

Any analysis, whether clinical or scholarly, implies what Lacan memorably calls "the subject presumed to know." The knowledge sought is presumed to exist somewhere. That fantasy of a knower "out there" is what we have to be cured of. But it is therefore ironic that no one performs the role of that knower better than Lacan. One can only conclude that the demystifier of the "subject presumed to know" is the most powerful of his incarnations. This is an observation with which PLATO's Socrates, who "knew nothing but the fact that he was ignorant," would agree.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The literature on Lacan illustrates the axiom that the more difficult the text, the more extensive the bibliography. In addition to his thesis, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (1932, *On Paranoid Psychosis in Its Relations with the Personality*; not yet translated), Lacan published *Écrits* (1966), a small selection of which appeared in English as *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (1977). The "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" as it appears in the French *Écrits* can be found, translated by Jeffrey Mehlman, in *The Purloined Poe*, edited by John Muller and William Richardson (1988), an excellent casebook containing essays by Jacques Derrida, Barbara Johnson, and many others. Another notable early translation of and commentary on one of Lacan's essays is Anthony Wilden, *The Language of the Self* (1968), which treats Lacan's "Rome discourse," "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse" (1953, "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis"). A selection of Lacan's writings on female sexuality with two substantial introductions was published as *Feminine Sexuality*, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (1982). To date, the annual seminars of Lacan that have been translated into English are book 1, *Freud's Papers on Technique*, 1953-54 (1988); book 2, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 1954-55 (1988); book 3, *The Psychoses*, 1955-56 (1993); book 7, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 1959-60 (1992); *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1977), a series of lectures given in 1964; and book 20, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, 1972-73 (1998). Several others have appeared in French. For an information-packed, fascinating biography, see the work of Elisabeth Roudiez; volume 2 of her two-volume history of psychoanalysis in France (*La Banville de cent ans*, 1982-86), devoted to Lacan, has been translated (1993; trans. (1990), and a separate work, *Jacques Lacan*, has also been translated (1993; trans. 1997). For a shorter but equally zesty account of psychoanalysis in France centered around Lacan's life and works, see Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics* (1978; rev. ed., 1992).

There are many introductions to Lacan's thought. The most useful for the non-specialist are Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (1990); Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (1991), a book that focuses particularly on Lacan's style; *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, edited by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher (1991); Madan Sarup, *Jacques Lacan* (1992), an introduction to Lacan in cultural context; Michael Payne, *Reading Lacan: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva* (1993); Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (1995); and *Lacan for Beginners*, written by Philip Hill and illustrated by David Leach (1997, 1999), which is unusually good as well as funny. For advanced engagements with the process of reading Lacan, see Jane Gallop's *Reading Lacan* (1985), and Shoshana Felman's *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight* (1987). For a good explanation of the differences between Lacanian and American psychoanalysis, see *The Subject and the Self: Lacan and Amerian Psychoanalysis*, edited by Judith Fehér Gurwicz and Mitchell Tor (1996). On Lacan's importance for cultural and historical studies, see Juliet Flower MacCannell's *Writing Lacan* (1986) and Teresa Brennan's *History after Lacan* (1993).

There are many critical and polemical books about Lacan. Some of the most inter-

esting are Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Title of the Letter* (1973; trans. 1992), which continues the famous critique Jacques Derrida had begun in his reading of Lacan's seminar on "The Purloined Letter" (see "The Purveyor of Truth" in *The Purloined Poe*); François Roustang, *Dire Mastery* (1976; trans. 1982), which considers the combination of the religious nature of psychoanalysis and the dynamical power of Jacques Lacan; and Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master* (1990; trans. 1991), a more restrained but still thoroughgoing critique of the effects of power in Lacan's theory. A theorist whose work is an ongoing reinterpretation of the work of Lacan is Slavoj Žižek; see his 1992 *Everything You've Ever Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* and other works. For a dated but annotated bibliography, see Michael Clark, *Jacques Lacan: An Annotated Bibliography* (1988). Dylan Evans has published *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (1996), which is extremely useful and contains a good bibliography.

### The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience<sup>1</sup>

*Jacques Lacan*

The conception of the mirror stage that I introduced at our last congress, fifteen years ago, has since become more or less established in the practice of the French group.<sup>2</sup> However, I think it worthwhile to bring it again to your attention, especially today, for the light it sheds on the formation of the I as we experience it in psychoanalysis. It is an experience that leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*.<sup>3</sup>

Some of you may recall that this conception originated in a feature of human behaviour illuminated by a fact of comparative psychology. The child, at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognize as such his own image in a mirror. This recognition is indicated in the illuminative minority of the *Alta-Erlabnis*, which Köhler<sup>4</sup> sees as the expression of situational apperception, an essential stage of the act of intelligence.

This act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of the monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates—the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him.

This event can take place, as we have known since Baldwin,<sup>5</sup> from the age of six months, and its repetition has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror. Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial (what, in France, we call a "trotte-bébé"<sup>6</sup>), he nevertheless overcomes, in a

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Alan Sheridan, who occasionally includes the original French in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the Psychoanalytic Society of Paris, the official French branch of the International Psychoanalytic Society.

<sup>3</sup> I think (Latin), a reference to the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650), which was founded on the statement "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*)—that is, the occurrence of thought.

<sup>4</sup> Köhler, Wolfgang (1887-1967), German co-founder of Gestalt psychology. *Alta-Erlabnis*: abstract experience (German).

<sup>5</sup> James Baldwin (1861-1934), American developmental psychologist.

<sup>6</sup> Baby trotter (French); that is, a walker.

flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image.

For me, this activity retains the meaning I have given it up to the age of eighteen months. This meaning discloses a libidinal dynamism, which has hitherto remained problematic, as well as an ontological structure of the human world that accords with my reflections on paranoid knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an *identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*.<sup>8</sup>

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *visifans*<sup>9</sup> stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.

This form would have to be called the Ideal-I,<sup>1</sup> if we wished to incorporate it into our usual register, in the sense that it will also be the source of secondary identifications; under which term I would place the functions of libidinal normalization. But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the success of the dialectical syntheses by which asymptotically,<sup>2</sup> whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality.

The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*,<sup>3</sup> that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constitutive than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size (*un relief de stature*) that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him. Thus, this *Gestalt*—whose pregnancy should be regarded as bound up with the species, though its motor style remains scarcely recognizable—by these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own making tends to find completion.

Indeed, for the *imagos*—whose veiled faces it is our privilege to see in outline in our daily experience and in the penumbra of symbolic efficacy<sup>4</sup>—the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world, if we go by the mirror disposition that the *imago of one's own body* presents in

hallucinations or dreams, whether it concerns its individual features, or even its infirmities; or its object-projections; or if we observe the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the *double*, in which psychical realities, however heterogeneous, are manifested.

