad-mouthed and dismissed as amateur. {97-99} When honest, intelligent and responsible Americans can have so partisan an outlook, {100-102} what hope is there for the inbred world of poetry where careers, movements and livelihoods can rest on little more than unsupported opinion?

45.11. Downgrading of Literary Criticism

Companies do not waste time honing their mission statement but proactively adapt to changing circumstances and needs. The more successful are 'outside-in', i.e. they continually learn what their customers want by market research, innovation and testing. All company managements, of whatever stripe, are judged on results, moreover: share price, profitability, productivity, product quality, and market share. {103-104} Modern poetry is concerned with none of those things, but, in contrast, often seems to glory in its unpopularity, seeing it as proof of intellectual superiority. Whatever its limitations, {105} the New Criticism did attempt some quality controls, setting standards, discovering what worked and what didn't, and why. Radically new work was not rejected out of hand, but compared with the traditional, and some balance sheet drawn up of gains and losses, without which all enterprises founder.

But critical theory has replaced literary criticism in many universities, and often seems closer to politics than sound business practice, i.e. resorts to oversimplification of issues and voter (tenure and publishing) bribery. What literary criticism does survive tends to be narrow and specialized, aimed at fellow academics rather than the general reader. {106} That old ideal of universities, the cultivated, rounded and wisely educated man, has disappeared. Even back in 1999, only 9% of students taking the PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) indicated an interest in the humanities, and English teachers now seem to have lost faith in both their abilities and their subject matter. {107} Indeed the more interesting books and Internet articles {108-110} already seem dated.

Perhaps that was only to be expected, given the poetry world's attack on the old standards. The articles — well-chosen, intriguing, often illuminating — that round off Paul

Hoover's *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* {111} focus on the need to experiment, to perform and dissolve conceptual boundaries, but say nothing on the poet's larger responsibilities: to bear witness, engender emotion and insight, entertain and make some sense of the world. It would be unkind to quote the articles out of context, since they have to be read for what they are: proselytising and provisional, an aesthetics made up on the hoof to illustrate or justify work, indulging in too much name-dropping, but sincere, earnest and hopeful. But the aesthetics displayed is very thin and poorly understood. To all the striking statements one can say, 'Yes, but . . .', and realize that it's the 'but', the yawning gaps in a proper understanding, that have allowed critical theory to undermine the current status and practice of literature.

45.12. Standard of Poetry Today

Back in 1994, the above-mentioned and well-put-together *Norton Anthology* {111} contained a decided sprinkling of successful poems. My count was 20 odd in the 477 poems or selections printed. Not too good for 50 years of American writing, one might think, but most do not amount to what is needed by poetry of any stripe. American work should employ American idioms, and it's sensible (though possibly limiting) to employ everyday speech for contemporary themes. But surely not the:

Pedestrian (e.g. David Antin's *a private occasion in a public place*)

*I consider myself a poet but im not reading poetry as you see
I bring no books with me though ive written books I* {112}

Endless shopping list (e.g. Anne Waldman's *Makeup on Empty Space*)

*I am putting makeup on empty space
all patinas convening on empty space
rouge blushing on empty space* {113}

Coy (e.g. Bernadette Mayer's *Sonnet 15*)

*A thousand apples you might put in your theories
But you are gone from benefit to my love {114}*

Pretentious (e.g. Kenneth Koch's *Alive for an Instant*)

*have a bird in my head and a pig in my stomach
And a flower in my genitals and a tiger in my genitals {115}*

Perverse (e.g. Clayton Eshleton's *Notes on a Visit to Le Tuc d'Audoubert*)

*bundled by Tuc's tight jagged
corridors, flocks of white {116}*

Or the breathless 'this is a poet talking to you' tone (e.g. Robert Duncan's *Poetry, a Natural Thing*).

*The poem
feeds upon thought, feeling, impulse,
to breed itself,
a spiritual urgency at the dark ladders leaping. {117}*

Only Allen Ginsberg, Bruce Andrews, Susan Howe, Amiri Baraka and Bob Perelman seem to have any larger, political awareness. Postmodernism dislikes 'grand narratives' but few of the poems even concern themselves with the issues of the workaday world, or indeed offer anything that could conceivably interest the general reader — assertive, refreshingly different, coterie-centered, obsessed with the process of writing, intriguing in small doses: that's about as generous as one can truthfully be.

However modest may be that achievement, the later work collected in the 2006 *Oxford Book of American Poetry* is even more negligible. {118} Nor does a survey of the small press output {119} prove any less depressing. Most offerings are not poetry by any usual meaning of the word, and fewer still are wholly successful, even within their own limits. William Logan is surely correct: {120} current American poetry is in a bad way.

Even poets on the public circuit seem embarrassed by questions like: 'what does poetry do?' {121} 'Its gatekeepers believe poetry matters because it's poetry, not because of what it says.' {122} Certainly the aims of poetry are discussed, endlessly in literary circles — the excellent *The*

Great American Poetry Show had listed 4774 articles and essays by March 2016. {123} — but their tone overall is more defensive than celebratory, quoting authorities rather than striking out for higher ground.

45.13. State-Supported Poetry

Serious poetry has become almost exclusively university-based. {124} It is tertiary education and associated MFA teaching courses that give contemporary poets their salaries, status and publishing opportunities. But if academia has become practically their sole refuge, that refuge is also under threat. {125} Political correctness, budget cuts, perpetual assessment by students ill-placed to judge, disappearing tenure, and uncertainty over the bases of literature itself have created an academic rat race where it is the astute political operator that best survives. {126} Work must conform to academic standards, support the narrow tenets of Modernism, and not seriously question establishment views. Indeed, given today's erosion of civil liberties, {127-129} is probably wise for poems to say nothing of any social significance whatever.

Tenure in the humanities is hard to gain, and increasingly easy to lose. {130} Outside tenure there is only part-time and ill-paid teaching. Beyond academia itself there is practically nothing: academics are not trained in journalism, and the balanced and well-researched article is not what popular outlets want. Alternative media are expanding, of course, but still struggle to pay their authors a living wage.

Public appointments expect public views, as Amiri Baraka found. In 2002, a year after 9/11, the black American poet and activist read a long poem criticizing America and including questions about the Israeli intelligence warning of an impending attack on the twin towers. {131} It was in his usual no-holds-barred, in-your-face style, {132} and the poet was writing from an establishment position as the poet laureate of New Jersey. The response was loud and

predictable. The Jewish community accused him of anti-Semitism, and demanded his resignation. {133} The mainstream press demonised him as anti-American. {134} The literary world distanced itself from his views, but pleaded for artistic freedom. {135}

No one pointed to the obvious, that firstly the poem was crude pamphleteering and, secondly, there was nonetheless a pressing need for a sustained, detailed and transparent investigation into the 9/11 tragedy, as there still is. {136-138} The media shot the messenger, or tried to, as the unrepentant Marxist wouldn't lie down. Baraka did not resign, and the Governor was obliged to discontinue the position.

A literary world so dependent on the public purse will encourage a poetry that knows its place, i.e. be adventurous in arcane and theoretical matters, but not seriously threaten the mainstream narratives that govern American life. Parallels with Persian court poetry, {139} and literature under Imperial Rome {140}, underline the obvious dangers.

45.14. Extinction of Traditional Poetry

Critical theory was first helpful but then became more hostile to traditional poetry, eventually killing off its host.

