

**Poetry and the Arts (ENG 266)**  
**Professor Jeff Dolven**

**Readings for Monday (3/14)**

Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West"  
William Wordsworth, "The Solitary Reaper"

Plus:

Northrop Frye, from *The Theory of Genres*

**Readings for Wednesday (3/16)**

Emily Dickinson, "Because I Would Not Stop for Death"  
Cathy Park Hong, "Our Jim"  
John Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"  
Frank O'Hara, "The Day Lady Died"  
Traditional, "Oh the Wind and the Rain" (see recordings on our website)

Plus:

Tzvetan Todorov, "Two Principles of Narrative"

**First Essay (due in class on Monday 3/14)**

Write a five-page (1800-word) essay that analyzes a poem in relation to another art, an art with which you take the poem to be in conversation. This is an occasion to reflect at greater length on questions we have explored together in discussion and in practice. So: you might write about how a sonnet either represents or invokes painting; how an ode describes or imitates music; and so on. You can choose any poem from the semester so far (or one we have not read, but please check with me first). The art in question should be one of those that we have discussed so far, music, image generally, photograph specifically, or drama. Make use of our theoretical readings where they are useful to you. Citing additional sources is permitted but not required: the assignment is fundamentally a close reading of the poem as it engages different modes, different senses, different ways of making.

Anon, their lamps' uplifted flame  
 Revealed Susanna and her shame.

And then, the simpering Byzantines  
 50 Fled, with a noise like tambourines.

## IV

Beauty is momentary in the mind—  
 The fitful tracing of a portal;  
 But in the flesh it is immortal.

The body dies; the body's beauty lives.  
 55 So evenings die, in their green going,  
 A wave, interminably flowing.  
 So gardens die, their meek breath scenting  
 The cowl of winter, done repenting.  
 So maidens die, to the auroral  
 60 Celebration of a maiden's choral.

Susanna's music touched the bawdy strings  
 Of those white elders; but, escaping,  
 Left only Death's ironic scraping.  
 Now, in its immortality, it plays  
 65 On the clear viol of her memory,  
 And makes a constant sacrament of praise.

1923

1931

The Idea of Order at Key West<sup>4</sup>

She sang beyond the genius<sup>5</sup> of the sea.  
 The water never formed to mind or voice,  
 Like a body wholly body, fluttering  
 Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion  
 5 Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,  
 That was not ours although we understood,  
 Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.  
 The sea was not a mask. No more was she.  
 The song and water were not medleyed sound  
 10 Even if what she sang was what she heard,  
 Since what she sang was uttered word by word.  
 It may be that in all her phrases stirred  
 The grinding water and the gasping wind;  
 But it was she and not the sea we heard.  
 15 For she was the maker of the song she sang.  
 The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea  
 Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.  
 Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew

4. One of the coral islands off the south coast of Florida.

5. The pervading and guardian spirit of a place.

20 It was the spirit that we sought and knew  
That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea  
That rose, or even colored by many waves;  
If it was only the outer voice of sky  
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,  
25 However clear, it would have been deep air,  
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound  
Repeated in a summer without end  
And sound alone. But it was more than that,  
More even than her voice, and ours, among  
30 The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,  
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped  
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres  
Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made  
35 The sky acutest at its vanishing.  
She measured to the hour its solitude.  
She was the single artificer of the world  
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,  
Whatever self it had, became the self  
40 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,  
As we beheld her striding there alone,  
Knew that there never was a world for her  
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez,<sup>6</sup> tell me, if you know,  
45 Why, when the singing ended and we turned  
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,  
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,  
As the night descended, tilting in the air,  
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,  
50 Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,  
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,  
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,  
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,  
55 And of ourselves and of our origins,  
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

1936

### Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu<sup>7</sup>

That would be waving and that would be crying,  
Crying and shouting and meaning farewell,

6. Stevens claimed (*Letters*, 798) that he had simply combined two common Spanish names at random, without conscious reference to the French literary critic and essayist Ramon Fernandez

(1894–1944).

7. Cf. Mark Strand's homage to this poem in *Dark Harbor*, XVI (p. 1864).

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,<sup>o</sup> *open meadow*  
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.<sup>4</sup>

1802–04

1807

### The Solitary Reaper

Behold her, single in the field,  
 Yon solitary Highland Lass!  
 Reaping and singing by herself;  
 Stop here, or gently pass!  
 5 Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
 And sings a melancholy strain;  
 O listen! for the Vale<sup>o</sup> profound *valley*  
 Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt  
 10 More welcome notes to weary bands  
 Of travelers in some shady haunt,  
 Among Arabian sands;  
 A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
 In springtime from the Cuckoo bird,  
 15 Breaking the silence of the seas  
 Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—  
 Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
 For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
 20 And battles long ago;  
 Or is it some more humble lay,  
 Familiar matter of today?  
 Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
 That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang  
 As if her song could have no ending;  
 I saw her singing at her work,  
 And o'er the sickle bending—  
 I listened, motionless and still;  
 30 And, as I mounted up the hill,  
 The music in my heart I bore,  
 Long after it was heard no more.

1805

1807

4. In Greek mythology, Proteus, the "Old Man of the Sea," rises from the sea at midday and can be forced to read the future by anyone who holds him

while he takes many frightening shapes. Triton is the son of the sea god, Neptune; the sound of his conch-shell horn calms the waves.

30 (Scholes), *theoretical genre/historical genre* (Todorov in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975]), *basic attitude/genra* (Viëtor), *basic genre* or *basic type/genra* (Petersen), or even, with some slight differences, *simple form/real form* in Jolles. Todorov's current position is closer to the one I am upholding here:

In the past, attempts have been made to distinguish "natural" forms of poetry (for example, lyric, epic, or dramatic poetry) from its conventional forms (sonnets, ballads, odes), or even to oppose [the "natural" and the conventional]. We need to try to see on what level such an assertion

may still have some meaning. One possibility is that lyric poetry, epic poetry, and so on, are universal categories and *thus belong to discourse*. . . . The other possibility is that such terms are used with regard to historical phenomena: thus the epic is what Homer's *Iliad* embodies. In the second case, we are indeed dealing with genres, but these are not qualitatively different on the discursive level from a genre like the sonnet (which for its part is based on constraints: thematic, verbal, and so on). ("L'origine des genres" [1976], in *Les Genres du discours* [Paris: Seuil, 1978], 50; tr. *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 18. Emphasis mine.)

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## 1.2 Theory of Genres (1957)

NORTHROP FRYE

Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, eds., *The Lyric Theory Reader* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

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We complained in our introduction that the theory of genres was an undeveloped subject in criticism. We have the three generic terms drama, epic, and lyric, derived from the Greeks, but we use the latter two chiefly as jargon or trade slang for long and short (or shorter) poems respectively. The middle-sized poem does not even have a jargon term to describe it, and any long poem gets to be called an epic, especially if it is divided into a dozen or so parts, like Browning's *Ring and the Book*. This poem takes a dramatic structure, a triangle of jealous husband, patient wife, and chivalrous lover involved in a murder trial with courtroom and death-house scenes, and works it all out through the soliloquies of the characters. It is an astounding *tour de force*, but we can fully appreciate this only when we see it as a generic experiment in drama, a drama turned inside out, as it were. Similarly, we call Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* a lyric, perhaps because it is a lyric; if we hesitate to call *Epipsychidion* a lyric, and have no idea what it is, we can always call it the product of an essentially lyrical genius. It is shorter than the *Iliad*, and there's an end of it.

However, the origin of the words drama, epic, and lyric suggests that the central principle of genre is simple enough. The basis of generic distinctions in literature appears to be the radical of presentation. Words may be acted in front of a spectator; they may be spoken in front of a listener; they may be sung or chanted; or they may be written for a reader. Criticism, we note resignedly in passing, has no word for the individual member of an author's audience, and the word "audience" itself does not really cover all genres, as it is slightly illogical to describe the readers of a book as an audience. The basis of generic criticism in any case is rhetorical, in the sense that the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public.

We have to speak of the *radical* of presentation if the distinctions of acted, spoken, and written word are to mean anything in the age of the printing press. One may print a lyric or read a novel aloud, but such incidental changes are not enough in themselves to alter the genre. For all the loving care that is rightfully expended on the printed texts of Shakespeare's plays, they are still radically acting scripts, and belong to the genre of drama. If a Romantic poet gives his poem a dramatic form, he may not expect or even want any stage representation; he may think entirely in terms of print and readers; he may even believe, like many Romantics, that the stage drama is an impure form because of the limitations it puts on individual expression. Yet the poem is still being referred back to some kind of theatre, however much of a castle in the air. A novel is written, but when Conrad employs a narrator to help him tell his story, the genre of the written word is being assimilated to that of the spoken one.

The question of how we are to classify such a novel is less important than the recognition of the fact that two different radicals of presentation exist in it. It might be thought simpler, instead of using the term radical, to say that the generic distinctions are among the ways in which literary works are *ideally* presented, whatever the actualities are. But Milton, for example, seems to have no ideal of reciter and audience in mind for *Paradise Lost*; he seems content to leave it, in practice, a poem to be read in a book. When he uses the convention of invocation, thus bringing the poem into the genre of the spoken word, the significance of the convention is to indicate what tradition his work primarily belongs to and what its closest affinities are with. The purpose of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify such traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them.

The genre of the spoken word and the listener is very difficult to describe in English, but part of it is what the Greeks meant by the phrase *ta epe*, poems intended to be recited, not necessarily epics of the conventional jumbo size. Such "epic" material does not have to be in metre, as the prose tale and the prose oration are important spoken forms. The difference between metre and prose is evidently not in itself a generic difference, as the example of drama shows, though it tends to become one. In this essay I use the word "epos" to describe works in which the radical of presentation is oral address, keeping the word epic for its customary use as the name of the form of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, and *Paradise Lost*. *Epos* thus takes in all literature, in verse or prose, which makes some attempt to preserve the convention of recitation and a listening audience.

The Greeks gave us the names of three of our four genres: they did not give us a word for the genre that addresses a reader through a book, and naturally we have not invented one of our own. The nearest to it is "history," but this word, in spite of *Tom Jones*, has gone outside literature, and the Latin "scripture" is too specialized in meaning. As I have to have some word, I shall make an arbitrary choice of "fiction" to describe the genre of the printed page. I know that I used this word in the first essay in a different context, but it seems better to compromise with the present confused terminology than to increase the difficulties of this book by introducing too many new terms. The analogy of the keyboard in music may illustrate the difference between fiction and other genres which for practical purposes exist in books. A book, like a keyboard, is a mechanical device for bringing an entire artistic structure under the interpretive control of a single person. But just as it is possible to distinguish genuine piano music from the piano score of an opera or symphony, so we may distinguish genuine "book literature" from books containing the reduced textual scores of recited or acted pieces.

