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CALIBRATING DIFFICULTY IN MODERNIST LITERATURE:
THE SPACE FOR READING IN DJUNA BARNES AND FRANZ KAFKA

by

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Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the
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For all my teachers.

For my best and most loving teachers, my parents.

And, always, for my students.

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Introduction

CALIBRATING DIFFICULTY

THE DIFFICULT QUESTION

"On or about December 1910, human character changed." With these words, Virginia Woolf stuck a flagged thumbtack on the literary calendar, cut off the Romantics in mid-rapture, and marked a beginning to the twentieth century sensibility now named Modernism.¹ Since then, critics have disputed many aspects of Modernism: its time span, adherents, characteristics, causes, effects, and even influences on it. Critics have also debated whether it was a movement, a literary period, an attitude, an approach, or a method. Because Modernism is unattached to specific writers, as is Imagism with Pound or Symbolism with Baudelaire, some critics have seen it as an umbrella -ism for all of the movements of the period such as Dadaism, Surrealism, and Cubism. Paradoxically, other critics have conflated Modernism with only one of the -isms. Critics have even contended over Modernism's very name, distinguishing it from terms such as

¹ It is interesting that Modernism was named "Modernism" rather than Post-Romanticism.

modernismo, modernist, modern, modernity, *avant garde*, and contemporary.

These controversies and confusions emerged from the question, "What is Modernism?" engendered by Modernism's own beginnings and later made academic in 1966 by Harry Levin's article, "What Was Modernism?" It was echoed in 1974 with Maurice Beebe's "Introduction: What Modernism Was" and repeated in 1978 in Robert Martin Adams' "What Was Modernism?" Irving Howe nods to this question in *Decline of the New*, and many other critics allude to it by asking, "What is Modernist about this work?", including Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch, Gabriel Josipovici, Matei Calinescu, Norman F. Cantor, and Wylie Sypher, who have added some interesting discriminations.

In *Philosophy in a New Key*, Susanne K. Langer warns the reader of the necessity of asking the right question to get the right answer. "The way a question is asked limits and disposes the ways in which any answer to it--right or wrong--may be given" (3). Langer contends that the forms of the questions frame the answer, and further, that the questions "give the angle of perspective, the palette, the style in which the picture is drawn In our questions lie our *principles of analysis*, and our answers may express

whatever those principles are able to yield" (4). To examine the "principles of analysis" embedded in the questions, we must first look at the answers for a clue.

Many critics have answered the question, "What is Modernism?" by constructing lists, oftentimes thought-provoking lists. Some taxonomies focus on form, that is, the experimental techniques; others, on content. Some critics catalogue causes of Modernism; others, influences on it. Yet others have inventoried the effects on readers, and still other critics have catalogued the authors and the works belonging in the canon.

Taxonomies have flourished and continue to flourish, as evidenced by my list of lists, which follows. David Lodge compiled an insightful list of characteristics:

Formal experiment, dislocation of conventional syntax, radical breaches of decorum, disturbance of chronology and spatial order, ambiguity, polysemy, obscurity, mythopoeic allusion, primitivism, irrationalism, and structuring by symbol and motif rather than by narrative or argumentative logic, and so on. (550)

Most of the characteristics which Lodge suggested in this list are best understood as violations of conventional lit-

erary traditions, violations evidenced by language such as "breach," "dislocation," and "disturbance." This insurgence against conventions is a thread woven through the lists. These violations may seem conventional to those in the field but they are not conventional or common to the general or literary public. Readers may wish to compare how Freudian notions have permeated all levels of our culture. Non-professionals may understand a Freudian slip or the fact that Freud believed in dream interpretation, yet they are probably unfamiliar with latent dream work or the definitions and functions of ego, id, and super ego. So, too, with the violations of literary conventions: professionals may be familiar with them but to the general reading public, they are still bizarre.

Robert Adams Day also offered a list of "Ten Defining Characteristics of Modernism":

A. Reaction against nineteenth century (high

Victorian) norms

1. Rejection of didacticism, overt (and sometimes covert)
2. Rejection of naive realism
3. Rejection of conventional form, structure, style, continuity

- B. Reactions against traditional norms of art
 - 4. Letting form control or dictate content
 - 5. Playing with time, space, cause and effect as conventionally seen
 - 6. Amalgamating or transposing the arts
(Spatial Form, anti-Laocoön)
- C. Reaction against traditional views of self, artist, audience
 - 7. Idiosyncratic use of the past (or places, cultures)
 - 8. Search for and cultivation of an idiosyncratic 'religion,' vision, or personal myth
 - 9. Disregard of the audience (real, or as seen by the artist)
 - 10. Exaltation of the artist as prophet, hero, superman²

Any or all of these produce the "difficulty" often seen as a distinguishing characteristic of high modernism. Again it can be noted that the context of the list as "reaction against" places Modernism up against the wall of convention.

² This list was offered in a course entitled, "Modernism," Spring 1982 at the CUNY Graduate Centre.

Some lists resemble parodies of categorizing. The following list, whether or not we agree with the judgments, exemplifies this. (This list is a good example of how a change in degree creates a change in kind, that is, the quantity of elements--fourteen--transforms the quality--parody.) Norman Cantor lists and then discusses fourteen characteristics of Modernism. In summary, Modernism 1) was anti-historicist, 2) focused on the "microcosmic dimension," 3) was preoccupied with self-referentiality or textuality, 4) had a "penchant for the fragmented, the fractured, and the discordant," 5) had a "lack of predetermined pattern," 6) rejected "philosophical idealism," 7) preferred "functionalism," particularly in architecture, 8) expressed an "antipathy for absolute polarities," 9) was "elitist," 10) was open to "sexuality," 11) was attentive "to the outcomes of a technological culture," 12) tended toward "moral relativism," 13) believed that humanity was "most authentic . . . when it is involved in art," and 14) leaned towards "cultural despair" (35-40). Again, this list inclines towards a perception of Modernism as non-traditional; the majority of the items on the list are reactions against convention and tradition.

Even the critical debate over the canon itself fuels the list-making frenzy. Who belongs? Who does not belong? In the *Zeitgeist* called Modernism, critics have included as modernist T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, and Ernest Hemingway, expatriates all. Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Marcel Proust have also been suggested for the canon. Because some critics privilege experimental form and content as criteria for eligibility--again the unconventional--we find claims that the works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, E.E. Cummings, or Lewis Carroll belong. The borders of the canon are further stretched when critics allow works with anything non-traditional, permitting Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, concrete poetry, automatic writing, and Beckett's *Watt* to be part of the Modernist canon.

Yet other lists include inventories of influences on Modernist writers, including perceptual changes from the ideas of Freud, Jung, Einstein, Frazer, Nietzsche, and Bergson, as well as arguing that technology and machines, the end of slavery, the suffragist movement, the growth of the city, and World War I are responsible for the shift to the modernist *Weltanschauung*. Lists proliferate and include time distortions, Spatial Forms, anti-heroes, unique or ex-

perimental syntax, mythical architectures, and sexual differences. It would not be difficult for a reader to catalogue over eighty characteristics of Modernism. However, "an inventory, no matter how scrupulously assembled, is not an explanation," according to Michael André Bernstein.

One objection to the lists is that they grow bloated and ponderous. With so many inventories of aspects such as influences, effects, experimental techniques and so many lists of what belongs in the canon itself, how can any of the lists, with little to no hierarchical ordering, be serviceable? In essence, what do we do with the lists once they are constructed? Do they explicate the texts? Do they help readers penetrate and understand the non-traditional structures? The lists are unwieldy, sometimes too broad, sometimes too narrow, like viewing a landscape through a microscope or measuring a hem length with an odometer. The lists themselves need to be catalogued, rearranged, abridged in order to be functional and, in this, the computer age, it may be possible to produce a list which cross-references all the qualities. Yet, is even a short list an argument? If we wish to know the structure of something, it is not enough to know the parts; ideally, analysis shows the relationship

amongst the parts. Understanding comes from the consciousness of those relationships.

Another problem with the taxonomies is that they remain unreconciled with each other. How can one consider Freud's theory of the unconscious as a cause of Modernism if both his theory and Modernism occurred simultaneously? Nor does it make sense to say that Einstein's theory of relativity caused James Joyce or T.S. Eliot to create *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land*, respectively. Critics writing about Modernism do not relate the inventories of textual experimentation or characteristics to the lists of influences; nor do they relate Modernism to the various -isms which precede, run through, and supersede Modernism; nor explain entropy in relation to Freud's unconscious, nor Freud's unconscious in terms of the proliferation of technology around the end of the century; nor Einstein's relativity theory in connection with the popular turn of the century ailment, neurasthenia. In fact, it seems more likely that the *Weltanschauung* that caused Freud to develop a theory of the unconscious or Einstein his relativity theory also precipitated Joyce to employ the interior monologue technique in *Ulysses* or Eliot to use pastiche in *The Waste Land*. Critics or readers who spend time attempting to make the lists synchronous with

each other rather than trying to understand the works themselves tend to become removed from the literature itself.

Discussions of Modernism are further fragmented by one other, crucial factor: critical stance. Definitions of Modernism have changed as critical fashions have changed; critics of the twenties differ from critics of the sixties and they from those of today. Distinguishing the term "Modernism" from the term "Contemporary," as Irving Howe has done, was useful when contemporary had a firm grasp on the coat-tails of "Modernism," but today that distinction fades. Even to position a theory of Modernism as a response to Romanticism, for example, is futile if one considers that, according to *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 11,396 theories of Romanticism exist--yet another list (Weinberg). Attempts to define Post-modernism are thwarted by the problems of defining Modernism. Also, because Modernism is unattached to specific writers, as is Imagism with Pound or Symbolism with Baudelaire, critics, by mere emphasis, sometimes conflate Modernism with one of the -isms of the period.

Why has the question "What is Modernism?" failed to elicit a satisfactory answer for those readers trying to understand better the literature of Modernism? If Susanne K.

Langer is correct and something is revealed by the answers to our questions, then we must turn our attention to the plethora of lists with which the critics have responded. What perspective or frame of reference do the taxonomies reveal?

First of all, the lists are generally paratactical: in other words, each item is given the same value as any other item on the list. This forms an entropic perspective in the sense that, as the lists proliferate, their power--their source of useful energy--decreases. Entropy, a term which comes to the arts from the sciences, is often confused with decay, disintegration, and extinction. In the Information Age, the sheer abundance of information now available has been accused of flattening out values and priorities. The real question is "What do we do with our information?" However, understood truer to its Greek origin, "entropy" should be compared with "transformation," specifically, with equilibrium. It is a form of homogeneity, a lack of differentiation.³ Lists remove ordination. There are no priorities set or discussed in the act of listing.

³ Comments on entropy are from "Entropy/Grids/Modern Poetry: Boredom Without Borders," an unpublished study, by P.E. Zaccardo.

Secondly, the very existence of lists expresses a bias, perhaps a prejudice. To take any task at hand--chores to be done for the week or an explanation of Modernism--and create lists implies that the subject is chaotic or complex. The mind cannot process so much information without extracting characteristics from the tasks, or in this case the literary work, and categorizing them. To write a list is to organize and simplify difficulty.

Revealed in the list-making frenzy is that critics have cast Modernism in an adversarial position as having broken the rules, having broken the conventions of literary tradition. This intractable child, Modernism, has to be controlled, made submissive, in this case, by lists. Unfortunately, Modernism's lack of traditions has been read as lawlessness, not as freedom, and its complexity as confusion, not as difficulty. It is the case of Modernism's differences being seen as obstacles, not as opportunities.

Constructing taxonomies is entirely antithetical to the disruptive, experimental techniques, to Ezra Pound's injunction to "make it new." Rather than fight the difficulty for which the literature of Modernism is known, this study focuses on it, not by making lists and emphasizing what is absent--conventional form and content--but by analyzing the

kinds of difficulties peculiar and particular to the literature of Modernism. Doing so means confronting not only the non-traditional structures inherent in the literature of Modernism but also the process of how they are read, in other words, what happens not only in the text, but in the reader.

THE QUESTION OF DIFFICULTY

Traditionally, audiences interpret theme and ascribe meaning to conventional works of literature by analyzing elements such as plot, characterization, setting, symbol, and point of view. With effort, critics can summarize or paraphrase traditional literature, even the classics. However, these methods do not work with the literature of modernist writers who challenged traditional expectations and judgments about how literature should be read and who experimented boldly with form and content, with language and syntax.

Although many critics have judged these works as elitist or as aberrations of literary traditions, a few critics have explored non-traditional interpretive and critical ways to explain the difficulties of the literature of Modernism. Following a non-deprecatory approach, this study proposes a model of reading to describe and apprehend characteristic

difficulties of modernist writers, represented in this study by Djuna Barnes (1892-1982) and by Franz Kafka (1883-1924).

This introduction outlines the problem of dealing with difficult works of Modernism. The first chapter maps out the concept of difficulty; the second explores the kind and degree of difficulty characteristic of and specific to Modernism, that is, Spatial Form. I redefine Spatial Form as "aesthetic entropy," a method of reading modernist texts which erases the borders between reader and text and engages the reader in the meaning-making process. I employ the redefinition in order to explore Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* in chapter four and Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung/The Metamorphosis* in chapter five. The conclusion presents a theory to explain why, as Harry Levin inquired, the Moderns have "burned in such pyrotechnic distinction? What was the *zeitgeist* they shared? What was in the air that they breathed that differed from the intellectual climate of their predecessors?" (318). I also describe the effect of our educational system on our ways of handling textual difficulty.

To help illustrate the direction, which this study pursues in exploring difficulty in Modernism, it is first necessary for readers to get a feel for the difficulty specific to the period profiled in the following examples. I begin with

an example from Mallarmé because he is often placed at the pinnacle of difficulty. I shall later include illustrations from Franz Kafka and Djuna Barnes, the subjects of this study. In the following lines from Mallarmé's poem "Une dentelle s'abolit," we find a lack, amongst other things, of a context or a setting:

Une dentelle s'abolit
Dans le doute du Jeu suprême
A n'entr'ouvrir comme un blasphème
Qu'absence éternelle de lit (Poésies 87)
Lace annuls itself/In the doubt of the play supreme/Not to partly open like a blasphemy/But eternal absence of bed. [my translation]

Individual words, such as "dentelle" (lace) or "lit" (bed, read), may have referents outside the poem, sometimes inside it, but larger units of meaning, such as phrases and clauses, do not. It is difficult for the reader to infer meaning since the words chosen seem to "annul" the semantics and the syntax. No amount of looking words up will unlock meaning. What does the reader do, then, to confront the difficulty and to comprehend this poem? Such difficulty has the effect of shutting out one kind of reader who, in frustration, abandons any efforts to make sense of the difficulty. The other readers, those in whom we are interested, take time to understand

Mallarmé's poems. Our interest is in what they do specifically to make meaning.

In another example from Barnes' *Nightwood*, difficulty is found in oxymoron--"a face that will age only under the blows of perpetual childhood" (134)--which arrests the reader in the process of reading. Analysis and free association may guide a reader to devolve several referential readings: the narrator may be speaking of senility, of second childhood, or even of never maturing. But these readings are strained and uncertain. Above all, they do not allow the reader to confront the fact that the ideas--should we call them images?--are contained in an oxymoron. However, since *Nightwood* is suffused with oxymorons, understanding them is imperative.

In the last example from *Die Verwandlung*, Kafka opens with Gregor Samsa's turning into an insect. "Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt"/As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubling dreams, he found himself in his bed, changed into a monstrous insect (6-7). Is Gregor's turning into an insect a joke or a metaphor? Or is it real--in fictional terms, that is, achieving verisimilitude? The difficulty of the reader's accepting the metamorphosis of a human into a monstrous insect is compounded by the contradiction between, on the one hand, the absurdity of the situation which increases with each

added detail, and on the other, Kafka's calm, disengaged, and detailed descriptions both of "bugness" and of Gregor's and his family's acceptance of the inconvenient change. The text presents contradictions which readers must process. How do they experience these contradictions in order to make meaning or apprehend the work?

Because of these verbal experiments, the works of Mallarmé, Kafka, and Barnes are puzzling, that is, "difficult." Ambiguity, non-referentiality, breached syntax, oxymoron, paradox, lacunae, rearrangement of narrative time, blanks, or use of concepts, borrowed from the visual arts, of collage or cubism--these experimental techniques, often ascribed as the source of difficulty, demand increased reader attention. In order to "get something out of" the Modernist works, the reader must respond by experiencing the structures within which the pieces are given, a reading process reminiscent of concrete poetry. The reader works as much, if not more, with form as with content in order to make meaning. This is the reader in an intense interpretive mode.

The experimental strategies have demanded attention from critics and readers, particularly those techniques which slow down, even erase, time: *Nightwood* examines the events of one night from three perspectives; *Ulysses* covers approximately one 24-hour period; Proust synthesizes past and present time. New Criticism, Formalism, and Structuralism fur-

ther intensified the stress on verbal and syntactical experimentation until examining the devices became an end in itself. Later, the texts were freed from the autotelic critical approaches, which had imprisoned them in structure studies, when the critical focus shifted from the texts to the readers. Reader-response criticism evolved to respond to the contemporary literature being practiced. Parallel to the verbal experiments that seem to slow time in modernist texts, reader-response theory also seems to examine the slowed process of reading in order to accommodate those texts. Modernist writers who use experimental techniques force the reader to "work" harder by prolonging the reader's perceptual process. This kind of involvement or work differs from the researching of unknown words, of allusions, or of cultural or historical underpinnings. Instead, the reader must maintain an intense dual role as performer and as witness to her own reading process, producing a state of mind that exists only as long as the reader is conscious of the literature, its textuality, the difficulty, and her own performance.

Many critics have focused on the reader in their works, including Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes, David Bleich, Harold Bloom, Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, Walker Gibson, Peter J. Rabinowitz, and Steven Mailloux.⁴

⁴ See anthologies by Suleiman and by Tompkins.

The works of Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading*, are most suggestive of an approach for understanding the works of Mallarmé, Kafka, and Barnes, because Iser's theory emphasizes ". . . the interaction between the textual signals and the reader's acts of comprehension" (Act 9).

It is interesting to note that Iser's concepts are called "reception theory," which shifts the focus from exclusively the reader's response towards an attention which notes that someone, the reader, is receiving something, the text: thus, the **relationship** between text and reader is not lost. The reader does not eclipse the text. In his discussion of Beckett, for example, Iser says that novels such as *Molloy* "act as irritants, for they refuse to give the reader any bearings by which he might move far enough away to judge them" (*Implied* 175). In essence, to comprehend a novel like *Molloy* requires the reader to become intensely aware of her processes of meaning-making. Iser allows this "space" for the reading process.

Unfortunately, Iser discusses the syntactical and rhetorical strategies when theorizing but emphasizes characterization and theme in practice.⁵ What would Iser's response be

⁵ Suleiman's introduction also notes some shortcomings in Iser's approach, especially regarding "ambiguity."

to the permutation of choices in any action in Beckett's Watt? How would he discuss the oxymorons in Barnes' *Nightwood*? Paradox in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*? When Iser does turn his attention to the strategies, he returns, unfortunately, to his preconceived notions of the effect of expectations and revisions on the reader's original assumption. Suleiman also points out that Iser works with the "supposed experience of a generalized reader" (26). With Joseph Frank's theory of Spatial Form, we shall again see this problem: theory is excellent, but application falters and changes course.

In order to avoid the lapse in application, it is necessary to examine the kinds of difficulty to which the readers are responding. The first chapter explores the concept of difficulty in literature. Difficulty may be intentional or non-intentional. It may be the result of problems in the author or in the reader. This chapter not only maps out the concept of difficulty, its kinds, degrees, and levels, but it also introduces Spatial Form as the kind of difficulty specific and correspondent to Modernism. At this early stage, Spatial Form is defined as a kind of reading demanded by the innovative rhetorical and syntactical innovations of modern-

ist texts: specifically, a self conscious reading process at a high level of abstraction.

The major works on which this chapter relies are William Empson's *7 Types of Ambiguity*, George Steiner's *On Difficulty and Other Essays*, and *The Situation of High-Quality Literature*, edited by Sture Allén. The idea of difficulty is behind many theoretical works, works which suggest ways of arranging the mind, of perceiving, of confronting the complexities of literature. In essence, individuals, as they mature as readers, move through levels of abstraction as well as levels of consciousness of their process of abstraction. Such consciousness gives them a critical stance. The problems inherent in Modernism's non-traditional forms require that readers prepare to meet the kind of difficulty which is a high order of abstraction, what Steiner has named as the "ontological difficulty" of the text. Of course this demands a definition and positioning in literature of the meaning of "abstraction." It is true that one work can engender a variety of interpretations. Although the complexity of a work can multiply the number of interpretations, it can also transform the kind of interpretation. A change of degree shifts into a change of kind.

Before reader-response criticism, other early critical efforts existed which attempted to meet the challenges and to sound the territory of the reader's involvement in the reading process created by the verbal experiments in modernist texts. One came in the form of T.S. Eliot's prefatory remarks on Djuna Barnes' novel (1935): "*Nightwood* demands something of the reader which the ordinary novel reader is not prepared to give" (xii). Although this pointed in the right direction, towards the reader's involvement with the text, Eliot did not elucidate further his critical position.

An even more important emphasis on the reader, an emphasis pivotal to this study, can be found in the now classic essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in which Joseph Frank established a non-condemnatory and disinterested way of discussing the anomalies of modernist experimental literature. In Modernism, the literature that broke traditions required a reader who could meet the challenges or obstacles presented. Frank's essay brought together the concept of Spatial Form and the idea of the reader's role by defining Spatial Form as a "complete reorientation in the reader's attitude toward language" (Gyre 13), in essence, a holistic rather than a discrete, linear cognition. Frank did not explore the reader's experiences even though he named the non-

traditional process of reading. He leaves his concept of Spatial Form unexplained.

Chapter Two explores the concept of Spatial Form and redefines it as the self-conscious reading process required by the difficult texts of Modernism. At present, the family portrait of Spatial Form is crowded and muddled. As David Mickelsen has written: "Perhaps because of its imprecision, the term 'Spatial Form' has been used both too much and too little: some critics apply the term in inappropriate contexts, while others ignore it in appropriate ones" (Smitten 63). The controversy, evidenced by the numerous books and articles on Spatial Form discussed in chapter two, demonstrates that the idea of Spatial Form is unclear and open for reinterpretation. Some of the problems with Spatial Form were caused by Frank's inadequate explanation; other misinterpretations, by the critics' own agendas. Because of the gap between the theoretical statement and its application, including Frank's naming but not relating "Spatial Form" to the reader's new "attitude toward" language, subsequent critical responses to the idea of Spatial Form have taken up several related but tangential issues: the iconic (W.J.T. Mitchell), the *ut pictura poesis* question, imagery, images, imagination, ekphrasis, parallelism in the arts, time studies in narrative, as well as the metaphoric versus literal use of the

word space. (For the sake of convenience, I have coined the phrase the "family of spacials" for this list.)

In order to differentiate between the notion of Spatial Form and its connections to the questions about the "family of spacials," Chapter Two explores the notion of "space" by examining the forerunners and successors to these concepts. After organizing and clearing the field, it is possible to describe then a reader's holistic rather than discrete, linear apprehension of a work with an eye towards its association with the abstract level of cognitive development. How does literary experimentation--the form in which the ideas are presented--create a reading space for the reader to experience non-linear thought? How does the reader experience non-linear thought? Frank's explanation of his own concept of Spatial Form is ambiguous, making it difficult to use in his analysis of *Nightwood*, an analysis that remains mostly thematic.

Chapter three examines *Nightwood* by Djuna Barnes in light of the redefinition of Spatial Form. Since Joseph Frank's idea of Spatial Form brought *Nightwood* into the spotlight in 1963, a discussion of his analysis of Barnes begins the chapter. Frank's criticism of Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* is predominantly discursive, not reflexive, to use Frank's own

term. What would a "reflexive" study of her work involve? The redefinition of Spatial Form allows this new investigation of Barnes' *Nightwood*. This chapter also looks at the feminist critics who have given Barnes a new audience but who have basically ignored form and focused on content, feminist theory, and biography.

What makes *Nightwood* a haunting and fascinating novel are the experimental devices that slow down the reading process and demand meaning making strategies from the reader, although those strategies may take other than discursive forms. Though *Nightwood* has three major rhetorical techniques--oxymoron, relentless use of metaphor and simile, and a derivative of parallel structure Proustian style--I shall discuss only oxymoron now. During the constant interruptions in the process of reading--what to name these?--what does the reader do? Does the reader confront the paradox imbedded in the oxymorons? Do the oxymorons, in fact, create an image or an idea? If they do, how? Does the oxymoron split our attention or widen the perceptual field? I argue in this chapter that the numerous oxymorons force us to read *Nightwood* differently than a traditional novel or poem that contains only a few oxymorons. This change in quantity modulates the quality of our reading experience.

Chapter Four, "Franz Kafka's Mind/Body Problem, explores the ways in which Kafka challenges our reading abili-

ties by demanding that his readers focus on paradox. By this chapter, it will have become obvious that, first, paradox comes in many forms; second, that it demands reader attention; and, finally, that how a reader apprehends paradox is a function of cognitive growth. The camera close-up focus on reality, which draws the reader into believing the "facts" of the story, is contradicted by the absurdities presented: *Der Prozess/The Trial* is a "travesty of justice." In *Die Verwandlung* the reader seems to have three choices. Reading the transformation into an "ungeheuren Ungeziefer" as "real" requires the reader to suspend disbelief, for humans do not become monstrous vermin. Reading it as metaphor may feel more comfortable thematically--yes, his family treated him as vermin and he accepted it--but it denies certain facts of the text. This study argues that the third perspective is one which forces the reader to experience, to think, what seems impossible: to read it as both reality and metaphor, an activity reminiscent of holding the oxymoron up to scrutiny. The novella works only if the reader is conscious of the metaphor and, simultaneously, completely accepts the metaphor as materialized--the bug is real. Here, I cannot help thinking of the joke about the alchemist's secret: while stirring, one can turn base metals into gold as long as he remembers not to think of the word rhinoceros. One makes the novel

work or experiences it fully as long as one remembers not to think of the metaphor.

I have chosen to explore Kafka's works, particularly *Die Verwandlung*, *Brief an den Vater*, and "Gibs auf!", not only because these works appeared around the same time as those of James Joyce's, T.S. Eliot's, and Ezra Pound's, or because Kafka functions as a German representative of Modernism, but because his works seem to suggest that the stop, or bafflement, and therefore the reader's performance and witnessing, can operate on different levels. Some examination of the paradox in metaphor is also necessary. Studying Kafka supports my reading model and proves of interest because Kafka seems less non-traditional than Barnes.

The emphasis on experimental technique, under the rubric of Spatial Form, has stigmatized the modernist canon as "difficult." The reader is forced to engage with the language of the text, not receive it. What a work means seems to be less important than how the reader experiences meaning. The critics of Modernism have various names for the effect of the experimental or "difficult" technique: it has been designated the "still point" in Eliot, the epiphanic moment in Joyce, the oxymoron in Barnes, the moment of truth in Hemingway. In a rephrasing of Eliot, I have named it the "reassociation of sensibilities." When emotions and

thoughts become one, when we know without pictures, without words, when knowing does not attach to object or emotion, this aesthetic entropy, where the boundaries between text and reader are erased, is Modernism.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DIFFICULTY OF READING AND THE READING OF DIFFICULTY

"When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, . . . " it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master--that's all." (Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*)

All interpretation is an acknowledgment of difficulty.

Ein Buch ist ein Spiegel; wenn ein Affe hineinguckt, so kann
freilich kein Apostel heraussehen.

C.G. Lichtenberg

PREFACE

What does it mean when a reader says, "This work is difficult to read"? Has the author withheld crucial information? Is the reader a child or an untutored adult, lacking knowledge of words or experiences of ideas? Has the text been corrupted by time or by editors? Is the work merely badly written? All of these questions suggest, first, that a difficult work presents a problem to be solved, an obstacle to overcome, an enigma to be plumbed and, second, that the problems, obstacles, and enigmas have various sources, namely, authors, texts, and readers. In this chapter, I explore the notion of difficulty in literature, examining separately each of the sources—author, texts, readers. These categories, parasitic and symbiotic, influence each other ceaselessly; the separation I impose is artificial. However, any distortions that become apparent should not interfere with our explorations. In order to see the role of each source in the creating difficulty during the reading process, I try to cast a spotlight and magnifier on each one individually.

