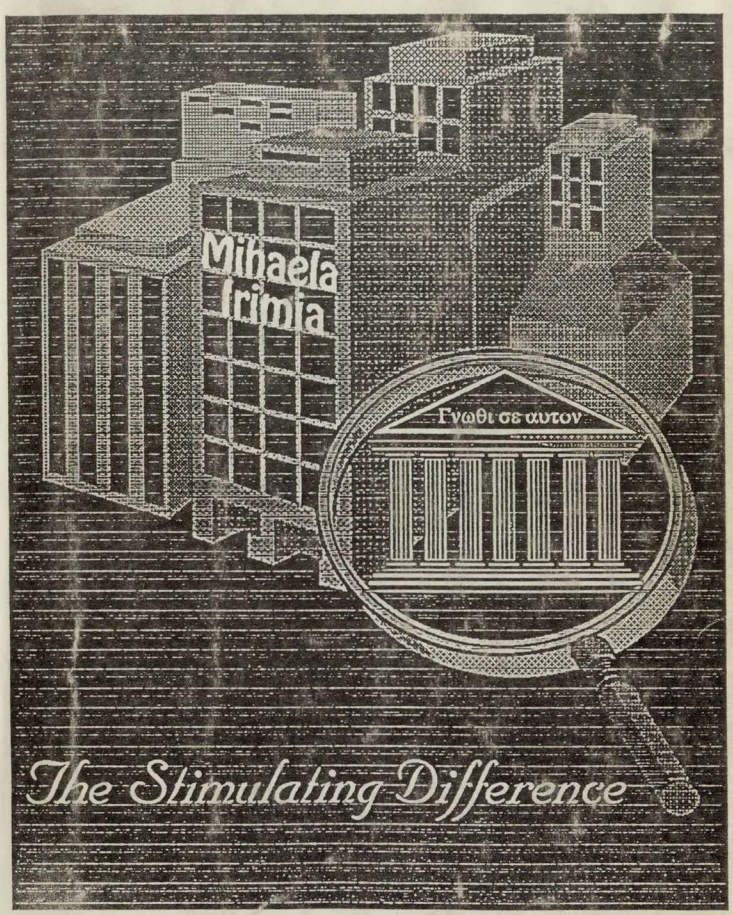

The Stimulating Difference

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THE STIMULATING DIFFERENCE

(Avatars of a Concept)

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CONTENTS

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This book has been some time in the making. It indirectly originates in a course in poetics, which I started offering in the mid-80's. I had then taught 18th-century, and Romantic, literature, for about a decade. Readings in Post-Structuralist Criticism gradually made me aware that Enlightenment, and Romantic, literature, on the one hand, and, at least Deconstruction, on the other, could not be separated from each other.

The sources I had access to in the 80's were rather scanty and only sporadically up-to-date. This became a serious problem in the early 90's. Then came a godsend: in the autumn of 1992, I competed for a Post-Doctoral Fulbright Scholarship, and won it. Of all universities, I was accepted by Harvard, and, of all people by Prof. Barbara Johnson, in the spring of 1993.

The academic year 1993-94 spent at Harvard remains a unique experience. The magnificent libraries that Cambridge, Massachusetts boasts (of which Widener, the biggest university library in the world), the incredible multiple resources of this prestigious forum, whose other wealth is the profusion of celebrities haunting the place, either as permanent faculty, or as visiting scholars, and the general cultural atmosphere, make it difficult for me to do justice to the many strands that make up this book.

Among those who have contributed with illuminating discussions and stimulating commentaries to the thinking and writing of this book, however, I feel it a moral duty to mention: Leo Damrosch, James Engell, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Seamus Heaney, Anthony Kubiak, Jurij Striedter, Helen Vendler (Harvard University), Ştefan Stoenescu (Cornell University), Stephen Greenblatt (University of California, Berkeley), Michael Fischer and James Thorson (University of New Mexico, Albuquerque), Virgil Nemoianu (The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.), Christine Raffini (University of Miami), Mihai Spariosu (University of Georgia, Athens), Kevin Cope (Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge), Richard Larsham (University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth), Andrew Sanders (Birkbeck College, University of London), Tzvetan Todorov (Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, Paris).

Other intellectual debts are obvious in my references and notes.

Grateful acknowledgement is extended to the Fulbright Programs, without whose support I would have never enjoyed the pleasure of reading at the source, and of making up endless bibliography lists on computers produced by the latest technology.

My special thanks and gratitude to Prof. Barbara Johnson for having been my academic sponsor cannot be phrased in words.

My husband and our daughter's patience and understanding during our stay in Cambridge, when they were not once turned away from the study door deserve remarking.

This book is dedicated to my students.

Dr. Mihaela Irimia

Cambridge, Massachusetts – 24 March, 1994
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INTRODUCTION

A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory by Raman Selden[1] introduces the different viewpoints in criticism supposed to characterize the field, by recourse to Roman Jakobson's celebrated diagram:

CONTEXT
ADDRESSER → MESSAGE → ADDRESSEE
CODE

Coupled with it, the following diagram drives the argument home, or, so to say, to a more linguistic home:

CONTEXT
WRITER → WRITING → READER
CODE

By attaching a linguistic function to each of these elements, Selden derives his own diagram:

REFERENTIAL
EMOTIVE → POETIC → CONNOTATIVE
METALINGUISTIC

This, Selden maintains, is retraceable in yet another diagram, in which he is ready to place the various currents that he sees operating in 'contemporary literary theory:

MARXIST
ROMANTIC → FORMALISTIC → READER-ORIENTED
STRUCTURALIST

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[1] Raman Selden, **A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory**, The University of Kentucky Press, published in Great Britain, 1989.

A few things will arrest our attention as we comment on Selden's proposed schema. To start with, Selden talks about a number of viewpoints in criticism, but signs a guide to literary theory. As we read his elegant presentation of such currents as Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism, we become aware of how thin the demarcation line between criticism and theory has grown. Thus, while this is an easy tendency to notice in Deconstruction or in Feminism, Phenomenology or critical discourse on power are no less 'theories' building up in the critical process. The traditional difference between literary criticism and literary theory seems to have been seriously challenged. 'Lit. crit.' now sponges on theory shamefacedly *and* shamelessly, and theory appears to be the end product of a subtle and at times arcane critical process. More than ever, as it were, the deep and complex meaning of criticism is revealed. *Κρίνειν*, in classic Greek, was the capacity in people to choose and pick out, to discern, and, by way of consequence, to decide, judge, estimate, and pass sentences upon things. *Κρίσις* denoted the attitude or disposition in which a *κριτής* found himself. The attitude was one of separating, differentiating among the various aspects of a case, as, principally, in trials. The person thus engaged in the process was the judge, decider or umpire called upon to use all the (critical) acumen, and (moral) responsibility that he was capable of. His attitude was *κριτική*.

The other thing to comment on is the linguistic bent noticeable in 'literary' criticism, and theory, for that matter. When he replaces the median line in his diagram, Jakobson operates a shift whose articulations are:

ADDRESSER → WRITER
MESSAGE → WRITING
ADDRESSEE → READER

Communication in general, and communication in particular. Communication as an irrepressible drive and necessity in nature to open dialogues with whatever lies outside the limits of any distinct (id)entity, to relate ITSELF to the OTHER. And communication as the irrepressible drive and necessity in the human race to articulate their likes and dislikes, their preferences and refusals, in a word, to judge. This is the critical act *par excellence*. There is no judging without differentiating. And there is no difference without the critical eye able to grasp it. The ancient Greeks called the power of viewing, examining, and speculating on things σκέψις. A person engaged in such a process was a σκεπτικός. The name came to be given to Pyrrho's philosophical school, the Sceptics, whose belief in the unattainable truth of certain knowledge required of the 'viewer' a suspension of judgement, to the benefit of mere opinion. This, the Sceptics maintained, was conducive to genuine wisdom and happiness. Few people today realize that a 'viewer' as 'spectator', in the classic Greek antiquity, was a θεωρός, and that the activity he was engaged in was called θεωρία.

Theory is thus the source *and* result of criticism. It seemed fair that this differentiation -- an acknowledgement at the same time of SAMENESS and of OTHERNESS -- be made in the introduction to a book on DIFFERENCE. As it seemed fair that communication as exchange between different identities be understood and defended in terms of SELF and OTHER. It also seemed fair that the evolution in literary theory/criticism from Formalism and Structuralism to Post-Structuralism be considered in terms of linguistic/literary concepts. At no point in the following analysis did it appear possible for difference to be avoided.

Part of an ampler project, this book deals with some of the tendencies in, and some of the names that have established and confirmed the dignity of, Formalism and Structuralism in Anglo-

American literary theory/criticism. Dealing with the basic concept of difference, it could not remain blind to the paradoxical situation where literary theory/criticism in the English-speaking world is massively represented by non-English speaking *and* non-Anglo-American theorists/critics. The novelty cultivated by Russian Formalism, the stupendous work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes's epoch-making interventions, and Tzvetan Todorov's fascinating contributions are felt as consubstantial with the newly acquired status of literary theory/criticism in the academia. This book stops to consider their respective theoretical/critical stands, aware that what was once Anglo-Saxon pragmatism has undergone a sea-change owing to the influx of French speculation, and Russian-Czech linguistic conscience. Michel Foucault is obviously mentioned, but not treated in a separate chapter. While Foucault cannot be omitted from any analysis of Structuralism, it was felt that he would find his place more convincingly in a further study dealing with Post-Structuralism.

The list of names and critical stands submitted to the reader's attention is selective. It remains therefore open. It could have comprised names like Michael Riffaterre, Jonathan Culler, Fredric Jameson, Gerard Genette, A.J. Greimas, or Robert Scholes, and could have allotted each a separate chapter. As the book was being written, it was felt that it would be normal for its author to concentrate on those attitudes that have most prominently shaped a critical disposition in the academia. Devised and composed while its author was doing a postdoctoral research at Harvard University as a Fulbright professor, it assumed the present contours largely under the impact of what has been happening in 'lit. crit.', 'theory', and teaching in English-speaking universities, for roughly the last quarter of a century. What I could test on the spot at Harvard, and in a number of other places (Cornell University; University of

California, Berkeley; University of Miami; The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.; Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; University of Georgia, Athens) has been confirmed as being the case in such British Universities as University of London, Leeds University, Warwick University, University of East Anglia, Manchester University, University of Edinburgh, Glasgow University. In all these fora, Formalism is above all the contribution of the Russian school, Structuralism, that of French sophistication and idiosyncracy as in Barthes, the passage to Post-Structuralism something like the Todorov case. In all of these, Bakhtin is the master to whom low bows are made on a daily basis, in lectures and seminars. It was deemed appropriate that they be brought into focus.

* * * *

The final bedrock of Formalism, as of Structuralism, is the nature of language. Unlike *engagé* Post-Structuralism, they do not deal with the material and historical existence of human societies, do not find determinism of this kind relevant, opt out for some solution or other to consider the work as autotelic, and reject any idea of meaning, function of the substance of the text. They are instead interested in relations holding the work together as form or/and structure. In so doing, they "challenge some of the most cherished ideas of the ordinary reader (with his fatal philistine and anti-intellectual attitude)"[1]: that the work is the child of the author's creative life, and the expression of his own self, that the text contains the thoughts and feelings of the author, that art tells the truth about human life. They promote instead ideas such as: the author is 'dead', the work

[1] Raman Selden, *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

does not speak about anything outside its own boundaries, the truth of art is not subject to the truth function of science or of life, for that matter. As a result, motivation is abolished, because it is based on the illusion of 'realism', and Formalism and Structuralism do not seek motivation in 'content'. After Barthes's proclaimed 'death of the author', writers have no other power than to combine already existing writings, and "to draw upon that immense dictionary of language and culture which is 'always already written'"[1].

The need for order characterizes both Formalism's and Structuralism's assiduous search for schemes and schemata organizing the body of the work. In a very persuasive demonstration, Peter Caws sees in structuralism 'the art of the intelligible'[2]. A way of looking at the intelligibility of the human sciences, Structuralism is presented as a philosophical position that has never been dead. Caws's own article on it, in *Partisan Review* (1968)[3], brought to the fore the leading figures of the 60's: Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault. It has been remarked less forcibly that the '68 and the ensuing growing interest in 'human sciences' were the beginning of the end of Formalism and Structuralism. A sense of relativity fed on such notions as cultural specificity, the centre - margin dialectics, and the free play of language was starting to replace the sense of confidence in order that the classic structuralists had been after. The late 60's still believed in a deep structure giving coherence to the 'social sciences', and in some intentionality which was the only one element of

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[2] Peter Caws, **Structuralism: The Art of the Intelligible**. Humanities Press International, Inc., Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1988. All quotations and references to Caws's book are based on this edition.

[3] Peter Caws, 'What Is Structuralism?', *Partisan Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Winter 1968, pp. 75-91.

significance relevant for the work. Structuralism was understood as a subdiscipline of philosophy, whose last revolutionary was Immanuel Kant. Along the Kantian line, structuralists such as Cassirer were seen trying to grasp those features that, even though not apparent, were considered able to make our experience of the world, and the world itself congruent. They were described attempting to see human intelligence at work in the artefacts of culture. Lévi-Strauss's fascinating theory was admired: the emergence of writing marks the passage of human society from the clock to the engine type of organization, from cold to hot, or else from a tendency in each society to maintain itself in its initial state to a tendency to change, function of a difference in temperature between its parts, as manifest in social hierarchy. And Lévi-Strauss's thesis was emphasized: what matters in the primitives' pleasure for *bricolage* is not the material used, but the structure identified as a moulder of that material. The observation came very close to the formalist tenet: it is 'literariness', not literature as such that the critic is after. Behind Cassirer's project, and, more largely, Kant's, the human mind operating a structuring activity by trafficking ideas was the structuralists' object of interest in the late 60's.

Caws offers a short historical survey encompassing the events of a full half century's Structuralism: the 1916 posthumous publication of Saussure's **Cours de linguistique générale**; the 1928 first International Congress of Linguistics at the Hague, where Jakobson and Troubezkoy present structuralist concepts for the first time, to be followed by Jakobson's 1929 christening of 'the structuralist method'; 1944, the *annus mirabilis* of New York refugee circles (bringing Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss together); Lévi-Strauss's 1945 seminal contribution on **Les structures élémentaires de la parenté**; Ernst Cassirer's **Philosophy of Symbolic Forms** (1953-57); Barthes's **Système de la mode** (1967); eventually, the '68. In all these Caws seems

to see something rising up to Chomsky's search for a "system of rules" (47), a grammar regulated by mind or reason, which, in the good Kantian tradition, is an autonomous province of being. (48) In all these Caws seems to see something like Peirce's theory of signs known as '*phaneroscopy*', from Peirce's own coinage, '*phaneron*', "the collective total of all that is in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not". (46) In all these Caws seems to see René Girard's theory in **La violence et le sacré** (1972)[1]: structural order dominates the world in a conceptual sense; it appeases and neutralizes violence, which breaks out exactly where and when structural differentiation fails. (52)

Structure as system is Caws's main concern when he discerns a structuralist bent even in Wellek and Warren's distinction between literature assimultaneous order and literature as chronological order. Jonathan Culler's **Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature** (1975)[2] makes the structuralist linguistic stand more than clear from its very title, and on its basis proposes a differential model of text analysis. When he evinces a linguistic base in Saussurean and post-Saussurean Structuralism, Caws focuses on language as purely relational, and as only one among the structures of human intelligibility. Language is the most obvious paradigm of human intelligibility, because of its dominance. (59) In Saussure's definition of the sign as concept and sound image, Caws understands language as perceived difference which produces significance. He subtly points out the role of convention: by combination, the negative values assume positive meaning or relevance. This, Caws notices, makes it possible for the linguist to reduce, throughout the system of language,

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[1] René Girard, **La violence et le sacré**, Paris: Grasset, 1972.

[2] Jonathan Culler, **Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature**, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.

absolute to relative arbitrariness. Most exciting is the position adopted by Pike[1], who, taking over the Saussurean opposition between the phonetic and the phonemic, develops a theory of 'etic' - 'emic' opposition, in which the emic viewpoint studies behaviour from inside the system. Pike's conclusion is the corollary of a consistent structuralist stand: any event has etic features, no event can be etically null; an event can be emically null; the problem is to know what etic features are emically significant -- which puts one in mind of the Jakobsonian syntagmatic combination raised to paradigmatic motivation. Finally, Troubetzkoy's symmetrical schemata are the apotheosis of structuralist binary oppositions, whose basic oppositional pair remains phonetics vs. phonology, the latter with the internal characteristics of the emic; whereas the phonetician is an atomist dealing with independently occurring elements, the phonologist is a structuralist who perceives elements as relational and differential.(85) Enlarging upon Nicholas Troubetzkoy's privative oppositions, Jakobson makes the discovery of the ideological use to which one of the terms -- the one lacking the mark in question -- can be put, as in same vs. different, self vs. other, Roman vs. barbarian, Gentile vs. Jew, Christian vs. heathen. A display of structuralist rigour gives elegance to Jakobson's demonstration of the passage from babbling to articulated speech.[2] Thus, Jakobson sustains, "in place of the phonetic abundance of babbling, the phonemic poverty of the first linguistic stage appears, a kind of deflation which transforms the so-called 'wild sounds' of the babbling period into entities of linguistic value". (90)

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[1] Kenneth L. Pike, **Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior**, The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967.

[2] Roman Jakobson, **Child Language, Aphasia, and Phonological Universals**, trans. A.R. Keiler, The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1968.

This reduction, in Troubetzkoy's words, of all systems to a limited number of schemata, like Jakobson's passage from syntagmatic to paradigmatic motivation in literature, is in fact the passage -- through structural reduction -- from the incidental to the ordered, from nature to culture, from being to structure. It is through such systematic structural reduction that order is created to replace chaos. In Jakobson, this is the result of speech and thought being built on a series on 'dichotomous scissions'[1]: yes - no, black - white, father - mother, which become so automatic that they come to the lips at the same time, and one feels the need to repress from the pair the term which is not appropriate; they make up couples which are at once identification and differentiation. (451) In the historic '68 Jakobson concluded in an interview[2] that "language straddles the divide between nature and culture" (18), because it is biologically possible *and* is invested with a universal form of behaviour shared among the members of the species. The idea that language is the very foundation of intelligibility, and therefore an agent of systematic reduction and order transpires from Jameson's study of Structuralism and Russian Formalism known as **The Prison-House of Language**[3]: Structuralism is merely the projection of a linguistic model of cultural products (113), because structure is fundamental to intelligibility. Reduction to the system also occurs in myth, which, according to Caws, is structured on the most primitive fundamental

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[1] Cf. Roman Jakobson, **Selected Writings I: Phonological Studies**, The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1962. References to this work are based on this edition.

[2] 'La langue est le moteur de l'imagination' interview with Michel Treguer & François Chatelet, *La Quinzaine littéraire*, No. 51, 15-31 mai, 1968, pp. 18-20.

[3] Fredric Jameson, **The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism**, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

oppositions, such as heaven - earth, from which are derived oppositions such as fire - water, excess - defect, the alimentary - the linguistic (i.e. what goes into the mouth vs. what comes out of it), the conjugal - the non-conjugal, etc. All these oppositions are founded in myth, as they are founded in thought, not on the opposition of self and other, but on considering the other as opposition. (119)

Relations in society are also regulated through systematic reduction, Caws will have it, not without a wry smile on his face when he considers the passion for correct behaviour advertised and imposed by fundamentalists of whatever allegiance. Correct behaviour in dress, diet, manners, religious practice, like correct behaviour in speech and writing, is the result of solid grammar and of the consequent strict observance of its rules. With such observations in mind, we can try to decode Nietzsche's half sad, half panicked thought that God is not dead, as long as we still have grammar. And we can certainly understand why Deconstruction is frontally rejected by 'religiously' strict people -- by firm Catholics, or stern Communist preachers. What we call norm, Caws goes on, is the result of constraint imposed -- a passage, that is, from nature to culture, which he is ready to associated with Montesquieu's theory in **De l'esprit des lois** (1748): the laws of any society are related to religion, to the size of its population, to its morals, customs, climate -- the *'esprit générale'* or 'ethos' of that society. The formulation comes too close to Alexis de Tocqueville's 'habits of the heart' and 'habits of the mind' not to be considered in that connection. Montesquieu's search for the general spirit is reductionist, so order-giving, but it indirectly paves the way for cultural specificity in Post-Structuralism. Caws is not explicit about this, but when he refers his discussion to Rousseau he is impressed by Rousseau's idea that progress in society is accelerated by the appropriation of alien ideas. Briefly,

Caws remarks, social relations are internalized in individuals and transmitted externally to other individuals.

The exchange of gifts is one of the most structurally relevant rituals in any society. Potlatch, Caws observes, is the ceremonially structured distribution of gifts, in which it is not the material offered that matters so much as the symbolic gesture of the exchange, in which the giver - taker pair plays the central role, function of collective consciousness. There is an element of gratuitousness and arbitrariness in this ritualistic exchange, since it is not the material, nor its concrete value that capitalizes the community's energies. The arbitrary though becomes obligatory by establishment through custom. Marcel Mauss's **Essay on the Gift** (1954) is quoted by way of theorizing the ritual: "it is groups, not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts, and are bound by obligations; the persons represented in the contracts are moral persons -- clans, tribes, and families". (133) (underlinings mine) A very significant passage occurs that could be visualized as:

arbitrariness → constraint
ceremonial role → stability
social patterns → social interaction
NATURE → CULTURE

The schema calls to mind Goffmann's theory of roles and role-playing[1], basically a theory of life as game, in which communication of any possible type is possible only because certain rules that have been inherited, taught, studied, and internalized by the community's members, are observed. The passage from nature to culture thus appears as a 'grammaticalization' of the spontaneous into the normative. Or,

[1] Ervin Goffmann, **Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior**, Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Co., 1967.

as Lévi-Strauss maintains, the passage to culture is done through restrictions, e.g. exogamy instead of endogamy.

Caws's reference to obligation as regulator gives the occasion of exciting observations on religion. To him, like to us, religion and the intelligible make sense in the same way, because they are both essentially ob-lig-ations, forms of "binding" (155), as indicated by the etymology of religion (Lat. *religio, religionis* < *religo, religare* < *re-* thoroughly + *ligare* to bind). Religious bonds produce other forms of structural binding, among which institutions, myths, legends, sacred texts, gods. (155) Dumézil supplies further samples to the same effect.[1] Dumezil's basic contribution to a structuralist view of society is his theory of Indo-European religions betraying a conception of god as threefold, i.e. as a trinity not of mystical persons, but of divine functions (including the administration of the world, the play of force, and fecundity). This, Dumézil maintains, explains the use of religious structures in other fields as well, e.g. the deification of the Roman emperors, the echo of the triple functions in the founding kings, etc. Lying deep underneath the surface of such processes is the consciousness of structure in 'civilized' people. Dumézil calls this the capacity in 'civilized' people to build city dwelling, which is, let us remark, what the etymology of 'city' suggests (Lat. *civitas, civitatis* city, whose inhabitant was the *civis* citizen, characterized by being *civilis* civil). There is, Dumézil concludes, a subtle deep structure - divinity interconnection in the history of Western culture, of which the God - Word equation is only one *and* fundamental variant. Thus, we are led to infer, an acute sense of order as bond or obligation, of 'grammar', of the 'written word' gives coherence to culture as (reductionistically) disciplined nature. It is in light of this that we can better understand the sense of revolt in such

[1] Georges Dumézil, **Les Dieux des Indo-Européens**, Paris: Proses Universitaires de France, 1952.

people as Blake, who vituperates against "all Bibles" in **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell** (Plate 4: **The Voice of the Devil**). Blake's recourse to the Devil as the opposite of God is the acknowledgement of constricting order that has lost its inner motivation. It is not a sign of heresy, for Blake is a fervent believer, but it definitely is a sign of rebellion against the petrification of once necessary, because motivated, rules. Not unlike Blake does Nietzsche theorize his revolt against 'Egyptianism' -- the overall petrification of expression. At the extreme of such positions, Deconstruction rises against imposed order and does a vehement revisionism of writing as force.

In Lacan's view, the unconscious, like language, is structured as a signiferous system. Evidence is brought to substantiate this premise: children have linguistic experiences before they are able to understand, and have no difficulty using expressions taken over from other people -- the Other. For Lacan the Other is somebody very much like Cartesian God, even though this can be a specific other, e.g. the child's own father. The ensuing identification of the Other with the Father, whose speech is law, explains the use of power exerted in the Name of the Father, hence the installation of an (unconscious) social order -- a demonstration with an obvious Freudian basis.

Caws is particularly interested in the "practice of writing" (159), a formulation situating the debate on the fringe between Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. Whereas Structuralism is a plea for absolutes, centres, origins -- given its taste for apotheosis, Post-Structuralism prefers the here and now of relativity and derivation. The intelligible is con-structed, mainly in texts (cf. Lat. *textus* fabric, structure < *texere* to weave). Hence Structuralism's focus on text and on writing. In Foucault's extended notion of text (not only the linguistically inscribed text, but all kinds of texts), we do have the text nonetheless, and the intelligible appears as textual construction,

through the agency of 'writing'. Deconstruction, a "modification" of the text, as text to be understood only contextually, attempts an overcoming of the "ethnocentricity or logocentricity of Western thought", (160) Deconstruction though, Caws drives his point, is a mere prolongation of Structuralism (a thing visible in its name), if we consider the impact of phenomenology on it. The phenomenological reduction proposed by Husserl and Heidegger is not, Caws implies, different from the basic drive in Structuralism to operate systematic reduction to a set of abstract rules. The intelligible world, for Deconstruction, as for Structuralism, is the world of relations.

Structure, Caws concludes, is what obtains from the need to bracket substance into rules. Its intention is to make sense. Without it the world would not be intelligible. Structure is the way in which objects are connected. Whatever we say is a fact having its own structure; it can depict the world by being isomorphic with it. (178) No wonder Structuralism has often been associated and functioned with Semiotics[1].

To pay philological homage to Caws's excellent demonstration, and to the dream of global meaning that Leibniz, before Kant, had dreamt, let us consider a few basic etymologies: 'intelligible' comes, in the last instance, from Lat. *intelligere* to understand < *inter-* between, among + *legere* to choose, to pick; 'rule' < OF *reule* < Lat. *regula* ruler, rule < *regere* to lead straight, to direct; 'connect' < Lat. *connectere* var. of *conectere* < *com-* together + *nectere* to bind > *nexus* a bond or bind between the several members of a group or series, a link.

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[1] For information on the relation between Structuralism and Semiotics a few titles are fundamental, among which: Terence Hawkes, **Structuralism and Semiotics**, Routledge, London, 1977; Jonathan Culler, **The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction**, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1981; Robert Scholes, **Semiotics and Interpretation**, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1982.

The nostalgic tone in Caws's realization that global meaning is a utopia assumes notes of frontal attack on Structuralism in Thomas Pavel's **Le mirage linguistique: Essai sur la modernisation intellectuelle** (1988), whose English version announces a yet more cynical title: **The Feud of Language** (1989).[1] Basically, Pavel's book advances the idea that most of the Structuralist "revolution" (ironic inverted commas), and especially the Post-Structuralist movement, are based on a mixture of ignorance and speculation. (5-6) Pavel takes as his object of interest French Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, but his deployment of critical troops could easily be performed on Anglo-American territory as well. His butt of attack is the two currents' view of natural language, rooted in their choice of language as the main concern of the human sciences and of philosophy. In strictly 'scientific' terms, this meant the triumph of linguistics deemed as 'supreme', and the concurrent submission of philosophy to its concepts and methods. The mental equipment of structuralist linguistics was gradually turned into metaphysical notions, on whose basis one of the most exciting attempts of intellectual modernization occurred.

The counter-current of the late 60's, with its promotion of cultural relativism and return to axiology, and the theory of value marked an abandonment of interest strictly in formal/structuralist tenets, and the advent of moral, and political responsibility as a critical attitude. Pavel offers his own historical survey of Structuralism: (1) Syncretic Humanism (1945-60) combines Marxism with Phenomenology, ethics with

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[1] Thomas G. Pavel, **Le mirage linguistique: Essai sur la modernisation intellectuelle**. Editions de Minuit, coll. 'Critique'. Paris, 1988; English version: **The Feud of Language**, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989; Romanian version: **Mirajul lingvistic - eseu asupra modernizării intelectuale**, trans. Mioara Tapalagă, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1993. Quotations from, and references to, this book are based on the Romanian translation.

dialectics, and history with modernity, and teaches trust in revolutionary social progress; (2) Structuralism (1955-60) influences the sciences of signs (anthropology, poetics, psychoanalysis, philosophy); a literary semiology and a grammar of narrative are sought, but disillusionment starts spreading: Barthes finds the method too 'scientific', in the sense of reductionist, Foucault and Derrida depart from structuralist abstractions, even if they continue to use vocabulary impregnated with 'language' language; (2.1) Moderate Structuralism opposes the traditional impressionism of literary criticism, and shares a good deal of the concerns and intentions of Russian and Czech Formalism, the American New Criticism, the more international Morphology of Culture, and German Stylistics; Todorov's ambition to set up a taxonomy and systematize literary genres is an excellent example of such endeavours; (2.2) Scientist Structuralism bases its prestige on that of linguistics, considered the most advanced of the 'social or human sciences' (13), and proposes rigorous schemata in domains like anthropology, semiology, formal narratology represented by brilliant thinkers like Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, and Barthes, and frequently resorts to linguistic theory and its exponents (Saussure, Hjelmslev, Jakobson); (2.3) Speculative Structuralism, uniting the philosophical with the ideological branch of the movement, encourages radical political stands and the theorizing tendencies behind them, as in Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida.

In all these variants, Pavel sees the following common features: a recurrent use of linguistic concepts (not seldom combined with algebraic or other mathematical notations); a critique of humanism (as in Lévi-Strauss's research programme, or in Foucault's **Les mots et les choses**, where man is described as a 'recent invention'); a critique of subjectivity and of truth (on the assumption that the subject cannot guarantee a

foundation of knowledge, which means that truth itself is ungrounded; a pervasive speculative stance (resulting in the replacement of metaphysics by metacriticism). A kind of 'return of the subject' is felt though in Lévi-Strauss's theories on language and writing, in Foucault's investigations in the history of medicine, economics, biology and linguistics, or in Althusser's acrobatics on the rope of traditional Marxism. Lévi-Strauss brings onto stage the concept of 'the Other', "without which there is no ethics" (15), Derrida fringes on anthropological reconsiderations in his debates on language, grammar, and grammatology, Lyotard excogitates on postindustrial society[1], in an attempt to produce myths able to replace the "lost tales of Progress and Revolution". (17)

The "rhetoric of the end" (17) is the name Pavel gives to this Post-Structuralist disappointment. Its articulations comprise a sustained discourse on power, a massive attack on logocentrism and onto-theology, the rehabilitation of history and of arbitrariness -- all indications of the collapse of structuralist order. In Derrida's **Of Grammatology** (1967, English version: 1976), for instance, Western rationalism, Greek metaphysics, Christian theology, and modern science are equally challenged as embodiments of logocentrism, which is to be ousted, for empiricism to be hailed in. Instead of the illusion of order instilled by the logos, the infinite reflexivity of the subject seems a more creditable solution. Hence Derrida's 'supplement' -- the endless scission of the ego in a space of perpetual reiteration. (25) Interestingly, this combines with a growing awareness of how and why meaning depends on culture -- a realization shared by the work of Baudrillard[2] and Geertz.[3]

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[1] Jean-François Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

[2] Jean Baudrillard, **Oublier Foucault**, Paris: Galilée, 1977.

Pavel lays the blame for this sense of end on the formal rigour promoted and practised by people like Jakobson, Propp, Lacan, or Todorov. He brings together the Barthes of **Eléments de sémiologie** (1964) and the Eco of **Trattato di semiotica generale** (1975). In them he sees new pioneers of the old dream of universal conscience, when in fact each conscience "destroys something of the received vocabulary".[1] Whereas by coupling the phenomenology of language with Saussurean semiology the sign has been advertised as the supreme ruler, and the subject been frozen, the 'return of the subject' in Post-Structuralism discloses the subject in time, mobile and open. In Derrida's formulation, "the subject present-for-itself" is an idealization, and can only lead to ideality. (79) Hence writing is a mingling of *'différance'* and discordance that measures out the performance of the thinking subject. This focus on performance and on being-in-time unveils the confluence of Deconstruction and Phenomenology in the awareness that Being and being are two different entities. Through this, classical metaphysics is tentatively abolished, on the assumption that language is only the appearance of reality.

By way of conclusion, Pavel detects a basic reductionist schema, which he chooses to call "discretionary intellectual behaviour". (163) To illustrate it he mentions Lévi-Strauss's method of reducing the variety of customs and traditions to the uniformity of cultural models; Marx's, or Max Weber's taxonomic patterns applied to social behaviour; the ordering zeal of Generative Semiotics in Greimas, Quine, and Chomsky; the fury of Narratology in Riffaterre, Barthes, and Todorov; the ambition of logic to encroach upon the territory of modern

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[3] Clifford Geertz, **The Interpretation of Cultures**, New York: Basic Books, 1973.

[1] Cf. Brice Parain, **Recherches sur la nature et les fonctions du langage**, Paris: Gallimard, 1942, p. 87

science in general. The opposite direction is instead typical: a situation of cultural frivolity fostered by multiculturalism and hyperabundance in the Western world has resulted in theories pleading flexibility, decentralization, looseness. At the extreme, this is called Antifoundationalism, a term Pavel does not bring up in his book, but one that is certainly frequent in Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism.

Thus ends the dream of order that the Russian Formalists and the French Structuralists have contributed to the critical thinking of our century. Thomas Pavel's survey of French critical thought, with frequent references to the Russian Formalists confirms our premise. Criticism in the Anglo-American world is to quite a significant extent purveyed for by these non-Anglo-American *and* non-Anglo-Saxon sources. It was felt only appropriate that some of them be presented in the following chapters.

LITERATURE AS DIFFERENCE
(Russian Formalism)

In spite of the frontal attack on Formalism in recent literary theory and criticism, especially since the advent of Deconstruction, in the more widely Post-Structuralist framework, Russian Formalism has been doing considerably well. Its technically specialized terminology and obsessive discussion of 'method', signs of aridity, in the name of 'science', have been opposed to the 'humanistic' approach advocated by the American New Critics. And its consequent bent on binary oppositions has become subject to open revisionism and downright dismantling by Post-Structuralist critics. And yet, its tenets and pronouncements, no less than its vocabulary are far from having ceased being seminal in the literary arena. Rather, even overtly Antifoundationalist attitudes have not failed to acknowledge its rights and authority! Such a stance is taken in the following:

> "We are now forced to recognize the formalist position as only part of a dialogue which took place in the intellectually charged atmosphere of postrevolutionary Russia of the 1920s. This dialogue laid out in almost schematic form, with a clarity rarely achieved since, an almost complete set of the theoretical concepts which, up until comparatively recently, has constituted the principal arena of contention within literary theory"[1].

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[1] Clayton Koelb & Virgil Lokke (Eds.), **The Current in Criticism: Essays on the Present and Future of Literary Theory**, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1987, p. 209.

The historical avatars of the 1915 founded Moscow Linguistic Circle, and of the 1916 established Opojaz (Society for the Study of Poetic Language) are no secret now. Their eventual capitulation in front of communist social command, so much like the ban imposed on Czech formalism by the nazi rule, did nothing but, in effect, spread the influence of the 'new' thinking. Roman Jakobson's, and René Wellek's emigration to the United States saw expanding relationships between formalist and other positions, in the mid-century, of which Noam Chomsky's will not count among the last. Jakobson's scanning of all linguistic categories involved in his understanding of literature/poetry is especially worth mentioning. As is the diagram devised by him to indicate different viewpoints in criticism.[1] The plethora of critical literature on Russian Formalism in the Western world can hardly be ignored now.

The basic assumption in what follows is that Russian Formalism's deep-seated tradition in 20th-century critical approaches owes some of its prestige to its subtle handling of the basic concept of difference.

This view seems to be embraced by Victor Erlich, Jakobson's student at Columbia, then at Harvard, in the mid-50's, when he wrote an impressively comprehensive account of the Russian critical school.[2] After naming Russian Formalism none but the 'father' of 'practical criticism', vs. the 'New Criticism' in America, Erlich concentrates on "the conventionality of art (as an) esthetic modus operandi -- the set of conventions

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[1] See Raman Selden, **A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory**, The University Press of Kentucky, 1989, Published in Great Britain, pp. 1-4.

[2] See Victor Erlich, **Russian Formalism - History - Doctrine**, University of Washington, with a Preface by Rene Wellek, Yale University, Mouton & Co., 1955.

superimposed on the materials". (163) He further halts at length to call attention to the typically formalist concern with the literary object *qua* object, and with "not why or by whom it was created, but 'how' it was made". (163)

Let us consider the implications of the aforesaid. If the work of art is an object, it obviously is made. Boris Eichenbaum's 'formal method' theory of 1927 posits the question of literature as object, of art as device, of construction by specific skills, in the literary field. Boris Tomashevsky's discussion of 'Literary Genres' (1925) centres on devices. Viktor Shklovsky's 'Literature without Subject' (1925) follows closely his earlier interest in 'The Revival of the Word' (1914) only to reach theoretical completion in the concept of *'ostranenie'* (defamiliarization), in his 1925 'Art as Device' pronouncements. And Yuri Tynjanov's 'Principles of Construction' (1924) round off a view of art as definitely form, not 'subject', and of form as definitely achieved by 'techne', or, rather, of form as 'techne'. Subsuming all these notions are, basically, the concept of difference, and a differential definition of art/ literature/ poetry.[1]

Literature simply makes us see differently because, unlike 'practical' language, the language of literature is what obtains through deviation or distortion. By making full use of the phonetic substance of linguistic expression, poetic language disorganizes the automatism of perception, Eichenbaum tells us. We thus are enabled to "see things"[2], rather than normally know them. This different way of perceiving reality which the artefact offers is instrumentalized in devices, e.g. image, parallelism, hyperbole, symmetry etc. Not only does poetry/ literature/ art

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[1] See also Mihai Pop (ed.), **Ce este literatura? - Şcoala formalistă rusă**, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1983).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

dislocate the boring, unnoticeable automatisms of everyday language. By its special recourse to difference, poetry/ literature/ art actually takes to pieces old 'artistic' structures, and, using their material, puts up new scaffoldings. An intimate dialectics is at work in the artefact, in general, itself definable in terms of difference: thus the same (of artistic material) becomes the other (of artistic construction), function of the artefact's capacity to turn the old 'what' into a new 'how'.

This is all a question of refined technique, of metapoetics, as Peter Steiner prefers to call it.[1] In his unmatched study, Steiner distinguishes three main metaphors at the heart of the Russian Formalists' definitions, i.e. the machine, the organism, the system. Let us have a look at each of these, and, hopefully, it will not have been lost on the reader of the following lines that difference is the concept on which each is built.

The machine metaphor, first, in what Steiner chooses to name mechanistic formalism, is Shklovsky's differential device. As a watchmaker examines a clock, or a driver a car, so does the writer examine a book, i.e. with a craftsman's curiosity. His interest in the technique of the literary text comes from his feeling for objects, and for language as object. For, Shklovsky maintains, 'art' differs from *'byt'* (everyday life), or holds a relationship of heteromorphism with the latter, exactly because it operates through de-familiarization, where the latter resorts to automatism, it is characterized by teleology, where mere life unfolds through causality, and makes use of devices, rather than simply of material, as life does. Exemplifying with Shklovsky's 'How **Don Quixote** Is Made', or with Eichenbaum's 'How Gogol's **Overcoat** Is Made', Steiner concludes that the

[1] Peter Steiner, **Russian Formalism, A Metapoetics**, Cornell University Press, Ithaca / London, 1984.

difference between art and *'byt'* is the difference between the "rule of 'is made'" and the "rule of 'is'". (63)

In 'The Revival of the Word' (1914), Viktor Shklovsky deploys almost a troop of Vicoian metaphoric formulations: the word is the image and its petrification, the epithet is a means whereby the word can be renewed, the half-intelligible language of ancient poetry is more telling than everyday language, and, most significantly, words are poetic *ab origo*, but are gradually petrified into automatic meanings, so that language as we speak it on a daily basis is but a cemetery of words; they initially have 'form' (which can only be grasped in an emotional-intellectual interaction) -- this is their poetic state, but 'form' gradually wears off, and words are reduced to their prosaic state of ordinary communication. Such metaphoric phrasings concerned with language have been heard before the Russian Formalists, of course. Longinus imagines words as leaves growing on a tree, which slowly but irreversibly grow yellow, dry and fall off. Nietzsche sees in truths an army of metaphors that have lost their freshness, like coins wearing smooth under the rubbing of hands. And Carlyle's remark about 'art's thirst for the concrete' nearly brings a Coleridgean-Keatsian note to Shklovsky's belief that poetry can revigorate language's plastic image-making potential.

Art is image, and image as trope has the unusual power of taking out of the series the item it designates. Where Plato scoffingly rejected from his Republic the poets for their meagre double imitation of the unique idea, Shklovsky romantically entrusts the 'revived poetic word' with the power of unique differentiation: like a child, the poet singularizes the object of his perception; he perceives it *per se*, rather than in the 'algebraic' serialization of similar objects; he perceives it as different where the ordinary beholder would see it as indistinguishably the same as the other items in the series.

This refreshing effect is due to art being "a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object"[1], rather than the object, unimportant in itself. Which is why Shklovsky embarks upon thoroughly analysing Sterne's **Tristram Shandy**, a book ostentatiously laying bare its own machinery of devices. This position flagrantly contradicts the classic precept whereby *'ars artem celare'*, art is the concealment of art, i.e. the subtle handling of artistic tricks, as if they were natural.

Acknowledged resort to the device of art regulates the organism metaphor, too, which may sound paradoxical. In contradistinction to the machine metaphor, the view of the work as organism would, in principle, be expected to push the whole discussion into the realm of *'byt'*. Life, according to Petrovsky, is the material of literature, with a difference, though, because always restructured. Like Cuvier's organism described from parts to whole (a device called in art synecdoche), or like Goethe's holistic view of the organism (through the technique of metoynmy), the morphological formalists[2] apply, in Zhirmunsky's own words, "the teleological concept of style as the unity of devices".[3] (emphases mine) Vladimir Propp's later detailed inspection of the **Morphology of the Fairy Tale** is the best illustration.

Finally, the system metaphor gives coherence to Tynjanov's systemo-functional formalism.[4] He, too, differentiates between 'art' and *'byt'*, but his is a deeper, and indeed systematic, insight. In 'The Notion of Construction' (1924) Tynjanov looks at art as, dichotomically, materials and relations, and strictures against

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[1] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Device', in Raman Selden, *Op. cit.*, p.11.

[2] Cf. Peter Steiner, *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

those who fail to realize the leading role of the latter. His relation-concepts, basic in his "construction principles"[1], secure the dynamism, or interaction, of the work's components. Thus, a cluster of factors is promoted, to the detriment of others -- an active vs. a subordinate group. The former, called the dominant, differentiates itself from the rest, yet holistically contains the elements of the work as such. As dynamic form, art lives owing to the interaction of these opposite factors, and literally dies when their conflict languishes down into automatism. A 'living' period is then superseded by a 'dead' one, the fresh, constructive, differentiating factor is replaced by a subordinate, familiar one. De-familiarization is the solution, in Tynjanov's, as in Shklovsky's opinion. But, where Shklovsky's *'ostranenie'* is '*literaturnost*', i.e. literariness as immutable essence intrinsic to the work, Tynjanov's dynamic system extends differentiation to every constituent, and every level, of the work: to the infraliterary, the intraliterary, and the extraliterary.

That difference is 'life' in art, *the* life of art, can be seen from the role played by 'Rhythm as an Architectonic Factor of Verse' (1924). Rhythm is an all-encompassing factor organizing poetry and prose equally, through a "refined use of opposite factors"[2]. (emphasis mine) And when he writes 'About Literary Evolution' (1929), Tynjanov postulates that a literary fact exists as literary fact, function of its differential quality, whether in correlation with its literary series, or with an extraliterary one, etc. In his use of system, which he takes over from Saussure, Tynjanov rejects Saussurean 'langue' fixity, to the benefit of conceptualizing a mobile inter-relatedness. We shall see how fruitfully all this diffuses through Roman Jakobson's theory.

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[1] **Ce este literatura?**, p. 512.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 536.

Strangely omitted in Steiner's otherwise remarkable survey of Russian Formalism, Tomashevsky's contribution to the critical ferment of the time holds promise of drawing the contours of a consistent **Poetics**[1]. Rooted in difference, his poetics proceeds along a number of oppositions. Its thrust is evincing the 'leading' opposite, a concept featuring in Tynjanov's, or Jakobson's thinking, as the 'dominant'.

Metaphor, to start with, is the conjoint parallel of figurative, and literal, meaning, embedded in, and lying beyond, the text, respectively. While the figurative dwells in the very 'sensible', i.e. material, surface of the text, the literal sends one to an otherness that betrays the text's poetic nature. Truly, a relationship of compatibility holds between the immediate poetic material and the mediated notion beyond the text. But genuinely poetic enjoyment requires reading the figurative in the first, *and* the last, instance. Literal meaning, i.e. meaning transcending the poetic text, can only foster prosaic fruition, because it is, in effect, a bringing the poetic language closer to 'normal' language. Now, it is this very 'normality' of literal communication that poetry was, originally, alien to, or should now be born as an alienation from. The figures of speech, i.e. deviations from the 'norm', used in classical 'high style', were once called the language of the gods. (99) It is the business, and duty, of poetry to save language from serialization in the norm. Like Shklovsky's 'defamiliarization', Tomashevsky's 'deformation', of the series is the founding gesture of a differential poetics.

Hence, an essential reversal of the form - content relationship, with form being the basic element that gives coherence to the work. Since form dwells in the text, it is text, and content sends elsewhere, it follows that form is the intrinsic

[1] See Boris Tomaşevski, **Poetica** , Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1973.

motivation of the text. Or, rather, 'motif', the smallest unit of the work, is form-determined. Content depends on form all through, as will be apparent in themes, or ideas, which are merely excuses to use formal devices. [1] It also follows that 'motivation', in the 'normal' sense of the word (sic), is suspended in the genuine artefact. 'Normal' motivation is based on the illusion of the 'real', of what we usually call 'realism'. Poetic motivation is then 'abnormal'. It is not grounded in the 'beyond' of the text. Like Yuri Tynjanov distinguishing between prose as "deformation of sound by meaning", and poetry as "deformation of meaning by sound"[2] (emphases mine), Boris Tomashevsky differentiates between semantic and expressive 'motivation'. Like Viktor Shklovsky praising the half-intelligible language of ancient, and, for that matter, of futurist poetry, he places 'phonetic metaphor' on top of this intrinsic hierarchy of 'motifs'. 'Phonetic metaphor', Tomashevsky's **Poetics** maintains, is "the use of sounds as equivalents of expression". (125) (emphasis mine)

Utmost expressiveness is the peak of poeticity. It is the state where words *qua* words communicate a language untranslatable into the language of referential reality. It is amazing to see how, in his turn, Tomashevsky sings a hymn to the primordial Adamic language of, and only of, poetry, the language of a time out of time, when man was the equivalent of poet, for all utterance was poetic.

There is a difference, indeed, between prose and poetry, yet one not to be mistaken for the fundamental difference between literal and figurative language. Like Tynjanov's use of the concept of 'rhythm' as systematic organizing principle, Tomashevsky's resort to the term needs considering within the bounds of his overall differential poetics. 'Rhythm', to him, too,

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[1] Cf. Raman Selden, *Op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

[2] Cf. Peter Steiner, *Op. cit.*, p. 117.

is incomparably more than what we 'normally' understand by it. Prose, too, has rhythm, as a result of the semantic *and* expressive construction of prose speech. And even everyday speech has rhythm. Where then is the difference, and what is this difference?

A sense of *'telos'*, 'aim', 'ultimate end', differentiates literary from ordinary language. Ironically, nowhere is this more obvious than in content elements. Take, for instance, the thematic constituents of the literary text. A major result of this thematic organization is the difference between *'fabula'* and *'sjuzhet'*. Following Aristotle's binary opposition, in **Poetics,** VI, of story (the normal flow of events), vs. plot, or 'mythos' (the arrangement of incidents), Tomashevsky's **Poetics** proposes a similar opposition. Corresponding to story, 'fabula' is the 'realistic' raw material of events, in which motifs 'realistically' occur in causal succession; they await the writer's 'poetic' hand. To the Aristotelian 'mythos' corresponds *'sjuzhet'*, i.e. the totality of motifs set in artistic order, as they have been ordered by the 'poetic' hand. The fable then closer to reality, follows the logic of succession; the subject matter, artistically made, is marked by formal devices. Of these, some are revealed devices, as are the play-within-play, or the mask. (277-81) Others are dissimulated devices, in effect as fabricated, as teleologically organized. The best exemplification of such subtle devices Tomashevsky finds in Swift's **Gulliver's Travels**, apparently as 'formalized' as Sterne's **Tristram Shandy**, Shklovsky's favourite for applied analysis. Fascinated by Swift's technique, Tomashevsky concludes:

> "In order to present a satirical picture of the European social-political order, Gulliver... tells his master (the horse) about the customs of the ruling class in human society. Compelled to tell everything with the utmost accuracy, he

removes the shell of euphemistic phrases and fictitious traditions which justify such things as war, class strife, parliamentary intrigue, and so on. Stripped of their verbal justification, and thus defamiliarized these topics emerge in all their horror. Thus criticism of the political system -- nonliterary material -- is artistically motivated and fully involved in the narrative".[1] (underlining mine)

We are, again, on territory shared with Shklovsky, for the effect of defamiliarization is not only aesthetic, in the work *per se*, but psychological. The shock Tomashevsky detects in Swift's defamiliarization procedure brings to mind the "deautomatised perception (which is) the author's purpose"[2], Boccaccio's, for instance, in the spiciest episodes of the **Decameron.** For, says Shklovsky, in 'Art as Technique':

"... Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. ...And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*". [3] (underlining mine)

To make the stone stony. The formula has the force of axiom. Hardly any of the Russian Formalists' theoretical positions fails to make a religion of language. ART is LANGUAGE, material, and palpable. Language to be perceived emotionally, not simply, or only, to be understood rationally. A quotation from Alexander Potebnya, the 19th-century philologist,

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[1] In Raman Selden, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

[2] Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in **Twentieth-Century Literary Theory:** A Reader, Edited and Introduced by K.M.Newton, MacMillan Education Ltd, London, 1988, p. 25.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

galvanizes thoughts on language throughout the formalist circle and the formalist Opojaz society:

> "Art is thinking in images. (...) Poetry, as well as prose, is first and foremost a special way of thinking and knowing".[1]

The Humboldtian tradition of differentiating between poetic and prosaic language which Potebnya writes in seems to have been proudly inherited by the Russian Formalists. The question of prose, as with the Romantics, is a complex one: prose, for Potebnya, as for Shklovsky, or Tomashevsky, is not merely that which, unlike poetry, is not written in verse. If the difference is linguistic, which it is, prose differs from poetry because it is unable to capitalize on polysemy, which is the "eidos of poetic language".[2] This is another way of saying that poetry can be prose, or that prose can be poetry, depending on whether language fails or, on the contrary, manages to make the best of its potential. In a way, the Potebnya quote puts one in mind of T.S. Eliot's appraisal of the English Metaphysicals, who, in Eliot's words, were able to write with the intellect at the tips of their fingers. And, in fact, the Eliotesque model of undissociated poetic sensibility embodied by the Metaphysicals is, paradoxically, not unlike the Romantic project of universal poetry.

"The work of art is the art of the word". [3] This other Potebnya citation encapsulates the general feeling, among the Russian Formalists, that the specific differentia between prose and poetry is actually one between normal, economical, efficient speech, and language made artificially, made, that is, with art,

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[1] **Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays**, trans. and eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965, p. 5.

[2] Peter Steiner, *Op. cit.*, p. 140.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

in the etymological sense of skill. To skilfully use language's immense capacities is to save it from habitualization, to keep it in a state of potential defamiliarization of reality. In practical terms, this is as much as shocking those content with the familiar: '*Epater les bourgeois*' is the Formalists' acknowledged purpose.

Special attention is paid to all those forms of language that differ from the familiar idiom: foreign languages, languages so remote from us, whether in space, or in time, that we are perfect aliens to them, children's babble, aphasia, the glossolalia of religious sects, whatever contravenes common expectations. And, most importantly, the original language of mankind, a question looked into in connection with the natural origin of names, which Plato credits to Cratylus.

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In no one of the formalists is this question of LANGUAGE as *the* question of LITERATURE more overtly posed than in Jakobson.

With the acumen and insight of a linguist and poet, which are guarantees of a subtle feel for language, Roman Jakobson developed and sustained a structuralist view of language and literature, and of LITERATURE AS LANGUAGE during a lifetime of probings and investigations that extend back into the mid-1910's Saussurean beginnings in Moscow, cover the Prague years, and go through the century into the early 1980's, when he died in Cambridge, Massachusetts. By that time, Jakobson's interest in the abnormal and the pathological in linguistic communication had resulted in theories about the language of children, of the diseased, and of the insane. This makes of his one of the voices, alongside, in the first place, Michel Foucault's, articulating a distinct 20th-century critical discourse

about madness. It also makes of it an anticipation of the late century's concern with marginal categories.

Described, in recent years, as "a magnet around which (one) can cluster certain notions of a formalist analytic, a structuralist hope, and a more or less benign 'scientism'"[1], Roman Jakobson has been somehow absolved of the sin of unflinchingly promoting an oppositional model devised, in his early career, under the impact of Ferdinand de Saussure's differential theory. According to the Swiss linguist's view of language as a signifying system, meaning is the effect of differences between linguistic signs, rather than of a relationship holding between the word and the world/ ideas/ concepts, i.e. reference, for 'langue' (the systemic scaffolding of language) is marked all through by the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. Reproached with disinterest, inherited from the very Saussure (sic), in 'parole' (the actualization of language in communication), Jakobson has been usually contrasted with Bakhtin, the ardent advocate of dialogism, therefore of live communication. More flexible and comprehensive judgments have been passed on him, especially since the first commemorations of his death[2], though he has not been spared attacks for practising 'logocentrism'[3].

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[1] Virgil Lokke, 'Contextualizing the Either/Or: Invariance/Variation and Dialogue in Jakobson / Bakhtin, in Clayton Koelb & Virgil Lokke, *Op. cit.*, p. 201.

[2] For more information about this, see **A Tribute to Roman Jakobson: 1896-1982**, Mouton Publishers, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, 1983; **Language, Poetry and Poetics - The Generation of the 1890's: Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Majakovskij**, eds. Krystyna Pomorska, Elzbieta Chodakowska, Hugh McLean, Brent Vinee Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, 1987, based on papers given at the First Roman Jakobson Colloquium at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in 1984; and, while Jakobson was still alive, Julia Kristeva, **Desire in Language**, Columbia University Press, New York, 1980.

[3] Allan Reid, **Literature as Communication and Cognition in Bakhtin and Lotman**, Garland Publishing, New York and London, 1990, pp. 65-74.

Jakobson is commonly placed in the formalist, and the linguistic school[1], and, while a divide is hard to establish between the two, given his structuralist stance, inseparable from his formalist position[2], and the ulterior semiotic turn[3] in his career, this distinction is a useful working hypothesis.

In good formalist tradition, through the late 20's, when he christens Structuralism, and further on in the 30's, Jakobson develops a system of taxonomies based on oppositions. He follows in the track of Potebnya's differentation between prose and poetry, of Shklovsky's differentiation between metonymy and metaphor, of Tynjanov's differentiation between prosaic and poetic language, in terms of semantic vs. rhythmical elements, and, like Tynjanov, he adopts the term *'ustanovka'*, 'intention', 'orientation', when he remarks the tendency poetry has to be 'bent' on expression.

Jakobson discusses poetry as a special and specialized form of communication, on the basic assumption that poetic language is different from 'communicative' language, function of the aforesaid expressionistic *'ustanovka'*. The poetic word itself is a thing, he advocates, in Husserlian terminology, and it has a structure of its own. Not so the word of current communication, transparent and liable to the signification of other, non-linguistic entities. Echoing the poet Khlebnikov's differentiation between everyday language and the 'pure word', in whose great shadow we communicate, Jakobson is nostalgic of the primordial poetic word. No wonder he has been accused of embracing Western

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[1] Cf. K.M. Newton (ed.), *Op. cit.*

[2] See, for instance, 'Formalisme russe, structuralisme tcheque' (Statements in the *Cercle linguistique de Prague*), *Change 3* (1969), pp. 59-60.

[3] 'Linguistic and Communication Theory', 1961; 'Visual and Auditory Signs', 1964; 'Life and Language', 1974.

metaphysics, from a wider antifoundationalist position that will be expounded later.

'What Is Poetry' (1934), written in full structuralist times in Prague [1], condenses the Jakobsonian theory, in a faithful anticipation of his seminal postulation of 'the dominant'. The whole demonstration rises out of a deeply entrenched belief in the inescapability of contrast and difference. From the dialogue between 19th-century Czech philosopher Karel Sabina and poet Karel Macha, symbolically featuring as motto, to the final lines, this article is an 'apology for poetry' reverberating back into Romantic, and, further back, into Renaissance, *prises de position*. The whole universe is made up of contraries, of which harmony is the result. True poetry, therefore, will shatter us the more fiercely as in its bowels are dormant unknown opposites. Poetry expresses itself through devices (697), and, like any linguistic manifestation, it stylizes and modifies the event described. The poetic word is the word as word, it has its own weight and value. It is not representation. It is. Jakobson calls this capacity 'poeticalness'. (700) It is owing to it that literature guards us off against automatization. It is owing to it that -- the phrasing is downright metaphoric -- rusty formulas are fenced off, and we can still move free outside the 'cemetery' of decayed cultural values that history eventually turns into. (701)

'The Dominant' (1935)[2], at once a survey and appraisal of Russian Formalism, is Jakobson's own act of allegiance to formalist principles. Sound and meaning, or rather, sound as meaning, "the integration of sound and meaning into an inseparable whole" (26), was theoretized by Formalist research round the concept of dominant. Jakobson singles it out as "one of the most crucial, elaborated, and productive concepts in

[1] See the **Ce este literatura?** anthology of Russian formalist texts, pp. 697-701.

[2] See K.M. Newton, *Op. cit.*, pp. 26-30.

Russian Formalist theory" (26), and sets forth his own differential definition of:

> "the dominant (...) as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure". (26) (umderlinings mine)

To avoid a skewed reading of this, intertextual references will help. In his 'Problems in the Study of Literature and Language' (1928)[1], written with Tynjanov, Jakobson proposes a flexible view of the synchrony - diachrony opposition. A more nuanced understanding of synchrony as not simply system, and of diachrony as not merely evolution, is needed. There is something systemic in history, as there is evolution in any system, he maintains. And, looking retroactively at his Czech structuralist days, he remarks:

> "Since my earliest report of 1927 to the then new born Prague Linguistics Circle, I have pleaded for the removal of the alleged antinomy synchrony/diachrony and have propounded instead the idea of permanently dynamic synchrony, at the same time underscoring the presence of static invariants in the diachronic cut of language".[2]

The dominant then, structurally a hierarchical value, is not a fixed value. It "specifies" the work, we are told. (26) It is, structurally, the one trait differentiating the work as species from other species. The dominant is a *'differentia'* within a *'genus'*, as

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[1] In Ladislav Mateika and Krystyna Pomorska (eds.), **Readings in Russian Poetics**, Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T.Press,1971), pp. 79-81.

[2] Roman Jakobson, **Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time**, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 6.

it were. The question is one of identity. As elsewhere, where he discusses the poetic work, Jakobson reveals the 'eidos' of POETIC LANGUAGE as EXPRESSION. The dominant is, basically, expression:

> "The dominant specifies the work. The specific trait of bound language is obviously its prosodic pattern, its verse form. It might seem that this is simply a tautology: verse is verse. However, we must constantly bear in mind that the element which specifies a given variety of language dominates the entire structure and thus acts as its mandatory and inalienable constituent dominating all the remaining elements and exerting direct influence upon them. However, verse in turn is not a simple concept and not an indivisible unit. Verse itself is a system of values; as with any value system, it possesses its own hierarchy of superior and inferior values, and one leading value, the dominant, without which (within the framework of a given literary period and a given artistic trend) verse cannot be conceived and evaluated as verse..." (26) (underlinings mine)

Interestingly, Jakobson relativizes what could have passed for ossified Saussurean system, by introducing the temporal coordinate, without which (both in the sense of outside, and of in the absence of, which), there would be no literary period, nor would there be literary trends. 'Structure', i.e. literally what is built (Lat. *structura* < *structus*, pp. of *struere* to heap up), is erected, completed, and accepted, in time. It is in time that its hierarchy of spatial components undergoes processes of settlement, and of modification. Internalized as function, therefore become 'familiar', the dominant changes, subject to time and to context. As a dynamic system, the literary work performs defamiliarization (or else constant change of identity

from within). Simply, its elements are structured, differentially, in relations of foreground and background. Of the former category those elements are selected, in time, that turn the dominant(s).