The connection between a speaking poet and a listening audience, which may be actual in Homer or Chaucer, soon becomes increasingly theoretical, and as it does so *epos* passes

insensibly into fiction. One may even suggest, not quite seriously, that the legendary figure of the blind bard, which is used so effectively by Milton, indicates that the drift toward an unseen audience sets in very early. But whenever the same material does duty for both genres, the distinction between the genres becomes immediately apparent. The chief distinction, though not a simple one of length, is involved with the fact that *epos* is episodic and fiction continuous. The novels of Dickens are, as books, fiction; as serial publications in a magazine designed for family reading, they are still fundamentally fiction, though closer to *epos*. But when Dickens began to give readings from his own works, the genre changed wholly to *epos*; the emphasis was then thrown on immediacy of effect before a visible audience.

In drama, the hypothetical or internal characters of the story confront the audience directly, hence the drama is marked by the concealment of the author from his audience. In very spectacular drama, such as we get in many movies, the author is of relatively little importance. Drama, like music, is an ensemble performance for an audience, and music and drama are most likely to flourish in a society with a strong consciousness of itself as a society, like Elizabethan England. When a society becomes individualized and competitive, like Victorian England, music and drama suffer accordingly, and the written word almost monopolizes literature. In *epos*, the author confronts his audience directly, and the hypothetical characters of his story are concealed. The author is still theoretically there when he is being represented by a rhapsode or minstrel, for the latter speaks as the poet, not as a character in the poem. In written literature both the author and his characters are concealed from the reader.

The fourth possible arrangement, the concealment of the poet's audience from the poet, is presented in the lyric. There is, as usual, no word for the audience of the lyric: what is wanted is something analogous to "chorus" which does not suggest simultaneous presence or dramatic context. The lyric is, to go back to Mill's aphorism referred to at the beginning of this book, preeminently the utterance that is overheard. The lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a Muse (note the distinction from *epos*, where the Muse speaks *through* the poet), a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object. The lyric is, as Stephen Dedalus says in Joyce's *Portrait*, the poet presenting the image in relation to himself: it is to *epos*, rhetorically, as prayer is to sermon. The radical of presentation in the lyric is the hypothetical form of what in religion is called the "I-Thou" relationship. The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners, though he may speak for them, and though they may repeat some of his words after him.

*Epos* and fiction make up the central area of literature, and are flanked by the drama on one side and by the lyric on the other. Drama has a peculiarly intimate connection with ritual, and lyric with dream or vision, the individual communing with himself. We said at the beginning of this book that there is no such thing as direct address in literature, but direct address is natural communication, and literature may imitate it as it may imitate anything else in nature. In *epos*, where the poet faces his audience, we have a *mimesis* of direct address. *Epos* and fiction first take the form of scripture and myth, then of traditional tales, then of narrative and didactic poetry, including the epic proper, and of oratorical prose, then of novels and other written forms. As we progress historically through the five modes, fiction increasingly overshadows *epos*, and as it does, the *mimesis* of direct address changes to a *mimesis* of assertive writing. This in its turn, with the extremes of documentary or didactic prose, becomes actual assertion, and so passes out of literature.

The lyric is an internal *mimesis* of sound and imagery, and stands opposite the external *mimesis*, or outward representation of sound and imagery, which is drama. Both forms avoid the *mimesis* of direct address. The characters in a play talk to each other, and are

theoretically talking to themselves in an aside or soliloquy. Even if they are conscious of an audience, they are not speaking for the poet, except in special cases like the parabasis of Old Comedy or the prologues and epilogues of the rococo theatre, where there is an actual generic change from drama to *epos*. In Bernard Shaw the comic parabasis is transferred from the middle of the play to a separate prose preface, which is a change from drama to fiction.

33

1.2

NORTHROP FRYE

In *epos* some kind of comparatively regular metre tends to predominate: even oratorical prose shows many metrical features, both in its syntax and in its punctuation. In fiction prose tends to predominate, because only prose has the continuous rhythm appropriate for the continuous form of the book. Drama has no controlling rhythm peculiar to itself, but it is most closely related to *epos* in the earlier modes and to fiction in the later ones. In the lyric a rhythm which is poetic but not necessarily metrical tends to predominate. We proceed to examine each genre in turn with a view to discovering what its chief features are. As in what immediately follows we are largely concerned with diction and linguistic elements, we must limit our survey mainly to a specific language, which will be English: this means that a good deal of what we say will be true only of English, but it is hoped that the main principles can be adapted to other languages as well.

[ . . . ]

### The Rhythm of Association: Lyric

In the historical sequence of modes, each genre in turn seems to rise to some degree of ascendancy. Myth and romance express themselves mainly in *epos*, and in the high mimetic the rise of a new national consciousness and an increase of secular rhetoric bring the drama of the settled theatre into the foreground. The low mimetic brings fiction and an increasing use of prose, the rhythm of which finally begins to influence verse. Wordsworth's theory that apart from metre the *lexis* of poetry and of prose are identical is a low mimetic manifesto. The lyric is the genre in which the poet, like the ironic writer, turns his back on his audience. It is also the genre which most clearly shows the hypothetical core of literature, narrative and meaning in their literal aspects as word-order and word-pattern. It looks as though the lyric genre has some peculiarly close connection with the ironic mode and the literal level of meaning.

Let us take a line of poetry at random, say the beginning of Claudio's great speech in *Measure for Measure*:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where:

We can hear of course the metrical rhythm, an iambic pentameter spoken as a four-stress line. We can hear the semantic or prose rhythm, and we hear what we may call the rhythm of decorum, the verbal representation of the horror of a man facing death. But we can also, if we listen to the line very attentively, make out still another rhythm in it, an oracular, meditative, irregular, unpredictable, and essentially discontinuous rhythm, emerging from the coincidences of the sound-pattern:

Ay:

But to die . . .

and go

we know

not where . . .

Just as the semantic rhythm is the initiative of prose, and as the metrical rhythm is the initiative of *epos*, so this oracular rhythm seems to be the predominating initiative of



lyric. The initiative of prose normally has its center of gravity in the conscious mind: the discursive writer writes deliberately, and the literary prose writer imitates a deliberative process. In verse *epos* the choice of a metre prescribes the form of rhetorical organization: the poet develops an unconscious habitual skill in thinking in this metre, and is thereby set free to do other things, such as tell stories, expound ideas, or make the various modifications demanded by decorum. Neither of these by itself seems quite to get down to what we think of as typically the poetic creation, which is an associative rhetorical process, most of it below the threshold of consciousness, a chaos of paronomasia, sound-links, ambiguous sense-links, and memory-links very like that of the dream. Out of this the distinctively lyrical union of sound and sense emerges. Like the dream, verbal association is subject to a censor, which (or whom) we may call the "plausibility-principle," the necessity of shaping itself into a form acceptable to the poet's and his reader's waking consciousness, and of adapting itself to the sign-meanings of assertive language well enough to be communicable to that consciousness. But associative rhythm seems to retain a connection with dream corresponding to the drama's connection with ritual. The associative rhythm, no less than the others, can be found in all writing: Yeats's typographical rearrangement of Pater which begins *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* illustrates how it may be extracted from prose.

The most natural unit of the lyric is the discontinuous unit of the stanza, and in earlier periods most lyrics tended to be fairly regular strophic patterns, reflecting the ascendancy of *epos*. Stanzaic *epos*, such as we find in medieval romance, is usually much closer to the atmosphere of a dream world than linear *epos*. With the Romantic movement a sense that the "true voice of feeling" was unpredictable and irregular in its rhythm began to increase. Poe's *Poetic Principle* maintains that poetry is *essentially* oracular and discontinuous, that the poetic is the lyrical, and that verse *epos* consists really of lyrical passages stuck together with versified prose. This is a manifesto of the ironic age, as Wordsworth's preface was a low mimetic one, and announces the arrival of a third period of technical experiment in English literature, in which the object is to liberate the distinctive rhythm of lyric. The aim of "free" verse is not simply revolt against metre and *epos* conventions, but the articulation of an independent rhythm equally distinct from metre and from prose. If we do not recognize this third rhythm, we shall have no answer for the naive objection that when poetry loses regular metre it becomes prose.

The loosening of rhyme in Emily Dickinson and of stanzaic structure in Yeats are intended, not to make the metrical pattern more irregular, but to make the lyric rhythm more precise. Hopkins's term "sprung rhythm," too, has as close an affinity with lyric as running rhythm has with *epos*. Pound's theories and techniques, from his early imagism to the discontinuous pastiche of the *Cantos* (preceded by a half-century of French and English experiment in the "fragmentation" or lyricizing of *epos*), are lyric-centered theories and techniques. The rhetorical analysis founded on ambiguity in new criticism is a lyric-centered criticism which tends, often explicitly, to extract the lyrical rhythm from all the genres. The most admired and advanced poets of the twentieth century are chiefly those who have most fully mastered the elusive, meditative, resonant, centripetal word-magic of the emancipated lyrical rhythm. In the course of this development the associative rhythm has become more flexible, and has consequently moved from its Romantic basis in style to a new kind of subjectivized decorum.

The traditional associations of lyric are chiefly with music. The Greeks spoke of lyrics as *ta mele*, usually translated as "poems to be sung"; in the Renaissance, lyric was constantly associated with the lyre and the lute, and Poe's essay just referred to lays an emphasis on the importance of music in poetry which makes up in strength what it lacks in preci-

sion. We should remember, however, that when a poem is “sung,” at least in the modern musical sense, its rhythmical organization has been taken over by music. The words of a “singable” lyric are generally neutral and conventional words, and modern song has the stress accent of music, with little if anything left of the pitch accent that marks the domination of music by poetry. We should therefore get a clearer impression of the lyric if we translated *ta mele* as “poems to be chanted,” for chanting, or what Yeats called cantillation, is an emphasis on words as words. Modern poets who, like Yeats, want their poems chanted are often precisely those who are most suspicious of musical settings.