American poetry in the early years of the twentieth century was popular and profitable, having, its supporters declared, the ability to 'beget spiritual sensibility, to build character, and to refine one's sense of beauty, truth, or morality.' {141} Modernists were following other concerns, however, {142} and their 'unpoetic' productions did not much feature in mass-circulation magazines or later radio shows. High Modernism and the New Criticism eventually triumphed, after a long battle through the universities, becoming the reigning orthodoxy in the 1940-50 period, {143-144} when poets who had written excellent but alas popular poetry — Kipling, {145} Masefield, {146} del la Mare {147} — were 'reassessed' and marked down. Improved university courses

passed them by, and their rehabilitation continues to depend on approved Modernist elements being identified among their other features.

The fight was bitter, and hostility naturally continued long after victory, against all forms of tradition, {148} and society in general, {149} however unreasonable. Inevitably, with triumph of the Modernist paradigm, came unswerving belief in the innate correctness of its views, and these beliefs are held just as firmly as those of the *American Academy of Arts and Letters* that for thirty years stood opposed to the 'the lawlessness of the literary Bolsheviki [that] has invaded every form of composition.' {150} Modernism today may be no more aware of increasing dissatisfaction with its narrow views than had been the earlier *Academy* that 'irony and pastiche and parody and a conscious fever of innovation-through-rupture would overcome notions of nobility, spirituality, continuity, harmony, uncomplicated patriotism, romanticized classicism.'

45.15. Overturning the State

Revolutions do not benefit the people if the intricate matrix of beliefs, common aims and social institutions that constitute a functioning state is suddenly swept away. Into the vacuum are apt to step doctrinaire policies and coercion.

Economic breakdown, war weariness, and discontent with the autocratic system overthrew the czarist government, but the coalition of liberals and moderate socialists brought to power was itself overthrown by the Bolsheviks in October 1917. {151-152}

Lenin (41) seized power in a coup d'état, and added forced labour camps, terror, torture and wholesale murder to the autocratic system he inherited. Perhaps a million people perished in these early years of communism: there is little way of knowing for sure. The country was only slowly industrializing, but on the eve of the Revolution had 71,000 km of railway track, smelters producing 4 million tons of pig

iron per year and mills processing almost as much cotton (from Uzbekistan) as Germany. Almost half the population was literate. Private banking was rudimentary, however, and the country relied on foreign capital, funding the railways by overseas sale of securities. The contribution of heavy industry to Russia's GDP rose from 2% in 1885 to 8% in 1913, but agriculture took the lion's share. The 1917 Revolution was followed by four years of civil war, in which the Bolsheviks had to agree to the peasants' demand for ownership and equal division of the land. {153-154}

The Soviet 'big push' began in 1928 with the first Five Year Plan. Investment was channelled into heavy industry and machinery production. Targets were set, and bank credit extended where necessary. Mass education was enforced, and vocational training encouraged. The fourth pillar of the plan, collectivisation, was a disaster, however: farm output fell, and millions died of starvation. In other respects the plan succeeded. Pig iron production had expanded to 15 million tons by 1940. Electric power generation had increased from 5 to 42 billion kilowatt-hours. The 1939 investment rate rose to 19%, and, in the same year, the USSR processed 900,000 tons of ginned cotton, 50% more than Britain's, though only 52% of America's figure. {153-154}

Always brutal in his methods, transporting millions to new territories, to slave labour in the gulags, or to their deaths on murderous projects like the White Sea Canal, Stalin strengthened his hold on power through party appointments, informers, an efficient secret police force, swift removal of potential opposition and the 1937-8 reign of terror. Hundreds of thousands perished as the tortured 'named' their fellow conspirators. Illustrious Bolsheviks, fellow colleagues who had made the Revolution, 'confessed' to treasonous crimes in show trials and were executed. The army was purged of its experienced men — 80,000 officers were shot — and so found itself seriously weakened when Germany broke its 1939 Non-Aggression Treaty. Horrific battle losses were

slowly reversed, however, and Stalin gradually left the command to professional soldiers. German supply lines were over-extended, and all combatants had then to face the Russian winter. Stalingrad proved a turning point, and by 1944 Soviet armies were recapturing enemy ground and advancing on Berlin. {153}

W.W.II had brought unmitigated hardship. 15% of citizens lost their lives (40% in the 20-49 age group), and wide swathes of farms and industry were devastated. Nevertheless, much had been repaired by 1950, and by 1975, the USSR's iron production of 100 million tons exceeded that of the USA. Investment was kept at 38% of GDP, the fertility rate dropped, and more consumer goods were produced. {153}

Yet even the heroic war period — credited to Stalin and unyielding communist principles — was unmasked by Krushchev's 1956 speech when the reality of Stalin's despotic rule were disclosed, only partially, but sufficient for disillusion to set in. The young turned away from the stern principles and suffering that characterized their parent's and grandparent's lives, and looked to the west for alternatives. The great social experiment was over, and, though the Union was kept together by political and military force for several decades more, its end was inevitable when Gorbachev relaxed that force. {153}

By contrast, change came in Britain in stages that slowly modified and extended the existing social institutions. Few nineteenth century politicians envisaged universal suffrage, and even further from their thoughts were democracies on the American model. {155} To nineteenth-century lawmakers, the property qualification seemed eminently sensible. Those of independent means were likely to be better educated and less susceptible to mob rule. They had a stake in the country's future. Indeed the qualification had a symbolic value. Man is a territorial creature, and land

ownership is not only an echo of the old feudal order, but a physical share of the country. {156}

The 1815 victory at Waterloo, which put an end to the Napoleonic Wars and the threatening experiments of the French Revolution, was followed by a slump. Europe was too impoverished to buy British manufactures. To lay-offs were added 300,000 demobilized soldiers and sailors. Paper money had to stay in place to cover the continuing high taxes, and there were widespread disorders when the Corn Laws kept food prices high. In 1820, National Debt charges amounted to £30 m. of a total revenue of £53 m., and such high taxation and inflation levels delayed economic recovery. Habeas corpus was again suspended in 1817, and public meeting likewise restricted, but agitation continued nonetheless, even after the notorious 'Peterloo massacre' of 1819. The Six Acts rushed through Parliament, which banned public meetings, authorized house searches, and punished sedition with transportation, only drove reform underground. Though an 1820-26 industrial recovery absorbed some labour, there were still riots, rick-burnings, organized gangs of poachers, and an 1830 'labourers' revolt' against threshing machines. But agitation was not coordinated, and gradually subsided until the trade-union led disturbances of 1871. {156}

Working conditions also improved. From 1800 to 1815, Robert Owens' New Lanark Mills demonstrated that profits were still achievable with working hours as low as ten and a half a day: the secret was larger, more efficient machinery and steam-power in place of water. Laissez faire capitalism became the order of the day, though workers were forbidden to form combinations to improve pay, and the landowners could still prohibit the importation of cheaper foodstuffs. The Factory Acts — bitterly resisted by claims that higher wages would make British exports uncompetitive and so ruin everyone — gradually restricted the ages of the employed and the hours worked. {156}

The 1832 Reform Bill swept away rotten boroughs and gave suffrage to house-owners and tenant farmers — for all that reform had to be urged on by carefully staged riots. Suffrage increased from 220,000 voters to 14 million, and the Commons gained power at the expense of the Lords. Yet the poor who had fought hardest for reform were not represented at all, and the common people turned from parliamentary hopes to Chartism and revolutionary trade unionism. {156}