The same process of defamiliarization operates changes in literature, and, more largely, art, history. As within the work per se, so within historical entities, the dominant crystalizes identity and secures the *Gestalt* of epochs, currents, fashions, only to eventually undergo a function shift:

> "For example, it is evident that in Renaissance art such a dominant, such an acme of the aesthetic criteria of the time, was represented by the visual arts. Other arts oriented themselves toward the visual arts and were valued according to the degree of their closeness to the latter. On the other hand, in Romantic art the supreme value was assigned to music. Thus, for example, Romantic poetry oriented itself toward music: its verse is musically focused; its verse intonation imitates musical melody. This focusing on a dominant which is in fact external to the poetic work substantially changes the poem's structure with regard to sound texture, syntactic structure, and imagery; it alters the poem's metrical and strophical criteria and its composition. In Realist aesthetics the dominant was verbal art, and the hierarchy of poetic values was modified accordingly". (26-27) (underlinings mine)

It should be noticed that, in order to explain how the dominant works at all, Jakobson needs to evince the notion of mechanics. Since the dominant is an element of structure, it follows that it is made. In direct opposition to the monistic point of view, he proceeds, the mechanistic standpoint recognizes a multiplicity, or mechanical agglomeration of functions. Of all of

these functions, poetic language, itself devised through specialized tehnique, is dominated by the aesthetic. On the contrary, ordinary language fulfills a dominant referential function. And when he concludes that "a poetic work is defined by a verbal message whose aesthetic function is its dominant" (27), he emphasizes the "internal structure of the sign" (28), an intimate intricacy which is the end product of minute labour. All a matter of technique, this poetic mechanics, one cannot help speculating: μηχανή, in classic Greek, of which 'machine' in most modern languages, was derived from μῆχος means, expedient, remedy. The 'how' of poetry, its 'ῥητορική τέχνη' is the true focus of the formalist-structuralist critic. And indeed, as we shall see further on, Jakobson takes special interest in tropes.

'Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak' (1935)[1] discloses the essence of the poetic trope as lying not simply in "the manifold relationships between things, but also in the way they shift or dislocate the familiar relationships". (144) (emphases mine) This study is seminal in sedimenting a crucial differentiation that Jakobson will return to over and over again, in his linguistic-poetic interventions. It is a distinction originating in the Saussurean model of horizontal (or else syntagmatic), vs. vertical (or else paradigmatic), axis, respectively. The two axes, together with grammatical categories, and other such taxonomies, concur in what the critic lovingly called the 'poetry of grammar', the 'grammar of poetry'[2].

Arranged, therefore, along the two differential axes of language, metaphor, and metonymy, the fundamental tropes, are defined in the Jakobsonian vocabulary of analogous, and antithetical, parallelisms, respectively. Paul Kiparsky recalls

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[1] In Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone, **Pasternak - Modern Judgments**, Aurora Publishers Inc., Nashville/London, 1969.

[2] 'Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry', in *Lingua* 21, (1968), pp. 597-609.

Jakobson taking delight in citing a quotation from Hopkins, in which the Victorian poet speaks of 'comparison for likeness' sake' and of 'comparison for unlikeness' sake'[1]. Likewise, metaphor, set on the vertical axis called paradigm, is governed by similarity, whereas metonymy, on the horizontal axis called syntagm, observes the logic of contiguity. As structural elements, we are invited to speculate, the two tropes carry basic semantic loads: metaphor, the capacity of substitution, metonymy, the relational topography of language as communication. As semantic, rather than narrowly rhetoric figures, they are extensive differential categories: paradigmatically, METAPHOR operates through selecting samples (< Lat. *exemplum*, Gr. *παράδειγμα* < *παραδείκνυναι* to show side by side), while METONYMY is engaged in the syntactic operation of combination (< Gr. *συντάσσειν* to arrange together, to put in order together). The ensuing differential categories are set in parallel, to help the reader visualize the contrast, while keeping in mind the vertical/horizontal disposition dicussed above:

METAPHOR	METONYMY
similarity	contiguity
paradigmatic	syntagmatic
lyric poetry	epic & fiction
Romantic-Symbolist	Realist
surrealism	cubism
drama	film

The structural(ist) nature of paradigmatic, or *in absentia*, vs. syntagmatic, or *in praesentia*, relations headed by the two figures has been compared to Roland Barthes's two axes in clothing[2]:

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[1] In **A Tribute to Roman Jakobson: 1896-1982**, p. 31.

[2] See Elmar Holenstein, **Roman Jakobson's Approach to Language**, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & London, 1976, p. 148

paradigmatic	syntagmatic
hat	hat
cap	shirt
hood	tie
helmet	jacket
cowl	trousers
turban	shoes

One will recall Barthes's suggestion that the menu in a restaurant can, structuralistically, be read syntagmatically, and paradigmatically. In the late 50's, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan paired the two axes with the two principal mechanisms assigned to the unconscious by Freud:

metaphorical	metonymic
condensation	displacement

Jakobson's own observations on aphasia, even though made from the linguistic viewpoint, shed some light on the mental processes involved in metaphor and metonymy. Aphasia is a speech defect, as its etymology indicates: Gr. αφασία < α- without + φάσις utterance. It is the loss or impairment of the power to use or comprehend words, usually resulting from brain damage. In his study of aphasia, Jakobson considers its implications for poetics. Hence the assumption that aphasia deserves analysing as substance for the practical critic. Two differential axes are discussed again: (1) a vertical dimension of language, whereby each element is selected from a set of possible elements, and could be substituted for another set; and (2) a horizontal dimension, whereby the elements are combined in a sequence (which constitutes a *parole*). There are then two kinds of aphasia: (1) aphasia caused by similarity disorder, which corresponds to metaphor; and (2) aphasia entailed by contiguity disorder, which corresponds to metonymy. Jakobson's conclusion is that even normal speech tends towards these two

types of speech defects. As does literary style, in which either the one or the other may be predominant, e.g. metaphor in Romantic and Symbolist poetry, metonymy in Realist fiction. Poetry does, in effect, project its language from the metaphoric or paradigmatic axis of verbalization onto the metonymic or syntagmatic. By so doing, poetry opposes the ongoing linearity of speech with synchronic features, or, speculating on the idea of opposition, poetry is a deliberate contrast of linear temporal flow (illustrated in syntagm/metonymy) vs. spatial landmarks (illustrated in paradigm/metaphor).[1] The suggestion was used by David Lodge, in **The Modes of Modern Writing** (1977), in which modernism and symbolism are seen as essentially metaphoric, while antimodernism and realism appear as basically metonymic.

All of the basic concepts and the theoretical thrust of his earlier formalist-structuralist articles are taken over and magisterially worked into the fascinating demonstration of his 'Linguistics and Poetics' (1960).[2] This much debated contribution criticized by Roger Fowler from Halliday's Speech-Act theory perspective, in an as famous article[3], has yet remained a point of reference in the literature.

'Linguistics and Poetics' is too peremptory a title to avoid defining as corollary to fundamental discussion. It is replete with conclusive excogitations and engages the reader in matters instantly perceived as *sine qua non* in the field. Who speaks is, obviously, the master:

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[1] For further details, see Robert Scholes, **Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction**, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1974.

[2] 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1960, p. 350-77. All references and quotations in this book though are from the reprinted text included in K.M. Newton, *Op. cit.*

[3] 'Literature as Discourse', in **Literature as Social Discourse: The Practice of Linguistic Criticism**, London, 1981, pp. 80-94.

"I have been asked for summary remarks about poetics in its relation to linguistics. Poetics deals primarily with the question, *What makes a verbal message a work of art?* Because the main subject of poetics is the *differentia specifica* of verbal art in relation to other arts and in relation to other kinds of verbal behavior, poetics is entitled to the leading place in literary studies". (119)

It sounds as if these are 'summary remarks', or a 'closing statement' not only for the occasion, but in principle. The axiomatic tone pervades the brisk introduction. Everything in manifest recognition of the differential definition at hand.

LANGUAGE *is* LITERATURE, with a difference. Language is, by and large, communication. Even though Jakobson concentrates on the verbal, he is alert to those areas of para-, or pre-verbal, communication that complete the communication act, which he offers in the well-known six-factor schema:

CONTEXT

ADDRESSER MESSAGE ADDRESSEE

CONTACT

CODE

Who speaks is also the linguist, who thus proposes his own differential schema, by means of amending the unsatisfactory, because simplificatory, traditional three-element chart of "the first person of the addresser, the second person of the addressee, and the 'third person', properly -- someone or something spoken of..." (122) Jakobson then embarks upon looking at the functions that each of these factors plays, and comes up with a corresponding six-function schema:

REFERENTIAL
EMOTIVE POETIC CONATIVE
PHATIC
METALINGUAL

We are now oriented, as it were, in Jakobson's schema of verbal communication in general. Specifically, though, this largely linguistic framework (the *genus*) includes the poetic terrain, whose confines need defining. By doing so, Jakobson evinces the *DIFFERENTIA SPECIFICA* enunciated in his exordium. As elsewhere, the discussion focuses on the message. It is the message that is the dominant factor: the word *qua* word, in formalist jargon, phonetic, concrete, Jakobson seems to say with his remark about pre-abstract communication:

> "The endeavour to start and sustain communication is typical of talking birds; thus the phatic function of language is the only one they share with human beings. It is also the first verbal function acquired by infants; they are prone to communicate before being able to receive informative communication". (122) (emphasis mine)

Who speaks is also the poet, and, in fact, Jakobson's original poetic writings have been given some attention especially in recent years. His very preference for Gerard Manley Hopkins could be explained by the above-quoted passage. In his correspondence with Robert Bridges, Hopkins admits that his poetry needs reading with the ears, not with the eyes. Similarly, for Jakobson, linguist, literary critic, and poet,

> "The set (*Einstellung*) toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language. This function cannot be productively

studied out of touch with the general problems of language, and, on the other hand, the scrutiny of language requires a thorough consideration of its poetic function. Any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification. Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. Hence, when dealing with poetic function, linguistics cannot limit itself to the field of poetry..." (122-23) (underlinings mine)

A myriad terms and concepts strewn (or, poststructuralistically, 'disseminated') about the corpus of his previous critical work crop up here, as cogent evidence of a lifetime's endeavour to grasp the whys and whereofs of LANGUAGE and of POETRY: the overdebated verba - res relationship, the functional aspects of language, the encoding / decoding process, the question of motivation / arbitrariness of the linguistic sign (Cratylus or Saussure?), the creative power of words, the *poietic* force of the word. To use a Genette term, Jakobson sends us to his own hypotext, traceable in 'On Realism in Art' (1921), 'Problems in the Study of Literature and Language' (1928), 'What Is Poetry?' (1934), 'Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak' (1935), 'Aphasia as Linguistic Topic' (1955), 'Linguistics and Communication Theory' (1961), 'Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry' (1961), 'Life and Language' (1974), 'Linguistic Contributions to the Pathology of Language' (1974), a.s.o.

The note he strikes in 'The Dominant' with reference to METAPHOR and METONYMY as, in fact, organizing

processes in communication recurs here. It is the note on which he works out his definition of the POETIC FUNCTION:

> "What is the empirical linguistic criterion of the poetic function? In particular, what is the indispensable feature in any piece of poetry? To answer this question we must recall the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal bahavior, *selection* and *combination*. If 'child' is the topic of the message, the speaker selects one among the extant, more or less similar, nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect, and then, to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs -- sleeps, dozes, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the base of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity, while the combination, the build up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. *The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination*. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence". (123)(underlining mine)

A few of these terms deserve considering, by way of conclusion. One is the palpability of signs in poetry: this is at once a great responsibility, and a rare quality, in either situation the poetic sign taking over the task of replacing the 'thing', of being a thing. Another is the empirical nature of the distinctly poetic feature: poetry is experience, poetry is practice. The etymon of 'experience' sends us to Lat. *ex- + periri*, akin to *periculum* attempt, and further back to Gr. *εμ- (ε ν-) + πε ῖρά ν* to attempt. The Middle and Old English for fear, indicating sudden peril, were phonetically, and semantically, more faithful to the notion of attempt. There is no genuine attempt without commitment, and poetry is certainly such a one. It cannot be

done by delegating responsibility. And it cannot be done. It is made: a third basic term here is device. Poetry is produced with skill. But, most distinctly, poetry is that special selection of empirical material that has the power of combining the disparate into the coherent. It is LANGUAGE with a difference, and the difference is harmony, the merging of loose items into the oneness of a whole. LITERATURE, as it were, is this DIFFERENCE.

Between scientist and poet, both trades with the vocation of order in the chaos of the world, Roman Jakobson opts out for the latter. Poetic language is all equivalence, but so is the metalanguage of science: A = A.

> "Poetry and metalanguage, however, are in diametrical opposition to each other: in metalanguage the sequence is used to build an equation, whereas in poetry the equation is used to build a sequence". (124)

Recent evaluations of Jakobsonian poetics confirm our speculations. By semiotically extending the notion of text, in search of equivalences and parallels, "Jakobson's poetic myth blurs the difference between life and art".[1]

Tzvetan Todorov[2] writes with serious amusement about Jakobson's obstinate idea that, of all the things he had ever done in his lifetime, he was, in the first place, not a structuralist, or a formalist, but a poet:

> "Pour Jakobson, comme pour les romantiques dont il prend la succession, la poésie est un langage qu'il faut

[1] Krystyna Pomorska, **Jakobsonian Poetics and Slavic Narrative**, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1992, p. xxi.

[2] 'L'heritage formaliste', in **Jakobson**: Cahiers Cistre 5, Avant-propos de Roland Barthes, Editions L'Age d'Homme et Cistre, Lausanne, 1978.

examiner pour lui-même. C'est un langage qui met l'accent sur le langage. Or la théorie structuraliste part precisément de ce postulat. Les à-cotés du langage ne seront pas ignorés, mais ordonnés dans une hiérarchie ou ils interviennent de façon seconde. La poésie, de ce point de vue, apparaît en quelque sorte comme la quintessence du langage". (49) (emphasis mine)

And, as if paraphrasing Jakobson's own combination of linguistics and poetics (a metaphoric metonymy?), he goes on, like an echo to Jakobson's grammar of poetry, poetry of grammar:

"... la contribution majeure de Jakobson dépasse chacune de ses découvertes ponctuelles. L'essentiel c'est qu'il sait donner du langage l'image la plus étendue. Il pousse les linguistes, plutôt qu'à s'enfermer dans la recherche d'une norme, a saisir le langage dans son amplitude maximum. Il dit, en paraphrasant le dicton latin: je suis linguiste et rien de ce qui est langagier ne m'est étranger. Or le langage est matériau de la littérature, il ne faut jamais l'oublier. Donc, même quand il étudie la grammaire, il nous enseigne quelque chose qui modifie notre compréhension du texte poétique. En ce sens, toute l'oeuvre de Jakobson est pertinente pour l'étude de la poésie. (...) s'il fallait caractériser Jakobson (...), je le rangerais, non du coté des savants austères, mais plutôt parmi les amoureux fervents'. (50) (emphasis mine)

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CONCLUSION

In their acknowledged and consistently proclaimed desire to approach literature scientifically, the Russian Formalists, like the Czech Structuralists, looked at literature as an object, and resorted to method in literary studies. Both the formalist and the structuralist attitude, as the very names indicate, focus on the technical make of the literary object *qua* object.

The Formalists concern themselves with the text as such, and concentrate on the linguistic and formal aspects of literary texts, rather than on their relation(s) with non-literary language, without though neglecting the latter. In fact, in their attempts to analyse the literary text, they proceed differentially, by opposing literary language to non-literary or practical language, and by evincing the differences between the two.

A linguistically-bound approach to literature, theirs is a basically analytical method rooted in the direct experience of the text, with special emphasis on its technicalities. A major Formalist-Structural preoccupation is identifying devices in the literary text, and, on this basis, developing a larger understanding of literature and literary language as skill, style, art. This accounts for a whole vocabulary featuring such technical terms as 'object', 'thing', 'mechanism', 'ploy', 'strategy', a.s.o.

In trying to differentiate between the literary and the non-literary, in order to define the literary, the specificity of literature appears to be the central notion. The term 'literariness'

thus gains currency and polarizes formalist discourse. Literature is regarded as a linguistic activity with a specifically aesthetic function, the dominant of the literary text. Literariness is the effect of the use of devices, which are self-referential, i.e. point to themselves. Thus, devices make the reader aware of form in language, and, indeed, of language as form.

By resort to devices, literary language differentiates itself from practical language in several respects: it is artificial, i.e. made, and made with technical *savoir faire*, art, it is self-sufficient i.e. exempt of interest(s) in the outward world, it shocks our expectations, because it acts by defamiliarization, i.e. it uses devices in order to save language from automatism(s).

Methodologically, this approach favours taxonomies based on binary oppositions and hierarchies, and is infused with a general sense of grammar or system. This, together with the formalist-structuralist bent on the work as object, and on language as form, is the main butt of attack by post-structuralists now.

Nonetheless, the Formalist-Structuralist moment (roughly the mid-10's to the 60's) was as innovatory a phase in linguistic and literary studies, as it has remained an influential one. Both in terms of method, and of theoretical thinking, full-fledged Structuralist, Semiotic, Psycho-Analytic, and, indeed, Post-Structuralist, approaches (the latter flagrantly anti-formalist-structuralist), could not be conceived of without the crucial contribution made by Formalism and Structuralism in their day.

HETEROGLOSSIA AND CARNIVAL AS DIFFERENCE
(Bakhtin and Bakhtinianism)

The student or scholar moving in the Anglo-American academic circles of the 1990's prodded by some cultural reason or other to look up terms like 'polyglossia', 'dialogism', 'chronotope', 'carnivalization', in some book or other by Mikhail Bakhtin, who authored them, will be, in 99% of cases, frustrated to realize, after repeated attempts, that Bakhtin material is hardly available in the library stacks where he or she expected them to stand. Reason? Not that those libraries are not well-equipped, nor that, given that this is a Russian critic writing about long forgotten things like medieval fairs, his books have landed somewhere in a depository or reserve space, available only on request. The reason is exactly the opposite, and it seems only fair that a chapter dedicated to Bakhtin should start on an oppositional note!

Bakhtin is hard to find because everybody reads Bakhtin. Tomes have ben written about his work, and translations from the original succeed one another at impressively short intervals. The most recent titles include the most clandestine of his notes and jottings, some saved with labour and industrious dedication by Russian Bakhtinians, from the ravages of time. Piles of unknown early writings discovered in the 1970's were minutely deciphered and transcribed. They came out in English in the 1990's, owing to the strenuous work of Bakhtinians overseas.[1]

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[1] **Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin**. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, Translation and Notes by Vadim Liapunov, Supplement translated by Kenneth Bronstrom, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1990, and M.M. Bakhtin, **Toward a Philosophy of the Act**, Translation and Notes by Vadim Liapunov, Edited by Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov, University of Texas Press, Austin,

These so long ignored pages complete the configuration of a lifetime's work. They have, in the last couple of years, shifted yet again the accent in Bakhtinian studies. To speak of Bakhtin and of the Bakhtin circle and to speak of Bakhtinianism in Russia and elsewhere is part of the humanistic agenda nowadays.

'Lit. crit.' in the academic curricula and literary criticism as a preoccupation are, according to some, marked off by Bakhtinian borders. David Lodge, a prominent critic of the English-speaking novel, and, more largely, of fiction, speaks about the "after Bakhtin" era in a book of the same title[1], in which he distinguishes three neatly definable phases since the mid-century: Structuralism (the 60'), Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism, in general (the 70's), and the discovery and dissemination of Bakhtin's work, which transcends and counters Structuralism and Post-Structuralism (sic), in the 80's. Wayne Booth, author of the famous **Rhetoric of Fiction** (1961), pays due homage to Mikhail Mikhailovich in the introduction to the English translation of **Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.**[2] After remarking the "recent explosion of Western interest" (xiii) in Bakhtin's work, Booth broaches the ideology - form relationship, which, under the Russian critic's pen, led to revisions of standards and canons, and eliminated gross

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1993. These two volumes publish manuscripts of Bakhtin's philosophic period (1919-1924), which was followed by his arrest (1929) and deportation (between the 1930's and the 1960's). Bakhtin managed to hide them, but the shock of his arrest during Stalinist terror made him reluctant, even in the years after his return from official exile, to have them published. The English version follows briefly the 1986 Russian edition.

[1] David Lodge, **After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism**, Routeldge, London and New York, 1990.

[2] Mikhail Bakhtin, **Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics**, Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, Introduction by Wayne Booth, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.

simplifications naively treated by the West, in the 50's. The late Allon White, an ardent British Bakhtinian, sees in the Russian master's work an anticipation of the Halliday-Fowler sociolinguistic analyses[1] and divides recent critical territory into Bakhtin, Sociolinguistics, and Deconstruction! Michael Gardiner[2], aware of the enormous interest in Bakhtinian theory, and of its application to an impressive amount and variety of texts, from Homer to Soviet puppet theatre and 'rap' music (sic), finds that Bakhtin is appropriated by the most different schools, including those he either utterly disliked (the Formalist), or he would have disliked (Derridean theory)! Allan Reid[3] places him in the Neo-Kantian tradition, against the European philosophical background, and Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist[4], leading Bakhtin scholars in the United States, locate the centre of interest in Bakhtinianism in its thorough concern with difference:

> "A question that fuels Bakhtin's whole enterprise (...) is What makes difference different? Difference is a major preoccupation of modern philosophical thought, Derrida's *différance* being only one of the more recent and notorious instances. The factor that distinguishes Bakhtin in this tradition is his concentration on the possibility of encompassing differences in a simultaneity. He conceives of the old problem of identity along the line not of 'the same as', but of 'simultaneous with'. He is thus led to meditate on

[1] Allon White, **Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing: Collected Essays and Autobiogrpahy**, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 137.

[2] Michael Gardiner, **The Dialogics of Critique: M.M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology**, Routledge, London and New York, 1992.

[3] *Op. cit.*

[4] Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, **Mikhail Bakhtin**, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1984.

the interaction of forces that are conceived by others to be mutually exclusive. How, for example, can the requirement of language for fixed meanings be yoked together with the no less urgent need of language users for meanings that can be various in the countless different contexts created by the flux of everyday life? How can the requirement of societies for stability be reconciled with their need to adapt to new historical conditions? How can a text be the same and yet different in different contexts? How can an individual self be unique and yet also incorporate so much that is shared with others?" (9-10) (underlinings mine)

From the vantage point of readers of Bakhtin in the 1990's, when aspects of his theory have been brought to light which were uknown before, we can gauge the expanse and variety of his work with an increased degree of precision. And yet, words should be chosen cautiously to define his work, as they were chosen cautiously by himself, in defining his concepts. Even terms like 'theory' and 'precision' require considering with relative care, since Bakhtin was a convinced believer in lived experience, rather than in theorization, and a supporter of ambiguity, inherent and inescapable in whatever form of life, rather than of precise forms regulating life. It is in such basic oppositions and tensions that he articulates his broad humanistic discourse.

It will be best for us to pursue his thinking chronologically, trying to establish some invariants, in the luxuriant wealth of hypotheses and questionings that mark his critical stance at every point. In so doing, we shall try to see in this questioning attitude *the* Bakhtinian attitude.

The recently published early philosophical contributions face us with a new Bakhtin, as if difference never stopped working

in the interstices of his work. As has been noticed, these texts shock us much in the way in which Charles Lutwidge Dogson's **Condensation of Determinants** failed to amuse Queen Victoria, who had been so delighted with the author's previous book, **Alice in Wonderland**, that she had left a standing order for his next fabulation![1] For those left in a state of perplexed amazement, let us recall that Charles Lutwidge Dogson was Lewis Carroll's real name.

'Art and Answerability' (1919), 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' (ca. 1920-1923), and 'Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art' (1924), gathered as **Art and Answerability** (1990), and the manuscript fragment published as **Toward a Philosophy of the Act** (1993) propose 'anachronistic' concepts like 'author', 'hero' and 'aesthetics', Holquist and Liapunov seem to say, tongue in cheek (ix). After Barthes's declared 'Death of the Author' and Foucault's challenging, even though rhetorical, question 'What is an Author?', and at a time of revisionistic attempts calling in question even the aesthetic value of high art, this Bakhtinian critical repertory, it seems to us, sounds less disquieting, though, indeed, more contradictory. Highjacked into the camp of antifoundationalist reconsiderations, Bakhtin, we believe, is not an antifoundationalist, i.e. a dissolver of high culture and of the canon. Rather, grappling with difference at every turn, he tries to infer how it accommodates in apparent evenness. Bakhtin does remain the exegete of colossal figures of the world literature canon -- Dostoevsky and Rabelais --, and his bringing folk art and subversive culture to the fore is *not*, to our mind, aimed at demolishing 'Western metaphysics', as has been

[1] This apocryphal story, apparently current during Lewis Carroll's lifetime, set Carroll thinking even more deeply about 'fiction'. Holquist and Liapunov trace it back to Roger Green's revision of **The Lewis Carroll Handbook**, cf. *Op. cit.*, pp. xlv-xlvi.

maintained in the anti-canon arena, and it may be that, seen from this angle, Mikhail Bakhtin appears even more oppositional than thought before.

'Art and Answerability' sets the stage, as it were. Opposing the 'mechanical' as alienating and devoid of meaning, Bakhtin looks for meaning in the "three domains of human culture -- science, art, and life", only through the unity of "the individual person who integrates them into his own unity". (1) (all emphases added) Now, this union may itself become mechanical, and more often than not it does, which makes Bakhtin the humanist uneasy. We are here confronted with a deeply ethical question, and ethics should, at any time, be confrontation. The ethical - aesthetic rapport needs looking into with full responsibility, we are let to understand. Where Eliot distinguishes between the 'man who suffers' and the 'mind which creates' ('Tradition and the Individual Talent'), Bakhtin bewares of the naive mechanical union of artist and human being in one person, to the effect that art turns "too self-confident, audaciously self-confident, and too high-flown, for it is in no way bound to answer for life" (1), and life "has no hope of ever catching up with art of this kind (...) 'That's art, after all! All we've got is the humble prose of living'". (1) There arises the huge ethical problem of seeing and accommodating the two sides simultaneously:

> "When a human being is in art, he is not in life, and conversely. There is no unity between them and no inner interpenetration within the unity of an individual person.
>
> But what guarantees the inner connection of the constituent elements of a person? Only the unity of answerability. (...) It is not only mutual answerability that art and life must assume, but also mutual liability to blame. (...)

The true sense, and not the self-proclaimed sense, of all the old arguments about the interrelationship of art and life, about the purity of art, etc. (...) is nothing more than the mutual striving of both art and life to make their own tasks easier, to relieve themselves of their own answerability. For it is certainly easier to create without answering for life, and easier to live without any consideration for art.

Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself - in the unity of my responsibility". (1-2) (underlinings mine)

So, Bakhtin rejects the mechanical union of art and life, only to assume the responsibility of genuine union, which, in his view, is lived directly and personally. Hence the adequacy of the term 'assume', in his case. As will have been noticed, Bakhtin phrases the whole discussion from the first-person viewpoint ('myself', 'my responsibility', etc.) This personal nature of answerability lies at the heart of his philosophy of the act, and accounts for why Bakhtin regards himself as an anti-Aristotelian: in his **Poetics**, 9, 26, Aristotle gives priority to philosophy over history, for dealing with universals, rather than with particulars. Philosophy's power of generalization abstracts it and raises it above history. It is what Bakhtin cannot accept, in his devoted "new definition of the human subject (as) a radical specificity of individual humans". (Holquist & Liapunov, xx) Aristotle places poetry, or, by extension, art, between philosophy and history; its statements have something of the nature of universals (for dealing with necessity or probability, what 'ought to be' or 'might be'), whereas history treats mere particulars ('what has been'). It is this placement of philosophy, and, consequently, of art above history that problematizes the art - life relationship in Bakhtin's "first philosophy (...), the philosophy of the act-deed"[1].

[1] **Toward a Philosophy of the Act**, p. 53.

Toward a Philosophy of the Act provides the ground for his "moral philosophy" (54), where moral is perceived as human all through. Bakhtin's division of human culture into science, art, and life ('Art and Answerability', 1) makes of him a Neo-Kantian[1]. Indeed, a Kantian type of triad is set forth, presenting culture as the cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic, field, respectively. If we look at the proposed triad, we shall see that to the cognitive field correspond science (Bakhtin), or philosophy (Aristotle); to the ethical correspond life (Bakhtin), or history (Aristotle); and, to the aesthetic, art (Bakhtin), or poetry (Aristotle). Of the three, the aesthetic field/ art/ poetry is an all-embracing kind of activity. The aesthetic comprises the ethical and the cognitive, and is subject to uniqueness, because it is human:

> "The world in which a performed act orients itself on the basis of its once-occurrent participation in Being -- that is the specific subject of moral philosophy. (...) But these concretely individual and never-repeatable worlds of actual act-performing consciousness (of which, *qua* real components, unitary and once-occurrent Being-as-event comes to be composed) include common moments -- *not* in the sense of universal concepts or laws, but in the sense of common moments or constituents in their various concrete architectonics. It is this concrete architectonic of the actual world of the performed act that moral philosophy has to be described. (...) These basic moments are I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other". (53-54) (all underlinings added)

[1] Allan Reid, *Op. cit.*, p. 82.

The I - you is, in philosophical terms, the self - other relationship, and has to do with the question of identity. In aesthetic terms, it assumes the shape of the author - hero pair, discussed in 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity'. Bakhtin looks at this central opposition as inherently human differentiation, and projects it against the wider background of human life, with its space and time determination. Thus, to the author - hero relationship is added the complicating factor of spatial-temporal identity, as when he treats the "spatial form of the hero" (22), "outward appearance" (27), "outward actions" (42), "the inner and the outer body" (47), "the value of the human body in history" (52), but especially "the outer body as an aesthetic phenomenon". (61)

From the physical act of seeing the other, to the 'consummation' of 'integrating' this other into the whole of the work, the process is aesthetic *and* ethical. It is effecting wholeness out of chaotic parts, but not without the risk of affecting the oneness of the other, from the standpoint of the self. It gives substance to the concept of 'architectonics' (literally original, primary, therefore exemplary, building or putting together), but cannot be dissociated from the Urdifferenz of self-perception vs. other perception. (Holquist & Liapunov, xxviii) It is, because of this, an ethical question, and adds to the notion of 'hero' as exemplariness the other note, sacrifice, in a world existentially indifferent to the individual human. In as much as 'architectonics' is, aesthetically, the putting of heterogenous parts into a "consummated whole" (22), it is equivalent with the production of order, but still leaves the unrepeatability of life an open question. Once again, we can grasp the responsibility assumed by art, with 'authoring' featuring as a fundamental moral aspect. This tantalizing question is the centre round which gravitate the complex **Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics**.

The kind of ethics Bakhtin proposes then is the ethics of everyday existence, in which we all author communication in some form or other: we perform various deeds, whether as physical action (seeing, hearing, etc.), or as thoughts, or we produce utterances, or write texts. In each of these possible forms of communication we basically commune with others. Speculating on this is actually in the Bakhtinian spirit, and the religious connotation has been emphasized.[1] Singificantly, Bakhtin does not personalize the author as 'we', but as 'I'. This is a very important point that he makes, and the intricate network of communication as performance and sharing derives its complexity from the 'I-ness' that is responsible for the mere act/deed of communicating. I am, at any time, involved in dialogue with some other 'I', my self performs an act of commun(icat)ion with another self, or rather with other selves. OTHERNESS is the very ground of human existence. As when he looks into human culture as science, art, and life, when he posits the self - other self/selves question, Bakhtin underlines the human nature of this constant exchange, and the collective nature of the values produced in this constant DIALOGUE. Whether cognitively, ethically, or aesthetically, I communicate within the context of values that are already there. Not only do I interact with other 'I's, I also interact with the world, and its values. Hence the moral responsibility, the answerability of my each and every individual deed.

There is another aspect of this interrelationship of SAMENESS (my 'I') and OTHERNESS (another 'I'), and it comes from the 'I's placement in the world. Each 'I' has its own

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[1] Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Op. cit.*, pp. 82-86, discuss the matter in terms of a "radical Christology", with special celebration of the body (of Christ), therefore, a special enactment of the Eucharist, all this through language, which, in Bakhtin's view, is material and dialogic, so prone to sharing.

space and time 'location' (this will be later developed into the theory of the 'chronotope'). Each 'I' is, *per force*, selective in its interaction with another 'I'/ other 'I's. Each 'I', moreover, because of its spatial-temporal determinations, becomes a 'you' seen from the other end (the other 'I') in the process. What happens is that the interactive 'I's, by communicating, produce and exchange values, which otherwise do not exist as pregivens in the world. The self's time is open, centrifugal. The other's time is completed, centripetal. But this is so only from each individual 'I's perspective. Indeed, the I - you relation is, in the first place, a question of place (sic), of relation, rather than relationship. The 'I', Bakhtin maintains, sees 'this', because it is blind to 'all that'. It has a 'surpluss of seeing', from the perspective of the other 'I'/ 'I's, but, for sure, so does/ do the other 'I'/ 'I's. There is then, according to what Bakhtin calls the law of placement, a mutual answerability of the 'I's. We are all authors of acts/ deeds, we address our values to others and take values from others, we are caught in a network of negotiations (as the New Historicists will plead). We are *in* the world as authors of values communicated through language. There is reciprocity, there is exchange, there is solidarity, owing to language, our collective human "house of being". [1] Freedom and human dignity through language is Bakhtin's credo. It is hard, we believe, to place him in the revisionist and antifoundationalist camp alongisde critics that see in language a "prison house", or a "madhouse".[2]

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

[2] The former syntagm is Frederic Jameson's, who uses it as the title of his well-known Marxist attack on the ahistoricity of Formalism-Structuralism: **The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism**, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1972. The latter title is one of the 'en vogue' antifoundationalist reconsiderations of Enlightenment philosophy, mentality, culture, etc. This is Allan Ingram, **The Madhouse of Language: Writing and Reading**

In a way, **Freudianism: A Critical Sketch** (1927) disputed as Voloshinov's, or Voloshinov-Bakhtin's, is a blueprint for the great well-known Bakhtinian works, and a resumption of the issues dealt with in the earlier writings (see above). For one thing, it is excellent evidence of Bakhtin's rejection of all form of imprisonment. The main point is the opposition Bakhtin sees between Freud's and his own stance, in terms, again, of the problematics of the self, and of human freedom as an individual asset. Sigmund Freud's theory of the superego as restraining factor imposed upon the ego (superposed) is part of Bakhtin's critique of hierarchy. On the contrary, the self is, for him, inseparable from, and, in principle, as free as, other selves. The self exists in the world, to freely enjoy it, and is perfectly motivated in its attempt to reverse the world's hierarchy, if only momentarily, if, by so doing, it frees itself of impositions. We shall see this dialectics of self and other at work in Bakhtin's treatment of HETEROGLOSSIA, DIALOGISM, POLYPHONY, and CARNIVAL -- epoch-making terms in literary criticism, all related to DIFFERENCE.

Yet another halt, before discussing the great Bakhtin books, will not be useless. Belonging to the same philosophical period of the 20's, 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art' (1924), and **The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship**[1], dialogically authored by Medvedev-Bakhtin, are essential especially for an understanding of the phenomenon of LANGUAGE in LITERATURE. Differentiating himself from the Formalists, whose limitations in dealing with language originate in their static view (language as '*langue*', as Saussure

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Madness in the 18th Century, Routledge, London, 1991.

[1] The edition used here is P.N. Medvedev/M.M. Bakhtin, **The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Crticial Introduction to Sociological Poetics**, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1978.

will have it), Bakhtin focuses on the valorising activities involved in language as such, and, particulalry, in literary language. The discussion turns back on Neo-Kantianism , i.e. the human dimension of culture, hence its axiological nature:

> "Everything enters into art, it rejects nothing. Art transforms reality without changing its cognised and ethically valorised nature. (...) It unifies the world of cognition and act, it harmonizes nature and naturalizes man"[1].

This all-absorptive power of art is due to the power of language, which is simultaneously content and form, in its material quality. Literature, materially language, is all of language, which, as we have seen, secures exchanges of values among humans, as it hosts values, in its capacity as home, the abode of communication. The material of language contains "informed moments of content"[2]. (underlinings mine) As a human deed, language is personal, or rather, interpersonal. It internalizes experience. The artistic creator does basically the same, with a difference, namely that he has an acute sense of "verbal activeness"[3]. Where the Formalists, in other words, simply see the materiality of language, Bakhtin reveals the creative attitude in language as the activity of consciousness. Like anything human, consciousness is shared: it dwells outside us, on the border between the individual and society.

To conclude with a speculation, the world of humans is a world of speech, in which we give and take and partake. Each of us is, as the Romans would say, a *socius*. Our answerability in the world is the moral consequence of our being social

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[1] In Allan Reid, *Op. cit.*, p. 83.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 85.
[3] *Idem.*

enacters of this give-and-take. It is only normal that poetics should be sociological[1].

It is difficult and against the Bakhtinian spirit to simplify discourse, even critical discourse, but for didactic convenience we shall remark that Bakhtin's discussion of HETEROGLOSSIA, dialogism, and polyphony singles out the Dostoevsky connection, while the aesthetics of CARNIVAL builds up round Rabelais. The common denominator is the novel as genre, and art, therefore as answerability. We shall proceed with considerations on Bakhtin's poetics of the novel.

'Discourse in the Novel', written in the troubled 30's, and fortunately not lost, as was a study of German fiction, 'Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel: An Essay on Historical Poetics' (1937-1938), 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' (1940), and 'Epic and Novel: on a Methodology for the Study of the Novel' (1941), four essays on 'the art of fiction' (the Jamesian syntagm requires reading *à la Bakhtin*, of course) make up a volume entitled **The Dialogic Imagination**[2], in English, **Esthétique et théorie du roman**, in French. As Bakhtin would have said, nothing is for ever the same, everything is unachieved. Not only his disparate notes, hidden from Stalinist authorities, at times lost, or partially retrieved and edited, but his 'finished' works (the term is risky) remain open. In this particular case, it seems to us that the

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[1] Michel Aucouturier, in his Preface to Mikhail Bakhtine, **Esthetique et theorie du roman**, trans. Daria Olivier, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1978, sees in Bakhtin's "axiological moments" the basis of a theory of signs, his sociological poetics, that prefigures contemporary semiotics.

[2] Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, **The Dialogic Imagination**, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981.

English title is more felicitous: for one thing, it Bakhtinianly avoids the term 'theory', and suggests the centrality of DIALOGUE in literature.

'Theory' is not a favourite term in Bakhtin's vocabulary because of its normative nature, and he looks at himself as anti-Aristotelian, so anti-normative. His 'theoretical' thoughts on the novel start with discourse, i.e. language, a phenomenon he constantly refrains from regarding other than in process, performative, not normative. Language for him is process ('*energeia*'), not system ('*ergon*'). For a subtler understanding of this opposition, let us have a look at the etymology of these two terms. Gr. ἐνέργεια action, operation, energy derives from ἔργον deeds (especially of war), works of industry, tilled lands, fields, farms; a hard piece of work, a hard task; pass. that which is wrought, a work; the result of work. A telling opposition was established in classic Greek between ἄνεργον untilled land < α-, αν - without, and ἐνεργόν tilled land < εν - in. The former designated land on which no human process of 'energy' had been exercised, the latter, on the contrary, implied activity exercised on land. The view of language in general, of literary language in particular, and of the work as such proposed by Bakhtin in this connection is now embraced by New Historicist Stephen Greenblatt[1]. As has been passingly remarked, in contradistinction to the Formalists, Bakhtin proposes, in effect, a linguistics of '*parole*', and theoretician David Lodge readily admits that Bakhtin is anticipated only by Plato, in **The Republic**, 3, where Socrates distinguishes between *diegesis*, i.e. the poet's speech, and *mimesis*, i.e. the imitated speech of the characters. It is, Lodge says, a reaffirmation of the writer's

[1] Cf. 'The Circulation of Social Energy', in **Shakespearean Negotiations**, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988.

creative and communicative power, after Barthes's sinister announcement of 1968 that the author is dead[1].

Bakhtin's is an antipoetics, rather than a poetics, of the novel, in the sense that he revisits and reverses the very notion of novel, and ends up with a differential definition of the novel not as genre, but as novelness. This is a force rather than a category, and has to do with such indefinites as process and exchange, rather than with definites. This transgression of accredited boundaries is part and parcel of Bakhtin's reversal strategies, and has, in recent years, been advocated as ground for encouraging minority and marginal voices (whether from the sexual, ethnic, or cultural angle); its political equivalent as strategy is called 'affirmative action' in the United States.

Genre becomes a volatile notion also by undergoing a metamorphosis that extends it to literature/language as such. There are only two categories in all genres: (1) 'epic', different though from the traditional designation of that term, and (2) 'novel', itself different, as we have cursorily noted. In the former category of the 'epic' are included all those genres called by Bakhtin monologic, because of their preference for "a world of firsts and bests, and of the 'bigger' past"[2]. Such are the great legends, the classic epics, and, for that matter, poetry, which, according to Bakhtin, always imposes one voice. This is the category of high literature, whose seriousness has kept it protected against centrifugal forces. The latter category, the 'novel', has the fluidity of time and contiguity of space. It is otherness as such. It can be parody (cf. Gr. παρα- beyond, ἀοιδή song, singing < ἀοιδέιν to sing), the Socratic dialogue, menippean satire, and all form of popular counter-culture. The anti-canon movement now can be seen as an exacerbation of this.

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[1] David Lodge, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

[2] In Katerina Clark & Michael Holquist, *Op. cit.*, p. 285.

The volatile character of the novel is defined by Bakhtin with the term 'chronotope', which suggests a temporal-spatial unity in perpetual change. The novel produces dialogue, it *is* dialogue. Anticipations of this differential view of the novel, it seems to us, do not fail to manifest themselves from the first theoretical positions adopted. Thus, Fielding's historic definition of the novel as a 'comic epic poem in prose' is, in a way, Bakhtinian. Fielding defines the new genre by opposing it to the much-praised epic, sees in it, in effect, a democratic type of literature ('comic', of course, means both producive of laughter, and enjoyable by the many), and naturally thinks of it as dwelling in the realm of prose, mobile and permissive, unlike the constrained code of poetry. Modern definitions of fiction insist on the time coordinate: Ian Watt, for instance, in **The Rise of the Novel** (1957), places the novel in the bosom of history, and consequently detects in it particulars of not only time and space, but of names, happenings, etc. Lukács and Barthes see in the novel the marriage of man and time.

Differently from these critical stands, Bakhtin's starts from language, again, with a survey of the 'prehistory of novelistic discourse'. In classic Greek times, we are told, myth was possible because of there being one single language to articulate it. This situation Bakhtin calls monoglossia and explains as a perfectly homogeneous word - meaning relatedness. We have heard this obsessively in the Romantics: the Adamic language of transparency and direct reference, the poetic word of God, God the Poet, the poet as God, etc. The nostalgia of the atemporal-aspatial Eden of the **Bible** is the poetic disposition itself. Bakhtin differs from this position radically: far from being a situation to be jealously desired, this homogeneity is, in fact, contrary to human nature, mobile of its own nature (sic), as history has only confirmed. The advent of barbaric languages and customs was not, Bakhtin believes, pernicious. Rather, it

brought about otherness, either as different linguistic expression, or as different cultural values, or, yet, as critique of the 'sacred' genres, etc. It had, as we say today, with reference to postindustrial multicultural societies, the effect of cross-fertilization that is beneficial to both the central, and the marginal values engaged in this interaction.

We are then invited to see in contrast, a Ptolemaic, and a Galilean world of language, respectively -- one of monoglossia, the other of polyglossia. Latin was already sensitive to the other-languagedness of expression that came about with the dissipation of the imperial centre. Thus, language is same and other both in space, and in time: it lives on the border with other languages, with which it shares space, and keeps differing from itself in time. This quality is HETEROGLOSSIA, which includes POLYGLOSSIA, but is not coextensive with it. Language is different both interlingually (e.g. the polyglot condition of Latin after barbaric engraftings), and intralingually (i.e. with respect to itself). That language is different in its own identity is a saving grace, rather than a flaw: in the slippery in-betweenness of word-meaning flourishes the creativity of the human race.

Clark and Holquist (13) see in Bakhtin's insistence that language is primarily utterance, not word, the simultaneous differences at work in the bosom of language. We suggest, for the Bakhtinian view of language, the expression *in vivo*, as opposed to the *in vitro* position that, to our mind, the Formalists adopt towards language. To consider the phenomenon of language *qua* phenomenon is to understand the lived nature of language, the fact that language is dialogic (Gr. *διά* - apart, asunder, *λέγειν* to speak, but, originally, to put together), i.e. it is a come-and-go. Like society. Between the extremes of monologue and silence, Bakhtin suggests a *tertium datur*: neither the personalist stance of 'I own meaning', nor the

deconstructionist position of 'no one owns meaning', rather the dialogic attitude of 'we own meaning'.

This communal nature of meaning secures our solidarity through language. Terms like the 'protocols' or 'social practices' of communication (whether linguistic or other than linguistic), 'performative', 'contextual', 'intentional', etc., all with recognized currency in the critical vocabulary nowadays can be traced back to Bakhtin. The Manichaean struggle in language, i.e. its tendency, at once, to centripetally preserve its structuredness, and to centrifugally wander out into the world Bakhtin defines as HETEROGLOSSIA,

> "not only a static invariant in the life of language, but also what ensures it its dynamics... Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside centralization and unification, the uninterrupted process of decentralization and disunification go forward"[1].

Elsewhere, he remarks that irony is a kind of paradigm for all utterance: I can appropriate meaning to my own purposes only by ventriloquizing[2].

We shall conclude this part of our discussion on an etymological note: the classic Greek for struggle was πόλεμος, hence πολεμικός 'polemic'; Lat. *ironia* comes from Gr. εἰρωνεία which designated the attitude of the εἴρων a dissembler, a double-dealer, one who says less than he thinks. No wonder Bakhtin finds in Socrates a model. Socrates is the actor of exemplary DIALOGISM: he always speaks, never writes, he is engaged in transactions with his interlocutors. to come to (some) truth, and he is ready to combat the others and be combatted.

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[1] **The Dialogic Imagination**, p. 272.

[2] Cf. Clark & Holquist, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

And we feel rather tempted to side with Bakhtin's, rather than with Derrida's Socrates.

POLYPHONY derives from HETEROGLOSSIA. As the name indicates, it means the co-existence of a multitude of voices, and, faithful to Bakhtin's stand, we should add, the coexistence of diverse elements at the same time, and in the same place. This associative nature of art (everything happens in con-text, words occur not individually, but with other words, in utterances, everybody is, at any point, engaged in dialogue with someone else) is normal, since art, like life, is social. POLYPHONY -- this is another way of saying DIALOGISM: what we utter goes away from us, circulates into the world, and comes back to us, enriched. We never utter definitive utterances. Our utterances are shared before we produce them, for, like anything human, they come into a world already axiologically contoured. Hence the sensation of ventriloquism. This implied idea of speaking with the body will assume special shape in Bakhtin's Rabelais book.

In **Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics** (1929)[1], otherness is put to work as aesthetic form. A differentiation operates here, too: European fiction is found to have been preeminently monologic, or homophonic. The traditional novel (as genre) is calcified in its own normativeness, which, at the level of expression, reads as authorial imposition: who speaks is the author, his one voice gives the tone and sings the tune. Bakhtin's abhorrence of monologism is, interestingly, similar to Blake's rejection of "single vision and Newton's sleep", and, in fact, the Christian background against which both positions are

[1] The edition used here is Mikhail Bakhtin, **Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics**, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, Introduction by Wayne Booth, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.

formulated allows of further parallelisms. Blake refuses to accept the commandments of a totalitarian Old Testament God, which he scornfully compares to dry science. Bakhtin praises the menippea, born at a time of crisis in classical antiquity, and has all the human compassion for humble Christ, the Son of Man, born in the outskirts of monological power. And, equally, Bakhtin rejects ossified Christianity turned, in its turn, monological in time. Blake, the fervent Christian, is, similarly, a stern critic of the hypocritical institution of the church.

By contrast, Dostoevsky's novel (as force, 'novelness') is language itself in its utter freedom -- open, mobile, slippery, in-between. Always indefinite. Dostoevsky's is the 'polyphonic novel', in which the characters have their own consciousness, so there can only be a multitude of voices, the chorus of mankind, as Bakhtin confesses elsewhere. No character is a third person enclosed in a network of determinations. All characters are a you each, ready to engage in an I - you relationship. Each of the participants, of which the author is one, among so many, is in a position to hear and overhear other voices, with which his or her individual voice can have commerce. If there is truth, truth is relative; it lies between consciousnesses, it is negotiated.

Wayne Booth's Introduction to the 1984 English translation of **Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics** deserves special attention. Written almost a quarter of a century after his own **Rhetoric of Fiction** (1961), this is more than a mere introductory study. Acknowledging his own Western ignorance of Bakhtinianism until some time in the late 70's - early 80's, Booth asks a grave critical question:

> "What were we in the West saying about the relations of ideology and form while Bakhtin was writing and rewriting, losing and finding again, his thousands of astonishingly

various yet curiously harmonious pages?" (xiii) (underlinings mine)

Art has form *and* is always "loaded with ideology". (xiv) There is no pure formalism. Between the formal critics, on the one hand, and the ideological critics, on the other, Booth, in Bakhtin's track, opts out for the *tertium datur*, the art of fiction, where "art is somehow concerned with form", form is "what distinguishes art from life", and "fictional forms are embedded in the materials of life". (xv) Booth sees in Bakhtin's position an "ideological formalism" (xviii) superior to his own Western "objectivity" (xix), always failing as genuine objectivity, because achieved in fiction through the author's voice, therefore imposed. Booth declares himself fascinated by Dostoevsky's sublime vision of the world accruing from "multi-centeredness" and "multi-voicedness", from the "chorus of languages" (xxi) engendered by the social, not private language -- polyphony -- with which we come into consciousness. But, perhaps the most sincere homage paid to Bakhtin is Booth's readiness to admit that, if he had not, like the practical critics, concentrated on objectivity as technical surface created by the author, he would have, probably, lent an ear to Bakhtin and his circle!

Completed in 1941, **Rabelais and His World**[1] was left in limbo for twenty odd years. It came out in Moscow, in 1965, as a revelation, and has not, for about another two decades, stopped being a central reference book in Western universities. It is, in many respects, the apotheosis of Bakhtinianism. It is a hymn to language, a coronation of Bakhtin's creed that to be is to communicate dialogically. To paraphrase the dictum, '*sum, ergo communico*' (Lat. *communicare* to impart, to participate <

[1] The edition used here is Mikhail Bakhtin, **Rabelais and His World**, trans. Helene Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984.

communis common < *munus* service, gift, Skt. *mayate* he exchanges). All of these connotations transpire from the Rabelais book.

The thrust of the demonstration here is CARNIVAL as human spectacle, and CARNIVALIZATION as an attitude. In aesthetic terms, grotesque realism is the equivalent. Underlying the two, the social, and the aesthetic expression of carnival, is a semantics of the body. As Pantagruel declares axiomatically, at the end of **Pantagruel**, Book 5, Chapter 47:

> "and your philosophers who complain that the ancients have left them nothing to write of, or to invent, are very much mistaken. Those phenomena which you see in the sky; whatever the surface of the earth affords you, and the sea, and every river contains, it is not to be compared with what is hid within the bowels of the earth"[1]. (underlining mine).

The centre of the world, as Bakhtin himself will instantly admit, is ex-centrically, indeed, eccentrically moved from where it traditionally was supposed to dwell, to the underground world. A reversal occurs, the result of which is that high is low and low is high, to speculate in the Shakespearean vein. Bakhtin takes Rabelais's suggestion of re-reading the divinity. According to Hermes Trismegistus, the divinity is "a sphere whose centre is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere". (369) The re-reading is, implicitly, a re-reading of Dante's **Divine Comedy**, "on the comic level" (369), on the assumption that there is more happiness down in the world than up in the skies.

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[1] **The Works of Francois Rabelais,** Faithfully translated from the French, with variorum notes and frontispiece, London: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly, p. 640.

The Dantesque **Commedia** constantly points upwards: each of the three canticles ends with the word 'stars' (*'le stelle'*), which is the destination of the hero's exemplary journey. Dante's hellish experience eventually brings him out of the tenebrae, for his aim is to see the stars again: "*E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle*" (**Inferno**, XXXIV, 139). His purgatorial excursion results in a purity of the self able to make the self ascend to the stars: "*Puro e disposto a salire alle stelle*" (**Purgatorio**, XXXIII, 145). And the paradisal vision of the stars as activated by the divine principle of love is the ultimate experience: "*L'Amor che muove il sole, e l'altre stelle*" (**Paradiso**, XXXIII, 145).

The opposite downward movement is paradigmatic in Bakhtin's exposition, for it is inherent in all forms of popular festive merriment and grotesque realism, which, out of prudery, or shame, or hypocrisy, have been kept in a subordinate position. As have curses, abuses, debasement, interment, actually usual techniques in carnival. Reason? There has, for centuries, been a dichotomy of official culture vs. popular culture. There would not be much wrong with this, if only the former did not, shamefacedly, ban the latter from the public arena, while, in fact, jealously wanting to use its means and enjoy its pleasure. Bakhtin's critique of the later Freud will now sound more convincing in its unveiling of the maiming effect of 'myth', as in **Civilization and Its Discontents** (1930), and **Moses and Monotheism** (1939).

The Hermes Trismegistus connection is interesting: Hermes was the name given to the Egyptian god Thoth, regarded as the author of all mysteries and alchemical doctrines. Hence, the hermetic nature of his interventions. He was described as Gr. *τρισμεγιστός*, Lat. *ter-maximus* thrice-greatest, and worshipped for his exceptional powers. Of extreme importance is, in Bakhtin's Rabelaisian retrieval of the Hermes Trismegistus figure, the subterranean, mysterious side of his personality. As

is the earthly side of Saturn, initially the Italic god of agriculture (the name of Saturn containts the Lat. root *sa-* of 'to sow'). Saturn was gradually associated with Greek Chronos, deposed from the sovereignty of the gods by his son Zeus/Jupiter. A yearly staging of this overthrow was enacted by the Romans in mid-December. This was a time of merrymaking extending even to the slaves. It was itself a reversal, in that the slaves acted as masters, and were waited on at table by their masters, now turned slaves. The festival was called Saturnalia.

Bakhtin theorizes (sic) on this antiritual celebration of the other. The spectacle known as CARNIVAL, "a gap in the fabric of society"[1], is a proposed unknotting of the syntax of social order. Laws, rules, and norms are suspended temporarily. And so is the hierarchy of high and down values itself. By transgressing spiritual norms, carnival installs the momentary reign of the body: eating, drinking, dancing, and low speak become the signifying activities. To the grave, serious vertical hierarchy of Christian metaphysics is opposed the unlashed roar of laughter, so physical, so bodily, an expression of utter human freedom. As usual, etymologies will help: grave (Lat. *gravis* heavy, grave) is of the same origin as grieve; serious (Lat. *serius* weighty), was associated with series, i.e. the rank or class in which somebody or something was fixed, as with the weight of observed rule. The outburst of carnivalesque laughter was the sign that the heavy laws of serialized behaviour were, for a while, lifted.

The toppling of the publicly accepted hierarchy is itself a ritual. Carnival is an institution to this day. Resumptions of the medieval spectacle are still topical in 20th-century culture. The Rio de Janeiro event scarcely needs presenting. No less spectacular is the New Orleans carnival, the Mardi Gras show.

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[1] Clark & Holquist, *Op. cit.*, p. 300.

References to carnival as spectacle, show, event are, indeed, part and parcel of its definition. Carnival is an overall show, yet it particularly impresses the spectators visually. Already the formulation is redundant: spectacle comes, in the last instance, from Lat. *spectaculum* < *spectare* to watch, frequentative form of *specere* to look, look at < Gr. σκέπτεσθαι and σκοπέιν to watch, look at, to behold; to consider. Seeing is believing, the English phrase goes. Seeing is also reviewing beliefs, Bakhtin will have it. The dual nature of language is bodily infused in the word skeptic: to be a skeptic (Gr. σκεπτικός), as we use the term now also etymologically implies to evaluate a situation by looking at its physical manifestations, by being a witness, a spectator as at the theatre. Etymologically, theatre and theory are related. Thus, Lat. *theatrum* < Gr. θέατρον a place for seeing, a theatre, focuses on the visual experience: Gr. θεασθαι to view < θέᾱ act of seeing, have as derivative the noun θεωρός spectator. Hence θεωρία a looking at, seeing, beholding, and by derivation, speculation (cf. Lat. *speculari* to spy out, to examine < *specula* watchtower < *specere*).

Contrary to accepted belief, theorizing is then relative, not absolute, and concrete, before it eventually resorts to abstraction. It allows of flexibility, because resulting from relatedness. And, dealing with the concrete, it is subject to change. It differs all the time. As does the relative and concrete spectacle of the world staged in CARNIVAL.

To better understand why Bakhtin finds in carnival all these valences, let us look into its cultural implications. Carnival is part of a traditionally observed calendar, in that it necessarily precedes an interval of rigorous fasting, before a crucial religious event. In Christian societies, carnival is the season of feasting and masquerading included in the general merrymaking before Lent. Francophone and Catholic Louisiana, for instance, keeps Mardi Gras, which obviously comes from French culture.

'Fat Tuesday' is an indicative name: food and drinks are consumed in excessive quantities on this particular day, the last in an interval of intensely earthly celebrations. Mardi Gras is the greatest show in the United States nowadays. People get ready for it months in advance. The spectacle as such is devised and prepared all through the year. As is the Rio de Janeiro Carnival, held in deeply Catholic Brazil. Like the former, Mardi Gras is an industry involving dress, food, and drink dealers, i.e. businesses catering for the physical aspects of life. It also involves a whole network of amusement producers, from traditional bands to modern technologies. They all serve to orchestrate a huge show of riotous excess. Even in Protestant Anglo-Saxon cultures, such as the English, carnival has preserved, at least onomastically, its relation to the Catholic background. Thus, Shrove-Tide is the period comprising Quinquagesima Sunday, and the following two days, i.e. Shrove Monday, and Shrove Tuesday. Lat. *quinquagesima* is literally 'the fiftieth'. Quinquagesima is the fiftieth day before Easter, reckoning inclusively. Shrove (ME *shriven*, OE *scrifan* to shrive, prescribe, is akin to OHG *scriban* to write < Lat. *scribere).* According to religious discipline, to shrive is to administer the sacrament of reconciliation, and to free from guilt. As the term indicates, administering is performed by the priest, the minister, i.e. the religious servant (Lat. *administrare* < *ministrare* to serve < *minister* servant). Freeing from guilt is, in terms of religious practice, performed by confessing one's sins to the minister. The result is an untying of the bond (cf. Rom. *dezlegarea de păcat*). Very popular are variants of this purging scenario in which people go round singing for money. The same pattern occurs in Halloween 'trick or treat', or in Christmas carolling (cf. Rom. *ne dați sau nu ne dați*). So, the period preceding spiritual ascension through fasting and general physical asceticism is an interval of

bodily enjoyment of life, hence, traditionally, the neccessity to free oneself of the fleshly bond.