Although theory and criticism, in general, can be seen as attempts to hypothesize and explicate difficulty, few critics have confronted specifically the notion of diffi-

culty in literature. Alan C. Purves edited a collection of essays, *The Idea of Difficulty in Literature*; George Steiner tackled the issue in his essay, "On Difficulty"; Sturé Allen edited papers, presented at the Swedish Academy Nobel Jubilee Symposium, entitled *The Situation of High-Quality Literature*; and Marina Van Zuylen, in *Difficulty as an Aesthetic Principle*, used a concept of difficulty in her study of three nineteenth century authors. Readers may find themselves considering yet other possible literary or critical works connected to difficulty, as have I, and include William Empson's *7 Types of Ambiguity* or even Angus Fletcher's *Allegory*. Some explanations of difficulty, once addressed and considered below seem borne of common sense, but that does not negate their being complex structures or systems.

I would have preferred to select only those critical paradigms that relate individually to author, text, or reader as possible sources of difficulty. This would have created an explanation that took the form of a beautiful collage. However worthy such a collage may have been, it creates two problems. First, it renders a disservice to the original paradigms which do not focus only on author, text, or reader: if I disassemble a critic's ideas or concepts, if I use only fragments of the whole, I remove the possibility

of my readers' appreciating the uncut, original model. Second, I prefer that readers be acquainted with the variety of other ideas on the notion of difficulty in order to contextualize and to ground my argument: namely, that the difficulty of Modernism differs from the general notions of difficulty presented. These differences and their ramifications shape the subject of the second chapter: The Difficulty of Spatial Form in Modern Literature.

BACKGROUND

Difficulty probably had its origins, according to Hazard Adams, in hermeneutical exegesis and was sustained by ancient priests who "developed a vested interest in mystery" (Purves 23). Another echo of difficulty emerged with didacticism in literature, finding the message, as discussed in Horace's *Ars Poetica*.¹ Horace emphasized the pragmatic nature of literature as a means to an end: the education of public taste. His "*dulce et utile*" reveals an emphasis on

¹ M.H. Abrams' study *The Mirror and the Lamp* outlines the writings of three other classical philosophers, each as an "orientation of critical theories" (3). They include Plato's mimetic mode, Aristotle's objective mode, and Longinus' expressive mode. Since we engage theory and criticism to deal with difficulty, Abrams' modes suggest other perspectives for dealing with the causes of difficulty.

the audience in which the writer pleases in order to instruct. As soon as a work embeds a message, its literal level is eclipsed and difficulty arises. The *res/verba* coincidence is absent and readers find it necessary to interpret in order to find or make meaning.

Another approach to difficulty is suggested by Dante's four levels of meaning which he discusses in his *Letter to Can Grande* and in the *Convivio*.² In Dante's paradigm, the first level of meaning is the literal and narrates what occurs. Distinguished from the literal, the next three levels are variations of the non-literal level, specifically the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogic, corresponding roughly to the secular, the ethical, and the spiritual dimensions of analogy. As soon as we use the term "analogy," or "speaking otherwise," according to the classic definition, we are drawing on the need for further interpretation. These four levels may all be layered in one work. The literal level poses little or no difficulty even though, technically, it requires some interpretation; the mimetic

² I wish to thank Professor Deborah Sinnreich-Levi of the Stevens Institute for suggesting Dante's levels of meaning in connection with the concept of difficulty. Also note, Dante's ideas are foreshadowed by Origen's writings on exegesis.

tradition is intact and, again, the separation of *res* and *verba* is minimal. However, the three non-literal levels present a challenge to readers who are trying to find meaning, particularly when interpretation looks for the "right" message or for Truth. In a modern parallel example, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* represents a polysemantic work which functions at various levels of meaning. It is a child's story, delighting young and old alike. At another level, depending on the reader, it also shows brilliant insight into how a child gains control over her environment. At yet another level, it reflects the inner and outer worlds of Victorian Society. Each level requires more information for the reader to process in order to overcome difficulty. Nevertheless, we may still find ourselves asking, "Which one is the right interpretation?" or "Are all these interpretations compatible?" If they are not compatible, do we discard the odd man out or the others? Thus, layers of meaning are both sources of and exits from difficulties. But, as we all know, those exits may be, simultaneously, entrances, permitting or creating new difficulties.

Inevitably, any study of the concept of difficulty in literature simply can not avoid examining and using terms related to interpretation and misinterpretation, reading and

misreading, translation and mistranslation. This includes not only biblical readings or even translations from, or to, a foreign language, but also literary interpretation and the intermediary steps of the interpretive process: paraphrase and summary, or any reduction or metamorphosis of the "unreadable" to the "readable."

Wallace Chafe uses the term "readability," or "ease of processing" language while reading. Educators consider "readability" in choosing texts for students in elementary through university levels. Hazard Adams criticizes "developments in society and education" which have "resulted in our tendency to defer students' reading of so-called difficult texts" (in Purves 45). The consequence of this, according to Adams, is that students have problems, difficulties, reading any texts, literary or otherwise. Not challenging students to solve "puzzles" at an early age retards their ability to do so successfully in the future and defers endlessly their confronting texts of increasing difficulty. This has given rise to what some may consider "cognitive remediation" in the form of Critical Thinking courses where critical thinking is perceived as a discipline rather than a goal of all education.

Poetry inhabits a space where logic and clarity do not hold sway, where language opens up strange paths that defy all our intellectual classifications and attempts at possession. As Gerald Bruns (1989) so eloquently shows us, in such spaces we are not in control--of our language, of ourselves, of a poem and its meaning. And when we encounter this kind of 'difficulty,' we are at the beginning of thinking [italics are mine] (in Purves 83).

Stimulation begins young and continues throughout people's lives as they wrestle with difficulty. Recent brain research has established what has been common knowledge: that the cognitive stimulation a child receives in the first four years of life determines the future "absorbability," if you will, of the brain. This accounts for the tragedy of children strapped to chairs in Chinese orphanages with no one speaking to them. However, domesticating language based on readability ignores the question of whether or not difficulty results from excess or from deficit, from complexity or from ambiguity, from enrichment or from obscurity.

The logical work to feed our discussion is William Empson's *7 Types of Ambiguity*. Ambiguity is a source of difficulty. In fact, one may substitute "difficulty" each

time "ambiguity" is used. Ambiguity is from Latin, meaning to *wander about*. The intentional evasiveness as well as the unintentional indecisiveness is evident in the etymology.

(Philip Wheelwright believes that *plurisignation* is a better term than ambiguity.) In addition to the seven categories, Empson defines ambiguity in several ways: "Any verbal nuance...which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (1). Since Empson acknowledges that the categories overlap and are somewhat arbitrary, I have listed the seven types for the reader's convenience.

1. One detail may have several meanings and **all** the meanings are effective.
2. Two or more meanings in word or syntax may be resolved into **one** effective meaning.
3. Two or more meanings **cannot** be resolved but the results are effective.

The first three seem intentional.

4. Complex state of author's mind manifested in literature.

The fourth seems the most aesthetically sophisticated.

5. Writer discovers ideas while writing.

6. Writer says nothing--writer's state of mind is evasive-- so that reader is forced to interpret.
7. The work of literature manifests contradictions in the author's mind. (One detail may have several meanings and all the meanings are effective (type one) but they conflict (type seven). (Writer's block)

The last three seem unintentional.

Reading this study of ambiguity, one is awed by the subtleties of Empson's classifications and insights into poetry. Not only does Empson hold both writer and reader responsible for the meaning of a work, he manages to communicate how writer and reader meet in the text, particularly in the context of literary tradition. This triad--writer, reader, text--is my focus in the following explanation.

Empson seems sensitive to and intimate with not only the writer's composing process, the emotional and aesthetic difficulties the writer encounters, but also the readers' roles in working with the language of the text. Some writers design ambiguity into their language and the texture and shape of their ideas (types one through three). Other authors are responsible for ambiguity either from an inabil-

ity to write or from confusion about what they wish to communicate (types five through seven). Type five ambiguity results when writers discover their ideas when writing--the serendipity principle, in my terms. Empson expressed the concept as "an elaborate and definite technique at the back of the author's mind" which the author "is allowing . . . to fall into the disorders that come most easily" (170). In type six, authors "convey an evasive frame of mind; they show the author feeling that he will lose the attitude he is expressing if he looks at it too closely" (190). Type seven occurs when works reveal that authors were confused or unclear about what they were trying to communicate. The writer is least conscious of his process in the seventh type of ambiguity. This reflects a "fundamental division in the writer's mind" (192).

Not only is Empson familiar with the role of the writer's composing process in creating ambiguity but also with the role of the reader in understanding it. According to Empson, "The onus of reconciliation can be laid very heavily on the receiving end" (193). Empson states that he himself produces "columns of a reader's sensitivity-coefficients" (11). The reconciliation may occur during a first or second reading, as with puns or allegories (type

three). Readers must know surface meanings and parallel meanings for puns and allegory to work. Some ambiguities change, dissolve, or cease with multiple readings, that is, with the reader doing her "homework." Such readings end one ambiguity but may open the door, clearing the view to other ambiguities. Other ambiguities are not resolved but appreciated or tolerated.

The first three ambiguities require the reader to find the "author-ized" meaning. In type five ambiguity, the writer's ideas fall into "disorders that come most easily" (170) and result in the authors' discovering ideas as they write. According to Empson, the reader must then explain the ensuing ambiguities. Type six also requires reader involvement: the reader must be aware that the author said "nothing, by tautology, by contradiction, or by irrelevant statements; so that the reader is forced to invent statements of his own and they are liable to conflict with one another" (176).³ This occurs when, let us say, the author is describing a woman, but the real subject of the poem is parody. (Are form and content really separable?) The seventh ambiguity "is the most ambiguous that can be conceived," and "occurs when two meanings of the word, the two

values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind" (192). In dream analysis, which Empson summons to explain his last ambiguity, "conflict" is often expressed as contradiction. We may look to Freud for an explanation: "The dream work is particularly fond of representing two *contrary* ideas by the same composite structure" (*On Dreams* 49). The ambiguity, the conflict, is tightly packed in the writer's unconscious mind. With this kind of difficulty, readers work even harder to analyze (in Freudian terms) or Deconstruct (Derridean terms) the alternatives of the paradox. In literary terms, readers are interpreting. Interestingly, Empson is not looking for closure or a single, "correct" interpretation but is, in fact, looking to open or to explode language, for a plurality of interpretations.

As authors lose their control over the texts, readers increase their dominion. Empson says of his categories: "In each case the earlier on my scale is more conscious because more superficial" (191). The first three seemingly intentional ambiguities are, therefore, more conscious, author intended. Readers seem to be interpreting ambiguity

³ Compare with Wolfgang Iser's ⁴¹model later in this chapter.

in order to find the message that the writer designed. Type four seems to unite reader, author, and text, in perfect harmony. "Several feelings, several reactions to a complex situation, are united by the writer, and can be accepted as a unity by the reader" (Empson 190). The last three are less conscious but, perhaps, equally effective aesthetically. However, the more ambiguous works become as writers encounter difficulties in the composing process, the more active and involved readers become in working through the ambiguities. Authors become less conscious up Empson's scale as readers become more conscious.

Embodied in the idea of ambiguity is the notion of incompleteness, "the non-finito": that which the reader must fill in or conclude. Complexity, on the other hand, is well-wrought and dense. It is hard to analyze or resolve what is "complex," what has two or more parts which are "more intimately associated than in simple mixture."⁴ In Gestalt terms, the sum is greater than its parts. In literary terms, we are discussing a polysemous work of art. The contradiction embodied in the opposing definitions of ambiguity exists because difficulty has been a problem but, not

⁴*Dictionary of the English Language*. Essex, England: Longman Group Ltd., 1984.

until High Modernism, "with its blunt techniques of alienation, did difficulty and inaccessibility become positive aesthetic principles" (Van Zuylen 1). The difference between difficulty as a problem and difficulty as an aesthetic principle is the focus of this study. This chapter deals with it as a problem; chapter three explores it as an aesthetic principle.

Difficulty, whether in its positive or its negative manifestations, requires a more intense reader's attention either to create or to discern patterns and meanings which make sense. The quantity of attention a reader extends changes its quality. Such creating and discerning are variations on the theme of interpretation. We get the image of difficulty's being caused by a text three-dimensional, rich, and polysemous or a text faint, poor, and one-dimensional. In either case, readers, authors, even the text itself, are accomplices to difficulty.

One caveat: exploring the idea of difficulty in literature runs the same risk as explaining the punchline of a joke. Looking for the sources and the structures of humor or of difficulty threatens to unravel the fabric, the pleasure, of the experience. However, where the joke works best with the element of surprise on the first telling--"You had

to be there!"--the reading of difficult literature works best on rereading. In analyzing a punchline, a joke is disrobed; however, difficulty, by its very nature as something complex, may accrue more layers of meaning as readers experience and re-experience it.

AUTHORS

The most obvious difficulty in reading occurs when authors are poor writers: essentially, they cannot communicate what they envision or they have no vision to communicate. Readers do not often think of bad writing as a difficulty. However, considering how many times we readers struggle with a text, thinking that the author's ideas are profound and impenetrable, and attributing our inability to understand to our own deficiencies, we must assert that difficulties sometimes do, in fact, derive from bad writers. Empson's earlier categories--particularly authors who discover ideas while writing, who evade emotionally loaded ideas, or who unconsciously create contradictory ideas--may remind the reader of the inept author. However, authors' difficulties in the process of creating a literary work are not the same as their inability to produce a coherent though challenging text.

One of the responses to working with unsuccessful texts--as well as successful ones--is to look beyond the text to resolve or probe difficulties. Such a response may also occasion hazards. We are cautioned not to refer to the author's biography, lectures, notes, diaries, or other expositions. To do so would result in the *intentional fallacy*, "a confusion between the poem and its origins It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological 'causes' of the poem and ends in biography and relativism" (Wimsatt 21). W.K. Wimsatt and his co-author, Monroe C. Beardsley, argue in *The Verbal Icon* that the meaning of a work cannot be determined by looking to the mind, the intent, of the author: "The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of art" (3). The writer may have intended certain meanings to appear in her work, but intention does not guarantee their presence in the text. Wimsatt further argues that "the poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public" (5). I am not supporting the idea of banishing the author. The author's

ideas live in the text. If we cannot find the meaning in the text, why ask the author what she meant, for she can only convey her intentions, not her executions. Such a revised perception of looking at the work of art altered critical and theoretical attitudes, incubating Formalism and New Criticism, both of which focused intensely on the text to the exclusion of external influences and gave rise to Structuralism. A reader or critic who appeals to authorial intention rarely solves the textual difficulty--depending on the kind of difficulty it is--but, rather, places the author in the role of reader/critic, albeit of her own work. Or, to view it as Wimsatt and Beardsley did, "Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle" (18).

However, when we discuss difficulty in "literature," an author's intellectual deficit is the least interesting source of the problem. Writers are more likely to conceal their message, consciously or unconsciously, when they work within the confines of political and social pressures in some countries or under psychological pressures in the "countries" of their minds. Salmon Rushdie and Sylvia Plath are but two writers who have raged against their prisons. Rhetorical techniques such as allegory, satire, irony are

sources of difficulty used to create or to escape prisons.⁵

A third possible source of authorial difficulty may be one which relates, not to politics or psychology, but to aesthetics. These difficulties are intended by a writer perhaps to dislocate her audience's complacency, or because what is being expressed needs an uncommon form of expression.⁶ In essence, then, difficulty also arises at the other end of the spectrum: an author's vision or abilities are profound. Andrew Marvell, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Stéphane Mallarmé and, of course, my subjects Djuna Barnes and Franz Kafka, exemplify variations of this category. This is difficulty as an aesthetic principle to which Van Zuylen alludes. Hence, in this first set of difficulties, we can perceive a hierarchy of writers from novice to master.

⁵ One can debate, as I have, whether to put rhetorical devices in the category of author or text or even reader. The more I attempt to separate them for analysis, the more convinced I become that these three elements are inseparable.

⁶ George Steiner discusses this as a "tactical difficulty," in his essay, "On Difficulty." In a later section of this chapter, I explain and examine Steiner's four categories in detail, in part as summary and in part as a transition to the explanation of the difficulty peculiar to Modernism. However, when some of my explanations overlap one of his categories, I shall include a footnote for the reader's convenience.

Narrators are yet another source of difficulty. I place them in the category of author because sometimes it is difficult to separate a narrator from an author as, for example, in autobiography or in journals. How reliable and truthful are the narrators/authors of genres such as these? The author may have invented a "persona" to write texts; conversely, the persona or narrator of fictional genres such as novels, short stories, or poetry may project the authentic identity of the writer. Even if the facts of the life portrayed do not mirror the author's, the style and personality may be the same.

Perverse and unreliable narrators present problems and create difficulties. A narrator may thwart progress at every turn, as did Tristram Shandy in Laurence Sterne's novel of the same name. In another example, Samuel Beckett's narrator in *Watt* subverts meaning and, hence, understanding. Eventually, the narrator, Watt, is institutionalized in a mental hospital and presents the chapters in disorder so that the chronological sequence is 4,1,3,2 (and addenda) rather than 1,2,3,4. How can we trust this narrator/author? How close is he to the "real" Beckett? It would be nice, even easy, to say that the author "made it all up" but what do we say about the mind that chooses to

"make up" the permutations and difficulties of *Watt*? We must question the form in which that writer's creativity manifests itself. Narrators such as Beckett's force the reader to confront a difficulty--the reader is coerced into experiencing the same loss of meaning which Watt experiences: language permutates. It is not content which communicates the loss of meaning; it is form (narrative order and sentence permutations). Beckett's work should be listed in the category of intentional aesthetic difficulty.

Another kind of difficulty is propagated when authors break from tradition, the literary or cultural norms of their age. This is a form of aesthetic difficulty though often not intentional. A change in subject matter, style, or rhetoric may stop the readers from comprehending. For example, not having access to a classical education based on Latin and Greek models because she was a woman resulted in Aphra Behn's unbridled graphic descriptions in *Oroonoko*.⁷

The following investigation tackles the idea of cultural sources of difficulty from a different angle, using ideas of Matthew Arnold's "On the Modern Element in Literature" and T.S. Eliot's "What Is a Classic?"

⁷ See *Told in Letters* by R.A. Day.

A classic can only occur when a civilization is mature; when a language and a literature are mature; and it must be the work of a mature mind.

It is the importance of that civilization and of that language, as well as the comprehensiveness of the mind of the individual poet, which gives the universality. (*Selected* 116)

Although the "classics" are not the focus of this study, the idea that the author, the language, and the culture are in harmony, in tune, is important. Eliot's line of thought, though responsible for the charges of elitism against him, serves the purpose here of helping to explain another kind of difficulty.

Eliot emphasized that a writer's mature mind must exist in a mature civilization in order to create a classic; in essence, however, he also argued that only a mature reader's mind can "recognize" a classic. What I am arguing here disagrees with part of Eliot's position. Difficulty may arise because a writer is out of step with her culture as was Aphra Behn. For Eliot, the writer who is out of synchronism with the culture cannot be a writer whose work is judged a classic whereas I suggest that the writing may satisfy the criteria, perhaps even be greatly advanced and evolved, but

it is the society that is ill-equipped to comprehend. And, as with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or Derrida's *Deconstruction*, writers sometimes create and educate their audiences. Either way, difficulty occurs when the synergy between the author and the audience has been abandoned. What critics must decide is whether or not the difficulty can be explained and whether or not it has value for literature and its traditions. I would argue that, in some works, it does.

Numerous factors create the writer. They may seem obvious to most of us. These factors include her geographic area, nationality, religion, historical period, her culture, her economic status, and her psychological, cognitive, and conative development, as well as her racial and gender politics. The kind of education an author has had--classical, modern, eclectic, or none--is yet another consideration in the woof and warp of her perceptions. Her purpose for writing alters her creation of the work: is it for herself, a course requirement, a literary journal, teaching? Is she burning to create the great American novel or does she just want to make money? Cultural and aesthetic pressures also operate. All of these aspects influence, construct, and continue to restructure a writer's mind, a process which tempers the writer's experiences, perceptions, understand-

ing, and interpretations of life, the world and, therefore, affects how she reproduces, shapes, perhaps even distorts, her experiences in her work. I have named all these determinants the "writer's perceptual fabric." When I consider the diversity of ingredients and conditions that creates this perceptual fabric, I can only be in awe of the writers who succeed in communicating a coherent vision. Lest we not forget, however, each thread of the perceptual fabric can construct an occasion for difficulty.

TEXT

The second factor in the reading process, the text, embodies three sources of difficulty since the work manifests itself on various levels. It exists as a physical entity: words on a page or computer screen. (I am not concerned with literature's other forms such as a play's performance or audio versions because those forms embody yet other problems.) The work also exists in the context of literary tradition. And, finally, it expresses the message itself, the content or meaning. Again, I create somewhat artificial distinctions from which evolve other problems. Nevertheless, separating these aspects of the text is necessary for analyzing difficulty.

Too often a variety of interferences distances the audience from the intended work. These obstructions are the result of an unstable text. One set of interferences or difficulties emerges through an editor's work. When editors intrude and change a text, they may change the meaning. If their maieutic efforts are successful, then we have a Pound editing Eliot's *Wasteland* or an Eliot editing Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. In both cases, editors, it seems, have also increased the difficulty of the work. The changes are frequently improvements though I acknowledge that one needs to inquire, "Improvements in whose point of view?" However, if the intrusions become violations, if these trespasses result in losses, distortions, or corruptions of meaning, then a different kind of difficulty occurs. The work may be easier to read but it may also be compromised aesthetically. A changed text also risks resulting in changed meaning because editors are shaping the work to satisfy their interpretations, whether or not the interpretations or intentions are conscious. Such, for example, was the case with the works of Sylvia Plath. After her death, Ted Hughes, Plath's husband, rearranged the order of Sylvia Plath's poems so that her suicide looked inevitable from the content of her poetry.

The published *Ariel* we know ends on a note of absolute despair, and virtually invites the reader to luxuriate in the *frisson* of knowing that a week after writing "Edge" ("The woman is perfected./Her dead/Body wears the smile of accomplishment"), Plath would herself be dead. The actual manuscript ended quite differently, on the note of triumph sounded by the magnificent cycle of bee poems, whose subject is the reclaiming of an autonomous womanly self. Its final word, as Plath noted, was "spring." (Pollitt 94)³

Most readers familiar with other editorial controversies: Emily Dickinson's dashes, Thomas Wolfe's unending manuscripts, even Eliot's excisions from *Nightwood*, excisions which have been execrated by feminists. As Helen Regueiro Elam has pointed out in "The Difficulty of Reading," Emily Dickinson's early editors changed her work.

[They] substituted normal punctuation for her dashes, gave the poems titles, and arranged them thematically. On occasion, some editor would even lop off an unwanted stanza that reopened an inter-

³ *Ariel Ascending: Writings about Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Paul Alexander. NY: Harper & Row, 1985.

rogation that by the end of the poem should have been closed. (Purves 83)

We may ask ourselves, then, what kind of work *Ulysses* would have been if editors and typesetters had been permitted more interference. In the last few decades, movies have been field-tested and then edited to examine their effects on audiences. Imagine if the makers of *Easy Rider* had field-tested the devastating ending and changed it to satisfy and placate audiences! Next, imagine that James Joyce, Judy Chicago, Elvis Presley or any other creator of controversial or banned works of art had to revise their creation for the critics. Editors influence readings of the text because their perceptual fabric may intrude and change the author's original vision. Editors' visions risk becoming a distorting lens through which readers are forced to perceive a work.

Even without external editorial intrusions, when an author functions as editor, the work of art becomes unstable. This is evident with the variations of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* which, between 1855 and 1897, passed through ten editions, each one with new material as well as with revisions of the old. Even if the changes are subtle, readers must reinterpret at each reading. Again the validity of the text is in question. Even though Whitman approved of the

editions, can we necessarily trust him as an editor? Not only does a form of the *intentional fallacy* enter here but, by editing and revising, Whitman also became, paradoxically, an audience/editor for his own poems. Thus, he may be editing to protect not his aesthetic vision but his public persona.

Why do people read the excisions such as Eliot's typescript of *The Waste Land*, Cheryl J. Plumb's editing of *Nightwood* which includes the original version and related drafts, or Ted Hughes' publication of Plath's discarded poems? They may be looking for a glimpse into how the author's mind was working, how her or his ideas were evolving in order to find an *ur-meaning*. Readers may also want secrets revealed by and about the writing process. More than likely, however, they may be probing the creative process to validate their interpretations of textual difficulties. Allow me to play the Devil's Advocate for a moment to say, "But revisions shed light on the meaning of the text by showing how the form which carries that meaning was developed."³ The first assumption is that earlier versions will reveal the writer's intended meaning. This is not necessar-

³ I wish to thank Professor Fred Nichols for this observation.

ily true are often not conscious of what they intend. Secondly, the form, which allegedly carries meaning, may not function in a simple one-to-one relationship: in other words, a form like irony does not mirror content. As fascinating as these reasons may be, examining drafts and editings forms another kind of literary study, of interest to historians, biographers, and psychologists, but not necessarily fruitful either for establishing the text or for criticizing aesthetically.

Even more potentially violating is the translation of a work of art. With the most excellent translator, readers are subject to the "translator's perceptual fabric." Hazard Adams cautions that "Too often translators and interpreters have lost the meaning of the great poets and reduced them to moralists only" (Purves 25). Other than in a translator's introduction or in a classroom lecture, how does a translator transfer national tradition and the culture from one language to the next? For example, the medieval resonance of *orgueil* or pride, a crucial concept in the knightly, courtly tradition, are not part of the W.W. Comfort's translation of *Erec et Enide* by Chrétien de Troyes or, for that matter, most translations. Such detail needs footnoting or marginalia. Although readers place great responsibility on

the translator to communicate the integrity of the original, it is also incumbent on readers to do their share of the work to understand the culture and the period. However, as will be demonstrated later, knowing the literary tradition can work against the reader.

When I discuss translations, my focus is on approaching a work that is as faithful as possible to the original. Ideally, this means not only knowing but also living through a language, diachronically and synchronically. This is not to say that translation is impossible but that, by being aware of the pitfalls, we can produce a translation as faithful as possible to the original in significant ways. Anyone who has translated a passage of literature is aware of how frustrating it can be to move ideas from one language to the next. Words which seemed innocuous, so stable, so friendly are now the enemy. A change in syntax can change meaning. Even with a translator's linguistic abilities as well-tuned as possible, her world view--her politics or psychology, for example--may not permit accuracy in translation.

In his review of a new translation of *The Analects of Confucius*, Jonathan Spence notes that, "Some--including the translators and editors--favored a position that sought to

interpret classical Chinese texts [*including Confucius*] in a way that was not antithetical to Christian dogma" (8). This example of translation reveals other factors that sometimes make a work difficult, such as the political, religious, and psychological climate of a literary period. Spence also argues that, even though Simon Leys' new translation of *The Analects* is

clear and elegant . . . the elegance and clarity also reflect his point of view, his attempt to make the *Analects* not just timeless, but timely for ourselves in our current [1997] predicaments. It is here that the fascinating exercise of evaluating the political and emotional weight of words must be undertaken. (10)

Simon Leys' translation is greatly influenced by his own "perceptual fabric," shaped by a twentieth century Christian milieu. Reading texts in the original may avoid only some of the pitfalls.

A reader may be unable to apprehend not the psychological or intellectual but the aesthetic essence of another place or time. Probably the major difficulties of any literature occur with an author's style of writing. But if the word "style" is lifted out of its twentieth century politi-

cal rhetorical resonance, it re/uncovers its true complexity. Style is rhetoric passed down to us from Cicero, nourished by centuries of use in discourse, in speaking, and in writing, rich with layers of tradition. It is this rhetoric--the figures of speech and thought--which reveal the texture, the design of the writer's mind. We say a poet who uses alliteration or onomatopoeia has an ear for sound, but what description do we use to capture the gift of an author who uses chiasmus, paradox, anacoluthon, zeugma, irony or any of the figures of diction or thought.¹⁰ My discussion here confronts the problem of difficulty's being locked into the content/form controversy: language is not merely a tool. Language is both the means and the end, the vehicle and the tenor, the message and the medium.

SPACE FOR THE READER

Critics tend to conceive of the reader's role in the reading process as the most fertile source of difficulty in literature. The possibilities are greater, to modify Plato, because the mind which reads is four times removed from the

¹⁰See *Ad Herennium*, attributed to Cicero. (Loeb Classical Library. Trans. Harry Caplan. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981.)

ideal work of art. In order to discuss the reader/audience as a source of difficulty, I wish to set the stage for the reader's role in the reading process.