That a *Gestalt* should be capable of formative effects in the organism is attested by a piece of biological experimentation that is itself so alien to the idea of psychical causality that it cannot bring itself to formulate its results in these terms. It nevertheless recognizes that it is a necessary condition for the maturation of the gonad of the female pigeon that it should see another member of its species, of either sex; so sufficient in itself is this condition that the desired effect may be obtained merely by placing the individual within reach of the field of reflection of a mirror. Similarly, in the case of the migratory locust, the transition within a generation from the solitary to the gregarious form can be obtained by exposing the individual, at a certain stage, to the exclusively visual action of a similar image, provided it is animated by movements of a style sufficiently close to that characteristic of the species. Such facts are inscribed in an order of homeomorphic identification that would itself fall within the larger question of the meaning of beauty as both formative and erogenic.<sup>5</sup>

But the facts of mimicry are no less instructive when conceived as cases of homeomorphic identification, in as much as they raise the problem of the signification of space for the living organism—psychological concepts hardly seem less appropriate for shedding light on these matters than ridiculous attempts to reduce them to the supposedly supreme law of adaptation. We have only to recall how Roger Caillois<sup>6</sup> (who was then very young, and still fresh from his breach with the sociological school in which he was trained) illuminated the subject by using the term *legendary psychasthenia*<sup>7</sup> to classify morphological mimicry as an obsession with space in its derealizing effect.

I have myself shown in the social dialectic that structures human knowledge as paranoid<sup>8</sup> why human knowledge has greater autonomy than animal knowledge in relation to the field of force of desire, but also why human knowledge is determined in that 'little reality' (*ce peu de réalité*), which the Surrealists,<sup>9</sup> in their restless way, saw as its limitation. These reflections lead me to recognize in the spatial captation manifested in the mirror-stage, even before the social dialectic, the effect in man of an organic insufficiency in his natural reality—in so far as any meaning can be given to the word 'nature'.

I am led, therefore, to regard the function of the mirror-stage as a particular case of the function of the *imago*, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*.<sup>1</sup>

In man, however, this relation to nature is altered by a certain dehiscence at the heart of the organism, a primordial Discord betrayed by the signs of uneasiness and motor unco-ordination of the neo-natal months. The objective notion of the anatomical incompleteness of the pyramidal system<sup>2</sup> and

5. Giving rise to sexual desire. "Homeomorphic": having the same form (as opposed to "heteromorphic," differing from the usual form).

6. French philosopher and critic (1913-1978), who when young was a surrealist.

7. A term once used for general neuroses.

8-Cf. "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits* (Bacelar's note). "The social dialectic": human-inter-

9. Members of an experimental literary and artistic movement founded in France in 1924; inspired in part by SIGMUND FREUD, surrealists sought to express subconscious thought and feeling.

1. The inner world and the outer world (German).

2. Part of the central nervous system that links the brain and spinal cord and controls voluntary movement.

7. According to Lacan, knowledge itself is structured like paranoia, in that it projects a coherence onto the world that may not be there.

8. Likeness, statue (Latin).

9. Incapable of speech (Latin).

1. i.e., "je-idéal") without further comment, other than to say that I have not maintained it since [Lacan's note].

2. Coming ever closer but never reaching.

3. Form, pattern, whole (German).

4. Cf. *Écrits*, "The Symbolic," p. 1081. *Symbolic*

JA

likewise the presence of certain humoral residues of the maternal organism confirm the view I have formulated as the fact of a real *specific prematurity of birth* in man.

It is worth noting, incidentally, that this is a fact recognized as such by embryologists, by the term *foetalization*, which determines the prevalence of the so-called superior apparatus of the neurax,<sup>3</sup> and especially of the cortex, which psycho-surgical operations lead us to regard as the intra-organic mirror.

This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmental body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic<sup>4</sup> and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. Thus, to break out of the circle of the *Innenwelt* into the *Umwelt* generates the inexhaustible quadrature<sup>5</sup> of the ego's verifications.

This fragmented body—which term I have also introduced into our system of theoretical references—usually manifests itself in dreams when the movement of the analysis encounters a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual. It then appears in the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for interstitial persecutions—the very same that the visionary Hieronymus Bosch<sup>6</sup> has fixed, for all time, in painting, in their ascent from the fifteenth century to the imaginary zenith of modern man. But this form is even tangibly revealed at the organic level, in the lines of 'fragilization' that define the anatomy of phantasy, as exhibited in the schizoid and spasmodic symptoms of hysteria.

Correlatively, the formation of the *I* is symbolized in dreams by a fortress, or a stadium—its inner arena and enclosure, surrounded by marshes and rubbish-tips,<sup>7</sup> dividing it into two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle whose form (sometimes juxtaposed in the same scenario) symbolizes the id in a quite startling way. Similarly, on the mental plane, we find realized the structures of fortified works, the metaphor of which arises spontaneously, as if issuing from the symptoms themselves, to designate the mechanisms of obsessional neurosis—inversion, isolation, reduplication, cancellation and displacement.<sup>8</sup> But if we were to build on these subjective givens alone—however little we free them from the condition of experience that makes us see them as partaking of the nature of a linguistic technique—our theoretical attempts would remain exposed to the charge of projecting themselves into the unthinkable of an absolute subject. This is why I have sought in the present hypothesis, grounded in a conjunction of objective data, the guiding principle *a method of symbolic reduction*.<sup>8</sup>

3. Neuraxis or central nervous system.
4. Relating to correct child rearing. Lacan is drawing on the core meanings of the word's Greek roots).
5. An allusion to "squaring the circle," or constructing a square whose area is equal to that of a given circle (an impossible task if, following the dictates of classical geometry, one uses only a

It establishes in the *defences of the ego* a genetic order, in accordance with the wish formulated by Miss Anna Freud,<sup>9</sup> in the first part of her great work, and situates (as against a frequently expressed prejudice) hysterical repression and its returns at a more archaic stage than obsessional inversion and its isolating processes, and the latter in turn as preliminary to paranoid alienation, which dates from the deflection of the specular *I* into the social *I*.

This moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the *imago* of the counterpart and the drama of primordial jealousy (so well brought out by the school of Charlotte Bühler in the phenomenon of infantile *transitivism*<sup>10</sup>), the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations.

It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others, and turns the *I* into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation—the very normalization of this maturation being henceforth dependent, in man, on a cultural mediation as exemplified, in the case of the sexual object, by the Oedipus complex.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of this conception, the term primary narcissism,<sup>3</sup> by which analytic doctrine designates the libidinal investment characteristic of that moment, reveals in those who invented it the most profound awareness of semantic latencies. But it also throws light on the dynamic opposition between this libid<sup>4</sup> and the sexual libido, which the first analysts tried to define when they invoked destructive and, indeed, death instincts, in order to explain the evident connection between the narcissistic libido and the alienating function of the *I*; the aggressivity it releases in any relation to the other, even in a relation involving the most Samaritan of aid.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, they were encountering that *existential negativity* whose reality is so vigorously proclaimed by the contemporary philosophy of being and nothingness.<sup>6</sup>

But unfortunately that philosophy grasps negativity only within the limits of a self-sufficiency of consciousness, which, as one of its premises links to the *meconnaissance*<sup>7</sup> that constitute the ego, the illusion of autonomy to which it entrusts itself. This flight of fancy, for all that it draws, to an unusual extent, on borrowings from psychoanalytic experience culminates in the pretension of providing an existential psychoanalysis.