Symmetrically, there follows a span of time dedicated to the soul. The next day from Shrove Tuesday is Ash Wednesday, strictly observed in the Roman Catholic Church, and in some Protestant churches. A look at T.S. Eliot's poem of the same title will not be superfluous. The name reflects the custom of sprinkling ashes on the heads of the penitents, by way of reminding them that they are perishable. It is an enactment of sorrow (Lat. *paenitentia* < *paenitere* to cause regret, to feel regret), associated with pain (Lat. *poena* < Gr. *ποινή* price paid, payment, penalty; akin to Gr. *τίνειν* to pay (a penalty), to make return or requital, *τίνεσθαι* to punish, Av. *kaena* revenge, Skt. *cayate* he revenges). Thus, one is supposed to pay for one's sins. Notice the exchange pattern, as in the Shrove rituals mentioned above. Ash Wednesday is the inception of Lent, i.e. forty days of fasting and penitence, in commemoration of Jesus's fasting and suffering in the wilderness. The forty days (Lat. *quaresima* the fortieth) till Easter-eve are thus a celebration of the metaphysical, after the explosion of the physical element. More strictly symmetrical are the opposite Sundays on either side of Easter, if we regard the latter as a divide between the two: Quinquagesima Sunday, the fiftieth day before Easter, and Whitsunday, the fiftieth day after Easter. The former, a time of excessive merrymaking, as we have seen. The latter, also known as White Sunday (cf. Rom. *Duminica albă*), a time of spiritual purgation, as indicated by the white clothes worn to commemorate the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles. Behind the Christian tradition, the heathen background is also interesting. Easter festival is a prolongation of pagan fertility rites commencing with the spring revival of nature. In fact, the term Lent itself gives us a clue: ME *lente* springtime, OE *lencten*, akin to OHG *lenzin* spring. Thus, Shrove-Tide, and

Shrove-Tuesday as the border line with fasting and penitence mark off the enjoyment of fleshly pleasures, before Ash Wednesday sets the scene for behaviour on the other side, i.e. spiritual betterment. CARNIVAL bears all this in its own lexical identity: It. *carnevale*, alteration of earlier *carnelevare* < Lat. *carnelevarium* < *caro, caris* flesh + *levare* to raise, to remove. CARNIVAL is literally the putting away of flesh as food, a forsaking of the carnal for the celebration of the spiritual.

Preeminently relevant, in Bakhtin's view, is the low element (earthly, as in Saturnal festivals, or subterranean, as in the Hermetic tradition). Rabelais's fascination with the entrails of the earth electrifies his imagination. Bakhtin devotes special attention to the sublimation of the physical into the meta-physical. But, differently from the usual way, he turns the hierarchy upside down: rather than consider the spiritual a sublimation of the material, he sees in the corporeal a trans-gression (sub-limation < Lat. *limen, liminis* threshold) of imposed bounds, a freeing.

Hence the emphasis on the BODY in **Rabelais and His World**. Carnival is the show of the BODY, the display of FLESH as performance. Bakhtin concentrates on the *hic et nunc* quality of carnivalesque experience, the triumph of man as body. The body is flesh, it feeds itself on flesh (meat), it wets itself with drinks, which, as in the ancient ritualistic orgies, produce liberation through excessive intoxication, the result being a trans-gression of rigorous borders. The body not only agglutinates material stuff, to keep it in shape, it also displays its physical shape in dancing, singing, defecation, copulation, etc. Intromission, and extromission, i.e. the putting in, and taking out of matter, respectively, play an important role, as has

been noticed[1]. Both attest special interest in orifices, through which the body has commerce with the world, as it were. As in commerce (Lat. *commercium* < *com-* with + *merx, mercis* merchandise), this is a give-and-take process, basically exchange.

It will now be clearer why the social side of carnival is so essential. Like any communal experience, carnival is a form of sharing, in a way the Eucharist quite physically enacted. Bakhtin thus proposes a different reading of the Eucharist as ritual. According to the Christian tradition, the Eucharist is spiritual communion with God, (Gr. *εὐχάριστος* grateful, thankful < *εὐ*- prefix derived from *ευ* well + *λᾶρίζεσθαι* to show favour < *χάρις* favour, grace, gratitude; akin to Gr. *χαίρειν* to rejoice, to be glad, to be delighted). The Eucharist is a reenactment of the Last Supper, of course, in which the material is the metaphoric counterpart of the spiritual: bread, as the body of Christ, and wine, as the blood of Christ, are consumed with a view to spiritual sublimation. They secure union with the Holy Spirit, therefore with God, through Jesus.

In his study of carnival, Bakhtin focuses on eating, drinking, and speaking as forms of exchange. Particularly is he interested in the most material forms that these activities assume, as in their excessive uses, such as gluttony, drunkenness, or swearing. At the face of it, this is a counter-culture move. And yet, for Bakhtin, carnival is the primal triumph of culture over nature. This makes sense only if we duly understand Bakhtin's revisionism of the concept of culture. Culture itself is relative and subject to variety, and there are high, as well as low cultures in all human communities. In the former category Bakhtin singles out the Roman Catholic Church rituals, while CARNIVAL is his favourite in the latter.

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[1] Clark & Holquist, *Op. cit.*, p. 302.

Bakhtin sees in low culture an incredible capacity for intertextuality. This concept has gained currency in literary criticism owing to a number of approaches, whether formalistic or sociologically-bound. Bakhtin handles the concept differently from either of these approaches, though his is clearly bent on the latter kind. What he finds in carnival, for instance, is an intertextuality of ideologies, i.e. a mingling of official, and unofficial value-systems and concepts. Carnival takes place in the public square, too, so it fringes on life more directly than 'serious' culture. Similarly, the grotesque body is an intertextuality of nature, i.e. a mingling of officially accepted high values, and officially rejected 'shameful' low values. This dichotomy operates further in differentiating between serious monolithic Christian culture (ordered by vertical hierarchy), and liberating carnival laughter (the effect of which is horizontal utopian equality). We shall pause later to consider the utopian nature of carnival.

Let us proceed here to analyse the examples Bakhtin provides of carnival as political show, which excitingly widens the notion of carnival. He finds that xenophobic societies, in their desire to keep the body 'pure' (i.e. untouched by otherness), usually associate the body with the state, therefore bestow upon it official qualities. They beautify it, we could say. The feast of the low is yet common practice in totalitarian socialist societies which gloat on praising the 'people'. Such were, we know, the heavy Stalinist pageants contemporaneous with the critical texts that Bakhtin had to cautiously keep away from public awareness. Such were, along decades, communist rallies everywhere else in Eastern Europe. The irony is that the official praise of the 'people' in these societies could easily, and ususally did, turn into the tyranny of the 'People', in whose name the authorities silenced the 'people'. In his category of political villains though Bakhtin also includes the bourgeoisie (a slave to practicality),

the Holy Roman Empire (which stifled national identity), and the Roman Catholic Church (the alleged possessor of absolute truth, and an authoritarian suppressor of man as bodily presence).

As a paradigmatic form of low culture, carnival releases tensions engendered and promoted by official culture. It creates a safety valve opened by laughter. This liberating effect of laughter has been discussed by authors of notoriety in the field. Thus Freud sees in laughter a deliverance from repressed material. Henri Bergson, as is known, underlines the automatic type of behaviour that triggers it off: laughter is "something mechanical encrusted on the living".[1] Incidentally, Bakhtin makes a point of diverging from both positions. He finds Freudianism reductionistic in its concentration on the ego-instinct, and is no less unhappy with Bergson's mechanical imposition. Either theory, he maintains, is conducive to a monologic stance. He therefore chooses to combat either by bringing onto the stage of human life carnival, at once polyglot and dialogic. Yet, despite overtly uttered difference of opinion, there is a common denominator among the three, in that they all underline the freeing effect of laughter. For what do we do when we mock at situations or people, if not see ourselves superior to some victim? By allotting to ourselves a position of alleged superiority, we make our 'victim's the inferior, and 'put them in their place'. The phrase suggests serializing people, placing them in a series, therefore effacing their individual identity, while, from a superior stand, advertising one's own identity. The same suggestion of downgrading is embedded in the phrase 'to put somebody down a peg or two'. In both these cases, language

[1] Henri Bergson, **Laughter, An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic**, Trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, MacMillan & Co., Ltd, London, 1911, p. 37.

formulates the reversal of hierarchy involved in laughter. No wonder laughter is feared by repressive regimes.

The "sabbatical subversion"[1] engineered by laughter is beneficial: the world is briefly, and safely, we should underline, subverted in carnival time, in order to allow us to rehearse and revise the categories by which we live for the rest of the year. Through humour we stop being the slaves of the rules of life and become voluntary survivors of these. We know this from our everyday strategies aimed at combating monotony. The New Year custom of throwing away old things (literally throwing them out of the window, in some cultures), the general cleaning preceding crucial events in the religious calendar, or the idea that one should never start a new business before getting rid of the signs of the old one, are all cleansing therapies that refresh us, humans. We find pleasure, and needed support in questioning the given, in order to make room for the new.

Bakhtin is perfectly aware of the political implications of such moves. What appears as vulgar and dirty is so only if taken out and torn away from this world, which is what the authorities usually do, to justify their rule. **Rabelais and His World** is replete with remarks on the invigorating effect of subversion, as in "gay carnival bonfire, in which the old world is burned". (380) The prevailing *diableries* of this spectacle confirm that the high powers and their values are deposed. Bakhtin even embraces the extravagant interpretation offered by German scholars to the term carnival as coming from *karne* or *harth* holy site + *val* or *wal* dead, killed. He placates this on political carnivalesque scenes, like the burning of dummies -- a spectacular denigration of official ideology, through physical damage exerted upon images of its rule. Such momentary reversals are, indeed, therapeutic, but remain utopian. They

[1] John Durant and Jonathan Miller, **Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour**, Longman Scientific & Technical, 1988, p. 16.

discharge the lightning rod function, but cannot prevent the eventual restoration of official culture. And while the utopian nature of such revisions has been debated, Bakhtin's belief remains commonly accepted that comedy reveals the most serious meaning of human history, i.e. human freedom[1].

A final remark will bring the favourite Bakhtinian terms HETEROGLOSSIA and CARNIVAL together. What Bakhtin finds in Dostoevsky is a human comedy replacing the divine comedy of one voice and unique truth. Polyphony is the necessary consequence of human diversity. There are as many voices as there are idetities in the novel, which, let us remember, is not mere genre, but an attitude, the attitude called freedom. Instead of univocal, plurivocal expression -- POLYGLOSSIA, instead of the same, diverging expression -- HETEROGLOSSIA. Like the NOVEL, so CARNIVAL, a kind of 'novel' played in the public market place. They are both performances, rather than static expressions, they bring to the fore humans, rather than gods and goddesses, and they are voiced by the chorus of laughing people, as Bakhtin loved to say. If humanity has enacted a drama, as it seems to have, this is a comedy, Bakhtin suggests, a human comedy.

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BAKHTINIANISM, a term acknowledged as a distinct critical approach in the Anglo-American literature, is the best indication of how fruitful the above-presented *démarche* has remained. The main threads that go into the making of a Bakhtinian critical mind will be singled out in the Conclusion. Let us stop here to consider the work of two prominent

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[1] Richard Keller Simon, **The Labyrinth of the Comic: Theory and Practice from Fielding to Freud**, Florida State University Press, Tallahassee, 1985, p. 15.

Bakhtinians, Peter Stallybrass, and Allon White. The former is a Britisher now teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadephia. The late Allon White, also English, but frequently mentioned in the American academia these days, has left us his **Autobiography** recently published[1].

Coauthored by them, **The Politics and Poetics of Transgression** (1986)[2] is a usual reference in critical bibliographies. That Bakhtin is the master for both is acknowledged in the first lines, as it is only too transparent from the title. That Bakhtin is associated with more recent influences, like Bourdieu, also shows the pertinence of his views. Stallybrass and White focus mainly on Bakhtin's **Rabelais and His World**, which they place in an wider context, somewhere in the area of Cultural Studies and New Historicism, alongside Norbert Elias's **History of Manners** (1978), and Mary Douglas's **Purity and Danger** (1966).

The book takes its main thrust from Bakhtin's concepts of the grotesque body, of the city, of hysteria, and THE CARNIVALESQUE. Each of these invites to exciting speculations.

The grotesque body as defined by Rabelais is analysed as a basic ingredient of fair and marketplace shows in eighteenth-century English popular culture, as well as in traditional rural rituals, such as pig-slaughter. Animal-human associations do have a history, of which medieval bestiaries are only partial illustration. Stallybrass and White rather seem to cleverly look into animal culture as symbolic and coextensive with human culture, and the first other book of the same effect that comes to mind is Robert Darnton's **The Great Cat Massacre** (1984).

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[1] Allon White, **Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing: Collected Essays and Autobiography**, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

[2] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, **The Politics and Poetics of Transgression**, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1986.

Thus, they sublty point to cultural transgressions, in modern times, which have been perpetuated since classic antiquity. The authors also provide an extremely exciting short history of the English pub as a form of low culture, and regale of the body. This, we belive, should be quite useful to students of English, whose notion of Englishness is thus rounded off with information about material culture.

The city appears as an open space, and an underground reality, which is not the novelty of Stallybrass and White's analysis. The city is usually regarded as an open space, *the* space of modern life, in contrast with the closed space of the medieval castle and its dependencies. Here is another instance of cultural transgression, in which boundaries are extended, and violated, and a new culture effectively burgeons in a more relaxed social milieu. The 'entrails' of the city, a metaphor pointing to both the body and low culture, should not strike at least readers of Balzac or Hugo novels. Stallybrass and White propose a transgressive reading of the city text alongside similar lines.

Hysteria is maybe the one term most literally associated with transgression. Not only is its etymology relevant, in this respect: Lat. *hystericus* < Gr. *ὑστερικός* < *ὑστέρα* womb. The Greeks did believe that hysteria was peculiar to women, and that it was induced by disturbances of the uterus. Used in such syntagms as collective hysteria, or political hysteria, the word is transgressive all through. Hysteria is normally associated with uncontrollable boisterous outbursts. It *is* a manifestation of disruption, what in the traditional literary vocabulary would have been called *hybris*. It is the hybristic cultural spectacle *par excellence*. Stallybrass and White are at their best Bakhtinianizing on marketplace shows. The temporary suspension of official order enacted through the carnivalesque performance is analysed in terms of the body participation, as a transgression of borders imposed by high spiritual culture.

The tone is basically Neo-Marxist, especially when the authors refer to "bourgeois myth" and "symbolic inversion" (17), when they see Bakhtin as "self-consciously utopian and lyrical about carnival and grotesque realism" (9), or when they resort to Terry Eagleton's theory. As when they sepak about "all the *clutter* and *mess* of the bourgeois Imaginary", and the "*ressentiment* structure" (199), which they work into their own theory, starting from Nietzsche and Freud. Particularly exciting is the way in which Foucault's view of transgression as "the interrogation of boundaries" (200) is brought side by side with Kristeva's carnivalesque discourse, which "breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest". (201)

Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing: Collected Essays and Autobiography (1993) is Allon White's acknowledged contribution to Bakhtinianism in the English-speaking world. The suggestion in the subtitle, as, in fact, in the very title, does not surprise one, if we keep in mind the gay background against which this book is written. Carnival, i.e. cultural reversal, hysteria, i.e. biological outburst, and writing, i.e. sublimation of the body through inscription, are all usual formulations in contemporary literary criticism. Maybe the most frequently used is the syntagm to inscribe the body, by which is understood a process of cultural storage in the body (whether physical, politic, or the body of cultural materials).

References to transgression are explicit here, too. Such is the *éclatement du sujet* in the work of Julia Kristeva. Nor should White's interest in psychoanalitic criticism take us aback. Along the same lines, he pursues discussions of language and location in Dickens, or of prosthetic gods in Deleuze's work.

Chapter 7, 'Bakhtin, Sociolinguistics, and Deconstruction' arrests our attention. The peremptory tone of the inceptive paragraph speaks of itself. We shall therefore quote it at length:

"In this essay I want to show that Bakhtin produced a theory of literature which encompassed and pushed beyond the present opposition between structural and sociolinguistic views of literary language. Moreover, since literary structuralism and deconstruction are ultimately linked to the same debate, I believe Bakhtin's theory simultaneously encompassed and pushed beyond them too. By 'push beyond', I mean that Bakhtin's work prefigured both structuralist and deconstructionist views of the language of literature, but crucially placed them both in a sociolinguistic framework which thereby makes them responsive to an historical and thoroughly social comprehension of literature. In other words, Bakhtin's theory of language can *give an account* of the split between structural and functional linguistics which is something neither tendency can do within its own terms". (135) (underlinings mine)

We could hardly think of a more Bakhtinian way of putting things. To embrace opposites, *and* to go beyond them seems to be the clue to Bakhtinianism. This reminds us of Bakhtin's looking at himself as an anti-Aristoteltian, and of the current view now that he resorts to a *tertium datur*. Let us take White's *demarche* more analytically.

Allon White sees in Bakhtin an anticipation of seminal sociolinguistic concepts, i.e. sociolect and register. Particularly does he insist on Bakhtin's awareness of the intentional dimension of meaning. These are well-entrenched terms in linguistic studies nowadays. White only underlines Bakhtin's sensational intuition that language/ literature/ culture are context-dependent, because, and therefore, axiologically marked. There is, in other words, a feedback process between 'text' and 'context', as we say today. For instance, when he sees in Bakhtin an anticipator of M.A.K. Halliday and Roger Fowler, White concentrates on such aspects of language as intentionality,

impossible to ignore now in any Speech-Act or Pragmatic analysis. He considers language's intrinsic capacity of negation in the light of Bakhtin's axiomatic statement that all discourse "lives on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context". (138) Which raises the question of heterogeneity vs. homogeneity, and of the essentially heterogeneous nature of language.

Sesitive to Bakhtin's view of language as living reality, White attempts parallelisms with Bloom's, and Iser's thoeries. Harold Bloom's **Anxiety of Influence** (1973) defines 'strong poems' as engaged in an antagonistic struggle against the alien word, eventually resulting in either harmony or dissonance. Wolfgang Iser's **The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response** (Baltimore, 1978) brings to the fore an 'implicit reader'. Language is, for the German critic, basically utterance at any time *for* or *to* somebody other than the utterer, whether this other be present or absent as such, in the given situation of language performance. In both cases, language is, as Bakhtin would say, dialogic, i.e. both same and other, and the two together. This is what he calls HETEROGLOSSIA, and this is what makes of language's case a case of constant POLYGLOSSIA. Which leaves the gate wide open to White's pervasive interest is language/ literature/ culture as hybrid:

> "Bakhtin is perfectly aware that the polar opposition between a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia and a developing polyglossia is something of a fiction. (...) What they represent, however, are two fundamental tendencies: monoglossia embodies the hegemonic force of a language established as 'the' language of the speech community, unified, centralized, authoritative, always *mythic* because unrelativized and unpunctured by travesty. Polyglossia embodies the forces of dispersal and differentiation, the

reality of actual speech situations, their disjunctions and productive heterogeneity". (149-50) (underlinings mine)

It is useful not to forget, even for a moment, that what is crucial in Bakhtin is the actuality of language. This, in fact, is the basis of White's critique of Deconstruction, as of Structuralism *per se*. To the '*langue*' status of language that forms the structuralist/deconstructive object, White sees Bakhtin opposing the '*parole*' status. Hence the difference (sic) between Derrida's '*differance*' and Bakhtin's '*heteroglossia*'. Concluding on this, White is firm in calling Derrida's *grammatology* "a purely *metaphysical* notion of heteroglossia insulated from the transformative and conflictual social arena of speech events". (150) After all, this is a study of language as writing, and as carnival, and hysteria. Which also illumines the correlation in White (and Stallybrass)'s previous book, between the politics and poetics of transgression.

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CONCLUSION

Bakhtin has enlarged literary critical terminology with items so well-entrenched in the Anglo-American critical jargon now, that it would be hardly possible to either omit or ignore them. Among these count such terms as POLYGLOSSIA, HETEROGLOSSIA, DIALOGISM, POLYPHONY, IN-BETWEENNESS, ANSWERABILITY, CARNIVAL, and CARNIVALIZATION

In all these basic Bakhtinian terms the common denominator is DIFFERENCE. The concept of difference is transparent in some, implied in others, but always present.

DIFFERENCE *à la Bakhtin* involves a number of aspects: binary oppositions, hierarchy, historical evolution, as well as contemporary heterogeneity.

Bakhtin does make use of binary oppositions, even though he likes to describe himself as anti-Aristotelian. He works out his own taxinomies, e.g. monoglossia vs. polyglossia, canonic genres vs. polyphonic genres, poetry vs. prose, monologism vs. dialogism, the epic vs. the novel, high culture vs. low culture, etc.

Not only does he resort to binary oppositions, but he also theorizes on hierarchy as the organizational principle of such oppositions. On this basis he engineers a critique of hierarchy.

Language, literature, culture exist in history, perpetually subject to change, marked by alterity. They are, consequently, context-bound, at all times subject to recontextualization. This implies variety not only in time, but also in space, as suggested by the term chronotope, basic in Baktin's differential poetics of the novel.

Given that language, literature, culture are living realities, phenomena, they are intrinsically different at the same time as they are contemporary with themselves. In other words, always other, never same.

Given that language, literature, culture are social phenomena, they are at all times shared experiences, as well as performance, rather than static manifestation. Hence the moral aspect of the exchange strategies in which they are always involved. Bakhtin's term for this is answerability, a complicating, yet inseparable factor in communication.

Bakhtin's critique of hierarchy envisages bringing to the fore the subordinate element, which has, historically, been silenced, ingored, if not altogether suppressed by the leading force(s). Such are popular culture as a whole, carnival as specific anti-official manifestation, parody, satire, comedy, etc. In as much as they are alternatives to official high culture, they are forms of liberation, safety valves for tensions long accumulated. Releasing such huge energies in low cultural forms is at once moral and therapeutic, while it clearly implies social consequences.

Bakhtin's cultural isomorphism, as in high vs. low culture, official vs. popular language, etc. does not operate through exclusion, despite his overt promotion of the disadvantaged element. Rather, his stance is accepting that otherness exists and at the same time *as*, and *in*, sameness. This creates the *tertium datur* situation, where one and the same identity is itself, different from itself, i.e. its other, and the two things together.

Bakhtin's insistence on language as performance is consonant with his poetics of the novel, and his poetics of carnival, both of which are, for him, more than mere genres; rather, they are attitudes in the display of human energy on the stage of history. The carnival-novel-drama association is the natural consequence of his view of culture as live performance.

The motor of low culture is activated by laughter, whose transgressive force releases frustrations and annihiliates injustice. Bakhtin imagines the drama of world history performed by a chorus of laughing people. This is, of course, a comic performance, the low subversive side of drama. In its overthrow of the accredited authority, comedy is also revelation, i.e. it unveils the most serious meaning of world history -- freedom.

Bakhtin's special interest in the body, ignored and despised against a background of ascetic high tradition cannot be understood properly outside this performative context. The body physical, the body politic, the body of material culture -- they are all carriers and enacters of transformative processes in history.

Through all this, Bakhtin proposes a human comedy, material, permissive, democratic, in place of the traditional stiff scaffolding of official authority built on ossified seriousness.

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Bakhtin's inexhaustible repertory of concepts and terms has not remained without the most striking consequences. A number of schools, trends, or critics have seen in his work the most different directions to follow, or combat.

His materialism has fed the most ardent leftists in the Western world, and not few of these have seen in Bakhtin's criticism a high water mark of Marxism. This is the more curious as Bakhtin had to devise the strangest and most humiliating of strategies to keep his subversive manuscripts away from the Soviet authorities in the 30's. He tried hard to avoid an arrest, which nonetheless came, at the time of Stalinist terror.

His critique of authority, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism was not really soft-voiced. Nor was it confined to the literary arena, as in his debates on the novel vs. the epic, or on carnival vs. official culture. His moral option for polyglossia is, in the last instance, political, and has seen the most various interpretations and adaptations: in Cultural Studies, he is seen as a precursor of multiculturalism, and of popular culture, in Race Criticism, he features as a promoter of ethnic minorities, Feminism, and, more widely, Gender Criticism have discovered

in him a liberator of subordinate sexuality, Neo-Marxist Criticism has equated him with the advocate of the 'culture of, and for, the people', Deconstruction takes pride in demolishing Western metaphysics, and some of its actors have imagined him in their circle, and Antifoundationalist voices claim him as theirs in their concerted attack on the canon.

Some revisionistic positions advocate that inherited tradition, allegedly ossified, should be done away with. To look at Bakhtin as joining them is rather risky. Bakhtin *is* the author of magisterial books on such colossal canonic authors as Rabelais and Dostoevsky. His studies of menippean satire, comedy, and parody are proofs of impressive erudition, a quality scarcely possible to associate with disrespect for tradition. Rather, his interest in marginal areas (folk literature, jokes, oral tradition) has resulted in enlarging the canon. Critics like New Historicist Stephen Greenblatt admire him for his unbiassed interest in the official, as in the underground, culture of various places and times. Postmodernist Criticism praises him for his own variant of the liberating concept of difference and variety.

It is only fair that such an indomitable supporter of DIFFERENCE and DIVERSITY should have been acclaimed so diversely, in so many camps. Here is a remarkable instance of intellectual and emotional longevity.

WRITING, THE TEXT, AND SIGNIFICATION AS DIFFERENCE

(Roland Barthes)

In 1968 Barthes wrote an epoch-making essay bearing the title 'The Death of the Author'. It came out briefly after the **Essais critiques** (1964) published by *'Tel Quel'*[1], and anticipated only by two years **S/Z** (1970)[2], the one trailblazing study in Post-Structuralist criticism. Three and a half decades after the troubled 1968, still regarded by many as the beginning of something new, by others as the beginning of the end, Barthes's essay is a mandatory title on academic bibliography lists, and in anthologies of critical texts. A good many books have been written about Barthes in the English-speaking world[3], and most of his critical contributions are assiduously read by students in

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[1] The edition used here is **Critical Essays**, trans. by Richard Howard, Evanston Ill.: Northwest University Press, 1972.

[2] The edition used here is **S/Z**, trans. Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

[3] Special attention is here given to the following titles, further either commented upon, or referred to: Philip Thody, **Roland Barthes, A Conservative Estimate**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, c1977, 1983; Annette Lavers, **Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After**, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London, 1982; Michael Moriarty, **Roland Barthes**, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1991. Other titles worth consulting include: Jonathan Culler, **Barthes**, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, Steven Ungar, **Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire**, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, and D.A. Miller, **Bringing Out Roland Barthes**, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

the humanities. To this day, Roland Barthes has stayed an impossible name to omit in critical debates.

Barthes is directly responsible for the extension of structuralist principles to such fields as fashion, eating, furniture, or the automobile industry, going yet one step further from Lévi-Strauss's own application of Saussurean theory to myths, rituals, and other community customs. His interest in signification and signifying systems, and in the differentiations produced by such formalizations is far from being on the wane today. Rather, we should remark, semiotic analysis and semiological studies have profited in no little proportion from his insights.

The ground that he shares with critics of other 'impersonal' orientations has made his own firmer in up-to-date reviews of critical developments on either side of the Atlantic. Thus, like the New Critics, Barthes is an adept of close reading, and, we should never forget, a promoter of writing, and an enjoyer of the 'pleasure of the text'[1]. Like Roman Jakobson, he sees in the literary work an artefact, and consequently proceeds to look for meaning only intratextually. He is concerned with reference, like Riffaterre, and with 'saving the text'[2], like Hartman[3].

Barthes's essentially structuralist conviction that language is a system endowed with signification underlies all his other critical evaluations. This offers him the starting-point for considerations on language in general, as on discourse and text in wider than merely linguistic terms. The differential view of

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[1] Cf. Roland Barthes, **The Pleasure of the Text**, trans. Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.

[2] Cf. Geoffrey Hartman, **Saving the Text**, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.

[3] This opinion is also partially held by A.C. Goodson, 'Structuralism and Critical History in the Moment of Bakhtin', in Joseph Natoli (ed.), **Tracing Literary Theory**, University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1987.

language that he suggests implies such fundamental issues as: revisiting the signifier - signified relationship, and the concept of signification; extending the notion of language to non-linguistic codes of everyday communication; identifying a linguistic infrastructure in ideology, social order, power relations; fathoming deep into the depth of language, with the unflinching belief that language is infinite, therefore reading, like writing, is plural.

For all the return to some kind or other of non-formalistic criticism in recent years, Barthes has kept his place of honour in the Anglo-American critical field, especially in the American academia. Frank Lentricchia's frontal attack on Formalism[1] has not succeeded in abating curiosity about Barthes's thinking. Interestingly, such sociologically-bound approaches as the New Historicist use Barthes texts as preliminary critical bibliography! Truly, Roland Barthes moved out of strictly structuralist positions later in his career, so that what Lentricchia, in Gramsci's track, unveils as the 'antihistorical method -- nothing but metaphysics', rather misses the point, in Barthes's case. On the other hand, Barthes's association with the French left, through friendship or other personal relations (of which Sartre is the first to come to mind), or through his own critique of 'bourgeois myth' can hardly escape notice.

Roland Barthes is only one of the first-hand French critical minds that have substantially contributed to changing the configuration of critical thought in the United States.

Barthes's writings of the 50's, without engaging in a round of critical one-upmanship, do posit crucial Structuralist questions.

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[1] Frank Lentricchia, **After the New Criticism**, London: the Athlone Press, 1980.

Two particular titles require special attention. These are **Le degré zéro de l'ecriture** (1953)[2], and **Mythologies** (1957)[3].

Given the general structuralist bearing of both, it will be best for us to recapitulate the main postulates of the structuralist theory laid out by Ferdinand de Saussure, in his 1906-1911 Geneva lectures, published after his students' notes as **Course in General Linguistics** in French in 1915.

Saussure differentiates between (1) *'langue'*, i.e. language as system, and (2) *'parole'*, i.e. language as utterance. Thus, (1): he declares as the object of linguistics the identification of a system of rules, or 'grammar', and (2): he finds in the individual actualization of the system (in utterances) the mark of systemic and systematic regulations; in order to communicate, we utter words, which do not correspond to their referents (the word - thing relationship, in other words, is not direct); rather, words are 'signs', and each sign is made up of a *'signifiant'*, signifier (i.e. its oral or written mark), and a *'signifie'*, signified (i.e. its concept, or what is 'thought'). Saussure's differential definition of the linguistic sign could be illustrated visually as:

$$\text{SIGN} = \frac{\text{signifier}}{\text{signified}}$$

Meaning is also differentially produced, not through direct connections between words and things, but rather through relations in the system of language (*'langue'*), so that difference is, in fact, a central principle, responsible for correct expression, and for semantic relevance.

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[1] References and quotations here used will be from Roland Barthes, **Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology**, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith; preface by Susan Sontag, New York: Hill and Wang, 1968.

[2] Roland Barthes, **Mythologies**, Selected and translated by Annette Lavers, New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.

Saussure concentrates on systematic behaviour in language, as it were, in search of some 'structure' deriving from particular uses ('*parole*'), and acting, at the level of the whole ('*langue*'), as a set of regularities. He thus abstracts a structural model for that particular language. Subsequent contributions along the same line made by Benveniste, Bloomfield, or Chomsky have "variously attempted to formulate structural models that would *describe*, beyond any specific language, the grammar of the linguistic faculty of man"[1] (underlinings mine). In his own attempt, Saussure was confident that linguistics could acquire the supremacy of 'Queen of the Sciences'[2], that is become the foundational discipline of the century. It will be well to bear in mind this Saussurean ambition for an understanding of Barthes's own high goals.

For the time being, let us sum up Ferdinand de Saussure's theory as 'arbitrariness' of the sign, and the a priori status of language in relation to thought. Let us also underline something usually ignored in contemporary Formalist criticism, most notably by Deconstruction, namely that Saussure is aware of the conventional nature of this arbitrariness.

Basically, structuralist literary criticism applies the linguistic model to literature. In so doing, it likewise tries to single out a system of conventions whereby LITERATURE is DIFFERENT from LIFE. The difference lies equally in (1) expression, and (2) meaning. In other words, literature uses its own expressive means, as it produces itw own meaning, independently of historical or authorial instances. This is the nexus of Barthes's

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[1] John Carlos Rowe, 'Structure', in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds.), **Critical Terms for Literary Study**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, p. 28.

[2] *Idem.*

concern with (1) WRITING, THE TEXT, DISCOURSE, and (2) 'THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR.'

Both the early Barthes, with an obvious structuralist stance, and the post-68 post-structuralist Barthes are seminal figures in contemporary American literary criticism. The Structuralist, and Post-Structuralist fascination with the 'model' / 'grammar' / 'structure' is still alive. Its enduring virtue has a good deal to do with the fundamental DIFFERENCE between NATURE and CULTURE that it presupposes: man-made, 'fabricated', the cultural model brings in a difference. In his discussion of structure, from a leftist angle, John Carlos Rowe[1] sees the whole evolution of modern society from the classic capitalist, to the postindustrial phase, in terms of a growingly marked passage from Nature to Culture, from the "use-value" of a product to its "exchange-value" (notice the Marxist terminology). This may be, Rowe suggests, what lies at the basis of Baudrillard's 'simulation' theory. In an economy of information and representation, as is the case of postmodern, postindustrial society,

> "'Nature' is no longer considered the foundation for judging the value of something produced (...): 'value' is entirely a measure of 'exchange', the relation of one 'product' to another as established by general market conditions. Without being cynical, we can say that the 'value' of an 'original' designer dress from some Paris *haut couturier* is less a function of the materials and workmanship than of the 'intelligence' and 'creativity' of the designer or simply his or her knowledge of market conditions. Those nostalgic for an older, material world may condemn our postmodern economy for its disregard of the self-evident 'values' of natural use. The fact remains, however, that we

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

have entered an epoch in which 'nature' is always a self-evident 'fabrication', always the *effect* of certain human interests and social purposes". (30)

Writing Degree Zero (1953), rather dated for us today, is a relatively comprehensive Barthesian *incipit*. Audacious, if not altogether utopian as it may appear, its intention of founding a new kind of literary history still fascinates us. A number of concepts discussed in it reveal a distinctly structuralist stance, which the Barthes of the 70's will leave behind, or reconsider.

The title takes its formulation from the linguistic field. Moriarty (1991) has concluded that the source is not Saussure, but rather the Danish linguist Brondal, from whom Barthes borrows the term 'degree zero'. He uses it linguistically, as in the notion of the zero sign, relevant in its very lack of distinctive features -- a feature in itself. It is important to underline the linguistic connection in **Writing Degree Zero**, especially as here Barthes raises a major Saussurean problem, i.e. the binary opposition between *'langue'* and *'parole'*. Also, the whole debate could be summed up as a consideration of literature as language, and system of signs, hence the linguistic and semiological implications which become part and parcel of the Barthesian argument.

Assuming that literature *qua* system of signs has its own closure, Barthes hopes to "affirm the existence of a formal reality independent of language and style" (emphases added, p.5). So first he needs to provide a definition of language and style. He does so by resorting to the favourite structuralist trope of the two axes, one vertical, the other horizontal, ideed, like Saussure's model. For Barthes,

"... language is (...) a horizon, and style a vertical dimension, which together map out for the writer a Nature,

since he does not choose either. The language functions negatively, as the initial limit of the possible, style is a Necessity which binds the writer's humour to his form of expression. In the former, he finds a familiar History, in the latter, a familiar personal past. In both cases he deals with a Nature, that is, a familiar repertory of gestures, a gestuary, as it were, in which the energy expended is purely operative, serving here to enumerate, there to transform, but never to appraise or signify choice". (13) (emphasis mine)

Let us evince the parallelism with Saussure's differential model of language.

Corresponding to Saussure's rule of *'langue'*, one for all individual users, is Barthes's horizontal plane of language, or speech, as he insists, which is shared with all the writers of a given period. It is a corpus of prescriptions and habits which is not the writer's, but all the writers', in a given period. It is, because of this, a horizon, i.e. an extreme limit, the "geometrical *locus* of all that he could not say without, like Orpheus looking back, losing the stable meaning of his enterprise and his essential gesture as a social being". (10) Language is transpersonal, it cannot be chosen, it functions as "familiar History". It is a question of family or myth (the latter term assumes pejorative dimensions only in the syntagm "bourgeois myth", further on). Hence the Orpheus connection: for the understatement is, if Orpheus had abided by the rule he was meant to observe blindly, and had not personally tried to test its validity, a terrible fate would not have befallen him. He ought to have accepted his horizon, a word whose etymology will better illumine our understanding of the Barthesian term: Gr. *ορίζον (κύκλος)* bounding (circle) < *ὁρίζειν* to bound, to divide or separate, as a boundary; to define < *ὅρος* boundary, landmark; limit.

There is then the vertical plane, that of style, which, like Saussure's '*parole*', is the individual manifestation of language. This has its roots "in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology". (10) In Saussure's schema, this personal actualization is not constrained other than through the abstract rules of language. Barthes complicates the schema, by inserting a tertium datur in the guise of '*écriture*', writing, whose definition is linguistic and ethical.

WRITING is a specific relationship of 'form' and 'content'. Unlike language and style, which are objects, writing is a function. Inasmuch as it is content-determined, we are made to understand, writing is imbued with myth (which is familiar *and* personal history). And inasmuch as it is form-bound, writing has the overtones of style. Most importantly, WRITING is the meeting point of the personal and the social. It is form as human intention, with a social finality, i.e. uniting at a single stroke the reality of the acts and the ideality of the ends. This statement already anticipates Post-Structuralist views held later, as does the idea of the writer's commitment:

> "Now every Form is also a Value, which is why there is room, between a language and a style, for another formal reality: WRITING. Within any literary form, there is a general choice of tone, of ethos, if you like, and this is precisely where the writer shows himself clearly as an individual because this is where he commits himself. A language and a style are data prior to all problematics of language, that are the natural product of Time and of the person as a biological entity; but the formal identity of the writer is truly established only outside the permanence of grammatical norms and stylistic constants, where the written continuum, first collected and enclosed within a perfectly innocent linguistic nature, at last becomes a total sign, the

choice of a human attitude, the affirmation of a certain Good". (13-14) (all emphases mine)

WRITING, it seems, is defined by Barthes differently from merely formal manifestation, as well as differently from merely human commitment. To speak of the writer's formal identity is, indirectly, to differentiate between the writer's personal and social identity, on the one hand, and his artistic identity, on the other. This will become a landmark in Barthes's later criticism, of which mention should be made here of 'The Death of the Author' (1968), and **Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes** (1975); the latter title, in its suggestion of a **Roland Barthes** written by Roland Barthes, purposely differentiates between the two. WRITING is the "compromise between freedom and remembrance" (16), i.e. the overlapping of personal inventiveness (Barthes's vertical plane of 'style'), and collective memory (the horizon of 'language') -- a nearly Freudian formula. It is the space where the sign stops being mere form, or, rather, as form does imply value, it is the space where the sign becomes a total sign, i.e. responsible, because an act of commitment. This idea of the responsibility of forms will be reiterated in other texts. There is yet another aspect related to WRITING that anticipates the later Barthes, i.e. the idea of all the texts ever written being One Big Text or One Big Book that the individual writer is born into. This at once limits his individual freedom, and enhances his responsibility. A further derivative of it is the 'inter-text' and intertextuality, favourite concepts in later Barthes texts.

In her 1968 Preface to the English version of **Le degré zéro de l'écriture** Susan Sontag, author of **Against Interpretation** (1961), concludes her words of appraisal with the remark that *'ECRITURE'* is a new myth about literature. She also points to the other myths invoked by Barthes, among which the Hegelian

"history of consciousness", Existentialist "freedom", and Marxist "bourgeois society". (xxiv) The last will bring us to the question of the zero degree of writing.

The demonstration is rather unprecedented, even though tangentially bending on the well-known myths listed above. Barthes comes up with a final differentiation: (1) classical discourse (which he places on the horizontal axis, and associates with algebra -- the stricture of rules is more than obviously pointed to), vs. (2) modern discourse (which recognizes the links between writing and ideology, and sees the delusive nature of the latter). Writers like Camus or Blanchot practise "writing degree zero", they mark, that is, the final stage of the "disintegration of the bourgeois consciousness". (5) The classical discourse of universal rules and truths eventually standardizes WRITING, hence the algebraic myth of a universal human nature. The bourgeoisie, Barthes will have it, does nothing but take over the myth and make it its own, while openly declaring its defiance of aristocratic values. This infects socialist realism, as it infects petty-bourgeois naturalism, either self-sufficient, while pretending for themselves the stature of protest. This attack on the inherited tradition (from Kant to the present day, and back to Plato and Socrates) is exploited by Deconstruction to its last, and, at times, very serious, consequences. On the other hand, leaving aside a facile Marxist critique, Barthes's little praiseworthy remarks on "bourgeois myth" remind one of Ionesco's absurd middleclass household scenes, and of Flaubert's **Bouvard et Pécuchet**, a novel that Barthes actually repeatedly returns to. A corrective is then necessary, especially from the vantage point of the 90's -- the term "bourgeois" is almost coextensive with shallow and literal-minded, as suggested by Barthes's ironic reference to Monsieur Jourdain's double equation, according to which, on the one hand, poetry = prose + a + b + c, and, on the other, prose = poetry - a - b - c. Along

the same line, Barthes sees in (1) classical language, simply a chain of superficial connections without density or depth, and in (2) modern poetry, the Word in its encyclopedic state, a generic form open to all possibilities, a sort of zero degree, or Pandora's box from which fly out all the potentialities of language.

A cursory look at "the world as object"[1] will pave our way to Barthes's **Mythologies**. His description of a world of domesticated objects sounds the more telling now, when what he called, in the late 50's, self-sufficient nominalism in an empire of merchandise has exploded into hyperconsumerism in the Western world. Here is Barthes meditating on Dutch painting -- in a way itself a myth of the modern world:

> "... classical Dutch painting (...) has washed away religion only to replace it with man and his empire of things. Where once the Virgin presided over ranks of angels, man stands now, his feet upon the thousand objects of everyday life, triumphantly surrounded by his functions. Behold him, then, at the pinnacle of history, knowing no other fate than a gradual appropriation of matter. No limits to this humanization, and above all, no horizon". (63) (underlining mine)

For all his leftist penchant, it would be hard to categorize Barthes as a Marxist, after the abovesaid.

Mythologies (1957) may seem a strange title for a book of criticism. Not when the structuralist bent is explicit, one could reply. Not when the structuralist critic cannot help raising the question of language in terms of a system of signs, or else a semeiotics (Gr. σημεῖον sign, mark, token; sign from the gods,

[1] Cf. **A Barthes Reader**, Edited with an Introduction by Susan Sontag, Hill and Wang, New York - A Division of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. 1982.

omen; sign, signal; ensign < σῆμα sign)[1]. The parallelism with Saussure's theory comes in handy again. It reveals the inroads made by linguistics, and by semiology, in twentieth-century epistemology, in the long run. Saussure, it will be remembered, had in mind an overall system of signs whose object was to be treated by a then emerging science -- semiology. Linguistics, in Saussure's view, was to be part of this (more) comprehensive science of signs.

Barthes's extensive interest in SIGN and SIGNIFICATION, transparent in a title like **Eléments de sémiologie** (1964)[2], pervades his book on 'myth(s)' and 'mythologies'. Barthes introduces a significant difference, by reversing Saussure's semiology - linguistics rapport. Among semiological languages,

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[1] The term 'semiotic' was coined by C.S. Peirce and used with reference to 'the formal doctrine of signs' which Ferdinand de Saussure called semiology. The 'science of signs' is also currently named semiotics, and the two terms are relatively interchangeable. Semiotic approaches to language and literature, or, for that matter, to culture in general, do bear a direct relation to, and draw on, formalist approaches. A conglomerate of formalist, structuralist, and semiotic/semiological interpretations is therefore rather easy to encounter, when it comes to any of these methods being used. The mutual relationships holding among them is also apparent in the critics that make use of them. Thus, Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Jonathan Culler has made a significant contribution (see 'Semiotics as a Theory of Reading', in **The Pursuit of Signs Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction** (1981). Yury Lotman's **The Analysis of the Poetic Text** (1976) is a basic reference book, and his relation to the Russian Formalists and to Bakhtin is substantially treated in Allen Reid, **Literature as Communication and Cognition in Bakhtin and Lotman** (1990). The work of Julia Kristeva, centering rather on signifying processes, and combining the semiological with the psychoanalitic approach, is also seminal [see **Semeiotike: Recherche pour une sémanalyse** (1969), **Langue, discours, société: pour Emile Benveniste**, sous la direction de Julia Kristeva, Jean-Claude Milner, Nicolas Ruwet (1975), and **Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art** (1980)].

[2] English version, **Elements of Semiology**, Boston: Beacon, 1970.

the linguistic sign remains the starting-point for him. Language is "language-object", whereas mythical language is a second-order semiological system, a "metalanguage"[1]. So, whereas in Saussure's view semiology aims to take in any system of signs, of which linguistics is one part, Barthes regards the linguistic sign as the basic sign for further SIGNIFICATION. Consequently, concepts such as TEXT and WRITING undergo a significant (sic) change. WRITING extends to image as well, or rather, image-as-writing is a distinct Barthesian term. It follows that, to articulate this TEXT, a 'lexis' is needed (Gr. λέξις speaking, saying, speech; way of speaking, diction, style). The 'text' of this or that particular 'myth' is writing which requires reading. A writing-reading process is at work in the production of myths.

Myths then rather than myth. The differentiation within Barthes's own theory is fundamental. In **Mythologies** he deals with all kinds of visual and verbal 'representations', e.g. photographs, movies, advertisements, food, sports, striptease and other shows, and even the physical support of such 'texts', e.g. newspapers, magazines, cars, children's toys, restaurant menus, or consumer goods. Written in the late 50's, this book is a splendid anticipation of topical subjects broached and enlarged upon nowadays by Cultural Studies, Postmodernism, Gender, Race, or Post-Colonial criticism[2]. The subject-matter *per se* of

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[1] Barthes discusses this rapport in 'Myth Today', which is part of **Mythologies** and will be looked into further on. A fairly detailed analysis of this is offered in José Augusto Seabra, **Poietica de Barthes**, Colecçao poetica / Brasilia Editora, 1980.

[2] One needs to be selective in suggesting further readings, given that such an impressive amount has been written from any of these separate, yet correlated critical positions, none formalist. So much more exciting, too, that Barthes should have contributed to the shaping of such 'committed' attitudes.

For Cultural Studies readings, one cannot fail to mention Henri Lefebvre,

Barthes's 'mythologies' is mass culture. It stands to reason that things done or made *en masse* should be plural, and analysed as such.

Everday Life in the Modern World (1968), Clifford Geertz, **The Interpretation of Cultures** (1973), Michel de Certeau, **The Practice of Everyday Life** (1984), Patrick Brantlinger, **Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America** (1990), Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler (eds.), **Cultural Studies** (1992), Simon During (Ed.), **The Cultural Studies Reader** (1993), N. Dirks, G. Eley, S. Ortner (eds.), **Culture/Power/History -- A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory** (1994).

For Postmodernism the list could include Jean-François Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge** (1979), Matei Călinescu, **Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism** (1987), Douglas Kellner (Ed.), **Postmodernism -- Jameson -- Critique** (1989), with essential statements by Frederic Jameson, still the authority in the field in the American academia, James Naremore & Patrick Brantlinger, **Modernity and Mass Culture** (1991).

Gender Criticism cannot avoid titles like Anne Hollander, **Seeing Through Clothes** (1978), Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, **The Madwoman in the Attic** (1979), Helene Cixous & Catherine Clément, **The Newly Born Woman** (1986), Julia Kristeva, **Tales of Love** (1987), Margaret Whitford (ed.), **The Irigaray Reader** (1991).

Race Criticism is best illustrated by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.), **"Race", Writing, and Difference** (1985), and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., **The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism** (1988).

Post-Colonial Criticism has been excellently anticipated by such titles as Edward W. Said, **Orientalism** (1978), and Tzvetan Todorov, **The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other** (1982), and is best represented by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward W.Said, **Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature** (1990), and Sarah Harasym (ed.), **The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak** (1990).

Representation as strategy is the thrust of Stephen J. Greenblatt (ed.), **Allegory and Representation** (1881), and Murray Krieger (Ed.), **The Aims of Representation: Subject/Text/History** (1987), among others.

Mass culture is more usually referred to nowadays as popular culture. It requires a semiological analysis, Barthes himself acknowledges in his Preface to the 1970 edition. Written in the aftermath of the revisionistic summer and autumn of '68, when the very 'Established Order' seemed to come to pieces, this *prise de position* is the more acutely centred on analysing (i.e. literally breaking up) the strategies 'operating' in social mythology.

Here Barthes starts with a conclusion, so to say, which he also comes back to in the conclusive chapter proper. His demonstration is rooted in the central assumption that mythic activities are performed in everyday life, in modern societies (e.g. French society in the mid-, and late 50's), as in the ancient ones; these activities are actually some kind or other of WRITING, which is endowed with meaning; there are 'operations' of writing and meaning through which 'myths' are created, and 'mythologies' are produced; modern society, Barthes maintains, by extrapolating from the French model, lives copiously on collective images; these are false images of human 'nature', given that modern society is pervasively marketed by commercial interests. Because collective, mass culture is a "mystification which transforms petit-bourgeois culture into a universal nature". (9) Mystification occurs in images of things (the multifarious 'TEXTS' produced by this richly 'mythical' society), so, in order to "liberate 'the significant'" (9), the analyst needs to demystify reality. 'History', for instance, is shown by the media as if it were 'nature', for the media, language is itself 'mythical', i.e. it 'mystifies' reality. How familiar this sounds in an Eastern European context we need hardly say. And, again, the similarity with Eugene Ionesco's scathing attack on collective imbecility (whether communist or capitalist, as Ionesco explicitly puts it[1]) is striking. Even more striking is the fact that

[1] Cf. Claude Bonnefoy, **Conversations with Eugene Ionesco**, trans. Jan Dawson, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

these similar views were held by at the time openly leftist Barthes, and openly non-leftist Ionesco. They both offer analytical perspectives, the one decoding the 'operations' of 'myths', the other breaking down language to basic units and rules. Both conclude on a note of amazement in front of the absurd and alienating effects of what is hoped, or at least expected, to be communication. The debate proposed by Barthes has, in more recent years, been formulated in terms of the particular manipulation of opinion performed through the media. So much more exciting will it be for us to halt at some length to consider the examples provided, and the theoretical conclusions derived.

Barthes's impetus for analysing modern 'mythologies' could be called political. References to 'history', 'culture', or 'ideology' abound in this somewhat Post-Structuralist text *avant la lettre*. At every turn, he is interested in the man-madeness of 'myths'. Which is why what takes most of his attention is not so much the object or substance of modern 'mythologies', as the way or rather the technique, by which meaning is manipulated. Barthes's analysis focuses on how myths are "produced, circulated, and exchanged"[1], a jargon almost identical with, say, Steven Greenblatt's critical vocabulary in his New Historicist Shakespearean studies of the 80's, and his analyses of representation of the 80's and 90's. This accounts for why Barthes is concerned with the "values and attitudes implicit in the variety of messages with which our culture bombards us"[2].

The Barthesian concept of "myth" presupposes a certain message (as in Gr. μῦθος tale, story, narrative, fable transmitted by word of mouth in a community), and a certain rendition of the respective message. A careful look at this myth structure will

[1] Steven Ungar, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.
[2] Michael Moriarty, *Op. cit.*, p.19.

reveal a binary pattern, i.e. the 'what', and the 'how' of myth, or, in terms used by Barthes himself in **Eléments de sémiologie** (1964), the 'ideology', and the 'rhetoric' of myth. To the former corresponds the Saussurean *'signifié'*, the signified, to the latter, the *'signifiant'*, the signifier.

But the differentiation operates even further. Short 'TEXTS', or cultural 'items' are producers of meaning in popular culture, because they are basically WRITING, part of a big cultural TEXT. In their 'what' is embedded the *bon sens* of Mr. and Mrs. Average, as we say in English, so that common sense eventually comes down to the same as mediocrity. And mediocrity, Barthes does not fail to point out, operates through exclusion, given that the *petite bourgeoisie* is anti-intellectual. At this level, myth uses the denotative language of common sense, phrased into its own 'mythical' language, which is connotative. The way myth uses language though, the 'how', is a constant alternation between denotative and connotative meaning.

Barthes's further differentiation from the Saussurean binary opposition is borrowed from Hjelmslev's distinction between form and content, as (1) the form of form, and the form of content, and (2) the content of form, and the content of content[1].

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[1] Hjelmslev's complex language model is based on binary oppositions all through. Hjelmslev offers oppositional definitions, of which: Df. 29: The FORM is the Constant in a Manifestation -- opp. Df. 30; Df. 30: SUBSTANCE is the Variable in a Manifestation -- opp. Df. 29; Df. 31: A MANIFESTANT or SUBSTANCE-FUNCTIVE is a Derivative of the Substance -- opp. Df. 32; Df. 32: A MANIFESTATUM is a Derivative of the Form -- opp. Df. 31; Df. 33: A SYNTAGMATIC or SIGN-PROCESS is a Semiotic Process -- opp. Df. 35; Df. 34: A CHAIN is a Class that is a Derivative of a Syntagmatic -- opp. Df. 36; Df. 35: A PARADIGMATIC or SIGN-SYSTEM is a Semiotic System -- opp. Df. 33; Df. 36: A PARADIGM is a Class that is a Derivative of a Paradigmatic -- opp. Df. 34. For further reading see Louis Hjelmslev, **Resume of a Theory of Language**, Edited, translated, and with an introduction by Francis J. Whitfield, University of

Barthes's focus on the mode of representation 'operated' through myth has been considered in light of a post-Saussurean stance, closer to Bakhtin's view of communication occurring at the level of *'parole'*, rather than of *'langue'*, a differentiation from, in the sense of reversal of, the Saussurean model[1].

To better understand the Barthesian mechanism of myth, let us proceed on the path suggested by the critic himself in **Mythologies**. A few examples of modern myths will be the starting point of the demonstration.

Thus, in 'Operation Margarine' Barthes provides a typical modern myth case. As the title suggests, the margarine myth becomes efficient through an 'operation', namely: *Astra* margarine is advertised as the base of a new mousse; instantly, common sense will react with a definite 'No', for it is unthinkable to use margarine, rather than butter, in a mousse; as instantly, though, margarine is advertised as tasty, actually delicious, digestible, and economical! "The moral at the end is well known: 'Here you are, rid of a prejudice which cost you so dearly!'" (42) A "game of hide-and-seek (is enacted), in which a connotative meaning is displaced by a more accessible denotative sense"[2]. The denotative meaning here is that margarine is inferior to butter -- a *dictum*, as it were, of inherited common sense. The connotative meaning is that margarine is superior, given that it is less fat, and more inexpensive! In Roland Barthes's reading of Louis Hjelmslev's terms then the margarine myth is (1) ideologically, 'what' is transmitted through the form of connotative signifieds, and (2) rhetorically, 'how' this is transmitted through the form of

Wisconsin Press, 1975.

[1] Cf. Steven Ungar, *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

[2] Steven Ungar, *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

connotative signifiers. (1) corresponds to the form of content, (2) to the form of form. If we consider that Barthes sees in "operation margarine" a metaphor of modern myth in general, this emphasis on the form of form in myth is even more relevant. This particular 'operation' underlies the public image of the Army, or the Church, both of which function according to the same rule of "homeopathy":

> "...one cures doubts about the Church or the Army by the very ills of the Church and the Army. One inoculates the public with a contingent evil to prevent or cure an essential one. To rebel against the inhumanity of the Established Order and its values, according to this way of thinking, is an illness which is common, natural, forgivable; one must not collide with it head-on, but rather exorcize it like a possession: the patient is made to give a representation of his illness, he is made familiar with the very appearance of his revolt, and this revolt disappears all the more surely, once at a distance and the object of a gaze, the Established Order is no longer anything but a Manichaean compound and therefore inevitable, one which wins on both counts, and is therefore beneficial. (...) A little 'confessed' evil saves one from acknowledging a lot of hidden evil". (42) (underlinings mine)

The "operation margarine" then is a formalized strategy whose basic technique is that of vaccination, later discussed by Barthes as a variant of myth rhetoric.

'The Face of Garbo' offers another instance of modern myth, whose rhetoric, i.e. form of form, is an "admirable face-object (...) set in plaster". (56) This is no longer a face, a natural face, Garbo's face. Rather, it has been metamorphosed into a mythical face, a cultural face, "the face of Garbo". The passage from

'nature' to 'culture' that occurs in myth is the result of a formalization process: under the temptation of the absolute mask, this face becomes "an archetype of the human face, (...) a sort of Platonic Idea of the human creature, which explains why her face is almost sexually undefined". (56) The Michael Jackson myth today, one cannot help noting, is massively helped along by Jackson's indistinct black-white male-female looks. It is this transformation of the natural into the conventional that makes of an index a SIGN (whether the index be strictly linguistic, or more widely cultural, as in this case). The difference between NATURE and CULTURE is secured through raising the first SIGN SYSTEM of language to a second-order SEMIOLOGICAL SYSTEM. As will become apparent in differentiating between Audrey Hepburn's face and the face of Garbo:

> "the face of Audrey Hepburn, for instance, is individualized, not only because of its peculiar thematics (woman as child, woman as kitten), but also because of her person, of an almost unique specification of the face, which has nothing of the essence left in it, but is constituted by an infinite complexity of morphological functions. As a LANGUAGE, Garbo's singularity was of the order of the concept, that of Audrey Hepburn is of the order of the substance. The face of Garbo is an Idea, that of Hepburn, an Event". (57) (all emphases added)

By WRITING nature into culture, myth 'operates' a change in SIGNIFICATION. In so doing, it preserves every appearance of naturalness. It mythifies by mystifying. All this is thoroughly tackled in 'Myth Today', the conclusive chapter. But another few examples will, at this point, further clarify the Barthesian theory.

'Steak and Chips', and 'Wine and Milk' extend the TEXT of myth to food and drink, to that particularly formalized area of food and drink corresponding to the 'myth' of Frenchness. Thus *'la frite'* incorporates a whole national identity, differentiating it from others. As does wine, or, more precisely, the know-how of wine-drinking:

> "Wine is felt by the French nation to be a possession which is its very own, just like its three hundred and sixty types of cheese and its culture. It is a totem-drink, corresponding to the milk of the Dutch cow or the tea ceremonially taken by the British Royal Family". (58) (underlining mine)

And, when Barthes recalls General de Castries asking for chips for his first meal after the armistice in Indo-China, he subtly differentiates between mere "vulgar materialistic reflex", and "an episode in the ritual of appropriating the regained French community" (64) (emphases added). In other words, ideologically, the general asks to be fed not on the content of the signified, but on the form of the signified. Rhetorically, the announcement he makes that he wants *'frites'* for his first meal points to the form of the signifier and enhances the connotative force of the mythical TEXT he utters. Some of us will remember the terrified face of the US soldier taken as hostage in Somalia, during the 1993-94 UN intervention. Interviewed, after his release, the young American declared that what he missed most as a hostage was pizza, part and parcel of Americanness these days!

Typology, which Barthes calls "the disease of thinking in essences at the bottom of every bourgeois mythology of man" (75), is what formalizes even landscape. By WRITING

picturesque nature into geographic culture for the use of the 'bourgeois' tourist, the geographic myth equips the latter with a TEXT that satisfies his expectations, precisely by leaving out the unexpected. 'The *Blue Guide*' displays the items that go into the making of the picturesque *à la carte*, as it were. To speculate on menu taxonomy is not, in fact, un-Barthesian, if we recall his differential ordering of food along the paradigmatic, and syntagmatic, axis, respectively. Similarly, the standardized Hachette World Guide, dubbed *Guide Bleu* in French, acts as a systematizing grid. It has its own 'ideology' of "Helvetico-Protestant morality (...) which has always functioned as a hybrid compound of the cult of nature and of puritanism". (74) So, as in the previous examples, we can detect (1) an ideology, in this case inculcated by the Blue Guide as "the morally uplifting walk" -- this is the form of the signified (abstracted from the walk as such and formalized into moral altitude); and (2) a rhetoric, which here lavishly describes Alpine gorges, defiles, and torrents -- the form of the signifier (taking off from mere description of nature and formalized so as to instil the sense of elevation through labour and effort).

In **Journal en miettes** (1967)[1] the late Eugene Ionesco confesses that his **Bald Primadonna** was somehow dictated by the **Assimil** conversation textbook, **English Made Easy**. In it he found himself introduced to a 'typical' British family, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, who most seriously tell each other

> "some very surprising truths: that there are seven days in the week, for example, which I happened to know before; or that the floor is below us, the ceiling above us, another thing that I may well have known before but had never thought

[1] The English edition is used here that came out as **Fragments of a Journal**, trans. Jean Stewart, New York: Grove Press, 1969.

seriously about or had forgotten, and suddenly it seemed to me as stupefying as it was indisputably true"[1].

The typical become stereotypical is both Ionesco's, and Barthes's pet subject here (Gr. στερε- or στερεο- < στερεός stiff, stark, firm, solid is akin to OHG *staren* to stare, best grasped in an expression like 'to stare somebody in the face', i.e. to be undeniably and forcefully evident or apparent). In a Chekhov short-story a character is such a flawless geography teacher (sic), that he infallibly informs his room-mate about such geographic truths as that it is hot in summer, but cold in winter, that the Volga is a river, and so on, and so forth. How much like Bouvard and Pécuchet he is we scarcely need to remark, again. In Flaubert, Barthes found his 'bourgeois' myth theory at work, there for the taking, exactly like Ionesco perusing the **Assimil** manual. The name of the textbook says it all: English is made easy, ready to assimilate, i.e. literally to make simil(ar) what was different. Both Ionesco and Barthes extend the same - other opposition from the strictly linguistic cover (denotative rhetoric) to the 'ideological' content (denotative ideology). Assimilation thus becomes superfluous, given the commonly shared 'ideology' of everyday practice. Hence the sense of absurdity. The more so as denotation is worked into connotation through the inescapable mechanism of myth.