The broad role of audience has its origins, undoubtedly, in classical Greek and Roman rhetoric. Classical rhetoric was the source of power in an oral culture. Rhetoric was divided into five parts: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery/presentation. Figures of Thought and of Diction (Cicero's *Ad Herennium*) enabled both the speaker and the audience to remember the oration and to be convinced by it. In M.H. Abrams' terms, this is an adaptation of the Horatian pragmatic orientation, which re-emerges in yet another form in the eighteenth century. However, viewing the audience in the form of reader as participant is a concern that emerged around the turn of the twentieth century in philosophy, aesthetics, and literature. It is manifested in the works of Roman Ingarden, it is implied in the essays of T.S. Eliot in the twenties, and it came to full blossoming around the sixties with critics and theorists such as Hans Robert Jauss, Roland Barthes, David Bleich, Harold Bloom, Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, and Steven Mailloux. Jane Tompkins sees reader-response criticism as having started with I.A. Richards'

"discussion of emotional response in the 1920s or with the works of D.W. Harding and Louise Rosenblatt in the 1930s" (x). Susan Suleiman, in her introduction to *The Reader in the Text*, explains the reader-response phenomenon.

Some revolutions occur quietly: no manifestoes, no marching and singing, no tumult in the streets; simply a shift in perspective, a new way of seeing what had always been there. New words enter the vocabulary, old words suddenly take on new meaning: proletariat, ego, structure. Or they retain their meaning but their *position* changes: the peripheral becomes central, the walk-on becomes the hero of the play.

For the past few years, we have been witnessing just such a change in the field of literary theory and criticism. The words *reader* and *audience*, . . . have acceded to a starring role. (3)

The sense of the reader's filling in the gaps to explain what would normally be considered a difficulty in literature or something that needs explaining has been explored by Wolfgang Iser. I focus on Iser because he comes closest to sensing the dynamics of the reading process, of trying to supply the necessary pieces of information, connectors, or background so

that what the audience is reading makes sense. He seems to accept the challenge of explaining what a reader does in the face of difficulty but, more important, Iser emphasizes "the interaction between the textual signals and the reader's acts of comprehension" (Acts 9). According to Iser, during the reading process, the reader encounters "blanks and negations," that is, places where she must use her imagination: for us, those places are the difficult passages. The reader's experiential knowledge--the woof and warp that creates thinking, that is, her "perceptual fabric"--forms a background against which the events of the text form a foreground. As the reader is affected by the "foregrounded theme" from the text, she assimilates the "alien experience," thinks "alien thoughts," both of which, in turn, help her to become conscious of a previously unknown inner world, that is, a heightened "self-awareness" (Acts 157-158).

Iser's theory has some value for dealing with literary works with textual difficulties because he does recognize that the text changes the reader and the reader changes the text. Louise M. Rosenblatt has also explored this particular interaction.¹¹ In his discussion of Beckett, for exam-

¹¹ Rosenblatt's study was originally published in 1978 and predates Iser.

ple, Iser says that novels such as *Molloy*, "act as irritants, for they refuse to give the reader any bearings by which he might move far enough away to judge them" (*Implied* 175). If the reader accepts the premises of a novel like Beckett's, the "very foundations of his [the reader's] knowledge [begins] to shift beneath his feet" (*Implied* 179). "Knowledge" is too narrow a term to use for this entire process because it conflates all the components creating the reader's perceptual fabric into one reduction. To comprehend a novel like *Molloy* requires that the reader become intensely aware of her own process of making meaning. Iser is discussing a different kind of reading, a very Modernist, intense involvement. Most importantly, he allows "space" and "time" for the reading process. Chapter Three, "The Difficulty of Modernism" explores this involved reading experience in detail as a difficulty that does not diminish as the reader becomes more familiar with the material.

READER

We cannot generalize one generic reader, one ideal reader when we discuss difficulty. If the author has a "perceptual fabric," so too does the reader. Much of what I

have written about the author applies also to the reader and must be considered in the woof and warp of her perceptions. Gerald Prince supplies yet another list of reader parameters: "Of course, a given reader may be very tired or not at all, very young or very old, in a good mood or in a bad one; he may have a very good or a very deficient memory" One can see the direction which Prince is taking.

His physiological, psychological, and sociological conditioning, his predispositions, feelings, and needs may vary greatly and so may his reading: his knowledge, his interests and his aims determine to a certain extent the conventions, assumptions, and presuppositions he takes to underlie the text, the kinds of connections he is particularly interested in making, the questions he chooses to ask, and the answers he brings to them (229).

Prince concludes that all these elements influence interpretation even by the same reader. I would add that we could extrapolate a list similar to Prince's for authors and begin to see how those parameters create difficulties. All of these aspects influence, construct, and continue to restructure a reader's mind, a process that affects her understand-

ing and interpretation of the literary work. These determinants are the "reader's perceptual fabric."

A few examples will help to explain this line of investigation. We have little problem accepting that Blacks find Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* insulting or difficult because of the portrayal of Jim and the use of the word "nigger." However, we might have reservations upon hearing that an individual with a Mediterranean upbringing--less reserved and more demonstrative--may find nineteenth century English novels or poetry restrictive or even boring. Italian-American groups rail against the image of Italians in the numerous novels and movies focusing on the mafia. American Indians fight against negative Indian stereotyping. We hear less about these and many other groups because they are not "politically correct." If forewarned is forearmed, then the critic-in-the-reader must caution herself about such pressures in interpretation.

All interpretation is an acknowledgment of difficulty. In the following set of examples, feminist studies clearly reveal how dealing with difficulty constructs radically different meanings. A French feminist's reading of Andrew Marvell's poem, "To His Coy Mistress" or of Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa* differs from a reading by a nineteenth cen-

ture male impressionistic critic or even a twentieth century New Critic. Where the feminist, for example, may see Marvell's poem as privileging male domination and reducing the female to a stereotype, a nineteenth century critic may see the poem as merely celebrating *carpe diem*. Which of these critics has dealt with the difficulty best? Which critic's interpretation least distorts the original? Can we know? Can we decide? As I shall argue later in this chapter, we have the tools and the art to deal with these questions.

Another more specific example of how the perceptual fabric influences meaning and, therefore, creates difficulty appears in "Toward a Feminist Poetics," where Elaine Showalter takes to task Irving Howe's reading of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. First, Showalter quotes Irving Howe's praise of the opening scene:

To shake loose from one's wife; to discard
that drooping rag of a woman [Susan Henchard],
with her mute complaints and maddening passivity;
to escape not by a slinking abandonment but
through the public sale of her body to a stranger,
as horses are sold at a fair; and thus to wrest,
through sheer amoral willfulness, a second chance
out of life--it is with this stroke so insidiously

attractive to male fantasy, that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* begins. (128)

Irving Howe sees Susan Henchard as a "drooping rag of a woman," yet as Showalter argues, the early scenes of Hardy's novel do not support his view. Showalter quotes Howe "to indicate how the fantasies of the male critic distort the text" (129).

In the third illustration, Christopher Ricks, in *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice*, chastises four critics who interpret the refrain--"In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo"--from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, as Eliot's deprecation of the women (12-16). Helen Gardner, one of the critics, says of the women: "The absurdity of discussing his [Michelangelo's] giant art, in high pitched feminine voice . . ." and Hugh Kenner tags "the women" as "trivial" (13). However, as Ricks points out, the interpretations of the lines reveal the critics' own prejudices. Eliot has not disparaged the women; why have the critics? These prejudices remain prejudices and the difficulty of the text endures. Showalter and Ricks illustrate how varying interpretations and misinterpretations become entangled in a variety of prejudices and that getting meaning from words on

a page depends on numerous factors--eyes, minds, bodies, and biographies--other than those words.

In trying to understand a work and confront its difficulties, a reader may look to extra-textual explanations. One we saw earlier with the intentional fallacy: looking to the author's intent. In other circumstances, readers try to resolve difficulties by resorting to their own responses: the affective fallacy. Wimsatt and Beardsley, in *The Verbal Icon*, warn readers that the "Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results" or effects on the audience (21). To complicate matters more, the readers' responses are the actual sources of new difficulties, ones which occur when they overreact. Readers must not use their emotional responses to explain the difficulties in the text because such responses may circumvent or eclipse the literary qualities of the work. If a play helps a woman understand her divorce, that does not mean that the play is aesthetically successful. A reader's repulsion at the mention of dung beetles does not validate her judging Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* a poor work of literature. If the message or the content is abhorrent--violent, prurient, hateful, politically incorrect--can the work of art still be judged excellent? The answer is, "Yes." And if the message is ex-

tremely pleasant or uplifting, is that sufficient criterion to judge the literary work as successful? The answer is "No." The evidence must be in the work of art, in the quality of the literary elements, not in the audience's responses.¹²

In this argument resonates the idea that, emotionally or psychologically, readers may not be able to tune their perceptions to the work.¹³ T.S. Eliot called this tuning process "taste." Changes in psychology also associated with the affective fallacy may make a contemporary reader question the emotional roller coaster of Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, the violence of some novels such as *An American Psycho* or the emptiness of others such as *Less Than Zero*, both by Bret Easton Ellis. An audience from one period may not be able to adjust to the perceptions of another time or place.¹⁴ We also cannot dismiss the fact that the reader's being tuned to a work depends on the writer's ability to engage the audience in what is essentially foreign territory.

¹² Wimsatt begins the chapter on affective fallacy with the following quote from "The Beautiful Music" by Eduard Hanslick: "We might as well study the properties of wine by getting drunk."

¹³ To use a non-literary example, what do we think about Ricky spanking Lucy on *I Love Lucy* or Ralph's threatening Alice on *The Honeymooners*? Their behaviors are now condemned as abusive.

engage the audience in what is essentially foreign territory. The difficulties of a work often reside in literary tradition and language. Literature embodies not only the author's perceptual fabric but also that of the culture and the period. Language is the vehicle through which the culture's "Zeitgeist"--the lived, rather than perceived, substance of a period--is transported.

We can get yet another perspective on the reader's perceptual apparatus in delineating what is difficult in the meaning making process by looking at Donald Hall's "Four Kinds of Reading." Hall, an educator, poet, and essayist, categorizes the reading process of literary and non-literary texts according to the reader's purpose. In his model, inadvertently, purpose coincides with the reader's attention span. To summarize Hall's divisions, one kind of reading is for information: we read "to learn" as with textbooks or manuals. Students have been known to read literature in this way: to get the plot in order to know information for a test. The second is the reading of literature, a slow reading where we pay attention to language--to metaphors, to associations, to the texture of language. This is aesthetic reading. The third kind of reading is philosophical and demands "reflecting on the text." Where reading literature

focuses on the way something is expressed, philosophical reading emphasizes ideas and thoughts. (Hall did not emphasize the attention to language in his philosophical category.) The fourth kind of reading is narcotic reading: like a drug, it takes the reader to a fantasyland. Because the reader's purpose eclipses the writer's designs or the text's attributes, we can read *Anna Karenina* or *Valley of the Dolls* as a narcotic: the author's purpose for writing does not necessarily coincide with the audience's purpose for reading. Hall's taxonomy is by no means complete: as my students have often pointed out, "Where does one place pornography in this paradigm?"

The point is, however, that the reading experience here depends on the reader's intent, attention, and kinds of concentration. (An echo of Empson's ambiguities can be heard.) Narcotic reading may require little to no concentration, just an openness to being swept away. The concentration on informational reading, the quick read, is mostly for memory work rather than thinking, albeit that successful memorizing requires a trained mind, usually with an ability to structure or categorize. According to Hall, in philosophical and literary categories, the reading is slower, more mindful: the process of synthesis demands time. For the reader of

philosophy, the ideas are meaningful. Content prevails. For the reader of literature, attention to the medium--figures of speech and figures of thought--takes precedence. Form prevails. However, all philosophy and all literature are not necessarily difficult: *Anna Karenina* can be read as a narcotic, *Valley of the Dolls* as culture study, or *La Nausée* as philosophy. The reader's purpose for reading plays a critical role not only in grasping difficulty but also in ascertaining that it even exists. Just as we read for different levels of meaning, we can perceive different levels of difficulty.¹⁵

Another factor playing a role in the concept of difficulty results from the reader's unfamiliarity with the conventions of literature.¹⁶ Professors consider this difficulty to be a major obstacle confronting students who are trying to understand literature. A student, for example, may be ignorant of various genres or subgroups, such as sonnets or haikus in poetry or journals and autobiography in narratives. She may be inexperienced in reading works from other eras or national literatures or she may be unfamiliar

¹⁵ Like Hall's categories, Dante's four levels of meaning also focus on the reader's process of reading.

¹⁶ This is Steiner's contingent category of difficulty.

with rhetorical devices. Imagine a student, with no knowledge of irony reading Swift's *Modest Proposal* or Ferlinghetti's "Coney Island of the Mind." A reader's lack of literary background may also occasion the difficulties she finds in her reading works of T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, or Ezra Pound. What a reader has **not** learned about rhetoric and literary tradition and conventions greatly determines the level and intensity of difficulty she feels. Even if the reader is knowledgeable about literary forms, problems arise. She may read a work believing it is fiction but later discover that the work is an autobiography or she may presume a work to be autobiographical which is actually fiction. A reader may also feel that the author of an autobiography revealed too much whereas, were the text fiction, she may feel the author had not revealed enough. These kinds of difficulties require a reader's shift of perception whereby her judgment of the text more than likely changes. And, of course, the work may be wearing a mask, claiming to be autobiography or fiction.¹⁷ The mask the work wears is the literary convention through which we read the work.

¹⁷ I wish to thank Professor David Kleinbard for the observation that texts may wear masks.

Sometimes, amazingly, the reverse is also true. In the following extended example, a reader's academic training in the conventions of medieval literature has woven her perceptual fabric too tightly. Such training imprisons the interpretive abilities and predetermines explanations of difficulties, that is, the meaning. I.A. Richards has called this "stock responses," which are "views and emotions already fully prepared in the reader's mind" (14).¹⁸

In *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien de Troyes focuses on Erec's *recreance* (infidelity to duty) which generates the central difficulties of the romance: why did Erec cease competing in the tournaments and battles and why did he journey on an adventure with Enide, his wife, whom he admonished to be silent? Traditional critics argue that Erec's sloth results from his excess love for Enide, an excess which results in his preferring to remain by her side rather than to participate in knightly competitions. In order to justify Erec's behavior, the reader must accept an interpretation of this difficulty that burdens Enide with the blame. However, not only does Erec's "recreance" precede his meeting Enide, but Erec's pride also seems heavily based on appearances, on il-

¹⁸ This has been the problem of some feminist criticism as will be shown in chapter four on Djuna Barnes.

lusions of chivalry. Traditional critics here emphasize the specialized medieval use of *orgueil* or pride. In the medieval cosmos, pride tempered by moderation (*mesur*) is a virtue and is crucial in the chivalric code. Prowess as a knight measures the knight's ability to love and, thus, to uphold the chivalric code. Erec's sloth inverts the topos of the medieval world where a knight's valor demonstrates a proof of love. Unfortunately, in Chrétien's romance, Erec's pride is excessive and untempered. As a result, critical explanations based on these deeply medieval worldviews are unsatisfactory to modern readers.

The problem of this novel is magnified when a reader well-versed in medieval culture and literature is also reading through her twentieth century perceptions. Such a reader is "of two minds" as she attempts to reconcile the difficulty of Erec and Enide. *Orgueil* resonates with the meanings imbued by the medieval view and, simultaneously, the meanings clash with her twentieth century point of view. This reader cannot resolve the difficulty of the hero's bad behavior as he exhibits excessive pride. Loosening the bonds of the medievalist's perceptual fabric liberates the reader to discover that Chrétien is satirizing the chivalric code when, for example, Chrétien interrupts his narrative

with moments of descriptive excess or contrasts the behavior of two knights, Gawain and Erec. Such juxtapositions demand that the reader reevaluate chivalry.¹⁹ For the reader, pride magnifies the absurdity of chivalry and strengthens Chrétien's criticisms of it. We begin to see that sometimes knowledge of literary tradition is a freeing instance, but, as with Chrétien's work, it can also be a prison.

I have been far less concerned with the many issues and problems of reader-response or reception theory and have, instead, explored the reader's role in the creation and accretion of difficulty. Purves and Beach "found that the classification of problems in reading and understanding overlap a great deal and could be generalized into three schemata of understanding: information lack; cognitive failure; and psychological block" (55-56).²⁰ We are beginning to see where these operate in our discussion.

George Steiner's essay, "On Difficulty," offers an interesting paradigm which more clearly pulls together many of the elements discussed: author, text, reader. Steiner's model also demonstrates, as did Empson's ambiguities, a hi-

¹⁹ These concepts are detailed in my unpublished paper on *Erec et Enide*.

erarchy of difficulty: Steiner implies that, in each of his categories, difficulty increases. This, in itself, has ramifications: first increased difficulty requires increased reader attention; second, increased attention implies increased reader involvement and expectations.

Steiner explores readers' experiences of reading by dividing difficulty into four areas: contingent, modal, tactical, and ontological. The first of his four categories, the contingent, Steiner explains as "things that 'we need to look up'" (19). Into this arena fall those words, expressions, references, allusions with which the readers are not familiar: the readers must do their homework by searching out the meaning of words either because time has rendered the word obsolete or because diction changes with cultural and social uses (Steiner 20). One "looks up" words not merely for clarity but also to unravel language, to unravel where and how it lives in the present as well as where and how it lived in the past. Whether the homework takes us to the *Oxford English Dictionary* or *Chang Tzu's Thirteen Treatises on T'ai Chi Ch'uan*, the first order of business in the

²⁰ In "Literary Theory and the Notion of Difficulty," William Touponce summarizes Purves' and Beach's book, *Literature and the Reader*. (See Purves, 56.)

contingent difficulty is to learn, to translate what we do not know into what we do know; to do the requisite "home-work." Unraveling the vocabulary and allusions in *Moby Dick* or *Brothers Karamazov* would fall largely into this category.

Steiner offers numerous examples, such as Mallarmé's Poem designated as *Plusieurs Sonnets IV* and Mallarmé's use of *ptyx* which, though it is not found in a French lexicon, can be "unmasked via Greek and via liturgical art" to mean *conch* (20). Vocabulary is not the only thing needing translating; syntax, often of older texts, requires transposing into a twentieth century key. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, [not Steiner's example] readers may be able to paraphrase the words but they may be perplexed by the order of the vocabulary which is, for them, not unlike having all the right notes in the wrong order. "Let me not to the marriage of true minds/ Admit impediments. Love is not love/Which alters when it alteration finds." The simple inversion of the normal subject/predicate/object ["When it finds alteration] may baffle some readers. Into this category also fall most literary traditions: rhetoric, genres, satire, haiku, sonnet, irony, chiasmus--whatever the reader can learn and needs to know to understand. The first, or contingent, stage, then, is one which suggests that, "If I but work hard

enough looking up information, if I do my homework, I shall understand." However, we know this is not always true.

The second or modal stage of difficulty, according to Steiner, involves the readers who do the necessary homework of looking up words and allusions but still find themselves not understanding the text or, as he puts it colloquially, "not digging it" (28). Readers may know intellectually or in Steiner's terms, at "the cerebral level," (32) what the writer is trying to communicate but the readers' sensibilities reject the works at another level--perhaps the level of taste or feelings.²¹ These are difficulties, as Steiner says, that "lie with the beholder" (33). Modal difficulties challenge readers' empathy. This recalls the discussion earlier in this chapter of preferences based on race, class and, particularly, gender. More important, this reminds us of Eliot's admonitions to discipline "personal prejudices and cranks."

The modal difficulties also include a variety of issues found in Richards' work, particularly his discussion of four kinds of meaning which he claims are the "four main exits

²¹ This seems to align itself with the negative aspects of the affective fallacy and/or denigrating the messenger because we abhor the message.

from true interpretation" (182). Richards explains sense, feeling, tone, and intention as follows: sense is the subject, the content; feeling is the emotion, the author's attitude towards the subject [Longinus and Lipps]; tone involves the author's attitude to the audience and essentially reflects method or technique [Horace]; and intention refers to the writer's purpose. Many rhetoric textbooks for freshman composition have employed and codified these categories. The reader's perceptual fabric, that which affects sensibilities, must not be erased but laid out on the table for examination and considered as a factor.

The third or tactical class of difficulties, Steiner argues, occurs when a gap exists between the writer's "intention and his performative means" (33). This category of Steiner's certainly reminds us of Empson's fourth, fifth, and sixth types of ambiguity. Despite Steiner's description, which seems to support Wimsatt's disaffection for intentionality, the tactical difficulty actually emphasizes the writer's use and intentional subversion of language. Why do writers force this kind of obscurity? As exemplified earlier with Salmon Rushdie and Sylvia Plath, they may be hiding from political realities or they may desire to protect their personal lives.

The writer may also be difficult in an effort to break the borders and "reanimate" lexical and grammatical modes in order to recharge language "or achieve certain specific stylistic effects" (33), as did the Surrealists and Dadaists. In Chapter Three, "The Difficulty of Modernism," I discuss Victor Shklovsky's concept of estrangement in conjunction with Steiner's tactical mode. Readers "are not meant to understand easily and quickly" (35). This seems to coincide with aesthetic difficulty. As an example, Steiner cites Wallace Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar," which he calls "transparent" both contingently and modally (38), yet

no reading of the text has come up with a coherent parsing or equivalent transposition into normal syntax. To transpose, to paraphrase into correctness, is to relinquish both the motion and the meaning of the poem's meaning." (39)

Readers are forced to change their perceptions of language and syntax or, as Steiner describes it, the works force us to "more delicate orderings of perception" (40). Tactical difficulties are author-inspired: their purpose is to push us to new understandings, to force us "to understand slowly or to stand poised between alternatives of signification" (45). Where the contingent and modal categories are reader

oriented, the tactical level--yes, it implies a hierarchy--emphasizes manipulated language.

In the last stage, the ontological, the contract between writer and reader, according to Steiner, is "itself wholly or in part broken" (40). Difficulties in this category cannot be looked up; they cannot be resolved by genuine readjustment of sensibility; they are not intentional authorial techniques of retardation or creative uncertainty. Ontological difficulties question the very nature and ability of language to communicate. One warning is offered: this is not the entropic inability of language to communicate which we find with information theory where the excess of information flattens out any possibility of a hierarchy of information, but the inability hinged on the profound.

In Steiner's explanation, the mimetic tradition has been judged by some thinkers such as Heidegger as an error in that it has taken the mystery out of language, making speech "inauthentic" (44) "Ontological difficulty seems to point to a hypostasis of language" (46). We may interpret language as having a life of its own and, hence, its own "perceptual fabric." In its concreteness, language, in a sense, intrudes, bearing its own biography, culture, rituals, psychology, history, and bearing down, obscuring not

only meaning but also writers' efforts to manipulate the sense, and hindering readers' attempts to alter their perceptions and to understand the language. For Steiner, the writings of Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Stefan George, and Paul Célan exemplify the ontological category of difficulty. If Steiner's first three categories describe works, ones which still consider the reader, the fourth category, the ontological, ignores the reader. Author and language are isolated in a symbiotic, obsessive affair.

Resolving the contingent difficulty may take a reader a great deal of time to understand. The second or modal stage increases the reader's level of involvement. The expense is emotional and, for various reasons, we appraise the emotional cost as more valuable. Also, as a result, we are more protective of the emotional expense. At another level, the reader has less control and becomes more vulnerable because, to appreciate the work, she must acquiesce in the writer's literary world, his *Weltanschauung*. The tactical elements in the third category spotlight the text, specifically, its forced rhetorical and syntactical changes, for the aesthetic benefit of the reader. One could look at the tactical category as a Modernist version of Horatian didacticism: irritate and dislocate in order to educate. Tacti-

cal difficulties, unlike modal ones, are intentional. It seems that writers have lost their control over language in the ontological mode in part because they question the purpose of language and, in part, because they question the ability of the language to function. We may turn around and begin to search for the causes for the lost ability of language to function. Certainly, for many Modernists at the turn of the century, as the world began to change at an exponential rate, language seemed powerless either to mirror the real world, to carry the meaning of the world, or to respond to the horrors and joys and sorrows of life. Instead, language was left either to create its own reality or be mismatched with the reality about which it was trying to speak.

Steiner's explanation and analysis of the ontological difficulty does not seem as clear as the description of the other three categories. Simply put, Steiner's ontological difficulty is difficult. It is complex and paradoxical. We have moved from language as a vehicle to language as a context, then to subject, finally to language as the message itself. This use of language is reflexive, self-conscious and, in some ways, profound.

In summary, we note that Steiner's contingent stage depends on the reader's abilities to look up the unknown in language. These are intellectual concerns. The modal stage depends on re-orienting the reader's sensibilities that are at odds with those expressed by the text. These are the reader's sympathetic, empathetic, or emotional concerns. Next, we shift emphasis from reader to writer. In the tactical stage, the writer deforms the text for intellectual, psychological, and aesthetic purposes. Rhetoric becomes the aesthetic. In the ontological mode to which we assign much Modernist literature, neither author nor reader controls the message. Language itself takes control and, simultaneously, looks at itself while readers stand, pounding at the doors and the windows of the text for entrance.

How do readers balance all the elements of the reading process: the difficult text; the mushrooming emphasis on reader-response; pressures on the reader from her perceptual fabric; increased reader involvement in making meaning; and anticipating and obviating the affective fallacy? Validity and integrity are even more important in works of Modernism that increase reader participation. How a reader maintains critical integrity is the subject of the next section.

CALIBRATING THE TUNING FORK

As we consider the reader's role in negotiating difficulty, or the perceiver's role in the problem of perceiving, we are also exploring the problem of critical accuracy or what I.A. Richards called, "exits from true interpretation" (*PC* 182). We need not look any further than the field of visual perception to illustrate the extent of the measurer's role, the e/affects of the "reader's perceptual fabric," in the construction of the object measured and, thus, the reader's role in manipulating meaning. In the famous vase/two faces optical illusion or the old woman/young woman image, the person who is looking, the perceiver, is the one who determines the image seen. With concentration and practice, a perceiver can see, alternately, the two images.²² In another example, Carolyn Seeborn, using a scientific example in her article, "How to Change Your Point of View," presents another version of the notion that the observer affects the perceived reality or truth:

²² No matter how quickly a person processes the two images, she can never see them both simultaneously. Scientists, as of 1997, have found that the brain's hardware functions discretely.

The famous Dr. Edward Jenner was busy trying to solve the problem of smallpox. After studying case after case, he still found no possible cure. *He had reached an impasse in his thinking.* At this point, he changed his tactics. Instead of focusing on people who had smallpox, he switched his attention to people who did *not* have smallpox. It turned out that dairymaids apparently never got the disease. From the discovery that harmless cowpox gave protection against deadly smallpox came vaccination and the end of smallpox as a scourge in the Western world.²³

A shift in point of view can help resolve difficulty. Werner Heisenberg, an early twentieth century German physicist, also has shown in experiments that what is measured is altered by that which measures (Letwin 322). This is known as the Uncertainty Principle. In its reductive version, whoever does the "looking" can only approximate what is seen because what is seen changes. Even outside the realm of physics, the

²³ The concept of changing one's point of view, shifting perception, restructuring paradigms is a fascinating and extensive field. I would like to note that metaphor, among other figures of speech and thought, performs precisely this function: changing one's point of view.

principle of uncertainty or indeterminacy has two implications. First, the process of knowing the world is a kind of interaction with the world; thus, in Heisenberg's terms, we alter the world as we measure it. How, then, can we ever know the world if our interaction with it is constantly changing it? (How Heraclitean!) There seems to remain always an imprecision of perception.

Second, how can we calibrate the instrument of measurement, ourselves, to have the least distorting effect on the object measured? For scientific observers, objectivity has been, what I have termed, the "tuning fork."²⁴ But what is the tuning fork for readers in the humanities? What kind of objectivity can a well-tuned reader have, particularly given her "perceptual fabric"? Is it objectivity for which we are striving, or is objectivity in the humanities a different concept than it is in the sciences? What or who is the tuning fork in the humanities? I am arguing that the critic, specifically defined, functions as a tuning fork in the reading process.