At the culmination of the historical effort of a society to refuse to recognize that it has any function other than the utilitarian one and if the anxiety of the individual confronting the 'concentrational'<sup>8</sup> form of the social bond that

9. Austrian-born English psychoanalyst (1895-1982). Freud's daughter; her "great work" is *The ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936).
10. Aggressive mimicry. Bühler (1893-1974), German child psychologist.
11. The universal internalization of the prohibited object: one's mother and the love-hate relation between father and son. Freud. Lacan's point is that human desire is not natural; it is shaped by prohibitions and prohibitions.
12. Self-preservation.
13. Dérive (Latin) a Freudian term. That is, generous and altruistic help; for the purpose of the good Samaritan, see Luke 10.30-37.
14. That is, by JEAN-PAUL SARTRE (1905-1980), author of *Being and Nothingness* (1943); the French philosopher argued that humans have no essence before they act and thus shape themselves through their autonomous choices.
15. Mistrerecognitions (French).
16. "Concentrationnaire," an adjective coined after World War II (this article was written in 1949) to describe the life of the concentration camp. In the hands of certain writers it became, by extension, applicable to many aspects of "modern" life (Lacour's note).

seems to arise to crown this effort, existentialism must be judged by the explanations it gives of the subjective impasses that have indeed resulted from it; a freedom that is never more authentic than when it is within the walls of a prison; a demand for commitment, expressing the impotence of a pure consciousness to master any situation; a voyeuristic-sadistic idealization of the sexual relation; a personality that realizes itself only in suicide; a consciousness of the other than can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder.<sup>9</sup> These propositions are opposed by all our experience, in so far as it teaches us not to regard the ego as centred on the *perception-consciousness system*, or as organized by the 'reality principle'—a principle that is the expression of a scientific prejudice most hostile to the dialectic of knowledge. Our experience shows that we should start instead from the *function of mécommissance* that characterizes the ego in all its structures, so markedly articulated by Miss Anna Freud. For, if the *Vernichtung*<sup>1</sup> represents the patent form of that function, its effects will, for the most part, remain latent, so long as they are not illuminated by some light reflected on to the level of fatality, which is where the id manifests itself.

We can thus understand the inertia characteristic of the formations of the I, and find there the most extensive definition of neurosis—just as the captation of the subject by the situation gives us the most general formula for madness, not only the madness that lies behind the walls of asylums, but also the madness that deafens the world with its sound and fury. The sufferings of neurosis and psychosis are for us a schooling in the passions of the soul, just as the beam of the psychoanalytic scales, when we calculate the tilt of its threat to entire communities, provides us with an indication of the deadening of the passions in society.

At this junction of nature and culture, so persistently examined by modern anthropology, psychoanalysis alone recognizes this knot of imaginary servitude that love must always undo: again, or sever.

For such a task, we place no trust in altruistic feeling, we who lay bare the aggressivity that underlies the activity of the philanthropist, the idealist, the pedagogue, and even the reformer.

In the recourse of subject to subject that we preserve, psychoanalysis may accompany the patient to the ecstatic limit of the *'Thou art that'*, in which is revealed to him the cipher of his mortal destiny, but it is not in our mere power as practitioners to bring him to that point where the real journey begins.

1949

### From The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious<sup>1</sup>

As my title suggests, beyond this 'speech', what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language. Thus from the outset I have alerted informed minds to the extent to which the notion

that the unconscious is merely the seat of the instincts will have to be rethought.

But how are we to take this 'letter' here? Quite simply, literally.<sup>2</sup> By 'letter' I designate that material support that concrete discourse borrows from language.

This simple definition assumes that language is not to be confused with the various psychical and somatic functions that serve it in the speaking subject—primarily because language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it.

Let us note, then, that aphasia,<sup>3</sup> although caused by purely anatomical lesions in the cerebral apparatus that supplies the mental centre for these functions, prove, on the whole, to distribute their deficits between the two sides of the signifying effect of what we call here 'the letter' in the creation of signification.<sup>4</sup> A point that will be clarified later. Thus the subject, too, if he can appear to be the slave of language, is all the more so of a discourse in the universal movement in which his place is already inscribed at birth, if only by virtue of his proper name.

Reference to the experience of the community, or to the substance of this discourse, settles nothing. For this experience assumes its essential dimension in the tradition that this discourse itself establishes. This tradition, long before the drama of history is inscribed in it, lays down the elementary structures of culture. And these very structures reveal an ordering of possible exchanges which, even if unconscious, is inconceivable outside the permutations authorized by language.

With the result that the ethnographic duality of nature and culture is giving way to a ternary conception of the human condition—nature, society, and culture—the last term of which could well be reduced to language, or that which essentially distinguishes human society from natural societies.

But I shall not make of this distinction either a point or a point of departure, leaving to its own obscurity the question of the original relations between the signifier and labour. I shall be content, for my little jab at the general function of *praxis* in the genesis of history, to point out that the very society that wished to restore, along with the privileges of the producer, the causal hierarchy of the relations between production and the ideological superstructure to their full political rights, has none the less failed to give birth to an esperanto in which the relations of language to socialist realities would have rendered any literary formalism radically impossible.<sup>5</sup>

For my part, I shall trust only those assumptions that have already proven their value by virtue of the fact that language through them has attained the status of an object of scientific investigation.

<sup>1</sup> *À la lettre* [translator's note].

<sup>2</sup> Speech-loses.

<sup>3</sup> This aspect of aphasia, so useful in overlooking the concept of "psychological function," which only obscures every aspect of the question, remains quite clear in the purely linguistic analysis of the two major forms of aphasia worked out by the leaders of modern linguistics, ROMAN Jakobson (1896–1982). See the most accessible of his works, the *Fundamentals of Language* (with Boris Halle, Gravenhage: Mouton, 1956), part II, chapters 1 to 4 [Lacan's note].

<sup>5</sup> We may recall that the discussion of the need for a new language in communist society did in fact take place, and Stalin, much to the relief of those who adhered to his philosophy, put an end to it with the following formulation: language is not a superstructure [Lacan's note]. "Superstructure": the term used by KARL MARX (1818–1883) to designate the political, legal, social, and cultural forms of a society, which are based on its economic structure. Joseph Stalin (1879–1953), leader of the U.S.S.R. (1924–53).

<sup>9</sup> An allusion to the Master-Slave dialectic (see above) described by GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH

1. Denial (German).  
1. ... the original French in parentheses.

that of New Criticism. The New Critic allowed that literature was in some significant sense cognitive, yielding a sort of knowledge of the world; Frye insists that literature is an "autonomous verbal structure" quite cut off from any reference beyond itself." But for Frye this is hardly a failing, for he is determined to understand literature in its own terms, "opposed to any construct—Marxist, Freudian, Thomist, or whatever—that is going to annex literature and simply explain literature in its own terminology" ("Freedom and Concern," 1985).

In our selection, "The Archetypes of Literature" (1951), Frye sketches an early version of his approach. He argues that literature teachers must not confuse literature with criticism: we cannot in our classrooms "teach literature"; rather, we teach the criticism of literature. If teachers aim as they should to make criticism a "systematic structure of knowledge," then they will need to shed their mistaken ideas and habitual practices. For Frye, a common mistake is assuming that criticism is the making of value judgments; these, he says, amount to no more than exercises in the history of taste. Other mistakes include the intensive analysis of specific texts (disconnected "close readings" do not lead us toward the goal of a unified and coherent field of scientific study) and a focus on conventional literary history (periods such as Gothic and baroque are cultural rather than truly literary categories).

In defining genuine criticism, Frye shows how it is connected to but different from philosophy, theology, history, and the social sciences, meriting autonomy as a rigorous and comprehensive professional university discipline. He finds the work of cultural anthropologists particularly valuable in his search for a "co-ordinating principle," and from Frazer, Jung, and others he develops his theory of "archetypes," such as the quest of the hero. Knowledge of the archetypes enables us to perceive the shared myths that literary works rely on and explore: through that awareness we can glimpse the underlying structure of the structures of all works.