The history of music shows a recurrent tendency to develop elaborate contrapuntal structures which, in vocal music, almost annihilate the words. There has also been a recurrent tendency to reform and simplify musical structures in order to give the words more prominence. This has sometimes been the result of religious pressure, but literary influences have been at work too. We may take the madrigal, perhaps, as representing something close to a limit of the subservience of poetry to music. In the madrigal the poetic rhythm disappears as the words are tossed from voice to voice, and the imagery in the words is expressed by the devices of what is usually called program music. We may find long passages filled up with nonsense words, or the whole collection may bear the subtitle “apt for voices or viols,” indicating that the words can be dispensed with altogether. The dislike of poets for this trituration of their words can be seen in the support they gave to the seventeenth-century style of isolating the words on a single melodic line, the style which made the opera possible. This certainly brings us closer to poetry, though music still predominates in the rhythm. But the closer the composer moves toward emphasizing the verbal rhythm of the poem, the closer he comes to the chanting which is the real rhythmical basis of lyric. Henry Lawes made some experiments in this direction which won the applause of Milton, and the admiration that so many *symbolistes* expressed for Wagner was evidently based on the notion (if so erroneous a notion can be said to be a base) that he was also trying to identify, or at least closely associate, the rhythm of music and the rhythm of poetry.

But now that we have music on one boundary of lyric, and the purely verbal emphasis of cantillation in the center, we can see that lyric has a relation to the pictorial on the other side which is equally important. Something of this is present in the typographical appearance of a lyric on a printed page, where it is, so to speak, overseen as well as overheard. The arrangement of stanzas and indentations gives a visible pattern to a lyric which is quite distinct from *epos*, where the lines have approximately the same length, as well as of course from prose. In any case there are thousands of lyrics so intently focussed on visual imagery that they are, as we may say, set to pictures. In the emblem an actual picture appears, and the poet-painter Blake, whose engraved lyrics are in the emblem tradition, has a role in the lyric analogous to that of the poet-composers Campion and Dowland on the musical side. The movement called imagism made a great deal of the pictorial element in the lyric, and many imagistic poems could almost be described as a series of captions to invisible pictures.

In such emblems as Herbert's *The Altar* and *Easter Wings*, where the pictorial shape of the subject is suggested in the shape of the lines of the poem, we begin to approach the pictorial boundary of the lyric. The absorption of words by pictures, corresponding to the madrigal's absorption of words by music, is picture-writing, of the kind most familiar to us in comic strips, captioned cartoons, posters, and other emblematic forms. A further stage of absorption is represented by Hogarth's *Rake's Progress* and similar narrative sequences of pictures, in the scroll pictures of the Orient, or in the novels in woodcuts that occasionally appear. Pictorial arrangements of the visible basis of literature, which is alphabetical

writing, have had a more fitful and sporadic existence, ranging from capitals in illuminated manuscripts to surrealist experiments in collage, and have not had much specifically literary importance. They would have had more, of course, if our writing had remained in the hieroglyphic stage, as in hieroglyphics writing and drawing are much the same art. We have previously glanced at Pound's comparison of the imagistic lyric to the Chinese ideogram.

We should expect that during the last century there would have been a good deal said about the relation of poetry to music on the one hand, and to painting on the other. In fact the attempts to bring words as near as possible to the more repetitive and emphatic rhythm of music or the more concentrated stasis of painting make up the main body of what is usually called experimental writing. It would make for clearer thinking if these developments were regarded as lateral explorations of a single phase of rhetoric, not, through a false analogy with science, as "new directions" portending a general advance of literary technique on all fronts. The reverse movement of the same progressive fallacy gives us the moral indignation that talks about "decadence." A question on which little has yet been said is the extent to which poetry may, so to speak, disappear into painting or music and come back with a different rhythm. This happened for example in the emergence of the "prosa" out of the sequence in medieval music, and it happens in a different way when a song becomes a kind of rhythmical reservoir for a number of different lyrics.

The two elements of subconscious association which form the basis for lyrical *melos* and *opsis* respectively have never been given names. We may call them, if the terms are thought dignified enough, babble and doodle. In babble, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and puns develop out of sound-associations. The thing that gives shape to the associating is what we have been calling the rhythmical initiative, though in a free verse poem it would be rather a sense of the oscillations of rhythm within an area which gradually becomes defined as the containing form. We can see from the revisions poets make that the rhythm is usually prior, either in inspiration or in importance or both, to the selection of words to fill it up. This phenomenon is not confined to poetry: in Beethoven's notebooks, too, we often see how he knows that he wants a cadence at a certain bar before he has worked out any melodic sequence to reach it. One can see a similar evolution in children, who start with rhythmical babble and fill in the appropriate words as they go along. The process is also reflected in nursery rhymes, college yells, work songs, and the like, where rhythm is a physical pulsation close to the dance, and is often filled up with nonsense words. An obvious priority of rhythm to sense is a regular feature of popular poetry, and verse, like music, is called "light" whenever it has the rhythmical accentuation of a railway coach with a flat wheel.

When babble cannot rise into consciousness, it remains on the level of uncontrolled association. This latter is often a literary way of representing insanity, and Smart's *Jubilate Agno*, parts of which are usually considered mentally unbalanced, shows the creative process in an interesting formative stage:

For the power of some animal is predominant in every language.  
For the power and spirit of a CAT is in the Greek.  
For the sound of a cat is in the most useful preposition *κατ' εὐ-χεν* . . .  
For the Mouse (*Mus*) prevails in the Latin.  
For *edi-mus, bibi-mus, vivi-mus—ore-mus* . . .  
For two creatures the Bull & the Dog prevail in the English,  
For all the words ending in *ble* are in the creature.  
Invisi-ble, Incomprehen-si-ble, ineffa-ble, A-ble . . .

For there are many words under Bull . . .

For Brook is under Bull. God be gracious to Lord Bolingbroke.

37

1.2  
NORTHROP FRYE

It is possible that similar sputters and sparks of the fusing intellect take place in all poetic thinking. The puns in this passage impress the reader as both outrageous and humorous, which is consistent with Freud's view of wit as the escape of impulse from the control of the censor. In creation the impulse is the creative energy itself, and the censor is what we have called the plausibility-principle. Paronomasia is one of the essential elements of verbal creation, but a pun introduced into a conversation turns its back on the sense of the conversation and sets up a self-contained verbal sound-sense pattern in its place.

There is a perilous balance in paronomasia between verbal wit and hypnotic incantation. In Poe's line "the viol, the violet and the vine," we have a fusion of two opposed qualities. Wit makes us laugh, and is addressed to the awakened intelligence; incantation by itself is humorlessly impressive. Wit detaches the reader; the oracle absorbs him. In dream-poems like Arthur Benson's *The Phoenix*, or in poems intended to represent dreaming or drowsy states, like the medieval *Pearl* and many passages in Spenser and Tennyson, we notice a similar insistence on hypnotically recurrent sound-patterns. If we were to laugh at the wit in such a line as Poe's, we should break the spell of his poem, yet the line is witty, just as *Finnegans Wake* is a very funny book, although it never leaves the oracular solemnity of the dream world. In the latter, of course, the researches of Freud and Jung into the mechanisms of both dream and wit have been extensively drawn upon. There may well be buried in it some such word as "vinolent," intended to express everything in Poe's line at once. In fiction the associative process ordinarily shows itself chiefly in the names the author invents for his characters. Thus "Lilliputian" and "Ebenezer Scrooge" are associative names for midgets and misers respectively, because one suggests "little" and "puny" and the other "squeeze," "screw" and perhaps "geezer." Spenser says that a character of his has been named Malfont:

Eyther for th' euill, which he did therein,  
Or that he likened was to a welhed,

which implies that the second syllable of his name is to be derived both from *fons* and from *facere*. We may call this kind of associative process poetic etymology, and we shall say more about it later.

The characteristics of babble are again present in doggerel, which is also a creative process left unfinished through lack of skill or patience, though the psychological conditions are of the opposite kind from those of *Jubilate Agno*. Doggerel is not necessarily stupid poetry; it is poetry that begins in the conscious mind and has never gone through the associative process. It has a prose initiative, but tries to make itself associative by an act of will, and it reveals the same difficulties that great poetry has overcome at a subconscious level. We can see in doggerel how words are dragged in because they rhyme or scan, how ideas are dragged in because they are suggested by a rhyme-word, and so on. Deliberate doggerel, as we have it in *Hudibras* or German *knittelvers*, can be a source of brilliant rhetorical satire, and one which involves a kind of parody of poetic creation itself, just as malapropism is a parody of poetic etymology. The difficulties in the way of giving prose itself something of the associative concentration of poetry are enormous, and not many prose writers, apart from Flaubert and Joyce, have consistently and resolutely faced them.

The first rough sketches of verbal design ("doodle") in the creative process are hardly separable from associative babble. Phrases are scribbled in notebooks to be used later; a

first stanza may suddenly “come” and then other stanzas of the same shape have to be designed to go with it, and all the ingenuity that Freud has traced in the dream has to be employed in putting words into patterns. The elaborateness of conventional forms—the sonnet and its less versatile congeners the ballade, villanelle, sestina, and the like, together with all the other conventions that the individual lyric poet invents for himself—indicates how far removed the lyrical initiative really is from whatever a *cri de coeur* is supposed to be. Poe’s essay on his own *The Raven* is a perfectly accurate account of what he did in that poem, whether he did it on the conscious mental level that the essay suggests or not, and this essay, like *The Poetic Principle*, anticipates the critical techniques of a new mode.

We may note that although of course lyrics in all ages are addressed to the ear, the rise of fiction and the printing press develops an increasing tendency to address the ear through the eye. The visual patterns of E. E. Cummings are obvious examples, but do not by any means stand alone. A poem of Marianne Moore’s, *Camellia Sabina*, employs an eight-line stanza in which the rhyming words are at the end of the first line, at the end of the eighth line, and at the third syllable of the seventh line. I doubt if the most attentive listener could pick this last rhyme up merely from hearing the poem read aloud: one sees it first on the page, and then translates the visual structural pattern to the ear.