In Goethe's words: "There are three kinds of readers: one who enjoys without judgment; a third who judges without

²⁴ It would be arrogant to think that the perceptual fabric does not affect the sciences.

enjoyment, and, in between, a reader who judges while enjoying and enjoys while judging."²⁵ However, we must also take one step back: who calibrates the tuning fork? Who or what tunes the critic? The answer: literary tradition.

The literary correlation to this idea of objectivity, though not named so, can be found explicitly and implicitly discussed in a variety of T.S. Eliot's essays, essays which not only focus on the definition of the critic and the critic's duties but also touch upon what literary works are worthy to be measured. Eliot tunes the critic by discussing in part what a critic should avoid and in part what she should accomplish as well as by discussing the canon and literary tradition. Literary tradition is the calibrator for the tuning fork: the critic. In turn, the critic tunes the instrument: the reader.

In "Hamlet" and "The Perfect Critic," collected in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, Eliot warns readers that "art cannot be interpreted," (45); interpretation is a form of translation, a re-creation of the story which is, for Eliot, "to create something else" (52). If we pause to think about it, all translation is an acknowledgment of difficulty, even

²⁵ I am indebted to Jacques Leenhardt, in "Toward a Sociology of Reading," for the observation from Goethe.

if it is the most obvious difficulty of not knowing a foreign language or not knowing our own language well. (As Hazard Adams has expressed it, "The notion of literature's difficulty must have begun with the first interpreter" (23). In addition, Eliot's notion of the "impressionistic critic" adumbrates, thirty-four years earlier, the idea of the affective fallacy which warns against judging a piece of literature by the affect it has on the reader when the reader should assess the piece by the text itself.

If we are examining how our interpretative abilities, in this case, our thoughts and emotions, affect the meaning we construct in or with the literary text, whether cognitively or experientially, then we are also examining our process of confronting difficulty. Since all interpretation is an attempt to resolve difficulty, then we must try to separate the real difficulties of a text from those that we create. The debate over the affective fallacy is not new, but it does add one other dimension to the notion of "difficulty" in literature. It is yet another obstacle to which the reader must be alerted.

We also learn from Eliot's comments on I.A. Richards' writings that writers themselves do not have a vantage point in criticizing their own works: they are not authorities

because they "do many things upon instinct" (88). Again we hear echoes of the intentional fallacy. Also rebuked by Eliot is the critic who writes to "impart some lesson" (56), that is, the Horatian didactic mode. Instead, the critic should "endeavor to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks . . . in the common pursuit of true judgment" (*Selected* 69).

We can begin to penetrate Eliot's vision of the critic as a specialized reader, or a reader's helper, who has as few distorting influences as possible. In other words, the reader/critic should be conscious of her perceptual fabric and, therefore, not let it interfere with true aesthetic judgment. Essentially, forewarned is forearmed. Eliot removes distortions by warning against them and by the critic's having "universal intelligence," as Aristotle had, that is, an intelligence that can be applied to anything (*Selected* 55). The critic's consciousness of these false sources of understanding is, then, a barrier against their e/affects. The critic should not be swayed by a personal desire to create art herself, nor should she judge a work by its therapeutic value, nor should she be controlled by a pedagogic or didactic agenda.

What work, then, according to Eliot, should the critic perform? The function of the critic, specifically, is to help the reader "return to the work of art with improved perception and intensified, because more conscious, enjoyment" (*Selected* 56). This echoes Goethe's vision mentioned earlier and sounds like a perfect prescription for reading Modernist works. Since art is an autotelic activity, the critic's focus should be on the work of art itself.

How does the critic elucidate the literature, correct taste, and improve the reader's perception? According to Eliot, the critic analyzes the piece of literature and compares it to other works (*Selected* 75). Eliot's proposal that the critic correct "taste" (69) or discipline "personal prejudices and cranks" may sound elitist. However, once the critic becomes aware of and eludes the distorting influences--in other words is calibrated--the critic is left, ultimately, with the task of focusing on the text itself. As Heisenberg sets forth, the relationship between what is measured, in this case, the text, and the instrument of measurement, the critic, emerges as the most important one but the critic as instrument of measurement must be finely calibrated or tuned to remove or avoid distortions. (Because the critic as instrument cannot escape her subjectivity,

literary tradition calibrates the critic only in proportion to the critic's awareness and abilities.)

"From time to time, every hundred years or so, it is desirable that some critic shall appear to review the past of our literature, and set the poets and the poems in a new order. This task is not one of revolution but of readjustment.

(Selected 86)

This idea from Eliot has been called the "pyramidal" theory, and is part of the calibration process. When a new work comes into the canon, it affects readers' perceptions of past works just as surely as past works influence readers' perceptions of new ones. For Eliot, tradition is the writer's knowledge of "his own generation in his bones," a feeling for "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer," and an understanding of the literature of his own country (38).²⁶ Since the critic cannot translate nor interpret a work, the critic's function is to know the literary tradition in order to analyze the text and compare it to other works. Where the critic who interprets is

²⁶ I am aware of Eliot's narrow view focusing on the Western tradition in the arts. I would defend his view insofar as knowing one tradition well facilitates comparisons for studying other traditions and cultures.

expressing what she believes the meaning is, the critic who analyzes explores the complex whole and the relationship of the parts to each other. Literary tradition, then, is still the calibrator.

Eliot's "perfect critic" functions as a tuning fork for the reader. The critic illumines the work for the reader's "improved perception" and "conscious" understanding of it. Eliot admonishes the critic to remove distorting influences-- in my vernacular, the perceptual fabrics--so that the critic's "measuring" ability, the "correction of taste," cannot misread the object measured, the literary work. An integral part of the reading process is the reader's--or critic within the reader's--constant self-calibration through literary tradition.²⁷

Other issues in reader-response criticism have eclipsed Eliot's ideas.²⁸ Unfortunately, even though critics have been focusing on the reader, the difficult problem of *calibrating* the reader/critic has been neglected in reader-response theory. The calibrator which focused on the liter-

²⁷ One objection to the prominence given literary convention is that the singular, uncommon, atypical, unorthodox, radical, deviant, tradition-breaking works of Modernism can not be apprehended through convention. This is an interesting argument but unconventional works do not spawn in a vacuum.

ary considerations of tradition, taste, and the text itself (Formalism and New Criticism) has been replaced with a focus on spheres such as biography (the author's and the reader's own), history, culture, psychology, linguistic theory, and gender theory. This is evident in the works of Djuna Barnes, whose *Nightwood* is the focus of chapter three of this study. The critics of her works have allowed her biography and their concerns with gender issues to cloud their readings of the novel itself. The interpretations of Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, the subject of Chapter Five, have also been tightly wrapped by his biography.

The reader's work, Iser's sense of filling in the gaps, becomes more complicated with the writings during the modernist period, with authors who experimented boldly with form and content, with language and syntax, and who challenged traditional expectations and judgments about how literature should be read. Although some critics have judged these experimental works of Modernism as difficult, elitist, even as aberrations of literary traditions, others have explored non-traditional ways of explaining their difficulties. Many admirable studies have been written examining the experimen-

²⁸ These fascinating and complex issues have been discussed in both Suleiman's and Tompkins' works cited earlier.

tal techniques of modernist literature: collage in T.S. Eliot, cubism in Gertrude Stein, Homeric scaffolding in Joyce, and convergence in Proust. The experimental strategies have demanded attention, particularly those techniques which slow down, even erase, time: *Nightwood*, for example, examines the events of one night from three perspectives; *Ulysses* covers one 24-hour period; Proust synthesizes past/present time. Parallel to these experiments, slowing time in modernist texts, reader-response or reception theory also slowed the process of reading, accommodating those texts. It is even more important to calibrate the critic/reader when dealing with works that demand increased reader involvement and response. However, though these studies have examined the experimental techniques, they have not explored fully or clearly the effects of the techniques on readers. The problem appears in Wolfgang Iser's reading paradigm. As Iser has written:

The literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic [sic]: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader The convergence of

text and reader brings the literary work into existence." (*Implied* 274)

The idea that the reader and the text work on each other is a laudable one; however, Iser's model slides over the experimental strategies of the literature, emphasizing, instead, characterization. In his theory, he is interested in the effects of difficulty on the reader; however, in his analytic practice, he falls back on traditional analyses of plot, characterization, and theme.

Two important early critical efforts existed which attempted to meet the challenges created by the verbal experiments in modernist texts and which specifically sounded the territory of the reader's involvement in the reading process. One came in the form of T.S. Eliot's prefatory remarks on Djuna Barnes' novel (1935): "*Nightwood* demands something of the reader which the ordinary novel reader is not prepared to give" (xii). Although this pointed in the right direction, towards the reader's involvement with the text, the process by which this occurs remains a mystery. From this preface and Eliot's essays, we know more about what critics should not do than what they should do. This has resulted in the dual claims that Eliot is not specific in his criticism and, simultaneously, that he is profound. Yet

Eliot's concept of the reader/critic's role, as has been shown, reveals an insightful caution for the newly "involved" reader at that time.

An even more important emphasis on the reader's work can be found in the now classic essay, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1948), in which Joseph Frank establishes a non-condemnatory and disinterested way of discussing the anomalies of modernist experimental literature. Although Frank's essay brings together the concept of Spatial Form with the idea of the reader's role defined as a "re-orientation in the reader's attitude toward language," he did not explore the reader's substantive activities; Frank generalized about a non-traditional process of reading, a holistic rather than a discrete, linear cognition, but the concept of a reader's space remains theoretical, unexplained, and tantalizing (*Idea 15*). Again, theory is original but practice is conventional. These critics all seem to hold up their hands, pointing to that place where text and reader converge but it is still a dark room filled with shadows.

CHAPTER TWO

SPATIAL FORM: THE DIFFICULTY OF MODERNISM

"If I see the moon, but you do not, I will point at it. First you will watch my finger to see where it goes. Eventually, however, you must take your eyes off my finger and find the moon yourself." So it is with the sutras [Buddhist literature]. They point you toward the truth, but must not be confused with truth itself.

The Laughing Sutra Mark Salzman

To imagine a language is to imagine a world.
Wittgenstein

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. Words exist because of meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words.

Chuang Tzu

Space The Final Frontier

Star Trek:
The Next Generation

INTRODUCTION

IMAGING

On a stage, vying for the spotlight, two theories eye each other curiously: George Steiner's categories of difficulty and Joseph Frank's Spatial Form. How do they relate to each other? How do these theories help us to explain the difficulty that is specific to the literature of Modernism? Despite the fact that Frank circumscribed a frame where no frame had existed before, Spatial Form, in many ways, is a word shell, the contents of which are still being defined and redefined.

At present, the "family portrait" of Spatial Form is crowded and muddled. As David Mickelsen has written, "Perhaps because of its imprecision, the term 'Spatial Form' has been used both too much and too little: some critics apply the term in inappropriate contexts, while others ignore it in appropriate ones" (Smitten 63). The response to Spatial Form theory has led to a collection of articles: *Spatial Form in Narrative*, edited by Smitten and Daghistany (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) and Frank's own re-issue of his essay and responses to some of his critics in *The Idea of Spatial Form*. The lively debate about Spatial Form--is its use

metaphorical or literal?--continued with W.J.T. Mitchell's "Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory" (*Critical Inquiry* 6:1980, 539-567). Leon Surette responded with "Critical Response II: Rational Form in Literature: (*Critical Inquiry* Spring 1981, 612-621). Mitchell pursued the exchange in his reply to Surette's response in "Critical Response III: Diagrammatology" (*Critical Inquiry*. Spring 1981, 622-633). Such controversy from this sampling of articles demonstrates that the idea of Spatial Form is unclear and open for reinterpretation. In 1988, the XIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association devoted volume five to space and boundaries in literature and theory. Many of the articles explored the issue of Spatial Form and spatialization in literature. Other works, such as Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* or Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, address the issue of space in literature, though not the issue of Spatial Form and, therefore, are not included in this study. Some of the problems of Spatial Form were caused by Frank's incomplete explanation; other misinterpretations, by the critics' own agendas; yet other difficulties by the fact that Frank was educating a reading audience for works which were falling upon ears not yet conditioned to the discourse of Modernism. This was

a reading audience upon which these difficult works could not reverberate.

This chapter focuses on Spatial Form in an attempt to fill in the word shell with substantial criteria and meaning. In the first section, I present the idea of plot by using the visual metaphor of a line--a timescape--and its various metamorphoses in order to discuss the shape of time in literature. This approach is necessary because the philosophical and literary concepts behind this line are the conventional contexts against which Spatial Form emerged. Through time maps of plot narration, we see some misconceptions of the notion of Spatial Form, particularly that slowing time, reversing, reconfiguring, stopping, even erasing time are not the direct and crucial criteria of Spatial Form. Because Spatial Form has been discussed against the notion of narrative, I also consider the functions of narration in contrast with description, a segue which foreshadows Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocöon* and Joseph Frank's use of Lessing's work in his theory of Spatial Form.

As I clear the stage of misapprehensions about Spatial Form, I also leave space to invite other factors on stage for exploration, particularly that modernist, ontological difficulty differs from reading narration and description. Having

cleared away confusing intruders, Spatial Form can stand up to scrutiny in the spotlight with neither crutches nor shadows from other concepts.

The main focus of this chapter is Frank's theory. Summaries are like translations and subject to distortions and fuzziness. To compensate for this, and to retrace Frank's train of thought, I have reflected on the original sources to which he referred in order to argue his ideas. I follow with a review of the critical responses to Spatial Form and, simultaneously, address the major problems which critics have confronted. It is here that the distinction between narration and description plays a useful role. It is here also that I explore the differences, and similarities, between verbal and visual readings.

In the last part of this chapter, I redefine the term Spatial Form itself, drawing on the previous discussions, visual theory, and cognitive development. I demonstrate and discuss the effects of language invading the visual territory of painting. In my redefinition, I argue that the works of Modernism are different from others, not merely in degree, but in kind. The difficulty of modernist works is that they always remain difficult. This may seem a simplistic statement until we understand why they remain difficult

and how that difficulty affects readers. Despite readers' intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic efforts, the work remains penetrable only during the act of reading, if then, where penetrable is not the same as resolving difficulty. Some literary works never yield their meaning--are they then useless because meaningless?--or, if they do, it is ineffable, elusive, perhaps even profound. These "visual" readings lengthen the reader's "time" even though the narrative time seems condensed or digested.

Part I: PLOT

An open book rests on the table. Letters are strung together, forming words; words progress, one after the other, forming sentences; sentences construct paragraphs. Within words, sentences, and paragraphs, ideas are conceived and discourse proceeds. We read one word after another, one sentence after another, one paragraph after another, one idea after another. Time flows from one moment to the next. This is plot. This describes the traditional, discrete

structure of narrative, of story telling.¹ For the record, then, time in literature refers to the amount and shape of time it takes the characters, not authors or readers, to live out their existences in the pages of literature.

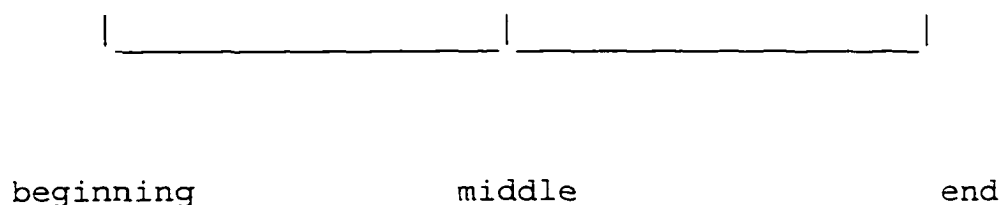
The first misconception about Spatial Form results from the critics who are confusing the time the reader takes to read with the time the narrative takes to unfold. This misconception becomes particularly prominent when critics compare reading literature to reading a painting. They argue that reading literature takes a measurable amount of time whereas reading a painting is instantaneous. This, they assert, is spatial. But, before disagreeing with the critics, we need to unravel the conundrum of time and its cousins--plot, narration, and description.

Time is measured in minutes, hours, days, months, years, even decades and centuries, more often in literature by generations and memories. Most of our measuring devices are linear, discrete.² So too in fiction. E.M. Forster argues that "in the novel there is always a clock [ticking]"

¹ *Discrete* is from the Latin *discretus*, meaning individually distinct, separate elements. All Latin definitions are from *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*.

² Emotional intensity seems to differ in the way it is measured. Feelings seem to carry three-dimensionality to them;

(29). The following diagram illustrates this ab ovo form:



This line represents the shape of time and the structure of a story. It is a basic timescape, a visual metaphor. It looks so simple, but writers have woven magnificent stories with it. Time starts; time progresses from event to event (even when the events are a character's thoughts and feelings); time ends. The unfolding of events, according to Forster, is "story" which is without moral but gives us a chronological order (41). Even when a story does not follow the linearity of events but jumps around, we know that it "jumps around" because of the linearity upon which the plot is predicated. Plot, according to Forster, differs from story. Plot introduces causality by revealing characters' motivations, the causes and effects of human, and sometimes non-human, behavior. Forster expresses the sense of story

they are measured by volume, by weight as in deep feelings or a heavy heart.

with "who did what to whom." Plot is expressed by "who did what to whom and WHY."

Hayden White impresses on us and clarifies the important relationship of narrative point of view to causality and to meaning. Commenting on medieval annals which list a date (year) and an event, White argues that these events are not yet a story because the information in the annals have no causal connections: "They seem to have the same order of importance or unimportance. . . . This time has no high points or low points; it is, we might say, paratactical and endless" (7-8). A short version of his sample follows:

709 Hard Winter. Duke Gottfried died

710 Hard year and deficient crops

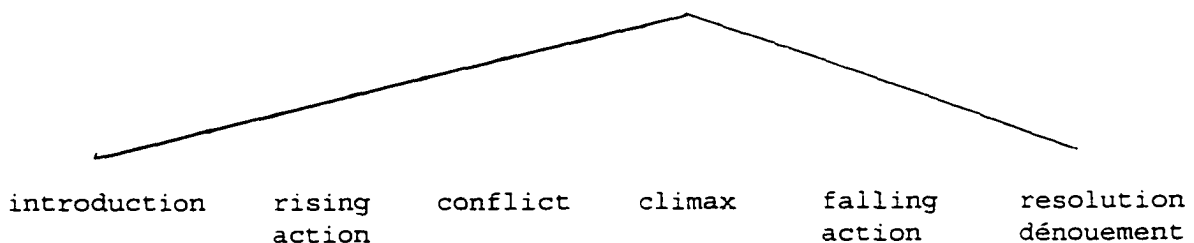
711

712 Flood everywhere

This is an uninflected timescape, not even a flat line but a disconnected one, without narrative perspective and, therefore, without point of view or meaning. The annals are not "plotted stories," for they have no motivation, no causality, no moral, no beginning, and no end. Historical events, like literary "stoff" (matter, substance), need a narrator, a point of view to shape and fill in meaning. The world does not "present itself to perception in the form of well-

made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, ends, and a coherence" (White 24). Through selection, combination, and arrangement, authors provide perspective, hence explanations, judgments, and morality. It is the author of a narration, literary or historical, who selects and rearranges real or imagined world events and colors them with meaning. We can never "narrativize without moralizing," White argues (25) and it is this sense of morality which provides causality, the swells and dips of a timescape.

That sense of causality, meaning and motive, manifests itself in the visual metaphor elaborated below:



Freytag's Pyramid, as it is called, engages Forster's sense of "plot." The straight iron rod of linearity has erupted and melted into the rising and falling line of the pyramid, capturing the pulse of life. Time lives and has a structure. This deceptively simple map of time has numerous

variations and, with it, numerous reader responses.³

Sometimes the ascent to the conflict is long; sometimes, short. Sometimes stories start centuries before the main action as with fairy tales or myths; other times stories drop readers into the moment of conflict as with Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*. The variations of Freytag's pyramid shape are endless. Each kind of emotional, intellectual, social crisis reshapes the timescape. Soap operas, or novels similar to soap operas (Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* or some 19th century works) maintain high peaks of conflict and climax, with the characters (and audience) riding a roller coaster of emotions. Crisis follows crisis. In another example, mystery stories often embody two interest peaks: the murder and the revelation of the murderer's identity. Why the victim was murdered might be made public either during the murder or during the revelation. Mystery writers often keep suspense high--a timescape with a long ascent, several peaks, and a quick drop--till the last few pages which, on

³ For the record, a point has zero dimensions; a line is one dimensional; a shape, a box drawn on paper, for example, is two dimensional though representing a three-dimensional object; the real object, adding depth, is three dimensional. Moving an object in space, our very own walking across the room, adds the alleged fourth dimension, time. When Forster discusses flat and round characters, we already sense the idea of two and three-dimensional characters.

television, has been translated into the crescendo rising to the climax before the penultimate commercial and the mystery solved prior to the last commercial.

Traditional linear plot shapes seemed common in eighteenth and nineteenth century novels because of the novel's attempt to mirror reality. The straightforward chronology of epistolary or journal forms (Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* or *Pamela*) and the Bildungsroman (Dickens' *David Copperfield* or Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*) encouraged traditional linearity. We sense historicity in the meaning of the French *le histoire* or of the German *das Geschichte*. The historicity of these words strongly points to the linearity, to the "something-happened-then-something-happened next." Ian Watt argues that "the novel's imitation of human life follows the procedures adopted by philosophical realism in its attempt to ascertain and report truth" (31). According to Watt, "the premise, or primary convention, [is] that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience" (32).

Further, in order to satisfy the audience, just as counselors satisfy the court of law, details are necessary, "details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms"

(32). As Watt argued, the novel educated the reading public, hence literature's didactic and mimetic nature. Historicity, report, referential language all cling to the idea of verisimilitude, where referentiality implies a shared or communal sense of values. One aspect of those values is the acceptance of linear time structures. Readers familiar with narratives can see differences in, for example, how medieval romances, episodic novels, or *Bildungsroman* each asserts a different shape to reality and to time. Whether the author stretches out one day into a novel or squeezes one hundred years into a paragraph, whether the pyramid has several peaks or one shallow plateau, plot still defers to a chronological, forward marching time.⁴

As strange as a work may seem, as long as the narrative plot is linear, readers seem to have little difficulty comprehending. Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" exemplifies this idea. The unsettling gothic themes are not "difficult" because plot adheres to linear structures. Setting and mood are established in the first line of Poe's story:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the

⁴ See *Theory of Literature* by Wellek and Warren, NY: Harcourt: 1956, chapter 16, particularly page 204.

clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher."

(317).

Time references abound in words and phrases such as "during," "autumn," "year," "passing," "length," and "evening." Poe's language is that of description; time is marked by spatial metaphors. Readers meet the characters and are challenged by the story itself: the strange death of the Ushers and the disintegration of the house sinking into the tarn. If readers have any difficulty with the story, it is on the order of George Steiner's second or modal category of taste or sensibility.

Poe attempts to make the unsettling content familiar through the narrator's "I, " a narrator who was a childhood friend of Roderick Usher's. First person narrators impart a sense of reality: "I was there!"⁵ This narrator mediates

⁵ Other narrative points of view, first, second, or third, in all forms and disguises, each have assets and liabilities in establishing and maintaining a sense of verisimilitude. Third person seems objective; second seems authoritative or intimate, where intimacy means revealing secrets . . . Truth.

between, on the one hand, the intimate, magnified view of the mysteries at the House of Usher and, on the other, the reader's curiosity or sympathy for the victim. What is traditional in Poe's story is that it begins at the beginning and ends at the end: events happen in sequence, following a linear chronology. Content may be unfamiliar, but plot shape is traditional.⁶

Even though authors do not always present time marching straightforward, the story remains predicated on linear chronology. This is true for flashback techniques, works that begin in media res,⁷ and works that seem to double back in time from separate points of view as in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Another change in timescapes--this one is a line re-etching itself--occurs in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, for example, which is told in letters, journals, notes, diaries, newspaper clippings, medical reports, telegrams, ship logs, even diaries on phonograph, resulting in overlapping time sequences. The form demonstrates a proclivity for reproducing the verisimilitude of

⁶ This technique became famous with the film *Rosemary's Baby* where the attention to details, such as dirty ashtrays or half-empty glasses of milk, lulled and seduced viewers into Rosemary's world and point of view. This method of calm in the face of terror reappears in the chapter on Kafka.

real time. The adherence to the magnification of reality and to factual technique validates and makes believable this incredible story.

This nod to the mimetic tradition also depends on a referential use of language. The mimetic tradition is a structured, organized, bordered system. Readers still look for causality even when the linear chronology is abused, ignored, or tied into knots.³ Flashbacks and flashforwards, though not in chronological order, assert order because we know the sequence of the plot against which they were originally arranged.³ However, reconfiguring the shapes of plot exercises the reader's abilities to deal with difficulty. She must keep track of the time changes, perhaps also of narrative events, characters' dispositions, and shifting points of view.

William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" helps illustrate how a changed timescape is intricately interdependent on

² Technically or philosophically, speaking, all literature begins *in media res*.

³ Walter Ong, in *Interfaces of the Word*, describes "deplotted" stories, "not stories which have no plot but stories which in one way or another advertise that they have no plot. That is to say, they have an antiplot, something that is not plot but is defined by references to plot. Plot is . . . now displayed under wraps." (246)

point of view and how they both affect characterization and meaning. This interdependence marks a major change in plot function as well as in the structure of a timescape. The narrator of Faulkner's story is one of the townspeople, speaking in the present, yet he refers to the townspeople themselves in two forms: as "we" and as "they." The "we" includes those folks contemporary with the narrator himself; the "they" designates the townspeople of past generations as well as the fading customs of the past. The story opens with death: "When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral" The story closes when, after her death, the newer generation comes to her house out of curiosity, and finds, on the bed, the forty-year-old remains of Homer Barron, a northern day-laborer and one-time suitor of Miss Emily's. The narrator of the present, the "we," in telling Emily's story, juxtaposes the traditions and culture of the Old South, the South of the "they," to the encroachment of modern day life, his contemporary culture. The five sections of "A Rose for Emily" weave in and out of various events of Emily's life--but not in chronological order.

³ I am tempted to include *Tristram Shandy* with flashbacks except that Sterne's novel "digresses" and defies categorization and is the critic's favorite exception.

They give a devastating portrait of "a fallen monument," for Emily represents the demise of Southern culture. The time line does not move forward but exists as a double helix representing the two cultures, past and present. Would the structure of *The Sound and the Fury* with its five points of view resemble a five-threaded helix, a timescape of immensely different proportions than Freytag's pyramid or its variations?

A work such as Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," with its gothic ending may test a reader's sensibilities, Steiner's second or modal category, because difficulty depends on taste. But, with experience, readers can develop a taste for the gothic or, as sometimes happens, a reader's perceptual fabric already has woven into it a predisposition for the gothic. Like the contingent category, the modal presents a situation where the reader needs to do "homework" to surmount the difficulty. That homework is personal: emotional or intellectual. The plot structure also disorients the reader in terms of Steiner's third or tactical category of difficulty, that is, stimulating the reader into consciousness. Faulkner rearranges both the timescape and the narrative point of view. The double message of the demise of Southern culture as well as its perverted effects on Miss

Emily are woven into the time past/time present, again the double helix of the timescape.

Although we are accustomed to flashbacks, they are used in increasingly complicated ways in literature. One characteristic of flashback that contributes to its difficulty is the abruptness, the unexpectedness of the time change which challenges the reader's abilities. This occurs more intensely in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Gift*. In Nabokov's novel, the plot line unravels, like pulling a thread of a piece of brocade and finally seeing the single skeins from which the patterns were woven. An illustration of the time line of this novel would look something like a spiral whose line finally frees itself of the circle and spins out into a single line in the future.



The Gift opens with Fyodor Gudunov-Cherdyntsev's moving into a new apartment in Berlin. He is writing the biography of Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernishevsky (1828-1889) author of *Life and Aesthetics*. As he writes, Fyodor confronts the antecedents of his social, psychological, and intellectual heritage, the baggage of the past that he carries with him. Each reverie in his mind or in his writing, each revolution into the past, transports Fyodor further away from the pres-

ent and from himself. For example, when he relates his own experiences, he does not use the first person of autobiography, but writes about himself in the third person, in the form of biography as if practicing the novelist's craft. But, when he repeats his father's words, he uses first person, "I can see now . . ." (130). The narrative third person overlaps the story of his father as if son and father had merged and were seeing through the same eyes. Fyodor, speaking in the first person, assumes his father's identity and his father's point of view.