Like Jung, Frye uses terms with a looseness that can make his writing both suggestive and exasperating. Sometimes he refers to the archetype; sometimes he states that the archetype is itself a myth, like the quest. And while his theory, supported by a rich and wide range of reading, allows him to make connections between many texts, he rarely if ever attends to the text's language. One could also point out that Frye's canon, while capacious, is not capacious enough: few women and minorities figure in it. In this respect Frye is no different from most other critics and theorists of his generation, and his theory could be said to have a built-in answer to the charge: the nature of archetypes ensures that they also structure the literature he himself fails to discuss, and thus in a sense he has included it after all.

Frye is an extraordinary synthesizer, whose system building is matched in twentieth-century literary criticism and theory only by the very different system building of I. A. Richards and KENNETH BURKE. At a certain point, however, the categories, patterns, classifications, lists, and charts in Frye's major theoretical works threaten to become formulaic, as perhaps happens at the close of the selection below. Many texts are briefly touched on and connections among them made, but none of them is really brought into sharp focus. Curiously enough, Frye now often seems most rewarding less for his bold vision of literature as a whole than for the essays on specific texts that he did produce. When he writes about Milton's elegy "Lycidas" (in *Fables of Identity*) or *Hamlet* (in *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*), he demonstrates a subtle, sensitive, compelling feeling for the text in its own right—the text as related to countless other texts but a discrete literary experience nonetheless. Frye's work as a practical critic sometimes departs from the tenets of his theory, and is arguably the better for it.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Frye's major books include *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), *T. S. Eliot* (1963), *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (1965), and

*Study of English Romanticism* (1968). He also wrote a number of books on Shakespeare, including *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy* (1967) and *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare* (1986). Among his collections of essays on diverse topics are *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (1963), *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society* (1970), and *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (1976). See also *Reading the World: Selected Writings, 1935-1976*, edited by Robert D. Denham (1990). In addition, Frye has been a significant force in turning the attention of literary scholars to the narratives and structural patterns of the Bible; his books on this subject include *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1982) and *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature* (1990).

The University of Toronto Press has begun publication of *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, under the general editorship of Alvin A. Lee. Along with new editions of Frye's books, it will include his diaries, letters, student essays, speeches, fiction, and notebooks and other unpublished material. Three volumes have appeared to date: *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp, 1932-1939* (2 vols., 1996) and *Northrop Frye's Student Essays, 1932-1938*, edited by Robert D. Denham (1997). Frye gave many interviews about his life, work, and career; see, for example, the collection *Northrop Frye in Conversation*, edited by David Cayley (1996). Also valuable is John Ayre's *Northrop Frye: A Biography* (1989).

Good brief overviews include Robert D. Denham, *Northrop Frye and Critical Method* (1974); David Cook, *Northrop Frye: A Vision of the New World* (1986); Ian Balfour, *Northrop Frye* (1988); and Joseph Adamson, *Northrop Frye: A Visionary Life* (1993). The most comprehensive studies are A. C. Hamilton, *Northrop Frye: An Anatomy of His Criticism* (1990), and Jonathan Locke Hart, *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination* (1994).

There are a number of helpful collections: *Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism*, edited by Murray Krueger (1966), which includes essays by Krueger, Angus Fletcher, William K. Wimsatt Jr., and Geoffrey H. Hartman, comments by Frye, and a checklist of his writings; *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*, edited by Eleanor Cook et al. (1983); *Northrop Frye and Eighteenth-Century Studies*, edited by Howard D. Weinbrot—a special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (winter 1990-91); *Visionary Poetics: Essays on Northrop Frye's Criticism*, edited by Robert D. Denham and Thomas Willard (1991); *Northrop Frye*, edited by Robert D. Denham and *The Legacy of Northrop Frye*, edited by Alvin A. Lee and Robert D. Denham (1994), which is especially useful in describing Frye's contributions to Canadian culture and his work on Romanticism, modernism, and religion. Another excellent collection is *Rereading Frye*, edited by David Boyd and Imre Salusinszky (1999).

See also Robert D. Denham, *Northrop Frye: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (1987), and the essays and bibliographies in the *Northrop Frye Newsletter*. The Northrop Frye Centre was established in 1988 at the University of Toronto.

*Northrop Frye*

#### The Archetypes of Literature!

Every organized body of knowledge can be learned progressively, and experience shows that there is also something progressive about the learning of literature. Our opening sentence has already got us into a semantic difficulty. Physics is an organized body of knowledge about nature, and a student of it says that he is learning physics, not that he is learning nature. Art, like

nature, is the subject of a systematic study, and has to be distinguished from the study itself, which is criticism. It is therefore impossible to "learn literature": one learns about it in a certain way, but what one learns, transitively, is the criticism of literature. Similarly, the difficulty often felt in "teaching literature" arises from the fact that it cannot be done: the criticism of literature is all that can be directly taught. So while no one expects literature itself to behave like a science, there is surely no reason why criticism, as a systematic and organized study, should not be, at least partly, a science. Not a "pure" or "exact" science, perhaps, but these phrases form part of a 19th Century cosmology which is no longer with us. Criticism deals with the arts and may well be something of an art itself, but it does not follow that it must be unsystematic. If it is to be related to the sciences too, it does not follow that it must be deprived of the graces of culture.

Certainly criticism as we find it in learned journals and scholarly monographs has every characteristic of a science. Evidence is examined scientifically; previous authorities are used scientifically; fields are investigated scientifically; texts are edited scientifically. Prosody is scientific in structure, so is phonetics; so is philology. And yet in studying this kind of critical science the student becomes aware of a centrifugal movement carrying him away from literature. He finds that literature is the central division of the "humanities," flanked on one side by history and on the other by philosophy. Criticism so far ranks only as a subdivision of literature; and hence, for the systematic mental organization of the subject, the student has to turn to the conceptual framework of the historian for events, and to that of the philosopher for ideas. Even the more centrally placed critical sciences, such as textual editing, seem to be part of a "background" that recedes into history or some other non-literary field. The thought suggests itself that the ancillary critical disciplines may be related to a central expanding pattern of systematic comprehension which has not yet been established, but which, if it were established, would prevent them from being centrifugal. If such a pattern exists, then criticism would be to art what philosophy is to wisdom and history to action.

Most of the central area of criticism is at present, and doubtless always will be, the area of commentary. But the commentators have little sense, unlike the researchers, of being contained within some sort of scientific discipline: they are chiefly engaged, in the words of the gospel hymn, in brightening the corner where they are. If we attempt to get a more comprehensive idea of what criticism is about, we find ourselves wandering over quaking bogs of generalities, judicious pronouncements of value, reflective comments, perorations to works of research, and other consequences of taking the large view. But this part of the critical field is so full of pseudo-propositions, sonorous nonsense that contains no truth and no falsehood that it obviously exists only because criticism, like nature, prefers a waste space to an empty one.