The social measures had been anything but conciliatory. In 1834, the Poor Laws were amended, giving recipients a choice between factory work and the poorhouse. The last were particularly resented — the work was often senseless and degrading, breaking up the family unit — and many indeed were burnt down. But the labour market did sporadically pick up when the railway boom needed construction workers, and low transportation costs boosted industry. Working conditions were ameliorated by the 1847 Factory Act, Coal Mines Act and the Ten Hour Act. Even the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, free trade being then extended to sugar and timber. {156}

Universal suffrage came to Britain only when socialism agreed to give up some of its principles and work within the parliamentary system. Also relevant was the influence that newspapers could be seen to exert on public opinion. The immediate cause was war, however — when the horrific slaughter on the western front raised troubling questions. What were the masses dying for, if not democracy? {157} And just as Rome had to admit Italian allies in the Carthaginian wars to full citizenship, {158} so was Parliament obliged to grant suffrage to men prepared to lay down their lives for their country. With universal suffrage came universal education. 'We must educate our masters', realized Parliament, and so began modern schooling with its mix of the uplifting and practical, as much to foster national

pride and loyalty as train the workforce for an increasingly competitive world.

Several suggestions follow. Firstly, literary history should throw its net wider and add socio-economic matters to its usual analysis of trends and influences. Secondly, intangible or spiritual matters like poetry can have mundane correlatives, even correlatives amenable to business study (as the following chapter illustrates). Thirdly, Modernism is a complex movement, but in its last Postmodernist manifestation, under the influence of critical theory, seems to have adopted the Soviet model of change, imposing a dogma that outlaws any symbiosis of the old and new. Fourthly, change comes only when alternatives exist, as they did at the end of the Soviet era, but not in the western Roman Empire.

What alternatives exist for contemporary poetry? Only, it seems to me, by rethinking the history of Modernism, and perhaps reshaping English Literature courses to:

1. Foster a genuine love of literature, sufficient to carry graduates over a lifetime of deepening and delighted reading.
2. Treat critical theory in its broader framework of aesthetics and related philosophic issues.
3. Insist students have a proper grounding in cultural history, not only western but worldwide. Literature cannot be understood in isolation.
4. Teach writing skills that allow complex and contentious material to be addressed in the manner of educated beings: with sensitivity, intelligence and some sense of proportion and good humour.
5. Appreciate that literature is both inspiration and craft. Poetry in particular will not recover its popularity until it writes movingly on things that matter to everyday people.

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46. MARKETING THEORY

Even the most esoteric of disciplines have their economic dimensions, and those dimension influence how those disciplines are studied — obviously so, as the costs of lecture rooms, books and salaries have to be met somehow. However indirectly, those studies must also represent some accepted social purpose. Crass as it must seem to poets and the worthy institutions that support them, poems are only the result of skilled effort applied in certain ways, and no product in our competitive world automatically sells itself. Similarly with critical theory: presentation — packaging and astute marketing — are inescapably part of critical theory, explaining some of its currently features. Marketing becomes part of the product, moreover. With the cosmetic product we buy the go-ahead, glamorous or whatever life style the model is representing, and with the poem is wrapped up the critical articles featuring its author and the status of prestigious publications in which its author appears. Image trounces quality, which may be downplayed or ignored altogether because negative advertising hurts the whole market sector.

46.1 Prevalence of Advertising

Advertising seeks to encourage, persuade, or manipulate an audience. {1} The sums spent are large, and enter into every facet of modern life. Of the \$117 billion spent on all US advertising in 2009, the larger industries accounted for: {2}

Automotive industry \$3.5 billion

Pharmaceutical companies \$2 billion

Fast food restaurants \$2 billion

Departmental stores \$ 1.6 billion

Wireless telephone services \$1.5 billion

Industries would not spend such sums if advertising did not pay, and the mechanism was not well understood and

closely monitored to get the maximum return for each dollar spent.

Advertising is tailored to the market concerned. Dime stores emphasize bargains. Luxury goods hint at status and exclusivity. Not-for-profit hospitals promote their caring skills and professionalism. Universities stress their student facilities and commitment to the highest standards of independent research. And so on. Presentation and business models differ, but all have bills to meet and competition to overcome.

Power of Advertising

Marketing is only loosely linked to product quality. More important is perceived value to the customer. Some examples of effective campaigns:

Glaxo

Glaxo overcame the market dominance of Tagamet, the leading ulcer drug developed by SmithKline Beecham, with their 1981 Zantac drug. Though the FDA rated Zantac as making 'little or no' contribution to existing drug therapies, Glaxo promoted Zantac to the number one pharmaceutical product in the world by:

1. Quickly introducing the drug worldwide.
2. Extensive partnerships with distributors.
3. Articles in medical journals on the negative effects of Tagamet and potential for Zantac.
4. Simplifying the dosage, from 4 to 2 pills a day.
5. Marketing as 'fast, simple and specific' (which doctors interpreted as 'faster, simpler and safe').
6. Pricing Zantac at a slight premium over Tagamet.

SmithKline did not properly defend its product, and Zantac achieved a 42% global market share, with sales amounting to US\$1 billion by 1989. {3} The example proved a turning

point for Big Pharma, which cut back on research to make higher profits through advertising.

Intel

When Intel could no longer call the 386 its own or superior microprocessor, the company set up the 'Intel Inside' marketing campaign with nearly 200 OEM (Other Equipment Manufacturers) partners in 1991. The object was to create a brand memorable to Intel's direct customers (dealers) and the end-users (consumers and business purchasers). Such a brand strategy was a fairly new approach, but aimed to make customers confident of their computer's inner workings. Intel had spent \$4 billion on marketing its logo by 1997, but results were striking. Intel research indicated that only 24% of European PC buyers were familiar with the 'Intel Inside' logos in 1991, but that figure had grown to nearly 80% by 1992, and to 94% by 1995, a recognition Intel continues to enjoy, helped by social media marketing. {4} Intel licensed the logo to some 1,000 PC makers, and found that some 70% of home PC buyers and 85% of business buyers stated a preference for Intel, saying they would pay a premium for the security and peace of mind offered by the brand. {5} The premium more than repaid the marketing costs.

Apple

In the early 2000s, the music industry was facing (and losing) a battle with piracy. Apple's response was firstly, beginning in 2001, to open retail stores across the US to ensure proper marketing of its products. Secondly, in April 2003, Apple launched an Internet-based music selling initiative called iTunes, making deals across the recording industry and preventing piracy with added DRM (digital recording management) software. Thirdly, hard on the heels of iTunes, Apple launched its iPod, which alone could play iTunes downloads. Because iPod was an attractive product, and fitted seamlessly with iTunes, the iPod became a smash

hit. The revenues of Apple grew from US\$ 5.3 billion in 2001 to US\$ 13.9 billion in 2005. {4}

Apple slowed the decline in sales in a saturated market by introducing new models as a 'must have' gadget (with new styling, 'touch' operation, Wi-Fi connection and increased memory) {6}, usually at high prices that were slowly scaled back as yet newer models were introduced.

Procter & Gamble

Currently investing \$400 million in over 20,000 research studies a year, P&G has become a recognized innovator, and over the last 16 years the company succeeded in placing 132 products on the top 25 Pacesetters list — more than their six largest competitors combined. {9-10}

:Crest

P&G entered the Chinese oral care market with two versions of essentially the same toothpaste. The premium brand, Ku Bai, targeted urban consumers wanting teeth whitening and breath freshening. Marketing was through ads and Crest's Chinese website, which featured Li Yuchan, a popular singer voted 'Super Girl' in an American Idol-type contest in 2007. Ku Bai retails for US 95 cents per 5 ounce tube.