In essence, Fyodor confronts his heritage, perceives that his relation to it is that which his imagination constructs, and emerges with a knowledge of who he is for himself, within the Berlin society, and in his present literary world. Each time Fyodor returns to the present, a present continually becoming past, he has moved forward in time and closer to his real identity as a writer, to the reality of living in Berlin, and closer to having found a subject--himself--for his novel. He can only write about himself when he is free of the past, of history, of his family.

Fyodor tries to get into his subject, the same way he tries to play with memory. Other authors present the "magnificent fabric," their novel, after they have organized

their materials. Rather than presenting the completed pattern, Fyodor reveals the wrong side, the reverse, of the fabric. He unravels the threads of the past and recreates the act of the mind as it creates its own biography, thus giving the reader the process of becoming a writer which is also the product, this novel, *The Gift*. Form and content fuse, as do personal and professional struggle. Paradoxically, the act of writing about the biographies from the reverse side of the fabric is the act of the mind creating its own autobiography and, simultaneously, its own identity. This example is more complex than the traditional flashback of a narrator or an author who stops the forward progression of events in order to insert necessary information or to record a dream. The time changes in *The Gift* are inextricably linked to the theme of the novel and to the character's development. We begin to realize that, in *The Gift*, what we traditionally call plot is something which tests our abilities to describe it clearly. It is not a frame upon which Nabokov constructed a story. The timescape is the story as well as its theme. We begin to understand better the inseparability of content and form, a concept discussed further in the section on Concrete Poetry.

What devices shift our perceptions by millimeters or by miles in the traditions of plot? In part, responses to these shifts and understanding their level of difficulty depend on our expectations and previous experiences of story telling in literature, our perceptual fabric. With few to no experiences, we are like the child asking questions endlessly as our parents read us a bedtime story. "What was the prince doing while Sleeping Beauty slept? Didn't she get thirsty at night and get up?" Questions such as these are reality based. Until children, and adults, learn to suspend their disbelief for reading, they cannot let go of day-to-day life and submit to the author created world, particularly when that author created a world which does not mirror their experiences or understanding. Part of that submission is part of the learning process. Upon opening a book and with repeated exposure to new thoughts, we learn to expect the unexpected: adventure on the high seas or in foreign lands, noses stretching, speaking animals, time moving backwards or not at all. We learn to expect increasing quantities and qualities of the unknown. Experienced audiences diminish reading difficulties when they learn what to expect the unexpected, the unknown.

In one sense, as the reader experiences larger, broader, more diverse expansions of the various genres, she is also being forced not only to integrate these variations into her definitions of each genre but, at the same time, more clearly to define for herself the essential characteristics shared by the genre despite the diversity. This holds true also for the reader's experience of plot.

As plots become more difficult to map out, readers have more difficulty in understanding a work and in finding the thread of causality. Readers respond to difficulty, viewing it as a challenge or as a source of frustration, the latter often expressed as boredom. How much change must occur in the timescape before it is no longer plot? When does the change in degree of plotting suddenly jump the fence and become a change in the kind of plotting . . . or no longer even plot? Is Spatial Form dependent on these changes? Although we revisit these questions shortly, I am asking these questions here in order both to condition the reader to some of the changes which we shall be discussing and to spotlight the problems which the changes engender.

Victor Shklovsky, in his analysis of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, also employed definitions of story and plot; however, they are quite different from Forster's.

Shklovsky's ideas not only push the boundaries of plot but also set it in a new frame. Forster's plot presents the sequence of events as they happened so that the cause and effect connections are more or less evident. For Shklovsky, on the other hand, plot is the sequence of events as the author has chosen to present them; thus, plot may not follow a straight line or even the crooked or knotted line of flashback or flashforward. Plot is the defamiliarization of the reality-based story line. Shklovsky defines "ostranie" or defamiliarization as follows.¹⁰

If the complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it's as if this life had never been.

And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. "By 'estranging' objects

¹⁰ Shklovsky's comments seem to echo Plato's prescription that the unexamined life is not worth living. Also, Benjamin Sher discusses his translation of *ostranit'* (verb) or *ostraniene* (noun) which are neologisms (xviii) in Shklovsky's work.

and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious.' The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant." (5-6)

Shklovsky would prefer readers not to identify with the referential use of language, "recognition," but would prefer that they acquire knowledge by the organ of sight; however, I would strongly argue that Shklovsky's sight refers more to insight than eyesight. "Deceleration," or the slowing down of reading, effects defamiliarization. According to Shklovsky, various techniques with point of view, tropes, and style achieve this decelerated reading. Plot reconfiguring is also an essential technique for deceleration. The purpose of defamiliarizing the known, making it strange, is to "transfer" an "object from its customary sphere of perception to a new one" (12). This is the power of tropes, the same impetus for metaphor and many other figures of thought and speech that have built into their structures the ability to dislocate our perceptions, forcing us to conceive of the

unknown in terms of the known.¹¹ What is important here is that Shklovsky's theory points to the reader's work while reading. Estrangement is an artistic device which makes "perception long and 'laborious'" (6). This slowing down and hard work of the reading process--labor, as in childbirth, reminding us of difficulty--occurs because the reader experiences the "process of creativity" (6). By making an object strange, the writer makes us experience it as if it were for the first time. In my terms, this is the difficulty that never becomes familiar and always remains difficult. What exactly are we doing when we are laboring over the difficulty?

Discussions of plot are, inevitably, discussions of timescapes. Each of the works I have mentioned increases in its strangeness. We may be unfamiliar with them because we are not prepared and do not expect to meet the unfamiliar plot structures. Yet we can become accustomed to plot aberration. We can also become accustomed to works whose syntactical and grammatical differences challenge us. These

¹¹ Aristotle's idea that a pure or true metaphor depends on A:B::C:D where one term is missing and is known not by the others but by the **relationship between** the others. Rosenblatt's transactional theory also emphasizes the relationship between reader and text, acknowledging that they modify and adjust each other. (See bibliography)

defamiliarizations are carried out at the rhetorical level, causing a "complete reorientation of the reader toward language," as Frank would say. We perceive when things are out of order or not arranged correctly only against a backdrop or mindset of order. The dislocation, reformation, even the seeming erasure of time, and therefore, history, has a disorienting affect on readers. We may view Shklovsky's defamiliarization" in terms of George Steiner's tactical mode of difficulty where the author intentionally distorts the work to awaken the reader's consciousness. At what point does the slowing down or erasure of time become the insistence of space? Or does it? Is there a kind of literature in which no amount of rereading and, therefore, mitigation of Steiner's first three difficulties, will ever erase the strangeness?

These transfers from customary to new spheres of perception may be small or large, amusing or frustrating. We can certainly condition ourselves to accept reconfigurations of timescapes even if they never become domesticated or familiar. We are "reoriented," to borrow a word from Joseph Frank. This reorientation is one which permits us to confront, even embrace, rather than reject difficulty even if we still find the work of art difficult. We must not for-

get, though, that the degree of unfamiliarity depends on the degree of difficulty the reader perceives, a degree which, itself, depends on her reading experiences and comprehension.

Defamiliarization echoes Steiner's third or tactical category of difficulty: dislocations of plot, point of view, syntax, and grammar in order to reconfigure the reader's sensibilities. Yet, there is a shift where a change in degree crosses the line to a change in kind. We ask, "How much modification or aberration--now we may call it defamiliarization--is permitted before the reader is no longer processing plot, but differently processing a different kind of reading?" The question is not of how much difficulty but what kind of difficulty. When is plot not plot?

The critic must consider the possibility that this change of degree may transform into a change of kind. The idea of degree versus kind, or quantity versus quality, is not a difficult but a relative concept. By this I mean that a change in degree transforms into a change in kind at different points for different people. So, for example, you and I may disagree about the point at which social drinking transforms into alcoholism or spanking a child for discipline becomes child abuse. The quantity of drinking or degree of

spanking can change the quality of the drinking or the kind of spanking depending on the perceiver.

The same holds true for literature. At what point has the degree of plot reconfiguration become a change in kind of plot? Is it actually the diminishing or removal of plot which causes Spatial Form or is it something else which occurs concurrently? As the plot narrative is more deeply imbedded beneath, behind, even inside description, less plot relies on more visual description. The change in degree becomes a change in kind of plot. Narration has metamorphosed into description and description means that the reader must work harder. Dislocations--or should I use the less denigratory "relocations"--of grammar and syntax do not fall into the same category as plot shape changes or deformations. Slowing down at the plot level differs from slowing down at the sentence level. The difference may be attributed to the difference between telling and showing, between narration and description, between referential and non-referential.

Readers may think of many parallels for the telling/showing quandary:

telling	showing
narration	description

naming	reproducing,
	re-presenting
intellect (mind)	emotions (senses)
generalizations	specifics
instruct/persuade	judge
chronology in time	removed from time (space)
plot (why)	characterization (who or what) ¹²
architectural	rhetorical (tropes . . .)
direct experience	mediated
subjectify	objectify
eidetic	reproduce

"Narrate" derives from Latin's *narrare*, "to relate, to tell," and is related to *gnarus*, "to make known." Implied in the Latin is the idea that the person who "narrates" has had the experience herself, is retelling an event or events which she has digested. Even if I were to retell a story as told to me, I might use "narrate" were I to have an intimacy, real or imagined, with the events, the individuals, and the emotions involved; otherwise, I am summarizing.

With narration, even with intimate first-person narrative in autobiography or in fiction, readers are voyeurs. We may feel close to the "I," but we are not the "I." We may resonate with the "I" but we are still Other. We are

¹² Critics of modernist works have often commented that, as plot diminishes, characterization swells.

always outside the experience itself, onlookers, audience. To become lost in the "I" is to lose aesthetic sensibility, to suffer the affective fallacy. With description, as we shall see, we can experience what our translator experiences: it is the nature of the beast.

How does narration differ from description? Again we find a clue in the Latin. *Describere*, means "to transcribe, to copy, to represent in words." Implied in the Latin is the idea that the person who describes is a mediator or translator between viewer and viewed, between world perceived and the perceiver, between object and receiver. The translator reproduces the object as does a mirror, attempting fidelity to the original.¹³ Further, "describe" includes the root of the Latin word *scribere*, "to engrave with a sharp-pointed instrument, . . . hence 'to write.'" The sense of vividness and clarity, how we often say etched in memory, survives in this meaning."

¹³ Historically, the idea of copying nature exactly has had its ups and downs. It also highlights a variety of questions: if one can paint a flower arrangement realistically, why not privilege, rather, the flower arrangement itself as art? Why paint anything when one can take a photograph? The answer is twofold: first, an artist selects and then combines, creating a work by giving it meaning through point of view. Second, each art form has its own materials and therefore, its own rules that need to be followed and/or

Description works through the senses: we see and hear; we feel texture; we smell and perhaps taste an object. To describe is to objectify what exists unlike the eidetic nature of narration. If I ask you to describe a painting, you become for me a mirror, reflecting what your senses communicated to you so that I, your audience, can see the same painting. To describe is to objectify what exists unlike the eidetic nature of narration. However, if I tell--narrate--the painting to you, I am communicating my experience of it. Narration works through the mind, through logical sequences, through time. This is the difference, between narrating and describing. Narration tends to personalize; description, to objectify.

As I consider description's functions, I am perplexed by several problems. It would be naïve to think that, when a writer describes, she is not coloring her subject and predetermining the reader's responses. For example, if I use the terms "penal institution" rather than "correctional facility" for "prison," I have already slanted my language and predisposed my audience's opinions.¹⁴ However, I would

broken. This includes flower arranging, photography, and literature.

¹⁴ S.I. Hayakawa's notion of slanting where he divides words into three categories of purr, neutral, and snarl.

question whether the expression penal institution is description or an all too "familiar" buzzword or cliché. When writers use figurative language--is all language figurative?--do we consider that description? Probably, yes. However, a writer who does so has already shifted the functions of language from a familiar to an estranged mode, given that tropes help us to express the inexpressible.

We can look to the opening pages of Balzac's *Père Goriot* as a point of reference for our discussion. This work is regarded in the literary canon as being intensely descriptive. The novel opens historically and geographically, framing Madame Vauquer's boarding house in Paris. Balzac describes first the Latin Quarter, then the lodging house property, then front of the house itself. Next we move from the street, through the gate, up the garden till before us stands the house which Balzac also describes in detail:

The house itself, three storeys [sic] high without counting the attics, is built of hewn stone and washed with that yellow shade which gives a mean look to nearly every house in Paris. The five windows at the front on each floor have small panes, and their blinds are all drawn up to different levels so that the lines are at sixes

and sevens. At the side there are two windows,
and those on the ground floor are barred with an
iron grille. (27-43)

This seems to be a traditional description, a re-presenting of what is seen, in the sense of "showing." Only "mean look" tells or gives opinion. Balzac leads the reader through the front door to the sitting room and eventually through the various rooms of the people boarding there. We walk behind the narrator who seems omniscient. Finally, Goriot's rooms and possessions are described in detail. In the next illustration from Balzac, the alleged description tells more than shows in the sense that Goriot's experience is being filtered through another point of view.

Goriot came with a well-furnished wardrobe, the excellent outfit of the business man who denies himself nothing when he comes to shut up shop. Madame Vauquer had opened her eyes at the sight of eighteen cambric shirts whose fineness, moreover, was set off by an ornament the vermicelli-maker was accustomed to wear on his shirt front, two diamond pins linked with a slender chain; . . . His snuffbox, also of gold, contained a locket full of hair, which seemed to prove that

he had made several conquests among the ladies.

When his hostess accused him of being a breaker of hearts a happy smile hovered on his lips, the smile of the worthy citizen whose vanity is tickled by allusion to a weakness he cherishes. (43)

We hear the narrator's judgments and opinions in this passage more than we actually see the details of description. What color is the lock of hair? What colors are the cambric shirts? The adjective "cambric" does not yet touch the senses. It points to the known, of what we already may have experienced. Is the character Goriot vain? Is he really a lady's man? Are these merely the perceptions of Madame Vauquer? Do we know what Goriot himself or his household silver looks like? Can we recreate a likeness of these people and things? What seems like description is not actually description but narration, recreating Madame Vauquer's experience, fictional though it may be. True photographic description risks detailing the reader to death. Instead, Balzac has shown us Old Goriot unpacking his possessions so that we know his possessions by their effect on Madame Vauquer. This is a technique which we shall see discussed by Lessing. The author "narrates an object." By this I

mean that the author, rather than describing the object itself, describes the process by which the object was created.

"Description," like "Modernism" and "Romanticism," eludes definition. Earlier, I introduced the origins of description and narration. In *Roget's Thesaurus*, we find offered three major definitions for the word. The first category is description itself: a) rendering, representation b) chronicle, memoir, narrative c) fiction, fairy tale, myth, allegory d) plot, characterization, action. This is the telling mode, narration. The second category includes the following: interpretation, translation, paraphrase, explanation, simplification (*Roget's* #552.9). This is part of the original meaning of the word as mediator or conduit. The third category comes closest to the qualities that we consider spatial in contemporary meanings of description: particularity, identity, specificity, property, concreteness, and detail.

Why does the third seem closest to the spatial sense? Part of the answer rests in the fact that specificity and concreteness of detail owe little to plot. The sequence of sentences has less impact than the structure of individual sentences and the language within sentences. Rhetoric eclipses plot as a source of Spatial Form. We may argue

that erasing time is not the source of Spatial Form but, when time is erased, when narrative slows down, description prevails. Description has the potential to open the door to the non-referential, to the unreal, non-existent world, unmediated world. Through description, the unknown can be made known. What is strange can be reconstructed to seem common. What is common can be reframed to seem strange. If description reproduces an object, whether the "object" is a thought, action, or person, then the reader not only mentally re-constructs the object, apprehends it, but she must also form her own "narrative" about it: finding significance or creating meaning is a form of resolving difficulty. It seems we have come full circle to the obvious: narration tells; description shows.¹⁵ The more writers show readers through description, the more we must take time to look. Paradoxically, our taking more time to look is a slowing of narrative pacing but, conversely, an increasing of reader's

¹⁵ This concept, the difference between showing and telling, seems obvious but is actually quite complex. (Understanding the difference can mean the difference between passing and failing in a freshman composition class.) The issue is made more intricate with figures of thought and of diction.

reading time.¹⁶ The slowing of narrative pacing is the slowing of the reader's pacing but an increase in the length of time a reader takes to read.

Is there really a slowing down of the process of reading when a person reads description or does it depend on the quantity and quality of detail? Or does it merely seem as if there is a slowing down because the object is static, not moving in narrative time? How many dimensions does a verbally described thing have? Forster argued that flat characters seemed two-dimensional and round characters, three-dimensional. How does our perception of a painting relate to this? If we were to set up equivalencies, we might say that an object described, like an object in the world, is three-dimensional, having length, width, and depth. An object narrated has four dimensions: length, width, depth, and time but, as time prevails, dimensionality recedes.

If we look at two sentences, we can distinguish stops as opposed to linear, continuing time. "Sam ran down the

¹⁶ Many critics (see Smitten and Daghistany's anthology) agree that slowed time means harder work for the reader. Unfortunately, the emphasis has been on "slowing time" and "making connections" to make sense. These are red-herring emphases. This assumes that meaning is in the sense that readers make of restructured syntax rather than in the absence of cohesion.

street," has no feeling of a stop. Our first inclination is to ask why he ran down the street, an interpretation that impregnates the sentence with plot-like qualities. "The Chinese red lacquered box with ball claw feet fell on the floor," transmits to the reader a sense of a stop because our minds are busy reproducing the box before we set it into motion. This does not occur with "Sam." To reproduce a thing, a person, an action in language with words is to describe. Some descriptions reproduce in microscopic detail and others give but a faint sketch. Description requires reader work more than narration.

Description that brings attention to the materials of its creation impels the reader to do even more work of a different kind. An art analogy here may help. Abstract paintings--those of Pollack or deKooning, for example--call attention to the paint, the strokes, the colors, and their movement. People who look at these paintings are working through these materials to get to the content or subject. To do so requires the "perceiver" to do more work than she would with a representational painting.

The question still remains: is literature spatial in form when the author describes in detail? If the answer is yes, then we want to know why. Because we are describing an

object in space? Because we are bordering on the realization of the metaphor, "painting with words" which, according to Frank, is not what he meant by Spatial Form? Whatever the answer, we cannot get away from the idea that the reading is slower, slowed, even brought to a stop. The one point necessary to make here is that Spatial Form is not dependent on the degree of describing one does but, as will be explained in this chapter, it depends on the kind of description and its affect on the reader. Some descriptions can be boring; other description can bring the subject to life. The relationship between description and motion is at issue here.

In fiction, we know that one basic dislocation of plot occurs when the story line does not occur in the order, or even in the disorders, we have learned to expect. A writer who makes what we read seem unfamiliar--whether to wake us into consciousness, to shock us, to teach us, to please us--has many techniques at her service. But we should ask, "How many degrees away from traditional plot narration can a work of literature move before the work is redefined?" If a reader understands the role of plot in defining a novel, then how one responds to the work is predicated on understanding the function of plot in fiction. At the extreme

end, if plot does not exist, is the work in question still a novel or still a short story? Is it still a narrative or is it a spatially formed work of literature?

In order to find answers to these questions, we need to explore some of the more unique cases of plot. An interesting one occurs with Ernest Hemingway's "Interchapters." The full text follows:

While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed I'll do anything you say. I believe in you and I'll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus. The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet. The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody. (143)

Although this is an interchapter, it is often treated as a short, a very, very short, story. I have used this work in class many times. Once students acclimate themselves to the idea that a story can be uniquely short--if this is indeed a story--they then divide into two camps, with each camp arguing equally vehemently for one or the other position: that this is a short story or that it is not a story; that it has a plot or that it is plotless. Perhaps students perceive this work with the possible "non-plot" by its degree of deviation from what they conceive of as plot. More interestingly, it is possible that those students who adjust their modal sensibilities more quickly than others are the ones who see the work as less "difficult." Familiarity with variations of genre and structures assist in adjusting taste and decreasing reading difficulty.

Familiarity and experience in reading can also evolve in relation to Steiner's second and third forms of difficulty, namely, the modal and the tactical. A reader's sensibilities will be less burdened or injured the more familiar she becomes with other cultures, traditions, and psychologies. Again, a reader can become acclimated to the unusual. Her tastes can learn to accommodate and/or appreciate that which is foreign or even repulsive. To echo the

line of thinking described in the preceding chapter, a reader/critic must be conscious of her own perceptual fabric, erase pre-judgments, and focus on the transaction between the work and the reader: forewarned is forearmed. Just as a reader becomes psychologically acclimated, she can also learn to apprehend and appreciate texts that are grammatically and syntactically challenging. In other words, she becomes aesthetically acclimated. What is developed is not merely familiarity with "otherness" or the "foreignness" but a willingness to experience the unfamiliar: the emphasis here is not, then, on the product but on the process, not on individual, difficult texts, but on accepting the concept of difficulty whatever its form. I am not saying that any kind of difficulty should be acceptable. I am, however, trying to convince my audience that the reader's openness to working with difficulty comprises half the strategy of understanding difficulty.

At this point, two roads seem to converge: on one path, the notion of Spatial Form, and on the other, the difficulty of Modernism.

The earlier examples of Poe, Faulkner, even Nabokov still nod, perhaps even bow to linear time. Nabokov seems to come close to a modernist difficulty because of the ne-

cessity for the reader not merely to keep track of past and future, real and unreal, but to rearrange the ideas presented in order to make sense of the work. This is not a case of memory work nor of what George Steiner would call the contingent category of difficulty. This goes beyond memory, beyond the tactical category or Shklovsky's estrangement. This is also not a case of the reader's working with knowns and unknowns. Instead, it is a case of the reader working with unknowns and being obliged to create her own knowns, the process of creativity. This is the point where a change in degree shifts into a change in kind. Remembering, or even total recall, does not engage the reader in the same way that disorganized words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs do. The subject/ predicate/object structure of a sentence orchestrates the linearity of traditional narrative.

What seems to be the most sophisticated form of flashback--and for the moment I am focusing only on this aspect of this spectacular work--occurs in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Time past is woven together with time present; however, it is exceedingly different from the representations of flashback previously discussed because it marks a change of degree engendering a change in kind. The major

differences seem to result for two reasons. First, Proust's style allows the flashback to occur not in the story or in a scene but abruptly, within a moment, within a sentence, syntactically consummated:¹⁷

He next crossed a little hall which--just as certain rooms are arranged by their owners to serve as the setting for a single work of art (from which they take their name), and, in their studied bareness, contain nothing else besides--displayed to him as he entered it, like some priceless effigy by Benvenuto Cellini of an armed watchman, a young footman, his body slightly bent forward, rearing above his crimson gorget an even more crimson face, from which seemed to burst forth torrents of fire, timidity and zeal, who, as he pierced the Aubusson tapestries that screened the door of the room in which the music was being given with his impetuous, vigilant desperate gaze, appeared, with a soldierly impassibility or a supernatural faith--an allegory of alarums, incarnation of alertness, commemoration of a riot--to be

¹⁷ This includes Proustian sentences that sometimes are more than 800 words long.

looking out, angel or sentinel, from the tower of
dungeon or cathedral, for the approach of the en-
emy or for the hour of Judgment.

This is a dizzying journey through associations, *mémoire in-
voluntaire*. This description of what was seen is woven with
memory--much like Nabokov's reverse side of the fabric. Is
this description or narration or another form, function, or
use of language? This is not mimetic or representation of
the exterior world; however, critics have argued that this
language is mimetic of interior worlds, what I have called
"innerscapes." This is not a narrative from which one can
draw a timescape. It is also not a description which re-
etches a known reality. A pared down sentence gives us the
following: "He next crossed a little hall which...displayed
to him as he entered it, . . . a young footman . . . who, .
. . . appeared, . . . to be looking out, . . . for the ap-
proach of the enemy or for the hour of Judgment" (250).

Where the flashback stops time and transports a chunk of
past time to our reading present, Proustian "flashback"--a
misnomer--erases the borders between present and past time,
between real existence and association so that the reader
experiences both simultaneously. We cannot separate them
even if we wished to do so. [Madame] Yvette Louriá has ana-

lyzed Proust's technique as "convergence," an intricate and complex form of parallel structure, embedded modifiers, and subordinated clauses.

Bergson's "durée" is the logical comparison that comes to mind for philosophical considerations for time. The traditional, scientific, culturally and socially bound notion of time is linear. Time is measured in standardized, discrete units. According to Bergson, linear time is passive. Distinct from this traditional view of time, Bergson discussed "durée réelle" or "pure time." This is the human experience of time also called "lived" time. This moving ebb and flow of time some people liken to a 1960's lava lamp and others to the fluidity of a river. We are even free to conceive of time as envelopes of consciousness rather than lines, a conception which erases past/future distinctions. Bergson's durée is no less a human construct itself than linear or clock time, but its presence allows us to reconceptualize time and metaphorize its relationship to human consciousness. As a result, literary critics have compared Bergson's durée with stream of consciousness writings such as James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's.

Bergson's argument enables critics to conceive of and to discuss other time shapes, such as "flow time," in the

contemporary sense of the word, where one's sense of time disappears during creative work: I begin writing, look up from my desk, and am startled to realize that, instead of thirty or forty minutes, three hours have passed. As soon as time is wrenched from its linearity, that iron rod of time shaping our discourses, we can conceive of time moving, expanding and contracting, going backwards, looping over itself, foregrounding and backgrounding in our consciousness. It begins to resonate with who we are, with our style, and it becomes an active part of how we exist and behave. Even the metaphors we assign to express the time shapes we perceive reveal us. Bergson's idea of time "feels" right to most readers because it allows for each of our individualized visions of being in the world.¹⁵

How does this have an impact on our discussion of time? Bergson articulated a conception of non-linear time, allowing us to think about time in packages of consciousness

¹⁵ *The Living Clocks* by Richie E. Ward discusses biological clocks, an interesting juxtaposition to this discussion. Plants and animals (humans also) have rhythms determined by the elements and by day and night. These in turn affect the subjects' chemicals or hormones. Once people went indoors, facilitated by inventions of light, and were not at the mercy of dawn to dusk for daylight, they began to change their biological clocks. Ward's discussion of human activity cycles seems to support this hypothesis.

where we may move from one chunk or blob of awareness to another or even where we may elevate all moments to conscious ones. If time is like a river, we do not leave our past behind us: it is always part of our present, just as our past and present are part of our future and, therefore, always part of our perceptual fabric. Time as a river is another shape that attempts to capture the sense of the infinite and undelineated. As with the Impressionists and Cubists, Bergson was redefining time, erasing borders and boundaries.

The beauty of Bergson's ideas is that his shape of time permits him to philosophize about freedom and will from an entirely different perspective, a universe that rejects the either/or structure. What permitted Bergson to conceive of this new notion of non-linear time also permitted writers of literature to manifest a non-linear time in their works. In both philosophical and literary instances, time affects how we see consciousness. With Bergson and the critics of narrative as a backdrop, we can return to exploring how the shape of plot, its physical metaphor, changes and, more importantly, relates to Spatial Form.

How can I graphically portray the timescape of Proust's work? Straight lines retracing their surfaces, spirals, helixes fail to portray time adequately. However, the image

of Chinese boxes, one inside the other, might better convey Proust's method. Each box is filled with differing time periods. Rather than a plot whose timescape has a forward momentum or even a momentum re-inscribing the past, Proust has encouraged us to stare with a "vigilant desperate gaze" at his creation—Swann's mind, a mind of numerous perspectives. A reader cannot become "familiar" with this work; it remains always defamiliarized. First, because of the intense use of figurative language and rhetorical devices (figures of thought and figures of diction), the plot element is eclipsed and time fades. This is not the kind of novel we read for "who did what to whom."

Some readers may object to my subordinating the plot aspects of Proust's work because the characters focus on and are shaped by this aspect. However, if plot were truly the center of this work, then we might as well read Judith Krantz type novels and watch soap operas. The point is that we read Proust more for how plot unravels than for the plot itself. The aesthetics of the telling occupies center stage.

Second, we read for the aesthetic experience, the experience of the language that is so impossibly and exquisitely woven into the subject and theme. With each reading, the

experience of the language is renewed, for Proust's is not the kind of language use from which a reader can absorb all the rhetoric, paraphrase meaning, or synthesize plot. There is no overt didactic or mimetic function, and there is no number of rereadings which will remove the difficulty of the language.

One major problem with explaining the idea that "the difficulty of Modernism is that Modernism is always difficult" is that Western culture privileges the logical, the linear, and the rational: in other words, finding causality equals finding meaning. If we reevaluate Steiner's four categories of difficulty in context of our discussion on plot/narration/description, we can reframe his divisions, particularly the ontological difficulty.