We are now in a position to find more acceptable words for babble and doodle, the radicals of lyrical *melos* and *opsis* respectively. The radical of *melos* is *charm*: the hypnotic incantation that, through its pulsing dance rhythm, appeals to involuntary physical response, and is hence not far from the sense of magic, or physically compelling power. The etymological descent of charm from *carmen*, song, may be noted. Actual charms have a quality that is imitated in popular literature by work songs of various kinds, especially lullabies, where the drowsy sleep-inducing repetition shows the underlying oracular or dream pattern very clearly. Invective or flyting, the literary imitation of the spell-binding curse, uses similar incantatory devices for opposite reasons, as in Dunbar’s *Flyting with Kennedy*:

Mauch mutton, byt buttoun, peilit gluttoun, air to Hilhous;  
Rank beggar, ostir dregar, foule fleggar in the flet;  
Chittirlilling, ruch rilling, like schilling in the milhous;  
Baird rehator, theif of natour, fals tratour, feyindis gett . . .

From here the line of descent is easy to the *melos* of physical absorption in sound and rhythm, the pounding movement and clashing noise which the heavy accentuation of English makes possible. Lindsay’s *The Congo* and *Sweeney Agonistes* are modern examples of a tendency to ragtime in English poetry that can be traced back through Poe’s *Bells* and Dryden’s *Alexander’s Feast* to Skelton and to Dunbar’s *Ane Ballat of our Lady*. A more refined aspect of *melos* is exhibited in lyrics which combine accentual repetition with variations in speed. Thus Wyatt’s sonnet:

I abide and abide and better abide,  
And, after the olde proverbe, the happie daye:  
And ever my ladye to me dothe saye,  
“Let me alone and I will provyde.”  
I abide and abide and tarrye the tyde  
And with abiding spede well ye maye:  
Thus do I abide I wott allwaye,  
Nother obtayning nor yet denied.

Aye me! this long abidyng  
 Semithe to me as who sayethe  
 A prolonging of a dieng dethe,  
 Or a refusing of a desyred thing.  
 Moche ware it bettre for to be playne,  
 Then to saye abide and yet shall not obtayne.

This lovely sonnet is intensely musical in its conception: there is the repeated clang of “abide” and the musical, though poetically very audacious, sequential repetition of the first line in the fifth. Then as hope follows expectancy, doubt hope, and despair doubt, the lively rhythm gradually slows down and collapses. On the other hand, Skelton, like Scarlatti after him, gets fidgety in a slow rhythm and is more inclined to speed up. Here is an *accelerando* in a rhyme royal stanza from *The Garland of Laurell*:

That long tyme blew a full tymorous blaste,  
 Like to the Boriall wyndes, whan they blowe,  
 That towres and tounes and trees downe cast,  
 Drove clouds together like dryftes of snowe;  
 The dredful dinne drove all the route on a row;  
 Som trembled, som girned, som gasped, som gased,  
 As people half pevissh or men that were mased.

In the same poem there is a curious coincidental link with music: the verses to Margery Wentworth, Margaret Hussey, and Gertrude Statham are miniature musical rondos of the *abaca* type.

We have several times noticed the close relation between the visual and the conceptual in poetry, and the radical of *opsis* in the lyric is *riddle*, which is characteristically a fusion of sensation and reflection, the use of an object of sense experience to stimulate a mental activity in connection with it. Riddle was originally the cognate object of read, and the riddle seems intimately involved with the whole process of reducing language to visible form, a process which runs through such by-forms of riddle as hieroglyphic and ideogram. The actual riddle-poems of Old English include some of its finest lyrics, and belong to a culture in which such a phrase as “curiously inwrought” is a favorite aesthetic judgement. Just as the charm is not far from a sense of magical compulsion, so the curiously wrought object, whether sword-hilt or illuminated manuscript, is not far from a sense of enchantment or magical imprisonment. Closely parallel to the riddle in Old English is the figure of speech known as the kenning or oblique description which calls the body the bone-house and the sea the whale-road.

1862 Titled - Confirmed -  
Delirious Charter!  
Mine - long as Ages steal! 1890

445 (613)

They shut me up in Prose -  
As when a little Girl  
They put me in the Closet -  
Because they liked me "still" -

5 Still! Could themself have peeped -  
And seen my Brain - go round -  
They might as wise have lodged a Bird  
For Treason - in the Pound -

Himself has but to will  
10 And easy as a Star  
Look down upon Captivity -  
And laugh - No more have I -

1862

1935

479 (712)

Because I could not stop for Death -  
He kindly stopped for me -  
The Carriage held but just Ourselves -  
And Immortality.

5 We slowly drove - He knew no haste  
And I had put away  
My labor and my leisure too,  
For His Civility -

We passed the School, where Children strove  
10 At Recess - in the Ring -  
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain -  
We passed the Setting Sun -

Or rather - He passed Us -  
The Dews drew quivering and Chill -  
15 For only Gossamer, my Gown -  
My Tippet - only Tulle<sup>9</sup> -

9. Sheer silk net. *Tippet*: shoulder cape.

We paused before a House that seemed  
 A Swelling of the Ground -  
 The Roof was scarcely visible -  
 20 The Cornice<sup>o</sup> - in the Ground - *crowning point*

Since then - 'tis Centuries - and yet  
 Feels shorter than the Day  
 I first surmised the Horses' Heads  
 Were toward Eternity -

1862

1890

533 (569)

I reckon - When I count at all -  
 First - Poets - Then the Sun -  
 Then Summer - Then the Heaven of God -  
 And then - the List is done -

5 But, looking back - the First so seems  
 To Comprehend the Whole -  
 The Others look a needless Show -  
 So I write - Poets - All -

10 Their Summer - lasts a solid Year -  
 They can afford a Sun  
 The East - would deem extravagant -  
 And if the Further Heaven -

15 Be Beautiful as they prepare  
 For Those who worship Them -  
 It is too difficult a Grace -  
 To Justify the Dream -

1863

1929

588 (536)

The Heart asks Pleasure - first -  
 And then - excuse from Pain -  
 And then - those little Anodynes  
 That deaden suffering -

5 And then - to go to sleep -  
 And then - if it should be  
 The will of it's Inquisitor  
 The privilege to die -

1863

1890



*Our Jim*

In this world hacked from marrowed dust,  
the half-breed assassin slays  
men before they breed to corps,  
He belts his innard song.

He travels to a sapling town where  
sawyers hew logs to songs of plovers,  
and mansadors tame broncs of the blackest,  
lustiest blood.

Soon the town blooms to terror,  
and fades before it booms.  
Ghosts weed out of bodies with their sharp  
imagined hands.

A hobbled miner, delirious from the sun,  
feels the shadow of his innard song,  
and croaks: I'm a buck nun  
failure anyway.

The half-breed leaves him be,  
rides to a town of tents wooled with alfalfa  
and glass-needled rain shatters  
the dusted tundra.

So, if we may not let the Muse<sup>2</sup> be free,  
 She will be bound with garlands of her own.

1819

1848

### La Belle Dame sans Merci<sup>3</sup>

O what can ail thee, Knight at arms,  
 Alone and palely loitering?  
 The sedge has withered from the Lake  
 And no birds sing!

5 O what can ail thee, Knight at arms,  
 So haggard, and so woebegone?  
 The squirrel's granary is full  
 And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow  
 10 With anguish moist and fever dew,  
 And on thy cheeks a fading rose  
 Fast withereth too.

"I met a Lady in the Meads,<sup>o</sup> *meadows*  
 Full beautiful, a faery's child,  
 15 Her hair was long, her foot was light  
 And her eyes were wild.

"I made a Garland for her head,  
 And bracelets too, and fragrant Zone;<sup>o</sup> *girdle*  
 She looked at me as she did love  
 20 And made sweet moan.

"I set her on my pacing steed  
 And nothing else saw all day long,  
 For sidelong would she bend and sing  
 A faery's song.

25 "She found me roots of relish sweet,  
 And honey wild, and manna<sup>o</sup> dew, *food (from heaven)*  
 And sure in language strange she said  
 'I love thee true.'

"She took me to her elfin grot<sup>o</sup> *grotto*  
 30 And there she wept and sighed full sore,  
 And there I shut her wild wild eyes  
 With kisses four.

2. Source of poetic inspiration.

3. The lovely but merciless lady (French). This is

an earlier (and widely preferred) version of a poem first published in 1820.

“And there she lullèd me asleep,  
 And there I dreamed, Ah Woe betide!  
 35 The latest<sup>o</sup> dream I ever dreamt *last*  
 On the cold hill side.

“I saw pale Kings, and Princes too,  
 Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
 They cried, ‘La belle dame sans merci  
 40 Hath thee in thrall!’

“I saw their starved lips in the gloam  
 With horrid warning gapèd wide,  
 And I awoke, and found me here  
 On the cold hill’s side.

45 “And this is why I sojourn here,  
 Alone and palely loitering;  
 Though the sedge is withered from the Lake  
 And no birds sing.”

April 1819

1888

## Lamia<sup>4</sup>

### *Part 1*

Upon a time, before the faery broods  
 Drove Nymph and Satyr<sup>5</sup> from the prosperous woods,  
 Before King Oberon’s bright diadem,<sup>6</sup>  
 Sceptre, and mantle, clasp’d with dewy gem,  
 5 Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns  
 From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip’d<sup>7</sup> lawns,  
 The ever-smitten Hermes<sup>8</sup> empty left  
 His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft:  
 From high Olympus had he stolen light,  
 10 On this side of Jove’s clouds, to escape the sight  
 Of his great summoner, and made retreat  
 Into a forest on the shores of Crete.  
 For somewhere in that sacred island dwelt  
 A nymph, to whom all hoofèd Satyrs knelt;  
 15 At whose white feet the languid Tritons<sup>9</sup> poured  
 Pearls, while on land they wither’d and adored.  
 Fast by the springs where she to bathe was wont,<sup>o</sup> *accustomed*  
 And in those meads<sup>o</sup> where sometime she might haunt, *meadows*  
 Were strewn rich gifts, unknown to any Muse,<sup>1</sup>

4. In Greek mythology, a female demon who preyed on humans.

5. Like dryads and fauns (line 5), nymphs and satyrs were minor classical deities.

6. Crown of Oberon, king of the fairies (post-classical supernatural beings).

7. Covered with cowslips (a species of wildflower).

*Brakes*: thickets.

8. Or Mercury, the gods’ messenger, especially at the service of Jove (or Jupiter, Zeus), the chief god.

9. Minor sea gods.

1. One of the nine sister goddesses who presided over song, poetry, and the arts and sciences.

thirty years a shade, yet whose traits (plus others  
 not so staring—loyalty, cynicism,  
 15 neophyte's pure heart in erotic mufti<sup>3</sup>  
 straight out of Baghdad)

solve the lifelong riddle: a face no longer  
 sought in dreams but worn as my own. Aladdin<sup>4</sup>  
 rubs his lamp—youth? age?—and the rival two beam  
 20 forth in one likeness.