The green brand, Cha Shuang, targets rural customers, and has a tea flavour. It retails for US 88 cents per 5 ounce tube. In brief, P&G leveraged the Crest brand across two market segments by making the distinction clear to customers. {9}

:Clorox

P&G market Clorox, a strong cleaning agent, associated in the popular mind with bleach and industrial chemicals. Research showed that American customers were attracted to more natural products, but did not want those products to be ineffective or only available at separate stores. The company therefore re-introduced the product as part of its Green Works line, emphasizing both its effectiveness and natural affiliations. The Sierra Club endorsed the product,

and sales were five times those expected by eleven months into the campaign. {11}

Note the varied strategies of the companies concerned, the research required, the sums involved and sales revenues unconnected to product quality.

46.2 Business Models

Companies adopt various business models that describe how their organization captures, creates and delivers value to its customers. Each model (and they're not exclusive) has to be straightforward, complete and relevant, without oversimplifying matters. Most obviously, each also has to be effective, and indeed models survive only to the extent their adoption benefits a company.

One of the better known is that of Osterwalder and Pigneur, {12} which has been tested and applied around the world. It recognizes nine basic elements or building blocks. Many elements are self-evident on reflection, but their identification helps companies concentrate on the areas that best repay their marketing efforts.

Customer Segments:

To better serve their customers, companies commonly group them into segments distinguished by common needs, common behaviors, or other attributes. Companies make a conscious decision as to which segments to serve and which segments to ignore, thus allowing them to focus on matters that vitally affect their business.

customer segments	key resources	value proposition
customer channels	key partnerships	cost structure
customer relationships	key activities	revenue streams

Customer Channels:

The Customer Channels describes how a company communicates with its Customer Segments to deliver a Value Proposition.

Channels have several marketing functions, including raising awareness of the company's products and services, helping customers evaluate the company's Value Proposition, allowing customers to purchase specific products and services, delivering a Value Proposition to customers, and providing post-purchase customer support

Customer Relationships:

Customer Relationships describe the types of relationships a company establishes with specific Customer Segments. Customer relationships may be driven by Customer

acquisition, Customer retention and/or Increased sales (upselling).

Key Resources:

Key Resources are the most important assets needed to make a business model work. Every business model requires them, and it is only through them that companies generate Value Propositions and Revenues. Resources may be physical, intellectual, human and/or financial.

Key Partnerships:

Key Partnerships are the network of suppliers and partners that make the business model work. Companies forge partnerships to optimize their business models, reduce risk, and/or acquire resources.

Key Activities

Key Activities are those a company must engage in to make its business model work. Every business model requires Key Activities, and they naturally differ depending on the business model type. They are commonly grouped under production, problem-solving and support.

Value Propositions:

Value Propositions are the products and services that create value for a specific Customer Segment. They do so by solving a customer problem or satisfying a customer need. This building block is an aggregation or bundle of benefits that a company offers customers, commonly some combination of newness, customization, getting a job done, design, price, costs reduction, accessibility and/or convenience.

Cost Structure:

The Cost Structure describes all costs incurred to make a business model work. Businesses may be driven by costs (fixed or variable), values, and/or economies of scale.

Revenue Streams:

Revenue Streams is the building block representing the revenues a company generates from each Customer Segment. Revenues are the lifeblood of a company, and it's usual to distinguish revenues resulting from one-time payments, recurring fees, subscriptions, leasing, licensing, brokerage, advertising and pricing mechanisms.

46.3 Application: Modernist Poetry

Such a business model will no doubt seem remote from poetry, but we can use it broadly to model prestige rather than cash. The nine components are then:

Customer Segments: Poetry-reading public.

Customer Channels: Literary magazines, mainstream newspapers, poetry workshops, academic books and journals, publishing houses.

Customer Relationships: Aesthetics or arguments for Modernism, across the spectrum, from solid academic studies through school guides to small press pamphleteering.

Key Partnerships: Universities-cultural institutions-publishing houses.

Key Resources: Writers — poets, academics, cultural journalists.

Key Activities: Writing Modernist poetry.

Value Propositions: More authentic expression of contemporary world, etc.

Cost Structure: Value-driven, with poets being nurtured by publishing houses and university appointments.

Revenue Streams: Recurring intellectual standing.

Modern poetry is marketed as entry into an exclusive club of culturally sophisticated and right-thinking people. The prestigious golf club does not vet their players' golfing skills beyond a basic competence, but is particular about their

socio-economic group, their manners and dress sense. A leading publishing house will want to see a good track record from the poet they promote: an English degree and/or MFA, a teaching role at one of the better universities, poems and articles in the top literary magazines, a book or two of literary criticism if possible. It will not want to see breaches in manners like strident political views, or lapses in dress code like rhyme or popular sentiments expressed in some high-minded manner. Modern poetry is a recondite, difficult art, and the supporting body of theory is part of the sales package.

Theory is continually being extended as literary critics carve out their own patch of academic turf, as they must to survive. Elaborate rules apply. No ad hominem remarks or questioning of the opponent's objectives. Graceful tributes to others' work in the best academic manner. Intricate, heavily qualified sentences, a safe, neutral tone, and the arguments expressed so diffusely that direct rebuttal is practically impossible: our energies are fully employed in untangling and grasping what is possibly being said. Perceptive analysis is not the main objective, but only one tactic in a serious game that rewards its winners with tenure at an ivy league university.

In all these interrelated activities, the trademark is of first importance. More people, many hundreds of times more people, may write and enjoy amateur poetry, but that work supplies a different market, as did P&G's two toothpastes. It would be disastrous to mix the Ku Bai and Cha Shuang brands, in which a great deal of money has been invested to make them supposedly serve different needs.

All this is too obvious to be worth labouring further, but what we gain from marketing analysis is an insight into various conundrums. A few examples:

46.4 Literary Theory

Even in its early days, some seventy years ago, modern poetry set out to be different. As Maurice Wollman put it: {13}

‘Allied with this neglect of the reader goes a rigid avoidance of anything that savours of poetic language, of the conventional poetic vocabulary, or of the poetic, “artificial” metre. Rather the most colloquial, the most commonplace, the most debased of everyday words, than the poetic cliché with the stock response it calls forth—rather the simplest and most commonplace and unobtrusive of metres, rather prose rhythm, than technical agility and artifice.’

Accordingly, in the affluent years after WWII, when American universities were well funded, their English departments did what any self-respecting manufacturer would do: they increased ‘sales’ by product diversity. The New Criticism continued, and even some of the earlier styles, engagingly written for the general reader, but into the expanding market were introduced the new and often difficult concepts of structuralism, post-structuralism, and the many variants noted in this book. Modern poetry needed new concepts because it was clearly pointless to look for insight, empathy, verse craft and sensitive deployments of words when poets were no longer concerned with such things. University courses expanded, and these developments were initially far more exciting than the scholarly treatments that had previously held sway. Literary theory insensibly merged with contemporary theory; one couldn’t be understood without the other; they were inextricably part of the literary scene.