Difficulty in literature is not an obstacle, but an opportunity.¹⁹ With each of Steiner's levels or categories, for example, a reader is in a learning process. At the contingent level, a reader learns to select and synthesize, much like translation where the necessity of making the right choice is only half the process for making meaning out of difficulty. This is a basic problem-solving strategy of,

¹⁹ The Chinese ideogram for obstacle also means challenge.

more or less, substitution. The other half is interpreting. The modal category also presents a learning situation in which the readers, by accepting works which offend their tastes, are learning either to be disinterested or even to change their tastes. What process does this require on the reader's part? I alluded earlier to the reader's need to readjust sensibilities and the self-examining required to do so. This sounds easy but, in fact, the reader must reassess and reorganize, perhaps piece by piece, like dominoes falling, her moral, ethical, emotional values. With this larger more comprehensive adjustment of values, an individual grows as an individual within a family, within a subgroup, within a society. Reading "alien" texts forces a person out of the "self," out of the limited, narrow world to which she may be accustomed. These "alien" texts no longer mirror her comforting world. Learning to accept the unacceptable is considered a sign of maturity and growth whereas a reader who faces what is difficult or "alien" and says, "I don't like this," has personalized her response. Her worldview is solipsistic.

The third category of difficulty, the tactical mode, requires a specialized knowledge in a field, a professional level of knowing. Readers who face tactical difficulties,

disorientations at the grammatical/syntactical level, have shifted into another literary realm, one in which the process of reading is a conscious, bifurcated one of both literary form and content. Readers who can not hold the "estrangements" will find literature at the tactical level difficult. Those who can recalibrate and reconcile to these tactical shifts will experience aesthetic literary pleasures. Consciousness of the literary elements can occur at earlier stages but that consciousness is acquired by a different kind of "work," the assembling of information. The modal and tactical difficulties bring consciousness through harder, psychological and philosophical work, work which challenges a reader's worldview.

Steiner's fourth level, the ontological, presents the most problems, for this category encompasses difficult literature that opposes any efforts of removing difficulty. Immediately, James Joyce sitting at his desk comes to mind: in addition to his own prodigious memory, he is surrounded by character charts, maps of Dublin, reference books . . . numerous works which he used to write *Ulysses*. How many pages or chapters can the most accomplished Joycean scholar read without assistance? Can this scholar hold within her mind the many references, meanings, and alternative mean-

ings? The point of understanding is not to recreate the state of mind per se when the author wrote the work. However, a strategy of difficulty is to surmount the obstacles by doing one's "contingent" homework. I would assume that this scholar has herself done a prodigious amount of contingent, modal, and tactical work; nevertheless, the reader can never recalibrate and reconcile both the degree and kind of difficulties in *Ulysses*.

We might consider that the major point is, in fact, to challenge the reader: obstacles have become opportunities. The author may not be doing it consciously but the end effect is, nevertheless, difficulty. Because of our Western tradition, we sometimes find it difficult to shift our perspective in our problem-solving endeavors. As I have shown in chapter two, critical attempts at trying to solve the problem of modernism have centered on examining causes, scrutinizing effects: hence, the lists. Now, however, we can consider modernist texts and Steiner's ontological category in a new light, as a difficulty that consumes the reader.

The simplest comparison, parallel to the ontological difficulty though not identical, occurs with the Japanese koan (Chinese *kung-an*), a paradox "which cannot be solved by

the intellect but which holds its attention while a higher faculty takes over. Used as an exercise for breaking the limitations of thought and developing the intuition, thereby attaining a flash of awareness beyond duality" (Humphreys 185).

The *kung-an* is often given to a disciple by his master in order to offer the student an opportunity for enlightenment. The major point of tangency among the *kung-an*, the paradox, and Spatial Form is the challenge. Briefly discussing the *kung-an* will help illustrate their connectedness.

The koan or *kung-an* is a one-paragraph story or, oftentimes, just a saying such as "The sound of one hand clapping," or a master/student dialogue called a *mondo*. Zen disciples meditate on the koan to help them reach "awakening" or enlightenment. "It is intended to propel one to clear insight by a route independent of discursive thought" (Shimano 72). In *Zen Keys*, Thich Nhat Hanh explains to readers that "there is a big difference between a *kung-an* and a math problem—the solution of the math problem is included in the problem itself, while the response to the *kung-an* lies in the life of the practitioner" (57).

In the Western tradition, the mind's analytical and logical nature is privileged over other functions. Reason reigns. "Zen masters have deliberately developed techniques . . . [that is, the *koan* and the *mondo*] to discredit the logical, verbal side of the mind so that the intuitive perceptions may define reality" (Hoover 5). In the Western mind, "the process of thought, of reasoning, takes place in the field of duality" (Humphreys 93). In the literature of Zen and *Koans*, disciples report feeling on the verge of madness, of losing their minds, when they meditate on the *koan's* paradox. This feeling results from trying to solve the *koan* intellectually or emotionally.

No thinking will achieve Zen Until the student deeply and fully understands that Zen lies, in its very nature, beyond all thinking or other mental process in duality, no progress will be made toward a Zen awareness. Thought can go a very long way; we can by reason achieve the concept of the ONE, the greater concept of the Void, ... But we are still reasoning about; we do not know. (Humphreys 93)

Western tradition also privileges words. Words are symbols used to transmit experiences.

We descend to the level of thought and wrap our discovery in the opaque material of thought and feeling in order to hand it to our friend. The friend must unwrap the symbol and extract for his own understanding whatever is left of the actual experience. (Humphreys 94)

Language is like the finger pointing to the moon in the *kung-an* that opened this chapter. To focus on the finger is to miss the moon of experience.

Paradox tears us away from thinking and thinking about. Zen writers sometimes compare the intellect to a machine used to analyze, to discriminate, to compare, or to synthesize. "The intellect is an instrument; it cannot know" (Humphreys 97). If we remember that description appeals to the senses and feeds the intellect and the emotions, then the following argument begins to make sense. "The sense and the intuition know; the emotions and the intellect work on material provided by the other two" (Humphreys 99). We know by experience, intuitively, not in the mind as reason.

Our either/or Western philosophy is still trying "to resolve dualities in a concept which unites them" (Humphreys 101). The paradoxes we find in works of Modernism defined by the label Spatial Form share with the *kung-an* several

features: the disciple or reader faces a wall of difficulty; the understanding gained by both is intuitive and more than likely not easy, if at all possible, to articulate. In other words, reader/disciple can not verbalize their enlightenment--for the reader, an aesthetic understanding and awareness; for the disciple, a spiritual one--nevertheless, the awareness shifts their experiences of reading/life. The boundary between the reader/disciple and the difficulty (text/koan) dissolves. Logic, reason, analyses will not, can not, resolve the difficulties encountered. Being free, open (Zen) to intuition and to the senses will permit one to "understand." The traditional readers of modernist, spatially formed texts are searching for logical answers, the right interpretation, a consensus meaning for the polysemantics rather than letting go of meaning and experiencing the work.²⁰

I am in no way arguing primarily that Spatial Form is the Western literary equivalent of a *kung-an*, for we are not seeking enlightenment (satori) through fiction although this is not as ludicrous as it may seem. Shimano, a Buddhist Zen

²⁰ I have had more than one student express the following sentiment upon reading *The Waste Land*: "I don't know what it means but I like listening to it."

master has written about *koans* and the differences between Eastern and Western approaches to teaching.²¹ Shimano cites poetry and lines from Tennyson, the New Testament, William Blake, T.S. Eliot, and even Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as sources of *koans* for Westerners studying Zen. We do, however, look to our writers for help in "understanding." I am tempted to insert an object for that predicate, "to understand," an object such as Truth, Beauty, Self. Unfortunately, expressing these would merely reinforce the duality against which my brief foray into Zen has warned me. When those writers communicate their understanding in a way which we find difficult to articulate, then we resort to our own version of the finger pointing to the moon, for essentially, my comparison of *koans* to Spatial Form is merely the finger pointing. The moon is your own experience of the literature.

What is the relationship of the *koan* to visual art and to Spatial Form? Neither is discursive. Both rely on experiencing and sensing rather than analysis. They reveal the meaning of our own existence--our ability to make meaning or solve problems--rather than the meaning of the work. They

²¹ In "Zen Koans" found in *Zen: Tradition and Transition*, edited by Kenneth Kraft, New York: Grove Press, 1988, 70-87.

break with the borders of time, time being a construct of logic. They all break borders of I-other, subject-object experiences, the dualities. To be sensing, to be struggling and reaching understanding, is to be "out of time." The reflexive reference is one's own experience of meaning. And, the biggest leap of faith involves discussing the non-logical apprehensions in words. Non-logical does not mean non-verbal, as the *koan* demonstrates. In this sense, all my endeavors to verbalize non-verbal apprehension are itself paradoxical.

Let us focus on the spatial nature of certain modernist works. For the moment, I will pretend that *Spatial Form* attempts to compare the "apprehending" of literature with "apprehending" of visual art. To do so, we turn to Joseph Frank and "Spatial Form in Literature."

PART TWO
THE VANISHING READER

In a now classic essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Joseph Frank establishes a non-condemnatory and disinterested way of discussing the anomalies of modernist experimental literature. Rather than judging these works as aberrations or abominations, as elitist or merely difficult, and rather than showing what these works fail to accomplish in relation to literary tradition, Frank sketches out what they were doing in reference to themselves. The value of Joseph Frank's analysis is that he assesses the literature of Modernism on its own terms, in its own territory.

Frank's essay brings together the concept of Spatial Form and the idea of the reader's role by describing Spatial Form as a "complete reorientation in the reader's attitude toward language" (Gyre 13). This is a stunning observation and rich with consequences; however, the concerns of the critics as well as Frank's own presentation of his ideas eclipse the importance and ramifications of his emphasis on the reader's reorientation. Frank theorizes using epithets and passive voice. As a result, he does not explain the reader's psychological, intellectual, nor aesthetic activi-

ties. In addition, he also focuses on traditional elements such as characterization, plot, and theme. The final barrier overshadowing exploration of the reader's reorientation occurs because Frank details the background and underpinnings of his thinking process: he spotlights Lessing, Eliot, Pound, and Worringer to frame his ideas and validate his concerns. McNeil judges that Frank took a "deliberately narrow focus" which results in "the avoidance of rhetorical and epistemological concerns" (357). I cannot claim that what he discusses or avoids discussing is deliberate, but I can assess the sources of the subsequent critical confusion. Ideally, in a second essay, Frank would analyze the reader's work to complete his study of Spatial Form. However, at the time of Frank's essay (1948), reader emphasis and phenomenological concerns were in their infancy.

Frank's essay has seven sections. The introductory section focuses on the lessons of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laoköon*; the second part, "Modern Poetry, employs Eliot and Pound, highlighting Pound's imagism; in section three, Frank explores Flaubert and Joyce's techniques; section four analyzes Proust's style; the fifth, the longest, examines Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*; in the sixth section, "The Parallel with the Plastic Arts," Frank discusses Worringer's argument con-

cerning naturalistic and non-naturalistic styles; finally, section seven is entitled, "The Meaning of Spatial Form." I have included this outline because, in my explanation of Frank's position, I "flashback" to his sources for clarification and because I am arguing through and with some of his concepts and sources.

From Horace to Lessing to Worringer, one major aesthetic concern has been the interrelationship of the arts. How do we judge poetry and painting, the verbal and the visual arts? Can both arts treat the same subject in the same way? How are the arts restrained by their mediums--words in one instance and paint or clay in the other?

Simonides, the classic philosopher, asserts that painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture. But it is Horace's *ut pictura poesis* that is cited as the origin of the quandary and as one of the earliest comments on the relationship of the arts.

*Ut pictura poesis: erit quae, si propius stes, te
capiat magis, et quaedam, si longius abstes. Haec
amat obscurum, volet haec sub luce videri, iudicis
argutum quae non formidat acumen; haec placuit se-
mel, haec deciens repetita placebit.*

A poem is like a picture: one strikes your fancy
more, the nearer you stand; another, the farther
away. This courts the shade, that will wish to be
seen in the light, and dreads not the critic [sic]
insight of the judge. This pleased but once;
that, though ten times called for, will always
please (Horace, lines 361-365).²²

This has been interpreted in various ways: that poetry and painting do the same things; that poetry and painting share the virtue of repeated inspection if they are worthy; that the Truth of a work of art is in its ability to please and to instruct. (This latter point was the message of the *Ars* section preceding the above quote.)

These interpretations of and prescriptions for the arts are the backdrop against which Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in the *Laocoön* argues for an aesthetic of criticism which analyzes the medium rather than prescribed forms. It is here that we will now understand why a chapter on Spatial Form begins with a meditation on time, for temporal and spatial are the narrative and descriptive notions of Part One.

²² Horace. *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*. Trans. H.R. Fairclough. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978.

Joseph Frank opens his essay with a discussion of the *Laocoön* and emphasizes that his interest is in Lessing's method which was "a new approach to aesthetic form" (Gyre 7). According to the *Laocoön* legend, a father, trying to save his two sons from the death grips of sea serpents, perished along with his sons. Lessing first compares the methods of rendering the visual and the poetic versions of the story and then extrapolates rules to explain what is appropriate for each medium of art.

Lessing analyzes the laws of aesthetic perception; shows how they prescribe necessary limitations to literature and the plastic arts; and then demonstrates how Greek writers and painters, especially his cherished Homer, created masterpieces in obedience to these laws. (Frank, Gyre 5)

We find in Lessing, rather than Frank, that the father's scream is not depicted in the statue because it would be "ugly" and would leave nothing to the imagination (Lessing 79). In poetry, things are also not described because straight descriptions are essentially boring--hence Homeric epithets (Lessing 80). We can see from Lessing's comments on

effects, that he is concerned with the reader's responses as much as with the limits of the medium.²³

In his explanation of Lessing, Frank points out that painting uses form and color in space; poetry uses "articulated sounds in time," emphasizing the linearity of the medium in conventional composition (6).²⁴ The plastic arts are spatial because "the visible aspect of objects can best be presented juxtaposed in an instant of time. Literature . . . makes use of language, composed of a succession of words proceeding through time" (Frank 6). Frank is working against what I have named the traditional linear timescapes. The artist is bound by the materials, or "sensuous nature" as Frank describes it, of the medium. Paintings show with line, form, and color, spatially on the page; stories tell with

²³ One could argue that all literature, always, from Plato on, has been concerned with "reader-response." However, Longinus is the critic/philosopher who first changed the emphasis so that the reader's response, the expressive mode which continued with Theodor Lipps, was more important than other factors. As E. A. McCormick said in a class lecture on aesthetics, "All criticism is a matter of emphases" (CUNY Graduate School, NY, Spring 1983).

²⁴ Montaigne's essay form may be viewed as the first attempt to remove linearity of composition: an essay form that is not narrative employs not chronological but emphatic order.

words, with linearity on the page.²⁵ (Both, by the way, share principles of composition, many which overlap.) In responding to trends during his time, Lessing says, in essence, do not try to paint pictures with words and do not try to tell stories with visible images "because their aims are in contradiction to the fundamental properties of their mediums" (Frank 6). In Lessing's words:

Objects or parts of objects which exist in space are called bodies. Accordingly, bodies with their visible properties are the true subjects of painting.

Objects or parts of objects which follow one another are called actions. Accordingly, actions are the true subjects of poetry. (78)

Lessing does acknowledge, however, the possibility of minor overlapping (78).

Homer does not paint the shield as finished and complete, but as a shield that is being made.

Thus, here too he has made use of that admirable artistic device: transforming what is coexistent

²⁵ It is interesting to note that the sixteenth and seventeenth century neoclassical writers in France and Italy adhered to the three unities--time, place, action--which seem to lock linearity into an almost claustrophobic form.

in his subject into what is consecutive, and
thereby making the living picture of an action of
the tedious painting of an object. (Lessing 95)

A coexistent subject is one that is described as a consecutive subject; it is narrated. Rather than painting Achilles' shield with words, Horace narrates the process by which the shield was created. This is "narrating an object."

Lessing's main point is that form is an internal, not external, force or organization. This was the concept which Frank cultivated. What is valuable is that Frank's essay shifts the ground of the reader's critical point of view so that Modernist works are not seen as aberrations or increasing distortions of traditional conventions but are evaluated by their internal elements.

Frank argues that the literature of Modernism "is moving in the direction of Spatial Form" which Frank defines as follows: "writers ideally intend for the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence" (9). This, however, poses problems. Should the work be short, of haiku length?²⁶ (The most immediate enigma is trying to imagine apprehending *Ulysses* in a moment of

²⁶ Brevity was also of concern for Poe. See his *Compositions* in *Poe: Essays and Reviews*.

time!) Was Frank saying, in an anti-Laocoönian impulse, that literature could accomplish with words what the spatial arts accomplished with form and color? Frank defines Spatial Form tautologically, as "spatially," which, in turn, is defined as "apprehended . . . in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence." "In a moment of time" tells us how long, whereas "as a sequence" tells us in what manner. Combining these phrases has led critics to assume that Frank is arguing that works of Modernism are apprehended as one apprehends a painting--a quick look. Given Frank's discussion of the image, critics have valid reason for extrapolating a comparison between perceiving in the visual arts and the perceiving of verbal images. Narrative is removed; description prevails. However, shortly, we shall see this is in error.

In addition, Frank states that the purpose of his essay is "to apply Lessing's method to modern literature--to trace the evolution of form in modern poetry and, more particularly, in the novel" (8). Although Frank anticipates and prepares the reader through Lessing's argument, the argument that poets cannot paint pictures and painters cannot tell stories, Frank later denies this as his purpose. In "An Answer to the Critics," Frank emphasizes that his purpose was descriptive and not prescriptive (70-71). In essence, criti-

cism must follow the forms of art and art follows the forms of its medium. Readers, however, may be confused because, despite Frank's stress on method, that what "Lessing offered was not a new set of norms, but a new approach to aesthetic form", we cannot dismiss the attention which Frank gives to Lessing's content (7). Our question, then, is "Why walk readers down this Lessing Road only to deny later that it was worthwhile?"

I find a contradiction in Frank's saying he wishes to follow the method because he takes up Lessing's content in the harvest. I concede that Frank is interested in tracing the oscillations between the two poles of time and space as they are used in literature and art, but there is some leap of faith expected when he ends his discussion of Lessing's prescriptions against Spatial Form in literature only to define Spatial Form in modern literature against the very prescription he has just described. Eliot, Pound, Proust, Joyce, and Barnes--"All these writers ideally intend the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence" (Frank 9). Before addressing this argument in terms of looking at a painting, I wish to complete Frank's idea of Spatial Form.

In the second section, Frank acknowledges that Pound and the Imagist movement were the impetus for Spatial Form Modern Poetry. Although Frank theorizes in terms of poetry, he later analyzes novels with great insight. According to Frank, Imagist poetry, "opened the way for later developments by its clean break with sentimental Victorian verbiage" (9). Kafka also rebelled against the more elaborate language use and "purified" his writing style. This again suggests mitigating narrative functions. The Imagists first appeared in Pound's *Ripostes* in October 1912. By March 1913, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" was published in *Poetry* magazine. The image was paramount.

'An image,' Pound wrote, 'is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.' . . . an image is defined not as a *pictorial reproduction* but as a unification of disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially" (Frank 9) (emphasis mine).

An image is not linear, not discursive, but delivers an "instantaneous impact." According to Pound, "The image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy" (*Selected Prose* 345). These "fused ideas" may remind readers of description which, in turn,

conjures up painting pictures with words. Description is, inevitably, our response to an object or to an experience. However, Frank denied that he was interested in the issue of painting pictures with words. In "An Answer to the Critics," Frank stresses the idea that critics ignored his emphasis on Pound's definition of an image, specifically that the image is not "a pictorial reproduction" (*Idea* 74).

Pound's definition of an image highlights the writer's efforts; however, Frank shifts the emphasis to the reader's efforts. This shift may give a clue to the seeming confusion and contradiction involved in Frank's explanation, particularly denying the idea that painting pictures with words was distinct from the image understood as fused ideas with an instantaneous impact. The clue is in the phrase "complex presented spatially." First, as we can see, this emphasizes the writer's efforts. Second, "presented spatially" strongly suggests a physical arrangement on the page and further implies that Frank is discussing, perhaps, Concrete Poetry (which I shall be exploring later in connection to Spatial Form). This alleged physical or concrete rearrangement of letters, words, phrases, grammar and syntax reminds us of the disruptions, dislocations, fragmentations, pastiche, and collage in experimental literature. These are

sentence level metamorphoses and not a question of the stopping or erasing of plot or even description such as painting pictures with words. The shift from writer to reader contributes to the lost emphasis on the grammatical and syntactical rearrangements as a source of spatiality.

In addition to Pound, Frank draws on Eliot, who saw poetry in a way similar to Pound's. "For Eliot, the distinctive quality of poetic sensibility is its capacity to form new wholes, to fuse seemingly disparate experiences into an organic unit" (Gyre 10). The pastiche of images in *The Waste Land* exemplifies this quality. Eliot also emphasizes the sensibilities of the writer. And, again, Frank turns the spotlight towards the reader.

After connecting Pound and Eliot's vision of poetry, Frank gives voice to various problems their ideas engendered. In those questions, we find the first shift in focus. Where Pound and Eliot primarily focus on the image, its "aesthetic attributes" and its "psychologic origins" (Gyre 10), Frank's questions turn the spotlight onto the reader's reception of the literature: "Or was the poem itself one vast image, whose individual components were to be *apprehended* as a unity? (Gyre 10) (italics mine) The passive voice of "to be apprehended" implies the reader is do-

ing some form of aesthetic work. Frank uses phrases such as "to apprehend . . . spatially in a moment of time, rather than in a sequence" (Gyre 9), "to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be appreciated as a unity" (Gyre 13), "units of meaning are apprehended reflexively in an instant of time" (Gyre 16). These passive-voice locutions diminish the reader's role and allow Frank to bypass explanations of the reader's activities. Frank's use of the passive voice is one of the causes diminishing both the importance of the reader and clouding the clarity of the explanation.

Frank concludes that Eliot and Pound created this new form in poetry in order to achieve the effect of the image "apprehended in an instant."

But then it would be necessary to undermine the inherent consecutiveness [linearity] of language, frustrating the reader's normal expectations of a sequence and forcing him to perceive the elements of the poem as juxtaposed in space rather than unrolling in time. (Gyre 10)

The image, conceived by juxtaposition and fragmentation, frustrates the reader's normal expectations of linearity and

this, of course, reminds us of Shklovsky's defamiliarization. The artist removes linearity (decreased narrativity) and juxtaposes images (increased description) which seem to create spatiality. Perceiving a fragmented image is often compared with perceiving a painting. The problem has been that Frank seems to emphasize duration for Spatial Form apprehension, when he should have emphasized manner.

Frank summarizes his notion of Spatial Form in the following lines which have fed critical disputes for decades:

Aesthetic form in modern poetry, then, is based on a space-logic that demands a complete re-orientation in the reader's attitude towards language. Since the primary reference of any word-group is to something inside the poem itself, language in modern poetry is really reflexive. The meaning-relationship is completed only by the simultaneous perception in space of word-groups that have no comprehensible relation to each other when read consecutively in time. . . . modern poetry asks its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity. (Gyre 13)

Spatial Form, for Frank, is an aesthetic which he defines by analyzing the internal patterns of modernist works. Where Eliot and Pound discuss the writer's creation of images, Frank discusses the reader's role. Because of the personalized, closed narrative voices common to modernist works (primary references are in the poem), external referentiality often fails to solve the problems these works engender. Readers must look to the internal references. However, since they are not consecutive, linear, sequential narratives, readers must suspend interpretation and judgment until "word-groups" may be "perceived simultaneously" (12). Again, the reception of a painting echoes in the image. This sounds suspiciously like both Iser's filling in the gaps and, to continue the painting motif, like viewing and completing the "non-finito." The mind's eye perceives something missing; to make sense of what is read, visually or verbally, we fill in the most logical parts to conceive of a whole, frequently an external, mimetic, reality-based whole. Is this what Frank had in mind, despite his denials?

As I have argued in the first part of this chapter, deforming, slowing, or erasing linearity at the plot level does not engender spatiality even though it is a technique of defamiliarization. We might view the problem differ-

ently: juxtaposition does not necessitate causality. The increase of imagery and figurative language is concomitant with the more three-dimensional timescapes of the modernist literature. Even though plot removal occurs when imagery increases, plot removal is not necessarily a direct cause. It is the increased imagery which engenders spatiality, not the lack of plot.

We generally do not consider poetry to have a plot, yet we could think of poetry as a moment in time frozen. I have in mind Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," a traditional work. It is not hard to imagine that Marvell's narrator, the lover, is sitting under a tree by a river on a spring day with his "coy mistress." This poem reveals his attempt to convince her that they should become lovers. He presents his thoughts and feelings in the form of an argument: if we had time, then I could court you and praise you eternally; however, life is short, so let's make love now. We may supply the plot of this poem by painting the crucial moment frozen in that plot. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, on the other hand, illustrates the increased imagery engendering spatiality. We may agree that the plot of Eliot's poem is not as pronounced, even as a frozen moment of time or the stopped narrative. In fact, *The Waste Land* is a-historical,

synchronic rather than diachronic. The poem has a first-person narrator as represented by "I" or "we." But it also has a consciousness which floats in and out of unfixed personal moments, history, literature, and art--hence the pastiche or collage about which critics often write. The movement of time and memory is abrupt, disconnected: summer at the Starnbergersee, sledding down the mountain, having Madame Sosostris read the tarot cards, Lil getting teeth for Albert's return after demobilization, walking through the city in the night after drinking at the pub: "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song." The examples are endless. I pause here because this last image from Section III, "The Fire Sermon," is one that seems to get some contextualization from the previous tableau of two women talking in a pub over drinks. It is elusive but not far-fetched to feel that, the narrator, after drinking and eavesdropping on Lil's conversation at the pub, is now walking around London after hours, singing or humming in a sad but liquored state: "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song./The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,/Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed" (36). We begin with discarded refuse of summer evenings. Abruptly, the nymphs sig-

nal a jump to the mythical, again a-historical moment. Even though we could construct a loose narrative frame behind *The Waste Land*, the juxtaposition of images do more for getting readers to "know" than does a strict narrative. What and how we know is also more ineffable than the strict narrative plot. Trying to explain what we know is like trying to nail jello to the kitchen cabinet.

Frank moves from poetry to the modern novel for an analysis of Spatial Form in literature and, in his first example of the Fair Scene in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, he likens the technique to cutaways in cinematography: in this we can see the idea of image at work.²⁷ Three levels exist: the mob in the street, speechmaking officials on a platform, and Rodolphe and Emma from a balcony window viewing the activities below. Flaubert

dissolves sequence by cutting back and forth between the various levels of action in a slowly rising crescendo until--at the climax of the scene--Rodolphe's Chateaubriandesque phrases are read at almost the same moment as the names of prize winners for raising the best pigs. (15)

²⁷ Frank acknowledges that plot is treated fairly traditionally in this novel except for this scene.

Flaubert intercuts, braids if you will, three scenes, each one seen in the text as shorter and shorter paragraphs trying to imitate various events occurring simultaneously.²⁶ Flaubert says they should sound "simultaneously" (Gyre 15). The pace of the narrative quickens; each description becomes the flash of the tachyscope; image piles upon image. The collage, condensed but still linear, seems like a picture. "The time flow of the narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the mobilized area" (Frank 15). Frank employs the passive voice: "attention is fixed" and we fill in, "by the reader." He does not explain "how." Lessing would approve of the emphasis on action; however, the syntactical fragmentation is not extreme and is, in fact, rather tame. Yet, it exemplifies a basic type of Spatial Form. The mob, the officials, and Emma and Rodolphe are juxtaposed. This is as close as Flaubert can get to a panoramic tableau of the three events. Flaubert's technique seems visual in the sense that it is cinematic. It is also visual because it is stopping narrative in order

²⁶ Alfred Bester, in *The Demolished Man*, used this technique to approximate the simultaneous "thought" conversations of ESPers, psychologists who could read minds at various levels (conscious, subconscious, and unconscious). Bester added an element of Concrete Poetry to the dialogue by placing it graphically fragmented on the page. See pages 20-21.

to present "events" simultaneously. I would argue that this is a plot technique rather than a spatial one, or at best a borderline example, because Spatial Form rests more on grammatical and syntactical mutations at the sentence rather than on plot.