1988

FRANK O'HARA  
 1926–1966

The Day Lady<sup>1</sup> Died

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday  
 three days after Bastille day,<sup>2</sup> yes  
 it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine  
 because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton<sup>3</sup>  
 5 npat 7:15 and then go straight to dinner  
 and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun  
 and have a hamburger and a malted and buy  
 an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets  
 10 in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank  
 and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)  
 doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life  
 and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN<sup>4</sup> I get a little Verlaine  
 15 for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do  
 think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or  
 Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*  
 of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine  
 after practically going to sleep with quandariness

20 and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE  
 Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and  
 then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue  
 and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and  
 casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton  
 25 of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

3. Civilian clothes worn by someone usually in military uniform.

4. Boy in "The Story of Aladdin and the Magic Lamp," popularly believed to be collected in the original *Arabian Nights* but actually an eighteenth-century addition. In it, Aladdin has a magic lamp whose genie promises to grant any wish.

1. Billie Holiday (1915–1959), American jazz and

blues singer, called Lady Day.

2. July 14, the French national holiday that celebrates the storming of the Bastille prison in 1789.

3. One of "the Hamptons," towns on eastern Long Island, popular, especially in the summer, with New York City artists and writers.

4. An avant-garde bookshop near the Museum of Modern Art, where O'Hara was a curator.

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of  
 leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT  
 while she whispered a song along the keyboard  
 to Mal Waldron<sup>5</sup> and everyone and I stopped breathing

1959

1964

### How to Get There

White the October air, no snow, easy to breathe  
 beneath the sky, lies, lies everywhere writhing and gasping  
 clutching and tangling, it is not easy to breathe  
 lies building their tendrils into dim figures  
 5 who disappear down corridors in west-side<sup>6</sup> apartments  
 into childhood's proof of being wanted, not abandoned, kidnaped  
 betrayal staving off loneliness, I see the fog lunge in  
 and hide it  
     where are you?  
 10                      here I am on the sidewalk  
 under the moonlike lamplight thinking how precious moss is  
 so unique and greenly crushable if you can find it  
 on the north side of the tree where the fog binds you  
 and then, tearing apart into soft white lies, spreads its disease  
 15 through the primal night of an everlasting winter  
 which nevertheless has heat in tubes, west-side and east-side  
 and its intricate individual pathways of white accompanied  
 by the ringing of telephone bells beside which someone sits in  
 silence denying their own number, never given out! nameless  
 20 like the sound of troika<sup>7</sup> bells rushing past suffering  
 in the first storm, it is snowing now, it is already too late  
 the snow will go away, but nobody will be there  
  
 police cordons for lying political dignitaries ringing too  
 the world becomes a jangle  
 25                      from the index finger  
 to the vast empty houses filled with people, their echoes  
 of lies and the tendrils of fog trailing softly around their throats  
 now the phone can be answered, nobody calling, only an echo  
 all can confess to be home and waiting, all is the same  
 30 and we drift into the clear sky enthralled by our disappointment  
     never to be alone again  
                             never to be loved  
 sailing through space: didn't I have you once for my self? West Side?  
 for a couple of hours, but I am not that person

1960

1964

5. Billie Holiday's accompanist (1926–2002).

6. "West-side" and "east-side" in the poem refer to areas in Manhattan (west or east of Fifth Avenue).

7. A Russian vehicle drawn by three horses abreast.

**Oh the Wind and the Rain**  
**Traditional**

There were two sisters came walkin' down the stream  
Oh the wind and rain  
The one behind pushed the other one in  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

Johnny gave the youngest a gay gold ring  
Oh the wind and rain  
Didn't give the oldest one anything  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

They pushed her into the river to drown  
Oh the wind and rain  
And watched her as she floated down  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

Floated 'till she came to a miller's pond  
Oh the wind and rain  
Mama oh father there swims a swan  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

The miller pushed her out with a fishing hook  
Oh the wind and rain  
Drew that fair maid from the brook  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

He left her on the banks to dry  
Cryin' oh the wind and rain  
And a fiddlin' fool come passing by  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

Out of the woods came a fiddler fair  
Oh the wind and rain  
Took thirty strands of her long yellow hair  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

And he made a fiddle bow of her long yellow hair  
Oh the wind and rain  
He made a fiddle bow of her long yellow hair  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

He made fiddle pegs of her long finger bones  
Oh the wind and rain  
He made fiddle pegs of her long finger bones  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

And he made a little fiddle of her breast bone  
Oh the wind and rain  
The sound could melt a heart of stone  
Cryin' oh the dreadful wind and rain

And the only tune that the fiddle would play  
Was oh the wind and rain

**Hey Ho, the Wind and the Rain**  
**William Shakespeare** (from *Twelfth Night*)

When that I was and a little tiny boy,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
A foolish thing was but a toy,  
For the rain it raineth every day.  
But when I came to man's estate,  
With hey, ho, & c.  
'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,  
For the rain, & c.  
But when I came, alas! to wive,  
With hey, ho, & c.  
By swaggering could I never thrive,  
For the rain, & c.  
But when I came unto my beds,  
With hey, ho, & c.  
With toss-pots still had drunken heads,  
For the rain, & c.  
A great while ago the world begun,  
With hey, ho, & c.  
But that's all one, our play is done,  
And we'll strive to please you every day.

ferent forms of the Sartrean attempt to understand human experience. Knowledge is slow to come by; it is reached through the synthesis of an infinite series of attempts to understand so many world-views experienced and assimilated throughout a lifetime. The critical essays mark moments of that ideal synthesis which remains by definition incomplete and open to the future. What makes Sartre so interesting to follow is that his self-proclaimed mission as demystifier has ultimately converted his own writings into a Sartrean myth. Sartre's essays, themselves literary reflections, are the basis of the studies by Suhl and Bauer, which are in turn the basis of this essay that is either three times removed from the reality of the primary texts or three times closer to it, through critical filtration. Like Roquentin's effort at self-understanding, Sartre's attempt to comprehend the world through verbal reflection cannot be definitively vindicated. There are only words and demonstrations, more words and future demonstrations.

In theory and in practice, words have never been ends for Sartre. They have been signs of human acts, and Sartre's apparent inconsistencies in linguistic theory can be traced to the ever-changing significance of human acts. Sartre's early linguistic sensitivity, similar to Mallarmé's and Valéry's, appears in the later fiction and criticism, the early problems of language having evolved into problems of communication. The urgency and frustration of interpersonal communication experienced during the German occupation has had a lifelong effect on Sartre's writings. The readership of *Les Temps Mo-*

*dernes* is not that of the prewar *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Sartre has tried to write for the masses. As *Being and Nothingness* came to carry the weight of his reputation, Sartre was placed in the unwanted role of spokesman. For remote reasons, critics often considered Sartre's fiction and criticism diluted philosophizing which neglected literary problems but wallowed in ideological flimflam. The appearance of *The Words* was greeted with moans of academic relief for precisely the wrong reasons, a general belief that Sartre had at last returned to literature. He had completed an ideological round-trip and was coming back a humanist! Relief was short-lived. Words alone have never been sufficient to contain Sartre's curiosity. When the early literary problems were pushed aside by the war, Sartre could no longer look back at them in the same way. Having survived the war, he trusted his journalistic career to the *générosité* he had come to know. His commitments to communication warned him against the self-enchantment which he condemned in Baudelaire and Valéry. If he has occasionally betrayed the same temptation to linguistic self-absorption which he has attacked in others, his commitment has remained firm; his perseverance has vindicated his faith in words.

For a long time I took my pen for a sword; I now know we're powerless. No matter, I write and will keep writing books; they're needed; all the same, they do serve some purpose. Culture doesn't save anything or anyone, it doesn't justify. But it's a product of man; he projects himself into it, he recognizes himself in it; that critical mirror alone offers him his image (*The Words*, trans. B. Frechtman, New York: G. Braziller, 1964, pp. 254-55).



Tzvetan Todorov

## the <sup>2</sup> Principles of Narrative



Since narrative is our subject, I shall begin by telling a story.

Ricciardo Minutolo is in love with Catella, Filippello's wife. But Catella does not return his love, despite all his efforts. One day Ricciardo learns that Catella is extremely jealous of her husband and decides to take advantage of this weakness. He publicly displays a loss of interest in Catella; meeting her one day, he confirms this to her in person and at the same time informs her that Filippello has made advances to his

wife. Catella is furious and wants to know everything. Nothing could be easier, answers Ricciardo; Filippello has set up a rendez-vous with his wife the next day in a nearby bathing establishment; Catella can simply go in his wife's place and she will be convinced of her husband's perfidy. She does just that; but in her husband's place, she finds Ricciardo, without recognizing him because the bedroom in which they meet remains totally dark. Catella first responds to the desires of the man whom she believes to be her husband; but immediately afterward she begins to bawl him out, revealing to him that she is not Ricciardo's wife, but Catella. At this point Ricciardo also reveals to her that he is not Filippello. Catella is very upset but Ricciardo convinces her that creating a scandal would do no one any good and that, on the other hand, "the lover's kisses have more savor than those of the husband."

Tzvetan Todorov is one of the founders of the French journal *Poétique*. This text is based upon specific analyses previously published in his *Littérature et signification*, *Grammaire du Décaméron*, *Poétique de la prose* and his introduction to the bilingual edition of Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground*.

diacritics / Fall 1971



So everything comes out well, and Boccaccio adds that when this story (*Decameron* III, 6) was first told, it was welcomed by a chorus of praise.

We have here a series of sentences that everyone would agree to recognize as a narrative. But what is it that *makes* this narrative? Let us return to the beginning of the story. Boccaccio first describes Naples, the setting of the action; then he presents the three protagonists; after which he tells us about Ricciardo's love for Catella. Is this a narrative? Once again I think we can readily agree that it is not. The length of the text is not a deciding factor—only two paragraphs in Boccaccio's tale—but we sense that, even if it were five times this length, things would not have changed. On the other hand, when Boccaccio says, "this was his state of mind when . . ." (and at least in French there is a tense change here from the imperfect to the aorist), the narrative is underway. The explanation seems simple: at the beginning we witness the description of a *state*; yet this is not sufficient for narrative, which requires the development of an *action*, i.e., change, difference.