Was critical theory really helpful? It was a necessary part of the business model (Customer Relationships). Coca Cola is only flavoured water, and not particularly good for health, but it’s indisputably part of the American way of life, and is sold as such. The legendary and never-ending war between Coke and Pepsi is not fought on issues of product quality but perceived associations. {14}

As my guide to verse writing puts it:

Free verse no doubt became the preferred medium of poets in or supported by academia — most serious poets today— because free verse could be written regularly and generate suitable material for critical study.

Regularly does not mean easily, but in the manner of academic work: a specialist writing for fellow specialists with keen deliberation and intelligence within a community of agreed approaches and standards. {15}

Today, with the continuing funding difficulties, contemporary poetry and theory occupy a shrinking market. In such situations, business strategies generally dictate ruthless cost-cutting, new venture funding out of retained profits, increased prices for committed customers, and market consolidation. {16-18}

As to be expected, poetry has become more focused on its contemporary objectives: experimental, prose-based and theory-driven — unlike, say, the poetry flowerings of the Elizabethan or Romantic periods.

46.5 Reviewing

Stephen Sossaman, an Amazon reviewer, put the matter succinctly: {19}

Poetry is the only art form in America that I can think of that no longer has a bracing tradition of real criticism. Novels, plays, films, operas . . . we expect critics to note honestly whatever flaws and failures they see in specific works. Critical reviews often hurt box offices and egos, but without them an art atrophies. . . To see if Logan's reviews are memorable, startling, and true for you, you can sample them at the web site of The New Criterion, but you might as well get this book now and dip into it now and again as a tonic against the hushed reverence that too often greets bland, lazy or meretricious poetry.

So why don't we see more helpful reviewing? Instead of 'In this collection of thirty-six poems, three in particular are illuminating and instructive of the writer's approach. . .' we find 'Seamlessly braiding English and Spanish, Corral's poems hurtle across literary and linguistic borders toward a lyricism that slows down experience. He employs a range of

forms and phrasing, bringing the vivid particulars of his experiences as a Chicano and gay man to the page.' {20} What does this tell us of the content and quality of the collection? Very little. It's packaging. Experience has taught the publisher that such minimal information sells the book, just as the sleek white box with description limited to the trademark sells the upmarket cosmetics product. That trademark has been promoted by lavish sponsorship and advertising on TV and in glossy magazines, and the publisher too will have a fine reputation earned by bringing out many worthy titles. Even the poetry collection under consideration should have received its review, which will have been respectful because the reviewer is playing by the rules, and perhaps hoping to aid his own career in the process.

Extensive and informed quotation is the only way readers can form independent judgements, but quotation does not appear in reviews because quality products don't allow sampling. Prestige is what is being sold, not efficacy, and 50% of all books now are indeed purchased simply for display.

In short, the candid review is unneeded because the book is not marketed on merit directly to the reading public but through a carefully honed system of customer channels. Unaided judgement is not expected of the book-reading public and, however patronizing that may seem, it is unfortunately a sound policy given the lamentable level of discussion in many poetry workshops and readers' comments that appear after the occasional poetry article in the British mainstream press.

Comparisons don't help sales in prestige products. We'll not see on the cosmetics package 'This product scored better among independent tests than products x, y and z' because such negative advertising damages sales across the whole market sector: customers begin to think more critically, and that vague, warm feeling that they deserve to pamper

themselves will likely evaporate. Literary comparisons are similarly muted, and there are enough factions in the academic and literary worlds already without gratuitously making enemies. As with political parties, where disunity is punished at the ballot box, a common voice is needed to get customers to reach for their credit cards.

46.6 Death of New Criticism

What happened the New Criticism that once carried out a detailed audit on poems, explaining what worked, what didn't, and why?

It doesn't pay to do so is perhaps the short answer, though we should first note that the proselytizing movement largely ended in the 1960s and was directed at established poems more than contemporary work. It was never without its critics, who felt it was too narrow and generated cleverness rather than genuine appreciation. Nor did it cope too well with Modernist works than renounced any unity or ready comprehension.

But, in marketing terms, it makes no sense to flag the limitations or flaws in the product — unless a better and more expensive product is being offered to the discerning few, an upselling situation which does not apply here. No doubt customers grow more cynical or wary of advertising, as they do of an increasingly stage-managed political scene, or the detergents that each wash whiter than their nearest rivals, but advertising works all the same. We expect it, if only more subtly presented in the 'extended' review, and something not advertised is clearly not worth buying. Psychology trumps common sense.

46.7 Literary Quality

Only a few of the poems submitted to a leading literary magazine are published, and few again of these make enjoyable reading. {21-22} The content is commonly so trivial that its truth or otherwise can be of no conceivable

concern to anyone. Another problem is the verse itself, often no better constructed than that of despised amateur productions. Indeed the most effective pieces are generally not verse at all, but in the debased coinage of prose. Is this a sort of Gresham's Law where the poor drives out the good?

The better coinage — the established classics in their various but always past styles — is hoarded because it serves as a touchstone or standard of excellence. No one is allowed to imitate it because doing so would test the foundations of literary history, where each epoch has its own characteristic mode of expression. The great Islamic and Chinese civilisations saw matters differently, of course, and were continually building on and expanding the past, but ours has less respect for tradition. Keep it off-beat, original and self-centred is the law implicit in our demands that verse today should be in a contemporary manner on contemporary themes. Indeed it can rarely be anything significant because language itself has been judged as full of holes and shortcomings. Verse craftsman is not taught or even appreciated in the upper levels of our education systems, therefore, though it's preeminently what the great poets needed to express their profounder shades of meaning.

In short, the comparison would be unflattering to the contemporary poetry industry that places conception above execution, and where traditional techniques are astutely avoided by appeal to contemporary theory. In marketing terms, serious and amateur poetry are different value propositions, and so promoted through different channels.

46.8 Reader-Orientated Poetry

Many poets become writers in residence at colleges and universities, or take public appointments. Why does the quality of their own poetry so often fall off year by year as they devote time to teaching, encouraging and promoting students' work?

First is the pressure on their time. Anyone conscientiously teaching, reading students' work, running workshops, visiting schools, appearing on radio or TV, and generally doing their honest best to fulfill the terms of their contract will find scant time for their own work. As with many academics, creative work has to be left to the vacations, and even then there are courses to plan and faculty meetings to attend. Stalwart souls once put their own work first regardless, but this is scarcely possible now with falling enrollments and the squeeze on tenure.

But the matter can also be seen as that basic distinction in selling: 'inside out' versus 'outside in'? 'How do we persuade our customers that they need our product?' versus 'What do our customers really need that we can devise and sell to them?' The second has much the better track record, and is the foundation of modern teaching approaches. It's sensible, responsible, and readily secures approval, but poets who stop listening to the promptings of their inner nature, and write only as the leading magazines demand, may eventually lose what makes them distinctive voices.

46.9 Academic studies

Why do academic studies focus on trends, influences and social issues rather than the quality of the work as poetry? As noted of a typical work: 'There is little or no evaluation of the poetry as poetry: the authors are more concerned with social and political backgrounds, the prevailing aesthetics, and the manifestos of the poets themselves. The quotations are short, designed to illustrate the larger picture, and are commonly not very good poems: the book will make few converts from the newcomer to these styles.' {23}

Academics are firstly more comfortable dealing with the sorts of trends, influences and intellectual issues that can be cross-referenced to more challenging matters and so generate the debate by which the subject lives. It's what academics are trained to do, rather than develop the

aesthetic sensibilities that can tell the good from the merely fashionable. Secondly, as we've noted under 'Death of New Criticism', their appraisal is likely to be somewhat qualified or negative, which would pose the question why anyone should study contemporary poetry in the first place. Thirdly, it would limit the field. Ever since radical theory decided that works of art were simply texts, to be studied like any other form of writing for their suppressed content, anything can call itself contemporary poetry and become a legitimate field of academic enquiry. Growth never stops. Hardly have the contributions to the new book been collated, proofed, published and reviewed, than some new school of poetry has emerged, requiring a complete rethink of previous attitudes. Literary criticism was what poets traditionally turned to writing when the springs of inspiration ran dry, and that negative association is even more with us when careers depend more on volume than quality.