The term "pseudo-proposition" may imply some sort of logical positivist attitude on my own part. But I would not confuse the significant proposition with the factual one; nor should I consider it advisable to muddle the study

2. Characteristic of the philosophy that views all knowledge as deriving from empirical experience and logical reasoning; any statement that cannot

be proved true or false is nonsense (i.e., a "pseudo-proposition").

of literature with a schizophrenic dichotomy between subjective-emotional and objective-descriptive aspects of meaning, considering that in order to produce any literary meaning at all one has to ignore this dichotomy. I say only that the principles by which one can distinguish a significant from a meaningless statement in criticism are not clearly defined. Our first step, therefore, is to recognize and get rid of meaningless criticism: that is, talking about literature in a way that cannot help to build up a systematic structure of knowledge. Casual value-judgments belong not to criticism but to the history of taste, and reflect, at best, only the social and psychological compulsions which prompted their utterance. All judgments in which the values are not based on literary experience but are sentimental or derived from religious or political prejudice may be regarded as casual. Sentimental judgments are usually based either on non-existent categories or antitheses ("Shakespeare studied life, Milton books") or on a visceral reaction to the writer's personality. The literary chit-chat which makes the reputations of poets boom and crash in an imaginary stock exchange is pseudo-criticism. That wealthy investor Mr. Eliot, after dumping Milton on the market, is now buying him again; Donne has probably reached his peak and will begin to taper off; Tennyson may be in for a slight flutter but the Shelley stocks are still bearish.<sup>3</sup> This sort of thing cannot be part of any systematic study, for a systematic study can only progress: whatever dithers or vacillates or reacts is merely leisure-class conversation.

We next meet a more serious group of critics who say: the foreground of criticism is the impact of literature on the reader. Let us, then, keep the study of literature centripetal, and base the learning process on a structural analysis of the literary work itself. The texture of any great work of art is complex and ambiguous, and in unravelling the complexities we may take in as much history and philosophy as we please, if the subject of our study remains at the center. If it does not, we may find that in our anxiety to write about literature we have forgotten how to read it.

The only weakness in this approach is that it is conceived primarily as the antithesis of centrifugal or "background" criticism, and so lands us in a somewhat unreal dilemma, like the conflict of internal and external relations in philosophy. Antitheses are usually resolved, not by picking one side and refuting the other, or by making eclectic choices between them, but by trying to get past the antithetical way of stating the problem. It is right that the first effort of critical apprehension should take the form of a rhetorical or structural analysis of a work of art. But a purely structural approach has the same limitation in criticism that it has in biology. In itself it is simply a discrete series of analyses based on the mere existence of the literary structure, without developing any explanation of how the structure came to be what it was and what its nearest relatives are. Structural analysis brings rhetoric back to criticism, but we need a new poetics as well, and the attempt to construct a new poetics out of rhetoric alone can hardly avoid a mere complication of rhetorical terms into a sterile jargon. I suggest that what is at present missing from literary criticism is a co-ordinating principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the

<sup>3</sup> Frye is referring to the evaluations of poets that the poet and critic T. S. ELIOT (1888-1965) made, and that others—for example, the English critic

F. R. Leavis and the American Ivor Winters—subsequently reinforced, modified, or disputed.

phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole. Such a principle, though it would retain the centripetal perspective of structural analysis, would try to give the same perspective to other kinds of criticism too.

The first postulate of this hypothesis is the same as that of any science: the assumption of total coherence. The assumption refers to the science, not to what it deals with. A belief in an order of nature is an inference from the intelligibility of the natural sciences; and if the natural sciences ever completely demonstrated the order of nature they would presumably exhaust their subject. Criticism, as a science, is totally intelligible; literature, as the subject of a science, is, so far as we know, an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries, and would be even if new works of literature ceased to be written. If so, then the search for a limiting principle in literature in order to discourage the development of criticism is mistaken. The assertion that the critic should not look for more in a poem than the poet may safely be assumed to have been conscious of putting there is a common form of what may be called the fallacy of premature teleology. It corresponds to the assertion that a natural phenomenon is as it is because Providence in its inscrutable wisdom made it so.

Simple as the assumption appears, it takes a long time for a science to discover that it is in fact a totally intelligible body of knowledge. Until it makes this discovery it has not been born as an individual science, but remains an embryo within the body of some other subject. The birth of physics from "natural philosophy" and of sociology from "moral philosophy" will illustrate the process. It is also very approximately true that the modern sciences have developed in the order of their closeness to mathematics. Thus physics and astronomy assumed their modern form in the Renaissance; chemistry in the 18th Century, biology in the 19th, and the social sciences in the 20th. If systematic criticism, then, is developing only in our day, the fact is at least not an anachronism.

We are now looking for classifying principles lying in an area between two points that we have fixed. The first of these is the preliminary effort of criticism, the structural analysis of the work of art. The second is the assumption that there is such a subject as criticism, and that it makes, or could make, complete sense. We may next proceed inductively from structural analysis, associating the data we collect and trying to see larger patterns in them. Or we may proceed deductively, with the consequences that follow from postulating the unity of criticism. It is clear, of course, that neither procedure will work indefinitely without correction from the other. Pure induction will get us lost in haphazard guessing; pure deduction will lead to inflexible and over-simplified pigeon-holing. Let us now attempt a few tentative steps in each direction, beginning with the inductive one.

## II

The unity of a work of art, the basis of structural analysis, has not been produced solely by the unconditional will of the artist, for the artist is only its efficient cause; it has form, and consequently a formal cause. The fact that revision is possible, that the poet makes changes not because he likes them better but because they are better, means that poems, like poets, are born and not made. The poet's task is to deliver the poem in as uninjured state as possible, and if the poem is alive, it is equally anxious to be rid of

him, and screams to be cut loose from his private memories and associations, his desire for self-expression, and all the other navel-strings and feeding tubes of his ego. The critic takes over where the poet leaves off, and criticism can hardly do without a kind of literary psychology connecting the poet with the poem. Part of this may be a psychological study of the poet, though this is useful chiefly in analysing the failures in his expression; the things in him which are still attached to his work. More important is the fact that every poet has his private mythology; his own spectroscopic band or peculiar formation of symbols, of much of which he is quite unconscious. In works with characters of their own, such as dramas and novels, the same psychological analysis may be extended to the interplay of characters, though of course literary psychology would analyse the behavior of such characters only in relation to literary convention.

There is still before us the problem of the formal cause of the poem, a problem deeply involved with the question of genres. We cannot say much about genres, for criticism does not know much about them. A good many critical efforts to grapple with such words as "novel" or "epic" are chiefly interesting as examples of the psychology of rumor. Two conceptions of the genre, however, are obviously fallacious, and as they are opposite extremes, the truth must lie somewhere between them. One is the pseudo-Platonic conception of genres as existing prior to and independently of creation, which confuses them with mere conventions of form like the sonnet. The other is that pseudo-biological conception of them as evolving species which turns up in so many surveys of the "development" of this or that form.

We next inquire for the origin of the genre, and turn first of all to the social conditions and cultural demands which produced it—in other words to the material cause of the work of art. This leads us into literary history, which differs from ordinary history in that its containing categories, Gothic, Baroque, Romantic, and the like are cultural categories, of little use to the ordinary historian. Most literary history does not get as far as these categories, but even so we know more about it than about most kinds of critical scholarship. The historian treats literature and philosophy historically; the philosopher treats history and literature philosophically; and the so-called "history of ideas" approach marks the beginning of an attempt to treat history and philosophy from the point of view of an autonomous criticism.

But still we feel that there is something missing. We say that every poet has his own peculiar formation of images. But when so many poets use so many of the same images, surely there are much bigger critical problems involved than biographical ones. As Mr. Auden's brilliant essay *The Enchanted Flood*<sup>4</sup> shows, an important symbol like the sea cannot remain within the poetry of Shelley or Keats or Coleridge;<sup>5</sup> it is bound to expand over many poets into an archetypal symbol of literature. And if the genre has a historical origin, why does the genre of drama emerge from medieval religion in a way so strikingly similar to the way it emerged from Greek religion centuries before? This is a problem of structure rather than origin, and suggests that there may be archetypes of genres as well as of images.