In effect, every change constitutes a new link in the narrative. Ricciardo learns of Catella's extreme jealousy—which allows him to conceive his plan—after which he can start carrying out the plan—Catella reacts in the desired way—the rendezvous takes place—Catella reveals her real identity—Ricciardo reveals his—the two discover their happiness together. Isolated in this way, each of the actions follows the preceding one and, most of the time, is linked to it in a causal relationship. Catella's jealousy is a *condition* of the plan that will be con-

ceived; the plan has, as a *consequence*, the rendezvous; public blame is *implied* by the adultery, etc.

Both description and narrative presuppose temporality that differs in nature. The initial description was certainly situated in time, but this time was continuous; whereas the changes, characteristic of narrative, cut time into discontinuous unities; the time of pure duration is opposed to the sequential time of events. Description by itself is not enough to constitute a narrative, but narrative itself does not exclude description. If we were to need a generic term including both narrative and description (i.e., texts containing only descriptions), we could use the term, infrequent in French, *fiction*. There would be a double advantage: first, because fiction includes narrative *and* description; then, because in each case it evokes the transitive and referential use that we make of words (and the example of a Raymond Roussel situating the origin of narrative in the distance between two meanings of a word does not contradict this), as opposed to the intransitive, literal use of language in poetry.

This way of looking at narrative as a chronological and sometimes causal sequence of discontinuous units is certainly not new; the work of Propp on the Russian folktale, which arrives at a similar presentation, is widely known today. It will be recalled that Propp calls each of the actions thus isolated a *function*, when the function is envisaged in terms of its utility within the whole of the story; and he postulates the existence of only thirty-one types of functions for all Russian folktales. "If we read consecutively through the list of functions, we see that each function derives from the other through a logical and artistic necessity. We see that no function excludes another. They all belong to the same pivot, and not to several pivots." The functions follow from one another and do not resemble one another.

Propp thus offers an integral analysis of a tale entitled *The Swan-geese*, and it will be useful to recall this analysis here. It is the story of a little girl who forgets to look after her brother; and the swan-geese kidnap him. The little girl sets out to look for him and, judiciously counseled by a hedgehog, manages to find him. She takes him away, the geese give chase, but, with help from the river, the apple tree and the stove, she succeeds in returning home safe and sound with her brother. Propp identifies 27 elements in this narrative, 18 of which are functions (the other elements are descriptions, transitions, etc.), all of which belong to the canonical list of 31. Each of these functions is placed on the same level; each of them is absolutely different from the others; the relationship among them is one of succession.

We can question the precision of this analysis; in particular, we can ask if Propp has not confused generic (and empirical) necessity with theoretical necessity. All of the functions are perhaps equally necessary to the Russian folktale; but are they necessary for the same reasons? Let's try an experiment. When I told you this tale, I omitted a few of the initial functions: for example, the parents had forbidden the daughter to go away from the house, the daughter had preferred to go off to play, etc. The tale was no less a narrative, was fundamentally identical to itself. I could omit certain functions without

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causing a notable modification of the tale. On the other hand, if I had not said that a boy and a girl lived peacefully in their house; or that the geese kidnapped the boy; or that the girl went after him, etc., the tale would no longer have existed, or else it would have been another tale. Consequently, all of the functions are not necessary to the narrative in the same way; here we have to introduce a hierarchical order.

Analyzing *The Swan-geese* in this way, we arrive at the following result: this story includes five indispensable elements—1) the situation of equilibrium at the beginning 2) the breakdown of the situation by the kidnapping of the boy 3) the girl's recognition of the loss of equilibrium 4) the successful search for the boy 5) the re-establishment of the initial equilibrium, the return to the father's house. None of these five actions could have been omitted without causing the tale to lose its identity. Of course we can imagine a tale which omits the first two elements and starts with an already unsatisfactory situation; or which omits the last two, ending in tragedy. But we sense that these would be two hemicycles, whereas we have here the complete cycle. Theoretical studies have shown (and recent empirical research has confirmed) that this cycle is part of the very definition of narrative: one cannot imagine a narrative which does not contain at least one part of it.

The other actions isolated by Propp do not all have the same status. Certain ones are optional, are added to the fundamental scheme. For example, the absence of the girl at the moment of the kidnapping could have been motivated or not. Others are alternative: at least one of them must appear in the tale; it is a matter determining the concrete way in which the action prescribed by the scheme is to be carried out. For example, the girl relocates her brother, but how? Thanks to the intervention of an auxiliary. She could have found him thanks to her ability to run fast, or her powers of divination, etc. Claude Bremond has undertaken the task of describing all the possible alternatives that narrative possesses.

But if we set up a hierarchy of the basic actions in this way, we note that new relationships are established between them: we can no longer be content with temporal or causal sequence. It is obvious that the first element repeats the fifth (the state of equilibrium); and that the third is the inversion of one and five. In addition, the second and the fourth are symmetrical and inverse: the little boy is taken away from his house or taken back. Thus it is not true that the only relationship between the units is one of *succession*; we can say that the relationship of the units must also be one of *transformation*. Here we have the two principles of narrative.

Can a narrative do without the second of these principles, transformation? In dealing with problems of definition and terminology, it is necessary to recognize that these gestures are necessarily somewhat arbitrary. We have before us a continuum of facts and relations; then we draw a boundary-line somewhere, calling whatever lies on one side of it narrative, and whatever lies on the other side non-narrative. But the words of the language that we use take on different nuances for different speakers. We

have just based the opposition of narrative and description on the two kinds of temporality that they display; but some readers would call a book like Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe* a narrative, although it suspends narrative time and presents the variations in the characters' behavior as simultaneous. Likewise for the presence or absence of transformational relationships between the individual actions. A narrative in which they are lacking can be artificially constructed; one might even find, in certain medieval chronicles, concrete examples of a pure principle of succession. But I think we can easily agree that neither these chronicles, nor the novel of Robbe-Grillet, are typical representatives of narrative. I shall say more: bringing out the difference between narrative and description or between the principle of succession and that of transformation allows us to understand why we take such narratives to be, in some sense of the word, marginal. Ordinarily, even the simplest, least developed narrative simultaneously incorporates the two principles; (anecdotal) evidence is offered by the French title of a recent Italian western, *Je vais, je tire, je reviens* (I come, I shoot, I return): hidden behind the apparent purity of succession there is a relationship of transformation between "aller" and "revenir"!

What is the nature of these transformations? The one that we have noted so far consisted in the changing of one term into an opposite or contradictory one. To simplify matters, let us call this *negation*. Lévi-Strauss and Greimas have put great emphasis on this transformation, studying its particular forms, to the point of giving the impression that it is the only one possible. It is true that this transformation enjoys a special status: it doubtless reflects the unique place that negation already occupies within our thought process. The passage from A to non-A is in some sense the paradigm of all change. But this exceptional status still should not go so far as to cover up the existence of other transformations—and we shall see that they are numerous. In the tale analyzed by Propp, we can, for example, observe a modal transformation: interdiction, i.e., a negative obligation imposed by the parents upon the girl, who is not to leave her brother for one moment. Or again, an intentional transformation: the girl decides to leave to look for her brother, then she actually does leave; the relationship of the decision to the departure is that of an intention to its actualization.

If we return now to our tale from the *Decameron*, we can see the same relationships in it. Ricciardo is unhappy in the beginning, happy at the end: thus, negation. He wants to possess Catella, then he does possess her: thus, a modal transformation. Yet, other relationships seem to play a more important role here. The very same action is presented three times: first there is Ricciardo's project of drawing Catella into the bathing establishment; then there is the erroneous perception of this scene by Catella, who thinks she is meeting her husband; finally the real situation is revealed. The relationship between the first and third of these propositions is that of a plan to its realization; in the relationship of the second and third we see the opposition of an erroneous and a correct perception of an event. It is this deception which obviously constitutes the

mainspring of the Boccaccian narrative. A qualitative difference separates the first type of transformation from the second. In the first case, we observe the modification of a basic predicate, which was taken in its positive or negative form, with or without a modal component. In the second case, the initial predicate is accompanied by a second one, so that paradoxically, "to plan" or "to learn" designates an autonomous action, yet, at the same time, can never appear by itself: one always plans for *another* action. Here we see that an opposition between two types of narrative organization is taking shape: on the one hand, a type which combines the principle of succession and the first kind of transformation; these will in some sense be the simplest narratives, and I would like to reserve the term *mythological* for this type of organization. On the other hand, the type of narrative in which the principle of succession is assisted by the second type of transformation, narratives in which the importance of the event is less than that of our perception of the event, of the degree of knowledge that we have about it: this leads me to propose the term *gnoseological* for this second type of narrative organization.

It goes without saying that with an opposition of this type, our aim is not the distribution of all the world's narratives into two piles: on this side, the mythological narratives; on the other, thegnoseological ones. As in any typological study, we are instead seeking to set forth the abstract categories which allow us to account for the real differences between a given narrative and some other. Moreover, a narrative does not have to include just one type of transformation, and not the other. If we return now to the tale *The Swan-geese*, we can also observe in it some traces ofgnoseological organization. For example, the kidnapping of the brother occurred during the girl's absence; in principle, she does not know who is responsible for it, and this would be the point to introduce a search for knowledge. But the tale says simply, "the girl guessed that they had taken away her little brother," without lingering over this process. On the other hand, Boccaccio's tale is based entirely upon ignorance followed by discovery. When seeking to link a given narrative to a given type of narrative organization, we have to look for qualitative or quantitative predominance of certain transformations, not for their exclusive presence.

Let us now look more closely at a narrative withgnoseological organization. A work like *The Quest for the Grail* usually prefaces the sequences which relate material events with others, in which the same events are evoked through predictions. There is a distinctive feature to these suppositional transformations: the characters always carry them out, and even perceive them as a moral imperative. Thus the outcome of the plot is related in the first pages by Perceval's aunt: "For well do we know, in this country as in other places, that in the end three knights, more than all the others, will have the glory of the quest: two will be virgins and the third will be chaste. Of the two virgins, one will be the knight for whom you are searching, and you will be the other; the third will be Bohort de Gaunes. These three will finish the quest." Or, there is Perceval's sister, who foresees the place where her brother and Galahad will

die: "For my honor, have me buried in the Spiritual Palace. Do you know why I request that of you? Because Perceval will lie there and you nearby him." Generally speaking, in the entire second part of the book, the actions that will take place are first announced by Perceval's sister in the form of imperative predictions.