46.10 Publishing

Self publishing, the resort of many poets whose work is not academically fashionable, has a poor image in the trade. Critics of the publish-on-demand companies point out that only the smallest percentage of such productions achieve respectable sales — which all goes to show, they assert, that the traditional model is best. The publishing houses know their business and do indeed sort out the wheat from the chaff.

But perhaps with some help. Any half-decent book today is the product of a large editorial team, in which the content is not only shaped but to some extent rewritten and crafted by specialists. Film star autobiographies are commonly written by ghost writers, and the MS submitted by celebrity academics, it is rumoured, can be little more than notes. Again, no one objects: it's the ideas that count, not their polished expression and copious, carefully checked references.

Success may simply overlook the selling process, therefore: the publisher's experience and contacts, the reps that tirelessly visit booksellers, the academic fraternity that places colleagues' works on their student reading lists, and the interrelated selling channels we have noted above. And then there is self-marketing: all authors need to promote their work through interviews and readings, but it is the prestigious publishers that open doors.

The poor sales typical of self publishing, especially of authors who sell directly from their websites, may not reflect quality, therefore, but simply the absence of the usual customer channels, that well-meaning collusion which makes the synergy work: poets, critics, journalists, teaching courses, workshops, text book publishers and the mainstream media.

46.11 Short-lived Movements

Poetry movements come and go with bewildering rapidity, often before they've put down roots and produced anything substantive. Why the stress on novelty?

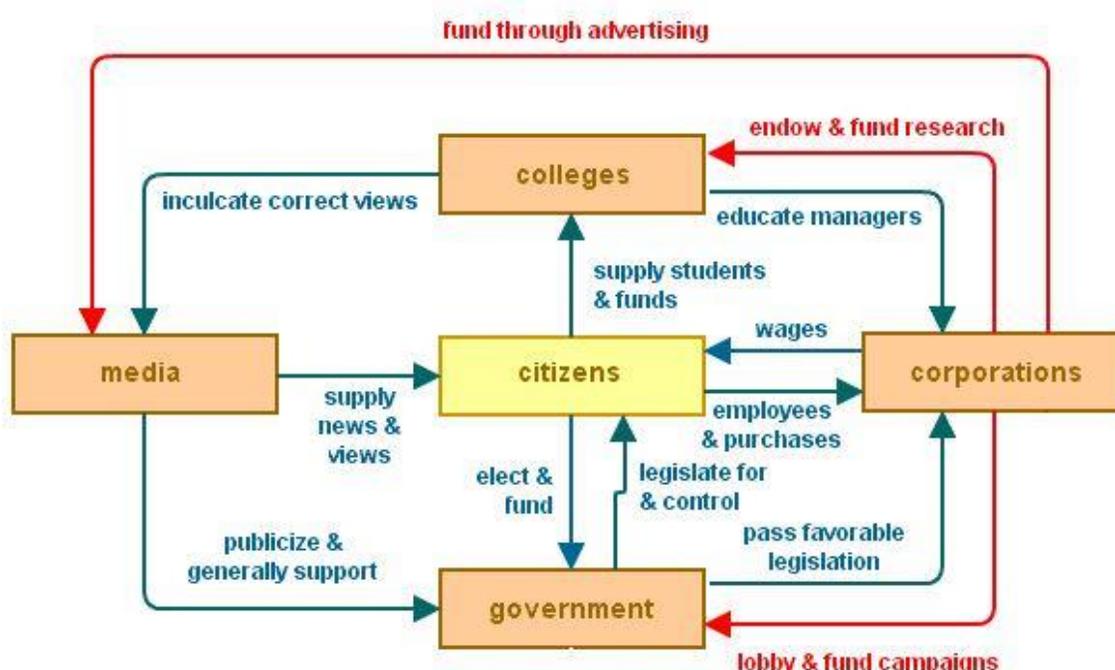
Because, firstly, product differentiation is the way to increase sales. And, secondly, because poetry is increasingly run as a business, led by publishers who consult their sales figures, as common sense demands. Once a market niche is filled another has to be found.

46.12 Advice to the Young Poet

Painters who make their name are commonly said to belong to one of two groups. The first markets itself aggressively, jumping on new bandwagons as they come along and astutely finding another as media interest wanes. The second ploughs a lonely furrow, and receives recognition (if they ever do) when nearing the end of their careers. A similar tendency can be found in poets, and each has its dangers. Poets like Lowell are great innovators, but may leave a record of promise more than achievement. Poets like

Wilbur, on the other hand, who develop a distinctive style and stick to it, may simply run out of things to say. A more measured approach to life usually helps the first, and a more challenging existence the second type of poet.

The sane course is to understand the poetry world, its blandishments and commercial requirements, and devise a strategy that employs what cannot be changed. Some concessions will have to be made, but not those that damage what makes the poet fundamentally worth reading. Put another way, the poetry world sets the rules, which the poet must play by, as in a game of chess, but the poet's goal is to overcome the opposition.



Or is it? If we agree with T.S. Eliot's remark that poetry is 'simply a superior form of entertainment' then prestige is what we aim for, though it's now a very competitive market with horrendous amounts of time and effort being spent to win a small measure of readership and esteem. If we see poetry as something more — perhaps close to Burckhardt's view of Islamic art as wisdom wedded to craftsmanship {25} — then marketing regardless of quality is the last thing wanted. Poets who really respect their art would be advised to earn a living well away from the conformist literary world, if only they can find an appreciative audience — which is