It is clear that criticism cannot be systematic unless there is a quality in

<sup>4</sup> A set of lectures published by the poet and critic W. H. Auden (1907-1973) in 1950.

<sup>5</sup> All English Romantic poets. PERCY BRUSSE

SHELLEY (1792-1822), John Keats (1795-1821), and SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772-1834).

96

literature which enables it to be so, an order of words corresponding to the order of nature in the natural sciences. An archetype should be not only a unifying category of criticism, but itself a part of a total form, and it leads us at once to the question of what sort of total form criticism can see in literature. Our survey of critical techniques has taken us as far as literary history. Total literary history moves from the primitive to the sophisticated, and here we glimpse the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture. If so, then the search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology, concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folk tale. We next realize that the relation between these categories and literature is by no means purely one of descent, as we find them reappearing in the greatest classics—in fact there seems to be a general tendency on the part of great classics to revert to them. This coincides with a feeling that we have all had: that the study of mediocre works of art, however energetic, obstinately remains a random and peripheral form of critical experience, whereas the profound masterpiece seems to draw us to a point at which we can see an enormous number of converging patterns of significance. Here we begin to wonder if we cannot see literature, not only as complicating itself in time, but as spread out in conceptual space from some unseen center.

This inductive movement towards the archetype is a process of backing up, as it were, from structural analysis, as we back up from a painting if we want to see composition instead of brushwork. In the foreground of the grave-digger scene in *Hamlet*, for instance, is an intricate verbal texture, ranging from the puns of the first clown to the *danse macabre* of the Yorick soliloquy, which we study in the printed text. One step back, and we are in the Wilson Knight and Spurgeon group of critics,<sup>7</sup> listening to the steady rain of images of corruption and decay. Here too, as the sense of the place of this scene in the whole play begins to dawn on us, we are in the network of psychological relationships which were the main interest of Bradley.<sup>8</sup> But after all, we say, we are forgetting the genre: *Hamlet* is a play, and an Elizabethan play. So we take another step back into the Stoll and Shaw<sup>9</sup> group and see the scene conventionally as part of its dramatic context. One step more, and we can begin to glimpse the archetype of the scene, as the hero's *Liebestod*<sup>10</sup> and first unequivocal declaration of his love, his struggle with Laertes and the sealing of his own fate, and the sudden sobering of his mood that marks the transition to the final scene, all take shape around a leap into and return from the grave that has so weirdly yawned open on the stage.

At each stage of understanding this scene we are dependent on a certain kind of scholarly organization. We need first an editor to clean up the text for us, then the rhetorician and philologist, then the literary psychologist. We cannot study the genre without the help of the literary social historian

6. Dance of death (French). See *Hamlet* (ca. 1600), 5.1.

7. Critics who call attention to Shakespeare's patterns of imagery and symbolism, led by Caroline Spurgeon (1869-1941) and G. Wilson Knight (1897-1985).

8. A. C. Bradley (1851-1935); his *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) provided a detailed study of "character."

9. The playwright and critic George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950). E. E. Stoll (1874-1959), critic who focused in his scholarship on the relationship of Shakespeare's plays to the dramatic conventions of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age.

10. Literally, "death of love" (German); the *Liebestod* is specifically an operatic aria or duet on the suicide of lovers and, more generally, the thematic linking of love and death.

the literary philosopher and the student of the "history of ideas," and for the archetype we need a literary anthropologist. But now that we have got our central pattern of criticism established, all these interests are seen as converging on literary criticism instead of receding from it into psychology and history and the rest. In particular, the literary anthropologist who chases the source of the Hamlet legend from the pre-Shakespeare play to Saxo,<sup>2</sup> and from Saxo to nature-myths, is not running away from Shakespeare; he is drawing closer to the archetypal form which Shakespeare recreated. A minor result of our new perspective is that contradictions among critics, and assertions that this and not that critical approach is the right one, show a remarkable tendency to dissolve into unreality. Let us now see what we can get from the deductive end.

### III

Some arts move in time, like music; others are presented in space, like painting. In both cases the organizing principle is recurrence, which is called rhythm when it is temporal and pattern when it is spatial. Thus we speak of the rhythm of music and the pattern of painting; but later, to show off our sophistication, we may begin to speak of the rhythm of painting and the pattern of music. In other words, all arts may be conceived both temporally and spatially. The score of a musical composition may be studied all at once; a picture may be seen as the track of an intricate dance of the eye. Literature seems to be intermediate between music and painting: its words form rhythms which approach a musical sequence of sounds at one of its boundaries, and form patterns which approach the hieroglyphic or pictorial image at the other. The attempts to get as near to these boundaries as possible form the main body of what is called experimental writing. We may call the rhythm of literature the narrative, and the pattern, the simultaneous mental grasp of the verbal structure, the meaning or significance. We hear or listen to a narrative, but when we grasp a writer's total pattern we "see" what he means. The criticism of literature is much more hampered by the representational fallacy than even the criticism of painting. That is why we are apt to think of narrative as a sequential representation of events in an outside "life," and of meaning as a reflection of some external "idea." Properly used as critical terms, an author's narrative is his linear movement; his meaning is the integrity of his completed form. Similarly an image is not merely a verbal replica of an external object, but any unit of a verbal structure seen as part of a total pattern or rhythm. Even the letters an author spells his words with form part of his imagery, though only in special cases (such as alliteration) would they call for critical notice. Narrative and meaning thus become respectively, to borrow musical terms, the melodic and harmonic contexts of the imagery. Rhythm, or recurrent movement, is deeply founded on the natural cycle, and everything in nature that we think of as having some analogy with works of art, like the flower or the bird's song, grows out of a profound synchronization between an organism and the rhythms of its environment, especially that of the solar year. With animals some expressions of synchronization, like the mating dances of birds, could almost be called rituals. But in human

2. Saxo Grammaticus (13th c.), Danish historian whose *Gesta Danorum* includes the Hamlet story.



life a ritual seems to be something of a voluntary effort (hence the magical element in it) to recapture a lost rapport with the natural cycle. A farmer must harvest his crop at a certain time of year, but because this is involuntary, harvesting itself is not precisely a ritual. It is the deliberate expression of a will to synchronize human and natural energies at that time which produces the harvest songs, harvest sacrifices and harvest folk customs that we call rituals. In ritual, then, we may find the origin of narrative, a ritual being a temporal sequence of acts in which the conscious meaning or significance is latent: it can be seen by an observer, but is largely concealed from the participants themselves. The pull of ritual is toward pure narrative, which, if there could be such a thing, would be automatic and unconscious repetition. We should notice too the regular tendency of ritual to become encyclopedic. All the important recurrences in nature, the day, the phases of the moon, the seasons and solstices of the year, the crises of existence from birth to death, get rituals attached to them, and most of the higher religions are equipped with a definitive total body of rituals suggestive, if we may put it so, of the entire range of potentially significant actions in human life.