These suppositional transformations preceding the event are complimented by others that we remember only when the event has already taken place. As he proceeds on his way, Galahad chances to be led into a monastery; the adventure of the shield gets underway; but just as it ends, a heavenly knight appears and declares that everything has been foreseen. " 'Here then is what you shall do,' said Joseph. 'There where Nascien will be buried, place the shield. It is there that Galahad will come, five days after having been received into the order of knighthood. Everything has been carried out as he had announced it, since on the fifth day you arrived in this abbey where Nascien's body lies.' " The same is true for Gawain: he receives a hard blow from Galahad's sword and immediately remembers: "Thus is confirmed the Utterance that I heard on the day of Pentecost, concerning the sword which I struck. It was announced to me that before long I should receive a terrible blow from it, and it is this very sword with which this knight has just struck me. The deed has indeed occurred just as it was foretold to me."

But still more than by this particular suppositional transformation constituted by the "announcement," *The Quest for the Grail* is characterized by another transformation, this time one of knowledge, which consists in a reinterpretation of previous events. In general, all earthly actions are interpreted by *prud'hombres* and hermits from a heavenly perspective; often purely terrestrial revelations are added. Thus, when we read the beginning of the *Quest*, we believe we understand everything: here are the noble knights who decide to undertake the quest, etc. But the narrative provides us, little by little, with another meaning of these same scenes: thus Lancelot, whom we thought to be strong and perfect, is an incorrigible sinner: he lives in adultery with queen Guinevere. Sir Gawain, who was the first to vow to undertake the quest, will never complete it, for his heart is hard and he fails to think enough about God. The knights whom we admire at the beginning are inveterate sinners who will be punished: they have not been to confession for years. The events of the beginning are evoked again but this time we see them from the vantage point of truth and not from that of deceitful appearance.

Here the reader's interest does not stem from the question "what happens afterward?" which sends us back to the principle of succession or to the mythological narrative. From the start we know perfectly well what will happen, who will find the Grail, who will be punished and why. Our interest derives from an entirely different question, one which refers to thegnoseological organization and which is: what is the Grail? This narrative, like so many others, tells the story of a quest; what is sought, however, is not an object, but a meaning: that of the word Grail. And since the question bears upon meaning



rather than upon action, the exploration of the future will give way to the exploration of the past. All through the narrative we will ask about the meaning of the Grail; the principal narrative is a narrative of knowledge; ideally, it never stops.

The search for knowledge also dominates another type of narrative which one might hesitate to connect with *The Quest for the Grail*: the detective or mystery novel. We know that the latter is grounded in the tension between two stories: the missing story of the crime, and the presented story of the investigation, the sole justification of which is to make us discover the first story. One element of this story is in fact told to us at the outset: a crime is committed almost under our nose; but we have not learned the identity of the criminals nor the true motives. The investigation consists in reviewing incessantly the same events, in verifying and correcting the tiniest details until, in the end, the truth about this same initial story is revealed; it is a narrative of apprenticeship. But unlike the *Grail*, knowledge is characterized here by its capacity to have only two values: true or false. We know or do not know the killer's identity, whereas the quest for meaning in the *Grail* includes innumerable intermediate degrees of knowledge, and even in the end, we cannot be sure that it is complete.

If we now take as a third example a tale by Henry James, we shall see that there can be still other forms of the gnoseological search. Here, as in the detective novel, we are seeking the truth about a material event, not an abstract entity; but, as in *The Quest for the Grail*, at the end of the book we are not sure of possessing the truth; rather, we have passed from our initial ignorance to a lesser ignorance. For example, *In the Cage* tells the story of a young woman, a telegraph operator, who concentrates her full attention upon two persons whom she hardly knows, Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen. She reads the telegrams that these characters send, she hears bits of sentences; but, despite her aptitude for imagining the missing elements, she does not manage to reconstitute a faithful portrait of the two unknown persons. Moreover, meeting the captain in person does not give her a better view of things: she can see how he is built physically, observe his gestures, listen to his voice, but his "essence" remains quite as intangible, if not more so, than when the windowed cage separated them. The senses retain only appearances: the truth is inaccessible to them.

Comprehension is made especially difficult by the fact that the telegraph operator pretends to know much more than she actually does when, in certain circumstances, she can question intermediary characters. Thus, when she meets a friend, Mrs. Jordan, the latter asks her: "Why, don't you know the scandal? She [the telegraph operator] fell back for a moment on the following remark: Oh, there was nothing public."

James will always refuse to name directly the "truth" or the "essence" which exists only in the form of multiple appearances. This decision will have a profound effect on the organization of his works and will draw his attention to the techniques of "point of view," to what he himself terms "that magnificent and masterly indirectness." *In the Cage* presents the

perception of the telegraph operator bearing upon that of Mrs. Jordan who, in turn, tells what she has drawn out of her fiancé Mr. Drake who, in turn, knows Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen only casually!

Once again, the process of knowledge is *dominant* in James' tale, although it does not exclude every other one. *In the Cage* also follows a mythological organization: the opening equilibrium of the telegraph operator is disturbed by the meeting with the captain; at the end of the narrative, however, she will return to her initial project, which was to marry Mr. Mudge. On the other hand, alongside those which are properly termed transformations of knowledge, there are other transformations, which possess the same formal properties without bearing upon the same process (the term "gnoseological" is no longer appropriate here): this, in particular, is the case of what we might call "subjectivation," the personal reaction or stance taken in the face of an event. *Remembrance of Things Past* will develop this latter transformation to the point of hypertrophy: the slightest incident of life, like the grain of sand around which a pearl may form, will serve as a pretext for long descriptions of the manner in which the event is experienced by one character or another.

Here it is necessary to distinguish between two ways of judging transformations: according to their *formative* power or according to their *evocative* power. By formative power, I mean the aptitude of a transformation to form, by itself, a narrative sequence. It is hard to imagine (although not impossible) a narrative which would contain only transformations of subjectivation, which, in other words, would be limited to the description of an event and the reactions which it provokes in various characters. Even Proust's novel includes elements of a mythological narrative: the narrator's inability to write will be overcome; Swann's way and the Guermantes' way, at first separated, will be joined by the marriage of Gilberte with Saint-Loup; etc. Negation is evidently a transformation with great formative power; yet the combination ignorance (or error)/knowledge also serves quite often as the framework for narratives. The other techniques of mythological narrative seem less apt (in our culture, at any rate) to form sequences by themselves. A narrative including only modal transformations would actually be more like a moral and didactic work, in which the sequences would be of the type "X should act like a good Christian—X acts like a good Christian." A narrative formed solely by intentional transformations would be akin to certain passages of *Robinson Crusoe*: Robinson decides to build himself a house—he builds himself a house; Robinson decides to enclose his garden—he encloses his garden.

But this formative (or, if you prefer, syntactical) power of certain transformations should not be confused with what we value especially in a narrative, or with what is richest in meaning, or with what allows us to make a precise distinction of one work from another. I remember that one of the most intriguing scenes of a recent spy film, *The Ipcress File*, consisted in showing us the principal hero in the process of making an omelet. Naturally, the narrative importance of this episode was nil (he could

have casually eaten a ham sandwich); but this captivating scene became almost the emblem of the entire film. This is what I call the evocative power of an action; it seems to me that a given fictional universe, as distinguished from some other, is primarily characterized by transformations of manner; but, by themselves, they could not generate, without considerable difficulty, an autonomous narrative sequence.

Now that we have begun to familiarize ourselves with this opposition between the principles of succession and of transformation (as well as the subdivisions of the latter), we might wonder if, in fact, it does not amount to the opposition which Jakobson makes between metonymy and metaphor. This connection is possible but does not seem necessary. It is difficult to assimilate all transformations to relationships of similarity, just as it is difficult, moreover, to assimilate all similarity to metaphor. Succession gains nothing, either, by being named metonymy or contiguity, especially since one is essentially temporal, the other, spatial. The connection would be all the more problematic since, according to Jakobson, "the principle of similarity governs poetry" and since "prose, on the other hand, moves essentially in relationships of contiguity"; whereas from our point of view, the principle of succession and the principle of transformation are equally necessary to narrative. If we had had to oppose narrative and poetry (or epic and lyric), we would have done so, first, (and here in agreement with Jakobson) on the basis of the transitive or intransitive character of the sign; second, on the basis of the nature of the temporality which is represented: discontinuous in narrative, perpetual present (which is not to say a-temporality) in poetry; third, on the basis of the nature of the nouns which occupy the position of semantic subject, or topic: narrative allows only particular nouns in the position of the subject, poetry allows general as well as particular nouns. As for philosophical discourse, it would be characterized both by the exclusion of particular nouns and by a-temporality; poetry would then be an intermediate form between narrative discourse and philosophical discourse.

But let us get back to narrative and ask instead if all the relationships of one action to another can be distributed between mythological type and the gnoseological type. The tale analyzed by Propp included an episode which I did not stop to discuss. Having set out to look for her brother, the little girl met some possible benefactors. First, a stove, from which she requested information, and who promised it to her on the condition that she eat some of its bread; but the girl, who was insolent, refused to do so. Next, she met an apple tree and a river: "analogous propositions, same insolence in her replies." Propp designates these three episodes by the term "triple testing," a very frequent device in folklore.

What is the exact relationship between these three episodes? We have seen that, in transformations, two propositions are brought into connection; the difference resides in a modification of the predicate. But in the three actions described by Propp, it is precisely the predicate which remains the same: in each case, the one offers, the other refuses insolently. What changes are the agents (the subjects) of

each proposition, or the circumstantial factors. Rather than transformations of one another, these propositions appear to be *variations* of a single situation, or parallel applications of the same rule.

One might then conceive of a third type of narrative organization, not mythological or gnoseological, but, shall we say, *ideological*, insofar as it is an abstract rule, an idea, which produces the different adventures. The relationship which holds among the propositions is no longer direct, we no longer pass from the negative to the positive form, or from ignorance to knowledge; the actions are linked by the intermediary of an abstract formula: that of the help offered and the insolent refusal, in the case of *The Swan-geese*. Often, in order to find the relationship between two actions which, materially, are entirely distinct, we have to look for it on a high level of abstraction.