When Frank discusses Joyce's *Ulysses* in this same section, he explains that the references and cross-references "must be connected by the reader and viewed as a whole before the book fits together into any meaningful pattern"

(16). *Ulysses*

can only be reread A knowledge of the whole is essential to an understanding of any part; but unless one is a Dubliner such knowledge can be obtained only after the book has been read, when all the references are fitted into their proper places and grasped as a unity." (Gyre 19)

(Can one really absorb or contain a complex novel such as *Ulysses*?) Although Frank supplies "the reader," Frank's explanation remains vague. How does (how can!) a reader connect references and cross-references? Is this a matter of having a profound and prodigious memory in the order of Steiner's contingent (first) category? Is this a work of translation or a connect-the-dots and fill-in activity? Is

it merely a reorientation of taste as in Steiner's modal (second) distinction? Or does Joyce's work effect a defamiliarization (Steiner's tactical model)? If, indeed, Joyce's novel achieves such responses from readers—and I think it does—then, as a reader of both Frank and Joyce, I need clarification of the reader's activities.

Frank does not make the reader visible although he again points to the reader by emphasizing that rereading is the means by which apprehension in a moment can occur. But such an instantaneous apprehension, particularly of a work such as Joyce's, suggests that the response comes in the form of a gestalt.²⁹

In the next section, Frank's discussion of Proust compares the latter's method to "that of his beloved Impressionist painters":

The Impressionist painters juxtaposed pure tones on the canvas, instead of mixing them on the palette, in order to leave the blending of colors to the eye of the spectator. Similarly, Proust gives

²⁹ In the Western philosophical tradition, the sum of the parts equals the whole. In a Gestalt, we cannot work backwards: the whole cannot be derived from the parts. The laws of organization and, hence, meaning, are inherent in the whole.

us what might be called pure views of his characters—views of them 'motionless in a moment of vision' in various phases of their lives—and allows the sensibility of the reader to fuse these views into a unity. (*Idea* 27)

Like the juxtaposed tones of color on the canvas, fragmented images are juxtaposed in literature, that is, syntactically and grammatically re-arranged. As Frank circles closer to the meaning of Spatial Form, we find that his ideas move closer and closer to the reader's activities as well as to the act of perceiving a painting. However, he explores neither of these in detail.

In his discussion of Barnes's *Nightwood*, Frank says that the "narrative structure . . . cannot be reduced to any sequence of action for purpose of explanation" (*Gyre* 31). However, he then proceeds to give a summary of the eight chapters of *Nightwood* which "are like probing the darkness each from a different direction yet ultimately illuminating the same entanglement of the human spirit" (*Gyre* 32). Frank follows the summary with a thematic and symbolic assessment of each character in turn. He emphasizes that *Nightwood* has the "subtlety and refinement of a Symbolist poem" (49). The Spatial Form he finds, but has not analyzed, results from "a

pattern arising from the spatial interweaving of images and phrases independently of any time-sequence of narrative action" (49). Spatial is again used to define "Spatial Form." "Interweaving" alludes to the grammatical and syntactical rearrangements. And, again, Frank wants us to look at the reader's responses to the text but he supplies neither textual nor reader specifics to illustrate his generalizations.

In the penultimate section entitled, "The Parallel with the Plastic Arts," Frank attempts to explain why all these modernist works are similar in their employment of Spatial Form. To answer this, Frank turns to Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*. Worringer tried to solve the problem "Why, throughout the history of the plastic arts, there has been a continual alternation between naturalistic and non-naturalistic styles" (51). Though he finds that Theodor Lipps's idea of the "urge to empathy" explains the naturalistic styles throughout history, Worringer posits that this is only "one pole of human artistic feeling" (Worringer 4). In contrast to empathy is abstraction.

Naturalistic is mimetic; non-naturalistic tends towards abstraction. In other words, when people feel good about the world, the naturalistic style prevails. They continue in the flux of life and represent it in their art. However,

when people feel the world is chaotic and they feel alienated, the non-naturalistic style prevails. In essence, people pull things out of the flux of chaos in order to control it and individualize it in art. Naturalistic styles "reproduce with loving accuracy" organic forms, including humans themselves (Worringer 51). He compares this to the mimetic mode, the mirror of nature. It is an aesthetic standard. According to Worringer,

The precondition for the urge to empathy is a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world, the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world. (15)

In non-naturalistic styles, the artist "abandons the projection of space entirely and returns to the plane, reduces organic nature to linear-geometric forms, and frequently eliminates all traces of organicism in favor of pure lines, forms, and colors." This exerts control. Thus, with the non-naturalistic style, one finds a precondition "of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world" (Worringer 15).

Frank extrapolates from Worringer's doctoral thesis the idea that the modernist style is non-naturalistic and, therefore, abstract. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, instability, the feeling of loss of control over the meaning and purpose of life, "seems to prevail." Worringer's explanation follows this path. The physical and spiritual forms of the "dread of space" are similar (16). The world is confusing, in flux, gives no solace. Mirroring the world in art forms offers no "tranquility" (16). "The happiness which artists sought from art did not consist in the possibility of projecting themselves in them [art forms]" (16). Rather, the abstract style sought to remove, to "wrest the object of the external world out of its natural context, out of the unending flux of being, to purify it of all its dependence on life..." (Worringer 17).

Life and the external world, the organic, are messy. The abstract is not. The world is a horrible, confusing, chaotic place. Therefore, I will take what I want out of the world (rather than copy chaos) and make my account regular and orderly. It is true that representational art also selects and rearranges so that the artist may order and regulate her materials, but how the artist creates and the product of that creation will differ significantly because

of the degree of order or disorder. Even this degree may be in the eyes of the artist.

One result of this urge to abstraction--one way of making an object from the world abstract--is "the approximation of the representation to a plane" (21) as well as "strict suppression of the representation of space" (Worringer 21). Both the plane (lack of three-dimensionality) and the suppression of space remove the object from the real world and help give the object its individuality. Conceivably, two-dimensional space exists, but "two-dimensions" refer to a line, essentially, length and width, not depth. "It is precisely space which links things to one another . . ." (21). Worringer's examples of non-naturalistic art include "Egyptian monumental sculpture, Byzantine art, and Romanesque sculpture . . ." (Frank 51). Frank sees the major art styles of the twentieth century as non-naturalistic.

Frank connects three-dimensional space with time. He interprets Worringer as follows: "Depth, the projection of three-dimensional space, gives objects a time-value because it places them in the real world in which events occur" (56).³⁰ When the world is chaotic, man wishes to escape.

³⁰ See Worringer, 38-39.

Non-naturalistic, the abstract style avoids space and prefers the plane; when an artist strives for three-dimensionality, he is striving after a closer representation of "reality" as it is commonly perceived. Things look realistic. This implies an existence in time, connecting an object to all other objects in the real world, thus putting the object back into the chaotic flux of reality.

In the final section, the idea of Spatial Form is finally spotlighted in an extension of Worringer's ideas. Frank sees both the temporal (literature) and the spatial (visual/plastic) arts moving in the same direction: increasing spatiality (57). Thus, painting and literature have rejected the narrative mode: "Each in its own way [has] attempted to overcome the time elements involved in their structures" (57). Frank ends his argument by pointing out that history has become "a-historical," that historical depth has vanished, and that "past and present are apprehended spatially, locked in a timeless unity" (59). In other words, removing time removes narrative and creates the a-historical mode. Frank ends with the observation the historical imagination has been transformed into myth.

Essentially, these are control issues: how do people control their art when they are and when they are not in

harmony with the world? An artist removes an object from the world's chaos and treats it as an individualized thing, wrested out of time. For Frank, removing "depth" or the three-dimensionality of an object is tantamount to removing "all traces of time-value." To remove the time-value is to move "in the direction of increased spatiality" where increased spatiality, or abstraction, is a sign of authorial control (Frank 57). This abstraction comes close to a gestalt. This makes sense on one level if the artist perceives the world in chaos. But where does that leave the reader? At another level, this is a paradox. If

depth = three-dimensionality = time = naturalistic

and

plane = two-dimensionality = abstraction = non-naturalistic

then

how can the abstraction denote an increased spatiality if three-dimensionality is more "real?" Frank's paradox works only in the sense that he establishes first that the plastic arts are more spatial "when compared with literature" (Gyre 56-57). "Paradoxically, this means that the plastic arts have been most spatial when they did not represent the space dimension and least spatial when they did" (57).

Worringer, interestingly, puts a different spin on the concept of depth. It is true that Worringer sees space as the major enemy of all striving after abstraction," for abstraction prefers the plane (two-dimensionality), but Worringer has another reason for avoiding depth (38).

Depth relations are disclosed only by foreshortening and shading; their apprehension therefore calls for habituation and familiarity with the object--familiarity constructs the notion of the object's physical reality experientially from these indications. It is evident that this pressing call for supplementary activity on the part of the spectator, this appeal to subjective existence, was a contradiction of all need for abstraction.

(39)

When an object is set free from space, that is, when its perspective and shading are removed, the object is disconnected from time and reality as in non-naturalistic, modernist, abstract art.³¹ The viewer, to apprehend the abstraction, must have some familiarity with the real thing. The defamiliarization here requires looking up, selecting, com-

³¹ One might conjecture that these include the arts of Modernism such as cubism, futurism, and symbolism.

binning, and translating. Yet, for the spectator to recall her experience of the real thing contradicts the very need for abstraction in the first place--that is, the removal of an object from the chaos.

Frank equates time to that very thing from which artists ("man") wish to escape (Gyre 56). We can see from Worringer why Frank included the idea that Spatial Form removes time and that plot deformations reorganize time sequences. However, it seems as if Frank has presented one side of the formula for Spatial Form but has not revealed the entire equation. Worringer himself was concerned with the reader as was Lipps from whom his theory evolved.

In exploring and critiquing Frank's essay based on the idea of difficulty and narrative, I have tried to bypass the critical dialogue, particularly since the critics are weaving their arguments one into another so that it is almost impossible to find one thread and follow it. However, I have chosen one essay to examine because Frank has responded to it.

A brief look at the "ut pictura poesis" issue in relation to Spatial Form will demonstrate part of the problem that arises in an analysis of Frank's concept. In his response to an essay by G. Giovanni, Frank decried Giovanni's

interpretation of the theory of Spatial Form as a one-dimensional reading of Lessing's prescription that each art is determined by its medium. Frank stated that he [Frank] was "not interested in the old 'ut pictura poesis' problem," that is, that words paint a picture, for this would reduce Spatial Form to the descriptive powers of language; nor did Frank seem to believe "that literature could attain the spatial effects of painting; . . . I was doing no such thing" (*Idea* 74).

Frank has responded to numerous critics, among them W.J.T. Mitchell, Frank Kermode, and Walter Sutton. More than anything, these exchanges accentuate how Frank's emphasis on the antecedents of Spatial Form, his use of passives, and his failure to detail the reader's activities all contribute to misreadings. Critics, in turn, have also bypassed the reader's role to which Frank continually refers without exploring it. More than anything, the very words "reading" and "readers" contribute to the problem because they are placed before us but are empty shells.

PART THREE
THINKING THE VISUAL

Since critics have continually raised the issue that Spatial Form seems intensely dependent on the visual and that reading a work of literature considered to be Spatial Form coincides with reading a painting, I have chosen to explore these two paths in order to examine their points of conjunction and relevance. The first section of part three investigates the following questions: "What form would Spatial Form in literature take if the visual prevailed?" The second section explores the question, "What occurs when a reader reads a painting? What comparisons can we make with reading a spatially formed text?" The third section shifts our point of view by examining Howard Gardner's concept of spatial knowing as one of the seven multiple intelligences or cognitive structures as discussed in *Frames of Mind* and in *Multiple Intelligences*. Viewing Frank's Spatial Form through a shift of perception, Gardner's description of spatial intelligence not only validates my approach but also reveals a clearer picture and an alternative explanation of modernist difficulty.

SECTION A: CONCRETE POETRY

What form would literature take if it were truly visual? Displaying these concrete poems materializes the answer to the question.

"Silencio" by Eugen Gomringer

Silencio	Silencio	Silencio
Silencio	Silencio	Silencio
Silencio		Silencio
Silencio	Silencio	Silencio
Silencio	Silencio	Silencio

"lesbares in unlesbares übersetzen" by Claus Bremer ¹²

lesbares	in	unlesbares	übersetzen
lesbares	in	~~unlesbares~~	
		~~unlesbares~~	
		~~unlesbares~~	

The first poem, "Silencio," marries the content and the form. It works verbally but better visually. We find it difficult to apprehend the silence of the blank space without the word *silencio*, a word which itself echoes in our ears as a paradox. Reading the poem aloud with "an appro-

¹²Bremer's original poem is often found in anthologies translated and entitled: "Rendering the legible illegible."

priate pause" does not enclose the silence as tightly or as immediately as the visual poem aloud: the shape on the page is a square. When we read or listen to the poem being read, the shape becomes linear. Reading it aloud increases the paradox by speaking the word silence. In the second poem, "Rendering the legible illegible," content plays on the meaning of the words woven into the visual effect: the legible has been rendered illegible. Concrete poems, then, often depend not only on their physical setting on the page but also on the sense of the words.

In *The Word As Image*, Berjouhi Bowler traces the progression of word as image from amulets to prayers to poetry, starting from Egyptian coffins dated 900 BC through Aramaic incantation bowls, Chinese amulets, Zen calligraphy, Malayan flags, Turkish wall hangings, Greek and Hebrew amulets, German Gothic calligrammes up to the post World War II movement of Concrete Poetry. One Chinese amulet had inscribed on it the magic formula for curing asthma. In another example, Aramaic bowls were inscribed with words with concentric circles, ending at the center. These bowls were originally intended to be sunk into the four corners of the house. Demons ran around the room, eventually into the bowls, and finally, around the circles. Once they reached the center,

they were unable to read backwards to get out and were trapped forever.³³

Many of these historic examples of word as image, culminating in Concrete Poetry, center on warding off evil spirits, curing illnesses, praising gods, kings, and emperors. Gradually, their functions as religious and mythical powers sources changed to artistic and decorative functions as self-conscious art objects. They are more than symbols because they embody power: they do not merely represent it.

In literature, Concrete Poetry itself has a rich history and comes in many forms. We can look back to the shaped verse of Herrick's "The Pillar of Fame" and Herbert's "The Altar," but we can include other examples: Carroll's "The Mouse's Tale" in *Alice in Wonderland*, Dylan Thomas' "Vision" and "Prayer" poems, selected poems of E.E. Cummings such as "grasshopper," German calligrams, Apollinaire's calligrammes and, of course, Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*. According to Mary Ellen Solt, the term "'concrete poetry' is now being used to refer to a variety of innovations and experiments following World War II" (7). Concrete Poetry is

³³ The Chinese ideogram for celebrating the new year is the symbol for Good Luck. It is written upside down so that the luck pours out on the recipient of the calligraphy.

often "exhibited," the latter word being the operative one: the First International Exhibition of Concrete and Kinetic Poetry took place in 1964. The visual prevailed, and it is with the visual that we associate Concrete Poetry.

Concrete Poetry emphasizes unusual typography: the message is in the messenger. Solt argues that,

generally speaking the material of the concrete poem is language: words reduced to their elements of letters (to see) syllables (to hear). Some concrete poets stay with whole words. Others find fragments of letters or individual speech sounds more suited to their needs. The essential is *reduced language*. . . . Put in another way this means that the concrete poet is concerned with making an object to be perceived rather than read. The visual poem is intended to be seen like a painting. . . . (7-8)

One test to determine if a poem qualifies as a Concrete Poem is to decide if a speaker can get across the poem's message in an oral reading without explaining: if the message must be seen, as in a painting, then it is a concrete poem. Visual apprehension is necessary.

Solt also notes that the emotional element of language is diminished. The reader must perceive the poem as an object and participate in the poet's act of creating it or, at least, in making it mean something. The reader must be conscious of the intention of the poem because the poem communicates first and foremost its structure.

Emmet Williams, a concrete poet, wrote, "The most successful methods are those which can be used once, for then the result is a poem identical with the method by which it was made." (61?) Each concrete poem exhausts its meaning in its method, a kind of entropic exhaustion. Another entropic aspect is that the boundary between visual and verbal is removed in Concrete Poetry. This boundary loss is a literary version of two-dimensionality. In this it is like the original objects of power: not symbols but embodiments. Emmet Williams' own poem "like attracts like" is remarkably similar to Bremer's "lesbares" or Eugen Gomringer's "wind" reproduced below. Signifiers mime the signified.

```

      w   w
    d   i
  n   n   n
i   d   i   d
w               w

```

In order to read Bremer's WIND aloud and to make the meaning clear, the reader would have to explain its presentation discuss the composition, the negative and positive spaces, as well as the arrangement of the letters on the page. Doing this would obliterate the impact of the structure as well as the medium in which it is presented, a medium which uses letters and words as strokes of paint. The most important thing in Concrete Poetry is that structure is content, with an interpenetration of language heard and composition seen. In Concrete Poetry, we "read" an image; language is reified.

I wish to look briefly at Cummings' poetry. Although only about one quarter of his work falls into the category of Concrete Poetry, other poems not considered concrete make stale language new and stretch the limits of how and what language communicates. Cummings has been called a less than serious writer in the literary tradition, yet he received numerous prestigious awards and positions: the Fellowship of the Academy of American Poets, a Guggenheim, the position of Charles Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetry at Harvard, the National Book Award in 1955, and the Bollingen Prize in 1957. According to Normal Friedman, poets seem to appreciate what Cummings is trying to accomplish with his writing.

Pound, Dos Passos, William Carlos Williams, Robert Graves, Marianne Moore, and Auden thought highly of Cummings. Yet critics such as Blackmur, Wilson, Jarrell, Matthiesen, Fraser, and Kazin were ambivalent or negative.

r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
 who
 a)s w(e loo)k
 upnowgath
 PPEGORHRASS
 eringint(o-)
 aThe):l
 eA
 !p:
 S a
 (r
 rIvInG .gRrEaPsPhOs)
 to
 rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
 ,grasshopper;

This is Cummings' "grasshopper" poem.³⁴ In many of his poems, Cummings distorts grammar and syntax: verbs and pronouns are used as nouns; adverbs, adjectives and conjunctions become nouns; adverbs replace adjectives to modify nouns. Cummings also coins words with prefixes and suffixes, sometimes using a positive root with a negative prefix. His use of -ly extends the range of meaning and

³⁴ You may wish to know what it says: Grasshopper/who/as/we/look/up/now/gathering/grasshopper/into/the/leap/arriving/grasshopper/rearrangingly/become/grasshopper.

effects a present-ness of modifiers which we usually associate with present progressive participles. These are more extreme examples of disrupted language. In addition to reconfiguring the grammar, Cummings also reorders and reassembles the words on the page. Some words are joined; others are split. Lines are broken up irregularly. Parentheses, capitals, and small case are used unconventionally. Several words are interlaced. It has been said that Cummings writes English as if it were an inflected language.

When the grammar and syntax are distorted, rearranged, woven, then the visual dominates the verbal. Readers then find it necessary to apprehend language in its visual manifestation. But there is a residue of the visual which pertains: the medium is still verbal. A short segue seems appropriate here. What if we had no words for things: fountain pen for the instrument with which I am writing this sentence? What if we could only describe or give references. This idea was explored in the "Darmok" episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. This episode gave me insight into Ezra Pound's use of language. It is the difference between translating experience-into-telling versus knowing-into-showing; narration versus description. During the time I was reading Pound's *Cantos*, I also saw the "Dar-

mok" episode. Two strangers from separate worlds are kidnapped to a planet to fight a third stranger, the enemy. Even with the futuristic universal translators they wear, the first two cannot communicate because each one's language use differs radically from the other's. Neither vocabulary nor syntax is a problem. Where Picard, the Starship Enterprise captain, can use words to point to ideas--you and I must join forces to defeat the enemy--the stranger can only recreate an historical incident, naming the participants and the place where two soldiers joined forces against a third, yet he still cannot say "join forces against the enemy," for the words do not mean that to him.

Into what category of difficulty would Concrete Poetry in general or Cummings' poetry specifically fall? The tactical (third) seems most appropriate because, as Steiner argued, it is the one in which the subversion of language is intentional in order to recharge the language and to shift the reader's perceptions. We can agree that this also falls into Shklovsky's category of estrangement. The poem reaffirms the grasshopper's "grasshopperiness," as Shklovsky might have said.

In a concrete poem, the art work may also be viewed as another language. Translating this visual language, as with all translations, into a verbal language does not quite measure up to the original. The work loses something in the translation. However, we may ask, "Should we be translating or interpreting?" Perhaps we should be "doing" something else during our reading since it is visual. The same argument pertains to Spatial Form literature. At the end of the analysis of Frank's Spatial Form, I compare the ontological difficulty with koans: not solving a paradox in a linear fashion, in a rational, logical way but understanding, even apprehending, as one would with an epiphany. We see more and more clearly that understanding or knowledge comes in forms other than scientific, rational ones. The non-linear process by which an individual understands concrete poetry corresponds with how one reads a painting.

Concrete Poetry is locked onto the page because of its two-dimensionality in the same manner as paintings are locked onto the canvas; one may think of the flatness of Matisse's "Pink Nude" as an example. (See Appendix I.) The visual aspect of concrete poems melds with verbal aspects so that one can neither unravel a narrative nor read the work aloud. We may not be able to trace clearly the step-by-step

process of how we understand a concrete poem just as we may not recreate the eye movements, mental connections, reorganizations which occur when we read a painting. In this sense, the concrete poem and the painting elicit the same, or at least similar, processes of reading and, eventually, apprehension. If we know the final effect, we know the poem or the painting.

In an essay, Philip N. Johnson-Laird argues that meaning does not always evolve from the information within a structure but depends on "the processes used to manipulate it and to extract meaning from it" (101). Such processes depend on form; thus, if the form is heavily image-oriented, the processes used to manipulate and extract meaning must follow suit.

Johnson-Laird also points out that, when links are missing, it takes the brain longer to make associations. If we take, for example, the pastiche style of *The Waste Land* or of *Ulysses*, we have a better picture of the kinds of difficulty which extend our efforts. The farther apart information is in "semantic networks," the longer it takes for the reader to establish relations. Further, "An association is not a meaning. It is merely a link from one representation in memory to another . . ." (99). Even after the reader takes

the time to make the associations, she must then work through to meaning.³⁵

When a person is working spatially with a text, she is obliged by the defamiliarizations to move information around, to control, manipulate, remember thoughts and images, to combine and to construct new information and patterns. One might say that a reader does this with a traditional text and she would be right; however, the means of constructing new information and patterns differ between traditional and modernist texts because the traditional text privileges audience and story telling and the modernist text, author and secrets. The work we do with a traditional text is the kind which accrues meaning. But the modernist text differs in that the "place and function of each component is determined by the structure of the whole" and it is more difficult to see the whole from defamiliarized parts (Arnheim 80).³⁶

Experimental forms slow the reader's reading, that is, processing of information. Some forms slow the reader's reading process a little bit, and other forms slow the reader's reading process, not to a halt, but to an extreme

³⁵ This may seem obvious but the ramifications are profound, particularly when we consider how little we privilege creativity in the "Information Age."

³⁶ Arnheim was defining a gestalt.

slowness. Stopping the reading process ends one part of the reading activity and gives access to another: the moment of apprehension.

Yes, experimental forms in literary Modernism, what we have been calling Spatial Forms or estrangements, slow down reading. However, at one point, linear thinking is erased, bypassed, overridden by visual perception in reading literature. At what point does this change in degree, slowing down, become a change in kind, **not** slow linearity, but emphasis on the spatial, the rearrangement of composition? In other words, where is the line between slowed or rearranged narrative and image making which establishes where the change in degree shifts into a change in kind? The change occurs when paradox enters, when the process of the linear, rational allows us no access to the text. This paradox occurs in various ways in modernist novels. However, an engram or microcosm of that paradox always exists, in varying degrees, because the verbal medium is at odds with the visual content. As a result, the process of writing and the process of reading share the qualities of both verbal and visual worlds. And, in a final note, although we work through words, grammar, syntax, the final acquisition, apprehension, if you will, is non-verbal and more firmly

rooted in the visual tradition.³⁷ And again I must acknowledge the challenge of exploring non-linear apprehension in a verbal medium.

SECTION B: READING THE VISUAL

Because we continually use the word "reading," we tend to confine ourselves to the discursive or literary function and tradition of the word.³⁸ Perhaps what is needed is another word for what the reader does or another description of another kind of reading. The distinction centers between what we do when we read and what we get out of the process. This seems to be Joseph Frank's problem: confusing the process of reading, particularly the reader's reorientation by the work of art with, on the other hand, the product of that reorientation which Frank misconstrues as apprehension in an instant.

When a writer emphasizes images over plot narrative, we are confronted with a paradox. The slowing down of our read-

³⁷ When the experimental forms come to seem "normal," even conventional, we have evolution in literary forms and writers seeking yet other innovations.

³⁸ What we do would include three of Steiner's categories: contingent, modal, tactical. We cannot "do" anything in the ontological category of Steiner's. What we get out of the reading would include a more Horatian perspective: *dolce et utile*.

ing process increases the time we take to read. The reader is thinking harder and more abstractly. She is trying to find meaning by reorganizing, making connections, filling in. Yet, conversely, reading a painting takes a shorter amount of time. How can the critics, and Frank, compare the slowed reading of a spatial-form literary work with reading a painting in an instant?

When we talk about "reading" literature as we would read works of art, the whole process takes a quantum leap onto another scale where the change in degree becomes a change in kind. Although the removal of narrative plot is responsible for part of the change, the emphasis on imagery is more important. Frank's assessment was correct. The "reading" of a painting only seems instantaneous in comparison with reading a poem or a novel. The verbal and the visual art works require the reader to read in a different way. One assumption has been that, in order to make sense of a text, we need to read in a certain order. This is partially true for the new definition of Spatial Form, depending on the work. However, it is not as well known that a good painting controls its readers also. If we read parts of a painting out of a certain order, we defy the aesthetic protocols of perceiving a painting whose grammar works through

line, color, shape, etcetera. Focusing on the drape of the robe in the "Mona Lisa" rather than her smile is tantamount to reading a page backwards.

Spatial works require that the reader read spatially. Allow me to explain this tautology. Rather than accrue information, collect events, trace plot development, understand character development, the spatial reading requires that the reader ignore the "someone doing something" line of thinking. What we have been designating up to this point as difficulty of a higher, more abstract order, I am arguing, is not only more difficult but a different kind of difficulty: not only a verbal difficulty but a visual difficulty. Spatial-form literature **seems** more difficult because we are trained in the verbal traditions. Those trained in the visual medium have far fewer troubles with reading modernist works spatially constructed. They are accustomed to "knowing" in ways other than the western, rational, scientific, verbally based model. Because the plot level has faded in a spatial work, because we are more concerned with the syntactical, grammatical, and figurative constructions of the work at the sentence level--moving them around, rearranging, re-connecting--we are now thinking visually, as if we were

trained in the perceptual processes of the visual arts.³⁹ We are not talking about the quantity of time a reader takes to process a work of art but the kind or quality of that thinking process. The slowness of reading is a different kind of reading: a reader is apprehending the verbal material as a reader would visual material.

We begin to realize that the visual arts have a tradition as well as a grammar and a syntax which determine how we read a work of art. Numerous books on color, color theory, and composition attest to this. Warm colors advance; cool colors recede. Our eyes move around the page depending on where the colors lead us. Certain colors are relaxing; others, stimulating. McDonald's uses reds and red/oranges because they stimulate appetite. Numerous color phenomena trick the eye: if we stare at an object in its natural or local color for ten seconds and then look away, we shall see an after image in the complementary color.

The visual arts also abide by a variety of laws such as the Law of Simultaneous Contrast. Paintings may be balanced by color as well as by objects on the page. Used in compo-

³⁹ Even this comparison comes with exceptions: Haikus would fall into the art scale, and historical triptychs the larger one.

sition and color, the Golden Mean sets proportions into a pleasing, not boring pattern. Objects are never placed too close to the edge of the page because, like the child who stands too closely to the edge of a cliff, viewers are made uncomfortable. This sampling from the traditional rules, grammar and syntax, for the visual domain of painting has seeped into the discourse of aesthetics. Rudolph Arnheim, for example, discusses tension, interest, boredom in his analysis of art work in *Art and Entropy* by using these elements.