Patterns of imagery, on the other hand, or fragments of significance, are oracular in origin, and derive from the epiphanic moment, the flash of instantaneous comprehension with no direct reference to time, the importance of which is indicated by Cassirer in *Myth and Language*.<sup>3</sup> By the time we get them, in the form of proverbs, riddles, commandments and etiological folk tales, there is already a considerable element of narrative in them. They too are encyclopedic in tendency, building up a total structure of significance, or doctrine, from random and empiric fragments. And just as pure narrative would be unconscious act, so pure significance would be an incommunicable state of consciousness, for communication begins by constructing narrative.

The myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence the myth is the archetype, though it might be convenient to say myth only when referring to narrative, and archetype when speaking of significance. In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility and partly a god or archetypal human being. The crucial importance of this myth has been forced on literary critics by Jung and Frazer<sup>4</sup> in particular, but the several books now available on it are not always systematic in their approach, for which reason I supply the following table of its phases:

1.

The dawn, spring and birth phase. Myths of the birth of the hero, of revival and resurrection, of creation and (because the four phases are a cycle) of the defeat of the powers of darkness, winter and death. Subordinate characters: the father and the mother. The archetype of romance and of most ditlyrambic and rhapsodic poetry.

2. The zenith, summer, and marriage or triumph phase. Myths of apotheosis, of the sacred marriage, and of entering into Paradise. Subordinate characters: the companion and the bride. The archetype of comedy, pastoral and idyll.

3. The sunset, autumn and death phase. Myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice and of the isolation of the hero. Subordinate characters: the traitor and that siren. The archetype of tragedy and elegy.

4. The darkness, winter and dissolution phase. Myths of the triumph of these powers; myths of floods and the return of chaos, of the defeat of the hero, and Götterdämmerung<sup>5</sup> myths. Subordinate characters: the ogre and the witch. The archetype of satire (see, for instance, the conclusion of *The Dunciad*).<sup>6</sup>

The quest of the hero also tends to assimilate the oracular and random verbal structures, as we can see when we watch the chaos of local legends that results from prophetic epiphanies consolidating into a narrative mythology of departmental gods. In most of the higher religions this in turn has become the same central quest-myth that emerges from ritual, as the Mesopotamian myth became the narrative structure of the oracles of Judaism. A local flood may beget a folk tale by accident, but a comparison of flood stories will show how quickly such tales become examples of the myth of dissolution. Finally, the tendency of both ritual and epiphany to become encyclopedic is realized in the definitive body of myth which constitutes the sacred scriptures of religions. These sacred scriptures are consequently the first documents that the literary critic has to study to gain a comprehensive view of his subject. After he has understood their structure, then he can descend from archetypes to genres, and see how the drama emerges from the ritual side of myth and lyric from the epiphanic or fragmented side, while the epic carries on the central encyclopedic structure.

Some words of caution and encouragement are necessary before literary criticism has clearly staked out its boundaries in these fields. It is part of the critic's business to show how all literary genres are derived from the quest-myth, but the derivation is a logical one within the science of criticism: the quest-myth will constitute the first chapter of whatever future handbooks of criticism may be written that will be based on enough organized critical knowledge to call themselves "introductions" or "outlines" and still be able to live up to their titles. It is only when we try to expound the derivation chronologically that we find ourselves writing pseudo-prehistorical fictions and theories of mythological contract. Again, because psychology and

3. Properly, *Language and Myth* (1925), by the German philosopher and historian of ideas Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945).  
4. Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941), *Scottish anthropologist and folklorist, whose Golden Bough*

(12 vols., 1890-1915) is largely concerned with the fertility figure. CARL GUSTAV JUNG (1875-1961), Swiss psychiatrist and theorist of archetypes.  
5. Literally, "the twilight of the gods" (German), and the title of an opera (1876) by the German composer Richard Wagner. More generally, the term refers to catastrophic collapse into violence and disorder.  
6. Mock-heroic satire (1728-43) by ALEXANDER POPE.

98

anthropology are more highly developed sciences, the critic who deals with this kind of material is bound to appear, for some time, a dilettante of those subjects. These two phases of criticism are largely undeveloped in comparison with literary history and rhetoric, the reason being the later development of the sciences they are related to. But the fascination which *The Golden Bough* and Jung's book on libido symbols<sup>7</sup> have for literary critics is not based on dilettantism, but on the fact that these books are primarily studies in literary criticism, and very important ones.

In any case the critic who is studying the principles of literary form has a quite different interest from the psychologist's concern with states of mind or the anthropologist's with social institutions. For instance, the mental response to narrative is mainly passive; to significance mainly active. From this fact Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* develops a distinction between "Apollonian" cultures based on obedience to ritual and "Dionysiac" ones based on a tense exposure of the prophetic mind to epiphany. The critic would tend rather to note how popular literature which appeals to the inertia of the untrained mind puts a heavy emphasis on narrative values, whereas a sophisticated attempt to disrupt the connection between the poet and his environment produces the Rimbaud type of *illumination*, Joyce's solitary epiphanies, and Baudelaire's<sup>8</sup> conception of nature as a source of oracles. Also how literature, as it develops from the primitive to the self-conscious, shows a gradual shift of the poet's attention from narrative to significant values, this shift of attention being the basis of Schiller's distinction between naive and sentimental poetry.

The relation of criticism to religion, when they deal with the same documents, is more complicated. In criticism, as in history, the divine is always treated as a human artifact. God for the critic, whether he finds him in *Paradise Lost*<sup>2</sup> or the Bible, is a character in a human story; and for the critic all epiphanies are explained, not in terms of the riddle of a possessing god or devil, but as mental phenomena closely associated in their origin with dreams. This once established, it is then necessary to say that nothing in criticism or art compels the critic to take the attitude of ordinary waking consciousness towards the dream or the god. Art deals not with the real but with the conceivable; and criticism, though it will eventually have to have some theory of conceivability, can never be justified in trying to develop much less assume, any theory of actuality. It is necessary to understand this before our next and final point can be made.

We have identified the central myth of literature, in its narrative aspect with the quest-myth. Now if we wish to see this central myth as a pattern of meaning also, we have to start with the workings of the subconscious where the epiphany originates, in other words in the dream. The human cycle of waking and dreaming corresponds closely to the natural cycle of light and darkness, and it is perhaps in this correspondence that all imaginative life begins. The correspondence is largely an antithesis: it is in daylight that man

is really in the power of darkness, a prey to frustration and weakness; it is in the darkness of nature that the "libido" or conquering heroic self awakes. Hence art, which Plato called a dream for awakened minds,<sup>3</sup> seems to have as its final cause the resolution of the antithesis, the mingling of the sun and the hero, the realizing of a world in which the inner desire and the outward circumstance coincide. This is the same goal, of course, that the attempt to combine human and natural power in ritual has. The social function of the work, therefore, seems to be closely connected with visualizing the goal of work in human life. So in terms of significance, the central myth of art must be the vision of the end of social effort, the innocent world of fulfilled desires, the free human society. Once this is understood, the integral place of criticism among the other social sciences, in interpreting and systematizing the vision of the artist, will be easier to see. It is at this point that we can see how religious conceptions of the final cause of human effort are as relevant as any others to criticism.

The importance of the god or hero in the myth lies in the fact that such characters, who are conceived in human likeness and yet have more power over nature, gradually build up the vision of an omnipotent personal community beyond an indifferent nature. It is this community which the hero regularly enters in his apotheosis. The world of this apotheosis thus begins to pull away from the rotary cycle of the quest in which all triumph is temporary. Hence if we look at the quest-myth as a pattern of imagery, we see the hero's quest first of all in terms of its fulfillment. This gives us our central pattern of archetypal images, the vision of innocence which sees the world in terms of total human intelligibility. It corresponds to, and is usually found in the form of, the vision of the unfallen world or heaven in religion. We may call it the comic vision of life, in contrast to the tragic vision, which sees the quest only in the form of its ordained cycle.