'Ornamental Cooking' deals with extremely realist-looking "petit-bourgeois" food display, glamoured according to *Elle* magazine petty taste. In 'Striptease', professional striptease is, not unlike 'Operation Margarine', a "mystifying device" (84), in contrast with popular striptease, which brings onto the

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[1] Eugene Ionesco, **Notes and Counter Notes: Writings on the Theatre**, trans. Donald Watson, New York: Grove Press, 1964, p.175.

improvised stage an awkward weak woman -- notice the parallelism with the 'face of Garbo', vs. Hepburn's 'event' face.

Finally, 'Photography and Electoral Appeal' speaks of the effigy that each candidate has, and uses, we should add, in order to persuade his voters. Etymologically, the term unveils the whole process of opinion-shaping: Lat. *effigies* < *effingere* to form < *ex-* out + *fingere* to shape; ME *dogh*, fr. OE *dag*, is akin to OHG *teic* dough, Lat. *fingere* to shape, Gr. *τεῖχος* wall. To speculate on always fascinating etymology, the candidate's effigy is basically the dough fashioned into shape by kneading and rolling, until the desired appearance is obtained which will gratify the palate of the voters. The candidate has, of course, to be expertly familiar with what the desired ingredients are (the 'what' of the recipe), as well as with what technique he should use (the 'how', or 'know-how' of the electoral 'cuisine'). The assimilation process is here at work, again:

> "the effigy of a candidate establishes a personal link between him and the voters; the candidate does not only offer a programme for judgment, he suggests a physical climate, a set of daily choices expressed in a morphology, a way of dressing, a posture. Photography thus tends to restore the paternalistic nature of elections, whose elitist essence has been disrupted by proportional representation and the rule of parties (...). Inasmuch as photography is an ellipse of language and a condensation of an 'ineffable' social whole, it constitutes an anti-intellectual weapon and tends to spirit away 'politics' (that is to say a body of problems and solutions) to the advantage of a 'manner of being', a socio-moral status. (The candidate on television says): '*Look at me: I am like you*'". (91) (underlinings mine)

The emphasis on image is basic. Barthes versatilely proposes the term morphology, which, if we go back to Hjelmslev's differentiation, indicates form and content at once separately, and conjointly (cf. Gr. *μορφ-* < *μορφή* form, shape + *-λογεία* < *λόγος* word, speech, theory, science). Through the mythical 'operation' of the electoral campaign the following processes occur: the dry 'ideology' of party programmes, platforms, etc. (the content of the signified) is abstracted to the form of the signified, hence the 'elitist essence' impossible to swallow, let alone digest and assimilate; to this end, 'ideology' is made passable by 'rhetoric', it is, in other words, conveyed ready-made, concrete and pleasing to the palate; thus the content of the signifier is lifted to the status of SIGN, i.e. it becomes the form of the signifier. By ellipse is obviously meant ellipsis in the quote above, and the idea of photography, i.e. visual image being an ellipse of language actually underlies Barthes's theory of "myth today", laid out in the chapter, or, as more than one voice has suggested, the essay of the same title that winds up his volume of **Mythologies**.

Myth Today is as challenging a syntagm as it is telling in the whole economy of Barthes's demonstration. It suggests a number of possible things, from the belief that myth is still alive today, and that there is a variety of myth in our contemporary world -- "myth today", to the more comprehensive assumption that myth is subject to time, because manifest in history.

Conclusions either drawn partially or merely inferred in the previous chapters, which, as we have seen, abound in examples, are phrased in peremptory terms here. A few formulations have the arresting force of definitions and hold pride of place in Barthes's debate on SIGNIFICATION. To introduce them is the categorical remark: "What is myth, today? I shall give at the outset a first, very simple answer, which is perfectly consistent

with etymology: *myth is a type of speech*". (109) Appended to this axiomatic formulation is the footnote: "Innumerable other meanings of the word 'myth' can be cited against this. But I have tried to define things, not words". (109)

To define things but also words, in fact, is what Barthes embarks upon, for, as we shall see, the old *verba - res* rapport is basic in any discussion of LANGUAGE, therefore no less of myth as speech. As the argument unfolds, it evinces Barthes's main concern with myth as a TYPE of speech, rather than speech, and this indication that form, and formalization are responsible for the production of myth is pertinent. In **Myth Today** the Structuralist addresses the Post-Structuralist critic. The one keen on definitions (Lat. *definitio, definitionis* < *definire* < *de-* from, down, away + *finire* to limit, end < *finis* boundary, end). This is the structuralist propensity for differentiation as identification. The other prone to investigate relationships beyond the boundary of the defined structure, and pry open realities associated with structural form. From the Structuralist angle, myth as speech (*verba*), from the Post-Structuralist viewpoint, myth as reality (*res*).

'Myth is a type of speech' makes the correlation of the two standpoints clear in positing that myth is not *any* type of language, for

> "language needs special conditions in order to become myth: we shall see them in a minute. But what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of SIGNIFICATION, a form. Later, we shall have to assign to this form historical limits, conditions of use, and reintroduce society into it: we must

nevertheless first describe it as a form". (109) (all emphasis added)

The specification is phrased with throwaway wit, yet how relevant it is to developments in the critical arena in roughly the last quarter of a century. Here is a clear-sighted critic. The whole evolution of Deconstruction in the company of sociologically-bound trends in the 80's and 90's only confirms Barthes's conditioning of myth as a working premise back in the late 50's. Suffice it to refer the discussion to analyses of such 'universal' things as fear, madness, or power by committed critics like Delumeau, Foucault, or Brantlinger, for us to realize how interestingly society has been reintroduced into critical discourse.

To Barthes, "myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message". (109) As system of communication, myth is necessarily put to "social *usage*". (109) A differentiation occurs when speech is thus formalized into discourse, so as to meet with transpersonal expectations. Conveyed by discourse, myth is *not* the things (*res*) referred to, but rather the speech *about* things referred to (*verba*).

> "Speech of this kind is a message. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of WRITING or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as support to mythical speech. (...) ... even with pictures, one can use many kinds of reading: a diagram lends itself to SIGNIFICATION more than a drawing, a copy more than an original, and a caricature more than a portrait. But this is the point: we are no longer dealing here with a theoretical mode of

representation: we are dealing with *this* particular image, which is given for *this* particular SIGNIFICATION. Mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a SIGNIFYING consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. This substance is unimportant: pictures, to be sure, are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analysing or diluting it. But this is no longer a constitutive difference. Pictures become a kind of WRITING as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a *lexis*.

We shall therefore take *language, discourse, speech*, etc., to mean any SIGNIFICANT unit or synthesis, whether verbal or visual: a photograph will be a kind of speech for us in the same way as a newspaper article; even objects will become speech, if they MEAN something. This generic way of conceiving LANGUAGE is in fact justified by the very history of writing: long before the invention of our alphabet, objects like the Inca *quipu*, or drawings, as in pictographs, have been accepted as speech. This does not mean that one must treat mythical speech like language; myth in fact belongs to the province of a general science, coextensive with linguistics, which is *semiology*". (110-11) (all emphases added)

Firstly, mythical speech is a message (ML *missaticum* < Lat. *missus*, pp. of *mittere* to put, fr. Lat. to send). Its rationale is its 'inbetweenness', as it were. Barthes does not use at any time this Bakhtinian concept, but we shall see that Bakhtinian notes are not alien to his theory. A consequence of myth being communication is the extension of WRITING to any mode of

writing, not its restriction to writing as scratching abstract signs on a plate. Not dissimilarly does Bakhtin proceed to consider the plenary expression of human values through complex spectacle. Here is a new, differential definition of WRITING, and consequently of the TEXT. It is one of Barthes's major contributions to rephrasing the whole critical jargon: talk of the body being inscribed with/in history, of culture being a theoretically infinite set of texts, or of being one big text itself, of such 'texts' being read by any number of 'readers', etc. is fairly well-entrenched in the literature nowadays.

Secondly, the relationship holding bewteen SIGNIFICATION and the particular image offered by mythical language is crucial. Meaning differs, function of the image-language, Barthes maintains. The dependence of expression on meaning is a classic postulate, only one formulation of which occurs in Pope's "The sound should be an echo to the sense". The dependence of meaning on expression is the liberation of the word worked by modern poetry, Barthes notes in **Writing Degree Zero**. What he means here rather is a different kind of dependence. When he speaks of caricature as more SIGNIFICANT than the portrait which it is made after, Barthes has in mind the second-order language of the copy in general. A further differentiation is proposed, one between the first-, and a second-order system of SIGNIFICATION, between, in other words, verbal language and mythical language. Bakhtin looks at parody as more telling than the serious original which it means to degrade, in that it indirectly contains the origial, as well. Barthes's mythical language is, in a way, the same kind of more original copy, in the sense that it likewise has an increased force of SIGNIFICATION. Paradoxical as this may sound, we shall see how much sense this makes, when we look into the Barthesian semiological schema.

Thirdly, SIGNIFICATION is the *sine-qua-non* condition of SPEECH in the broad sense of the word that Barthes ascribes to the term, i.e. LANGUAGE, or DISCOURSE. The latter term will, in roughly two decades, constitute the central concept of Cultural Criticism as practiced by Hayden White in **Tropics of Discourse** (1978). Not the same as language, myth comes after language, i.e. it is based on it, as semiology comes after linguistics, i.e. it is based on it. This is the basic Barthesian difference from the Saussurean theory of linguistics as the queen of sciences, indeed, yet included in semiology.

'Myth as a semiological system' moves further into the field of second-order language, and of SIGNIFICATION. If myth is a semiological system, it follows that mythology is one fragment of SEMIOLOGY, patterned, like linguistics, on the latter's sign system -- first-order language. Like linguistics, mythology deals not with facts as such, but rather with representations of facts, in which facts are tokens of something else (ME < OE *tacen*, *tacn* sign; akin to OGH *zeihhan* sign, Gr. *δείκνυναι* to show < *δικη* judgment, right; hence also Lat. *dictio*, *dictionis*). It is in this mediation, removal, or, in the last instance, difference from, things (*res*) that value is founded. And, we should add, expressed in the *'verba'* of myth. As the etymology points out, DICTION and SIGN -- LANGUAGE and SIGNIFICATION -- are of the same origin, and different from factual reality. They are both valorizing formalizations -- a position consistently held by Barthes, as in **Writing Degree Zero**, where "every Form is also a Value". (13)

Barthes sends one meditating on this in his statement that mythology is "a part both of SEMIOLOGY inasmuch as it it a formal science, and of IDEOLOGY inasmuch as it is an historical science: it studies ideas-in-form". (112) Which, in Hjelmslev's differentiation, would be the-form-of-the-content-in-

the-form-of-the-form. Barthes's explicit linguistic reference though is strictly to Saussure:

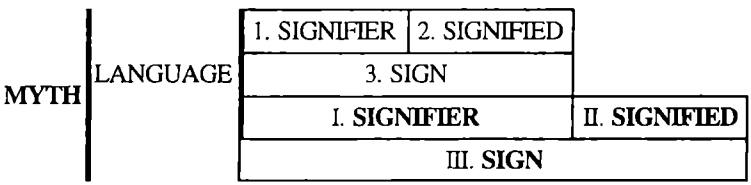
> "Let me therefore restate that any semiology postulates a relation between two terms, a SIGNIFIER and a SIGNIFIED. This relation concerns objects which belong to different categories, and this is why it is not one of equality but one of equivalence. We must here be on our guard for despite common parlance which simply says that the signifier *expresses* the signified, we are dealing, in any semiological system, not with two, but with three different terms. For what we grasp is not at all one term after the other, but the correlation which unites them: there are, therefore, the SIGNIFIER, the SIGNIFIED and the SIGN, which is the associative total of the first two terms". (113) (all emphases added)

Let us illustrate this tripartite relationship as:

1. SIGNIFIER	2. SIGNIFIED
3. SIGN	

Saussure, "who worked on a particular but methodologically exemplary semiological system -- the language or *langue*" (113), saw in it the relationship holding between concept and acoustic image, and the concept - image relation as such. This, Barthes makes a point of saying, applies to language and literature -- systems that use "language-object". (115) Schematic, since Barthes readily denies a direct word - thing relationship, the formulation aims at defining verbal language.

There is a difference between this and mythical language. As it originates in verbal language, myth uses its material in a second-order semiological system. Its language is then a metalanguage. It is also patterned by a tripartite relationship (the relationship between SIGNIFIER and SIGNIFIED, and their relation as SIGN). The semiological schema of mythical language though is accordingly more complex:



It is in this double signification (derived from Hjelmslev) that the essential differentiation occurs between language-object and mythical language. Barthes provides an example to illustrate the double schema, and we had better stick with this already too often quoted example. A picture from *Paris-Match* magazine showing a black soldier saluting the French flag is the message (as visual image here). As mere physical image, the message denotes a black soldier saluting the national flag, like any other soldier. This is the very illusion created by mythical language, Barthes will have it, for, behind the apparent first-order language of signified and signifier united in an apparently denotative sign, there is a deeper signifying schema: the black soldier salutes not the denotative flag, as it were, but Frenchness itself, and the TEXT behind the visual image is that blacks and whites equally venerate the grandeur of the French Empire -- this, at a time of crisis for France! Denotation (in the language-object) is thus used to the benefit of connotation (in myhtical language). It is manipulated by myth. What the photograph shows is used to induce a subtler meaning. A differentiation thus occurs in the

signifying process, function of the interplay of signifier and signified in the two planes, respectively:

> "We now know that the signifier can be looked at, in myth, from two points of view: as the final term of the linguistic system, or the first term of the mythical system. We therefore need two names. On the plane of language, that is, as the final term of the first system, I shall call the signifier: *meaning* (... a Negro is giving the French salute); on the plane of myth, I shall call it: *form*. In the case of the signified no ambiguity is possible: we shall retain the name *concept*. The third term is the correlation of the first two: in the linguistic system it is a *sign*; but it is not possible to use this word again without ambiguity, since in myth (and this is the chief peculiarity of the latter), the singifier is already formed by the *signs* of the language. I shall call the third term of myth the *signification*. This word is here all the better justified since myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us". (117)

The SIGNIFICATION then is formalized sign, the mythical 'operation', to use a Barthesian term, through which denotation is deflected to the extent that it is emptied of its own meaning. This perverse differentiation of meaning is extensively used in advertising, political discourse, and other forms of "myth today". They are meant to transform history into nature, to give the appearance of naturalness to realities normally perceived as unnatural or undesirable. The difference between language-object and mythical language Barthes calls mystification : "this is because myth is speech *stolen and restored*". (125) With a difference, i.e. that speech restored by myth is never the same as before, rather it remains duplicitous.

This leads us to the next step -- 'Reading and deciphering myth'. As myth is produced, so it can be undone, and the structuralist critic is at his best when he embarks upon dismantling the mechanism of culture. One is put in mind of the Russian Formalists engaged in a similar operation. Inversely from the mystifying 'operation' that works the semiological system of language-object into the semiological system of mythical language, the analyst proceeds to demystify it (Gr. μυστικός secret, esoteric, connected with the mysteries < μύστης one initiated, mystic).

It is worthwhile underlining this need for initiation. Only too easily can we be cheated by the play of signifier and signified. (1) If we focus on an empty signifier, the signified will fill the form of the myth; what obtains is a simple system, in which SIGNIFICATION is literal -- the black soldier saluting the flag is a symbol of French imperiality; this is what the myth-producer e.g. the journalist does. (2) If we focuses on a full signifier, we undo the SIGNIFICATION and grasp it as mystification -- the black is the alibi of French imperiality; this is what the mythologist does. (3) But if we focus on the signifier as an "inextricable whole made of meaning and form" (128), we receive an "AMBIGUOUS SIGNIFICATION" (128) (capitalization added) -- the black is the presence of French imperiality; this is what the reader of myths does.

Myth produces precisely this complete differentiation in SIGNIFICATION: it does not unveil the signified (as is the case in 1), nor does it liquidate it (case 2), rather it naturalizes the signified (case 3):

> "We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature. We now understand why, *in the eyes of the myth-consumer*, the intention, the adhomination of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to

have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason. (...) for the myth-reader (...) everything happens as if the picture *naturally* conjured up the concept, as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to the signified: the myth exists from the precise moment when French imperiality achieves the natural state: myth is speech justified *in excess*". (129-30) (underlinings mine)

Adhomination is the crucial term here: myth appeals to us only too humanly, in an *ad hominem* manner, addressing our feelings and prejudices, rather than our intellect. The pathetic side, as it were, is more important to myth than the noetic. And when Barthes compares the SIGNIFICATION of myth with that of poetry, in 'Myth as stolen language', he cannot help grasping how they both intend to catch "the thing in itself" (134), even though with different means. What myth is after is "transcending itself into a factual system" (134), acting according to the principle of 'as if', but behaving so as to keep its 'as if' obscure -- a term for which the ancient Greek was *μυστικός*. Hence the need for the mythologist to reveal its fundamental differentiation -- its artificial naturalness, its mystique. Much of this make-believe, we know, is the very substance of media techniques. A British magazine once remarked that Mrs. Thatcher was 'mythified' into the Iron Lady along the years by a whole team of professionals, not least of which were the then Prime-Minister's hairdresser and dressmaker.

From his leftist position in the late 50's, Barthes distinguishes between "myth on the left" and "myth on the right" in a manner little convincing for us, after 1989. His critique of the Stalin myth, then seen as about the only embodiment of a totalitarian

ideology, is the more pungent and comprehensive today, especially in a country with a recent past of the personality cult:

> "There came a day (...) when it was socialism itself which defined the Stalin myth. Stalin, the spoken object, has exhibited for years, in their pure state, the constituent characters of mythical speech: a meaning, which was the real Stalin, that of history; a signifier, which was the ritual invocation to Stalin, and the *inevitable* character of the 'natural' epithets with which his name was surrounded; a signified, which was the intention to respect orthodoxy, discipline and unity, *appropriated* by the Communist parties to a definite situation; and a signification, which was a sanctified Stalin, whose historical determinants found themselves grounded in nature, sublimated under the name of Genius, that is, something irrational and inexpressible: here, depoliticization is evident, it fully reveals the presence of a myth". (147) (underlinings mine)

A brief note on myth as "depoliticized speech" (142) will wind up this topical story. Given that myth confers upon contingency the appearance of naturalness, it lifts it out of history and produces an illusion of eternity. Myth operates through differentiation all through, from the denotation - connotation interplay, via the ideology - rhetoric interaction, to this essential reversal of the nature - culture opposition. From a leftist viewpoint, Barthes perceives French reality in the late 50's as "an *anti-physis*", and sees in the ideology of its myths "a *pseudo-physis*". (142) Almost half a century later, false naturalness looms large as *the* ideology of totalitarian political myth, which of necessity suspends genuine political life, i.e. pluralism of political parties, and of political discourse.

Fear of otherness, the petit-bourgeois malady, is a human thing in conservative or other closed societies. Petrified in their values, such communities reject alternatives: "The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home". (152) This narrow-minded complacency can lead to dangerous social effects, of which fascism is one, Barthes warns us. Not the only one, we can add. Shall we recall Ionesco's **Rhinocéros**, by way of example?

The collection of **Critical Essays**[1] published by *'Tel Quel'* in 1964 could not be a better corollary to the above-said. We shall look at a few of them, with the explicit intention of pointing to those aspects in Barthes's criticism that anticipate later critical developments.

'The Last Happy Writer' brings to the fore the case of Voltaire, one of self-aggrandizement aimed at confirming oneself. Voltaire, we are assured, embarks upon a paradoxical kind of travels in his tales, in the sense that he does not really move in an explorer's space, rather he visits "a surveyor's space" (87), from which he measures out the "allogenous humanity of the Chinese and the Persian" (87) only as a new limit to his self-same world, never as a new substance. This refusal of difference as otherness

> "explains why the Voltairean journey is neither realistic nor baroque (...); it is not even an operation of knowledge, but merely of affirmation; it is the element of a logic, the figure of an equation; these Oriental countries, which today have so heavy a weight, so pronounced an individuation in

[1] See footnote 1 for the edition consulted here.

world politics, are for Voltaire so many forms, mobile signs without actual content, humanity at zero degree (Centigrade), which one nimbly grasps in order to signify... oneself". (87-88) (underlinings mine)

We cannot help recalling Voltaire's amazement as to how one can be an Iroquois -- a question which he is reported to have uttered when he first saw an Iroquois chief brought to Paris. Barthes shelves Voltaire as the classic *par excellence*, when he contrasts him to Rousseau. The opposition thus ensuing is one between the classic "ablation of history (...) and immobilization of the world", vs. the modern reintroduction of history, through Rousseau's idea of "man's corruption of society" (89). Voltaire, Barthes concludes, was the last happy writer, untroubled by difference.

Edward Said's **Orientalism** (1978), still a landmark in Race and Postcolonial Criticism, does not uphold a different view. The Orient confected by Western man is an invention serving any kind of purposes, from mere amusement, to abuse. Todorov's move from rigorous structuralism to more historically-oriented analyses confirms Barthes's own evolution: after **The Conquest of America** (1982), and **Of Human Variety** (1989), Todorov's recent **Les morales de l'histoire** (1991) places him in an intellectual entourage in which Kristeva's **Strangers to Ourselves** (1988), and **Nations without Nationalism** (1993) find an appropriate place[1].

'Literature Today' sums up the question of the responsibility of forms and of signification as the relationship holding between what signifies and what is signified. Barthes goes on to admit

[1] Titles quoted in English refer to the English translations available at this point, those in French indicate that no such versions are yet completed. All years indicate date of publication in the original.

his interest in signifying systems *qua* formal systems, and in as many extralinguistic "languages" as there are "cultural objects (...), which society has endowed with a signifying power, (... such as) food, clothing, film, fashion, literature". (152) And when he proceeds to compare women's fashions as described in specialized journals, to literature, he concludes that describing something is conferring upon it a meaning which is not the literal meaning -- "is this not the very definition of literature?" (152) A particularly relevant note is struck when he rejects determinism in the study of literature. Neither Taine nor Marx, nor, in the track of the latter, Goldmann, will be credited, for a genuine history of literature is "not the history of the signified (...), but the history of significations (...); in short, we must have the courage to enter the 'kitchen of meaning'". (153-54) (underlinings mine)

Such statements are consubstantial with, and make more easily accessible, consistent semiotic studies of literature that gain terrain in the 70's and 80's[1].

'Taking Side', on the other hand, takes sides (sic), and, in so doing, confirms the complexity of the later Barthes's approach. A presentation of Michel Foucault's method in **Histoire de la Folie** (1961)[2] as neither positivistic nor mythical, but rather

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[1] Special mention deserve Yury Lotman, **The Analysis of the Poetic Text**, c1972, trans. D.B. Johnson, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1976; Michael Riffaterre, **Semiotics of Poetry**, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1978; Umberto Eco, **The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts**, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1979; Julia Kristeva. **Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art**, Oxford University Press, 1980; Jonathan Culler, **The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction**, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1981; Robert Scholes, **Semiotics and Interpretation**, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1982.

ethnological history anticipates the massive interest taken nowadays in context by critical schools sensitive to "historical syntax". (167) Not only are human mores variable, but the fundamental human acts are historical objects -- a realization in great proportion due to historians like Febvre and ethnologists like Mauss, Barthes acknowledges. Sleeping, eating, walking, dying vary not only in their protocols, but also in their human meaning -- as elsewhere, form and content are interdependent, both carriers of value(s). A whole passage is worth quoting by means of conveying Barthes's, and Foucault's voice at once:

> "... the history described by Michel Foucault is a structural history (and I am forgetting the abuse made of this word today). It is structural on two levels, that of the analysis and that of the project. Without ever breaking the thread of a diachronic narrative, Foucault reveals, for each period, what we should elsewhere call *sense units*, whose combination defines this period and whose translation traces the very moment of history; animality, knowledge, vice, idleness, sexuality, blasphemy, libertinage -- these historical components of the demential image thus form signifying complexes, according to a kind of historical syntax which varies from epoch to epoch; they are, if you like, classes of what is signified, huge 'semantemes' whose signifiers themselves are transitory, since reason's observation constructs the marks of madness only from its own norms, and since these norms are themselves historical. (...)
>
> Can we imagine that behind all these various *forms* of the demential consciousness there is something signified which is stable, unique, timeless, and, in a word, 'natural'? From the

[2] Published in the United States as **Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason**, trans. Richard Howard, Pantheon Books, New York, 1965.

medieval fools to the lunatics of the classical period, from these lunatics to Pinel's alienated sufferers, and from these to the new patients of modern psychopathology, the whole of Foucault's history answers: no, madness possesses no transcendent content. But what we can infer from Foucault's analyses (and this is the second way in which his history is structural) is that madness (always conceived, of course, as a pure function of reason) corresponds to a permanent, one might say transhistorical *form*; this form cannot be identified with the marks or signs of madness (in the scientific sense of the term), i.e., with the infinitely various signifiers of what is signified (itself diverse) which each society has invested in unreason, dementia, madness, or alienation; it is a question, rather, of a *form of forms*, i.e., of a specific structure; this form of forms, this structure, is suggested on each page of Foucault's book: it is a complementarity which opposes and unites, on the level of society as a whole, the excluded and the included". (166-67) (underlinings mine)

The reference to the form of forms is very indicative, if we remember the use Barthes makes of Hjelmslev's differentiation, itself a further differentiation from Saussure's. Interesetingly, Barthes speaks not of the form of form, but of the form of forms, and the use of the plural is an indication in itself. When he refers to Foucault's model as structural in two ways, i.e. as analysis and as project, Barthes, it seems to us, points to the structural nature of method and vision, in the last instance reducible to form and content, so both possible to look into both as form and content, themselves -- hence the extension of oppositions in Hjelmslevian terms.

There is another relevant point he makes, and this is the differentiation between the excluded and the included, function of any given society. Thus, to look at madness from the

standpoint of reason is to exclude it as unreason. But that leaves out cases of "respectable" madness, e.g. Holderlin, Nietzsche, Van Gogh. (169) Barthes raises here a question of acute interest today, namely, the relativity of values, especially in multicultural societies, and the changing centre - margin dialectic at a time of canon expansion, under the pressure of postmodern culture.

We shall now try to sum up Roland Barthes's semiological model by referring the whole discussion to **Eléments de sémiologie** (1964)[1]. This volume has the clarity of Structuralist schemata, which it constantly evokes, and the implications of Post-Structuralist analyses, undertaken in the 70's. In a sustained dialogue with Saussure, Hjelmslev, Jakobson, and Martinet, Barthes admittedly places himself among names that account for why his own influence is still far from dwindling.

The differentiation from Saussure's position is announced by way of introduction, and semiology, the science of SIGNIFICATION, is defined by its relation to language:

> "though working at the outset on non-linguistic substances, semiology is required, sooner or later, to find language (in the ordinary sense of the word) in its path, not only as a model, but also as a component, relay or signfied. Even so, such language is not quite that of the linguist: it is a second-order language, with its unities no longer monemes or phonemes, but larger fragments of DISCOURSE referring to objects or episodes whose MEANING *underlies* language, but can never exist independently of it. SEMIOLOGY is therefore perhaps destined to be absorbed into a *trans-linguistics*, the materials of which may be myth, narrative,

[1] The edition used here is the translation from the French by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Hill and Wang, New York: A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967.

journalism, or on the other hand objects of our civilization, in so far as they are *spoken* (through press, prospectus, interview, conversation and perhaps even the inner language, which is ruled by the laws of imagination). In fact, we must now face the possibility of inverting Saussure's declaration: linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is SEMIOLOGY which is a part of LINGUISTICS: to be precise, it is that part covering the *great signifying unities* of DISCOURSE. By this inversion we may expect to bring to light the unity of the research at present being done in anthropology, sociology, psycho-analysis and stylistics round the concept of SIGNIFICATION". (10-11) (underlinings and capitalizations mine)

The extension of LANGUAGE to DISCOURSE accounts for why WRITING, and READING, for that matter, are defined by extension, and why the notion of TEXT undergoes a similar metamorphosis. Barthes acknowledges that this SEMIOLOGICAL LANGUAGE articulates forms of CULTURAL DISCOURSE, as well as CULTURAL OBJECTS. The interdisciplinary studies which he thus anticipates are nowadays carried out almost by rule of thumb.

Barthes emphasizes the taxinomic quality of "structural thought" (12), whose binary classifications apply to "the discourse of contemporary social sciences". (12) The social aspect captures his attention wherever he places his own in the context of other scientific discourses. So, for instance, 'Language (*Langue*) and Speech' revisits Saussure by explicitly pointing to the dialectics of language and speech as there not possibly being language without speech, nor there existing speech without language. The focus on "the real linguistic *praxis*" (15), while bringing Barthes close to Bakhtin -- as has been suggested

above, is the trigger of his interest in speech, usage, and all the other practical consequences of DISCOURSE. It makes him sensitive especially to Hjelmslev's concept of usage, i.e. "the language as a set of habits prevailing in a given society" (17); it unveils in Martinet and Jakobson an emphasis on the idiolect and the socialization of language which Barthes finds similar to his own concept of "WRITING" (21); it embraces Lévi-Strauss's anthropological interpretations and, by way of consequence, smoothly moves into "the garment system" (25), "the food system" (27), "the car (and) the furniture system" (28), and more "complex systems" (30), such as the press. Let us illustrate with a lengthy quote about food -- a signifying system in which Barthes identified Saussure's distinction:

> "The alimentary language is made of i) rules of exclusion (alimentary taboos); ii) signifying oppositions of units, the type of which remains to be determined (for instance the type *savoury/sweet*); iii) rules of association, either simultaneous (at the level of a dish) or successive (at the level of a menu); iv) rituals of use which function, perhaps as a kind of alimentary *rhetoric*. As for alimentary 'speech', which is very rich, it comprises all the personal (or family) variations of preparation and association (one might consider cookery within one family, which is subject to a number of habits, as an idiolect). The *menu*, for instance, illustrates very well this relationship between the language and the speech: any menu is concocted with reference to a structure (which is both national - or regional - and social); but this structure is filled differently according to the days and the users, just as linguistic 'form' is filled by the free variations and combinations which a speaker needs for a particular message". (27) (underlinings mine)

Of extreme importance is the point that Barthes makes about signifying systems whose signs, fabricated all through, could be called "logo-techniques". (31) Such are fashion, furniture, the car industry, in which the standardized language, truly arbitrary, in Saussure's vocabulary, is more markedly conventional, a "signifying 'contract'" (32), in Barthes's terminology. The proliferation of such fabricated languages in postmodern society has entailed a critical discourse about simulacra and illusions especially in Lyotard and Baudrillard.

The functional definition of the SIGN is the logical conclusion derived from a structural analysis of "the two *relata*" (43) of the SIGN -- 'Signifier and Signified'. And, again, Barthes broaches the difference between "*intrinsic semes* for motivated signs, and *extrinsic semes* for unmotivated ones". (51) This places him in the tradition opened up in the late 19th century by the American pragmatist C.S. Peirce, who coined the term 'SEMIOTIC'. Peirce distinguishes three types of signs: 1) the 'iconic' sign, i.e. one resembling its referent; 2) the 'indexical' sign, i.e. one associated with its referent; 3) the 'symbolic' sign, i.e. one stemming from an arbitrary relation to its referent.

The differential model is comprehensively presented in Barthes's discussion of 'Syntagm and System', whose nexus is the differential pattern of the two axes of language inherited from Ferdinand de Saussure. Barthes makes explicit references to Roman Jakobson's use of the two planes, generalized by the latter to "two forms of mental activity" (58), i.e. the syntagmatic or *in preaesentia*, and the paradigmatic (or associative, in Barthes's words) or *in absentia*[1]. Barthes also differentiates between his own, and other theories:

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[1] For a more detailed discussion of this differential pattern see the section about Roman Jakobson here treated, for convenience, in the chapter about the Russian Formalists, even though, obviously, Jakobson is also substantially associated with the Prague school, as with Structuralism in general.

"The associative plane has evidently a very close connection with 'the language' as a system, while the syntagm is nearer to speech. It is possible to use a subsidiary terminology: syntagmatic connections are *relations* in Hjelmslev, *contiguities* in Jakobson, *contrasts* in Martinet; systematic connections are *correlations* in Hjelmslev, *similarities* in Jakobson, *oppositions* in Martinet". (59) (underlinings mine)

Barthes's own theory differentiaties between two axes of language which he calls syntagm and system, interrelated, given that "syntagmatic units (...) are not yet classified: but it is certain that they are already systematic units, since each one of them is a part of a potential paradigm" (p.67). This can be visualized in the following Barthesian schema:

```
syntagm → a   b   c etc.
          a'  b'  c'
        ↑ a'' b'' c''
      system
```

In which syntagm corresponds to association, while system is the very field of DIFFERENCE, in Barthes's terminology. DIFFERENCE manifests itself as opposition, which he treats relationally, as well as semiologically (basically, then, as form, and as content). A special case in DIFFERENCE arrests his attention in particular, and this is, in his own words, TRANSGRESSION. Barthes takes over the definition of transgression as opposition of arrangements:

"two words exhibit the same features, but the arrangement of these features differs in both: *rame/mare*; *dur/rude*; *charme/marche*. These oppositions form the majority of plays

on words, puns and spoonerisms. In fact, starting from a relevant opposition, (*Felibres/febriles*), it is sufficient to remove the stroke which indicates the paradigmatic opposition to obtain a strange-sounding syntagm (a newspaper has in fact used *Felibres febriles* as a title); this sudden suppression of the stroke is rather reminiscent of the removal of a kind of structural censorship, and one cannot fail to connect this phenomenon with that of dreams as producers or explorers of puns.

Another direction which has to be explored, and an important one, is that of rhyme. Rhyming produces an associative sphere at the level of sound, that is to say, of the signifiers: there are paradigms of rhymes. In relation to these paradigms, the rhymed discourse is clearly made of a fragment of the system extended into a syntagm. According to this, rhyming coincides with a transgression of the law of the distance between the syntagm and the system (...); it corresponds to a deliberately created tension between the congenial and the dissimilar, to a kind of structural scandal.

Finally, rhetoric as a whole will no doubt prove to be the domain of these creative transgressions; if we remember Jakobson's distinction, we shall understand that any metaphoric series is a syntagmatized paradigm, and any mentonymy a syntagm which is frozen and absorbed in a system; in metaphor, selection becomes contiguity, and in metonymy, contiguity becomes a field to select from. It therefore seems that it is always on the frontier of the two planes that creation has a chance to occur". (87-88) (underlinings mine)

How relevant the above-said is to practically all critical discourse after Deconstruction is probably not easy to infer at this point. Readings not only in, but a good deal about,

Deconstruction are required for one to get accustomed to the far from customary vocabulary, and thinking, proposed by the revisionistic deconstructive *démarche*. Deconstruction premises a 'structural scandal', indeed, and the scandal is not merely formal, but philosophical. As it looks now, in the early mid-90's, we can diferentiate between two kinds of deconstruction, the one rhetoric (Paul de Man, Harold Bloom), the other philosophical (Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman, Barbara Johnson, John Hillis Miller). It is this latter kind that presents itself as quite hard to digest. In its overall proposition of making a difference, in the sense of reversing accredited values, Deconstruction remains scandalous, to paraphrase Barthes. The reference to rhetoric in the quote above is, most likely, more far-reaching than it may appear at the face of it. What we have called philosophical Deconstruction does itself resort a lot to rhetoric plays, in full seriousness. It also, it seems to us, rings a bell in the context created by Nietzsche's massive reconsiderations on the basic question of truth and reference. Barthes's remark that creation occurs on the frontier of the expectedly separate, and separable, planes is therefore seminal. A whole set of revisionistic critical trends found their approaches in transgression, from the New Historicism to Feminism and Race Criticism.

On January 7, 1977, Roland Barthes delivered the lecture in inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, College de France, to which he had been elected[1]. WRITING, THE TEXT,

[1] The lecture was promptly published as **Leçon**, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978, and translated by Richard Howard as 'In Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, College de France, January 7, 1977', in 1980. It is here quoted from **A Roland Barthes Reader**, Edited with an Introduction by Susan Sontag, Hill and Wang, New York: A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982.

and, of course, SIGNIFICATION are dealt with in it, but it is round the concept of power that the speech evolves. He follows the distinction established in his essay 'La division des langages' (1973) between (1) 'encratic' and (2) 'acratic' discourses, i.e. (1) discourse within power (Gr. ἐν- < ἐν in, within + κράτος strength, might, power) and (2) discourse without power (Gr.α- not, without). Barthes relates to power almost each and every manifestation of language, and finds power omnipresent "in the most delicate mechanisms of social exchange" (459), i.e. not only in its overt carriers, such as the State, classes, groups, but also in public opinion, in fashion, in sports, news, family and private relations, in entertainment and "even in the liberating impulses which attempt to counteract it, (for he calls) the discourse of power any discourse which engenders blame, hence guilt, in its recipient". (459) (underlining mine). The Structuralist mania for binary differentiation still impregnates Barthes's critical discourse in the Post-Structuralist late 70's. Thus, power is active as powers, because "plural in social space, (and), symmetrically, perpetual in historical time". (460) Also, language is treated in relation to, and as different from, speech, and, most importantly, the same - other dialectic is revived with a force that cannot simply be the personal drive for defending homosexuality, an issue not blurred, in fact, in Barthes's debates on power.

Barthes introduces himself as an "impure fellow (...) in an establishment where science, scholarship, rigor, and disciplined invention reign". (458) The phrasing is not gratuitous. In parallel with his semiological studies, contemporaneous with "the birth and development of semiotics" (457), Barthes practices an *engage* criticism that makes him first salute the pervasive presence of Jules Michelet in the College de France. And, as he teaches us his **Leçon**, Barthes evokes Michelet's lesson of "the sovereign place of History in the study of Man". (458) The

coupling of the two bents, the formalist and the social, results in a complex ("impure") discussion of power, while it discloses the structuralist and post-structuralist positions enmeshed in the same theorist -- a lesson in difference, lived, not only asserted. With this he leaves another important legacy to contemporary literary criticism, i.e. the question of power and the strategies by which power is 'inscribed' in human history -- vocabulary now become routine in the literature.

The 'Inaugural Lecture' differentiates between LANGUAGE, which is "legislation", and SPEECH, "its code". (460) This reminds us of the Barthesian differentiation between 'horizontal' LANGUAGE and 'vertical' STYLE in **Writing Degree Zero**. The same opposition of the transpersonal vs. the personal operates here. It is the difference between 'remembrance' and 'freedom' -- Barthes's appropriation of, and differentiation from, the Saussurean opposition of '*langue*' vs. '*parole*'. As in **Writing Degree Zero**, Barthes eventually comes up with a compromise between the two opposites, i.e. WRITING, here fairly indistictly referred to as LITERATURE or TEXT, as well. But before he does so, he indulges in analysing the two opposites.

As legislation, LANGUAGE is "a trans-social organism in which power is inscribed". (460) This does not surprise. But then, SPEECH itself is, to Barthes's mind, "a classification (...) and all classifications are opressive". (460) (underlinings mine) To buttress this position, Barthes invokes Jakobson, who "has shown us that a speech-system is defined less by what it permits us to say than by what it comples us to say". (460) As we have already maintained, the structuralist and the post-structuralist speak in one critic here. Barthes's formulations in what follows are as many anticipations of current critical jargon today. Here is Barthes:

"by its very structure my (i.e. *personal*, explanation added) language implies an inevitable relation of alienation. To speak, and, with even greater reason, to utter a discourse is not, as is too often repeated, to communicate; it is to subjugate: the whole of LANGUAGE is a generalized *rection.* (...) Renan (...) realized that language is not exhausted by the message engendered by it. He saw that language can survive this message and make understood within it, with a frequently terrible resonance, something OTHER than it says, superimposing on the subject's conscious, reasonable voice the dominating, stubborn, implacable voice of structure". (460-61) (all emphases added)

And here is the Deconstructive thesis: there is no 'presence', i.e. metaphysics in language, no concepts of reference. Consequently, language does not, and can not, express truth, because there is no such thing as truth. Language does not say what it means, and it does not mean what it says. Deconstruction goes one or several steps further, in that, while Barthes perceives the subject as, indeed, subjugated, Derrida and his followers agglutinate the subject to WRITING -- a concept so dear to Barthes -- to the extent that the human element becomes indistinguishable from language. In fact, the **Leçon** comprises almost deconstructive statements (sic), as when Barthes defines language as "quite simply fascist" (461), because of its capacity of compelling speech. Or when, identifying in speech two categories, i.e. (1) the authority of assertion, and (2) the gregariousness of repetition, he eventually falls upon the Hegelian master - slave opposition, so dearly invoked, for demolition, by Deconstruction. Nor is the Nietzschean echo hard to hear between the lines -- which confirms Barthes's anticipation of current contemporary criticism:

"On the one hand, speech is immediately assertive: negation, doubt, possibility, the suspension of judgment require special mechanisms which are themselves caught up in a play of linguistic masks (...). On the other hand, the signs composing speech exist only insofar as they are recognized, i.e., insofar as they are repeated. The sign is a follower, gregarious; in each sign sleeps that monster: a stereotype. I can speak only by picking up what *loiters* around in speech. Once I speak, these two categories unite in me; I am both master and slave. I am not content to repeat what has been said, to settle comfortably in the servitude of signs: I speak, I affirm, I assert *tellingly* what I repeat". (461) (underlinings mine)

There is an essential difference though. Barthes admits that servility and power are inescapable in speech, and that there is no freedom except outside language. But he also admits that there is no exterior to human language, which means that the only struggle for freedom has to be fought *in* language:

"the only remaining alternative is, if I may say so, to cheat with speech, to cheat speech. This salutary trickery, this evasion, this grand imposture which allows us to understand speech *outside the bounds of power*, in the splendor of a permanent revolution of language, I for one call *literature*. I mean by *literature* neither a body nor a series of works, nor even a branch of commerce or of teaching, but the complex graph of the traces of a practice, the practice of WRITING. Hence, it is essentially the TEXT with which I am concerned -- the fabric of SIGNIFIERS which constitute the work. For the TEXT is the very outcropping of speech, and it is within speech that speech must be fought, led astray -- not by the message of which it is an instrument, but by the play of

words of which it is the theater. Thus I can say without differentiation: LITERATURE, WRITING, or TEXT". (462) (underlinigns and capitalizations mine)

This passage is in a way a watershed in the Barthesian theory of language. While it emphasizes the formalized structuredness of LANGUAGE, and, by consequence, of LITERATURE, it also expands the idea of the responsibility of forms to the extent that literature becomes a theatre of language. The moral responsibility of forms, it follows, is the one great responsibility of LITERATURE. This may sound paradoxical, for Barthes concurrently speaks of trickery, which is the antipode of honesty. It is in this impossible condition of LANGUAGE as LITERATURE that he builds up the heroic stature of the writer:

> "The forces of freedom which are in literature depend not on the writer's civil person, nor on his political commitment -- for he is, after all, only a man among others -- nor do they even depend on the doctrinal content of his work, but rather on the labor of displacement he brings to bear upon the LANGUAGE". (462) (all emphases added)

The divide suggested by Barthes's position is the differentiation between the existential person of the writer and the writer *qua* writer, the differentiation between the theatre of LIFE and the theatre of LITERATURE, i.e. in the last instance, the autonomy of literature posited as the basic condition of autotelic theory as such, whether formalist (as in the Russian Formalists), or conservative (as in Eliot). His use of the term 'trace' strangely sounds so much like the favourite Derridean term. The difference from Deconstruction, though, it appears to us, is the labour in the writer for displacement in LANGUAGE

that Barthes unequivocally identifies as the responsibility of LITERATURE *qua* form.

There are three forces of LITERATURE, all responsible, that he underlines: (1) *Mathesis*, i.e. the capacity to know something, to know *of* something, or rather, to know *about* something -- "literature feeds knowledge into the machinery of infinite reflexivity" (464); (2) *Mimesis*, i.e. the capacity to represent the irrepresentable real, and (3) *Semiosis*, i.e. the capacity to produce imaginary signs. Each of these accounts, in its own way, for the responsibility of WRITING, which is (1) intransitive -- a gratuitous pleasure, in effect, **The Pleasure of the Text** (1973), (2) irreducible and resistant to typified discourse (basically the discourse of science) -- as illustrated by **S/Z** (1970), and (3) producive of heteronymous things, and, indeed, of heteronymous persons -- **Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes** (1975), in which the homonymy is only apparent, the true struggle is within LANGUAGE become LITERATURE, where DIFFERENCE itself dwells.

The turning point in Barthes's theory of WRITING as freedom is 'The Death of the Author' (1968)[1]. Grasping the point of his demonstration in it amounts to grasping the difference between Roland Barthes and **Roland Barthes**. The essay starts with a sentence from Balzac and a fundamental question asked by the critic:

> "In his tale **Sarrasine** Balzac... writes this sentence: 'She was Woman, with her sudden fears, her inexplicable whims, her instinctive fears, her meaningless bravado, her defiance, and her delicacy of feeling.' Who speaks in this way? Is it the hero of the tale...? Is it Balzac the man, whose personal

[1] Text cited from K.M. Newton (ed.), **Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader**, Macmillan, London, 1988.

experience has provided him with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author, professing 'literary' ideas about feminity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? (154)

As has been noticed, Barthes draws on Benveniste's theory[1] that the self or subjectivity is constituted in the exercise of language. This complicates the question of DIFFERENCE as OTHERNESS considerably. If the self is not itself, if it is itself in LANGUAGE, it follows that the 'I' of the speaker is perpetually alientated from him/her. On the other hand, there being no exterior to language, as Barthes will have it, there is no 'I' as such, but only the 'I' uttered into being at the moment of utterance. What Barthes does here is not simply doing away with the concept of self-expression, but downright proclaiming the death of the author.

A text without author -- this is the DIFFERENCE he proposes. Instead of dismissing further problems, this announced death brings in a few more differentiations. Thus, it is not the author who speaks, it is LANGUAGE that does so, for language has the capacity called intrasitivity (see above) that makes it independent of life. The TEXT can only be "eternally written *here and now*" (156), which means that the modern author, unlike the Author -- the difference is singificant -- is a mere "scriptor (whose hand), cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin -- or which, at least, has no other origin than LANGUAGE itself". (156) Since this is mere inscription, the TEXT is no more than a "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture". (156) There is no expression, there is only the inscription of a "ready-formed dictionary".

[1] Cf. Michael Moriarty, *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

(156) There is no LIFE other than the imitation of the BOOK, and no book other than a tissue of SIGNS. Imitation thus becomes ceaseless deferral, WRITING, a ceaseless evaporation of meaning. THE WORLD as TEXT is the only conclusion in this suspension of certainty. The world, as it were, defines itself by DIFFERENTIATING itself from itself, by being OTHER. This death would not be definitive, were it not associated, differentially, by a birth, we are led to accept: for, while the TEXT refuses "to fix meaning" (157), which is as much as saying that it refuses "God and his hypostases - reason, science, law" (157), it places the responsibility upon the READER. Here is the myth overthrown: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author". (157)

A whole host of terms, and the concepts designated pave the way to Deconstruction in this epoch-making essay: deferral, inscription, the text (eventually lifted to the status of 'Monsieur Texte' by the deconstructionist), writing a.s.o. are a hundred per cent Derridean language. So is the method Barthes makes use of here, namely fragmentariness, which is the technical reflexion of the absence of 'presence', as Deconstruction maintains.

We see fragmentariness, plurality, writing, in a word, DIFFERENCE, at work in **S/Z** (1970)[1]. The title sends us back to **Sarrasine**, a character whose identity is uncertain, in that Sarrasine is castration personified. The inceptive sentence is a challenge, again:

> "There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean. Precisely what the first analysts of narrative were attempting:

[1] Roland Barthes, **S/Z**, Translated by Richard Miller, Preface by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, New York, A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974.

to see all the world's stories (and there have been ever so many) within a single structure: we shall, they thought, extract from each tale its model, then out of these models we shall make a great narrative structure, which we shall reapply (for verification) to any one narrative: a task as exhausting (...) as it is ultimately undesirable, for the TEXT thereby loses its DIFFERENCE". (3) (all emphases added)

This questioning of structuralist positions is telling. Barthes overtly asserts his dissatisfaction with "ascetic" Structuralism, for the Buddist practice of analytical dissection and consequent abstraction is what no longer he himself accepts as critical method. All marks of oneness, singleness, universality are superseded. The Post-Structuralist Barthes displays the vocabulary of DIFFERENCE. We shall stop to look into Barthesian 'difference' at some length, as a preface to further comments on Deconstruction.

Firstly, evaluation, as Barthes acknowledges, is unconceivable if not "only as a practice, and this practice is that of WRITING". (4) (underlining and capitalization added) It is crucial to understand the value of practice in Barthes's Post-Structuralist theory, because practice differentiates between the classic reader, and the modern one, who is "no longer a consumer, but a producer of the TEXT". (4) (underlining and capitalization mine) The TEXT itself has, similarly, undergone a process of differentiation: it no longer is the classic text, simply "*readerly*", but "the *writerly* text" (4), i.e. written and rewritten while permanently revaluated. Always different, we can conclude.

"Secondly, interpretation can only be plural, since the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of

the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersetced, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure". (5) (underlinings mine)

To speculate on a Barthesian note redolent of his own differential schema of LANGUAGE as horizon, and STYLE as vertical axis, WRITING, the compromise between the former two, can only be performative, "for as nothing exists outside the TEXT, there is never a *whole* of the TEXT", rather "we are dealing with incompletely plural TEXTS". (6)

Thirdly, following Hjelmslev, Barthes supersedes denotation in favour of connotation -- a yet further mark of DIFFERENCE. Again, he anticipates the Deconstructionist by dismantling the inherited hierarchy of denotation, then connotation:

"if we base denotation on truth, on objectivity, on law, it is because we are still in awe of the prestige of linguistics, which, until today, has been reducing language to the sentence and its lexical and syntactical components; now the endeavor of this hierarchy is a serious one: it is to return to the closure of Western discourse (scientific, critical, or philosophical), to its centralized organization, to arrange all the meanings of a text in a circle around the hearth of denotation (the hearth: center, guardian, refuge, light of truth)". (7) (underlinings added)

There is all the Derridean paraphernalia here, for the taking: Western tradition as a suppressor of DIFFERENCE, the tyranny of the centre, the centrality of truth.

Honest to his belief, Barthes does not theorize -- a business compatible with the analysis undertaken by his ascetic Structuralist Buddhists. On the contrary, Barthes practices DIFFERENCE, as the fragmentation of Balzac's **Sarrasine** into "*lexias*" (13) indicates. These are "units of reading" (13), he explains, and we should keep in mind the role of reading as participation, therefore the responsibility of the reader. Lexias are "arbitrary in the extreme" (13), too, since Barthes rejects norms, laws, or other such coercive strictures. Unlike the closed classic text, the modern TEXT is

> "an entrance into a network with a thousand entrances (...), a perspective whose vanishing point is nonetheless ceaselessly pushed back, mysteriously opened: each (single) TEXT is the very theory (and not the mere example) of this vanishing, of this DIFFERENCE which indefinitely returns, insubmissive". (12) (underlinings and capitalization added)

There follows that there is a plurality of readings, given the plural play of signifiers, their neverending shifting. There is no reading as such, there is only rereading. Matei Călinescu's latest book, called **Rereading** (1993)[1], identifies in this a norm. And here is Barthes's anticipation worth quoting at length:

> "Rereading, an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have us 'throw away' the story once it has been consumed ('devoured'), so that we can then move on to another story,

[1] Matei Călinescu, **Rereading**, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1993.

buy another book, and which is tolerated only by certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors), rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the TEXT from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere), multiplies it in its variety and its plurality: rereading draws the TEXT out of its internal chronology ('this happens *before* and *after* that') and recaptures a mythic time (without *before* and *after*); it contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is a primary, naive, phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to 'explicate,' to intellectualize (as if there were a beginning of reading, as if everything were not already read: there is no *first* reading, even if the TEXT is concerned to give us that illusion by several operations of *suspense*, artifices more spectacular than persuasive); rereading is no longer consumption, but play (that play which is the return of the DIFFERENT). If then, a deliberate CONTRADICTION in terms, we *immediately* reread the TEXT, it is in order to obtain, as though under the effect of a drug (that of recommencement, of DIFFERENCE), not the *real* text, but a PLURAL TEXT: the SAME and NEW". (15-16) (underlinings and capitalizations added)

Barthes's theory of DIFFERENCE defies the authoritative centre and regales the margin, it suspends accredited linear time and sings a eulogy to mythic time, it rejects univocity and raises hymns to diversity, it annihiliates analytical oneness and instantiates plurality.

How does he perform DIFFERENCE so far postulated? **S/Z**, the telling DIFFERENCE in SAMENESS, or ONE as DIFFERENT, is the answer. **Sarrasine**, an apparently realist

(therefore *readerly*) text, presents Sarrasine, the realist author modelling in clay the figure of Zambinella; realistically indeed, he tries to leave her body nude, for her secret to be revealed, only, Barthes notes, there is no 'behind' the paper of the text -- there is, in other words, no link between representation and referent; there is only fictional DIFFERENCE; but this gets even more complicated as we consider the existential DIFFERENCE involved: the statue of the woman is fashioned out on the model of a castrato called Zambinella as a female figure, but, stolen by Zambinella's protector, a cardinal, it is meant as a reproduction in marble, commissioned by the cardinal as the figure of the ex-male of his own desire; further artistic DIFFERENCES intervene: the marble copy is copied by an artist as the figure of Adonis, itself based on another model, that of Endymion. This staggering *mise-en-abîme* is the freedom Barthes elsewhere attempts to find in art. As elsewhere, creation occurs at the boundary of identities. The profusion of forms, with their impending responsiblity, is the lesson in DIFFERENCE Barthes elegantly teaches us. It is in the TEXT that this occurs, it is in WRITING that it is performed. It is in SIGNIFICATION, which is different from mere meaning, that it finds its rationale. It is in this rich creative process that the author himself undergoes a process of differentiation from his existential self, not Roland Barthes, but **Roland Barthes** by Roland Barthes, not the man that suffers, but the mind that creates, according to Eliot. The similarity with the case of Fernando Pessoa, the Portuguese modernist, has been pointed to[1]. The reification of the author through the TEXT, which is multiple, unavoidably leads to a multiple subject, always other, as it is same. Not Fernando Pessoa, but his heteronyms. Not the orthodoxy in Roland Barthes, but the heterodoxy in **Roland Barthes**.

[1] José Augusto Seabra, *Op. cit.*, pp. 87-91.

CONCLUSION

Barthes's fundamental contribution to literary criticism arises from the analytical bent of all Structuralism. The applied nature of many structuralist studies, especially in the 70's, but not only, confirms this[1]. Consubstantial with Formalism, owing to its equally sustained interest in form, order, structure, organization, typology, 'grammar', underlying which is the idea of some universal model, structuralism necessarily deals with language as system ordering reality.

The language - reality relationship is basic in the Barthesian critical discourse. By extending it beyond literature, to such fields as fashion, food, the car industry, etc., Barthes takes one more step from Lévi-Strauss's own extension of Saussure's theory. In so doing, he ends up proposing a study of

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[1] Even though brought under attack by Michael Riffaterre's 'Describing Poetic Structure: Two Approaches to Baudelaire's *Les chats*', the essay written jointly with Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss as an explication of a sonnet, 'Charles Baudelaire's *Les chats*', remains a classic. It is difficult to give even a selective list of titles following in the same track, so dense is the literature. For further readings, let us suggest Winifred Nowottny, **The Language Poets Use**, London, Athlone, 1965; Geoffrey N. Leech, **A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry**, London: Longmans, 1969; Roman Jakobson and Lawrence G. Jones, **Shakespeare's Verbal Art**, The Hague: Mouton, 1970; Seymour Chatman, **The Later Style of Henry James**, New York: Oxford, 1972; Susan Witting (ed.), **Structuralism - An Interdisciplinary Study**, The Pickwick Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1975; Robert Scholes, **Semiotics and Interpretation**, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1982; William V. Spanos, Paul A. Bove, and Daniel O'Hara (eds.), **The Question of Textuality: Strategies of Reading in Contemporary American Criticism**; Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1982; Joe Andrew, **Poetics of the Text: Essays to Celebrate Twenty Years of the Neo-Formalist Circle**, Amsterdam - Atlanta, GA, 1992.

SIGNIFICATION, in which the notion3 of TEXT and of WRITING have undergone a considerable change.

In his ambition to write a new history of literature he starts from the assumption that literature as language is characterized by binary oppositions. He devises his own opposition on the basis of Saussure's '*langue*' - '*parole*' relationship, i.e. the collective horizontal plane - the vertical personal plane. At the intersection of the two axes, writing is a personal and social function.

Deriving from this differential nature of writing, the idea is promoted that all the texts ever written are One Big Text or One Big Book into which is born the individual writer, and which the individual reader reads, which means that there is no such thing as a first reading, as there is no such thing as fresh writing. Everything is rereading and intertextuality.

The world as object is the equation that helps Barthes raise the scaffolding of his **Mythologies**. Everything in culture is myths, i.e. systems of signs produced in a complex writing-reading process, in which the individual and the collective are jointly present.

The collective nature of myth explains the phenomenon called mass culture and the 'operations' of 'mystification' performed in the production of myths as a result of the interplay of the 'ideology' and 'rhetoric' of myth, i.e. of the signified and the signifier.

Barthes's thesis is essentially that myth operates the passage from nature to culture, through WRITING. In terms of Jakobson's passage from selectivity to motivation, myth thus

appears as an artificial naturalness, rhe result of a differentiation taken for granted.

From the Structuralist viewpoint, myth is speech. From the Post-Structuralist, it is reality 'mystified' by the individual-collective writer-reader of myths. As such, Barthes concludes, myth is conditioned by culture and history.

Barthes has left us a differential schema of mythical language based on the Saussurean schema of the sign as a signified - signifier relationship.

Barthes proposes a strategy of myth demystification, by going back and decoding the passage of nature into history as the identification of the semantemes of history that function in the 'syntax of history'.

As a major difference from Saussure, Barthes's thesis that semiology is part of linguistics confirms his extension of the notion of TEXT to the text of culture, as well as of the notion of language to the notion of discourse. By this, Barthes anticipates overt Post-Structuralist stands of the Cultural Studies kind.

Barthes's theory of the socialization of language recalls Martinet's and Jakobson's emphasis on the idiolect, Hjelmslev's concept of usage, and Lévi-Strauss's notion of anthropological relevance, and places him among other consistent structure-aware thinkers.

His own differential model of language (the syntagmatic or *in praesentia*, and the paradigmatic or *in absentia*) recalls other

structuralist models, in the first place Jakobson's famous contiguity vs. selectivity.

Barthes's theory of language as power, influenced as it seems to be by Foucault, and, in the background, by Nietzsche, anticipates Post-Structuralist positions embraced by Deconstruction, Feminisms, and Race Criticism.

With a post-structuralist propensity, Barthes takes an interest in diffuse identity (transgression), like Todorov, his disciple.

A massive contribution made by Barthes to literary criticism in general is his declared 'death of the author', which, correlated with his use of deferral, inscription, and text as 'MONSIEUR TEXTE' (the overall text) paves the way to Post-Structuralism as such.

Roland Barthes is a typical case of evolution from vocal Structuralist *to* Post-Structuralist positions. Tzvetan Todorov, his doctoral disciple of the early mid-60's, has undergone a similar process. Both illustrate a tendency that'lit. crit.' as such has shown in the last two decades.

No consistent system of literary criticism could be conceived of today without the major Barthesian contributions presented above. Like other non-English-speaking critics, Roland Barthes is an indispensable name in Anglo-American criticism now.

SELF AND OTHER: FROM FORMAL TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

(Tzvetan Todorov)

In the choral of so many voices interpreting the critical staves of the day, Tzvetan Todorov is yet another European and non-Anglo-Saxon name that gives identity to Anglo-American thinking in the humanities. His seems to hold an at once challenging and reassuring position. On the one hand, he broadens the breach that has been seen at work at the heart of Anglo-Saxonism for the better half of a century. The process was, in effect, initiated with Russian Formalism slowly but irreversibly carrying its point, then standing its ground, in the decade following World War I, only to be consistently reinforced by Roland Barthes, after World War II. Extending, by and large, between two world-wide catastrophes, this lapse of fifty odd years of serious reconsiderations was, indeed, an interval of thorough-going revaluations. One feels that Todorov's critical posture cannot be fairly grasped unless related to this background of quite spectacular mutations. On the other hand, Todorov joins the plurivocal *tutti*, adding to the overall impression that critical singing in the latter half of the century, especially in the 80's and 90', is as much 'dialogism' and 'polyglossia', as it is something distinctly itself. An identity coming out of variety, an ID of multifarious substance, a SELF feeding on the OTHER.