clearly difficult if the world corresponds to the diagram above. {26}

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Adorno, Theodor, 444
 Advertising, **1**
 Examples, 1
 Aesthetic detachment, 116
 Aesthetic distance, 74
 Aesthetic qualities, 71
 Aesthetics, 48, **55**
 dangers, 58
 Afghan, Sayyid Jamaluddin, 478
 African American Criticism
 African American Criticism, 32
 Althusser, Louis, 446
 Alverson, Hoyt, 252
 Antin, David, 517
 Aquinas, Thomas, 271
 Aristotle, 310, 363
 Arnold, Matthew, 126, 436
 Art
 artist-centred philosophies, 62
 autonomous, 68
 communal learned activity, 76
 definitions, 56
 emotional expression, 60
 emotive expression, 111
 not autonomous, 81
 purposive activity, 62
 representation, 59
 social objects, 64
 viewer-centred philosophies, 63
 Art as discovery, 434
 Art as knowledge, 278
 Art as moral agent, 434
 Art as persuasion, 280
 Art as purposeful activity, 429
 Art as religion, 435
 Art as representation, 309
 Art as significance, 436
 Augustine, St., 69
 Austin, J.L., 318, 326, **327**
 Bakhtin, Mikhail, **106**, 418
 Balzac, Honore de, 90
 Baraka, Amiri, 519
 Barber, C.L., 386
 Barrett, Michelle, 467
 Barthes, Roland, 87
 Baudrillard, Jean, 277
 Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb, 429
 Beardsley, Monroe, 72
 Beauty, 61, **68**
 Beauvoir, Simone de, 466
 Behaviourism, 213
Being and Nothingness, 149
Being and Time, 158
 Bell, J.S., 386
 Benaviste, Emile, 405
 Benjamin, Walter, 445
 Berger, John, 64
 Bergson, Henri, 210
 Berkeley, George, 383
 Biological models, 259
 Biology of Belief, 229
 Black, Max, 249
 Bloom, Harold, 504
 Bolshevik coup d'état, 521
 Booth, Wayne, 109, 433
 Bosanquet, Bernard, 127
 Botezatu, Petre, 359
 Bower's semantic network theory, 202
 Bradley, N.H., 351
 Brain as computer, 214
 Brain cell hierarchies, 217
 Brain functioning, 205
 Brecht, Bertolt, 444
 Bretano, Franz, 145
 Britain
 social change, 523
 Brooks, Cleanth, 109
 Brouwer, L.E.J., 369
 Buchner, Eduard, 126
 Bullough, Edward, 74, 116
 Burke, Edmund, 121, 286
 Burke, Kenneth, 253
 Business Models, 1
 Modernist poetry, 1
 Carlyle, Thomas, 126, 277
 Cassirer, Ernst, 117, 383
 Catharsis, 115
 Cattell, Raymond B., 85
 Cell processes, 260
 Charcot, Jean-Martin, 177
 Charlemagne, 255
 Chateaubriand, Rene, 121
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 256
 Chesterton, G.K., 370
 Chomskian linguistics, 423
 Chomsky, Noam, 409, **423**
 Cognitive neuroscience, 214
 Collingwood, R.G., 62, **111**
 Complexity, 397
 Cope, Wendy, 503
 Cornillon, Susan, 466
 Creativity, 201
 Critical theory
 arguments, **15**
 Critical Theory
 autonomy, 506
 civil war, 493
 death of truth, 489
 downgrading of literary criticism, 515
 extinction of traditional poetry, 520
 failed state, 514
 in action, **489**
 local currency, 491
 overturning the state, 521
 perpetual revolution, 489
 progress in the arts, 501
 rejection of past, 490

standard of poetry encouraged, 517
 state-supported poetry, 519
 Critique of Judgement, 135
 Critique of Practical Reason, 134
Critique of Pure Reason, 131, 132
 Croce, Benedetto, 62, **111**
 Culler, Jonathan, 83
 Cureton, Richard, 267
 Curry, H.B., 368
 Danto, Arthur, 65
 Davidson, Donald, **339**, 342
 Davidson, John, 328
 Deconstruction, 329
 Deconstructive Criticism
 Deconstructive criticism, 28
 Defoe, Daniel, 256
 Dell theory, 200
 Depth psychology, 457
 Derrida, Jacques, 92, 329
 Dewey, John, 62, **113**
 Dickie, George, 65
 Dickinson, Emily, 465
 Dilthey, Wilhelm, 170
 Dubois-Raymond, Emil du, 127
 Duhem, Pierre, 384
 Duhring, Eugen, 126
 Dumitru, Anton, 359
 Dummett., Michael, 321
 Duncan, Robert, 518
 Eagleton, Terry, 447
 Écrivain, 88
 Écrivain, 89
 Edelman, Gerald, 215
 Einstein, Albert, 387
 Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen thought
 experiment, 386
 Eleusinian mysteries, 460
 Emotional representation, 117
 English Literature
 rethinking, 526
 Epidemiology, 275
 Eros, 460
 Eshleton, Clayton, 518
 Evans, Gareth, 331
 Existentialism, **145**
 Experimental psychology, 50
 Eynsenck, Hans, 85
 Fashion, 274
 Fechner, Gustav, 126, 210
 Feminism, 432, **465**
 Fenton, James, 502
 Feuerbach, Paul, 127
 Feyerabend, Paul, 379
 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 128
 Firth, J.R., 408
 Fish, Stanley, 432
 Fodor, Jerry, 426
 Form as argument, 75
 Formalists, **414**
 Frankfurt School, 444
 Frege, Gottlob, 326, 356, 365
 Freud, Sigmund, **177**
 Freyer, Hans, 293
 Frost, Robert, 499
 Fundamentalism, Islamic, 478
 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 169, 332
 Gender theory, 467
 Generative Semantics, 425
 Genre, 73, 311
 Girard, Rene, 386
 Goldman, Lucien, 446
 Goldsmith, Kenneth, 507
 Goodman, Nelson, 64, 380
 Grammar
 generative, 409
 relational, 410
 Graves, Robert, 495
 Greek sculpture, **58**
 Grice, Paul, 200, 320, 327
 Gynesis, 466
 Habermas, Jurgen, 68, 172, 332
 Hacking, Ian, 327
 Hardy, Thomas, 497
 Harrison, Tony, 503
 Hartman, E. von, 180
 Hartman, Nicolai, 125
 Hawkins, Jeff, 217
 Hayek, Friedrich August von, 299
 Hayward, Sir John, 453
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 123, 140, 288
 Heidegger, Martin, 146, 158
 Helmholtz, Hermann von, 127, 384
 Hempel, Carl, 168
 Herder, Johann Gottfried, 121
 Hermeneutics, **167**, 332
 Hertz, Gustav, 384
 Hesse, Mary, 378
 Heteroglossia, **107**
 Hilbert and Bernays, 368
 Historicism, 127
 History of literary theory, 4
 Hogarth, William, 69
 Homer, 255
 Hoover, Paul, 516
 Horkheimer, Max, 444
 Hume, David, 122, 375, 383
 Husserl, Edmund, 93, 125, **145**
 Huxley, Thomas Henry, 126
 Ineffability, 119
 Ingarden, Roman, 174
 Intention and artefact, 74
 Introduction, 4
 Irreducible Mind, 52, 223
 Iser, Wolfgang, 174
 Jacobi, Friedrich, Heinrich, 128
 Jacobson, Ramon, **404**
 Jakobson and Zirmunsky, 416
 James, William, **208**
 Jameson, Frederic, 447
 Jardine, Alice, 252
 Jauss, Hans Robert, 174
 Jevons, William Stanley, 441