I have attempted, for several texts, to describe the logical rules, the ideological imperatives, which control the events of the narrative universe (but one could also do so for each of the previously evoked narratives). Thus, the example of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*: all the actions of the characters can be presented as the products of a few very simple and very abstract rules: these rules, in turn, refer back to the organizing ideology of the book. Here are a few examples:

The first rule formulated concerns the love relationships of the characters: "Given two actors, A and B, and that A loves B. Then A acts so as to achieve the realization of the proposition 'A is loved by B'." In other words, desire is regularly followed by efforts to obtain what is desired. Thus Valmont, in love with Tourvel, does everything to make the latter love him in return. Danceny, in love with Cécile, proceeds in the same way; and likewise, Merteuil or Cécile.

Second rule: "Given two actors, A and B, and that A loves B on the level of being but not on that of appearance (i.e., he is not conscious of it). If A becomes conscious of the level of being, he acts against this love." An example of the application of this rule is furnished by the behavior of Mme de Tourvel when she realizes that she loves Valmont: she hurriedly leaves the chateau and herself impedes the development of this feeling. The same is true for Danceny, when he believes that his relationship with Merteuil is merely one of close friendship: by showing him that this is a love identical to what he feels for Cécile, Valmont induces him to renounce this new *liaison*.

Third rule: "Given two actors, A and B, and that B is the confidante of A. If A becomes the subject of a proposition generated by the first rule (above), he changes confidantes (the absence of a confidante representing the ultimate in confidence)." Cécile changes confidantes (from Sophie to Mme de Merteuil) as soon as her *liaison* with Valmont begins; likewise, Mme de Tourvel, having fallen in love with Valmont, takes Mme de Rosemonde for her confidante; for the same reason, in a less pronounced way, she had stopped confiding in Mme de Volanges. His love for Cécile leads Danceny to confide in Valmont; his *liaison* with Merteuil interrupts this confidence.

Thus apparently independent actions, carried out by different characters and in various circumstances, reveal their kinship, serving to illustrate or exemplify a common ideology.

Likewise, in Constant's *Adolphe*. Here there are essentially two rules which govern the behavior of the characters. The first derives from the structure of desire as it is presented by this book and can be formulated as follows: one desires what one does not have, one flees from what one has. Consequently, obstacles reinforce desire, and any assistance weakens it. There is a first blow to Adolphe's love when Ellénore leaves the comte de P. to come to live with him; a second when she dedicates herself to caring for him after he is wounded. Each sacrifice by Ellénore exasperates Adolphe: it leaves him still fewer things to desire. By way of contrast, when Adolphe's father decides to separate the two of them, there is an inverse effect, which Adolphe enunciates explicitly: "While believing that you are separating me from her, you may well be binding me to her forever." The tragic nature of this situation results from the fact that desire, although obedient to this uncommon principle, does not therefore cease to be desire, i.e., to cause the unhappiness of whoever is unable to satisfy it.

The second law of this universe, also a moral one, will be formulated by Constant in this way: "The great question in life is the suffering that one causes, and the most ingenious metaphysics does not justify the man who has broken a heart which loved him." Since one person's happiness always means the unhappiness of the other, it is not possible to base one's life upon the search for contentment. But one can organize it around the requirement that he cause as little pain as possible: this negative value will be the only one to have an absolute status in *Adolphe*. The commandments of this law take precedence over those of the first rule, when the two come into conflict. This is what will make it so hard for Adolphe to tell the "truth" to Ellénore. "Speaking in this way, I saw her face become suddenly covered with tears: I stopped, I retraced my steps, I retracted, I explained" (Chapter IV). In Chapter VI, Ellénore hears the whole story: she falls down, unconscious, and Adolphe can only reassure her of his love. In chapter VIII, he has a pretext for leaving her, but he will not take advantage of it: "Could I punish her for the imprudent actions that I was causing her to commit, and, as a cold hypocrite, seize upon her imprudence as a pretext for pitilessly abandoning her?" Pity comes ahead of desire.

Once again, then, isolated, independent actions, often carried out by different characters, reveal the same abstract rule, the same ideological organization.

I would like to give one last example of this ideological organization by recalling the adventures described in the second part of Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground*. The principle which the narrator and the other characters (the insolent officer, Zverkov, the schoolmates, Apollo) obey is that of the master and the slave. It requires that, when two individuals meet, one of them occupy, as soon as possible, the position of a superior, for otherwise he risks finding himself in the inferior position. Equal-

ity is unknown in this world, and to demand equality amounts to recognizing one's inferiority. But the status of superiority, once attained, does not bring with it the anticipated satisfaction: only the process of becoming master is significant; once acquired, superiority loses its meaning. Despite the meager happiness that characters find in the roles that this structure offers them, they cannot do without it: for they have discovered that their very existence depends upon a relationship of otherness (*altérité*), and this they are sure to find in the interplay of master and slave.

Thus, in the first episode, the narrator picks a fight with an unknown officer; he dreams of having himself thrown out; this he does solely because the fight implies his recognition by the look of the other person. Next he devotes his efforts to provoking a dispute on the Nevski perspective, in which he will not give ground to the officer. And when his wishes are fulfilled—both of them have to back off somewhat—he concludes with satisfaction: "I publicly placed myself on an equal social footing with him." Likewise with Zverkov: he participates in the dinner offered to him, although foreseeing the humiliation that he will have to undergo; but, by this very act, he will affirm his existence. Along with these roles of the slave, the narrator also knows the role of the master; he finds it in particular in his relationship with Lisa, whom he needs to belittle in order to be able to affirm his superiority: thus he will draw a black picture of the life and death of prostitutes; or again, he will remind Lisa of her condition by giving her money at the very moment when she least expects it.

The ideological organization seems to possess a weak formative power: it is rare to find a narrative which would not place the actions produced by it in another framework, which would not add a second organization to this first one. For, the illustration of a principle or an ideology can go on indefinitely, and there is no reason for a given illustration to precede—or to follow—some other one. Thus, in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* the actions which have been described are taken up again within a framework which stems from the mythological organization: the exceptional condition which is constituted by the domination of the "roués," Valmont and Merteuil, will be replaced by a return to the traditional order.

The case of *Adolphe* and *Notes from the Underground* is a bit different. Another order, which is not simply the absence of the preceding one, is established, and it is constructed with relations that might be termed "spatial": repetitions, antitheses and gradations. Thus in *Adolphe*, the succession of the chapters follows a clear-cut line: portrait of Adolphe in the first; build-up of emotions in chapters II and III; the slow decline of these emotions in IV-X. Each new manifestation of Adolphe's feelings has to be more intense than the preceding one in the first part, less intense in the second part. The end becomes possible thanks to an event which seems to have an exceptional narrative status, death. In the *Notes from the Underground*, the succession of events simultaneously observes a principle of gradation and a law of contrast. The scene with the officer



presents in abridged form the two roles open to the narrator; next he is humiliated by Zverkov, then he in turn humiliates Lisa; he is humiliated again by his servant Apollo and again humiliates Lisa with still more severity. The narrative pattern is broken by the enunciation of a different ideology, represented by Lisa, which consists in refusing the master-slave principle and in loving others for themselves.

Once again, then, we see that individual narratives exemplify more than one type of narrative organization (in fact, any one of them could have served to illustrate all of the organizing principles); but the analysis of one of these types is more illuminating for the understanding of a particular text than the analysis of another. We might make an analogous observation on a very different level: a narrative analysis will be illuminating for the study of certain types of texts, and not for others. For what we were studying here is not the *text*, with its own varieties, but *narrative*, which can play either an important or a negligible role in the structure of a text, and which, on the other hand, appears both in literary texts and in other symbolic systems. Today it is a fact that it is no longer literature which pro-

vides the narratives which every society seems to need in order to live, but film-makers tell us stories whereas writers deal with the play of words. The typological remarks which I have just offered relate then, in principle, not specifically to literary narratives, from which I drew all of my examples, but to all kinds of narrative; they pertain less to *poetics* than to a discipline which seems to me to have a solid claim to the right of existence, and which could be called *narratology*.<sup>1</sup>

(Translated by Philip E. Lewis)

<sup>1</sup>Key critical references for the preceding discussion include: V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics, 1958); Claude Lévi-Strauss, "La Structure et la forme," *Cahiers de l'Institut de Science Economique Appliquée* (series M, no. 7, 1960), pp. 3-36; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques* (Paris: Plon, 1964 sq.) 4 vols.; A. J. Griemas, *Séman-tique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966); Claude Bremond, "La Logique des possibles narratifs," *Communications* (Fall, 1966), pp. 60-76; Claude Bremond, "The Morphology of the French Folktale," *Semiotica* (Fall, 1970), pp. 247-276.

## interview / Claude Lévi-Strauss

The following interview is a translation of the integral transcript, a shortened version of which was published earlier this year in *L'Express*.

*Q.*— You are one of the greatest living ethnologists as well as the founder of structural anthropology. Do you consider the human sciences to be sciences?

*L.-S.*— I don't know if we must totally despair, but in any event, they are far from it. The physical and natural sciences have achieved this stage by succeeding in isolating for each type of problem a small number of significant variables at the heart of quite complex phenomena. We of the human sciences, or those claiming such status, remain overwhelmed and submerged by the number of variables and all the more so since, for us at the outset, this number is incomparably higher.

Besides, science studies objects, and it is particularly difficult for man to agree to become an object for himself by making an abstraction of his subjective existence, since he is at the same time both subject and object. One can foresee that, as they progress, the human sciences, much more than their sister fields, will be constantly running into this irreducible antinomy.

*Q.*— What significance do you attribute to your research?

*L.-S.*— What one calls, correctly or not, structuralism constitutes precisely an attempt, in a few fixed

and limited areas, to circumvent this twofold obstacle. Structuralism tends towards objectivity by considering preferably those phenomena which develop outside the disturbances and illusions of conscious thought processes, and for which it is possible to restrict oneself to a relatively limited number of variables which may explain the diverse forms that the same phenomena take on in different societies.

But, proceeding in this manner, one can only hope for a little improvement in our understanding of things which until then remained incomprehensible, still knowing well that neither we nor anyone else will ever fully understand them. After all, the only way to reduce life's boredom lies in our pursuit of knowledge. That's our best, perhaps our only justification.

*Q.*— What do you think of the vogue of structuralism?

*L.-S.*— One always feels a little bit amused and flattered by all of the attention one gets, even if it's annoying to be sought after for all sorts of things which have no justification whatsoever: such as formulating a message, setting forth a philosophy, while I feel I am devoting myself to specific craft-like tasks.

Further, structuralism's momentary vogue has