In the 60's, Todorov was going on the literary stage as the translator and propagator of the Russian Formalists. His **Théories de la littérature. Textes des Formalistes russes**[1] (1965) made known to the French, then to the whole Western

[1] Tzvetan Todorov, **Théorie de la littérature**, Paris: Seuil, 1965.

critical audience, statements that had been made four decades before. It brought to the fore the very concept of Formalism and helped create a contrastive analysis of European Formalism and American New Criticism. It was the starting point for a number of critical revisionisms, and constituted the immediate material for further translations of the same texts into English. This is not to say that Todorov's French translations replaced the Russian originals. In most cases they did not. But they did stir critical curiosity and acted as catalysts in the ampler process of renovation. Much of this material is now easily available in English: Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (trans. and eds.), **Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays** (1965)[1], and Ladislav Mateika and Krystyna Pomorska (eds.), **Readings in Russian Poetics** (1971)[2] have become part and parcel of critical readings in English departments on either side of the Atlantic. They include most of the crucial contributions by the Russian Formalists, with, maybe, the one exception of Shklovsky's 'The Construction of the Story and the Novel', which Todorov was not indifferent to. They give considerable space to pieces by Eichenbaum, Jakobson, Vinogradov, Tynianov, Brik, Tomashevsky, and Propp, all names looming large in Todorov's collection, and, more importanly, in his critical mind. This side of Todorov's personality has been pinpointed rather convincingly, and Westerners sharing his profession have not hesitated to see in him a go-between, in a way. As an exile from Eastern Europe, and a refined intellectual coming from a Slav country, it was assumed that Todorov was someone to confidently listen to. His challenging proposition that some different critical voices be heard was instantly embraced. In what he personally produced in the years to come, Tzvetan Todorov was to prove an intimate and deep-seated Formalist-

[1] See ch. 'Literature as Difference'.

[2] *Idem.*

Structuralist stand. The Russian Formalists were more deeply rooted in his critical assumptions than a mere anthology would suggest.

In an equally significant position does he stand to Roland Barthes[1], the structuralist master without whom Anglo-American criticism is impossible to conceive of today. Todorov's **Littérature et signification** (1967)[2], basically an application of structuralist methods to the exciting text of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's **Liaisons dangereuses** (1782), is none but his doctoral dissertation written under Barthes's guidance.

Less emphasized, though by no means less relevant is the year right between his Russian Formalism and his French Structuralism connections, respectively. Few seem to be aware even today that Todorov's participation in the 1966 Symposium on '*The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*' held at Johns Hopkins University was a point of reference in his, and Western literary criticism. A landmark that has not ceased being seen as the watershed between two orientations: the Formalist-Structuralist vs. the Post-Structuralist. Gathered in a compact volume, **The Structuralist Controversy**[3], the papers given at this event, and the discussions that they had entailed are readily available to the analyst now. Featuring by the side of Lucien Goldmann's, Tzvetan Todorov's contribution falls under the 'Language in Literature' Section, betraying a more than obvious structuralist propensity. So does Roland Barthes's paper on 'To Write: an Intransitive Verb', though the latter's insistence on the *joie* of composition somehow pushes merely structuralist walls off a formalist area. It brings in something of the human

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[1] See ch. 'Writing, the Text, and Signification as Difference'

[2] **Littérature et signification**, Paris: Larousse, 1967.

[3] Richard Macksey & Eugenio Donato, **The Structuralist Controversy. The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man**, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1970.

element that makes the difference. After all, this is a symposium dedicated to the 'sciences of man'. And who really makes all the difference, and makes of the occasion more than a simple occasion is Jacques Derrida. Derrida gives his historic paper on 'Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences' at this symposium. Seen in its entirety, the event lets one understand the moving sands on which traditional structuralists were meeting. That something was in the air seems to be suggested by the plural that one encounters two times in the symposium title: not the language, but the languages of criticism, and not the science of man (anthropology?), but the sciences of man. Diffidence about the one received attitude, or genuine acknowledgement of difference as the only decent stand? Two years before the no less historic 1968, Todorov is a direct witness to revisionisms in the humanities.

Derrida's proposed triad is an indication of changes in the making: structure, sign, play -to start with, the con-struct on which the semiotic graft is fixed, and because of which, it becomes a con-struct; concurrently though play, the one disposition that is conand current, same and other. From this incipient digging into DIFFERENCE, Derrida will develop a whole theory of reversals which he proposes as renovators of the old spirit. How many of us now stop to consider that Todorov was an immediate contributor to essentially the same views? And how many of us are prone to read in his further criticism notes that were then struck by another direct participant, Jacques Lacan, in 'Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever', published in the aforesaid volume? One hardly wonders that the Ecole Freudienne de Paris should have had a representative in the heated debate on the languages of criticism and the sciences of man. Rather, Lacan's demonstration comes incredibly close to some of Todorov's later statements:

"The message, our message, in all cases comes from the Other by which I understand 'from the place of the Other'. It certainly is not the common other, the other with a lower-case *o*, and this is why I have given a capital *O* as the initial letter to the Other of whom I am now speaking. Since in this case, here in Baltimore, it would seem that the Other is naturally English-speaking, it would really be doing myself violence to speak French. The question (...) raised, that it would perhaps be difficult and even a little ridiculous for me to speak English, is an important argument and I also know that there are many French-speaking people present who do not understand English at all; for these my choice of English would be a security, but perhaps I would not wish them to be so secure and in this case I shall speak a little French as well". (186-7) (underlinings mine)

Like Derrida, Lacan dwells on the activity called play. For a while, he appears to enjoy playing with the idea of the French- vs. the English-speaking audience, especially when, as if in a mere play of ironies, he will give security to the French-speaking attendants by addressing those present in English! This pleasure for *calembour* (whose obscure origin nonetheless sends one to *bourde* fib, falsehood, blunder), so typically French, seems to point to more than gratuitous, even though elegant punning. Lacan does choose to deliver his communication in a mingling of French and English, and, at times, in a composite of the two -- an intermingling, or mutual inmixing of Otherness in Sameness, as indicated in the title of his contribution. He goes on to sustain, with Freud, that words are the only material of the unconscious, and that the latter is precisely structured. The unconscious is structured as a language. But language is language, Lacan remarks, "and there is only one sort of language: concrete language -- English or French for instance -- that people talk. (...) there is no meta-language". (188) So far,

so good. But, and here we face the nexus of the matter, in Lacan's, as later in Todorov's terms: it is through the subject that the message is conveyed, and the subject is never a unity. The subject is a "divided essence" (192), a "lost object" (189) that has already been defined as *Dasein*. Unity as "the most important and characteristic trait of structure" (190) was the dream of the Gestalt school and of phenomenology, as in Husserl's eidetic method (< Gr. *εἶδος* form, type) -- a method of abstracting universals from the flux of images given to us in consciousness. This attempt to isolate the invariable in the objects of our consciousness is, to Lacan's mind, past hoping for. To him, the question of unity is one to be discussed contrastively, and he chooses the language of mathematics to bring the case home to his audience. In all theories of numbers -- distinct entities --, the formula '*n* plus 1' (*n* + 1) is the basis. Lacan sees the same applying to the question of the subject. The 'one more' or the question of the two is his own basis in a demonstration of IDENTITY - the ID as ITSELF and ANOTHER. Hence, on a Freudian note again, the relevance of the pleasure principle, and Lacan's own enlargement upon it in terms of *jouissance*, the deeply organic behaviour of the deeply organic nature of the organism. For, is not *jouissance* the desire for another, the pleasure of otherness in the intimately felt need to be oneself?

It is interesting to follow Tzvetan Todorov's evolution from Formalistic-Structuralist positions to an attitude best described in recent literary criticism as Cultural Studies. His rapport with the Russian Formalists, and, further, with French structuralism-oriented stands characterize the early Todorov as a disciple of a venerable European tradition. The later Todorov[1] though,

[1] The Todorov, that is, of books and studies such as **La conquête de l'Amerique. La question de l'autre**, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1982 (English version, **The Conquest of America. The Question of the Other**, trans. Richard Howard, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1982, Romanian

pursuing a line traceable in Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology, is a critic more sensitive to con-text, than to text, to ac-culturation, than to culture, and to any such indications of OTHERNESS at the heart of SAMENESS. This latter-day Todorov has left behind emphatically formal aspects, and has supplanted them by aspects of cultural morphology. He has taken his farewell from a one-time structuralist view of literature, and has moved into anthropocultural models. This has triggered off a widening of perspective as of scope of analysis. The Todorov one reads these days has, like so many other critics, evolved from a literary critic's to a cultural critic's position -- *per se* an exercise in difference. His is no longer an area subsumed under literary studies. It is, rather, an open-horizon field marked off by unstable, and, at points, even destabilizing borders of cultural identity. He shares Stephen Greenblatt's interest in 'cultural poetics', or Virgil Nemoianu's focus on a 'morphology of culture'. As he actually treads in the path of Vladimir Propp's clearly context-bound morphological studies of fairy-tales, in which actants and functions are, after all, function of human values and intentions, whether on the individual or communal scale. And he definitely follows a line so far only dicreetly manifest in his own criticism, as in his applied investigation of **Les liaisons dangereuses**, in his probings into intentionality, while he conducts an analysis in the structural ordering of **Decameron** material, or in the theme of

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version, **Cucerirea Americii. Problema Celuilalt**, trans. Madga Jeanrenaud, Institutul European, Iaşi, 1994); **The Deflection of the Enlightenment**, Presented at the Stanford Humanities Center, February 3, 1989 at 'The Novel and the Writer's Life', a symposium in honor of Joseph Frank and Ian Watt, Stanford, Californis, 1989; **Nous et les autres**: La Reflexion française sur la diversité humaine, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1989 (English version, **On Human Diversity**: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought, trans. Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993.

the 'I' vs. the theme of the 'you' that he explores in a book on the fantastic[1].

The cross-fertilization of identities engaged in mutual inmixing could not escape an Eastern European intellectual born of Jewish parents, in Bulgaria, in 1939, brought up in a Stalinist regime (which taught him the lesson of vacuous official discourse, and of the deeply entrenched disparity between what the people in power said and the lives they allowed the ordinary people to lead), an *emigre* in France since the 60's, distinguished member of the Centre Nationale de la Recherche, Paris since the 70's, and, almost as a rule, visiting professor to American universities (Harvard, the spring term, 1994, among others) since the 80's.

A first definition of terms is provided in the 1967 contribution to a collective volume that came out in 1968[2]. In it Todorov signed a study later published as an independent book, **Poétique**[3]. Both its own, and the title of the whole volume point to what passes as structuralist fads and fancies now, but was, at the time, fodder for serious critical rumination. Briefly after his **Poétique**, Todorov's **Grammaire du Décameron**[4] came off the press. They are both extremely typical of their author's early structuralism, and were issued in one volume in Romanian translation[5] in the mid-70's. It is to this volume that the

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[1] **Introduction a la littérature fantastique**, Editions du Seuil Paris, 1970, Romanian version, **Introducere în literatura fantastică**, trad. Virgil Tănase, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1973.

[2] x x x **Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?**, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1968.

[3] **Poétique**, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1973.

[4] **Grammaire du Décameron**, Mouton & Co. N.V., Publishers, Hague, 1969, in the Netherlands.

[5] **Poetica. Gramatica Decameronului**, trad. Paul Miclău, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1975.

following considerations will resort for commentaries, references, and quotations.

With a slightly changed, but categorically solid structuralist view, the 1973 edition of Todorov's **Poétique** proceeds with a definition of poetics. Accurate and orderly, the *demarche* requires of its author the clarification of consecutive steps back, and the debate starts off *ab ovo*. Not only do we need to know what structuralism is, nor do we need to know only what poetics is, but we have to make ourselves clear about what the literary text, and the literary work are, respectively.

Thus, the literary text is "an object of knowledge" (37), and the "manifestation of an absent structure" (37) (emphases mine). This reminds one of Umberto Eco's **La struttura assente** (1968). It also evokes passages in Todorov's book on the fantastic, in which he enlarges upon the idea that the text is no more than the actualization of a deep structure, which, in contradistinction to it, remains a remote abstraction. The work is the unique and ultimate object of critical interest whose rationale is interpretation. Faithful to the text as material object, the other, i.e. the interpreting subject is placed in the paradoxical situation of trying to identify a meaning, while keeping aloof from psychological contingencies. Where the later Todorov sees the more widely embracing text of culture only read through human values, and therefore deflected accordingly (the one and same text of the New World is read differently by conquerors and conquered, in **The Conquest of America**), the early structuralist critic sticks to the notion of text as literary notation and will not allow of any of the traditional fallacies accompanying its reading. In such dire straits, the only hermeneutic act is the mere re-writing of the text, for fear of betraying it either by adding to, or by taking from its substance. This ideal situation, merely envisaged by Todorov, and Borges's

short-story **Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote** (1939), in which the title character copies the integral text of **Don Quixote** and proclaims victoriously that he has fathered it forth, are as like as two peas. The difference holding between text and context will be made more use of in Todorov's later theoretical statements bordering on the concept of identity. Here he is content to conclude that there is no such thing as immanent reading, as long as there is a reader, for the reader will *per force* alter the text, through addition or suppression. He will leave in it something that Derrida calls the 'trace'. Everything is interpretation, there is no escaping the "hermeneutic circle". (39) But to stipulate interpretation in terms of a circle is to acknowledge a plurality of interpretations, i.e. difference as the outcome of uniqueness. And, to conceive of interpretation as circular is to grant no one reading right of priority over any other reading.

Todorov's proposal for a way out recalls his formalist Russian masters' attempts to found an otherwise sneeringly dismissed 'scientific method'. Evincing and establishing a body of "general laws whose product is /the/ particular text" (39) appears to be the solution. In effect, what we are offered is a differentiation between something like an invariant deep structure (DS), and its many variants, or surface structure (SS), the only means by which the former can ever assume material shape.

This serves as a pedestal for his poetics, whose mission is to break the symmetry holding between interpretation and science. Unlike the interpretation of particular works, poetics seeks not to name meaning, but rather to know the general laws responsible for the birth of each individual work -- herein lies the difference. There is yet another difference between poetics and sicences such as psychology, sociology, etc., i.e. that it tries to identify these laws at work within, rather than without the

terrain of literature proper. Again, where later the cultural critic will explore the text of civilizations with anthropological, psychological, historical, sociological, and a myriad other tools, all put to use from within the spacious text of culture, here the structuralist literary critic leaves out whatever is not literary substance, for the latter is something that he defines in terms of structure. It follows, then, that, if the work is none but the manifestation of an abstract structure, and if poetics deals with the scientific (i.e. rigorous) interpretation of works, which *are*, in the last instance, abstract structures, what poetics is after is not the uniqueness of the literary fact, but rather its literariness. The obvious Russian Formalist connection brings in the celebrated passage from Jakobson's oeuvre in which '*literaturnost*' is singled out as the object of literary science. The French Structuralist connection sheds light on Barthes's 'science of literature'. Both emphasize the linguistic basis of poetics. Along the same track, Todorov embarks upon a theory of structure, of literary discourse functions, and of literary potentialities -- all latencies that he sees assuming concrete shape in actual works. The differentiation announced *ab initio* is substantiated with more care for minutiae here. Structuralist Todorov's interest is rooted in language and/in literature, as it had been in the 1966 symposium at Johns Hopkins University.

Basically, the particular text is "merely an instance allowing for the features of literature /as such/ to be described" (41) (specification mine). The actual text, in other words, is a potential container of the whole of literature, in whatever particular, and at whatever moment. The incidental text is only apparently incidental. Essentially Language, the concrete text is literary discourse itself, or else Literature. This difference superseded, what crops up is an identity of difference understood. To come to the rescue of abstractions customized in concrete wrapping are structuralists *avant la lettre*. Whom

Todorov literally mentions is Henry James, whose **Art of Fiction** beckons to its readers as it warns them of a double danger: (1) thinking that the abstract units that make up a work do exist as such in the work, and (2) slashing the work (which is a 'living being') with the knife of abstract analysis. An invitation is therefore launched that we disentangle the Jamesian definition of 'the pattern in the carpet' accordingly, that is as difference understood, with the abstract pattern only visible in the concrete carpet, and with the carpet possessing its distinct, and concrete, identity only function of the pattern discernible in it. Whom Todorov does not mention is Aristotle. One is prompted to compare the considerations above with those in the Stagirite's **Poetics**, where 'abstract' philosophy is contrasted with 'concrete' history, an opposition serving Aristotle's definition of poetry:

> "It will be clear from what I have said that it is not the poet's function to describe what has actually happened, but the kinds of things that might happen, that is that could happen because they are, in the circumstances, either probable or necessary. The difference between the historian and the poet is not that the one writes in prose and the other in verse; the work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and in this metrical form it would be no less a kind of history than it is without metre. The difference is that the one tells of what has happened, the other of the kinds of things that might happen. For this reason poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts"[1]. (underlinings mine)

[1] Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, **Classical Literary Criticism**, trans. T.S. Dorsch, Penguin Books, London, 1972, pp. 43-4.

Likewise, Todorov's conclusion is that literature is a repository of possibilities, which, because structured linguistically, transcends the empirical data of the actual work, while it finds its contours in them. The enduring skeleton, as it were, will only become perceptible if covered by the perishable flesh. And while the structuralist is after the former, he will identify it in the latter.

There is yet another solution to this mitigated difference. Todorov is alive to the idea that by poetics can also be understood a restricted and historically given corpus of hypotheses. As it is in the nature of hypotheses to be numerically restricted, it follows quite obviously that what Todorov has in mind is a code to which language as such conforms, and by which it disciplines its variety, and reduces its richness. A code, any code, is differentiation accepted. Interestingly, the structuralist is also alive to the determination of contingency that this code suffers. The breach he discreetly works here will be spectacularly widened in Cultural Studies, New Historicist, Race Criticism and other post-structuralist approaches, in the 80's. Todorov markedly (and somewhat critically, it should be said) notices the hypertheoretical quality of much literary research in the late 60's and the early 70's, and his mention of historical givenness makes all the difference. Even though he further expatiates upon discourse and rhetoric with sturdy structuralist verve, in devising a "general semiotic project" (46), he seems not to have forgotten for a minute that the contingent is, after all, the dwelling place of the perennial. And it will not be hard for the reader of the later Todorov to distinguish in his study on 'The Deflection of the Eenlightenment' the innate capacity of discourse to de-flect reality (Lat. *dis-currere* to run or flow away, or in divergent directions) function of more or less historically rooted interests. As it will not be impossible for him or her to discern in the later Todorov an analyst of rhetoric as tropology (Gr. *τρόπος* turn,

direction, course < τρέπειν to turn, to direct, to swerve), not unlike a Hayden White[1]. Discourse as deflection is the kernel of all post-structuralist theories of representation[2] dealing in a fairly relevant proportion with historical conditioning (a sense of place, a sense of time, a sense of concrete identity as cultural specificity). Truly, in the model he advances for the analysis of the literary text, structuralist Todorov insists preeminently on the syntactic, i.e. the most abstract (or structure-aware) of the aspects he lists. Truly, the semantic and pragmatic aspects, if more intensely dwelt upon, would have resulted in more reference-sensitive considerations. Nor should we be surprised at Todorov's speculative bent -- the line, after all, of French critical thought. Where Anglo-Saxon pragmatism is deficient in the early Todorov, it will be consistently recuperated in the Todorov of the 80's and 90's, a critic fascinated by cultural practices, protocols, rituals, symbolic exchanges, and context-bound negotiations, the last of which have been so persuasively theorized by Greenblatt[3]. This lays bare a method significantly close to the Lévi-Strauss line of structuralism, i.e. a method

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[1] Hayden White, **Tropics of Discourse**: Essays in Cultural Criticism, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1978.

[2] Cf. Hayden White, **Metahistory**: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1973; Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), **Allegory and Representation**, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1981; Murray Krieger (ed.), **The Aims of Representation: Subject/Text/History**, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987; Hayden White, **The Content of the Form**: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1987; François Hartog, **The Mirror of Herodotus: the Representation of the Other in the Writing of History**, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1988; Hans Kellner, **Language and Historical Representation**. Getting the Story Crooked, The University of Wisconsin Press, London, 1989.

[3] Stephen Greenblatt, **Shakespearean Negotiations: the Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England**, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1988.

aiming at abstracting in the last instance universal codes of human behaviour from a practically infinite inventory of human gestures, of which language is one. Hence the later interest in language as much more than merely verbal language, or a redefinition of language as the human codification of things. We are on territory mapped out by Foucault as the difference negotiated between words and things[1].

Todorov thus embarks upon his own poetics as a theory of DISCOURSE, of TEXT, and of WRITING, wonderfully anticipating massive post-structuralist judgements passed on all these, especially by Jacques Derrida, and clearly following in the path of his master Roland Barthes. All critical discourse of the text (the text of the body, the text of the world, the text of history) since the 70's has resorted to such extensive uses of the concepts of text and of writing[2]. This, I believe, is relevantly proposed by a yet convinced structuralist, who chooses to discuss poetics and literary history as a working perspective. In the coupling of poetics (with its abstract scaffolding) and literary history (with its concrete determination), Todorov does, indeed, devise a tactic for his future strategy. I see in this a coupling of Russian Formalism with Cultural Studies, a going therefore back into the 20's and 30's, and a going forward into the 80's and 90's. The median position from which he regards both extremes (utmost formalism aspiring to the condition of science, and utmost relativism aspiring to the condition of impression or mere

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[1] Michel Foucault, **Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines**, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1966 (English version, **The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences**, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, New York, Random House, 1970).

[2] Cf. Anne Hollander, **Seeing through Clothes**, Avon Books, New York, 1975; Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.), **'Race', Writing, and Difference**, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1985; Toril Moi, **Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory**, Methuen, London & New York, 1985.

perception) seems to account for his view of the text/work's genesis.

No work, he maintains, is generated by other than other works. All text is, in the background, but another text, from which it derives its entity as a product of language, just like the foreground text itself does, both generated by Language. Literature is Language, with a difference: where language produces its own utterances by deriving them from a set of universal rules (or universal grammar), literature resorts to such codifications, but detects them as precipitations in previous texts. Some further homologation has occurred in the space of literature, one that has received the test of writing. Tynianov's remark that there is no proper understanding of a Dostoevsky text without referring the whole interpretation to a particular Gogol text is offered by way of illustration. This, Todorov believes, may have prompted Tynianov to put forth his 'theory of parody', as it may have encouraged a view of literature as polyvalent and dialogistic. The name Todorov fails to recall, and which instantaneously comes to mind, is Bakhtin, without which one could scarcely, if at all, conceive of Cultural Studies today. But even more Cultural Studies *avant la lettre* is Todorov's next statement: there is no excluding factors other than the purely linguistic and literary, in analysing a Balzac novel, for instance. The writings of all those that were philosophers, moralists, memorialists, or chroniclers of social life that have, in some way or other, contributed something to the genesis of a Balzac novel, of any novel, should not be ignored. Nothing quite surprising about this, after all, traditionalist view with positivistic nuances. And yet, there is more to notice: even collections of laws and regulations, or daily conversation have their own distinct role to play in the novel's genesis. The statement sounds French *Annales* school-oriented, with *mentalités* in the lime light. From his median position, Todorov again puts into theoretical

rehearsal the New Historicist play of the 80's. Not only are all these non-literary texts not devoid of literary relevance, but theirs is as significant a relevance as that of the literary text itself. From FORMAL to CULTURAL specificity the passage is one of difference negotiated.

The common denominator, we are warned in an almost Derridean formulation, is writing, whose priority in language and, therefore literature, derives from its natural priority: "life is bio-graphy, the world is socio-graphy" (95) (underlinings mine). This stress laid on the writing imprinted (in-printed, in-pressed) in the text prefigures the now common Cultural Studies theory of the body inscribed by/in history. Gr. *γράφειν*, literally to scratch, to scrape, to graze, also meant to express by written characters, and, by extrapolation, to inscribe in whatever form. Initially the operation was performed with a *γράφίς*, a stile for writing (on waxen tablets), but it gradually assimilated various other forms of ex-pression by in-pression, reducing difference to likeness. As participants in the code-making and code-deciphering business of culture, we interpret life and the world function of the universal grammar that keeps us -- life and the world -- together. As such, we never perceive an 'extra-symbolic' or 'pre-linguistic' state in our experience of life and of the world. Nor is the genesis of any literary work 'extra-literary'. There is no such thing as extra-textual genesis. *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte* will be the Derridean adage. Since everything is a commitment, to the text of life and of the world, of rules deposited in our universal grammar, it follows that any particular text is merely the transformation of one discourse into another, of one text into another.

In **Grammaire du Décameron** the Language - Literature equation is projected against the all-embracing scheme of Formalist-Structuralist ordering secured by universal grammar. The one crucial methodological hypothesis of this his work is

"the existence of a universal grammar" (114) which thinkers of all ages have endeavoured to grasp in their dealings with the question of language. The history of universal grammar begins with Protagoras and goes all the way to Chomsky, and special mention should be made of such moments in between as 12-th and 13-th-century modists, Harris's **Hermes** in the 18-th century, or 20-th-century Danish linguists (Jespersen and Hjelmslev). Roger Bacon, the 13-th-century philosopher arrests his attention with his conclusion that "Grammar is one in all languages". (114) In the best of Chomskyan formulations, Todorov identities the universality of grammar in the unity of fundamental psychological processes:

> "Universal grammar is therefore the source of all universals, and the provider of the very definition of man. Not only all languages, but all systems of signification comply with the same grammar. It is universal not only because it is spread up in all languages, but because it coincides with the structure of the universe itself". (115) (underlinings mine)

Where Michel Foucault sees in man a 'recent invention', Todorov sees a universal type. For Foucault, bent on distinguishing the classic, from the modern episteme, man is a 19-th-century romantic product. For Todorov, instead, bent on evincing a Code of codes, in the last instance, language (the actualization of universal grammar) is a "function of existence belonging to signs". (**Poetics**, 18) By combining the semiotic with the structuralist method, Todorov tries his own hand at a theory of man -- "an epistemic synthesis of the sciences of man". (**Poetics**, 22)

There are several steps to this Code of codes, and, since Language is the embodiment of Universal Grammar, and since

Literature is Language, therefore Universal Grammar, Literature is an actualization of the Code of codes. In the incidental literary text, which is a transformation of another text, itself a transformation of yet another text, and so forth, we eventually read the Text of the world. The gradation implied by the text is worthwhile covering, if such a promising outcome awaits the reader. In the act of reading he or she will read the text of life inscribed with universal letters (life is a *bio-graphy*), and the text of the world inscribed with the letters we, the race, share (the world is a *socio-graphy*). The communally shared repository of values is the guarantee of CULTURAL HOMOGENEITY, whose actualizations are HETEROGENEITY manifest here and now. Todorov makes a point of detecting in symbols bridges of communication that hold the race together. In fact, his insistence on the social quality of human axiology is the clue to his theory, and yet another anticipation of Cultural Studies these days. There are signs of communal sharing in all the basic vocabulary serving the language of the race, and, in the last instance, the Code of codes, e.g. in socio-graphy (Lat. *socius* companion < *com-* + *panis* /literally the man you share your bread with/, sharer, ally), in symbol (Lat. *symbolum* < Gr. *σύμβολον* < *συν-* with, together + *βάλλειν* to throw, to cast), and in syntax (Lat. *syntaxis* < Gr. *συντάσσειν* to join together < *σύν-* together + *τάσσειν* to arrange, to put in order).

There are also signs of sharing in the way the elements of language combine in communication: they co-exist *in praesentia* in syntagm, and *in absentia* in paradigm, a differentiation recalling Jakobson's paradigm-syntagm opposition. Relationships holding *in absentia* derive from the power that language has to symbolize and signify. Relationships holding *in praesentia* denote configuration and construction. At whatever turn, language is communion and communication.

No less relevant is the idea of scratching the signs of language on the text. What obtains is a set of letters (cf. Gr. γράμμα that which is drawn, that which is written, a written character, a letter). And, we are let to speculate, while the γραφίς ploughs its furrows in the Text of the world, it inscribes the letters of the Code of codes, the universal alphabet, whose initiatory force reads in its very name: the alphabet is the and of communication. The skill to use the letters of the Alphabet appropriately is called grammar (Gr. γραμματική τέχνη the technique or formal knowledge and use of the letters of the alphabet). By developing a grammar, the critic hopes to eventually decipher the Code of codes, and the Book of books - a formulation calling to mind a celebrated study by Frye[1]. When the **Bible** was given the Greek name under which it has been part and parcel of our European culture, the idea was implied that this was no usual book, rather that it was the Book, or the Book of books, or 'books' (βιβλία , pl. of βιβλίον a paper, scroll, letter, dim. of βίβλος the inner part of a papyrus, bark, book made of this bark).

With a similar intention, Tzvetan Todorov raises the scaffolding of **A Grammar of the Decameron**. Declared structuralist premises require of him to introduce his critical 'grammar' as an exploration of the text, deliberately ignoring the biography of the author or of his contemporary society. This rather surprising working hypothesis is superseded, as has been shown above, by pronouncements about the 'graphic' quality of life and of the world in his **Poetics** of a few years later. To speculate on the two texts in the proposed reverse chronological order may make more sense than it does at first sight. Not only has this been inferred from the Romanian volume referred to, but it has appeared sensible enough to regard Todorov's

[1] Northrop Frye, **The Great Code: The Bible and Literature**, Routledge, London, 1982.

analytical propensity in evolution from preliminary 'grammas' to the formulation of a 'grammar'. Considerations featuring in both his 'poetics' and in his 'grammar' have led us to see in his proposed grammar of the Decameron a grammar of so many other previous texts, and, eventually, of the Text as an invariant.

To see another text behind the text under scrutiny is not by any means Tzvetan Todorov's invention. Gerard Genette's concept of 'hypotext' ('*hypotexte*') points to the same. Both views betray a more commonly shared impression that what we, the human race, have ever written or will ever write is simply a palimpsest whose letters, once themselves 'scratched' on the same- yet other-looking parchment/ papyrus/ paper surface, have been erased to make room for new 'scratchings', in their turn some time or rather made subject to effacement, a.s.o. A subtle dialectics of SAMENESS and OTHERNESS lies at the core of all intertextual, and intratextual interpretation. This applies equally to writer and reader, both basically 'scratchers' of *dejà vu* stories. And this is how we should read Charles Baudelaire's famous "*O, hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère*", not haphazardly cited by such a palimpsest-haunted poetic mind as T.S. Eliot's. Baudelaire puts it black on white: there is no such thing as an utterly innocent writer, there are only writers that have perversely peeped, as it were, into other writings for inspiration; conversely, there is no such thing as an utterly pure reader, there are only readers that have fed themselves on other texts before committing words to paper and casting the most cursory look at the text lying in front of their eyes -- hence the unavoidable hypocrisy they share. A brotherhood/sisterhood of OTHERNESS makes of them all brothers and sisters unto SAMENESS. For what was a hypocrite to the ancient Greeks, shall we ask ourselves? We should, and we will feel the happier for getting an answer: Gr. ὑποκρῑτής interpreter, expounder, initially literally designated a person playing a part on stage, an

actor, or, by extension, player (of whatever role), from the idea that a 'hypocrite' is, metaphorically, a pretender, dissembler, or double-dealer, or, literally, ὑπό- under, underneath, from under, beneath + κρῑτής a decider, judge, umpire, and, by extension, an interpreter of dreams or of any other 'text', as we would say today, whose understatements are perceived to be as relevant as its statements; the noun κρῑτής is of the same semantic field as the verb κρίνειν to separate, to part, to put asunder, to distinguish; to pick out, to choose; to decide, to judge, to contest; to judge, to pass sentence upon. There is no safe and reliable judgement, in other words, unless difference is looked into as a premise of identity. Someone endowed with the power of judging was a case depicted by the ancient Greeks as κρῑτικός a critic. And Todorov appears to be one, a critic in the etymological sense of the word, i.e. a person able to judge the text with a 'hypocritical' capacity, a capacity, that is, to see the text as SAME, and as OTHER, to read the text in the foreground, and to peep through it into the text in the background, in an attempt to finally grasp the Text. Which is why he needs a critical grammar.

Yet he remains assured that the critic, like the leisure-time reader, is no more than the recipient of a story narrated by the author. For him as a critic, and an implied reader, to be able to look at the text and underneath it, he needs the *savoir-faire* of story-telling, or else he would never meet the narrator halfway and grin a hypocritical smile of complacency and connivance. "We murder to dissect", says the romantic Wordsworth. The critic could, after all, just resort to his instinctive flair in decoding the narrative, for the narrator's story is his as well, as it is neither's, being both the narrator's and the reader's, and, in fact, humanity's. But the confirmed certainty bestowed upon him by a 'scientific method' (the dream of the Russian Formalists) prompts him and prods him to devise a technical tool for his

methodical investigation. The 'science' he calls narratology, the method is the study of recurrent categories understood as making up an abstract system. The sine qua non in grasping and defining the abstract is a careful scanning of the concrete text.

But, as botany has as its object not the vegetable kingdom as such, but its 'vegetableness', so narratology concerns itself with the narrative in its technical aspects. Elsewhere, as we have seen, Todorov quotes Jakobson on literariness. The concrete substance of narratives is, of course, the immediate stimulus: not only literary narratives, but folk tales, myths, movies, dreams and other such 'stories', we are told, do not fail to call our attention on a daily basis. The essential thing though is to approach them from the viewpoint of narratology, a science "that does not exist yet". (109) As propounding founder of this new science, Todorov draws a fundamental distinction at the incipit of his demonstration: it is not the what, rather it is the how of the narrative that is the (structuralist) critic's hobbyhorse:

> "One could easily be misled thinking that our intention is anthropological rather than linguistic; that we seek to describe ACTIONS, not STORY TELLING. But actions 'in themselves' cannot be our object; we would be hard put to it to seek their structure beyond the structure that their discursive articulation confers upon them. Our object is actions in the manner in which they are organized by a certain discourse called story. It is this very thing that keeps our study close to literary analyses, alien to a theory of actions, supposing that there could be such a theory at another level than that of story-telling.
>
> The question also arises: is this a grammar of narrative, that is of all narratives, or merely one of the **Decameron**? Unfortunately, the present state of knowledge does not allow

us to provide a simple answer. We have tried, in the corpus of this work, to reach the highest level of abstraction, to single out the structure of story in general, not the structure of one book. For the moment, though, it is impossible to say to what extent the structure singled out here is universal, or is, on the contrary, only the **Decameron**'s own structure: for this, we would have to study, in a similar perspective, not all the stories, but many other stories from different ages, countries, genres, authors. We may have found in this collection of short-stories only some of the categories pertaining to the grammar of narrative". (110) (underlinings mine)

There is a more than striking similarity here with Vladimir Propp's formalistic interest in narratives from folk sources[1]. To advance a 'grammar' of the **Decameron**, Todorov has perused the literature[2]. Having identified sources and analogues for 90 out of the 100 short-stories told in Boccaccio's book, he is, like Propp, ready to evince the mythically formalized structure of the literary material analysed. He has been after recurrent relationships which he knows will help identify structure. The individual story is always an echo of other stories. "The originality of a literary text cannot consist in the absence of references to previous texts". (112) There is a kind of pride, rather, in sponging, as it were, on other texts, we are invited to meditate. Boccaccio himself comes to a telling conclusion in the **Decameron**, i.e. that he did not invent these stories, rather that he just wrote them, and that in writing them he conferred unity

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[1] See the English version. **Morphology of the Folktale**. Louis A. Wagner (ed.), Laurence Scott (trans.), Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.

[2] A.C. Lee, **The Decameron. Its sources and analogues**, David Nutt, London, 1909.

upon them, by assimilating folklore to literature. Likewise, Todorov pursues the argument, a loan word is eventually acclimatized into the new vocabulary, and, by morphological and syntactic transformations, comes to comply with the laws of its own new structure. The OTHER become SAME is the universal law of literariness as adaptation, we may conjecture. In becoming literarily adapted (literally, able to be fitted < Lat. *ad-* to + *aptare* to be fitted < *aptus* fitted, suited), the other now same will potentially be the source of further assimilations, in which the dialectics of same and other will work again. Adopted, and thus adapted, we will say. Given so much to the fascinating question of the Other, almost all the Post-Structuralist schools of criticism probe into the concept of IDENTITY. As a 'practice of everyday life', Michel De Certeau sees in reading poaching or theft[1]. Elsewhere, he devises a whole theory of heterology to point to accommodation through violence accepted[2]. Stephen Greenblatt expatiates on St Paul's conviction that the **Scripture** was written for 'us', and to 'us', even if written back for the Jews, and joins De Certeau in a remark on St Augustine's comment that the Jews stole the Egyptians' 'figura', when they flew from Egypt. This critical vocabulary of theft as ethical business will give fodder to Todorov's own theory in **La Conquête de l'Amérique**, with which a neatly different stage in his career finds its origin. The later Todorov will have gone all the way from formal to cultural difference, from identity, that is, perceived in the technique of story-telling, to identity seen at work in cultural practices. The way he will have covered is not impossible to discern in the structuralism of the late 60's and early 70's; his interest in the folktale, like his reiterated debts to Lévi-Strauss, reveals a

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[1] Cf. **L'invention du quotidien**, Paris: UGE, 1980.

[2] Cf. English version, **Heterologies: Discourse on the Other**, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.

diffuse yet persistent focus on cultural specificity, in which the distinctly formal cannot easily be distinguished from the distinctly material. And where, together with Propp, he believes in the most universally relevant story patterns embedded in folk productions (closer to myth than ordinary stories), Todorov is not blind to the intentionality behind such human confections in the story as plot, denouement, thesis. Recapitulating Propp's schema of the folktale, or Lévi-Strauss's schema of the Oedipus myth, he proposes a schema of his own in **Littérature et signification**, his doctoral dissertation. Barthes, his doctoral adviser, had seen the hypotext of the restaurant menu in a paradigm-syntagm opposition. Todorov applies the schema to **Les liaisons dangereuses**, but this could easily have been **The Decameron**, or **The Arabian Nights**:

	Syntagm			
Paradigm	Valmont wants to be liked	Tourvel lets herself be admired	Merteuil tries to place an obstacle before his first desire	Valmont turns down Merteuil's advice
	Valmont wants to seduce	Tourvel shows signs of liking him	Volanges tries to place an obstacle before his liking	Tourvel turns down Volanges's advice
	Valmont declares his love	Tourvel resists him	Valmont pursues her with obstinacy	Tourvel turns down his love
	Valmont tries to seduce again	Tourvel gives him her love	Tourvel flees from love	Valmont apparently turns down her love
	Love is achieved			

Structure is recurrence, he postulates in his 'grammar'. A visual display of recurrence is offered by the paradigm - syntagm oppositional schema. On the vertical paradigmatic axis a selection is operated that brings together actions of the SAME intentional type, e.g. to declare one's love, or to turn down somebody else's. The horizontal syntagmatic arrangement is a concatenation of DIFFERENT moments that give a sense of narrative evolution, e.g. the male partner declares his love, the female partner resists him, he consequently pursues her with obstinacy, and she turns him down. Much as he may want to ignore anthropo-cultural motivation, and simply concentrate on formal pattern, the structuralist will have to admit something that the reader of his proposed schema cannot have failed to notice, namely that there is a male - female relationship that is not merely formal. It is rather culturally validated and herein lies its essential accountability which can, among other things, be interpreted in formal terms as well. Todorov's later rejection of the anthropological basis of Lévi-Straussian structuralism sounds the less persuasive in the light of his own further allegiance to Cultural Studies.

The Arabian Nights, mentioned above, actually serve as illustration for his theory of narratology. This matchless collection of stories is not only a wealth of subject-matter, but also one of story-telling techniques, excellence both in the what and in the how of story-telling. In Scheherazade there dwells not the ordinary story-teller, not even the exceptional story-teller, but altogether the Teller of the Tale of the world. The obsession of the 'graphic' quality of life and of the world has not stopped visiting the critic. In the appendix attached to his 'grammar', Todorov significantly talks about story-people. Scheherazade is certainly the epitome of these virtuoso tellers. Her inexhaustible story-telling capacity is as comprehensive as the world itself, and it is the secret weapon that keeps death away. It is as if life

could not be without story-telling. For such a metaphysical task -- that of preserving life --, Scheherazade uses refined techniques of locution, illocution, and perlocution, we will say with the Speech-Act expert's vocabulary. The narrative trick of story-embedding rises up to her metaphysical condition, and the peak of this refinement is the self-embedded story, in which the 'laying bare' device is ostentatiously the very masterly trick. The Russian Formalists had been delighted with literariness as laying bare. But laying bare is an exercise in identity as SAME and OTHER together. As Borges once remarked, and Todorov cannot fail to make a point of this,

> "No story is more stirring than the one told on the six hundred and second night, the magic night among nights. On that night, the king hears his own story from the queen's mouth. He hears the initial story embracing all the other stories, and which -- monstruously -- embraces itself... The queen cannot help but carry on, and the motionless king will for ever listen to the truncated story of the 'one thousand and one nights', one from this point onwards infinite and circular..." (196)

Nothing, Todorov notices, escapes the narrative world. Or rather, the narrative world covers the whole of experience. Story = Life. No story = Death. If Scheherazade runs completely short of stories, she will be executed, so she has to keep story-telling for the life of her. Failing to do so, as is the case of doctor Dunban in **The Arabian Nights**, is costly: Dunban is forbidden the chance of telling the story of the crocodile, and is sentence to death by beheading, but, as usual in this story-obsessed collection of stories, Dunban the teller devises another way of telling the unflinching king another story. If he cannot perform the telling orally, since he is under royal interdiction, he can, at least, send the cruel king a book for the latter to read while the

hangman is getting ready to chop off the victim's head. The head rolls off from the wriggling body but acquits itself of its last story-telling duty right in time -- it addresses the terrible monarch with the words: "O, king, you can leaf through the book". The temptation to enjoy what his victim has been denied prompts the king instantly to open the tome, only to discover that its leaves are stuck together. He is hard put to turn on its pages. Each time he does manage to turn over a new leaf, he only poisons himself. The trick is rendered literal at the level of mere story fact: the king keeps dipping his index into his mouth. The book of blank pages is the metaphor of poisoned life, therefore of death. **The Arabian Nights** are, in a way, the other reading given to the Shakespearean adage. Life is a tale full of harmonious sounds, rather than of sound and fury. Instead of signifying nothing, it does signify something, and it signifies a lot. The whole meaning of life is condensed in tales subsumed to the Tale of life and the world. Scheherazade's story-telling as a panacea for deadly diseases ending up in fatal extinction is the vital spirit *per se*. She tells the arche-story of humanity -- our only promise of immortality.

Further probings into the Tale of life and the world show a Todorov even more distinctly interested in the question of IDENTITY. **Introduction à la littérature fantastique** (1970)[1] is quite a forcible reminder of this, as indicated by the very choice of the fantastic.

The fantastic, Todorov explains, is a volatile category bordering on other categories, i.e. the uncanny, and the marvellous. The three of them oscillate between the real and the irreal. It is this sense of fragile boundary that makes of the fantastic at once an exciting and a disquieting category. In statements echoing the French *Ecole des Annales*, or Anglo-

[1] All quotations from, and references to, this study are based on the Romanian version (see n.8).

American Cultural Studies these days, Todorov deals with IDENTITY in terms of fear: fear of the Other, of the unknown, of the strange/foreign, in a word, of DIFFERENCE. It is amazing how often this book indirectly sends one to Delumeau's **Fear in the West** (1978)[1]. The West is a term usually designating European culture, in contradistinction to the East, or Asian culture. This dichotomy is most elegantly established by Anton Dumitriu in **Civilizaţii eleate şi civilizaţii heracleitice** (1941), in which Zeno of Elea gives one cultural model based on aporetic immobility, whereas Heraclitus of Ephesus, with his philosophy of constant change in the world, provides the contrary cultural model. In Delumeau's book, the acquisitive, enterprising and pragmatic West (in the Heraclitean paradigm, cf. Dumitriu) appears as a besieged citadel under its own inner attack, rather than under the menace of external aggression. This metaphor of identity questioned with unhidden violence, and challenged from within underlies his theory of fear. At the heart of IDENTITY there is ALTERITY. Alongside such lines of thinking, Todorov's discussion of the fantastic cannot avoid, nor does it try to leave aside, fear as a double agent: on the one hand, as a preserver of identity, on the other, as a destroyer of identity. A matter of perception, identity is good, if one's own, but bad, if the other's. "One man's meat is another man's poison", goes the proverb. Like the Arabian king's poisoned book, the other's identity menaces mine, which for me is an identity indeed of flesh and blood. There is no reason why I should not feel motivated in trying to assimilate OTHERNESS into SAMENESS. There seems to run this consistent thread through this book, and the opposition eventually evinced

[1] Jean Delumeau, **La peur en Occident** (XIV-e - XVIII-e siècle) - Une cité assiegée, Libraire Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1978 (Romanian version, **Frica în Occident** (secolele XIV-XVIII) - O cetate asediată, trans. Modest Morariu, Editura Meridiane, Bucureşti, 1986).

between the themes of the 'I' and the themes of the 'you' confirms it.

Aware of the unsteady nature of the fantastic, Todorov circumspectly proceeds with a tentative definition derived from a definition of literary genres. He needs to trace such preliminary borderlines, if he wants to look into the mobile territory that he has chosen to investigate. The literary genres he sees borrowed by Goethe from the natural sciences, which further distinguish between genera and species. This, in logic, would correspond to the genus - differentia distinction. Todorov looks back to the Russian Formalists, again, and recalls Tomashevsky's solution: literary works fall into vast classes which, in their turn, are further divided into types and species. By gradual descent on the generic scale, we come all the way from abstract categories to concrete historical items, e.g. from poetry to Byron's poetry, from the short-story to Chekhov's short-stories (21). This is as much as saying that the deep structure (DS) of literature manifests itself in the surface structure (SS) of actual works - a structuralist view expounded in the 'poetics' and the 'grammar' discussed above. Any description of any particular text is, eventually, a description of a literary genre (23), and literary genres are links in the chain extending from the work to the universe of literature (24).

He succinctly surveys Frye's archetypal theory[1] and, where Frye postulates that whatever is new in literature is, in effect, something old molten into new shape, he draws a parallel with Barthes, Genette, T.S. Eliot, and, of course, the Russian Formalists. Again, Todorov admits that his own theory is rooted in the awareness of the text originating in another text. Where he diverges from Frye, Todorov likes to acknowledge himself as a committed structuralist. Opposed to the structuralist attitude,

[1] Northrop Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism**, Princeton & London: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Frye is of the same tradition as Jung, Bachelard, or Gilbert Durand (33):

> "As /Frye/ himself maintains (in the preface to an English translation from Bachelard) 'earth, air, water, and fire are and will always remain the four elements of imaginary experience'. While the structuralists' 'structure' is above all an abstract rule, Frye's 'structure' comes down to a display in space". (34) (underlining mine)

It will be exactly this anthropological orientation that Todorov will embrace in the 80's and 90's, joining the chorus of Cultural Studies with their focus on the human element active in the contingent (the *hic et nunc* of history).

Consistent with his theoretical stand elsewhere, Todorov recapitulates the three aspects of the work: (1) the textual, in which he will look at the *enoncé*, and will consider questions of 'vision' or 'point of view'; (2) the syntactic, dealing with relationships among the parts of the work, e.g. logical, temporal, and spatial relationships; and (3) the semantic, or else the 'themes' of the work. Interestingly, where in his 'poetics' he almost dismissed the semantic aspect from thorough analysis, here it is the literary themes that he gives most attention to.

A definition of the fantastic is his next step, and he makes a point of underlining the mingling of the real with the non-real in it. This uncertain identity entails a fundamental hesitation in the reader. In the middle of plain, familiar reality, something unlike this world of ours happens which brings in a note of diffidence. Losing his faith, as it were, either in the nature of the world depicted in the story, or in his own judgement, or in both, the reader is left in a state of discomfort resulting from distrust. The dual nature of the situation, in which things are real and non-real, credible and incredible, reliable and unreliable, stirs his intellective curiosity and leaves it unappeased. The fantastic is

"a particular case of a more general category called 'ambiguous vision'". (51) It produces fear because of the hybrid quality of the things witnessed. When disquietude comes to an end with the reader winning back his 'reason', the strange feeling that this has been a mere 'illusion', that the world itself can, after all, be only a dream invades him. Such serious suspensions of belief, in the middle of "the willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge's definition of "poetic faith" in **Biographia literaria**, XIV), nearly force the reader into believing the unbelievable, i.e. that this is all a spectacle of madness or a dream. That the much beloved baroque motif of the dream or the romantic motif of dream and madness should be so generous of confusion is no wonder. It is in the nature of the fantastic to vacillate between two possibilities without categorically opting out for either. Michel Foucault speculates on this at large in **Maladie mentale et psychologie** (1954)[1], launching a debate still heating critical minds: where does the border between sanity and insanity lie?, is this border solid, or can it be trespassed?, and if it can, what will come out of this hybris? It may help us understand Todorov's problem with the fantastic to look at hybrid and hybris in parallel. Their etymologies, excitingly so close to each other, have not been made too much of in the literature. In a deep sense, both hybris and hybrid raise the question of IDENTITY. Gr. *ὕβρις* wantonness, violence, insolence; outrage to the person, assault; (of over-fed horses) riotousness, could also be used to designate lewdness, in which case it was perceived as the opposite of *σωφροσύνη* moderation. Lat. *hybrida* later came to name the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. The strange mingling of NATURE and CULTURE (of the wild male with the domesticated female) may have been the source of wonder and fear in equal proportion, a feeling that English

[1] English version, **Mental Illness and Psychology**, trans. Alan Sheridan, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 1976.

has encapsulated in the linguistic compact 'awe' that needs careful analytical paraphrasing when translated into other languages. Hybris as violation of the natural limit[1], and hybrid as trespassing of the natural biological limit are cases of ALTERITY placed at the heart of SAMENESS. Going beyond the limit even within the same kingdom, such as the animal, may result in fear, let alone more spectacular combinations of different realms, such as the human and the animal. One of the forms of fear of the devil in the late Middle Ages, Delumau informs us, was the fear of *lycanthropy*, i.e. the supposed power of turning a human being into a wolf, or of becoming a wolf, by magic or witchcraft (< Gr. λύκος wolf + ἄνθρωπος man). America seems to have been so easily conquered for a number of reasons, not last of which the technological advance of the Spanish conquistadors over the primitive weaponry of the local inhabitants. Not least was though the impact of men riding into the native territories, where people had never seen horses and readily thought that the invader was a strange kind of species, half horse half man. The metaphysical trauma of the local populations that expected their gods to descend from the skies was certainly more terrible than the technological defeat. Todorov will devote more than minute attention to this historic discovery of the Other by a wise and presumptuous Europe in his **Conquest of America**. Exaggeration, exacerbation, excess, all things indicating a breach in the accepted limit, are ingredients of the fantastic, itself a hybrid of identities.

Quoting Roger Caillois, Todorov emphasizes the "involuntary element", something of an imposed and "disquieting interrogation", "something unexpected" in the fantastic. (53) (underlinings mine) The implication of denial, deprivation, or forcibleness contained by the prefixes underlined above is an

[1] Cf. Gabriel Liiceanu, **Tragicul - o fenomenologie a limitei şi depăşirii**, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1975.

indication of stirring exerted by the fantastic. But stirring is a disruption of stasis, i.e. of identity. Whatever gushes out against one's own will, or is violently conducted against one is a form of aggression and will of necessity induce unrest. Like the fantastic, the uncanny and the marvellous challenge the familiar quality of our world, and the current opinion we have of it. It is this baffling of the received ideas we live on that confuses the community, as it confuses the individual. And is not confusion a blurring of identity? (Lat. *confundere* < *com-* with + *fundere* to pour; confuse and confound make up an etymological doublet in English). If the challenge of identity is succeeded by a sense of the laws of reality not having been violated, we have landed upon territory called the uncanny. If, instead, it is followed by a sense of new laws of nature being needed, we are in the middle of the marvellous, as in, for instance, the Gothic novel, where the supernatural reigns supreme. All these are variants of the Other. Something or somebody strange is the representative of a world outside ours (cf. Lat. *extraneus* foreigner < *extra* on the outside). In this geography of OTHERNESS, the miraculous or marvellous could be called Wonderland (which Alice tries to decode the scheme of), since Lat. *miraculum* < *mirari* to wonder < *mirus* wonderful. The most direct reference to some agency other than human exerting its power from above is contained in the supernatural (cf. Lat. *super-* above). But the most graphic term indicating something not natural is still the fantastic (Gr. *φα ντᾰσ ία* imagination, the power by which an object is presented (*φά νετα ι)* to the mind, the object presented being *φά ντασμα*). It is important to remember this emphasis on 'vision' or 'point of view', to use Todorov's own words elsewhere. When he later discusses the themes of the 'I' and the themes of the 'you', he will stress the question of perspective over and over again. Structuralist as the point of view (as point-of-view technique) may appear to the structuralist-minded analyst, we will see it as

moulder of cultural specificity in the later Todorov, where the question of CULTURAL IDENTITY is a question of perspective which could simply be summed up as 'we see what we want to see', and it is this selectivity that in the long run turns NATURE into CULTURE, and institutes the latter.

Function of similarities with the strange and the miraculous, the fantastic itself allows of infusions of alterity by these two 'neighbours'. A schema is provided showing these combinations:

pure uncanny	fantastic-uncanny	fantastic-marvellous	pure marvellous

As for the pure fantastic, Todorov explains, it could be imagined as occupying an area somewhere in the middle, between the fantastic-uncanny and the fantastic-marvellous. To satisfy structuralist requirements of minuteness, a fair distribution of verbal tenses is conceived of, with the past dominating the left-hand side (the uncanny), the future characteristic of the right-hand side (the marvellous), and the present giving substance to the centre (the fantastic), which accounts for the typical attitude of hesitation. Samples are chosen to illustrate the different variants displayed in the schema, e.g. **The Saragosa Manuscript** embodying the fantastic-uncanny (all its supernatural happenings being given a rational explanation at the end of the story), the modern thriller which has replaced the ghost story as manifestation of the fantastic (the enigma solved in the end), Theophile Gautier's **Death in Love** standing for the fantastic-marvellous (the supernatural eventually accepted), and the fairy-tale as the pure marvellous (the supernatural taken for granted, not questioned, not stirring, not perceived as arbitrariness). Subvariants of the marvellous are discussed which will be taken over in **The Conquest of America** as

actualizations of cultural invariants, e.g. the hyperbolic marvellous, as in **The Arabian Nights** (Sindbad's reports about snakes thicker and larger than palm-trees), the exotic marvellous (Marco Polo's accounts of almost legendary beasts and birds populating remote places like China), the instrumental marvellous, in **The Arabian Nights** (the use of the flying carpet, of the wonderful lamp and the enchanted ring) , the scientific marvellous, as in science-fiction.

A standard structuralist return to the text gives the occasion of dichotomies which will further help identify the fantastic at work. Todorov embarks upon contrastive considerations with a relevant remark in terms of principles, namely that "any opposition between two genres must have at its basis some structural quality of the work" . (78) At the level of the text it is discourse that is the actualization of structure exemplified in two oppositions: (1) poetry vs. fiction, and (2) the allegorical vs. the literal. This is a confirmation of Fredric Jameson's definition:

> "The most characteristic feature of Structuralist criticism lies precisely in a kind of transformation of form into content, in which the form of Structuralist research (stories are organized like sentences, like linguistic enunciations) turns into a proposition about content: literary works are about language, take the process of speech itself as their essential subject matter". (underlinings mine)[1]

(1) Poetry vs. fiction. Whereas fiction is referential, so transitive, poetry is non-referential, or self-referential, therefore intransitive. Of course, as with numberless critics, ever since

[1] Fredric Jameson, **The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism**, Princeton & London: Princeton University Press, 1972, pp.198-9.

Aristotle, poetry is more comprehensive a term than the literal acceptation of the word suggests, and Barthes's theory of 'writing as an intransitive verb' endorses the view. But structuralist Todorov's dichotomy must strike a note of consistent opposition. So, while fiction invites us to considerations about characters, action, atmosphere, setting -- all non-textual realities, poetry is usually analysed in terms of rhyme, rhythm, figures of speech, etc., all pointing to the poetic text's "opaqueness". (79) Intransitivity is the mark of literariness *par excellence*, as the Russian Formalists had maintained. This essentially identity-oriented discussion on transitivity vs. intransitivity sheds supplementary light on the fantastic. To Todorov's mind, the fantastic can only dwell in fiction, because of the latter's capacity to swing like a pendulum between fiction and reality. Its identity is permissive, it is manifestly SAME *and* OTHER.

(2) The allegorical vs. the literal. Basically an opposition of sense, this contrasts the figurative to the proper sense of the word. From a choice of tentative definitions, Todorov stops to consider Fletcher's[1]: "In simple terms, allegory says one thing and signifies another". (81) Allegory, let us pursue along the same line, is a figure of alterity *par excellence*, it is sustained and extended metaphor, it is Literature at its best, i.e. intransitivity. Allegory is the deliberation of otherness in discourse (Gr. ἀλληγορία the description of one thing under the image of another < ἄλλος other, another, one besides + ἀγορεύειν to speak in public assembly < ἀγορά forum). Metaphor is the basic figure of transport of one quality into another (Gr. μεταφέρειν to carry over, to transfer; to change, to alter). As a concrete practice of allegory, the fable tends to

[1] Angus Fletcher, **Allegory**, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1964.

eliminate the proper sense of words altogether, and so does the fairy-tale.

Especially sagacious is Todorov's treatment of the deliberate oscillation between the allegorical and the literal, excellent examples of which are provided by German romantic short fiction. Famous for the subtle use of the fantastic, Hoffmann's short-stories abound in such vague situations. It takes a married young man a travel to Italy to discover the woman of his life, and to instantly forget his wife and child. There is alterity everywhere in 'The Story of the Lost Mirrored Image', in the name of the main character (Erasmus), in the name of his beloved one (Giulietta), in, from a German perspective (since it is all a matter of 'vision'), the exotic Italy of dreams accomplished. But, like any dream, happiness is a short-lived experience of the impossible become possible - a question of identity, again. We always see only what we want to see. Symbolically, Erasmus loses his image reflected in the mirror, when, prompted by his Giulietta, he acquiesces to leave his mirrored face as a memory of their one-time love. This parting with the Other that is the foil of the Ego is, obviously, fatal. From the literal loss, bad enough in itself, the at least socially allegorical loss is colossal. People in his own community stop noticing him, they decide to avoid this strange person and Erasmus ends up as an outcast. Todorov's example invites to further speculations on the play of the allegorical and the literal. Chamisso's impecunious hero Peter Schlemihl surrenders his shadow to the devil, literally a thin elderly gentleman wearing a most banal grey suit. Schlemihl's own loss of the Other as part and parcel of the Ego, results in isolation from his fellow citizens. Similarly, let us add, 'the late Mattia Pascal', in Pirandello's novel of the same title (**Il fu Mattia Pascal**), is literally reported dead, while he is alive and kicking. The story of his decease has so convinced the community though that

there is no way to talk them back into acknowledging his literal existence in flesh and blood. Allegorically, he has lost his identity because of the cultural discourse that has confected and promoted his disappearance. *Se non è vero, è ben trovato*, goes the saying. This applies wonderfully to the fragile identity of the fantastic world. Mattia Pascal must be a *φάντασμα*, if this is his community's 'vision'. Not unlike this worked the psychological mechanism producive of witch images in the Puritan communities of the 17-th century in America. A thing remarked and discussed at length by Delumeau, this process of strange imaginings entailed by the fear of otherness shows how identity at once protects and aggresses us, function of perspective. Todorov's own next example is Gogol's **Nose**, in which literal expressions such as 'to cock one's nose' become vehicles of the nose turned Mr. Nose. We are reminded, as Todorov is not, of **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**, in which English phrases are transposed into literal action: there is a March Hare, there is a Mad Hatter, and there is a castle of cards, as there are cards put on the table, all of which literally behave as the figurative meaning of the respective phrases suggests. All a matter of 'vision', since:

> "there is no text but is allegorical, for it is one of the specific properties of literature that it be endlessly interpreted and reinterpreted by its readers". (94)

Subject to interpretation, literature gives us the liberty that plain reality is unable to offer. In his definition of the fantastic discourse Todorov touches upon this as he enlarges himself on the above-mentioned literal use of the figurative expression. And where he halts to recapitulate poetry's unique intransitivity, he makes more comprehensive comments on literature:

"*only* poetry eludes representation, but literature on a whole situates itself outside the categories of truth and falsehood". (103)

We have thus moved into the core of a demonstration more closely adumbrating later critical stands in Todorov's career. All this talk of genres as "essentially culture-bound and 'relative' phenomena", of "society's presuppositions", and of "the complementary acts of writing, and of reading"[1] point to the same direction. And as his book on the fantastic gravitates round the semantic aspect of the literary work, themes come to the fore as the main issue. And, to give more substance to the Formalists' paradigm - syntagm opposition, he understands semantics as born of the paradigmatic, and syntax as based on the syntagmatic. To him literature is subordinated to semiotics, the general theory of signs, according to which there are three functions that the sign performs: (1) the pragmatic, i.e. relationships between signs and their users, (2) the syntactic, i.e. relationships of signs among themselves, and (3) the semantic, i.e. relationships of signs with what they designate -- their referent. From the third viewpoint, the fantastic is an experience of the limit, or of limits. As "margins of a universe unknown to us" (115), they suggest that "we float in vagueness" (115).