Jones, David, 408
 Josephson, Brian David, 387
 Jung, Carl, 185
 Kant, Immanuel, 122, **131**, 364
 Kelly, Edward F., 223, 462
 Kermode, Frank, 496
 Keynes, John Maynard, 296, 441
 Kierkegaard, Soren, Aabye, 147
 Kinsella, John, 510
 Kintsch, Walter, 200
 Kline, Morris, 370
 Koch, Kenneth, 517
 Kohlberg, Lawrence, 173
 König, Rene, 277
 Kosslyn, Stephen M., 197
 Kripke, Saul, 331, 360
 Kristeva, Julia, 465
 Kuhn, Thomas, 377
 Gödel, 368
 Labov, William, 408
 Lacan, Jacques, 189
 Laing, R.D., 459
 Lakatos, Imre, 378
 Lakoff, 221
 Lakoff and Johnson, 221, 250
 Lakoff and Núñez, 223
 Lakoff and Turner, 222
 Lamb, Sydney, 410
 Langer, Susanne, 117, 384
 Language, literary theory of
 Jakobson, 420
 Languages, private, 317
 Leavis, F.R., 436, 496
 Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, 364
 Lenin, Vladimir, 448
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 83
 Life
 Maturana and Varela school, 398
 Linguistic Philosophy, 325
 Linguistics, **403**
 descriptionists, 406
 London school, 408
 Russian formalists, 408
 Literary Criticism in Action
 Feminist views, 22
 Lesbian, gay and queer criticism,
 31
 Literary theory assessed, 14
 Literary Theory in Action, 19
 Literary Theory in Context
 History and historiography, 36
 Language of literary theory, 46
 Postmodernist response, 47
 Underlying issues, 36, 41
 Literature as money, 284
 Lodge, David, 109
 Logan, William, 518
 Logic
 limitations, 359
 many valued, 357
 mathematics, 365
 sentential, 356
 symbolic, 356
 Logical operators, 347
 Logical Positivism, 324
 Logical Positivists, 118, 352
 Lotze, Hermann, 126
 Lubbock, Percy, 109
 Lukács, Georg, 292, **443**
 Lukasiewicz, Jan, 358
 Mach, Ernst, 128, 384
 Macherey, Pierre, 446
 Mailer, Norman, 466
 Man, Paul de, 254
 Mannheim, Karl, 279
 Marcuse, Herbert, 297, 444
 Margolis, Joseph, 380
 Marketing Theory, **1**
 Marx, Karl, 289, 430, **438**
 Marxist Criticism
 Marxist criticism, 21
 Marxist economics, 439
 Marxist views, 438
 Maslow, Abraham, 459
 Materialists, 19th Century, 126
 Mathematics
 embodied mind, 370
 exposition, 367
 free expression, 369
 intuition, 369
 Mathesius, Vilem, 407
 Mayer, Bernadette, 517
 Meaning
 propositional calculus, 326
 religious, 334
 theories, 324
 truth conditions, 328
 Media misrepresentation, 514
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 149
 Mersenne, Marin, 458
 Metalanguages, 348, 357
 Metaphor, 220
 literary use, 253
 science, 248, 254
 theories, 248
 Metaphorical language, 51
 Meyers, F.W.H., 223
 Millet, Kate, 466
 Mind, Irreducible theory, 462
 Modernism, 313
 Modernism, Islamic, 478
 Moleschott, Jacob, 126
 Möser, Justus, 285
 Mukarovsky, Jan, 419
 Muslim world, 474
 Nebrija, Elio Antonio de, 256
 Neoliberalism, 442
 Neurath, Otto, 352
 New Historical and Cultural Criticism
 New constructive and cultural
 criticism, 29
 Newbolt, Henry, 76
 Newmann, John von, 214

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 148, 154
 Nineteenth century philosophers, 121
Norton Anthology, 517
 Frye, 385
 Orwell, George, 256
 ory in Context, 36
 Otherness
 post-colonial, 472
Oxford Book of American Poetry, 518
 Pagan inheritance, 461
 Panofsky, Edwin, 64
 Pepper, Stephen, 390
 Perkins, David, 497, 499
 Perloff, Marjorie, 504, 507, 509
 Petty, William, 441
 Phenomenology, 125, **145**
 Phillips, Stephen, 499
 Physics of Organisms, 237
 Piaget, Jean, 173, 190
 Piaget, Piaget, 359
 Pierce, Charles, 81
 Pinker, Stephen, 216
 Plato, 255, 309, 363, 461
 Platonism, 456
 Plotinus, 456
 Poirier, Rene, 359
 Popper, Karl, 376
 Post-colonial studies, **471**
 anti-aesthetics, 77
 Poststructuralism, *44*, 267
 Poststructuralist Marxism, 447
 Poststructuralists, 92
 Pragmatism, 352
 Prague Formalists, 419
 Preface, 1
 Prigogine, Ilya, 388
Principia Mathematica, 366
Process and Reality, 212
 Psychoanalysis, 196
 Psychoanalytic Criticism
 Psychological criticism, 20
 Psychology
 experimental, 195
 literature and emotion, 202
 Puzzle solving, 201
 Quine, W.V.O., 254, 321
 Racine, Jean, 89
 Reader Response Criticism
 Reader response criticism, 24
 Reasoning, 201
 Reference, 330
 Reference and Naming, 359
 Reich, Peter, 410
 Relativism, 333
 Religious perspectives, 453
 Rescher, N., 351
 Richards, I.A., 434
 Ricoeur, Paul, 174, 332
 Ridley, Matt, 301
 Rorty, Richard, 322
 Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 121
 Royal Academy, 75
 Royal Society, 282
 Russell, Bertrand, 365
 Russian Futurists, 414
 Ryle, Gilbert, 317, 326
 Said, Edward, 471
 Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, 98, 201, **406**, 427
 Sartre, Jean-Paul, 149
 Saussure, Ferdinand de, 82, **403**
 Scheler, Max, 125
 Schemes, 253
 Schliermacher, Friedrich, 167
 Schoenberg, Arnold, 445
 Schopenhauer, Arthur, 123
 Schorer, Mark, 109
 Schumpeter, Joseph, 294
 Science
 myth, 383
 new, 393
 truth, 374
 Searle, John, 225, 319, 327, 331
 Shannon, Claude, 504
 Shea, Eugene, 217
 Shetley, Vernon, 500
 Shklovsky, Victor, 415
 Simmel, Georg, 291
 Simplexity, 388
 Skinner, B.F., 409
 Smith, Adam, 285, 441
 Sociology
 poetry, 274
 Socrates, 461
 Sombart, Werner, 292
 Speech and Reading, 199
 Spencer, Herbert, 127, 128
 Spinoza, Baruch, 128
 Staats, Arthur W., 213
 Stael, Madame de, 121
 Stapp, Henry, 229
 Steele, Timothy, 505
 Strange attractors, 399
 Strawson, P.F., 319
 Strawson, Peter, 331
 Structuralism, *42*, 84
 Structuralist Criticism
 Structural criticism, 26
 Structuralist Marxists, 445
 Sweet, Harry, 408
 Swinburne, Algernon Charles, 490
 Synaesthesia, 202
 Tarski
 concept of truth, 339
 metalanguages, 348
 Tarski, Alfred, 339
 Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw, 56
 Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 127
The Concept of Mind, 317
 The New Criticism

The New Criticism, 23
Szasz, 459
Tolstoy, Leo, 111, 434
Tom Sawyer, 256
Translation, 254
Trilling, Lionel, 434
Tropes, 253
Trubetskoy, Nicolai, 407
Truth
 coherence theory, 350
 correspondence theory, 349
 logic, 355
 mathematics, 363
 theories, 346
Turing, Alan, 214
Tversky, Amos, 199
Veblen, Thorstein, 277
Vico, Giambattista, 252
Vogt, Marthe, 126
Voltaire, 285
Waldman, Anne, 517
Watson, William, 490
Weber, Max, 274, 291
Wellmer, Albrecht, 173
What is Literary Theory?, 4
Which Approach is Best?
 Which approach is best?, 36
White, Hayden, 253
Whitehead, Alfred North, 211, 508
Wilson, David Sloane, 268
Winch, Peter, 169
Wittgenstein, later thought, 325
Wolffin, Heinrich, 419
Woolf, Virginia, 465
Wordsworth, William, 490
Wright, G. H. von, 168
Wright, G.H. von, 358
Yeats, W.B., 499
Yerkes and Dodson, 202
Young, Thomas, 387
Zhirmunsky, Victor, 418