We conclude with a second table of contents, in which we shall attempt to set forth the central pattern of the comic and tragic visions. One essential principle of archetypal criticism is that the individual and the universal forms of an image are identical, the reasons being too complicated for us just now. We proceed according to the general plan of the game of Twenty Questions, or, if we prefer, of the Great Chain of Being.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.

In the comic vision the human world is a community, or a hero who represents the wish-fulfillment of the reader. The archetype of images of symbolism, communion, order, friendship and love. In the tragic vision the human world is a tyranny or anarchy, or an individual or isolated man, the leader with his back to his followers, the bullying giant of romance, the deserted or betrayed hero. Marriage or some equivalent consummation belongs to the comic vision; the harlot, witch and other varieties of Jung's "terrible mother" belong to the tragic one. All divine, heroic, angelic or other superhuman communities follow the human pattern.

<sup>3</sup> See *Sophist* 266c, by the Greek philosopher PLATO (ca. 427-ca. 347 B.C.E.).

<sup>4</sup> The notion of the universe as a hierarchical

7. *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* (1912; trans. first as *Psychology of the Unconscious* and then as *Symbols of Transformation*).

8. American anthropologist (1887-1948); *Patterns of Culture* was published in 1934.

9. CHARLES BAUDELAIRE (1821-1867), French symbolist poet. Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891),

French symbolist poet. James Joyce (1882-1941) Irish novelist who extended the term "epiphany" to refer to peak moments recorded in literature.

1. See *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795-96) by FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER (1759-1805)

German dramatist, poet, and historian.

2. Epic poet (1667) by John Milton.

order consisting of an enormous (or even infinite) number of links; Frye probably has in mind Arthur O. Lovejoy's *Great Chain of Being* (1936).

2. In the comic vision the *animal* world is a community of domesticated animals, usually a flock of sheep, or a lamb, or one of the gentler birds, usually a dove. The archetype of pastoral images. In the tragic vision the animal world is seen in terms of beasts and birds of prey, wolves, vultures, serpents, dragons and the like.

3. In the comic vision the *vegetable* world is a garden, grove or park, or a tree of life, or a rose or lotus. The archetype of Arcadian images, such as that of Marvell's green world or of Shakespeare's forest comedies.<sup>5</sup> In the tragic vision it is a sinister forest like the one in *Comus* or at the opening of the *Inferno*,<sup>6</sup> or a heath or wilderness, or a tree of death.

4. In the comic vision the *mineral* world is a city, or one building or temple, or one stone, normally a glowing precious stone—in fact the whole comic series, especially the tree, can be conceived as luminous or fiery. The archetype of geometrical images: the "startle dome"<sup>7</sup> belongs here. In the tragic vision the mineral world is seen in terms of deserts, rocks and ruins, or of sinister geometrical images like the cross.

5. In the comic vision the *unformed* world is a river, traditionally fourfold, which influenced the Renaissance image of the temperate body with its four humors.<sup>8</sup> In the tragic vision this world usually becomes the sea, as the narrative myth of dissolution is so often a flood myth. The combination of the sea and beast images gives us the leviathan and similar water-monsters.

Obvious as this table looks, a great variety of poetic images and forms will be found to fit it. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium,"<sup>9</sup> to take a famous example of the comic vision at random, has the city, the tree, the bird, the community of sages, the geometrical gyre and the detachment from the cyclic world. It is, of course, only the general comic or tragic context that determines the interpretation of any symbol: this is obvious with relatively neutral archetypes like the island, which may be Prospero's island or Circe's.<sup>1</sup>

Our tables are, of course, not only elementary but grossly over-simplified, just as our inductive approach to the archetype was a mere hunch. The important point is not the deficiencies of either procedure, taken by itself

5. Shakespeare's forest (that is, pastoral) comedies include *As You Like It* (ca. 1599). For the "green world" of Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), English metaphysical poet, see especially "The Garden" (1681).

6. The first book of DANTE ALIGHIERI'S *Divine Comedy* (1321). *Comus* (1634), a religious masque by Milton.

7. See, for example, Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" (written 1797; pub. 1816), which refers to Kubla Khan's "stately pleasure-dome."

8. The four fluids of the body—blood, phlegm, cholera, and black bile—whose relative proportions were thought to determine a person's disposition and general health.

9. Poem (1927) by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1933).

1. In Greek mythology, a sorceress who lived on the island of Aeaë (where Odysseus and his men were held in Homer's *Odyssey*). Prospero's island: the setting of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (1611).

but the fact that, somewhere and somehow, the two are clearly going to meet in the middle. And if they do meet, the ground plan of a systematic and comprehensive development of criticism has been established.

1951

## ROLAND BARTHES 1915-1980

Generally considered one of the leading figures in French structuralism, Roland Barthes is, as Jonathan Culler puts it, "famous for contradictory reasons." On the one hand, there is the scientific Barthes: the one who sought a universal grammar of narrative in his influential essay "Introduction to the Structural Study of Narrative" (1966), or who explored FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE's notion of semiology—a broad science of signs in human culture, of which linguistics would provide a model—in such works as *Elements of Semiology* (1965) and *The Fashion System* (1967). But on the other hand, there is the hedonist and connoisseur: the Barthes who wrote playfully and allusively about pleasure in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) and in *A Lover's Discourse* (1977). Even his literary tastes seemed contradictory: he promoted avant-garde writers (Robbe-Grillet, Brecht, Sollers), but he also loved and wrote about the most traditional of French authors (La Bruyère, Racine, Chateaubriand, Balzac, Proust). And he who questioned the importance of the author was himself preeminently an author—indeed, the only author to have written his own volume in a series of "perennial masters" (*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 1975). A quintessential critic, literal sense, organizing three of his books alphabetically so as to avoid thematic or logical organization, and highlighting the material form of letters in one of his book titles, *S/Z* (1970). He was less a path breaker than a habit breaker, resolutely committed to unlearning the routines of intelligibility, even those he himself had helped promote.

Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg. His father, a naval officer, was killed a year later, and Barthes's mother moved to the paternal family home in Bayonne in southern France. The theorist of the death of the author thus grew up without a father, living with or near his mother until her death in 1977, three years before his own. In 1924 mother and son moved to Paris, where Barthes progressed to the *baccalauréat* in the Parisian schools and began studying for entrance into the prestigious *École Normale*, until his promising academic trajectory was interrupted by the first of several attacks of tuberculosis. Meanwhile, his mother's already strained relations with Roland's half-brother, Michel Salgado. Although Barthes's grandparents were well-off, they refused Henriette Binger Barthes and her two sons any financial support, with the result that Henriette had to scrape by on what she earned as a bookbinder. From 1934 to 1950 Barthes's life alternated between tuberculosis sanatoria (he was exempted from military duty and spent the years of the Occupation in a sanatorium in the Isère), academic institutions where he studied, and, when his health permitted, teaching jobs in Biarritz and abroad in Bucharest and Alexandria. Despite—or perhaps because of—his forced convalescences, he read avidly, founded a theatrical group, and began to write. From the first Barthes's writings reflect both his idiosyncratic creativity and his attunement to the intellectual milieu in which he found

100