> "This hypothesis though provides us with two useful indications: first, that any study of the themes of the fantastic is contiguous with the study of themes in general; then, that the norm of the fantastic is constituted by the superlative and the excessive. We shall try not to forget this even for a second". (115)

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[1] Terence Hawkes, **Structuralism and Semiotics**, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 104.

The final remark deserves some attention. To discuss the fantastic in terms of the superlative and the excessive is to be alert to the fantastic as a border-flexible, border-sensitive, border-vague genre (cf. Lat. *superlatus* excessive < *super-* above + *latus*, pp. of *ferre* to carry; Lat. *excessus* departure < *excedere* < *ex-* out of, beyond + cedere to go). It is, in principle, to discuss identity on its way to alterity. And it is to discuss the circulation of the fantastic among other genres, and, by way of consequence, to broaden the discussion to one about literature as such. This is possible, Todorov believes, either in strictly structuralist terms (the Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Marx line), or in archetypal terms (the Bachelard, thematic criticism, Frye line). The one is the line of abstract thinking, of schemes and operations of the intellect betraying a "logic, even a mathematics of the unconscious" (119), the other, "a sensualist postulate according to which the fundamental (and therefore the authentic) coincides with the experience of the senses". (119) Corresponding to them, we are let to understand, there is logical criticism, following a vertical line and pointing to a high level of abstraction, and narrative criticism, which follows a horizontal line. This differentiation seems to reiterate the paradigm (semantic) - syntagm (syntactic) opposition. But in spite of his averred structuralist option, Todorov embarks upon an analysis of themes following an anthropological line. At one point he cites Ostrowsky[1] for a schema reminding one of Lévi-Straussian myth-schemata:

[1] Witold Ostrowsky, 'The Fantastic and the Realistic in Literature, Suggestions on how to define and analyse fantastic fiction', in *Zagadnienia rodzajow literackich*, IX, 1966, 1 (16).

characters 1 2 matter + conscience the world of objects 3 4 matter + space	5 act according to	6 causalities 7 and / or aims	8 in time

Two are the groups of themes he detects in the fantastic: (1) the themes of the 'I', and (2) the themes of the 'you'. **The Arabian Nights**, Hoffmann's 'Princess Brambilla', and Balzac's novel **Louis Lambert** (1832) illustrate a demonstration in which structuralist meet anthropo-cultural comments. Thus, the split personality, like the mother, incest, libido, or dual love issues raised tread in the track of Freudian psychoanalysis. In conjunction with these though questions such as perception, the object turned subject, the devil and vampires rather fall under a different heading. The former category looks like material for Freudian-Proppian-Barthesian approaches. The latter, on the Jung-Bachelard-Durand line, is fit substance for analyses of the way in which we, the human race, "'*enculturate*' all our experience, make it 'natural' and perceptible; make it *capable* of being experienced; make it, in short, *exist*"[1]. The two critical attitudes that Todorov earlier saw in opposition come together in his own, and IDENTITY, therefore DIFFERENCE, too are the common denominator of both types of issues. In all of

[1] Terence Hawkes, *Idem.*

Todorov's oeuvre, this point appears as the *locus geometricus* of a criticism evolving from FORMAL to CULTURAL DIFFERENCE.

(1) The themes of the 'I'. By virtue of a purely formal criterion, i.e. the mere co-existence of themes under scrutiny in **The Arabian Nights**, the structuralist sets out to list them. The impressive variety of situations he notices can be reduced, he proposes, to two types of supernatural elements: (a) metamorphosis, and (b) pandeterminism.

(a) Human characters change into other human or animal beings, plants and stones turn into humans, and the other way round. A world of incredibly mobile boundaries rises in front of our eyes, with individual identity subject to the most extravagant transformations. As in Ovid's **Metamorphoses**, supernatural beings co-exist with humans in perpetual interchange, to the delight of the historian of religions or the anthropologist[1]. Fairies or spirits act as embodiments of an imaginary causality which could bear the name of luck or happening. But nothing seems to derange this strange flow of things, and nobody appears to wonder at these strange mutations.

(b) The very notions of 'luck' and 'happening' are, in effect, excluded in this fantastic world. (133) Eckermann-Chatrian puts it explicitly in 'L'esquisse mysterieuse'[2]: "What, after all, is happening, if not the effect of a cause that escapes us?" (133) There is, Todorov concludes, some general determinism, after all, a pandeterminism accounting for the coherence of this only apparently illogical world. And he goes on to quote Alan Watts[3]:

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[1] Ovide, **Metamorphoses**, trans. & introd. Joseph Chamonard. Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1966, pp.5-38.

[2] Cf. P.-G. Castex, **Le Conte fantastique en France**, José Corti, Paris, 1951.

[3] Alan Watts, **The Joyous Cosmology**, Vintage Books, New York, 1962.

"For in this world there is nothing erroneous, or even stupid. To perceive a mistake is simply not to be able to see the scheme in which the respective event is caught, or to be ignorant of the hierarchic level to which this event belongs. (...) all these things are linked among themselves". (136)

Pandeterminism has as a natural consequence something that might be called 'pansignification': as there are relationships among whatever elements at whatever level of this world, this world signifies to a high degree. The world as signifier is a favourite structuralist thesis. Relating the signifier to the signified it covers is a most serious intellectual enterprise in itself, as well as a guarantee that everything is intimately motivated in the general scheme of existence (cf. Lat. *relatio* < *referre* < *re-* back + *ferre* to carry). Such motivation is equally a question of truth-validation and one of correctness. Things are correctly true, i.e. true in themselves, and true to the rules of the universe (cf. Lat. *correctus* < *corrigere* < *com-* together + *regere* to make straight, to lead straight, to direct > *regula* ruler, rule, regulation). The structuralist scheme of correspondences (cf. Med. Lat. *correspondere* < *com-* together + *respondere* to give back in return, to answer < *re-* back + *spondere* to pledge, to promise) is the classicist's dream. Things are neatly pigeon-holed in the overall structure of the universe, and if the universe is structured, i.e. made up, built of many things (cf. Lat. *structura* < *structus* < *struere* to build), it is so because of its oneness (cf. Lat. *universum*, neut. of *universus* turned, combined into one, all collectively < *unus* one + *versus* < *vertere* to turn). The many = the one. This is the structuralist formula of difference assumed, or of synecdochic surrender of the part to the whole. A project of holistic order. Intensely class-aware, the classicist finds pleasure in satisfying the needs of the class by feeding its entity on the individual entities of its components (cf.

Lat. *com-* together + *ponere* to put). Pope's God, in **An Essay on Man**, is the engineer-minded divinity assembling the parts into a flawless whole, whose perfection is warranted only if perceived correctly. It never fails, but we, its beholders, can, and do at times fail to grasp it:

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.
.....
All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;
All Discord, Harmony not understood;
All partial Evil, universal Good:
And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
One truth is clear, Whatever Is, Is Right".
(ll. 267-8; 289-94)

This could easily pass for a poetic rendering of Todorov's theory of 'grammar'. Here its grid is applied not to the text of an individual work (itself a palimpsest, and, in the last instance, a paradigmatic text), but to the text of the world, the Text. In it error is rightness misunderstood. In it all is relatedness and linking (cf. Lat. *ligatura* < *ligatus* < *ligare* to bind, to link). In it all is obligation (cf. Lat. *ob-* towards + ligare) turned pleasure.

Such abstract theoretical premises as we have speculated on at some length are perceptible to the senses as well, Todorov ventures on. In fact, it is the passage from idea to perception (138) that makes this strange world even more exciting. To stimulate the senses, drugs can be administered. The 'visions' induced will amaze the viewer with their mobility. Contours diffusing their distinct lines, identity become identities. The one = the many. Nerval's double man in one, Gautier's matter -

spirit oneness and the subject - object confusion retrace the way of the world, back to the initial harmony of things, in which there was no separation between the self and the world. A come-in-handy explanation which Todorov is not late in offering is Jean Piaget's: as in early infancy, when things are not separated, nor is the ego divided in any way from the world, so in drug-taking, borders are effaced. But while this evocation of artificial paradises reiterating Edenic harmony strikes structuralist notes, Todorov's insistence on the role of the senses brings in the other note: the body is, indeed, universal, in as much as we are all bodies, the senses are universal, in as much as we all have them and use them in our communication with the external world, but, sounds the Cultural Studies voice, the senses have never existed merely in principle, nor has the body ever been suspended out of time and space. Ever since Heidegger, we have lived with the awareness of Being in Time, rather than simply of Being. And, to be sure, people have replaced way after way of looking at their bodies, of putting them to use, of preferring some to other of the five senses, etc. The pandeterminism of abstract structure is not the only determinism in this world. There is the cultural and historical one, the Post-Structuralists will not tire to tell us, and so people have written histories of smell, of fear, of clothing and of furniture, all directly related to the body in various cultures and at various times. This is the other side of relatedness. The world is all a network of relations, which means that everything in it is relative.

The question of relativity is broached in Todorov's own discussion of the look. In 'Princess Brambilla' the look is directly responsible for the double personality -- doubtless a theme of the 'I'. The pair of spectacles and the mirror are indispensable items. As extensions of the eye, they offer 'visions', function of situations. A character, Pierre Mabille, makes the shrewd remark that *miroir* is related to both *merveille*

and *se mirer*. Lat. *admirari* is an etymological combination of the two: *ad-* at + *mirari* wonder; *mirabilia,* neut. pl. of *mirabilis,* was a derivative of the same *mirari.* Let us remember that **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland** are paired by her adventures **Through the Looking-Glass**. Let us also remember the moral of the Narcissus myth: Narcissus reaches out to embrace his image, but it also reaches out to embrace him, and he drowns! Trying to annihilate one's Other is the same as annihilating one's Ego, for the individual personality is double anyway. One's reflection is as indivisible from one's self as one's shadow. A *persona*, in the ancient Roman theatre, was the mask worn by an actor or actress to give him/her another identity, both as visual, and as sonorous identity (the *persona* was used *per sonare,* to sound another voice). Classic Gr. *πρόσωπον* meant face, visage, countenance, but also outward appearance, with the suspicion that this was DIFFERENT from, even though the SAME as the person! Rom. *prosop* is a loan from Ngr. *πρόσωπον* face, and its semantic evolution from real face to a cover for it is not a useless indication. If the mirror gives us a deflected, indirect image of ourselves, it is because it is next to impossible to see the truth by gazing straight at the mirror. We either need two mirrors to get the inverse of the inverse image, or we should keep away from mirrors, because they can know the cold essentialized truth which they pour on us only in wavy lines. The plain truth is told the wicked queen in **Snow-White** by the Mirror. The spelling deserves a capital letter, for the mirror there stops being the lying mirror under the queen's control, in which the cosmeticized double passes for the natural face. The moment the mirror becomes the Mirror, a different kind of 'cosmetic' show of things appears in its filtered waters. This is the unadulterated *κόσμος* of order, harmony, and propriety, as the initial meaning of the word designated., whereas *κοσμητική τέχνη* was the art of dress or ornament, i.e.

of the outward face given to the natural countenance. At the same time as the Mirror lays on its face the face of White-Snow, it erases the fake face of beauty which the mirror had hypocritically shown before. But the usual reflection in the mirror is a turning upside down of things, a reversal of identities which many find disquieting. The 'fearful symmetry' of NATURE and CULTURE is troublesome. A *mise-en-abîme* starts off here: which is the real, and which is the fake image? which is the right, and which is the left half? and which is the right, and which is the wrong side? (Lat. *sinister* left has seen a telling semantic evolution in most Romance languages, in which 'sinister' things are things not right in both senses). In Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott', the mirror is a likely witness to the critical moment in the lady's moral and sexual life. The moment she plucks up courage and looks reality in the face, the mirror cracks and she dies. Betraying the double is as grave as betraying the ego. Even more devastating is the symmetrical Shalott cavalier's experience in Elizabeth Bishop's 'The Gentleman of Shalott'. Physically dependent on the mirror, he has to cling to it for the life of him. Hence the increased sense of confusion of identity/ies:

> "Which eye's his eye?
> Which limb lies
> next the mirror?
> For neither is clearer
> nor a different color
> than the other,
> nor meets a stranger
> in this arrangement
> of leg and leg and
> arm and so on.
> To his mind

it's an indication
of a mirrored reflection
somewhere along the line
of what we call the spine.

He felt in modesty
his person was
half looking-glass,
for why should he
be doubled?
The glass must stretch
down his middle,
or rather down the edge.
But he's in doubt
as to which side's in or out
of the mirror.
There's little margin for error,
but there's no proof, either.
And if half his head's reflected,
thought, he thinks, might be affected.

But he's resigned
to such economical design.
If the glass slips
he's in a fix -
only one leg, etc. But
while it stays put
he can walk and run
and his hands can clasp one
another. The uncertainty
he says he
finds exhilarating. He loves
that sense of constant re-adjustment.

He wishes to be quoted as saying at present:
'Half is enough'".

This is a typical latter-day debunking of myth. Bishop's gentleman is a far cry from Erasmus in Hoffmann's 'The Story of the Lost Mirrored Image'. While in the latter's case things are as terrible as in the Faustus myth and assume tragic proportions (the hero sells off his other or plays forfeits with the devil over his identity), in the former the hero is literally halved. This gives Bishop the occasion of forcing the literal into figurative nuances: the line coming down the character's spine is an indication of moral reduction (a faulty capacity to stand vertical); the cavalier (always necessarily riding his horse) is halved to a man, a gentleman, indeed, but no longer a knightly person, so here is a double halving; his person (personality) is half looking-glass, yet another halving; he sees no reason why he should be doubled (which would be the normal case of SAME and OTHER in one), so not only is he not actually doubled, but he is not even one (and as he is, we would be hard put to decide which of the two halves making up the whole is missing, and he himself is in doubt as to which side is in and which is out); his middle is rather the edge, so he stops being, right on the line of his own vital symmetry. His "economical design" is an ironic reduction of the natural scheme, a "modesty" not unlike Swift's in his proposal. On that note, if the mirror stays put, the gentleman can walk and run! But how can we tell the mirror from the gentleman?, to paraphrase Yeats's famous identity question. Irony has definitely played its role from A to Z here. The gentleman is a comic *ειρων* (dissembler), but this is sad comedy, or tragicomedy, for he is unable to say which is the <u>dissembling</u> and which is the <u>sembling</u> side. So he takes delight in being quoted (which is <u>reduplication</u>, or, ironically, <u>halving</u>) on how fine it is to be halved! This cynical post-WW II

advertising of crushed identity could not escape lucid lesbian Elizabeth Bishop.

The mediated (mirrored) look, concludes Todorov, opens up avenues to the marvellous, the *mirabilia* of OTHERNESS. Baroque ceilings and walls were covered with mirrors, and the baroque remains one of the most identity-sensitive types of art and epochs. Whence also its neat preference for visual arts and for visual effects in the non-visual arts (poetry, music). The characteristically baroque image is one of troubled and troubling movement. Such are illustrations of religious episodes, e.g. Carmelite St Theresa's mystic visions, or St Cecilia singing hymns of praise to the heavens, both depicted in instances of ecstasy, a state in which personal identity is at stake, because the individual's bet transcends individual limits (cf. Gr. ἔκστασις displacement; entrancement, astonishment, trance < ἐκ- out + στάσις standing, posture of standing; position, post; state). In the nineteenth century full-length mirrors for dressing and wardrobes with mirrors were invented. They had the power to double the domestic space, as well as double the persons populating it, or maybe just show them their others. There are whole areas of the human body which we hardly ever see at all in a lifetime. It is the mirror that reveals us bits of our other, hidden face, like the unseen face of the moon. Let alone the fact that we are not aware of our body being ours for quite some time after birth. The process of self-appropriation itself takes some time before we see 'our' hands in our hands, 'our' thumb in the thumb we are just licking, and 'our' toes in the toes we are just about to put into our mouth. In Blake's 'Lamb' poem, the reiterated unanswered question "Little Lamb, whom made thee?" is significantly succeeded by a voluntary answer by the speaker of the poem, who, we are let to infer, knows for sure that the little lamb is still unaware of its own identity. What to the lamb is a speaking and mature 'you', and for the mature speaker is the

definite 'I' offers to give the needed reply to solve an essential ontological question. A glaring recent picture of Michael Jackson shows him posing in a room in which mirrors have been erected at all possible angles, which produces the stirring effect of an endless series of Michael Jacksons, from the frontal full image to the most scantily recognizable slices of his figure. I found the picture extremely interesting, just because it offered no end of variants of a star person(ality) with acute identity problems. The white black female-looking male Michael is there diffused in a yet larger sea of indistinctness. The themes of the 'I', as Todorov puts it, raise the acute question of 'vision'. And whom do we ourselves see, when we look in the mirror? Does the eye see an 'I' (the deliberate 'I'/ 'eye' confusion is a favourite Post-Structuralist, especially Deconstructive trick, another is the 'oral'/ 'aural' kind of perception) , or does the I see a 'you'?

(2) The themes of the 'you'. If the 'I' and the 'you' are relative, and in the first place relative to one another, if they are what they are because of, and as a result of the 'visions' they have of each other, and of themselves (themselves 'I' *and* 'YOU', or SELF *and* OTHER), it follows that the themes of the 'you' are related to the themes of the 'I', engaged in a relation of interdependence. Todorov's discussion of the themes of the 'you' conforms to this working hypothesis. He examines another few love stories, stories, that is, in which the I -you rapport is a sine qua non. He does in fact consider the same kind of material as when he brought into focus the themes of the 'I'. The difference is that he discovers in the reiterated motif of sexual desire or libido the formal criterion distinguishing this group of themes. As instinctual craving or drive behind all human activities, the libido tries to find its satisfaction, and when it does, it avoids psychoneurosis, according to Freud. But

there are instances of unaccomplished desire which entail individual hybristic derangements.

It is such situations that Todorov analyses in the samples he selects. Thus, Balzac's character Louis Lambert has always lived in a world of ideas, which have been palpable realities to him. But one day he falls in love with a real, physical woman of utmost palpable beauty and just before the announced marriage (which would be the corollary, and appeasement of his so far unsatisfied desire), he goes mad. His remains a suspended desire and the interpretation Todorov offers to the denouement is that one cannot have psychic *and* physical longings appeased at one time. One has to choose. The themes of the 'you', Todorov advances a first comment, are themes of sexuality in a context of incompatibility with other drives. The other case that Todorov stops to look into is Matthew Gregory Lewis's **The Monk** (1796). Ambrosio, the saintly superior of the Madrid Capuchinos, falls in love with one of his penitents and is gradually irretrievably depraved by his libido. He resorts to magic and murder and eventually kills the beloved girl, trying to escape detection. In the long run, he is caught by the Inquisition, tortured and sentenced to death. Ambrosio has been under devilish influence since the day he was tempted by a wanton that popped into his monastery in the guise of a boy novice. Under the menace of the imminent death sentence, he compounds with the devil for his escape, but is hurled into another form of destruction. The story of Ambrosio's protracted unaccomplished desire is symbolic.

And now our own interpretation. As the monk's name indicates, he is a person with an exacerbated sense of identity: like the ambrosia plant, from which the food and drink of the ancient Greek gods was made, on the assumption that it gave them immortality, Ambrosio is a mortal being with a propensity for immortality (cf. Gr. *α*- without, deprived of + *βροτός* mortal

being). As a monk, he has, in principle discovered his way to immortality, by suppressing his physical desires and concentrating all his energies on his psychic, emotional, and spiritual life. But he falls easy prey to temptation and his libido is stirred to the extent to which it has to be satisfied, or else a catastrophe will occur. As this is a matter of choice, once the physical side is regaled on sexual pleasure, the spiritual and psychic have to suffer. Obviously, he is a split personality, in as much as any Christian clergyman is one, simply because in the Christian practice, following the Christian dogma, the body is the shameful repository of sin and should be repressed. In the economy of his hybristic adventure, he has to pay back for what he has done in terms of violating the accepted norm. He has done an abnormal thing, he has trespassed upon forbidden territory. This is how we should read his temptation (cf. Lat. *temptare, tentare* prob. intens. of *tendere* to stretch, to extend). He has tried to assume and appropriate the Other which he has seen above him, transcending him, in some inaccessible or riskily accessible place. This is how we should read his desire (cf. Lat. *desiderare,* ? < *de-* from + *sidus, sideris* star). Desire as the motor of accomplishment, as well as of ruin is a familiar psychic mechanism. In one of Blake's own illustrations to his **Songs**, a child is depicted pointing to the moon in the sky, dragging his father by the hand, and nagging at him with the irrepressible expression of desire: "I want, I want".

From these instances, Todorov draws a divide between the otherwise interrelated themes of the 'I' and themes of the 'you'. Whereas in the former group the libido theme is present, but defined *in absentia*, in the latter it is defined and treated *in praesentia.* The libido, Todorov goes on, can be involved in no banal experiences, rather it can be, and is, more often than not, associated with the most essential things of life, which is why it can trigger off irreversible disaster, usually ending up in death.

This dialectics of opposites is best accommodated in the supernatural, where limit situations are part and parcel of the usual recipe. Thus, the libido = devil equation is typical of fantastic story developments. The woman = desire equation is also a recurrent subject for both elite and popular literature, and a good deal of Delumeau's samples of types of fear gravitate round the two equations. Hence the relatively widely spread belief in the European Middle Ages and on into the early modern age that woman = the devil, with every prolongation in terms of social, religious, political, economic and any other cultural practices, of separation between man and woman, and usual exclusion of woman from 'serious' and 'basic' business in communal life, or devolution of the unpleasant, hard, or menial jobs on women, e.g. cleaning the home of dirt, feeding the backyard animals, helping women in childbirth, washing the dead body, and other such operations in which woman is the protagonist in a drama of necessary purgation. We are born between faeces and urine, let the faeces and urine be washed off and away by the 'inferior' representatives of the species. This was projected against the background of Christian belief, according to which Eve was the derivative of Adam and would have to stick to a subordinate status. All this has become favourite Feminist stuff and butt of attack now.

In **The Monk**, Todorov argues with good reasons, Ambrosio is the very ideal clergyman at the beginning. He is so chaste, that he cannot even tell a man from a woman. Chastity = asexuality. He has so unbendingly observed the commandment of utter chastity, that he is a kind of angel. One recalls the stern dispute in the Middle Ages about the sex of the angels, a rather long-winded argument that was resolved with the quieting conclusion that angels are simply sexless. Todorov's remark on chastity and asexuality is central to our discussion of identity and difference.

The European cultural background is imbued with myths of repressed sexual energy, e.g. Onan in **Genesis**, XXXVIII, 9, and of the androgyne (Gr. ἀνδρόγυνος a man-woman, a hermaphrodite /a person, that is, having characteristics both from Hermes and from Aphrodite, cf. Plato/; a womanish man, an effeminate person < ἀνήρ, ἀνδρός man + γυνή woman). Both the Hebraistic and the Hellenistic vein of the European tradition, to use Matthew Arnold's terminology, are sensitive to identity in this sense. The most fascinating remains the Hermaphroditus myth, according to which a son of Hermes and of Aphrodite, whose onomastic identity, Hermaphroditus, was evocative of his natural fatherly-motherly descent, was beloved by Salmacis, the nymph of a fountain in which he used to bathe. Being indifferent to her entreaties, he was one day embraced by Salmacis, who, clasping her hands round his body, prayed to the gods that they be never again separated from each other. The twain were thus made one body. The term 'hermaphrodite' has since designated a person with features of both sexes in a single body.

In Plato's **Symposium** an extensive discussion on love goes on, with Eryximachus, Pausanias, and Aristophanes unfolding and expounding their respective theories. It is worthwhile surveying their views for a more resourceful interpretation of the themes under Todorov's scrutiny. As usual in Plato, basic philosophical concepts are in some way or other related to the even more basic notion of harmony. Love as a cosmic force stands, of necessity, in a relation of deep affinity with harmony. First, Eryximachus opines that the deity of love is so universal, that it extends its empire "over all things, divine as well as human"[1]. Eryximachus draws a telling distinction between good and healthy, and bad and diseased desire as manifestations of the

[1] **The Works of Plato**, Selected and edited by Irwin Edman, New York Tudor Publishing Company, MCXXXI, p.334.

two kinds of love - good and bad. Pausanias is the next speaker to put his case: it is precisely the duty of medicine, which is an art, and "the knowledge of the loves and desires of the body"[1], to "separate fair love from foul"[2], and to know how to satisfy them or not. For, Pausanias carries on, it is he who knows how to eradicate and how to implant love, respectively, that is the skillful practitioner of this most noble art. He will "reconcile the most hostile elements in the constitution and make them loving friends"[3]. Qualities are then considered in pairs of opposites, e.g. cold vs. hot, bitter vs. sweet, moist vs. dry, heavy vs. light, and gymnastics, husbandry, and music are provided as examples of arts securing the fair balance and harmony of these qualities. The clue is in all these cases the reconciliation of opposites. Heraclitus is quoted on the matter: "The One is united by disunion, like the harmony of the bow and the lyre"[4], and an explanation is given to this stunning statement, i.e. that the once differing notes of higher and lower pitch are now reconciled by the art of music, for "harmony is a symphony, and symphony is an agreement"[5], which is where temperance and justice originate in the world. There is in Pausanias's speech a typically ancient Greek insistence on the art (τέχνη) of ordering things, that diffuse but consistent sense of overall order that one might call the universal syntax of things (σύνταξις) which rhymes so relevantly with Todorov's universal grammar. At last, Aristophanes takes the floor and professes to open another vein of discourse. There follows the celebrated description of the nature of man as it was devised by the gods, and what has become of it in time,

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[1] *Ibid.*, p.335.
[2] *Idem.*
[3] *Idem.*
[4] *Idem.*
[5] *Idem.*

"for the original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word 'Androgynous' is only preserved as a term of reproach. In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and sides with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. He could walk upright as men now do, and over at a great pace, turning on his four hands and four legs in the air; this was when he wanted to run fast. Now, the sexes were three, and such as I have described them; because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth, and they were all round and moved round and round like their parents. Terrible was their might and strength, and the thoughts of their hearts were great, and they made an attack upon the gods. Doubt reigned in the celestial councils. Should they kill them and annihilate the race with thunderbolts, as they had done the giants, then there would be an end of the sacrifices and worship which men offered to them; but, on the other hand, the gods could not suffer their insolence to be unrestrained. At last, after a good deal ofreflection, Zeus discovered a way. He said: 'Methinks I have a plan which will humble their pride and improve their manners; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. They shall walk upright on two legs, and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a

single leg'. After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one; they were on the point of dying from hunger and self-neglect, because they did not like to do anything apart; and when one of the halves died and the other survived, the survivor sought another mate (...) ; so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man. Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the indenture of a man, and he is always looking for his otherhalf".[1] (underlinings mine)

Through Aristophanes's voice, Plato gives vent to fundamental theses in a whole philosophy of IDENTITY. The three, instead of two, sexes of primeval times indicate the subtle use to which the number 2, rather than the number 3 can be put. Man and woman, and man-woman as three distinct identities, are variations of 2 = 2, and 2 = 1, a speculation long resorted to after ancient times, extremely prolific in Renaissance philosophical and literary works, and exquisitely conducted in the texts of the English Metaphysicals. The main assumption that 1 = 2 underlies the central question of creation, of the One become the many, since two is the same as plurality, as long as it is different from the singular number. The description of original man, i.e. of man-woman stimulates rich commentaries. For someone to be the opposites together one has, indeed, to be a paradigmatic creature. The physical symmetry of the human body is further proof of 1 = 2, that the body appears as a reduplication of its own identity, measured with the same metre (cf. Gr. *σ υμμετ ρ ία* commensurability; due proportion, symmetry

[1] *Ibid.*, pp.338-40.

< συν- together, with + μέτρον measure). Mere simple identity would paradoxically be no identity, since asymmetrical, literally unmeasured. In the man-woman of primordial times, Plato imagines a double nature, therefore a double symmetry, which means the extensive and symbolic action of the number 4, as in the four elements, the four basic qualities, the four cardinal points, the four temperaments, the four types of spirits that come to people's succour, etc. The two faces on one visage are, like Janus's laughing-crying double face, signs of exhaustiveness in oneness. Janus, the ancient Italian god of the doorway (*janua*), had apparently been provided with double look, double hearing, double smell etc., in order to be able to look before and behind, to sniff at dubious people's foot-steps, and to hear noises from all the four cardinal points. This is Granny Wolf's dream in **The Little Red Riding Hood**, when she-he talks to the little girl from his-her sick bed, with an appetite greater even than his-her fake lethargy/ actual solid health. The four legs and four arms give primordial man-woman full and unrestrained mobility, the capacity to move in the four cardinal directions, back and forth, left and right of his-her axis. The latter marks an immaterial point in the centre of a circle, the perfect form, repeated, in effect, in all his-her body. Primordial man-woman is a sphere complete and perfect in itself, a latent universe.

As a consequence of such physical capacities, the generation of primordial men-women were menacingly strong. They were also emotionally generously equipped and their natural endowments made them dangerous to their creators! The Golem myth is not dissimilar to the story of the giants becoming aggressors and would-be usurpers of their own cosmic parents. Aristophanes is certainly not late in making a remark on the jealousy of the gods. Too robust and too clever were these primordial children of the human race. The previous experience of other revolts had taught the gods the lesson of heedful

caution in whatever move. What is at stake here is power. The gods are afraid of their own cosmic power being questioned and possibly claimed and taken over. One would think these ancient Greek gods are already Cartesian, for it is doubt that gnaws at their certainty and prods them to run no risk and take all possible measures of circumspect protection. But the question of power is indelibly associated with that of the limit. Transgressing the given limit is losing power. On the contrary, preserving power is the same as keeping one's subjects under control. The gods are pretty unhappy with the prospect of primordial men-women insolently breaking loose. Restraining their forces even more is the only solution in the gods' minds. It is relevant that lavish natural endowments stir others and makes one look insolent to them. Insolence etymologically refers to the uncustomary (Lat. *insolens, -entis* unusual, haughty; insolent < *in-* not + *solens, -entis* < *solere* to be wont, to be accustomed). Where the customary ends there rises the fear of the different. Fear is born at the limit of one's identity, where one is either literally in danger, or thinks that he or she is in danger. Fear is the result of uncertainty, as well as the generator of mechanisms of defence, not all necessarily reliable, and not all necessarily fair. Violence, the result of fear, is born at the frontier between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the strange or foreign, the SAME and the OTHER. Violence is the form that power can assume to come to its own rescue. The uneasiness produced in the gods by their too profusely endowed creation explains the symbolic act of violence conducted against one's own father discussed in Jungian and Freudian theory. The sacrifice of the 'pater' figure is thus the solution, unless the parental authority takes the upperhand. In the latter case the revolt is suppressed and the rebels severely punished. As in the Fall of the Angels, or in the Fall of Man, the divine instance remains in control of the situation. After pondering over the case

and looking into it carefully -- which is the peremptory proof of fear undisguisedly displayed --, Zeus comes up with a measure of exemplary revenge. Afraid that the OTHER can ruin his gods', but mainly his own SELF, he decides to alter primordial men-women's identity. Zeus does not conceal his motive: he wants to diminish their strength, and increase their numbers. Quantitative alterations are put to the service of qualitative changes. By splitting their primordial identity Zeus has empowered himself to use them profitably. It takes the sacrifice of inimical identity for the triumph of one's own.

The present human race, we now realize, is the halved primordial human race, which had been created by the gods to be strong, intelligent, and move freely. The present human race is, because of this halving, in constant search of its own other half. This is as much as saying that it is in search of its own (full) identity. There is no (FULL) IDENTITY without the OTHER. The SELF cannot be self without its opposite. In the Platonic cosmic scheme, the humans are a race of wanderers in a world of incompletion, who find temporary poise and stability when they meet their mates and suffer intensely when they lose them. They are kept on the alert by a perennial nostalgia (cf. Gr. νόστος a return home or homeward, gen. a journey or voyage + ἄλγος pain, grief, distress; whatever causes pain). It makes them feel strangers in this world, when their sense of destination is diffuse, and they are refused the shelter they need to put their identity under protection. This is extremely relevant in existentialist writings, in which the character usually looks at himself as a stranger, as in Camus's **L'Etranger**. Identity as one's home is a fairly familiar feeling. In Wordsworth's **Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood**, it is precisely in these terms that the birth of the race is described:

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our Infancy;
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily from the east
Must travel, still is nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on this way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day".
(ll. 58-77)

Where Wordsworth advances the romantic question of alienation from the divine origin of man (in principle the same as Plato's theory, later engrafted on the Christian belief), Shakespeare raises the question of identity in terms of poetic creation. In **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, V, i, 12-17, the nothing preceding the poet's creation turns into a definite something by being allotted a habitat and by being accommodated in a nominal paradigm. Identity, Shakespeare will have it, is homologated as spatial difference and referential distinction:

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;

And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name".

Naming things, people, places is a form of empowerment, Todorov tells us in **The Conquest of America**, sharing a fairly common opinion with the New Historicists and Cultural Studies critics. But power is not effective unless exerted on something, somebody, some place that is definite, i.e. with clear boundaries (cf. Lat. *definire* < *de-* down + *finire* to finish < *finis* end). Let us remember how terrible the case seems to be when baby Tom Jones is discovered in the middle of Squire Allworthy's bed as merely a foundling. Tom is a nobody at that point for a number of reasons: he is found at the very heart of domestic protection, in the most intimate room of the household, and at the heart of this intimacy, in the very master's bed, but, in spite of this symbolic centrality, his identity is void and null, because he cannot be located on the social or family scale at all, and, of course, he has no name, so he simply is not. Not unlike Tom's is Jack's fate in Wilde's **The Importance of Being Earnest**, where the protagonist bears the socially unacceptable mark of being a foundling that incidentally lands in a handbag in Victoria Station. His way from the nominally modest Jack to Ernest and John Worthing is the way of identity gained after the trials of recognition that he is forces into. He undergoes a whole process of homologation, i.e. assimilation, and eventually is accepted and recognized as earnest and worthy of such belonging.

There is a deeper sense in which the Platonic men-women of primordial human creation are home-aware as a confirmation of identity. Aristophanes pauses to give relevant details about each of the initial three sexes' sense of place in the universe: the man

was the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, the man-woman of the moon, but, he stresses, the moon is made up of sun and earth. In Amerindian myths Father Sun mates with Mother Earth to give birth to people, who at times invoke rain in rain-bringing rituals. Mother Gaea (Gr. Γαῖα Earth, but also soil, or land, country) couples with Father Uranus (Gr. Οὐρᾶνός the vault or firmament of heaven, the sky) to give birth to the Titans, Furies and Cyclopes. Uranus is ousted from his throne by his son Chronos (Gr. Χρόνος time; definite period of time, season, interval, while). The same scenario of overthrow of identity by one generation opposing its own parent generation operates here. So important though is the sense of spatial identity that it just does not matter that Gaea is also the mother of Uranus. While the father is symbolically dethroned and power taken over by force, the mother secures continuity and adultery is simply out of the question. The sky may be subject to fluctuation, as the clouds are, time is at any point change *per se*, but the sense of place is as enduring as it is indicatory of identity. The man-woman was the child of both the sun in the sky and of earth. The man-woman's sense of spatial identity is complete. The gods had any reason to fear the performances of such a solid race. As in the man-woman SELF and OTHER were one and indivisible, so the Sun and the Earth were one, indomitable to the agency of ruinous Time. Zeus enviously split the round man-woman, with a view to making them his slaves. But the slave - master relation is not always one of the slave's dependence on his master. Hegel's reversal of the rapport may work here as well. In Todorov's themes of the 'I' and themes of the 'you' a mutual dependence is detectable, and the 'you' as a supplement of the 'I' -- in a similar dialectics of fitting halves -- may be as dependent on the 'I' as the 'I' is on the 'you'.

Todorov's interest in the themes of the 'you' converges with his emphasis on those characteristics of the fantastic that evince

the limit as basic principle. All those variants of perversion in love affairs that haunt a good deal of fantastic stories arrest his critical attention. The list includes love for a dead woman, the vampire-woman's love, vampires and devils as lovers, sadistic and masochistic forms of intercourse, 'plural love' a.s.o. A desire to force the expected or accredited, therefore soothing boundaries hovers above them all, in a sustained attempt to go away from the right line of convention. Like the fantastic, so perversion (cf. Lat. *pervertere* < *per-* away + *vertere* to turn). And like the two of them, the literary figure, which the ancient Greeks called *τρόπος* turn, swerve, curve < *τρέπειν* to turn, to bend, to swerve. Todorov gives ample space to minute discussions of figures in **Théorie du symbole** (1977)[1], in which the swerving capacity of language is brought under scrutiny.

In **Défiguration du langage poétique: la seconde révolution baudelairienne** (1979)[2], Barbara Johnson excitingly identifies the figure as "decolage en deux temps"[3]. The first stage is the perception of anomaly, the second, the assimilation of anomaly. What obtains, Johnson leaves to be understood, is an ambiguous situation which she describes as "undecidable"[4], i.e. neither literal, nor figurative. It is, we shall venture to assert, the typically romantic situation in Keats' **Ode on a Grecian Urn**, in which the youth is caught just before he kisses his beloved woman the much desired kiss. The unaccomplished quality of the kiss is the guarantee of the eternal kiss. This suspension of desire through the figure seems unavoidable at the level of

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[1] Tzvetan Todorov, **Théorie du symbole**, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1977 (Romanian version, **Teorii ale simbolului**, trans. Mihai Murgu, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1983).

[2] Barbara Johnson, **Défiguration du langage poétique: la seconde revolution baudelairienne**, Flammarion, Paris, 1979.

[3] *Ibid.*, p.93.

[4] *Ibid.*, p.44.

language, because language is haunted by desire. Johnson opines that this suspension of desire cannot be taken for granted, in the sense that, unless we try to fill the gap, there is no suspension of desire. So, if the pair of lovers in Keats' poem knew that in this way their eternal kiss was guaranteed, the whole structure of desire would collapse. Desire then has a double nature: on the one hand, the desire to fill the gap, on the other, a kind of second conscience, the conscience of the observer who understands that, by satisfying his/her desire, he/she will die. This, Johnson maintains, is the very reading of the text, or reading as such. Reading is two different things at one time. It is how Paul de Man defines irony: not that the desire of participating in the structure of the text is annihilated, rather there is a second desire, the desire of understanding how desire functions[1]. Language itself is SELF and OTHER, it is the straight and the roundabout line at all times. Deconstruction feeds itself on this basic statement.

In Todorov's book on the fantastic though the themes of the 'I' vs. the themes of the 'you', as indicators of directness and indirectness, help identify the system of perception/conscience vs. unconscious pulsations. Thus, the former are the expression of the relationship holding between the self and the world, i.e. of the self's perception and knowledge of the world, whereas the latter point to the relationship between man and his own desire, which is a question of probing into the other side of conscience. The former deal with the conscious, the latter with the unconscious. The themes of the 'I' imply a passive position, those of the 'you', a dynamic one. The former are the 'themes of the look', the latter, the 'themes of discourse'. (164)

To ring down the curtain, Todorov has a last look at the analogies he has seen at work: (1) the themes of the 'I' and the

[1] See Mihaela Irimia, **Barbara Johnson: Deconstrucţia, încotro?**, Cotidianul - Litere, Arte, Idei, No.45 (179), Anul IV, Bucureşti, pp.6-7.

universe of childhood, (2) the themes of the 'I' and drugs, and (3) the themes of the 'I' and psychosis. As can be noticed, the 'I' indirectly includes the 'you' as well. (1) There is no distinction between spirit and matter, subject and object in infancy and early childhood. The acquisition of the sense of such distinctions is contemporaneous with the acquisition of language, when time starts being understood as a differentiation between present, on the one hand, and past and future, on the other. This is Piaget's view, which Todorov embraces. (2) The world of drugs is a world of no locution, which means that the differentiation between the Other and the Self is not possible. Desire thus has either no external object, as in self-eroticism, or has the whole world as its object, as in paneroticism. In between is 'normal' eroticism, which come with the sense of difference between the 'I' and the 'you'. (3) In psychosis the 'I' is unable to differentiate between its own world and another world. In medical terms, this failure to grasp another system, different from your own, is typical of schizophrenia, or of early childhood experiences. By contrasting this with mental sanity and mature age, Todorov nearly names the two paradigms in the Foucauldian scheme that have provided critical scaffolding to Cultural Studies, i.e. the CENTRE vs. the MARGIN. The sane/grown-up man's perception and conscience is the central or normal individual's experience. The insane/child's perception and conscience is the marginal or abnormal individual's experience. In establishing this opposition Todorov resorts to Freud's psychoanalytical views, which makes him categorize the themes on the 'you' as typical of neurosis. The later recuperation of psychoanalysis, as of other 'sciences of man', in critical theory and practice will make all the difference in the telling passage from FORMAL to CULTURAL difference. As a final judgement passed in this book, Todorov sees in psychoanalysis a 'science of structures' and a 'science of

interpretation'. (174) A science, that is to say, of the formal 'what' and of the cultural 'how', a composite critical attitude that has far from stopped being topical in recent developments in the field. Todorov's anticipation of such tendencies will become more apparent in his further writings.

Poétique de la prose (1971)[1] and **Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage** (1972)[2] reveal a persuasively structuralist Todorov en route to more and more markedly culturally specific interpretations of literary texts, as in **Théories du symbole** and **Symbolisme et interprétation**[3].

Poétique de la prose includes an impressive repertory of Todorov's structuralist literary criticism. The volume puts together essays on the theory of the novel, and, more extensively, of narrative, and exemplifies such intellectual stances with samples from sundry sources. The pleasure of rich documentation comes from the ease with which Todorov scans numbers of kinds of narratives, cultures and ages that have proved especially prolific to this effect. The thriller, for instance, is analysed and a comprehensive typology structuring it is advanced by way of differentiating it from other narrative forms in general, and from the novel or the short-story in particular. What is called the primitive narrative (as different from. the modern narrative) is lavishly and fascinatingly illustrated on Homer's **Odyssey**, as a splendid reiteration of Ernst Robert Curtius's enterprise in **European Literature and the Latin**

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[1] Tzvetan Todorov, **Poétique de la prose**, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1971.

[2] Tzvetand Todorov & Oswald Ducrot, **Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage**, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1972 (English version, **Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language**, trans. Catherine Porter, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.

[3] English version, **Symbolism and Interpretation**, trans. Catherine Porter, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1978.

Middle Ages. Another category is that of narrative-people, amply exemplified with stories from **The Arabian Nights**, somehow the apple of Todorov's narrative eye. When he identifies a grammar of narrative, he recapitulates in a nutshell his extensive analysis of **The Decameron** to which he had dedicated a book. There is also a search of the narrative structure, obviously easy to encounter in the Holy Grail legends, but Todorov's attention concentrates on the formalization of the narrative as search, which is as much as saying that human axiology is grasped in terms of the structural pattern of cultural gestures. In later years, Todorov's trajectory, if the same, will follow the inverse direction. Henry James, the master that he more than worships in his 'poetics', 'grammar', and 'introduction to the fantastic', provides him with the secret of the narrative, something detectable of course in the interstices of textual structure. But the narrative structure is itself subject to change. It is SAME and OTHER owing to a subtle play of alterity that Todorov readily identifies in Dostoevsky's **Memoirs from the House of the Dead**, as if in Bakhtin's track of DIALOGISM and POLYGLOSSIA. A discussion of Joseph Conrad's **Heart of Darkness** prompts him to propose the knowledge of the void as a structuring force, a formulation oscillating between formalistic and psychoanalytic positions. Finally, reading as construction is the premise for a set of theoretical considerations.

The assumption that the reader cannot be aware of 'the omnipresent' while reading, and the realization that selectiveness is an unavoidable attitude in the reader, as it certainly was in the writer, determine the critic to think of the reading process as a construction whose object is an imaginary universe. Now referential discourse, Todorov insists, is what obtains through the referential function of language, but comprehension is a different process from construction. The difference comes out of,

on the one hand, referential expression evoking events read about or relatively less directly perceived, on the other, of the narrative filters operating in the text as construct. As the narrator applies his own selection, so we, the readers, have our own vision of the events narrated. The question of 'vision', intensely exploited in the book on the fantastic, is crucial in the process of signification and symbolization. For, Todorov goes on, what happens while reading is a process mediated by 'introspection' (180), and he provides a schema to this effect:

1. author's narrative	4. reader's narrative
↑	↓
2. imaginary universe evoked by author	3. imaginary universe constructed by reader

From this Todorov concludes on construction as theme: "the fictional text takes construction as theme, because it is impossible to evoke human life without mentioning this essential process". (184) Starting from the information he/she receives, each character of necessity constructs the facts and characters surrounding him/her. Involved in a process similar to the reader's, the fictional character produces his/her own construction. Reading then is only one of the themes of any book. There are certainly others, as there are certainly other readings, too. (186)

Some of the entries in the **Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language** bear on issues raised above. When he introduces the question of reference, structuralist Todorov treads in Saussure's track: signifieds are

"purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not". (247-8) (underlining mine)

Other forms of difference are suggested by Frege's distinction between the referent of a sign (*Bedeutung*) and its meaning (*Sinn*), which he dwells on at length in his **Théories du symbole**, as well. Todorov establishes a relevant parallel between the Saussurean signified and Fregian meaning, when he sees in the latter the capacity to retain "only those features of comprehension that serve, *in the language used*, conventionally to locate the referent". (250) Concurrently, when he quotes Benveniste on deictics as an irruption of discourse within language, he insists that "their very meaning (...), even though it depends on language, can only be defined by allusion to their use". (252) This differentiation of language as system vs. discourse, central in Speech-Act theory, will be put to some interesting use in Todorov's Cultural Studies-oriented books.

Similarly, the entry on the typology of the phenomena of meaning borders on later Cultural Studies approaches. Varieties of meaning can be distinguished depending on: (1) the degree of encoding the meaning, and (2) grafting significations perceived as secondary on the principal meaning. In (1) he places cultural encoding, different from both linguistic and personal encoding, between these two, i.e. between the highest and the lowest degree of encoding. In the personal association of words Todorov evinces the act of enunciation as an activity vs. the linguistic utterance as abstract system, and emphasizes the role of actual communication. In (2) he differentiates between cultural context and immediate context, on the one hand (as specific and particular), and the dictionary status of signification (as general). More interested does he seem to be in types of

signification resulting from (a) resemblance between signifieds (synonymy), (b) resemblance between signifiers (homonymy), (c) contiguity of the signifiers (used in stylization, or in parody, cf. Bakhtin), and (d) contiguity of the signifieds (connotation or implication). These have poetic values, as in 'popular etymology' or in 'poetic etymology' (cf. Jakobson), a thing Seamus Heaney calls 'poetymology' [1]. Jakobson, like Tynianov, are recalled for their focus on the unusual in the stylistic effect called defamiliarization. (257) Finally, the difference between allegory and symbol is one between the particular sought for the general vs. the general identified in the particular. For Coleridge then, Todorov remarks, the symbol-synecdoche is characteristic of poetry, whereas the allegory-metaphor is excluded from it, and Northrop Frye, elsewhere critically rejected, gives him another basic working differentiation, i.e. of singnification falling into two types: centrifugal and centripetal, with the latter obviously dominant in poetry. (259)

The figure as deviation or modification of a primary expression regarded as normal (273) is introduced in a variety of possibilities, e.g. a sentence including an inversion vs. the selfsame sentence without that or any other inversion, or the metaphorical use of a word vs. its 'ordinary' use. He is especially sensitive to the romantic vein (Vico, Rousseau) that has maintained that all language is metaphorical, and quotes Nietzshce on the nonmetaphorical as actually extinguished metaphors. (275) Todorov shares with Tynianov and Empson the belief that "the word does not have fixed and mutually exclusive meanings, but a potential semantic nucleus that is actualized differently in each context". (275) (underlinings mine) A last paragraph on the rhetoric figure, after considerations on Aristotelian and medieval rhetoric, returns to Roman Jakobson

[1] See Mihaela Irimia, **Seamus Heaney: Coerenta mizeriei noastre**, Cotidianul - Litere, Arte, Idei, No.35 (169), Anul IV, pp.4-5.

and his famous differentiation between metaphor and metonymy in the Jakobsonian vocabulary of selection vs. combination, and of the "'metaphoric and metonymic poles' that dominate lingustic structure". (180)

The master is unavoidably present again throughout Todorov's entry on syntagma [1] and paradigm. A few preliminary considerations shed light on syntagmatic relationships usually involving units of the same type, while paradigm being, in the broad sense of the word, any class of linguistic elements (106, 108). The way in which syntagma and paradigm are interrelated is basic in language in general, and even more relevant in poetic language:

> "two units *u* and *u'* belong to the same paradigm if, and only if, they are capable of replacing each other in the same syntagma; that is, if there exist two syntagmas *vuw* and *vu'w*". (108)

A subtle remark that there is a big consensus in favour of subordinating paradigmatic study to syntagmatic study in practice brings in a Cultural Studies note again. Eventually, Jakobson is referred to in quite a lengthy summary, namely that, according to the master, there are two types of independent intellectual mechanisms: (1) "comparison with similar units (units that could thus be substituted for it)", and (2) "establishment of a relationship with coexisting units (units that belong to the same syntagma)". (111) By correlating the two, and seeing their interplay in the Jakobsonian suggestion, Todorov wonderfully concludes that "the meaning of a word is determined both by the influence of those that surround it in

[1] The term *syntagma* rather than *syntagm* (used elsewhere in the book) is the variant provided by the translator of Todorov and Ducrot's dictionary into English.

discourse and by the memory of those that could have taken its place". (111) The duality Jakobson observes in language is the syntagmatic or metonymic pole vs. the paradigmatic or metaphoric one.

A repository of theoretical statements basic in Todorov's critical thinking, and a landmark in his evolution from STRUCTURALIST to CULTURE-oriented studies, **Théories du symbole**[1] advertises its intentions in the contents proposed (from a general survey of Western semiotics to Jakobson's poetics and Freudian contributions to a theory of narrative), and in a technical explanation of the title attached to a relatively composite book (in which massive reconsiderations of romanticism serve as the most direct alley to a Cultural Studies Todorovian position in the 80's and onwards). A motto from Novalis adds to the impression of Todorov reiterating the Russian Formalists' own allegiance with the romantics in their language-based debates on literature as difference. Upon thorough reflection, Novalis says, one will profess that the historian must also be a poet, for it is only poets that are skilled in this art of adroitly fitting things together (*raccorder*, which in the French original sends one to Lat. *cors, cordis* soul). The critical exercise announced requires detecting similarities and differences and establishing schemes of correspondences the type we have seen in Todorov already.

This book essentially on language gravitates round the symbol, and delves into old sources to demonstrate the power of language to be metaphoric, i.e. to be OTHER in being SAME. Todorov will not ignore a single line of tradition contributing to the birth of Western semiotics. Like his other self-exiled fellow-

[1] Quotations from, and references to, this study are based on the French original (Ch. I-III), and on the Romanian version (Ch.IV to the end), function of the available sources.

citizen Julia Kristeva, he combines the Semiotic with Structuralist and Cultural Poetic approaches. The objective of semiotics is knowledge, its object, signs of different kinds, of which words are merely one category. There are then various perspective from which an approach can be initiated.

Thus (1), the semantic, raises the question of language's cognitive power, as in Plato's **Cratylus**, where the classic differentiation between natural and conventional signs is established, or in Aristotle's **Of Interpretation**, in which the Stagirite distinguishes between symbols and words, the latter implying a third term between sound and thing, i.e. the state of mind or mood in which the speaker finds himself at a particular moment -- an anticipation of more declared Speech-Act theory or Cultural Studies positions. (2) Logic connects the theory of signs to that of demonstration and establishes a differentiation operating at the level of the *'lekton'* (17), i.e. the speakable, between the true and the false speakable. (3) Rhetoric, following the Aristotelian distinction between proper and transposed sense, focuses on tropes as carriers of indirect meaning or right misnomers -- a paradox deliberately placed at the root of literature as deflected language use (in which the Russian Formalist stance is not hard to tell). Finally, (4) Hermeneutics is the science of difference assumed, since the logos - mythos rapport has always been its basic intellectual tool. Heraclitus is reported to have once made the essential statement to this effect: the oracle in Delphi does not say anything, nor does he hide anything, he simply signifies. As for Pythagoras, he is supposed to have constantly urged his acquaintances to take from him symbols, rather than words. This word - symbol opposition was for the first time processed in a consistent synthesis by St Augustine, the recognized father of Western semiotics, who deals with signs as transposed signs, differentiating, that is,

between rhetoric and hermeneutics, and focusing on the latter -- a crucial stance in the Christian context.

With structuralist interest, Todorov surveys the evolution of rhetoric from Aristotle's emphasis on persuasion, via Cicero's listing of figures (with special reference to ornamental figures), to Quintilian's res - verba opposition. He witnesses the more and more openly acknowledged division, in modern times, between the literal and the figurative sense, a division of capital relevance in Christian hermeneutics. In the 18-th century the signification - meaning difference is instituted, with the derived lexical - discursive meaning opposition. It is on these modern assumptions that allegory is differentiated from metaphor, as being two true propositions (i.e. a literal and a spiritual meaning enclosed in the literal sense), whereas metaphor is one single assertion (from one single figurative sense). (94) A schema is proposed containing all these differentiations and classifications:

figures	of speech	tropes	of signification
			of expression
		non-tropes	of diction
			of construction
			of elocution
			of style
	of thought		

Especially fascinating is Todorov's discussion of Egyptian hieroglyhps, because of their capacity to identify the same structure in different substances. This type of unification is

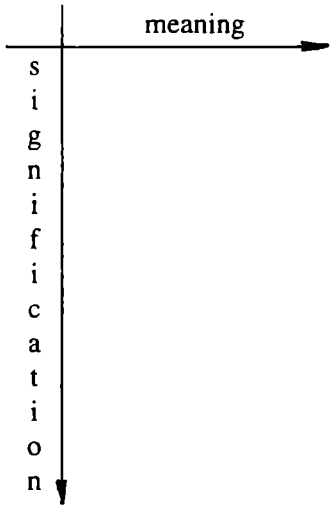
already a step towards the foundation of a semiotic theory. The following schema is offered to suggest the play of SAME and OTHER:

hieroglyphic writing	cyriological (proper)	
	symbolic	by imitation (cyriological)
		tropical
		by allegory and enigma

Thus, Todorov concludes, the material variety of symbolism does not diminish its structural unity, as symbol relates to sign (by establishing a rapport between the transposed and the proper sense), which means that rhetorical concepts can also apply to non-verbal signs. (33) But he also has an eye for Ciceronian persuasion, and when he pinpoints the necessity for public discourse to adapt itself to concrete circumstances he opens up the avenue of functional analysis and sees in language a certain type of instrumentalized power which he will dwell on at length in his book on America. His differentiation, in the classic antiquity, between what one might call Qunitilian Atticism, male and clear, and Ciceronian Asianism, effeminate and ornate, shows an availability to project a technical discussion against a more comprehensive cultural background (which may be a response to the motto from Novalis). When he pauses to consider 18-th-century rhetorical tricks of the type "the letter kills and the spirit vivifies" (77), as in Fontanier, Todorqv distinguishes between the neoclassic precepts of instruction and pleasure in view of the power language has to be indirect. Truly, language is a rhetorical instrument of "error and deceit" (78), but in the Augustinian system the one Truth conveyed by language had been stipulated and identified in the Christian context. Rhetoric as a given set of rules had imposed a system

of mandatory values. The 18-th century though witnessed a religious relaxation that eventually resulted in a variety of truths validated at the individual level, which brings to the fore personal inspiration. In this Todorov sees the "typically middle-class values" (81) that he will look into in his later discussion of the Enlightenment.

Thomistic philosophy calls his attention in the context of Christian hermeneutics, and of the division within the literal sense of words between the proper and the figurative. St Thomas, Todorov notes, excluded the poets' figures from the spiritual sense, which is the work of God. This assumption will be reconsidered by the romantics, for whom the poet = a God, God = the Poet. Things become more complicated as a patristic tradition of Biblical exegesis makes of allegory a much more complex relationship, at once of the literal *and* the spiritual sense, and distinguishes between signification, acceptation, and meaning. Signification is the abstract universal, or fundamental sense of the word. Acceptation refers to the various aspects of signification. Meaning is what results from the concrete individual combination of one word with other words in a sentence. Meaning derives from signification by analogy or by connection, i.e. by metaphor or metonymy. (91) Signification then is a question of lexical material, and one of paradigmatic distribution, whereas meaning is a question of discourse, and one of syntagmatic organization. Singnification is relevant at the level of language, meaning, at the level of interlocution. This conclusion with a Speech-Act theory aura could be summed up in the following schema:



What we have then is an opposition of language signification vs. discursive meaning, or else, Todorov suggests, linguistic vs. psychological meaning. In the latter kind we will find the human element responsible for cultural codification that the Cultural Studies attitude will entail in the 80's. At this point Todorov chooses to conclude that:

> "... the *trope* is the evocation of an indirect meaning, the figure, a relationship between two or more co-present words. (...) It is in the very definition of man to be able to link objects among themselves; it is therefore in the definition of man to produce tropes". (99, 102) (italics mine)

The deeply human power of association of one expression with another is difference negotiated and mitigated, which does not mean that difference is effaced. In fact, difference lies deep at the very heart of language since there is no such thing as a perfect synonym. The note Todorov strikes here could pass for

a preface to Deconstructivist assumptions. For tropes are tours round what is usually called the basic meaning. One might say, in Todorov's track, language has the Lobachevskyan quality of taking the curved line as the shortest between two points, in which the straight line is no more than a particular case -- a stance again nearly completely Deconstructivist.

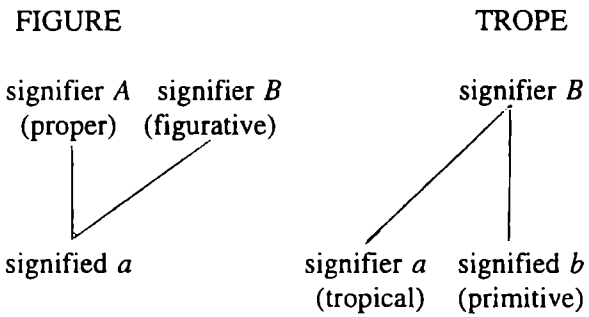
There is more difference in language though than may be apparent at first sight. From a Vicoian perspective, the primitive-tropological sense vs. the proper-figurative one could be seen as an opposition of diachrony vs. synchrony. There is variety in language, function of the linguistic context, or of circumstances, as there is variety because of paralinguistic factors. There is also more similarity in language than we may seem to realize. Thus, tropes are founded on (a) similitude, e.g. metaphor and allegory, (b) correspondence, e.g. metonymy, and (c) connection, e.g. synecdoche.

The *figure* instead is formal deviation, or else a way of speaking that goes off the simple and common line of expression. It puts on, as it were, more formal clothing than common ideas do as a rule. (116) But this is functional, not merely ornamental clothing. So, the figure is deviation (cf. Lat. *deviatus* < *deviare* < *de-* from + *via* road), but it is deviation from the abstract rule. In as much as it is formal deviation, too, which it is, it is deviation owing to a social convention, so that "the abstract 'general form' manifests itself in a figurative state" (121), in which each figure is a physignomic variation or particular modification of a deep universal form. Here is the surface structure (SS) - deep structure (DS) opposition that Todorov had singled out in his 'poetics' and 'grammar' not merely of Boccaccio's **Decameron**, but of literature. For this is what he says by way of conclusion:

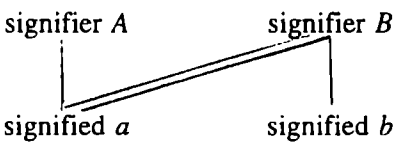
> "This refusal of the universal norm, of absolute truth applies to the very notion of literature: the latter does not

exist, or rather it does not exist other than in specific historical contexts". (125)

There is then a difference between figure and trope which is one of 'figures of speech' vs. 'figures of thought', since in the schema he provides Todorov sees the figure as a difference of signifiers, and the trope as a difference of signifieds:



A figure-trope (or else difference negotiated and mitigated) has the following structure:



for which he offers an example:

Most interesting is the explanation Todorov gives to the end of rhetoric, after he has discussed its rise and fall in almost pathetic terms. He places the whole discussion within the boundaries of the modern age, which, like the whole choir of post-structuralists of the 80's, he sees originating in the Enlightenment spirit of growing rationalism, to the detriment of revelation, and in the further spirit of victorious empiricism which will irretrievably supplant the rationalistic bent. He locates the breach in the 18-th century, when the advent of the middleclasses was preparing an overthrow of *Weltanschauung*. A new vision was setting in instead, with the traditional absolute and universal values abolished, and, he opines, the loss of prestige suffered by Christianity (137). This now commonly shared view among post-structuralist critics has rehabilitated the individual in a way that may be a sign of modern observance of human rights, as it may be the nostalgic loss of unity once enjoyed by a fairly coherent European culture. Before the overt assertion of multiculturalism of the last two decades, here is Todorov in the late 70's, a Jewish Bulgarian exile acclimatized in France that has the acute sense of cultural difference in all the possible ways that such a status can confer upon one. In the 18th century:

> "All rhetoric, or almost all (...) confines itself to a theory of figures (...) with a double determinism: an empirical one -- it corresponds to observable linguistic facts --, the other theoretical -- it can be integrated in a coherent system characterizing a vision of the world. It is in this latter sense that the figure sins in the eyes of those promoting the new ideology. For the whole rhetorical tradition coming down from Quintilian all the way to Fontanier, the figure is something subordinated, some additional ornament (...); /it/ is, as we have seen, a deviation from the norm. Rhetoric will

stop being possible in a world that makes of the plurality of norms its norm (...). The abolition of privileges bestowed upon certain forms (...), the eviction of rationalism by empiricism (...), the eviction of panchronic constructions to the benefit of history, all of these have a common source: it is the disappearance of absolute and transcendent values, which particular facts could be confronted with (and reduced to). In a world without God everyman is God. Likewise, utterances will stop being confronted with an ideal utterance, and languages with an abstract and 'deep' structure". (137, 138, 139) (underlinings mine)

A world, we shall venture to say, already Nietzschean, Derridean, post-modernist. A world of the *hic et nunc* of history, of difference let loose, of 'grammar' superseded by individual creativeness. A world in which the decease of rhetoric will be briefly succeeded by the birth of aesthetics. This is the passage from the ideology of the classics to that of the romantics.

For Todorov this is a process called the "misfortunes of imitation" (173), given that it marks the abandonment of classic rhetoric with emphasis on the mimetic observance of traditional rules, and the embracement of modern aesthetics valuing originality. There occurs a difference in outlook, the replacement of an ideology of the beautiful as, at the same time, good and useful, by an ideology of the beautiful as an autonomous and irreducible category. This book could have as well been called **Rhetoric and Aesthetics**: it looks at classic imitation superseded by romantic imaginativeness, and in so doing it leaves behind the prescriptive attitude to welcome a descriptive one. It looks backwards to precepts imposed by received values, and forwards to diversity, difference and the explosion of the one-time centre. A book of the late 70's anticipating the topical centre - margin dialectics of Post-Structuralism in the 90's.

As a sign of the new romantic vision, imitation assumes the role of motivated correspondence between signifier and signified. Not that this is an utterly new development. In his dialogue **Cratylus** Plato differentiates between a theory supporting the natural origin of language (defended by Cratylus) and one according to which language is conventional (Hermogenes's view). For St Augustine signs differ among themselves according as they are natural or institutional, and the Port-Royal logic makes the same distinction. Dubos is aware that words cannot imitate things, even though language was originally imitative (a view, let us recall, shared by Giambattista Vico, the real forerunner of a fully romantic poetic theory). In **Laocoon** Lessing distinguishes between poetry, a temporal art, and painting, a spatial art. The former uses motivated signs, because able to imitate nature, the latter resorts merely to unmotivated signs. A more diffuse belief that language was initially only natural signs traverses world literature, and Pope's imitative method in the St Cecilia odes is only one of many examples. Baumgarten promotes the idea that the beautiful is a quality perceptible by the senses, i.e. expressed only by natural signs, exempt of artificial signs. This, states Todorov, is the power of art: raising artificial signs to the power of natural signs, as in metaphor, which is a motivated sign achieved by means of unmotivated signs. The formulation recalls Jakobson's maxim: poetry raises the principle of repetition from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic level. By way of summing up, Todorov praises Lessing as a precursor of the romantic doctrine of poetic language, in that he rids himself of the classic attitude (imitation as the relationship between signs or images and the world) in order to further a romantic attitude (imitation as motivation, i.e. as the relationship between signifer and signified). (214)

The modern or romantic episteme -- a Foucauldian term that Todorov does not use as such, but which is described in an opposition to the classic episteme reminding one of Foucault's **Les mots et les choses** -- is announced not by Rousseau, Herder, Vico, or Shaftesbury, but by one Philipp Moritz (sic). In this minor author's work Todorov identities references to the original production of art as the label of the new spirit. Back in the late 70's, Todorov foreshadows the fury of the 90's especially in America, where minorities of whatever provenance, allegiance, orientation, expression a.s.o. are sacrosanct and are incited, through affirmative action, to subvert accredited majority tastes, preferences, values. Where T. S. Eliot had seen in the minors people that are as necessary as the majors of a culture, in the sense that they give an illusion of depth and complete our fatally partial image of things, some of the post-structuralist currents now have made of minor voices pioneers undreamt of even by those very voices (such are extremist feminists, intransigent race critics, or exaggerated cultural materialists).

A set of oppositions are provided as illustrations of the basic classic vs. romantic paradigm:

CLASSICISM	ROMANTICISM
representation	expression
the beautiful *and* the useful	the beautiful *vs.* the useful
/ one single category /	/ two distinct categories /
imitation	production
finite work	creative process
dead forms	organic metaphor
language as work (*ergon*)	language as activity (*energeia*)
language has representative function	language as expressive function
(words = the image of things)	(words = the image of the speaker)

The modern age has been a witness to the end of imitation and accredits the idea that the work of art is born out of conventions that have no replica in nature -- this is the revenge Hermogenes takes on Cratylus (216). The romantic concept of beauty evinces its intransitive quality, i.e. a gratuitousness that the classics would not have been able even to conceive of, let alone accept. The work, that is, is ordered according to its inner coherence, not function of any external transitivity. One would imagine, following Todorov's remarks, another schema of opposites:

CLASSICISM	ROMANTICISM
syncretism	synthetism
natural harmony	inner split
(originary unity of form and matter)	(form - matter spirit - senses)
concordance	contradiction

The aim of art is the creation of beauty, not the imitation of nature. Art expresses something that cannot be said in any other way. Poetic language more than abounds in meaning. It has the capacity of expressing even the unspeakable. The work is untranslatable, plurally interpretable, infinite. To quote August Wilhelm von Schlegel, romantic aesthetics is a semiotic theory, i.e. a theory of the symbol. We could visualize this in oppositional terms as:

CLASSIC ALLEGORY	ROMANTIC SYMBOL
direct designation	indirect designation
intellectual grasp	perceptive and intellectual grasp
transitive	intransitive
primary designation (it designates but does not represent)	secondary designation (it represents and sometimes also designates)
relation of similarity (among elements)	relation of exemplariness (one element = the type of the others)
signifier clearly separated from signified	signifier becomes signified

A whole chapter is dedicated to language and its doubles, based on the thesis advanced before that there is difference in the very identity of language. To serve it are some of the instances that we have been acquainted with reading the previous three hundred pages or Todorov's 'poetics' and his 'grammar', e.g. the dichotomy, in St Augustine, of proper vs. transposed signs, the rhetoric opposition of proper vs. figurative sense, or the romantic contrastive pair of allegory and symbol.

Also, a diffuse sense of revaluation of received ideas breathes in these lines. And, to be sure, Todorov joins the much bigger choir of Euro-American critical voices in doing so. For the *Ecole des Annales*, the modern age starts somewhere in the 12-th century and is still going on today. This exciting reconsideration of a whole concept and its refurbishing in recent years has triggered off shocking theoretical consequences. The Middle Ages as such do not feature as a distinct epoch any more, which means that critical thinking has done away with the Renaissance concept of an age in between itself and the classic antiquity, which the Renaissance had been defined after itself.

The notion of Enlightenment, devised to contrast an age of intellectual and practical engineering spirit, had also been meant as a term of contrast with the assumedly ignorant Dark Ages, but the definition of the age as an age of light had itself been encouraged by reference to the luminous classic antiquity, of which the Enlightenment was only another revival, after the preceding Renaissance. A type of concept, i.e. that of defining a period in terms of what it is not, by contrast with another, on the usual assumption that what comes first is always better (the *ubi sunt qui ante nos* motif) is questioned and reconsidered. For Jacques Le Goff this effacement of traditional borders between historical ages is a confirmation of continuity that looks more life-like than any didactic differentiation. For Todorov equally, the romantic age has not come to an end yet and here we are thinking and behaving like people two hundred years ago, he seems to maintain, since ours are the same as the romantics' problems: finding a motivation in language, identifying the origin of language, and, through it, the origin of the world, grappling with extensive dichotomies, a.s.o. We are people of the modern age, like the romantics themselves, since we are still faced with the colossal consequences of the internalization of concepts that has haunted human thinking since Descartes. The fury of antifoundationalist criticism in America feeds itself on the assumption that the Cartesian-Kantian-Hegelian model is oppressive for having founded a centre (in the thinking 'I'/'we') that has kept the Other on the periphery. Not unlike this does Todorov express an apprehensive thought when he remarks that we today are still under the influence of the romantic symbol, since

> "we declare that <u>we</u> - <u>normal adult people from the contemporary West</u> are exempt from the *weaknesses* related to *symbolic thinking* which only <u>others</u> have, that is *animals, children, women, mad people, poets* - these inoffensive mad

people - *savages, and forefathers* that are equipped with no other kind of thinking". (311) (underlinings mine)

Here is an excellent premise for Todorov's later discussion of the OTHER. Among the easily discernible structuralist sources for this critical attitude are Lévi-Strauss's detailed analyses in **Tristes tropiques** of annihilation of the other, whether as an individual or, as more commonly is the case, as a community or type of civilization, as easily discernible are references to French structuralist surveys of cultural bahaviour, e.g. Barthes's discussion of modern **Mythologies**. The SAME vs. OTHER differentiation proposed at this point could feature as the following schema:

US	THE OTHERS
the West	the non-West
'sane'	'insane'
adult	child
man	woman
'civilized'	'savage'
healthy	diseased
contemporary	pre-historic
knowledge trough *sign*	knowledge through *symbol*

The use of 'us' vs. 'them' in English, with the unavoidable sense of aggressive opposition exercised by 'them' against 'us', and by 'their' tactics and strategies to give 'us' offence and teach us a lesson has political undertones which are not absent in Post-Modernist Criticism. Even more topical though would the dichotomy sound if phrased in terms of

CENTRE	MARGIN
*ethno*centrism *anthropo*centrism *logo*centrism	(symbolic thinking considered ignorant of, and unequipped with, such notions)

The two paradigm above make a lot of sense in any discussion of Feminism, Race Criticism, New Historicism or Cultural Studies. Underlying the dichotomy is a classic opposition which the antifoundationalists will not acknowledge and prefer to remain silent about. This is the old NATURE vs. CULTURE opposition not given to oblivion in recent criticism, in spite of more and more overt interest merely in nature and liberation from the 'strictures' of cultural models. An excellent example of erudite approach to the matter is **God of Many Names: Play, Poetry and Power in Hellenic Thought from Homer to Aristotle** by Professor Mihai Spariosu from the University of Athens, Georgia[1]. If we were to illustrate this deeper opposition, we would get something like

phusei	*thesei*
natural	conventional
motivated	unmotivated
individual	social

That we are still romantic in our behaviour is shown by what we attempt to do in our most serious investigations. We still grope to reach back to the origin of the world through language. This is something that Todorov himself is after in his 'grammar' meant to give the guidelines for a reading not merely of texts,

[1] Mihai Spăriosu, **God of Many Names: Play, Poetry, and Power in Hellenic Thought from Homer to Aristotle**, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1991.

or of the texts of literature, but of the text of the world, of the Text (on the assumption that language has a structure which is the structure of the world). We embark upon etymological speculations, when etymological precision fails us. We are sensitive to metaphoric nuances and do not keep away from them, and that wittingly, even in scientific language. We try, in other words, to find a motivation in whatever appears to be unmotivated, and in so doing we go back from the abstract sign to the more convincing concrete symbol. We go back, that is, to mother NATURE even though we are the dear, albeit stepchildren of an adoptive mother CULTURE. We romantically look for tropes in long-forgotten etymologies and worn-out metaphoric words reduced to a state of Egyptianism, as Nietzsche will have it. We try to retrieve motivation in language, and hopefully in the world, by reviving the originary 'onomatopoeic' quality of language (once poetic all through, according to Vico). We are fascinated, like the 18-th century was, by the language of gestures, which, because natural, is regarded as motivated, or the degree zero of the sign (a state therefore of difference defeated, of sign become symbol). We try to defeat cold unmotivated abstraction by giving it the warm flesh of poetry, and therefore the motivation of life. We look for naturalness in the language of the 'savage' (whom in the 18-th century, like now, we were ready to call the good savage, not only, or necessarily, the bad savage). We are engaged in all these attempts to practise some kind of primitive symbolism without either considering it primitive, or detecting any trace of backwardness in its symbolic, i.e. 'visual' quality. We resort to poetic, i.e. tropical language with pleasure and confidence, and in so doing behave like the 'savages' betting on the magic power of language that can both aggress and curse, and defend and bless. We know that there is power in language that can kill or save, oppress or sustain, make people suffer or give them

solace and joy. We know how important it is to define people or things by giving them names and locating them in our mental/cultural habitations. Without such props we would be lost. We know that to say can easily be the same as to be. We know the power of the word, of the Word, because this has been part and parcel of our nature and culture. We all live, one might speculate, in the Kubla Khan situation where we dream of decreeing things every day. If only this were possible. It may be in this particular sense that Tzvetan Todorov exemplifies an impressive quantity of his theory with samples from **The Arabian Nights**. It is in this sense, most certainly, that he chooses paradigmatic Scheherazade as the Teller of the Tale. For, in what she does, the inexhaustible story-teller brings another basic difference to nought: Scheherazade reduces consecution to consequence. In her story-telling is resolved Thucydides's problem with *μετὰ τοῦτο* and then[1] -- the 'and then' that satisfies the listener's curiosity and gratifies the teller's gift of informing as well as forming his audience, the 'and then' of coherence and motivation that have defeated the initial chaos of mere happenings, the 'and then' of nature become culture and behaving like culture as nature. We are all users of symbolic language, makers and consumers of myths and we would be hard put to divorce from these our dear images. For they are images of the others and/as ourselves. They are them-us.

Freud's rhetoric is interpreted in terms of symbol and of the symbolic language of dreams. If dreams are basically linguistic confections, just like jokes, i.e. they are constructs in which the verbal nature of the narrative is more than obvious, they can also be analysed along the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic line. Dreams are semantic proximity projected into syntagmatic

[1] The question is discussed at large in fascinating passages by François Hartog in **The Mirror of Herodotus: the Representation of the Other** (see n.15).

proximity, which is as much as saying that their warp and weft are the fruit of rhetoric weaving. Something typical of the "psychogenesis of the spirit" (350) happens in dreams: a latent element is replaced not by one of its components, but by something more remote (an allusion for instance). This transfer entails a shift of psychic accent from a relatively important to a less important element. The margin comes to the fore again. And so does play, for, Todorov says, puns show how relevantly relations among signifiers can have a hold on relations among signifieds (365). Hence also the pleasure of nonsense, which is random association against the "yoke of reason". What is not like our sense of things is nonsense. What is not logical is symbolic. What is not our commonsensical game is their nonsensical game, and while we are all right, they are the others, i.e. children, insane, or savage people. The stuff that dreams are made of, Todorov seems to suggest, is the stuff of repressed unconscious desire, usually of infantile origin. In the same manner collective imaginings are 'narratives' about unconscious drives. They are therefore symbolic. In this category feature folklore, myths, legends, dicta, proverbs, plays upon words, a.s.o. (378) As a common denominator they have symbol at the basis of their narratives. Their symbolic nature makes them universally valid narratives and generously interpretable stories.

As a corollary of his reiterated praise of Roman Jakobson, Todorov devotes a whole chapter to Jakobson's poetics, starting from the anthological concept of '*literaturnost*' (literariness) by which the master had once defined literature. Jakobson's thesis of words as things, not as signs is mentioned, which reminds one of Barthes's intrasitive writing as well as of the romantic intrasitivity of poetic language, and the master is quoted on the poetic function, which "projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to that of combination". (411) The Jakobsonian projection of paradigm into syntagm appears to

Todorov, as it had in the case of Freud's poetics, as the way in which language is not let to sink into the 'natural', whatever the excuses. This is the trick commonly used by 'poets' to make language autonomous, that is self-sufficient, with the help of artistic devices, which are made, not natural. Hence the superiority of poetry, which is metaphoric, over prose, which is metonymic.

The whole of Todorov's demonstration is essentially a plea for difference and diversity. If the passage from the classic to the romantic Weltanschauung has been successful, as it has, if it is the one passage that has left an indelible print on us, people of the latter half of the 20-th century, this is also a passage that has brought in mutations on a long term and with consequences impossible to ignore. Once he has concluded that we, people in the latter half of the 20-th century, think, act, and express ourselves symbolically, just like Lévi-Strauss's 'primitives', Todorov can only end up a book on symbol on a note of confidence in the guaranteed emancipation of the race. In 'Openings', the final chapter, he calls forth German philologist, statesman and poet Wilhelm von Humboldt's **Of Diversity in the Construction of Human Languages** (1835). A combination of preoccupations as exciting as it remains paradoxical, the meditative-active humanist offers Todorov an excellent example of difference negotiated at the individual level at the dawn of the declaredly modern age. Humboldt could not be blind to diversity in his everday pragmatic concerns, nor could he be indifferent to principles of order that grammaticalize the plasmatic material of language or of general human behaviour, for that matter.

A supporter of philanthropic and neohumanist education, Humboldt promoted the model of complex and complete personality. He ideally envisaged a human type at once pragmatic and erudite, possibly the enterprising tradesman and

the learned scholar in one. He was deeply aware of the irreversible passage from classic imitation to romantic production varied like the variety of subjects produced by it. Benefiting from this, Humboldt believes, the spirit of the nation is rooted in the spirit of the language. The idea that there is a certain Weltanschauung in each and every language marks a turning point in the history of humanistic thought, as it draws indelible lines on the map of anthropocultural as well as political identity of communities in the late 20-th century. Underlying this idea is the conviction that diversity in time and space is more important even than unity and identity. That history is not the manifestation of an immutable essence, as the classic vision maintained. Rather that it is an irreversible temporal flow in time and an irreducible spatial unfolding. We could visualize the Humboldtian view as

CLASSIC DESPOTISM	BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION
arbitrarily imposed rules	irreducible differences recognized
classic rhetoric	romantic aesthetics
(language has one single norm)	(each work has its own expressive norm)
functional rhetoric	expressive aesthetics
transitive language	intransitive language
imitation	*production*

The aftermath of this romantic invention is now substance for critical antifoundationalist evaluations. Nietzsche would not make so much sense without this stand. Deconstruction would not appeal as much without it. The New Historicism would not excite critical minds to the extent that it does without it. Feminism as a multiple form of protest and contestation would not be as pertinent without it. Nor would Race Criticism be as

vigorous as it is without it. The sense of *hic et nunc* replacing the universals of a classic Weltanschauung would not be there without it. At the extreme of this widely relaxed and at times menacingly relativistic project, Rorty's apotheosis of difference as the blowing up of whatever central value would not be there without it[1]. Between the rhetoric of the classic, and the aesthetics of the romantic age, Todorov grasps a third aesthetic rhetoric nowadays which he chooses to call the aesthetics-rhetoric of plurality: language has multiple functions, whose hierarchy does not stay the same in different cultures and different ages. By way of conclusion, Todorov shows his as well as our general readiness "to assert HETEROLOGY". (425) (capitalization mine) We have come to understand, Todorov suggests, that the modes of signification are multiple and irreducible to one another, and that differences among themselves do not entitle any of them to formulate judgements of value. Rather that, as August Wilhelm Schlegel had once purported, each of them can be an example in its way. Let us ourselves conclude with a visual schema:

CLASSIC RHETORIC	ROMANTIC AESTHETICS
universal	differentiated
sign	symbol

HETEROLOGY
plurifunctional
type

At the extreme, the passage from HOMOLOGY to HETEROLOGY can, at least theoretically, lead to a new Babel through the disappearance of all homology, so of all homologation, i.e. of order-giving rules.

[1] See Richard Rorty, **Consequences of Pragmatism**: Essays 1972-1980, Brighton: Harvester, 1982.

Todorov, the promoter of a 'grammar' of the text/Text is not unaware of the dangers of such extreme revisionism, no matter how exciting the prospect of variety and diversity can be. The 1978 English version of **Symbolisme et Interprétation**[1] gravitates round the telling distinction between language and discourse that practically gives the distictive note to language studies in recent decades. A motto from Friedrich Schlegel paves the way to Todorov's demonstration: "It is just as deadly for the mind to have a system as to have none at all. So one has to make up one's mind to have both".

Basic to the nature of language, the distinction between language and discourse has not stopped inciting the minds of distinguished thinkers in our European tradition. Cicero, of all people, knew that words have a first value when they are taken in isolation, and a second when they are taken with others. Taken alone, they must be carefully chosen, taken with others, they must be carefully placed. Cicero was himself sensitive to positioning -- a term so dear to Cultural Studies focusing on questions of identity these days. Place and displacement are unavoidable in post-structuralist vocabulary designating various aspects of identity and difference. Montaigne, Todorov likes to recall, used to remark to the circle of his acquaintances that he had his own private dictionary, distinct, that is to say, from the dictionary of public use and usage. And Alexander Pope is worth quoting on the same issue of communicative relevance function of discourse characteristics: "I concede that a lexicographer may perhaps know the meaning of a word by itself, but not the meaning of two connected words".

This is as much as saying that what for the classics' Weltanschauung of universal order was a question of difference between words and sentences, for our modern vision of things this has become a difference between words and sentences vs. utterances. A difference evincing 'indirect' meaning vs. 'direct'

[1] Tzvetan Todorov, **Symbolism and Interpretation**, trans. Catherine Porter, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1978.

meaning, i.e. the meaning grafted onto the meaning proper to discourse. At the level of language there is verbal symbolism and indirect meaning. At the level of discourse there is the symbolics of language and direct meaning only, for we never speak other than at this direct and concrete level. All talk of text *in* context now, of the relevance of the text with relation to co-text and con-text that is fundamental in discourse analysis is an indication of the acute sense of identity as SAME *and* OTHER, and of their mutual interdependence. Descriptive studies have replaced the traditional prescriptive methods. Utterances are the units where analysis begins, which were once individual words perceived in something of an ideal state as if descending from the dictionary. Stress on actual usage has triggered off interdisciplinary approaches. There is every sign that language studies have embraced diversity as a more profound note of identity. And this is so very important in literature and conversation, Todorov acknowledges. For literature is even more keenly dependent on rhetoric. Where the classics once laid every emphasis on the sign (theirs being an interest in semantics), we, 'the moderns' stress symbol (ours being an interest in 'symbolics' or semiotics). This could be summed up in the following schema:

the CLASSICS	the MODERNS
words vs. sentences	words & sentences vs. utterances
verbal symbolism	symbolics of language
'indirect' meaning	'direct' meaning
language	discourse
'langue'	'parole'
semantics	semiotics
sign	symbol

And, to praise variety again, Todorov reconsiders the traditional differentiation between rhetoric and hermeneutics, i.e. between the production of discourse and the reception of

discourse. No longer valid, he maintains, this difference has been negotiated and a new attitude has proved the relevance of another stand: hermeneutics is, in fact, producing *and* understanding discourse (19), cf. Gr. to interpret (foreign tongues); to interpret, to put into words, to give utterance. He calls to his aid the authority of Friedrich Ersnt Daniel Schleiermacher, the German theologian and philosopher who founded modern hermeneutics based on the study of Biblical texts:

> "The kinship of rhetoric and hermeneutics consists in the fact that every act of comprehension is the inverse of an act of speech. (....) Understanding and expounding a work is a veritable reproduction or reconstruction of what has already been constructed". (20)

Each theory is then only one measure of truth, bracketing off different other aspects, but never possibly covering the whole area. Difference is inescapable because language itself is plural and complex.

La Conquête de l'Amérique. La question de l'autre (1982)[1] is the → *locus geometricus* of Tzvetan Todorov's sustained debate on identity as SELF or/and OTHER. There is no flying in the face of facts. Todorov's career as a critic amounts to building up a subtle and keen theory of identity and difference. The discerning mind of the convinced structuralist cannot fail to infer it in basic aspects of literary theory. It shows enviable readiness in fashioning out a 'grammar' of its own to put the data of its investigation to the test. It pries into eccentric areas such as the fantastic to see identity in the arms of difference and look into its discrete nature from an admittedly contrastive

[1] Quotations from, and references to, this book are based on the English version, **The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other**, trans. Richard Howard, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1982.

angle. It then labours to advertise the fruit of its investigation on the counter of a coherent poetics, combining the structuralist's with the semiotician's observations. In none of these successful attempts is the anthropocultural bent absent.

In his **Grammar of the Decameron**, for instance, after he has considered the exchange theme from an obvious structuralist perspective and has singled it out as a formalist signal at the level of the narrative, Todorov detects in it a sign of cultural relevance. He theorizes on this by first spotting a mechanism of transgression, and therefore a special kind of exchange which he decides to call "distorted exchange". (183) This occurrence of otherness at the heart of sameness is the breach in which he identifies the object of a few short-stories in the whole collection. He then analyses exchange as give and take, as adulterated interpersonal or communal game, as failing response, or unrewarded generosity, or faulty reciprocity, and comes up with a theoretical conclusion: a sense of legalized inequality of the values exchanged among the various characters in all the one hundred stories told in **The Decameron** seems to emerge from a difference in the tellers' social status. Thus a presumed taker placed somewhere at the top of the social scale will more often than not be encouraged to take what is due him/her, and encouragement to this end assumes the form both of narrative strategies, and of bids effectually made by the other characters, who know that the taker is entitled to take precisely because of his/her superiority in his/her community. Conversely, if allotted a modest place on the social scale, the taker will stay a presumed taker, deprived of the actual right to take. An implicit condemnation of social inequality is sanctioned through the narrators' attitude -- the structural level. At the same time though, Todorov maintains, the breach in the old economic system looms large in the text and something we call free initiative in modern capitalist economy assumes shape in front of our eyes. Here the structuralist critic, like the structuralist anthropologist in **Tristes tropiques**, reads the text of communal

coherence function of a myriad interests. They are interests that keep the community together and motivate its identity in terms of confrontation with another communal identity; they account for moments of violent outburst exactly when, at the border between two distinct identities, something cracks in the economy of identity that produces fear of otherness (either as disorder or as the order of the other); and they make of personal surrender symbolic sacrifice for the good of the collective self. All these aspects of identity are inseparable from as many aspects of difference, and Todorov can see in things literary the relevance of things non-literary and conclude in the manner of the post-structuralists of the 80's and 90's: that the literary is not the only text of interest that can land in front of the critic's eyes, that the legal, political, financial text is equally fascinating and relevant, that the whole 'text' of the society analysed can make rich and rewarding reading. Stephen Greenblatt and his New Historicist colleagues do not tire to collect the most non-literary samples only to put them by the side of literary bits, for a contrastive analysis with a view to detecting the contours of a poetics of culture. This exciting combination of formalism-structuralism with anthropocultural research is more than wonderfully exploited in Todorov's **Conquest of America**.

This book written as a story itself is the relation of so many other stories. A lot of its undeniable charm does come from the flavour of this most elegantly conducted narrative, made up of narratives, a good deal of which is the one continuous narrative that has come down along the generations by way of mouth. In a way, this book is another sincere, even though discreetly voiced homage to **The Arabian Nights**, Todorov's summum of story-telling. In a way, Todorov is engaged in an operation of detecting other possible Scheherazades. The arena is non-Europe again, and the fascination with CULTURAL OTHERNESS is the more pervasive, for the stories he is after this time are stories of real happenings, fantastic as they may sound. Like the Hew Historicists later, Todorov starts from historical documents.

Like them, he knows that fabulation is inescapable, and that, as he tries to disentangle the threads of the narratives he has selected, he will fatally weave his own threads into another pattern. The more so as here he bends over a culture of little if any written documents at all. At one extreme of the European model, in 'Arabia', he had got intoxicated on the perversely subtle fumes of endless story-telling raised to the status of literature *per se* and accurately preserved in the matchless collection that the children of this world, of the Old World in the first place, have been brought up on. At the other extreme, in the New World, Todorov wonders at the wonders of an oral culture which has preserved its dignified identity in texts other than the 'graphies' he had previously endeavoured to decipher.

The one thing that Todorov clearly emphasizes in his analysis of 'Arabianness', as in his investigation of 'Americanness' is that the merely incidental position taken by the sternly proud European -- the assumed central position -- remains a confection, a mental projection at whatever point subject to reconsiderations and frontal challenge. Edward Said[1] has convincingly put forth the case of a European confection circulated under the name of 'Orientalism' -- a "mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles"[2]. Said's basic assumption -- that the Orient was Europe's cultural contestant, one of Europe's most recurring images of the Other -- gives substance to Todorov's demonstration as well. There is no serious reason why the native inhabitant of an after all Europeanly devised New World should be relegated to a marginal position. Nor is there any decent reason why, from a confident status of male superiority, woman should be pushed into the background of public attention. And, to make this ostentatiously clear, and from a position anticipating minority stands in the American academia now, Todorov dedicates his

[1] Edward Said, **Orientalism**, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978.

[2] *Ibid.*, p.1.

book to the memory of a beautiful young Indian wife who, during the war waged by Captain Alonso Lopez de Avila, had been separated by force from her native husband and thrown to the dogs, as she could not be talked into giving herself to another non-native man. This comes from Diego de Landa's **Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan**, 32. Numberless are the sources that the European critic, himself existentially obsessed with the volatile concept of identity, resorts to.

The Conquest of America is erected on four pillars[1]: (1) discovery, (2) conquest, (3) love, and (4) knowledge. To follow then by way of conclusion or moral, or moral conclusion, is a prophecy voiced by Bartolome de Las Casas which is surprisingly close to Alexis de Tocqueville's about America. Both Europeans are stunningly lucid in foreseeing the long-term consequences of European pride used as an aggressive weapon against the New World. Both warn the generations to come that there is natural give and take that preserves the balance of things, and that once an entity has been deprived of any of its signs of identity, there is no avoiding paying the 'debt' back,

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[1] The term 'pillar' came to my mind in the context of meditating on explorations of other lands, more precisely of Arabian territories. It features in the famous **Seven Pillars of Wisdom** (first printed for private circulation in 1926, then published in 1935) by Thomas Edward Lawrence. Known as 'colonel Lawrence', he was one of the First World War British officers sent from Egypt to help the Sherif of Mecca in his revolt against the Turks. Siding with the Arabs, he won their sympathy and the generous appellation of 'Lawrence of Arabia', by way of gratitude. In a way, Lawrence's lived selflessness parallels Todorov's theoretical tolerance, itself doubled by his direct experience of living in Otherness as an exile acclimatized to his own territory of difference assimilated. A mere onomastic coincidence makes me recall the other Lawrence, David Herbert Lawrence, known as 'Lorenzo' in Italy, later an unsatiatied explorer of the America native identity in New Mexico (where he lived, at Taos), and elsewhere in the New World. D. H. Lawrence's **Plumed Serpent** is as fascinating an evocation of native mythology seen uninterruptedly at work in an America that is being 'civilized' by white man.

and paying the 'debtor' out for the 'loan' taken by force. That there is at least emotional providence, if not Providence, that will not let things go astray. That there is coherence in a community's values that makes it what it is, and that attacking those values is attacking the community's identity. This is the basic structuralist principle. But morally, in the face of our right to life and to dignity, there is no excuse for violence. This book written by an exiled European in Europe is a loving, even though sad message that difference should make us dignified and noble, not petty and rapacious, that tolerance is the mother of peace among people, and that variety is richness, provided we do not impoverish ourselves with our own narrow-mindedness. Hence the subtitle, **The Question of the Other**.

It is as if Todorov were, for a minute, going back to some of his earlier books. The 'I' in dialogue with the Other reminds one of the themes of the 'I' and the themes of the 'you' in **Introduction à la littérature fantastique**. The whole minute debate on symbols and symbolization as manifest in cultural rituals or protocols comes as a logical consequence of his **Théories du symbole**, and the role of cultural context vs. text as such refreshes our memory of **Symbolisme et interpretation**. The very first lines of this new book acknowledge the basic 'I' - 'you' rapport as an 'I - 'Other' opposition. "I mean to talk about the way in which the *I* discovers *the other*". (1) This is no simple business, as a quotation from Rimbaud suggests: *"Je suis un autre"*. What at the face of it was no more than a problematics of the exterior and the remote is much more complicated a matter. We can discover the others in ourselves, Todorov admits. And we can understand that we are not a homogeneous substance, that there is something heterogeneous in our own selves, that the SELF is ANOTHER at the same time as, and because, it is itself. And that the others are themselves their own selves, no less motivated to regard themselves as the point of reference from where such notions as *here* and *there* are validated. Moreover, social groups different from us can

themselves be interior, rather than exterior to a society. One can think of theoretically no end of oppositions obtaining from such differentiations, as in men vs. women, the rich vs. the poor, the insane vs. the 'normal', a.s.o. (1) Cultural, moral, or historical reasons bring people together, or, on the contrary, take and keep them apart, function of their respective sense of belonging or not belonging to something grasped as their own, not the others' own. A question of perception, a question of perspective, as he maintained in **Introduction à la littérature fantastique**.

(1) Discovery. It is extremely significant that Todorov's conquest originates in discovery. There is no gratuitousness in the statement. Conquest is, of course, physically preceded by discovery, but it is not the actual discovery that we insist on here. Rather, and this emerges from the whole of Todorov's discovery book (sic), discovery is a deeply human activity, and a deep activity as such. What matters infinitely more is the self-discovery of otherness, and of otherness in one's self, than the external discovery of other people, only too rashly qualified as the others. Even in drawing such demarcation lines we should take more precautions, for there is no such thing as exhaustive categorization. The porous quality of all identity rather, we are let to speculate, makes of this a tantalizing subject. Gr. *ιδιος* one' own, pertaining to oneself; peculiar, separate, distinct (as in Plato's *ιδιον η αλλοι* peculiar and different from others) gave *ιδιωσις* distinction between, from which *ιδιωτεια* private life or business, but also uncouthness, want of education (sic). In the same semantic family, *ιδιωτης* designated a private person, an individual; one in a private station, as opposed to one taking part in public affairs; one with no professional knowledge, or generally unskilled, unpracticed, rude; hence, someone ill-informed, an ignorant; hence, *ιδιωται* one's own countrymen, as opposed to *ξενοι* foreigners. The medical acceptation of the word *idiot* concentrates on the mental deficiency or faulty self-protection that the person called so displays. The common acceptation in terms such as *simpleton* or *fool* also indicates

paucity. On the one hand, paucity of understanding: someone unable to understand is a person devoid of full intellectual capacity (cf. Lat. *intellectus* perception, understanding, sense < *intelligere* to understand < *inter-legere* to choose from among several things, people, items). On the other, because of this incapacity to understand other things, people, items, as well, emptiness (Eng. *fool* < Fr. *fou* < Lat. *follis* a bellows, and, derived from this, a windbag). An idiot is, medically, a person that cannot relate himself/herself to another, as in *ἴδιος* one's own (and self-sufficient) identity. The common denominator is the refusal, whether willed or naturally imposed, to compare one's own with another identity. It is from this deficiency that the relativity of identity is ignored, simply because not understood. It is this mechanism of narrow self-protection that makes the idiot vulnerable, in spite of the acclaimed pretense of perfect self-protection. Blinding oneself to the other may result in xenophobia, where the *ἰδιώται* come to hate the *ξένοι*. It may result in a myriad forms of narrow-minded exclusivism where the only reassuring position is that the 'I' be placed in the middle of things, that it become the centre of things, the hub of the universe. Such absolutism -- by refusal to sense the relativism of perspectives -- assumes violent forms in inter-personal and inter-communal clashes, none ever exempt from the so deeply natural agency and exercise of power. As the etymologies above suggest, identity can become an arm of attack, if falsely used. It become a pain in the neck, if overestimated. What can be intensely wrong with it is the frontal rejection of alterity, in effect, just a confirmation of uncouth awkwardness. No identity is tolerant and elegant, unless tested on the wet-stone of alterity. Like ill manners, staying too long at home becomes second nature and an impossible disease to cure. And who can guarantee us that we are alone in this world, that there is no alternative to our coherent sameness?

In **The Conquest of America** Todorov attempts to provide the story of the most astonishing encounter of our history. He

confesses that he has had a problem with the mode of expression most adequate for his enterprise, and concludes that his option for myth, rather than for logical relation has had the moral of the story in mind, more than the mere narration of facts. The differentiation dear at the time of Socrates between μῦθος and λόγος evinced the quality of myth being a story delivered by word of mouth, and therefore including advice, commands, orders, or promises. Between the two, the former is closer to Saussure's 'langue', as it were, the latter to 'parole'. The former is detached and neutral, the latter is involved. The former aspires to the condition of objective history, the latter is human story/ies of history narrated from a personal perspective (which can be individual or collective). Story-telling with the moral conveyed is more prone to distinguish difference between mere facts and the dress they are covered in when expressed in words. It is in this sense of covering facts in words that Todorov embarks upon a dis-covery: as words cover things in their dress, so we cover ourselves in the dress of clothes, gestures, rituals. We get so used to this our dress that we pay less and less, at times no heed at all to what lies behind it. It is only by contrast with other displays of dress that we become aware again of there lying something underneath it. Something that needs uncovering.

Like Lévi-Strauss, Todorov values the experience of going to the other end of the world as total experience. (46)[1] Like the structural anthropologist, the cultural structuralist has superseded the position of certainty provided by rationalistic monism (55), and has instead adopted something of a Socratic dialectics, i.e. advancing one alternative, denying it by another, and mitigating the two in a third, which is a kind of difference digested into composite identity. Like the one-time director of the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale of the College de France, the researcher

[1] Quotations from, and references to Lévi-Strauss's book are based on the Romanian version, **Tropice triste**, trans. Eugen Schileriu & Irina Pîslaru-Lukacsik, Editura Ştiinţifică, Bucureşti, 1968.

of the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques knows that travelling in space is also travelling in social hierarchy, and in culture. But, most importantly, Lévi-Strauss knows that there is by no means as much difference between the 'primitives' of Brazil or Africa and the 'modern people' of technologically advanced Europe and America as there seems to be at first sight. Which makes the use of inverted commas necessary, not superfluous. That, if we uncover the communal body in mourning and sufferance, the way we uncover merely a physical body, we shall see basically the same types of rituals in burying the dead, and securing a separation between their world and ours, and in reinforcing the difference through reiterated protocols that make of this difference identity preserved. Likewise, Todorov knows that there are more similarities between the 15-th-century Indian woman's set of values and his own in the late 20-th century in the centre of modern civilization which Western Europe is. In this interplay of IDENTITY and DIFFERENCE Todorov discovers the nexus of his thesis. This his book will be a story about the Other, an "exemplary history". (2) At the cross-roads of real history and renderings of real facts, Todorov makes an honest halt, asking himself to what extent what he is going to narrate is *the* real thing. There are multiple hindrances to a decent path to truth, not least of which is the absence of native texts (most of the local populations not having any writing at all). To write a story of the history of the conquest by resorting only to the Spanish texts produced in the process and after is as risky a matter as it is partial. What he has not been able to achieve in terms of available material, Todorov will try to supplement and complement with an attitude of moral righteousness. He will write a story about the Other.

The discovery and conquest of America "heralds and establishes our present identity" (5): our genealogy begins with Columbus, whose descendants all of us are. The 1492 event was the discovery of the totality of which men (and *some* women *and* in Europe) had been only one part. As the moralist's attracts

him by far more than the historian's attitude, Todorov chooses to follow the *differentia* incumbent upon the teller of an exemplary history (cf. Gr. ἱστορία a learning by inquiry, inquiry, the knowledge thus obtained, information; an account of one's inquiries, a narrative, a history). The *differentia* he takes from the different, i.e. tropological or ethical meaning derived from Biblical exegesis. As in his investigation of allegory and symbol, here Todorov focuses on the indirect line of tropic discourse or figuration. The text of historical happenings will always un-cover the Text of the world and of life (what he had previously called 'cosmograhpy' and 'biography') in its endless cultural difference. Difference from one end to the other of the world, in search of human identity had been Lévi-Strauss's object of inquiry. More often than not, the discovery of human values was associated with symbolic scenes of suffering. The text then revealed a sad tropical Text -- **Tristes tropiques**. Likewise, Todorov's exemplary history is 'tropical' and sad. This story of cruel history is a relation of the greatest genocide in the existence of the human race.

There must have been three clear-cut motives behind Columbus's historic adventure, Todorov opines. To start with, there was the mere desire to get rich, not unfamiliar among navigators at a time of increasing numbers of stupendous voyages. Then, Columbus's pride had certainly been tickled by the prospect of meeting the Great Khan or Emperor of China described by Marco Polo. This must have developed in him a sense of special discovery: being the reiterator of an extremely exotic experience, this time with considerably more practical means and more solid prestige was no little thing. Interestingly, Genoa, his native city, had refused to assist him. Enjoying moral encouragement and material support from Isabel of Castile instead, Cristoforo Colombo, citizen of the Genoese Republic, became another person, a Spanish subject bearing the name of

Cristobal Colon. His was to be a mission of unique political relevance. If only he had known that he was going to discover yet more unknown, and more exotic places, that his discovery was to broaden the frontiers of the known world both quantitatively and qualitatively. The visitor to Seville these days may want to read in the city cathedral the epitaph consecrating this epoch-making event. The inscription bears witness to the discovery of something unknown before, with emphasis on the gift given to the then known world, metonymically represented by the haughty Spanish kingdom of Castile and Leon:

> "A Castilla y a Leon
> Nuevo mundo dio Colón".

But Columbus's mission was even more symbolically matchless. It little mattered, after all, that an Italian citizen was getting support from the Spanish monarchs. For all the ethnic and political differences between him and his royal protectors, the identity of religion was meant to be the passport to success. Indeed, before the emergence and consolidation of the European nation states, religion served as the main binding force and guarantee of identity on the whole continent. Symbolic violence these days is imbued with religious allegiance and confessional differences. Not one single hotbed of bellicose destruction in 'civilized' Europe is exempt from such horrors. Not Northern Ireland, not Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and not any of the ex-Soviet republics 'disciplined' by Russian military forces. A sense of Christian identity beyond national borders acts as a diffuse catalyst among the various European nations aware of there being something religiously different about being Asian. Back in the 15-th century, Columbus was engaged in a divine mission, that of proving the universal victory of Christianity. Like the one-time crusaders, he was setting off on a spiritual

mission to liberate Jerusalem, and to restore the Holy See to the Holy Church. (11) Thus, to sum up, Columbus was embarking upon a voyage, and upon the narrative of his voyage. The latter had found its point of departure in another travel narrative, Marco Polo's. Fascinated, like mythical Ulysses, with the idea of telling unheard-of stories, Columbus had assumed the responsibility of continuing a story whose first chapters had been committed to paper by his fellow countryman. And so starts Columbus's narrative. And so the critic with the knowledge of a 'grammar' of narrative pursues the teller's steps across and into the territory of fabulation. For there is no escaping fabulation.

Fabulation is done in words so skillfully woven into persuasive fabric as to pass for undeniable true-to-lifeness. As the teller interprets his raw material into his story, so the reader will, in principle interpret it out. Todorov decides to decode Columbus's story by considering the latter's own encoding first. The process suggested retraces Jakobson's schema:

CONTEXT

MESSAGE

ADDRESSER ..... ADDRESSEE

CONTACT

CODE

Once he has advanced suggestions for a consistent project in Columbus's enterprise, Todorov proceeds to identify the reasons articulating Columbus's world and Columbus's discovery, and thus pries into 'cosmography' and 'biography. As the 15-th-century European world is written into its identity with the letters of a complex cultural alphabet, so the Spanish-adopted

Italian navigator's discovery -- part of an adventurous life -- is written into what it is with the letters of Christian Latin culture life-style in which a Curtius would have read Europeanness.

Todorov's *démarche* foreshadows typical New Historicist curiosity and method, with the literary embracing and being embraced by the para-, and the non-literary. In an interview, Stephen Greenblatt[1] confesses how his whole intellectual cast of mind was radically altered from a formalist analyst's to a cultural critic's attitude by the exceedingly eventful life of Sir Walter Ralegh, whose one fragmentary text he had intended to approach. Greenblatt had started with a passage that he had found quite similar to T.S.Eliot's **The Waste Land**, but, more and more attracted by the venturesome quality of an intricate life ambushed by utmost dangers at every point and menaced by extinction ordered by royal authority, he ended up searching documents in archives to complete the image of a fascinating personality engaged in such an elaborate life scheme. He had started his investigation from a marginal text, from a fragment of a marginal text written by someone for whom literature was just a collateral occupation. So it seemed to him a natural thing that he should want to dislocate the cultural object and look at it from a number of directions that had usually been regarded marginal in relation to the strictly literary type of discourse. He rummaged for varied documentary sources and eventually analysed the non-literary and the literary samples applying the same method (basically that of treating them as texts using tropological language). At the end of the process, Greenblatt had a feeling that he was discovering something himself -- he was promoting a critical stand advocating a poetics of culture. He was, in his own words, taking to pieces 'central' texts in order to see in what directions these can be dismembered and

[1] See Mihaela Irimia, **Noul istorism: Raportul dintre centru şi margine**, România literară, no. 26, Anul XXVII, pp.20/21.

dislocated, so as to stand in clearer dialogue with the 'marginal' non-literary texts. He realized that as the protons clash with the epiprotons and give a dynamic image changing the very relationship holding between the centre and the margin of the atom, so those texts together intersected themselves at angles of incidence and coincidence which brought out aspects otherwise ignored. Indeed, when one goes on a visiting tour of the Tower of London, one cannot help lingering over the pages of Ralegh's **History of the World** which he had commenced during his imprisonment. One cannot help reading a few paragraphs from James I's **Counterblaste to Tobacco**. The king had made up his mind to use this 'counterblaste' as a moral weapon by means of combating the disgusting Indian herb brought to the English court and introduced by Sir Walter "in the silly name of Novelty". And one cannot help admiring Ralegh's plans to study plants and herbs and make medical cordials and other potions from the exotic stuff he had brought over all the way from the New World. In Greenblatt's fascination with Ralegh's adventurous personality we read Todorov's own wonder at Columbus's complex individual and public identity. Both stories reveal an ample dialogue between two types of culture. The reading they invite us to is the reading of CULTURAL IDENTITY through OTHERNESS.

It is only natural then that Todorov should look at Columbus as an interpreter. The articulations of Columbus's 'cosmography' and 'biography' are natural, human, and divine, according to Todorov. Under the first heading he places the abundance of fresh water which must have been a source of powerful attraction for a navigator leaving behind a reputedly arid land, in search of a land of promise. In the human paradigm, Todorov inserts Columbus's bewitchment with the opinions of other men. The voyage is a prolegomenon to the genuine 'logoi' uttered by others that he will not tire to listen to, therefore interpret. As

many stories as there are individual identities. But the divine reason behind Columbus's undertaking is the really decisive one: he sets out to confirm the authority of the sacred books.

Columbus is thus at once navigator and finalist - two identities in one. On the one hand, he seeks the truth that will be allowed him by circumstances and that he will remain a novice to, if the voyage fails. At this level, Columbus, we shall say, is a mere man in history unaware of what awaits him, part of a text that he is written into and which we shall ourselves call 'biography'. On the other, he seeks endorsement for what he knows in advance. He needs confirmation for his *a priori* knowledge (cf. Lat. *confirmare* to strengthen < *com-* thoroughly + *firmus* strong). This will make him even stronger in his certainty as a white Christian European man exploring something different. For in that difference, Columbus believes, as does his whole culture, there is the sameness of God's project, and of His intentions become reality. It could not possibly be otherwise, since the Catholic is an ecumenical church with a universal dogma (cf. Gr. *καθολικός* complete, undivided; universal < *καθόλου* on the whole, in general < *κατα*, *καθα* thoroughly + *ὅλος* whole, entire, complete; utter). Being Catholic is being safeguarded against uncertainty. Being Catholic is knowing how things stand because they have been pre-written in the Book of Divine Providence. As they have been seen in advance (Lat. *pro-videre*), so they have been inscribed in advance, and Columbus, the faithful interpreter of the Catholic Text of the world, will not possibly go amiss. Columbus's firmness has been fore-seen and fore-written. It remains for him to perform the hermeneutic business of disentangling the threads of the Text, and of weaving the text of his voyage on the same pattern. Identity is firm if seconded by confidence. Christ, let us speculate with Kermode, is *αρχεγών* and *τελειοτής* at once, i.e.

author and finisher[1], he has written in this world the paradigmatic Text of God the Father's teachings, and has enacted it in His own life-story. In Christ the Text meets the text of life, 'cosmography' meets 'biography', or, in Kermode's words, allegorical geography meets supplement or excess. As a Christian European explorer, Columbus is one of the many strong believers in the authority of the Text, therefore a faithful interpreter, too. The Text is, of course, revealed, so there is no contesting the peremptory force of the truth conveyed, the Truth.

Following th argumentation that we have speculated on above, Todorov discerns two kinds of hermeneutic discovery: interpretation based on "prescience" and authority (corresponding to the medieval Weltanschauung) (23), and intransitive discovery, or else the mere pleasure of discovering otherness (corresponding to the modern Weltanschauung). Again, Columbus is two people in one: on one side, he sticks to the Text, on the other, he ventures out to enjoy reading the text with his own eyes. As an insatiate observer of things and/as signs, he is a semiotician *avant la lettre*. Columbus reads natural and human signs. In the former category, he is quite conversant with the pragmatic signs that navigation bases its business on. When they confirm his expectations, i.e. satisfy his beliefs and hopes, Columbus turns a firm finalist. But he also gratuitously admires the signs of the world displayed to his eyes and takes intransitive delight in their otherness. In the category of human signs Columbus is engaged in an exemplary struggle with language which deserves minute attention.

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[1] The two terms are used by Kermode to comment on the appellation given to Jesus in **Hebrews**, xii, 2, and on the difference between myth or "world-plot", and "the plot of time" or "plot of excess", cf. Frank Kermode, 'The Bible: Story and Plot', in **An Appetite for Poetry**: Essays in Literary Interpretation, Collins, London, 1989, pp.208-22.

In the business of relating things to words, by means of designating the things of this world as carriers of meaning, Columbus envisages a complication. The Lacanian interpretation of Fr. *pli* (< Lat. *plica* fold) may be of help at this point. If the text is texture, so a multitude of folds, then such things become possible as *replicare* to fold back, to answer to, to reply < *res-* back + *plicare* to fold; *supplicare* to supplicate < *sub-* under + *plicare*; *applicare* to join to, to apply < *ad-* to + *plicare*; *complicare* to complicate < *com-* together + *plicare*; *implicare* to involve, to imply < *in-* in + *plicare*; *explicare* to unfold, to explain < *ex-* out + *plicare*. The ensuing operations can be done through language: attacking, clashing, warring; begging, beseeching, wooing; coming to terms; confusing, entangling, embroiling; hiding things and concealing facts; uncovering things hidden to the eye, breaking the news, revealing the meaning. The complication Columbus faces is indeed semiotic. If his schema is something like

words ---------- things

meaning

his problem is to what extent is the intermediary position that meaning occupies in his mental schema the result of mere equidistance between words and things, or, rather than observing symmetry, the result of an asymmetrical exercise of force. Columbus will soon learn the Foucauldian thesis that power is fundamental in human communication. For the time being, as an unflinching Catholic invested with trust and confidence by the Spanish royalty, in the name of Christianity, Columbus is

tempted to see in words signiferous signs[1], i.e. meaning-bearing signs. Hence the need he feels to interpret words, i.e. to unfold the bundle in which they have kept meaning away from human eyes. In his hermeneutic adventure, Columbus means, in the last instance, to unfold the ultimate *pli*, so as to get the confirmation of the things he knew *a priori* anyway. He only needs to live to see his great expectations fulfilled. Like Dante in the **Paradiso**, he will then unfold the last petal concealing the Beatrice of his exemplary journey. The multi-petalled flower in the middle of which meaning lies nicely enveloped is the semiotic flower in Umberto Eco's **The Name of the Rose** (1980). For Columbus, this is America, a compact of the exemplary lady and the flawless evergreen flower. The beloved lady as an unexplored America is a metaphor of high currency in English Metaphysical poetry. A particular poem by Andrew Marvell, 'Bermudas', relates something of an English Columbiad. The pattern is quite similar to Columbus's undertaking: after landing on the shore of the newly discovered virgin island, the explorers appropriate the place in the name of their belief and equip the name thus given with a local religious habitation (cf. Lat. *religio, -onis* < *religare* < *res-* back + *ligare* to bind). Identity is now confirmed:

"Where the remote Bermudas ride
In the ocean's bosom unespied,
From a small boat, that rowed along,
The listening winds received this song.
'What should we do but sing his praise
That led us through the watery maze,
Unto an isle so long unknown,

[1] The term "signiferous" is used at length by Peter Caws in his brilliant study on Structuralism, and, by way of consequence, Semiotics entitled **Structuralism: the Art of the Intelligible**, Humanities Press International, Inc., Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1988.

And yet far kinder than our own?
Where he the huge sea-monster wracks,
That lift the deep upon their backs.
He lands on us a grassy stage,
Safe from the storms' and prelates' rage.
He gave us this eternal spring,
Which here enamels everything;
And sends the fouls to us in care,
On daily visit through the air.
.....
He cast (of which we rather boast)
The Gospel's pearl upon our coast,
And in these rocks for us did frame
A temple, where to sound his Name".

(ll.1-16, 29-32)

Columbus is extremely good at comparing and contrasting names. Especially dense though is the sieve of his mind when it comes to proper names. In these he sees names more closely related to natural indices, as if the human overlapped the natural signs. As a good Catholic, Columbus can only share with Cratylus the indomitable belief in the accord between names and things. It may be relevant to notice that practising Catholics find Deconstruction downright offensive because of its insistence on language as mere play, something extending to 'the human sciences', in Derrida's view[1]. That proper names are clearly revealed names Columbus can conclude judging his own case. Not in vain was he called, or rather baptized Cristoforo < Lat. *'Christum ferens'* < Gr. *Χριστοφορός* < *Χριστός* < *χρίνειν* to anoint, trans. of Hebrew *mashiach* anointed + *φορός* carrier

[1] See n.6.

<φέρειν to carry. Christophorus is the carrier of Christ, the first to bear Christ to the New World. His last name is equally signiferous: Colon in Spanish evokes his quality as "repopulator" (28) of the City of Heaven, as he says in so many words in his journal. He had been meant to be the colonizer of the New World, which he would re-populate, in the sense that the newly saved souls would forsake their old identity, one rather of 'dead souls', as in Gogol, and become 'civilized' under the European colonists' rule (cf. Lat. *colonia* < *colonus* farmer). Cristobal Colon = the evangelizing colonizer. Columbus is the religious and the political colonizer, the metaphysical and physical 'repopulator'. His exaggerated care for his signiferous name results in a complicated signature, too. The written name, the sign(ature) should com-plicate and im-plicate in its own curving lines, dots and accents the divine content covered in its sonorous clothes. He spends considerable amounts of time to make his autograph as elaborate as possible. Like the Text itself, this bit of the text of life, of his own life (Gr. αὐτός self + γράφειν to write) is highly encoded. To this day, Todorov must admit, Columbus's autograph has not yet been completely decoded. Moreover, Columbus makes a point of imposing through written recommendation that after his death his son Don Diego, or whoever should inherit his name, use his own signature, rather than their own and draw with the minutest care the mazy lines and mysterious commas and dots that he has devised. Of course, behind this com-plicated text is im-plicated the divine nature of the Text. As a carrier of Christ to the other half of the world, Columbus has to make sure that the Christian identity be firmly sealed up. The words of his language are carriers of signs, so much more signiferous will the names of this New World be.

Columbus starts a campaign of name-giving, and in the ceremony of renaming the places discovered he possesses

himself of the old identity thus made new. Name-giving as appropriation is a recurrent New Historicist thesis. Greenblatt stops to consider in some detail the relevance of Columbus's unfolding of the Spanish flag on the coast of the New World. In the legal text thus pronounced, says Greenblatt, the Christ-Carrier gives new names, therefore a new identity to the territories dis-covered. They had always been there, only new to them, to paraphrase Prospero. Thus starts a myth-making process known as 'la gran vitoria'[1]. Naming is part of an ampler linguistic process. Between Columbus and the New World there lies an intricate semiotic net in which the linguistic threads are the warp of the text(ure). Todorov finds him in a position of stern indifference to other languages, because "ideological certainties can always overcome individual contingencies". (29) This attitude results in (a) acknowledging another language, but refusing to believe it as different, and (b) acknowledging it as different, but refusing to admit it as a language. Todorov provides the fascinating example of the word 'cannibal', in effect a corruption in Spanish of Caribes (a term used to designate the man-eating inhabitants of the Caribbean islands) to Canibales (a term invented to designate the people of the Khan). Convinced that he has landed in the Great Khan's country, Columbus does not hear the word Cariba, he hears the word Caniba. He hears what he wants to hear, and this disciplining of sensory experience so as to accord with a system of preconceived beliefs serves Todorov in his demonstration of the authoritarianism and condescension that accompany Columbus's hermeneutic investigation of the New World. His reading of the Text of the (New) World is not alien from his position of power. Post-Structuralist Criticism makes a point of associating language with power in a Nietzschean and

[1] See Stephen Greenblatt, **Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World**, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 55 & ff.

Foucauldian perspective. Todorov's conclusion that "in Columbus's hermeneutics human beings have no particular place" (33) betrays a similar critical position.

Thus, Todorov proceeds, Columbus sees the Indians as part of the landscape. Physically naked, they appear to him also culturally naked. By extension, they seem to be deprived of language and of religion and law. If we think of how intensely aware of clothes the whole Renaissance period was, and of how important clothes were in such a strictly hierarchic Catholic society as the Spanish society of the time, we will see Todorov's point. The underlying idea of the New World being "a blank page awaiting the Spanish and Christian inscription" (35) motivates Columbus's actions in Todorov's terms which are those of the post-structuralist *avant la lettre* again. Metaphors of inscription on the body (as the human body, the body politic, the body of the world) give identity to some of the post-structuralist vocabulary dealing with language and/as power. What the English 18-th century called 'the dress of words', i.e. the clothing put on things as linguistic cover, and the dress(ing) of words in the 'bill of fare to the feast' (as Fielding calls his introduction to **Tom Jones** -- an introduction to fiction, or to literature, for that matter) here functions as rhetoric aiming at manipulating views. If the Text of the Word has been prescribed, i.e. written beforehand, it has also been prescribed, i.e. it indicates from a position of authority what course of action is to be followed. As such, Columbus sees the Indians as equal and identical when he wants to assimilate them, i.e. to make the other same, on the assumption of his superiority, or, when he perceives a standing difference between his own race and theirs, he perceives them as inferior. Perfectly motivated in his own axiological system, Columbus, we could speculate, is caught in the limits of his own structuralist position: things do make sense when and only if they conform to our beliefs; when they fail to,

or run counter our set of images of the world, they create discomfort, anxiety, pain, and can result in violent opposition or eventually destruction -- whose aim is the annihilation of the other. Things are intelligible to us because we make them into neatly organized items that present themselves as systematic arrangements. The least flaw in the pattern and the most insignificant breach in the order desired and defended can be disastrous[1]. Columbus's play with difference is resolved, we could say, via positiva, by otherness being homologated to sameness, or via negativa, by otherness being liquidated.

> "What is denied is the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of oneself. These two elementary figures of the experience of alterity are both grounded in egocentrism, in the identification of our own values with values, of our I with the universe in the conviction that the world is one". (42-43) (underlinings mine)

From this failure to relate oneself to the other without marring or offending the other's identity rises asymmetry. Todorov detects it in what the Spaniards do in the newly

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[1] Peter Caws's book mentioned above (see n.66) dwells on this at large, on the basic theoretical assumption that Structuralism is a philosophical view to which the reality of objects of the human or social sciences is relational, rather than substantial. Linguistics, psychology, anthropology, mythology, sociology, economics, political science, literary, historical or philosophical studies -- all social sicences -- imply human intention. Intention is an element of significance. The structures dealt with by the human or social sciences are signiferous, i.e. meaning-bearing and necessitate interpretation. Through this process intelligibility is lent to the world by grasping apparently unrelated features of individual or collective experience, which thus appear as congruent. Structuralism is, for Caws, the 'art of the intelligible'.

discovered land. They advocate their mission to give religion, while they take the gold of the local populations. In **Marvelous Possessions**[1] Greenblatt distinguishes between the natives' and the conquerors' contribution in the conquest, in terms of the former giving the latter food, shelter and other such necessities for survival, and the latter giving the former trifles as insignia of their civilization in exchange. Asymmetry is a recurrent notion in Post-Structuralist Criticism. Feminist and Gender Studies, Race and Deconstructive approaches constantly refer to it and relate it to the concept of power. In Todorov's book 1492 is explained as the consequence of the deep asymmetry that had worked its way in the Spanish identity: after the repudiation of its "interior Other", i.e. the triumph over the Moors in the battle of Granada, and after forcing the Jews out of the country, Spain was now discovering its "exterior Other" (50) in America, treating it with the same disrespect. No wonder that, like the whole of the Spanish nation that had supported him, and like all the European nations that were to 'civilize' the 'primitives' in the modern age of 'progress', Columbus suffered from this miopia of asymmetric evaluation of the human race:

> "How can Columbus be associated with these two apparently contradictory myths, one whereby the Other is a 'noble savage' (when perceived at a distance), and one whereby he is a 'dirty dog', a potential slave? It is because both rest on a common basis, which is the failure to recognize the Indians, and the refusal to admit them as a subject having the same rights as oneself, but different. Columbus has discovered America, but not the Americans". (49) (underlinings mine)

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[1] See n.68.

In **Tristes tropiques** Oviedo is quoted on the symbolic mutual killing of whites and Indians by either of the opposite parties in the island of Puerto Rico. The whites invoked the social sciences in performing the massacres of what they considered 'animals'. The Indians resorted to the natural sciences instead, and enacted ritualistic sacrifices of the 'gods'. The asymmetry, Lévi-Strauss indirectly suggests, worked in favour of the 'primitives'.

(2) Conquest. The process was one of semiotic manoeuvring, Todorov lets one sense. We have only the Spanish texts as reminders of what happened. But even so, what matters is not the written material that has come down to us as the perspective from which the action and circumstances in which they were produced. The knowledge of truth, we are explained, is less important than the knowledge of verisimilitude. The production of statements is less strong than their reception. The author's text is no less significant when it lies, if the text is 'receivable'. Then the notion of truth vs. falsehood becomes irrelevant. If something that flies in the face of factual truth is embraced as true simply because it fits in the context of inherited beliefs, it follows that the pressure of such communally shared values is not perceived as a load but as a reassuring factor in the identity process. *Se non è vero, è ben trovato* goes the Italian proverb. The same applies in the reverse situation, when a truth is considered a lie because it does not accord with the set of received ideas. By the side of the logical, the emotional element is indispensable in human communication.

Most of the Indian inhabitants did not have much or any writing at all. That made a fundamental difference. The Mayas had rudiments of phonetic writing, the Aztecs used pictograms, the Incas were the most unfamiliar with writing. The invention of writing, says Lévi-Strauss in **Tristes tropiques**, was a revolution in the history of the race, whose next step was the

raising of fortresses and organization of empires. Writing was for longer periods of time than we can imagine a means to use and abuse people rather than to give them pleasure. By stocking memory, it changed the race's concept of time. Past, present, and future became relevant and could be used in conquest, domination and suppression. One cannot help recalling the rewriting of history in Orwell's **1984**. Communication with other generations also became possible. When, at the beginning of **Shakespearean Negotiations**, Greenblatt confesses that he wanted to talk with the dead, he sings the hymns to the ingenious human enterprise called writing, a business, after all, of otherness used as a mark of identity. In his expeditions, Lévi-Strauss remarked the reserve with which some of the native populations accepted even to look at the written texts used by the 'civilized' whites. The reason for such an attitude was moral: they saw in those strange signs on paper nothing like 'real things'. They looked rather like nondescript and literally undescribable things. They were certainly perfidious, because they could easily be turned into arms which the conquerors handled to attack the natives. The latter's association of writing with perfidiousness occurs in Greenblatt's book on the conquest of America, as it does in Todorov's.

When the Spanish conquistadors removed from holy places the native images (the idols) and replaced them with theirs, the religious conquest began. This was of colossal importance in the change of identity forced upon the natives. The Indians were convinced that the gods had fallen silent and lost control of communication. (61) The natives spent a lot of time interpreting messages, as part of their cyclical divinations, which, by common belief, were supposed to come true. In a brief and persuasive formula, only what has been Word can become Act. This accounts for why the possessors of prophecies were the favourites of the gods and the masters of interpretation were the

masters of the community. Reverence for the wisemen, for the bard and the seer of the tribe in European cultures, such as the ancient Greek, is not different from this praise. In the absence of a system of abstract notation, actual speech was very important. Of special force was the speech of the ancients preserved in the community through oral tradition. To this day, in places like New Mexico the story-teller is a central figure in the native folklore of Indian pueblos. The old grandmother on whose shoulders, neck, arms, lap endless numbers of grandchildren and great and great grandchildren clamber is a common presence. She is portrayed in an act of endless story-telling that secures the continuity of the tribe and carries the wisdom required for the right relation with the gods.

As Todorov notices, the Spanish pattern of human communication was based on a man - man relationship. The Indian pattern instead was rooted in a man - world relationship. Lévi-Strauss insists on some initiation rituals performed in symbolic isolation from the human community. After prolonged self-imposed seclusion in the dangerous wood, the young man that has fortified himself comes home victorious. He has confirmed his relation with the cosmos away from communal protection, so he can now face otherness. Both the Spanish and the native Indian societies analysed in cultural dialogue by Todorov had an acute sense of hierarchy. If the king, who was not supposed to appear in public, unless on very special occasions, was incidentally seen by a subject, the latter was instantly killed. The ritual interdiction of seeing the assumedly divine monarch's face operated in a number of cultures centuries ago, as in the Mongol Khans' or the Abyssinian dynasties'. Coleridge's mention of the Khan Kubla and of the Abyssinian maid in connection with the miraculous power of music-poetry does in fact refer the whole text to such old beliefs. The image of the romantic poet in a frenzy at the end of the poem is thus

only a reinforcement of the status of utter difference in which the chosen are kept from the community by the very community itself. For the native Indians with little or no writing the past had to be preserved at any cost. It thus had precedence over the present and was the basis to predict the future. The natives' notion of time flow was next to nil. They spent huge amounts of time expecting their gods.

A fascinating explanation is offered us with regard to why the natives were labelled as barbarians by the civilized conquistadors precisely because of not having systematic writing. The word barbarian was used by the ancient Greeks to designate someone not Greek, a foreigner, someone that is of another ethnic identity. This though served as a basis for wider associations with primitivism, ignorance and roughness. The use of the syntagm *ἀμαθὴς καὶ βάρβαρος* ignorant and foreign, in Aristophanes, shows the strength, cruel as it may be, of intolerance in the face of difference. The word *neamț* in Romanian, according to its Slav etymology, initially meant 'unhearing' in the sense of deaf, the assumption being that someone speaking a different language than yours cannot hear you, therefore cannot communicate. Phrases like the English 'to fall on deaf ears' convey the same idea. As people that keep being out of sight can go out of mind, so people that cannot hear one another can be, become or remain aliens to one another. Utter alienation, that is alienation from their divine instance made the Indians easy to conquer, Todorov seems to suggest. That this was so can be seen in the effects the conquest had on the three ethnic groups, the Mayas, the Aztecs, and the Incas. Todorov establishes an extremely fine connection between their respective degrees of abstraction and the collapse of their states. Thus, the Mayas, who did have some writing, even though in primitive form, did not consider the Spaniards gods and saw in them strangers and powerful ones. The Aztecs, users

of pictograms, which are more figural or true-to-life images, initially took the Spanish conquerors for gods. The Incas, who had no writing at all, strongly believed the conquistadors to be the long expected gods. These various cultural images of the Other are an indication of cultural relativity, so topical in Post-Structuralism nowadays and so intensely articulated in political discourse especially in countries that have identified themselves as multicultural societies. A schema could be drawn setting in contrast the Spanish and the Indian pattern analysed:

the Spanish pattern	the Indian pattern
capacity to improvise	art of ritual discourse
mobility	fixity
syntagm	paradigm
context	code
the present	the past
'in vivo'	'in vitro'
'parole'	'langue'

Even though pathetic, Todorov's assumption that the sincerity of the Indians -- apparently reported unable to tell lies -- was exploited by the Spanish conquerors may not contradict the moral colouring of identity, as we have seen above. The commonly spread belief that what 'we' do is good, what 'they' do is bad explains intolerance from bland disregard to phyisical liquidation. Eugeny finds its sap in the same belief that 'we' are the best (cf. Gr. *εὐγένεια* nobility of birth, high descent < *εὐγενής* well-born, of noble race, of high descent, Lat. *generosus*).

Two different Weltanschauungs that had initially found themselves in dialogue eventually developed a relation of clashing contrast. The Spaniards were efficient. Technically well-equipped, in possession of an abstract system of communication defying space and time difference, and

psychologically robust owing to a very flexible notion of morality (sic), they waged a war of sure extermination of the enemy. The Indians just could not come to terms with the idea of complete war. Their protocols required that war be put an end to with the symbolic truce of the defeated giving to the vanquishers their due. Theirs was a morally constructed notion of war and peace. The Spaniards' had proved a moral-free notion. This has not been without consequences, Todorov warns us. White man has been efficient in imposing his cultural pattern living on the illusion that communication is strictly interhuman. He has won in one respect, but lost in another. Communication is not only interhuman contact, but coherent and constant contact with the world. The idea that man can live disjoined from the cosmos is as costly as it can be painful. There is no living outside the surrounding other, function of which we determine our identity. When Lévi-Strauss describes the intermingling of culture and nature in the American big city he envisages an open-air exhibition on a huge scale, like everything American, conceived as a means of more efficient communication with the universe in the midst of man-made artifice. The Indians that have survived the atrocious genocide are still a species that was once in full accord with the Universe, keeping a fecund relation with the signs of freedom. And when Mircea Eliade invites our attention to the process of alienation that modern man has undergone through successive laicization, he subtly works the treadle of religion as cosmic link (cf. Lat. *religare*). To him modern man has stopped being *homo religiosus*, i.e. literally man in uninterrupted connection with the universe, comforting himself in times of panic or suffering with ideas of harmony and love, governing principles in the universe. With the loss of mystic communication man may have become more pragmatically successful, but he has won nothing in terms of confidence and solace. Columbus, we are offered the chance to ponder, may have seen his dreams of prosperity and power

come true. He did not know how severely he, as a human being, had deprived himself of humanity. How, in other words, he had attacked his own identity, convinced that he was making it more solid.

A cursory note on Cortés, the first Spanish conquistador to have a political and even historical consciousness of his actions, will complete the image of the conquest. While Columbus knocks down the Indian idols, Cortés preserves them as 'curiosities'. Todorov does not miss the chance to remark that the 15-th century witnesses the first 'museums' in the history of the race. The popes had initiated the fashion of collecting 'strange' cultures in the guise of items sent over by their faithful missionaries. There is a subtle ironic note in Todorov's reference to the financial profit and symbolic moral power gained through cultural possession that can at times turn into theft (as is the case of the Elgin marbles, among the many treasures taken as self-given 'gifts' and never given back by big powers elsewhere). Grave and interesting is the speculation we are invited to make on the museum as a place of cultural difference brought to the common denominator of human identity. Like the book, the museum is a repository of variety whose coherence becomes observable to the eye able to read the diffuse text underneath the one apparent. In 1492 a fundamental book was written in the Old World. It was the first grammar of a modern European language, the Spanish grammar by Antonio de Nebrija. Author of a 'grammar' of literature, Todorov could not possibly have missed the occasion to see the symbolic value of the basic statement in that regulator of language and therefore of communication among people: "Language has always been the companion of empire". (123) A statement not unlike Lévi-Strauss's, for whom writing features as the preface to institutionalized domination.

(3) Love. An idea of Freudian love - hate relationship seems to bring together the explanation Todorov gives to the process of understanding that ensues from discovery and conquest. As one aspect of asymmetry between the Indians and the Spaniards engaged in this intercultural dialogue Todorov signals Moctezuma's reticence and obstinacy to encounter the Other in contrast with the site that the Spanish conquerors have reserved in their mentality for the Other. The Indians are ready to act, the Spaniards are ready to react. A dreadful concatenation of grasping-taking-destroying becomes the Spanish evaluation of the situation. This is understanding-that-kills. It is a negative possessing of the Other based on a broad negative value judgement of the Other. Axiological rejection does not surprise to end up in destruction. By direct murder, bad treatment and the 'microbe shock' (127) the worst genocide in human history is conducted in the name of the love of Jesus. Basically the sense of extinction is decoded in different ways in the two opposing cultures. Hence the success of the new masters. The dichotomy in which we find the two types of society could be illustrated as follows:

Spanish society	Aztec society
massacre-society	sacrifice-society
massacre = atheistic murder	sacrifice = religious murder
physical motivation	metaphysical motivation
pragmatic present	symbolic future

A doctrine of inequality comes out of this axiological asymmetry, even though the conquistadors do not fail to admit the natives' superiority at times. Cortes commits to paper his admiration for their honesty. Yet the thesis promoted in the background is that the Indians are subjects reduced half way between subjects and objects to the role of object-makers. The axiological schema comes down to

IDENTITY	DIFFERENCE
equality	inequality

This is substantiated with claims, statements and charges and assumes legalized form in the Requirimiento. Fact becomes requirement. Reality turns into legal document. Supplying a legal basis to the fulfillment of desire (the desire to possess) is a usual procedure in political life. Placated on religious requirements, political motivation gains in prestige and efficiency: Jesus has transmitted his power to St Peter, St Peter has transmitted his power to the popes, one of the latest popes has bestowed the American continent upon the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors. Sepulveda appeals to the authority of Aristotle's **Politics** to motivate inequality, and Thomas of Aquinas is resorted to for a new explanation given to this doctrine: the influence of the climate people live in is capital in establishing a necessary and unavoidable hierarchy. Thus the model devised to motivate the asymmetry regulating this relationship is something like

Spaniards	Indians
adults (fathers)	children (sons)
men (husbands)	women (wives)
human beings	animals (monkeys)
forbearance	savagery
moderation	violence
form	matter
soul	body
reason	appetite
GOOD	EVIL

This is not simply legalized superiority vs. legalized inferiority, but moral duty become public requirement: the

Spaniards must impose their good on the others, for their good is Good.

A whole "technology of symbolism" irradiating from writing (173) comes to its succour. Human utilization is deemed legal and moral, since the Other is an object to be used by the (always better) subject. Some are always more equal, as in Orwell's **Animal Farm** hierarchic scheme. Assimilation goes on. While Columbus had resorted to enslavement, Cortes and Las Casas practise colonialism. This is more efficient and yields better long-term fruit. Like the export of any ideology or technology, Eastern European Todorov acknowledges, Christianization is imposed by arms or otherwise. Good information is the best means to establish power and the right to information becomes inalienable. All this from the occupants' perspective, and to their benefit. The essentially social function of information has been grossly adulterated in conquered America, in which communication has been reduced to violence. A lesson should be learnt from this, namely that

> "Nonviolent communication exists, and we can defend it as a value. It is what may permit us to act so that the triad: enslavement/ colonialism/ communication is not merely an instrument of conceptual analysis, but also turns out to correspond to a succession within time". (182)

(4) Knowledge. For the old Greeks, knowledge was intimately related to human nature and was considered relevant as knowledge *of* human nature. Gr. *γνώθι τεαυτόυ*, Lat. *gnosci te ipsum*, was the maxim promoted by the neo-classics in a faithful adaptation of the classics' precepts. Human nature was perceived as universally the same, though images of the other were usually associated with the idea of inferiority (cf. the definition of 'barbarians' as automatically also ignorant). From a perspective where two types of culture come in touch and

confront each other, as was the case in 1492, alterity needs analysing in terms of a typology of relations to the other, Todorov will have it. The problematics of alterity can be located along three axes: (a) the axiological, i.e. good vs. evil; (b) the praxeological, i.e. rapprochement to the other, which means (b.a) submission of the other, i.e. superiority, (b.b) neutrality in relation to the other, i.e. indifference, and (b.c) submission of the other, i.e. inferiority, and (c) the epistemic, i.e. knowledge vs. ignorance of the other. (185)

In their policy of assimilation after the epoch-making discovery, the conquistadors were engaged in the actual conquest, which occurred in a complicated love - hate relationship. This resulted in a process of gradual knowledge of their other(s), all four processes (discovery, conquest, love, and knowledge) being autonomous and elementary forms of conduct, in Todorov's view.

To exemplify this in the overall process of complex assimilation, Todorov takes the case of Las Casas's perspectivism into the heart of religion. (189) Whereas the Catholics regard the natives as equals and try to assimilate them, the Portestants emphasize differences and try to isolate their community from the natives. Both deny the identity of the other, but, Todorov thinks, in the Catholic attitude there is a higher form of egalitarianism in which each man is put in relation to his own values, rather than being faced with a single ideal. Todorov's argumentation gains in persuasiveness when he resorts to Giordano Bruno's **De l'infinito universo e mondi** (1584), a treatise in dialogue (observing, that is, a long European tradition that originates in Plato, and promoting what we have since called the Socratic method). Bruno brings to the fore the matter of heated debate in Renaissance Europe with regard to the finitude or infinitude of the world. The passages deserves quoting at length:

"... the earth no more than any other world is at the centre; and no points constitute definite determined poles of space for our earth, just as she herself is not a definite and determined point to any other point of the ether or of the world space, and the same is true of all other bodies. From various points of view these may all be regarded either as centres, or as points of the circumference, as poles, or zeniths, and so forth. Thus the earth is not the centre of the Universe; she is central only in relation to our own surrounding space. (...)

For all who posit a body of infinite size ascribe to it neither centre nor boundary. (...)

There is in the universe neither centre nor circumference, but, if you will, the whole is central, and every point also may be regarded as a point of circumference to some other central point". (192) (underlinings mine)

Bruno's relativity reverses a whole scheme of fixity inherited from Aristotle. The idea of an infinity of worlds, and therefore of the infinity of the universe relativizes the basic concepts of centre and margin without which Post-Structuralism would not be what it is. The relaxation and relativization that has occurred in Euro-American critical thinking after Nietzsche and Heidegger, and even more overtly so after Derrida and Foucault seems to originate in a Europe preceding Cartesian doubt by half a century. It will not be before the late 1630's that Descartes elaborates his philosophical position -- *"Dubito, ergo cogito, cogito, ergo sum"*. By that time, Bruno will have been dead some thirty years, burnt at the state on a charge of heresy proclaimed by the Spanish Inquisition. Bruno had relativized the scheme of cosmic order through a 'democratization' of perspective. There are as many centres as there are perspectives. The earth is central only in relation to our own world, but it may be that it is no more than one of the many points of a

wider circumference. Any point on that circumference can, in its turn, become a centre. The centre - margin dialectics is flexible and subject to reconsiderations both ways, i.e. from the centre to the margin, and vice versa. Pursued on this line, not only is the earth not the centre of the world, but an individual person can look at himself/herself as the centre of the world. What we call *axis mundi* designates the imaginary line rising from an imaginary centre where either we as individuals or our communities stand. The other will *per force* be the margin. In Bruno we have a relativization of the man - world relationship with immense philosophical consequences. Bruno anticipates the modern spirit free of the intransigence of ancient and medieval fixity. In the same modern spirit of relaxation, Las Casas, Todorov argues, preaches "an egalitarianizing religion". (193) He relativizes the man - man relationship. He practises a "distributive" and "perspectivist" type of justice (193) by renouncing the desire to assimilate the Indians and choosing the neutral path: they will decide their own future for themselves.

Diego Duran, Todorov maintains, takes a step further in the process. A Dominican born in Spain but brought up in the New World since the age of five or six, he is formed in a situation of hybridization of cultures. From him we have the **Historia de las Indias de Nueva España y las de la Tierra Firme** betraying an intimate knowledge of Indian culture. Unlike the Franciscans, who are realists and do not make much fuss about the survival of pagan idolatry among the Indians, the Dominicans are stern rigorists. For them any trace of survival of idolatries is scandalous, which is why total conversion is the one solution. Duran had the zeal to evangelize the Indians to the extent to which not a single nuance of paganism would be tolerable. Applied to the rigours of such a strongly hierarchized, codified and ritualized society as the Aztec society of the time, the model worked perfectly. Not without pain, but with obvious success. A pervasively hierarchized community has a sense of power

combined with that of sacredness. A highly codified society is sensitive to all forms of communal 'grammar' regulating daily activity. An extensively ritualized society practises the 'grammar' of individual and communal activities with utmost accuracy. A general 'religious sense' is associated with cultural values and practices in such societies. Everything is done with religious seriousness. As the saying goes in English, such societies make a religion of being 'grammatical(ized)' according to the rules and regulations in force. Todorov shares our speculation and when he ventures the hypothesis that Duran was so zealous that "he must have been a converted Jew" (210) he strikes a subtle note. Intolerance is always more intolerant in identity gained rather than naturally inherited.

A Franciscan 'grammarian' or 'linguist', Bernardino de Sahagun realistically embarks upon teaching the natives the language of the conquerors. It is a usual process for the 'slave' to be taught the language of the 'master'. The reverse does not usually happen, unless missionaries are sent to convert communities elsewhere, as is the case of American missionaries in Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism. Sahagun learns the language of the defeated, writes his **Historia general de la cosas de Nueva España** in order to describe the old Mexican religion, but his main intention is to create as many proselytes as possible. His interventions in the Spanish text (prologues, notes, prefaces, digressions) are a metatext through which the European Christian identity introduces and manipulates the native Indian values. While Duran practises the imposition of the European perspective, Sahagun has an eye for the Indian viewpoint, too. The former's attitude is "monophony", the latter's, "dyphony". (230) Todorov here fashions his vocabulary on the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony adapted to a situation of suppression vs. acceptance of the other.

The process has come the whole cycle. From discovery to knowledge, it has gone through conquest and love. The passage

from the unknown to the known includes violence and gentleness, annihilation of difference and then its assimilation to sameness. But memory works on a large scale and is not indifferent to difference reduced to sameness. Las Casas's prophecy, Todorov admits, is still valid today:

> "I believe that because of these impious, criminal and ignominious deeds perpetrated so unjustly, tyrannically, and barbarously, God will vent upon Spain His wrath and fury, for nearly all of Spain has shared in the bloody wealth usurped at the cost of so much ruin and slaughter". (245)

The worst genocide in human history was performed half a millennium ago, but collective memory has not yet performed its sifting function. It has not, consequently, performed its ideological function yet. Todorov finds an analogy in retaliatory actions against citizens of former colonial powers still happening now, about one and a quarter of a century after the abolition of slavery. IDENTITY is asserted, as it is challenged, in the relationship between the 'I' and the world. Where the 'I' invades the world, the 'I' is the subject. Where, on the contrary, the world invades the 'I', the 'I' is the object in the process. Europe, Todorov cannot help concluding, has tried to do away with an exterior reality. It will have to pay for this a long time. The fervour with which people militate nowadays for minority rights, affirmative action, and positive discrimination -- all forms of 'political correctness' in the American and Western European academia -- is a confirmation. They feel that it is a moral duty for them to regard the Other with due respect and to pay back for what was once aggressed. It is on a moral note that Todorov recalls the story of the Indian woman thrown to the dogs:

> "I am writing this book to prevent this story and a thousand others like it from being forgotten. I believe in the

necessity of 'seeking the truth' and in the obligation of making it known; I know that the function of information exists, and that the effect of information can be powerful. My hope is not that Mayan women will have European men thrown to the dogs (an absurd supposition, obviously), but that we remember what can happen if we do not succeed in discovering the other". (247)

Europe is the one culture most typically involved in a complex process of IDENTITY formation and crisis. Since Columbus Europe has colonized people who have adopted our customs and clothes. Custom, doublet of costume, comes from Old French *custume* < Lat. *consuetudo* < *com-* thoroughly + *suescere* become used to. Like costume, custom is the clothing or cover that makes identity conspicuous. The thorough analyst though needs to un-cover the body that has become used to the customs-costumes it travels in the world with, so as to really dis-cover the IDENTITY underneath. Lévi-Strauss does this with structuralist tools, trying to identify behind the cover of rituals a set of features that he can then arrange in a systematic grid to be applied to other cultures, too. Todorov's cultural 'grammar' will also be applied to other instances of Europeanization in his later work. For the time being, Todorov relevantly concludes that the intricate process of assimilation and adaptation in which Western civilization has been caught can be seen as a feature of man as such. If Western civilization has managed to export and impose its customs-costumes, and to assert a sense of superiority, it has paradoxically derived this from its own capacity to understand the other. Interest in the other results in empathy and temporary identification. With flexibility and improvisation, IDENTITY can be better and more efficiently affected.

The Eurocentrism that literary and cultural studies have spoken about for the last three decades or so is now witnessing

the contrary move in various forms of resistance and opposition which coexist with gross assimilation phenomena. Of all assertively multicultural societies, American society is the handiest example. Protest against the assimilation of other cultures by white man's has assumed a number of forms, from hippy clothing to punk hair-styles and Palestinian kerchiefs. They are alternatives to the mainstream which has itself undergone significant changes under the pressure of subversive forms. The widely spread uniform-like blue geens and T shirt is the suit of youth identity, the sartorial insignia of Western or Eurocentrist culture that was once ostentatiously put on in sign of protest against Eurocentrist values. There is a virtue in these values that Todorov identifies as the one factor of success:

> "Egalitarianism, of which one version is characteristic of the (Western) Christian religion as well as of the ideology of modern capitalist states, also serves colonial expansion: here is another, somewhat surprising lesson of our exemplary history". (248)

From Walter Benjamin to Jean-Francois Lyotard and Fredric Jameson, Western analysts have been preoccupied with the question of identity in our modern world. Todorov distinguishes two contemporaneous processes in Western civilization: (1) obliteration resulting from grasping the strangeness of the external other, and (2) discovery of an interior other. (2) has seen variants in Rimbaud's "*Je suis un autre*" , in the discovery of the beast in man, in the exploration of the unconscious - all "a hall of mirrors". (248) (1) comes from the painful experience of DIFFERENCE *in* IDENTITY. (249) But to experience this is easier said than done, and Todorov, a modern exile, knows that a modern exile is

"a being that has lost his country without thereby acquiring another, who lives in a double exteriority. It is the exiled person who today best incarnates, though warping it from its original meaning, the ideal of Hugh St Victor ; who formulated it this way in the twelfth century: 'The man who finds his country sweet is only a raw beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole world is a foreign country is perfect'. I myself, a Bulgarian living in France, borrow this quotation from Edward Said, a Palestinian living in the United States, who himself found it in Erich Auerbach, a German exiled in Turkey". (250)

The situation today is a dialogue of cultures in which no one has or should have the last word, in which we gain advantage from our externality to the other, a notion Bakhtin describes as exotopy. As Emanuel Lévinas puts it, our period is not defined by the triumph of technology for technology's sake, as it is not defined by art for art's sake, and it is not defined by nihilism. "It is action for the world to come, transcendence of its period -- transcendence of self which calls for epiphany of the Other". (150) (underlining mine)

The book he has written, Todorov hopes, tries to avoid either of the two extremes: reproducing the voices of these figures as they are, i.e. doing away with my own presence, for the other's sake, and subjugating the other to myself, i.e. making of him/her a marionette of which I pull the strings. It tries instead to follow the middle path of dialogue -- I question, I transpose, I interpret these texts, but I also let them speak. This determines Todorov to re-interpret the Bakhtinian formula not as polylogy (which he finds insipid), but as heterology (which is a necessity nowadays). In a recent interview Stephen Greenblatt [1] has made

[1] See n.64.

a similar distinction. To Greenblatt's mind the Western and in the first place American formula of letting all voices be heard is in the last instance a subtle way of letting no distinct voice be heard distinctly. This, he maintains, amounts to the same as letting no voice be heard, as a matter of principle, in totalitarian regimes. While some of the effects of these different startegies can be similar, the chance of being one voice even in a huge choir is still a chance that cannot be denied, nor can it be deemed the same as no chance at all. In the Post-Modernist current in which he finds himself engaged, Todorov finally remarks that history is now no longer the one-time *historia magistra vitae*. It has been replaced by the modern individualist ideology of diversity.

At the level of critical discourse this individualist ideology is what he carefully considers in **Littérature et ses théoriciens** (1984)[1]. From the very first lines he announces his growing interest in ALTERITY. Together with the Russian Formalists, but with at the same time a Post-Structuralist bent, he locates the spectacular changes that have occurred in our mentality in a romantic revolution that is still going on. The shift could be visualized as:

hierarchy → democracy
submission → equality
creation → enjoyment

A tinge of Derrida his master's language colours Todorov's belief that Spinoza's philosophy is the watershed of modern thinking owing to the separation identified as:

[1] Quotations from, and references to, this work are based on the English version, **Literature and Its Theorists. A Personal View of Twentieth-Century Criticism**, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1987.

faith	vs.	reason
truth	vs.	meaning

Truth has in this way become subject to interpretation, so that what matters after Spinoza is no longer 'Does this text speak rightly?', but only 'What exactly is it saying?' Whereas previously there was belief in one absolute and common truth leading to one universal standard, we are now in a situation where the recognition of human diversity resulting from equality has led to relativism, individualism, and, in cases that should not be ignored, nihilism.

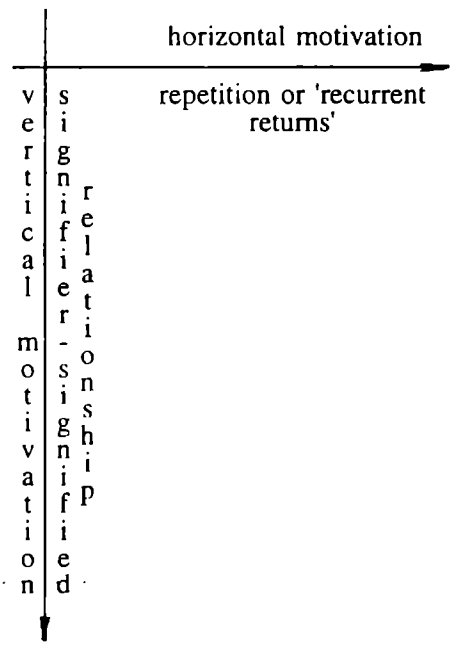
Written as a sort of critical Bildungsroman, this book deals with the trends and personalities that have in some way or other gone into the making of Tzvetan Todorov the LITERARY STRUCTURALIST and now CULTURAL POST-STRUCTURALIST CRITIC.

To start with, the Russian Formalists, whom Todorov had introduced to the Western critical world, are saluted cap in hand. Once again it is language, as they had maintained themselves, that established the indelible difference between practical and literary communication. Autotelic and self-valuable, poetic language conveys not sense, but a "supra-sense", and, owing to its emphasis on device, is "supra-conscious" (18). It could best be defined in a set of oppositions to everyday language as follows:

practical language	poetic language
heterotelic	autotelic
set toward communication	set toward expression
emphasis on message	emphasis on device
contiguity	resemblance
arbitrariness of the sign	motivation of the sign
conservative	progressive

Of the Russian Formalists, again, it is 'russet-haired Roma', as Roman Jakobson used to be called in Moscow in the 1910's,

that exerts the most pertinent fascination on our critic. It is amazing to see in how many contexts the celebrated paradigm - syntagm opposition once established by Jakobson occurs in Structuralist and Post-Structuralist Criticism. Todorov is undistractedly interested in the Jakobsonian principle of motivation, function of construction and arrangement, obviously a Formalist's pet concerns able to gratify the most whimsical Structuralist's fancies. In Jakobson's theory he perceives a systematic intersection of axes whose relevance derives from the relatedness characterizing the components of language. One could visualize this as



A seat of honour is reserved for Shklovsky as well, whose "defamiliarization" as differentia is "a Romantic idea in origin". (23) The statement, so far only inferred by us in **Théories du symbole** in the first place, is here expressed perspicuously. The whole Russian Formalist school though is evoked by way of spotting the areas in which they innovated: Brik, Jakobson, Tomashevsky, Eichenbaum, and Tynianov in poetry; Eichenbaum, Tynianiov, and Vinogradov in narrative discourse; Shklovsky, Tomashevsky, and Propp in plot construction. They all made a difference in criticism by creating a new science of discourse that renewed the link with Aristotle (the **Poetics** and **Rhetoric**), and with Romantic ideology. The object of this science of discourse they had identified in "literature as a specific system of facts" (25) differing from mere facts owing to its distinct formal arrangement.

Roland Barthes comes next, thus retracing an influence that Todorov had directly lived as a doctoral researcher in Paris. Barthes too seems to Todorov to continue a Romantic tradition, not immune though to Spinoza's proposition that truth be abandoned to meaning. On this basis, Barthes builds up a further separation of meaning from the critic's reconstruction of meaning. Behind it is yet another separation, i.e. of criticism from logic, on the assumption that the validity of criticism is internal coherence, without reference to meaning. But the most 'Romantic' elements in Barthes is intransitivity, i.e. the idea that the writer simply writes, and the plurality of meaning leading to ambiguity and infinite interpretation. Also, Todorov confides to the critic in his reader, Barthes combines radical historicism with a lack of interest in history, in that, on the one hand, he maintains that there is no general truth, but only provisional ideologies, and, on the other, his critical dialogue is "egotistically shifted toward the present". (64) Stressing the formal and poetic aspects, Barthes brackets the truth value of

criticism (65), and takes his exemplary leave from the two-hundred-year old collective superego, to embark upon scandalous individualistic positions.

Mihkail Bakhtin, the great Russian of Western criticism, is discussed in terms of the human and the interhuman, a combination announcing typical Cultural Studies vocabulary. Todorov distinguishes a number of phases in Bakhtin's career and shows no limited availability to consider each of them in oppositional terms. In the *formalist phase*, Bakhtin disembodies devices, in a manner not unlike that of classical Aristotelianism, but preaches a 'Romantic' doctrine of art's purity. Where from the formalist's perspective he singles out figures and tropes, from the Romantic angle he looks at the work in conjunction with such notions as unity and coherence. On the one hand he drives home the argument of transcendence (the device is different from and above pragmatic language) on the other he preaches immanence (the work is coherent in itself, free of any external determinism). In a further *phenomenological phase*, Bakhtin establishes a fruitful relationship between the author and the protagonist, on the assumption that a life can be seen in its completeness only from outside. This is the author's exotopy, i.e. exteriority plus superiority - all a matter of "transgredients" (74), i.e. elements external to consciousness, all a matter of OTHERNESS. It is on this that Todorov erects the Bakhtinian scaffolding of modern "uncertainties": we have renounced absolutes, we can only live in and speak in citations, the only art we can afford is "dialogic" art, in which multiple viewpoints have replaced the centre of once upon a time -- we live at a time of generalized relativity. Dostoevsky's revolution in fiction (from the 'I' - 'it' to the 'I' - 'thou' relationship), like Copernicus's and Einstein's revolutions in the physical world, has blown up the oneness of eternal values. The Other, instead, is the only instance completing 'my' identity, and completeness

is achieved in space through seeing the body from outside, and in time through conceiving of the soul between birth and death. Human plurality is basically asymmetrical, because each one of us is the necessary complement of the other. Otherness as interaction in speech processes characterizes Bakhtin's *sociological phase*, in which he deals with "translinguistics" -- what today we call "pragmatics". (78) Finally, the *historico-literary period* posits the question of discourse as heterology. The constitutive nature of the interhuman resembles the essentials of the Christian belief for Todorov, in that God is perceived as a being outside myself, and Christ as the other made sublime. (84)

Appended to this critical 'Bildungsroman' is a critical 'picaresque story'. The trick of committing to paper personal experience that functions as aesthetic experience *per se* is itself romantic. It is in the nature of personal experience to have confined relevance. But the poet's experience is *the* aesthetic experience. It is in the nature of romantic aesthetic experience to be personally confined *and* to be universal. An experience of universal bearing is the normal consequence of a deep equation holding between the ego and the world. So when we read Wordsworth's **Prelude**, a spiritual autobiography, or Coleridge's **Biographia literaria** (a transparent title) we actually read the romantic poet's, or merely the poet's peripateia. Equally peripatetic is Todorov's "traveling through American criticism", as the chapter is entitled in American spelling too. The critical picaro is brought onto stage having swept across STRUCTURALIST land and come all the way to a milestone on which distance is measured from point zero to point *n* of some territory beyond, one called POST-STRUCTURALISM.

The demarcation line between the two is marked off by a sign on which 'textual power' is inscribed. Following Robert

Scholes's instructions[1], the picaro structuralist has already trodden upon land beyond the structuralist frontier. Straddling it, Tzvetan Todorov shares critical geographer/topographer Robert Scholes's doubt about the meaning of/in the text. "What does the text mean?", a question valid till 1968, has centred too much round the idea of there being an abstract construct of relatedness within the text that makes it coalesce and gives it meaning. This 'power of the text' has, as it were, grown into the tyranny of the text. Neither theoretically nor didactically, Todorov implies, has this power been creditable any more since the temporal landmark of '68, for continuity *and* discontinuity make the territory beyond assumed as different identity. There is continuity through Deconstruction, a concept preserving the idea of structure, even though with a view to challenging it radically. But there is discontinuity in Deconstruction, if one thinks that its fundamental assumption is 'Nothing at all'. There is continuity in Pragmatism, in that it, too, like Structuralism, purports to start from the concrete object of investigation. But there is discontinuity in it, in that its slogan is 'Anything whatsoever'.

Deconstruction and Pragmatism then are the two poles of Post-Structuralist geography according to Todorov. Now it is the basic postulate of Deconstruction that the world itself is inaccessible, because there is only discourse. Called to his aid, Said is quoted maintaining, in **The World, the Text, and the Critic** (1984)[2], that literature is "an endless naming and renaming of the void". This calls to mind the pet deconstructive idea of naming and/as being. The other deconstructive premise,

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[1] Todorov refers his discussion to Robert Scholes, **Textual Power. Theory and the Teaching of English**, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

[2] Edward Said, **The World, the Text, and the Critic**, London: Faber, 1984.

i.e. that the text is internally contradictory, has made of the conjoint act of reading and understanding a really heroic enterprise, if we think of the insurmountable obstacles laid before it. To crown it all, any value-oriented behaviour is regarded as ridiculous. No value judgement is possible. We are stuck in *aporias*. Differences are rejected like the distinction between faith and reason. The latter is merely an avatar, rather than the 'power' it used to be in a system of assured, secured, and securing order. Not that there is no power now. There is. And, in fact, power is all. But Post-Structuralist Todorov's concept of power is Foucauldian with spices added by Sartre: the truth is that "human reality is-in-society, and it-is-in-the world". (85) There is continuity between Structuralism and Deconstruction in their both defending the being of the text as supreme. But there is discontinuity in Deconstruction seeing the text in the world, as it sees the world in the text, when it stipulates, through Derrida's voice, that "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*". There is continuity with Phenomenology, in that the adage inspired by Existentialist Sartre brings matters close to Heidegger's "Being-in-Time". But there is discontinuity too, if time is suspended altogether in Deconstruction's avowedly aporetic scheme.

One aspect of discontinuity between Deconstruction and its traditionalist relative called Structuralism is the former's use of concepts and strategies borrowed from, and shared with, Pragmatism. The authority here invoked is Stanley Fish[1], who formulates a handing down of authority to "interpretive communities". The notion of text is put to the severe test of authority challenge. What is the identity of the text, if its stability is illusory, if the text's only meaning is no one fixed

[1] Stanley Fish, **Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities**, Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1980.

meaning, but a plurality of meanings which *it* does not have, because it *is given* it by the reader(s)? Is there then a text in the class we teach? Fish asks himself rhetorically hearing in the background the voice of M.H. Abrams suggesting that "the notion of a mistake, at least as something to be avoided, disappears"[1]. Here Abrams rhetorically asks the question first voiced by Austin[2], as a confirmation of Speech-Act theory having encroached sensibly upon lit. crit. land.

With somewhat of a bitter tone, Todorov does cling to the hope that there is a common language, after all, since the dictionaries store it, that there is some kind of determinism which he cannot so much find in Eagleton's Marxism (being an Eastern European exile in the West), but he certainly identifies in Foucault, in the idea of the historical determinism of truth and justice through institutions and practices. To this he opposes Deconstruction and Pragmatism as "antihumanism", on the assumption that "it is not possible (...) to defend human rights with one hand and deconstruct the idea of humanity with the other". (190)

But Todorov *is* a convinced Post-Structuralist in **The Deflection of the Enlightenment** (1989), a paper given at the Stanford Humanities Center, February 3, 1989, on the occasion of a symposium on "The Novel and the Writer's Life" held in honour of Joseph Frank and Ian Watt[3]. He has witnessed, we understand, the deflection of ideals that, romantically, the race had embraced in revolutionary outbursts. The acknowledgement of equal human rights and acceptance of the plurality of

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[1] M.H. Abrams, 'How to Do Things with Texts', p.577, *Partisan Review* 46 (1979).

[2] John Austin, **How to do Things with Words**, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

[3] Tzvetan Todorov, **The Deflection of the Enlightenment**, Stanford Humanities Center, Stanford, California, 1989.

cultures, effects of the secularization and rationalization of the European Weltanschauung, should have remained the valuable "input" that they were around 1750, when the American and the French Revolutions were mentally in the making. Yet, Todorov must admit rancorously, the "output" some two centuries later leaves us unpleasantly surprised,

> "For between these two dates there have been sanguinary national wars within Europe, conquests and colonial exploitation's in the rest of the world, and the appearance of two distinct totalitarian systems, immense machines of repression and extermination that gave rise to some of the most horrendous events in human memory". (1)

Like Todorov's critical picaresque, this reflection brings together a number of attitudes: there is in it the hundred per cent post-structuralist attack on Enlightenment logic, with its rather ludicrous onslaught on oppressive reason (sic). There is the unconditional freedom that the individual should enjoy, after all determinism whatsoever has been abolished (which Todorov was hoping would never be the case, in his 1984 plea for some "historical detereminism"). There is the requirement that faith be separated from reason. And there is the need for diversity to be put in its own right. This is typical post-structuralist jargon, but Todorov leaves his personal critical imprint on it by referring the debate to the question of the Other that he acknowledgedly has been investigating (for his 1989 book on America, as we know).

As his method is post-structuralist, Todorov's samples exemplify post-structuralist theses. Thus Renan transforms Enlightenment humanism into scientism, a process that he, the post-structuralist, is not happy to see. Reasons: the past is a phenomenon on which individuals have no control, so

"determinsim neutralizes the effects of freedom" (3); faith is inculcated into reason, so rationality becomes "an article of faith" and science is turned into a religion (4). Michelet in his turn mingles nationalism with republicanism, making of national identity a religion. France, for Michelet, is truth and good. Speculating on this, we see in Todorov's Michelet's image of France the centre of the logos, as Derrida would say, or a raising nationalism to the height of universalism, with the consequent denigration of other countries, i.e. of the Other. Finally, Chateaubriand, who had travelled to America in his youth and had had every chance to discover the Other and praise it as "natural man", in his declaredly Rousseaustic love of exotic primitivism, eventually concludes that the crucial opposition he has had a flair for is not "the others" vs. "ourselves", but vice vs. virtue. His paradigms constantly oppose the good French 'I' to the bad Turks or Arabs, or the good dead Greeks to the terrible living Turks. In him, individualism degenerates into self-centredness, which, to the Post-Structuralist's mind imbued with notions of relative centre and relative margin, is as irrelevant a matter as it is unfair. Hence Todorov's virulence:

> "Thus, as individualism degenerates into self-centeredness, the subject takes another step on the path towards autonomy: he is not only a necessary but a self-sufficient entity; others are not only different, they are superfluous. 'A man need not travel for enrichment; he carries the universe within himself', declares Chateaubriand in the conclusion of his **Mémoires d'outre-tombe**". (9)

Todorov works out a mental scheme of deflection of the Enlightenment to 19th-century values which could read something like:

the Enlightenment	the 19th century
humanistic input	deflected humanistic output
humanism	scientism
freedom	determinism
the present	the past
reason as rationality	reason as religion
national identity as difference	national identity as religion
recognition of the other	denigration of the other
'us' vs. the others	good vs. bad
'my' country vs. 'your' country	centre vs. margin
subject vs. subject	subject vs. object
science and ethics	science above ethics
'l'esprit de la nation'	blind nationalism
freedom	egocentrism

To what extent this dichotomy is fully satisfactory remains to be seen. The deflection of Enlightenment logic he traces in the passage to Romanticism rather runs counter the assault of Post-Structuralism on Enlightenment-born Western metaphysics. It also betrays a contradiction between Todorov's earlier and this view of Romanticism. As if ready to defend himself against a possible counter-attack, Todorov shows himself prone to spot some "diabolical dialectic" (1) at work, which may at time deflect things in the hard task of reconciling "human unity with cultural diversity". (2) For, as he concludes, exclusivism is never good, nor is intolerance a benefit on the long term, reassuring as it may be as immediate comfort. At a time of asserted human rights, of difference instituted not only as a concept, but as cultural practice,

> "An examination of the values implied or affirmed by the perversions of humanism enables us to draw two conclusions. The first is that all of them derive from holistic ideology (...).

Holistic societies (of which France's *ancien regime* is an example) respect religious consensus, a hierarchy of persons and positions, the group more than the individual, and social rather than economic relations. Apparently, the emergence of modern democracy -- made possible by the victory of individualistic ideology over its predecessor -- entailed the repression of holistic values. The latter, however, did not simply vanish: they reappeared in those more or less monstrous forms known as nationalism, racism, and totalitarian utopias.

The second conclusion follows logically from the first: both holistic and individualistic ideology are, in some ways, incomplete representations of reality. They declare certain characteristics of human life to be preeminent and others subordinate. This also means that it is a mistake to see all the good on one side and all the evil on the other. Our present attachment to values derived from individualism (our humanism) cannot be abandoned, but it would be in our own interest (...) to *moderate* these attitudes with principles and values gleaned from elsewhere. This is possible as long as there is no fundamental incompatibility among the former and the latter (...) but rather a reshifting of dominant and subordinate elements. Indeed, this is the only hope we have of mastering the forces behind holistic values: if we do not seek to tame them, we run the risk of seeing them reappear under the grotesque but threatening guise of racism or totalitarianism.

(...) the ethical principles on which democratic consensus is based should be used to control both the applications of science and the excesses of ideology. Racialism codifies the existence of hierarchies among individuals; it is pointless to deny the differences on which these hierarchies are based and the need they fulfill, but we must avoid naive biologism and

openly acknowledge our own hierarchies, which are spiritual rather than physical. Nothing compels us to embrace the relativistic idea that 'It's the same difference'." (12-13) (underlinings mine)

So, unlike Rorty's or Lévinas's 'anything goes' formula, Todorov's plea is essentially ethical. That an Eastern European intellectual exile acclimatized in the West and occasionally teaching in the United States of America should maintain that difference is our promise is no surprise at all. Let us see how this has defined an eventually Cultural Critic's position in the late 80's and early 90's.

Nous et les autres came out in 1989, a year that saw the historic reconsideration of East - West differentiation in Europe. The title signals Todorov's bee in his critical bonnet -- the other(s) -- avoided only literally in the interesting title chosen from the English translation, **On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought**[1]. From opposition and interplay of the universal and the relative, as he warns us, Todorov is able to extract the terms of his differentiation. To the left-hand side he places ethnocentrism and scientism, to the right features relativism announced by Montaigne, illustrated by Lévi-Strauss -- an easy association at least in terms of the issue of cannibalism, addressed by Todorov himself in his book on America. When he deals with races and racism, he falls upon countless samples of statements by Gobineau and Renan, which makes the American translator sensitive to the difference between racism and racialism (present

[1] Quotations from, and reference to, this volume are based on the English version, **On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought**, trans. Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993.

in Said and Gates, as well). Tocqueville populates his relativistic slot under the heading of nations and nationalism, counterbalanced by Michelet in the opposite slot. A final chapter on exoticism recuperates the 18-th-century concepts of the 'good' vs. 'bad' savage and extends the debate from "the proper use of others" (282) to the utter suppression of the other.

More than his previous books on OTHERNESS, this is an apology for diversity. Hence the English title. More than his previous books, this is also a collection of diffuse remarks on his own life "in a country under Stalinist rule", where he "came to know evil" as the disappearance of people from the family or from his parents' friends' families, as double speak and double talk, and as the shameless manipulation of power in the open. (vii) A political book, in the last instance, it raises the question of personal identity from the perspective of public values in a regime hardly aware of the need for people to be themselves. His relations about individual and social schizophrenia (cf. Gr. σχίζειν to split, to cleave; to part, to separate + φρεν, φρενός mind) in native Bulgaria in the 40's and 50's do not take one aback, yet deserve some quotation:

> "I was never a direct victim of the regime, since my reaction -- like that of many of my compatriots -- was not to protest or challenge it, but to take on two distinct personalities: one public and submissive, the other private and independent. And yet, in another sense, I was a victim, like all my countrymen; and my private personality was not, as I thought then, a pure production of my own will, for it was forged in reaction to my environment. It was then that I became acquainted with evil. It lay in the glaring disparity between what people in power said and the lives they led and allowed us to lead, which seemed to devolve from quite different principles. It lay in the obligation to make a public

display of one's adherence to the official doctrines, and in the way these declarations robbed the noblest terms of their meaning: 'liberty', 'equality' and 'justice' became words that served to mask repression and favoritism, the flagrant disparities in the way individuals were treated. It lay in the assertion that there was a correct approach to every subject, and one only, and in our awareness that this position was determined by and for those in positions of authority at the time, since 'truth' was now merely an effect of force. It lay in the unlimited and arbitrary power that resided, we felt, with the police and the national security forces, with party members and other officials who could at any moment deprive you of your job, your house, your friends, and your freedom. It lay in the encouragement of submissiveness and mediocrity; it lay in the system of informing on others that had become the quickest way to get ahead; it lay in the fear of being afraid. The material discomforts, the lack of consumer goods, and the long lines were not evils in themselves (they could better be called misfortunes), but they became evils to the extent that they unquestionably proceeded from the other features of the regime; they were its emblems, as it were". (vii-viii) (underlinings mine)

But Todorov is not blind to the capacity of the human race to be alienated from its identity anywhere in the world. Living in France faces him with new realities and with incomparably more information and this helps develop in him an acute ethical sense, which makes him alert to the disparity between most people's "petit-bourgeois lives" and their claims to "a revolutionary ideal". (ix) This determines in the one-time firm structuralist a decision to study "the human (and social) sciences" thoroughly. (ix) In them is included history. All of them induce in the conscience at work an analytical propensity

centred on "the separation between one's life and one's words, between facts and values". (x) Mere working premise, this analytical propensity is the essential flaw Todorov sees in such studies. His ethical (and emotional) reaction comes promptly:

> "the distinguishing feature of such studies (is) the community of subject and object, and the inseparability of facts and values. In this area, thinking that is not nourished by personal experience quickly degenerates into scholasticism, and can satisfy only scholars themselves -- or bureaucratic institutions, which adore quantitative data. How can one deal with what is human without taking a position? (...) This is why I have come to prefer the moral and political essay to the human and social sciences". (x) (underlinings mine)

Todorov's acknowledged differentiation makes evident a new stage in his critical career. In the spring term of the academic year 1993-94, at Harvard University, he gave a course of lectures on solitude *and* solidarity in French literature. **Nous et les autres**, or **Of Human Diversity** looks at the relation "between 'us' (my own cultural and social group) *and* 'them' (those who do not belong to it)", it looks at "the relation between the diversity of human populations *and* the unity of the human race" from an attitude of commitment, not of divorce from the current situation in which the critic finds the country where he lives and finds himself living. His ethical commitment makes him look at not at "one *or* the other, but (at) one *and* the other". (xi) (underlinings mine)

Here is a Todorov whose evolution has been preparing since the time he was writing **La Conquête de l'Amérique**. His main area of interest, historically, has been the last two hundred years. This corresponds to precisely the one chronological slice that

comes under the usual attack of Post-Structuralist rejection of Western metaphysics. It is, by and large, what is as a rule called 'the modern period'. The French *Annales* like to extend it back to the Middle Ages, but the habitual demarcation of the last two centuries from the rest of human history within living memory is meant to delineate the modern *mentalité*, and Todorov is certainly not opposed to such a view. This new phase he finds himself in is not one of interest in history, but "reflection on history" (xii), a "genre" the choice of which "explains why the overall outline is thematic rather than chronological". (xii) (underlinings mine) He also notices the recurrence of some basic themes in recent history, as well as in the more remote, such as

> "some very general categories (ourselves and others, unity and diversity, beings and values, the positive and the negative), the themes I ended up choosing stood out because of the role they have played in the recent past. I observed that, in France, during the two centuries in question, the reflection on human diversity had focused on a few major questions, and these are the ones I chose to study. Namely: the opposition between universal and relative judgements; races; the nation-state; and nostalgic exoticism". (xii) (underlinings mine)

Todorov has obviously moved from the Structuralist position interested in narratology and the 'grammar' of literary discourse, and, through discourse, in human affairs in the manner of the anthropologist (Lévi-Strauss's Structuralist Anthropology), to a position of *engage* investigations in human and social sciences, where the political is conjoined with the ethical. As he confesses, he is interested in ideologies and doctrines as expressions of their authors' interest (cf. Lat. *interest* third person singular of *interesse* to lie between, to be important <

inter- between + *esse* to be). It is the whys and whereofs of history, intentionality, in other words, that he invests critical energy into -- a rather current attitude these days in language and literature studies equally. As it also is the how covering the what of history that Todorov analyses. "To take the route of discourse to gain access to the world is perhaps an indirect route, but it gets us there nevertheless" (xiii), a position recalling Hayden White's 'tropology of discourse'. He has come to embrace a critical position where he can combine at ease Structuralist Narratology and 'Grammar' with Anthropology and Committed Humanism. And he is interested in the "history of thought", which "is to be distinguished both from the history of ideas and the history (or the study) of works". (xiii) His project is best characterized by the word 'dialogue', he maintains. As in his book on America, in which he opted out for *mythos* rather than *logos*, the former appearing more human (because related to, and dependent on direct human experience *and* expressed in 'parole' rather than in 'langue'), here Todorov decides to focus on thought more than on ideas, on the individual subject's rather than the anonymous community's configurations. For him now it is a matter of principle "not to separate life from speech" (xv), to start from particular texts, and to produce a "hybrid, half history of thought, half essay in political and moral philosophy". (xiii)

Tzvetan Todorov's latest book confirms the stand of a critic in Cultural Studies. **Les morales de l'histoire** (1991)[1], a continuation of his reflections in **Nous et les autres**, as he proudly confesses, looks at history from this *engage* perspective. Summing up his growing Cultural Studies bent of the early 80's (the time of **La Conquête de l'Amérique**), it embarks upon

[1] Tzvetan Todorov, **Les morales de l'histoire**, Bernard Grasset, Paris, 1991.

considering the question of CULTURAL DIFFERENCE in two big chapters: (1) 'us' and 'the others', illustrated by such topics as 'Bulgaria in France', 'the conquest seen by the Aztecs' and 'the conquest seen by the French', or 'cross-cultural phenomena', and (2) 'among ourselves', where he discusses 'fiction and truth', 'the truth of interpretations', 'tolerance and intolerance', 'democracy or theocracy', 'manipulation and eloquence'.

Like the New Historicists, he takes delight in unearthing documents testifying to cultural practices. Like the Structuralist Anthropologists, he is happy to disentangle the threads of rituals and other ceremonies of everyday life and single out a pattern underneath the texture of these communal manifestations. He shares strategies of mixed interest (FORMAL and CULTURAL) with Yuri Lotman[1], or his master Roland Barthes, whose probings into modern mythologies point to the same. He has gone a long way from merely Formalist-Structuralist positions. Todorov now stands of firm soil in an area called Cultural Studies, where he has developed a special interest in the human and the social, in the track of post-French Revolution social and human sciences, but cultivating a moral and political attitude which he likes best to call 'ethic'.

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[1] See Yuri Lotman, 'Technological Progress as a Problem in the Study of Culture', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 12, No.4, 1991.

CONCLUSION

An extremely prolific author, Tzvetan Todorov covers a wide are of critical interest, from avowed Formalist-Structuralist positions embraced in the mid-60's, to an exciting Cultural Studies orientation in the 80's and 90's. This evolution coincides with an exciting evolution of the notion of DIFFERENCE in his investigations.

Todorov's first appearance on the critical stage is the invaluable presentation comprising translations an commentaries of the famous Russian Formalists, from which he borrows basic notions such as difference.

His **Grammaire du Décameron** is the most relevant and essential contribution to narratology since Vladimir Propp's work. In it Todorov analyses narrative transformations (as he will also do in **Poétique de la prose**), with a view to identifying a 'universal grammar'.

Todorov's narratological ambitions lead him to the conclusion that there is an essential difference between the textual manifestation and the grammatical arrangement of language/literature. His theorizing on universal grammar considers not only all languages, but all signifying systems (a combination of strictly language/ literature with semiotic studies).

Todorov is aware of supragrammatical rules of structuration and decides to look at the narrative text as *recit*. He uses semiotic, syntactic, and rhetoric tools to this end.

He establishes an inventory of narrative possibilities which are the invisible double of the actual text. This differentiation recalls the Russian Formalists' interest in a scientific method of analytical precision.

As he focuses on Formalist-Structuralist features, Todorov comes to give more and more attention to the culture-bound codes of values that fill these abstractions. He realizes that the laws of structural arrangement that he has singled out are granted by a given cultural community.

The 'themes of the I' vs. the 'themes of the you' organize his fascinating differential model within which he discusses the fantastic. His interest in other frontier genres shows an acute sense of identity as SAMENESS and DIFFERENCE.

His own definition of genres is elaborated in a differential perspective, as are such basic tropological concept as allegory and symbol.

The **Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage** also proposes differential schemata, some recalling other famous oppositional models (e.g. Saussure's 'langue' vs. 'parole', Jakobson's paradigm vs. syntagm, Barthes's intransitive vs. transitive language).

The very passage that he sees from rhetoric to aesthetics is a process of difference negotiated and superseded (in which imitation is opposed to artistic production, ethical-aesthetic values to aesthetic values only, and the classic to the romantic model).

Todorov's opposition of romantic vs. classic rises out of such deep oppositions as concordance vs. contradiction, unity vs. diversity, allegory vs. symbol.

His discussion of the centre vs. margin opposition, so unavoidable in any Post-Structuralist approach, shows his move out of strictly Formalist-Structuralist studies in the late 70's.

When he differentiates between language and discourse, Todorov takes one step further in the Post-Structuralist direction, as well as shows a more refined awareness of difference, this time within language. Language as plural and complex is a postulate from now on.

Difference within culture and among cultures is his main focus in the fantastic **La Conquête de l'Amérique**, whose subtitle, **La question de l'autre** stabilizes a basic item of critical vocabulary -- 'the Other'. This opens up the debate of difference from an anthropological, as well as structuralist, and cultural perspective.

Assimilation through adoption/adaptation or, on the contrary, liquidation is a process he sees at work in the clashing contrast of civilizations that gave substance to the birth of modern America.

Acculturation, cross-cultural phenomena, an other such processes on the fringe of distinct identity, and in the immediate presence of 'the Other' give a special flavour to his more clearly Cultural Studies oriented books.

Todorov offers his own list of borrowed differentiations in the homage he pays to his masters in **Littérature et ses théoriciens**. He also considers the European in contrast with the American critical arena.

From an *engagé* perspective, Todorov looks at culture structurally *and* ethically convinced that identity is indelibly related to diversity. This is the 'moral' of **Nous et les autres**, where the study of the motivation behind historical events is what he wants to reveal in the first place.

Todorov has been a persuaded supporter of difference, from his initial investigations in structure and structuration, via semiotic analyses, to his latter-day criticism. No serious survey of lit. crit. in the Anglo-American world can do without Todorov. Neither British nor American, nor even English-speaking, Todorov holds a position as visiting professor to such places as Harvard University, which is a guarantee that he is a central personality in investigations more and more markedly of the margin. Difference has left its imprint on his own personal identity as a critic. We should rejoice. It means that there is more variety in our critical propensity than we are ready at times to accept.

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