If we look briefly at the process of "reading" a painting, we can see some of the general problems engendered by the word "reading." In trying to explain Spatial Form in reading, the assumption has been that, as time slows down in the novel's narrative, so too time slows for the reading process. How slowly? So slowly that one apprehends in an instant? This is shown to be a paradox because, first, we do not conceive of "apprehension" as a slow process, but a quick one. Second, slowed time is lengthened time, more time, whereas stopped, in an instant, is less time.⁴⁰ The

⁴⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell's and other critics of Spatial Form have argued that all talk of time has been with metaphors of space. Time and space have been inseparable since Einstein.

paradox arises because it is difficult to conceptualize that slowing the reading process to deal with the difficulties involved both a longer period of time and a different kind of thinking. The idiosyncrasy becomes clearer when we focus on the distinction between the work we do in reading and the affect that the work has on us when we "get the full picture," the meaning.

We may still assert that the process of reading a verbal text correlates to "reading" visual art but now we must examine reading visual art or, as Rudolf Arnheim labels it in his book of the same name, visual thinking. We have already seen one confusion where the slowing or erasure of narrative time must not be confused with the amount of time it takes the reader to read, especially since reading time is slower but longer. Frank emphasizes the moment of apprehension where I am emphasizing the reader's work which precedes apprehension. Another distinction we discussed but must underscore is that the materials of art and narrative differ. In Spatial Form literature, the sentence level image making inches towards the techniques of painting. In a unique way, we are now looking at things rather than listening.

Whether the reading is of van Eyck's "Le Couple Arnolfini" (Appendix II) or of Picasso's "Guernica," (Appendix III) the reader will stand in front of the painting, to look at it. Contrary to the opinion of many critics who respond to Frank's essay, it seems to be a misjudgment to say that we "apprehend" a painting instantaneously. Using that alleged "instant," a reader can imagine the following: the art lover in front of van Eyck's painting closes his eyes, opens them for "an instant," even a minute, and then closes them again. If, in fact, we apply the metaphor of reading to painting, the art lover will not have been able to "read" the painting at all. What did she see? Two people standing, holding hands? What colors did she see? Does she perceive the color without its name? What objects were in the background? On the floor? Of what were they symbolic? What statement does the arrangement make? What meaning do the colors impart? How does she interpret the painting?

One assumption has been that, in order to make sense of a text, we need to read in a certain order. This is partially true for the new definition of Spatial Form, depending on the work.

The eye moves around the painting whether the painting is representational or abstract. Paintings have a central

focus, a center of attention, which is constructed by composition, color, size, shape, lines. (Some abstract artists have no center of attention in their paintings as in Jackson Pollock's "Number 5"; see Appendix IV. In this they work against tradition and break conventions.) The idea that the eye moves around the painting in order to read it is not so revolutionary. However, the same also holds true for reading a text. Paul A. Kolars, in "Reading Pictures and Reading Text," notes that the dichotomy between these two is misfounded for reading falls into both the visual and the verbal categories (136). Kolars premises his remarks on the idea that the verbal medium is also a symbol system. Kolars argues that "aspects of the perceptual processes involved in languaging [sic] and picturing run remarkably parallel" (136). In brief, Kolars describes the movement of the eye as it reads and as it looks at a painting. Interestingly, in reading, the eye jumps back and forth on the line as well as from line to line; it does not move forward in unremitting linearity. Kolars called this the "regressive motions" of the eye (148). "Many aspects of stimulus selection, editing, and supplementation intervene between what is on the retina and the text that is perceived." (151). In viewing a painting--Kolars used Hokusai's *The Wave* to show how people look

at a painting--the eye jumps around the materials (color, shape, movements) of the art work.⁴¹ The implications of this argument include a conclusion that the more difficult the text, the more regressive the eye movements. The more the eye moves, the longer it takes a reader to decode the text whether the text is presented as words or as images of color and shape.

The instant of apprehension seems to be a by-product of the process of reading and, therefore, a separate moment or kind of knowing. In order to examine the reading process itself, we would have to work in slow motion and in a very subjective manner. In the analysis of *Nightwood* and *Die Verwandlung*, I attempt to examine my reading process. Spatial Form thinking is the means; apprehension is the end product. The separation between content and means, between picture and visual thinking, is less distinct when we read a picture than when we read literature because of their mediums.

Assuming that everyone can read a painting is as absurd as assuming that a person who can phonetically pronounce the words as children do with difficult texts or students who can read aloud a foreign language know what those words mean.

⁴¹ G.T. Buswell used Hokusai's *The Wave* in his studies contained in *How People Look at Pictures*. See Kolers, 156.

Elliot Eisner, professor of education and art at Stanford University, has argued that aesthetic modes of knowing are important but are, unfortunately, not taught. "The rewards and insights provided by aesthetically shaped forms are available only to those who can perceive them" (25). To the rest of the population, modernist works provide insurmountable difficulties or merely unimportant experiments.

A painting exists within its own tradition and history. With this last statement, we have come full circle to the multivalence of a work like *Alice in Wonderland*, which can be read on several levels. A child looking at Matisse's cut-outs, *The Snail*, for example, may express delight at what she sees: "Mommy! Mommy! Look at the pretty colors!" (See Appendix V.) But that child knows but one level of a Matisse painting. She does not know what the critic or artist knows: that Matisse experimented with pure color, discarding traditional perspective. The child does not know that Matisse was trying

to perfect a new idiom that would be as expressive as the old . . . [that] He made light flow from the brilliance of his color harmonies. He suggested volume through contour at the same time giving the outline the quality of a flourish. (Muller 82-83)

Yes, we can all look, but can we all see?

SECTION C: PERSPECTIVES ON STAGE

The critical responses to Joseph Frank's classic essay have been, essentially, to clarify the idea of Spatial Form, to give specifics to Frank's generalizations. We have already addressed some of the recurring critical comments of Spatial Form, including the following: that Spatial Form is congruent to description, that is, painting with words and creating images; second, that erasing narrative plot time is less important than creating images at the sentence level; third, that erasing time automatically creates Spatial Form; fourth, that reading Spatial Form parallels the reader's activities of reading a painting: this is right-brain work, with internal textual principles and reflexive references; finally, Spatial Form is a metaphor.

Modernist difficulty. Narrative/descriptive powers. Spatial Form. Koans. Concrete Poetry. Reading Paintings. How do we perceive these participants on stage? What is their relationship to one another? Our answers depend on our perspectives: some members of the audience sit with me in the reader-response/new criticism section; others sit in the Deconstructionist aisle; yet others, the New Historical seats.

The theoretical stances are as numerous as there are members in the audience. However, I would like to shift everyone's focus a bit and invite my audience to look at the participants through a cognitive lens.

Several critics, Mitchell on Spatial Form and Arnheim on visual thinking, have included in their discussions the concept of left- and right-brain functions. The argument has been that the left brain controls rational, logical, mathematical functions and that the right brain controls visual functions. Logic is linear; visual is spatial. Hence, Spatial Form appeals to people who have a proclivity for right-brain thinking. This is an interesting and controversial path to take. However, because it is difficult to prove--becoming less difficult as science discovers ways to map brain functions--I shall present but one theoretical objection so that readers understand that numerous perspectives are possible. Obler argues for a model of right- and left-brain functions which see the left brain as a storage unit and the right brain as an intake area. Thus, the right brain shuffles and reshuffles information, making new combinations in an effort to gain knowledge. The left brain stores this understanding once it is known.

Despite the controversies surrounding right and left brain functioning, this cognitive theory opens the door for a way of looking at difficulty in modernist literature that extends beyond the inexplicable "taste" about which Eliot cautions critics. For this, we turn to Howard Gardner and his theory of multiple intelligences. Howard Gardner has removed much of the controversy surrounding alternative perspectives of intelligence.⁴²

As literary academe has been floating on the critical current of structuralist, deconstructionist, and postmodernist theory, other areas of intellectual inquiry have sailed on a different course. Multiple intelligence theory has been having profound consequences for American education as evidenced by the collaborative efforts of Gardner and his associates of Project Zero, the Educational Testing Service, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.⁴³ Gardner has re-framed both testing and curriculum in education. Trickle-down of the cognitive theory of multiple intelligences into

⁴² Gardner is Adjunct Professor of Neurology at the Boston University School of Medicine, a MacArthur Prize Fellow, and a recipient of the University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Education.

⁴³ *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* details the ramifications of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences on education.

other disciplines has been slow; I am hoping that my foray into this area in relation to literature will make some difference.

In his book, *Frames of Mind*, Gardner argues that intelligence comes in many forms. He bases his theory on knowledge of human development, information about cognitive skills, and research on exceptional populations from prodigies to autistics. In our society, we have less formalized, less studied, less posited versions of multiple intelligences: "Ah . . . she is a gifted musician" or "He is such a talented painter." Educators seem to have less of a problem identifying these "skills" or "interests" as they are often called. Yet "being athletic" or "good with people" is not privileged as an intelligence.

Gardner points out that our culture and educational system measures intelligence and achievement based on verbal and mathematical skills as evidenced by a variety of tests such as the Stanford Binet Intelligence Tests and the SATs. With research based on recent neurobiological and psychological findings, Gardner and his colleagues have found that the various models of intelligence are flawed and negatively affect cognitive theory. Further, the flaws of these earlier

models have serious implications since they have an impact on testing, curriculum, and pedagogy.

In the earlier models, the rational and the logical prevail. However, Gardner believes that "Reason, intelligence, logic, knowledge are not synonymous" (*Frames* 6). Intelligence quotient (I.Q.) tests are "skewed in favor of individuals in societies with schooling and . . . who are accustomed to taking paper-and-pencil tests . . ." (16). However, these I.Q. tests "rarely assess skill in assimilating new information or in solving new problems" (*Minds* 18).

Gardner's multiple intelligences fall into seven categories:

1. Linguistic Intelligence
2. Musical Intelligence
3. Logical-Mathematical Intelligence
4. Spatial Intelligence
5. Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence
6. Intrapersonal Intelligence
7. Interpersonal Intelligence

The first three are self-evident. Spatial intelligence, the fourth, I shall be discussing shortly. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence belongs to those people who "develop keen mastery over the motions of their bodies, as well as those indi-

viduals. . .who are able to manipulate objects with finesse" (*Frames* 207). This group includes dancers, athletes, inventors, and actors. In the intrapersonal intelligence group belong people with "access to one's own feeling life—one's range of affects or emotions . . . to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behavior" (*Mind* 239). Writers like Proust or Virginia Woolf display the ability to be in touch with their own feelings and communicating those emotions to others. The intrapersonal looks inward; the interpersonal looks outward. In the last category, people who exhibit an interpersonal intelligence are able to "notice and make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular, among their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions. This intelligence is developed in politicians and religious leaders, "skilled parents and teachers," therapists and shamans (*Frames* 239).

Let us now turn to the spatial intelligence which Gardner defines as follows:

the capacities to perceive the visual world accurately, to perform transformations and modifications upon one's initial perceptions, and to be able to re-create aspects of one's visual experi-

ence . . . to produce forms or simply to manipulate those that have been provided. (173)

The ability to perceive forms, shapes, and comparisons, to manipulate, displace, reconstruct, combine, and transform them--this is spatial ability. It is non-discursive thinking. Gardner notes that even Piaget distinguishes between "figurative" knowledge and "operative" knowledge: the former functions at a retrieval, passive level and the latter at a manipulative, active one. Figurative spatial knowledge would allow a person to look at something and draw it specifically; manipulative knowledge is exemplified by James Watson and Francis Crick, whose understanding of DNA manifested itself in the three-dimensional double helix model (191). The shape of knowing crosses over many territories and disciplines, demonstrating that a spatial knowledge is not limited to the visual arts. Spatial Form in literature, I am arguing, is the spatial intelligence applied to literature.

Gardner further defines the capacities of spatial intelligence:

the ability to recognize instances of the same element; the ability to transform or to recognize a transformation of one element into another; the capacity to conjure up mental imagery and then to

transform that imagery; the capacity to produce a graphic likeness of spatial information. . . .

(176) ⁴⁴

Gardner establishes as a facet of spatial intelligence the "metaphoric ability to discern similarities across diverse domains" (176). He gives as examples Freud's comparison of the unconscious as "submerged like an iceberg" or John Dalton's "view of the atom as a tiny solar system" (177). It is this metaphoric facet of spatial intelligence that interests us. It is the ability to yoke "two seemingly disparate forms" or to see similarities "across two seemingly remote domains of experience" (176). Gardner give us evidence for the educational, neuropsychological, and cultural bases supporting his theory.

Perceiving patterns whether or not all the pieces are evident; connecting and comparing what is not obvious to the general population; taking apart images, recombining them with other elements, and weaving new structures: these are all facets of spatial intelligence. These activities are comparable to the "complete reorientation in the reader's

⁴⁴ Spatial intelligence can develop in a blind person. Gardner verifies this with a variety of research studies. See *Frames*, chapter 8, "Spatial Intelligence."

attitude towards language" and the reflexive reference which Joseph Frank discusses with Spatial Form. It also echoes the sudden, non-linear understanding which the *koan* incites. The spatial imagination necessary to work with figurative language, particularly metaphors at many levels, with disrupted syntax, and with pastiche and collage is a kind of intelligence different from the narrative, linear ones privileged in our education and in our literary tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

Who Tunes the Tuning Fork:

Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* and the Critics

The purpose of this chapter is to calibrate the readers of Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, a 1936 expatriate novel. *Nightwood* has been viewed through gender theory, as modernist fiction, and as autobiography in the vein of Benjamin Constant's *The Red Notebook/Adolphe*. The first section of this chapter gives a brief biography of Barnes' shocking and tragic life. The next part explores the body of Barnes' criticism, focusing on gender issues in order to delineate some of the problems occasioned by the critical stances these readers take. The last portion of the study presents an analysis of the rhetorical components, primarily convergence and oxymoron, for the purpose of demonstrating that the literary elements can resolve some of the critical impasses of *Nightwood*.

BIOGRAPHY

Djuna Barnes was born in 1892 at Cornwall-on-the-Hudson in New York. About her childhood there is much mystery. Barnes admitted that her father, Wald Barnes,

attempted to rape her. The sexual horror of Barnes' childhood and youth included the fact that Djuna was given "as a sexual sacrifice to Percy Faulkner," the brother-in-law of Wald Barnes, that her father's wife and mistress as well as their children all lived in the same house, and that, if not incestuous, Barnes' grandmother, Zadel, had a bizarre sexual relationship with her granddaughter as attested to by letters with drawings, including "passages about her own [the grandmother's] breasts, erotic pleasure, and her desire for access to Djuna's body" (Dalton 118-121).¹ Forms of these and other biographical outrages appear in many of Barnes' works, particularly *Ryder*, *Nightwood*, and the *Antiphon*.

Djuna Barnes, barely out of her teens, worked as a freelance journalist, eventually and remarkably for a woman at that time, with her own by-line. She also worked as an artist in New York City from 1913 to 1919. Barnes wrote about New York and, over the years, interviewed many famous people including Lillian Russell,

¹ On grandmother/granddaughter incest, see Phillip Herring's "Zadel Barnes: Journalist" and Anne B. Dalton's "This is obscene": Female Voyeurism, Sexual Abuse, and Maternal Power in *The Dove*. These appear in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Fall 1993, special issue on Djuna Barnes. Also "My Art Belongs to Daddy" by Mary Lynn Broe in *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. M.L. Broe and Angela Ingram.

Ziegfeld, Stieglitz, Jack Dempsey, James Joyce, and Coco Chanel. Barnes, ahead of her time, also wrote as a participatory journalist, undergoing, for example, the pains of forced feeding in order to understand the hunger-striking suffragists in British prisons. In many of her pieces, she captures the essence of the times and of New York but always with her own distinctive style.² Barnes studied art at the Pratt Institute and Art Students League; she also acted with groups such as the Washington Square Players in Greenwich Village and the Provincetown Players in Massachusetts. But it was through journalism, often accompanied by her illustrations, that she supported herself and her family until 1931. Even as an expatriate in Paris, the New York magazines and newspapers published her observations of people, places, and existence.

As an expatriate woman writer in Paris, Djuna Barnes was known as

. . . formidable in the best sense of the word, that rare person with so many gifts that put you in awe of her: stunning in appearance;

² Herzig, Carl. "Roots of Night: Emerging Style and Vision in the Early Journalism of Djuna Barnes." *The Centennial Review*. Summer 1987, v 31 (3), p. 255-269.

tall; dashing; with a certain arrogant posture; elegant; short and wavy reddish hair combed back off her face; green-blue eyes (tempting and taunting); and dressed with great style, romantic capes and turbans. Her voice was attention getting--softly guttural. She had a quick tongue and could be witty, humorous, confounding, and devastating. Sure of herself. She was aware of her specialness without a show of ego; eccentric, yes. She was not a gypsy. She was an ultra sophisticate. (*Silence and Power* 340)

The real Djuna Barnes was also known to withdraw completely into silence and to isolate herself. This inclination manifested itself totally in the last forty years of Barnes' life when she returned to New York--Patchin Place in Greenwich Village--and lived as a recluse till she died in 1982 at the age of ninety.

Barnes would have been known today as a bisexual (Michel). Lesbians have tried to co-opt Barnes and her works. She had an approximately ten-year affair with Thelma Wood. Barnes was also known as a friend among the lesbian salons in Paris, such as Natalie Barney's,

about whom *Ladies Almanack* is allegedly written.³ On the other hand, Barnes herself said, "I'm not a lesbian. I just loved Thelma" (Field 37). Also, gay and feminist studies distinguish between gender and sexuality, a distinction which complicates the issue. Barnes also had many liaisons with men, which included a common-law marriage with Courtenay Lemon in Greenwich Village, an affair with Charles Henri Ford (also bisexual), and probably an abortion of her baby with Ford (Review 141).

The questions of sexual preference and of gender identity have played an overwhelming role in the criticism of Barnes' works. Barnes' sexuality as well as the critics' stances on gender theory have been both illuminating and deforming calibrators. Numerous critics have used Barnes' orientations for their own ends or have declaimed their readings of *Nightwood* based, not on Barnes' text, but on her biography. Critics have been calibrated not by literary tradition but by the issue of

³ See Kathryn R. Kent's "Lullaby for a Lady": Lesbian Identity in *Ladies Almanack* in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Fall 1993, 89-96 and Susan Sniader Lanser's "Speaking in Tongues: *Ladies Almanack* and the Discourse of Desire," Frann Michel's "All Women are Not Women All: *Ladies Almanack* and Feminine Writing," and The Outsider among the Expatriates: Djuna Barnes' Satire on the Ladies of the *Almanack* in *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*, edited by Mary Lynn Broe, Southern Illinois UP: Carbondale, 1991.

lesbianism, bisexuality, and homophobia. In "'I just loved Thelma': Djuna Barnes and the Construction of Bisexuality," Michel discusses how "recent bisexual activism and consequent public discussion on bisexual identity make available conceptual tools useful in mediating debates on the sexuality of Barnes and her work" (54). Michel's study discusses the differences between bisexual and lesbian perspectives. I am working here with Michel's idea of bisexuality and not with other social and psychological theories of homosexuality which support the belief that one does not choose sexuality.

Is Barnes lesbian or bisexual? Is *Nightwood* pro-homosexual or anti-homosexual? What gender affirmations or denials does the content or the form make? Despite the emphasis on sexuality and gender, the fact is that these recent gender theory studies have rescued *Nightwood* from oblivion. My objection, however, is that the direction which the gendered studies of Barnes' work has taken has been, oftentimes, negative and defensive. My purpose is to re-filter these gendered studies through the lens of rhetoric, to return to the text in a bow to New Criticism and emerge with a reading calibrated and tuned by a literary "objectivity."

While echoing T.S. Eliot's notion of the critic as tuning fork and as literary tradition as calibrator for

that tuning fork, I am suggesting that, because of the nature of difficulty in the experimental literature of Modernism, the text eclipses literary tradition as the calibrator. The experimental text tunes the reader who in turn "measures" the text. In this sense, then, the critic can only reproduce her experience of reading without summarizing or interpreting the literature OR the life of the author. The critic recreates her process of perceiving and understanding but may not, cannot, present the resultant perceptions or understandings themselves because each person's "reading" is an awareness of her own process of reading. *Nightwood* lends itself to this process, rather than product-oriented reading, for the only way of understanding *Nightwood* is by experiencing our own act of reading, being conscious of our minds in the act of trying to make sense of the novel.

CRITICISM

"Reading Djuna Barnes is like reading a foreign language, which you understand."

(attributed to Marianne Moore)

The critical history of the works of Barnes has been one of readers' trying to untangle the enigmas, the disorientation, the "difficulty" of her texts.⁴ The question of "difficulty" is inextricable from that of Modernist literature--though often the terms used to denote difficulty are disapproving--as is evident in such writers as Joyce, Mallarmé, Pound, and Kafka. This is not the "difficulty" of vocabulary or allusions, which can be researched, Steiner's contingent mode. Nor is it the kind of "difficulty" related to not knowing the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, or the *Weltanschauung*, the author's philosophy of life, Steiner's modal difficulty. The "difficulty" is structural, embedded in language used for a new epistemology. Two analogies come to mind which approximate the surface concept of "difficulty." In the magazine *Games* can be found "Wacky Wordies." The reader must figure out the message. For example: R/E/A/D/I/N/G is translated as "reading between the lines." Without the experience of seeing this, an individual would be hard pressed to un-

⁴ The notion of difficulty has been explored both in George Steiner's essay "On Difficulty," in *On Difficulty*, and in *The Idea of Difficulty in Literature*, edited by Alan C. Purves, SUNY P: NY, 1991.

derstand it. We find another example concrete poetry and Cummings' poem "Grasshopper" discussed earlier.

The visual poem is intended to be viewed as is a painting. As was argued in the preceding chapter on "Difficulty in Modernism," reading a painting is not instantaneous but takes time. If the reader intensifies the complexity of this form with a profound content, content which cannot be known without the form, then she can begin to see where Barnes' "difficulty" borders on, or actually is, a new epistemology, as the section on rhetoric will demonstrate.

Efforts to explain *Nightwood* begin primarily with T.S. Eliot's 1937 introduction to *Nightwood*. Eliot emphasizes Barnes' prose which "demands something of the reader that the ordinary novel-reader is not prepared to give. [It is] so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on poetry can wholly appreciate it" (*Nightwood* xii). Eliot recognized that the intensity of Barnes' style gives the work the quality of "poetic prose" (*Nightwood* xii) and poetic form seems to eclipse the narrative traditions. ("Poetic prose" seems to mean that the prose is difficult, like poetry, rather than that the novel is in verse.) The characters, according to Eliot, are individually less important than the pat-

tern they form as a whole. With each succeeding comment, Eliot tries to give coherence to a difficult novel. However, and this can never be emphasized strongly enough, discussions of the novel do not, cannot communicate the experience of Barnes' prose, for it is in the experience of her language *in the reader's mind* that the novel "lives." The discussion of this experience comprises the last section of this chapter. The subject matter which Eliot glosses over is the marriage of Robin Vote to Felix Volkbein, the birth of their child, Robin's leaving Felix and her subsequent love affair with Nora Flood, Robin's leaving Nora for Jenny Petherbridge, Nora's obsession with her lost Robin and with Nora's own misery, Felix's obsession with Guido, his son, and, woven throughout the book, the Rabelaisian monologues of Dr. Matthew O'Connor. Eliot warns the reader against taking the characters as a "horrid side-show of freaks" but affirms that the novel has "great achievement of style, . . . beauty of phrasing, . . . brilliance of wit and characterization, and a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy" (*Nightwood* xvi).

The title, *Nightwood*, gives readers a clue for understanding how to approach this work. "Wood" comes from Old English "wód" and means "out of one's mind, in-

sane, enraged" (Onions 2445). One of the chapters is called "Watchman, What of the Night?" and most of the action occurs at night. Most of the characters surrender to the night madness: the misery and the obsession of love and its loss.

Eliot's introduction is one of the first calibrators for *Nightwood*. Without Eliot's efforts, this book might never have been published. Barnes began writing *Nightwood* in 1927 after her break with Thelma Wood and, after numerous versions and revisions as well as editing by Eliot, the novel was published in 1936.⁵

Readers of the day were "mystified or repelled" by what they read (Plumb 149). Reviews of *Nightwood* abound and enter the register of calibrators; a collection of the reviews can be found in Jane Marcus' "Mousemeat: Contemporary Reviews of *Nightwood*." But it was Joseph Frank, in *The Widening Gyre*, who gave *Nightwood* a new life--before his reading was eclipsed by gender theory--with an even more important emphasis on the reader and, therefore, a new calibration. In his now classic essay, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Frank establishes a

⁵ For a fine article on Barnes' writing and editing of *Nightwood*, see Cheryl Plumb's "A kind of glee of despair." The Barnes Archive at the University of Maryland is home to the earlier versions of the novel. In 1995, the Dalkey Press published Cheryl Plumb's, *Djuna Barnes: Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts*.

non-condemnatory and disinterested way of discussing the anomalies of modernist experimental literature. Frank attempts to define the elusive quality of *Nightwood* and other works of literature as Spatial Form. In a traditional novel, the plot is linear. Something happens; something happens next, chronologically in time. Even the use of flashbacks is controlled by a linear, sequential movement. On the other hand, in the spatial arts--painting and sculpture, for example--time is almost totally eclipsed by concern for a spatial arrangement of parts. Since the Spatial Form novel is not linear and chronological, it is *apprehended* as is a painting. As the previous chapter explained, apprehension may be instantaneous but the process of reading is holistic rather than a discrete and linear.

In essence, a reader cannot read a novel like *Nightwood* once. A reader understands a Spatial Form novel only upon rereading at which time the fragments begin to cohere. Frank called this "reflexive reference" (16). Frank's essay brings together the concept of Spatial Form and the idea of the reader's role by defining Spatial Form as a "complete reorientation in the reader's attitude toward language" (Gyre 13). No reader of a novel such as *Nightwood* can be a passive reader. She must be both emotionally and intellectually engaged.

There are no voyeurs, no observers in this game, yet paradoxically, we are witnesses to our own reading process. We do not lose ourselves in such a work as one does in a Dickens' novel. We are always at least partly conscious of the fact that we are reading a text.

Since Frank's late sixties' analysis of *Nightwood*, other writers have turned their focus to Barnes' opus. James B. Scott, in the seventies, compares *Nightwood's* "verbal 'world'" to a tableau, which "is far more complex than the image . . . very much like that of a painting" (103-104). Spatial refers to the space of the reader's mind as it interacts with the intellectual and emotional aspects of the literature. The "work" a reader performs or experiences is spatial: it is the mind functioning not on memory, as traditional description may conjure up for readers, but on the struggle in the thinking process . . . the exertion, the effort, the labor which erupts, resolves, forges meaning and understanding.

The feminist movement and the death of Djuna Barnes gave *Nightwood* a new momentum and new calibrators. Two collections of critical essays have appeared, *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*, edited by Mary Lyn Broe, and a special issue of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Fall 1993. In addition to these

books, numerous articles have been published, dealing with previously untouched subjects such as transvestitism, bisexuality, lesbianism, incest, and abortion. I have narrowed my focus to the articles dealing with issues of gender and sexual orientation.

Since two of the main characters of *Nightwood* are bisexual--Robin and Jenny--and two are homosexual--Dr. O'Connor and Nora--critics often feel obliged to tackle the concept of the third sex, the invert. (Robin and Dr. O'Connor are considered the inverts of the novel.) "The invert fits within the binary structure of gender," according to Michel(42). (I here use Michel's definition of the invert, without bringing in the complexity of the rest of the article which includes Kristeva and Cixous.)

According to Michel, in our society, with the binary oppositions of masculine/feminine, the "dominant symbolic order" is masculine "so that feminine is not another identity but nonidentity" (34). Masculine writing is "syntactical, ordered, representational"; feminine writing "is guided by the sound values of words rather than by their logical, symbolic significance in the order of the sentence" (35). Michel continues her description: "Feminine writing, with its disruptions of conventional or expected order, its word play, parody, attention to language and the materiality of language,

sounds like what is usually described as modernist writing..." (36).⁵ The invert, Michel extrapolates from Dr. O'Connor's comments, is defined as follows: "the girl who is neither girl nor boy is half boy; the boy who is neither boy nor girl is half girl..." (42) Part of Michel's focus is that the invert "exists within the dualism of Man/Woman" (42). In simpler terms, the third sex is not third; it is a synthesis and/or variation of the first two. In another article on the construction of bisexuality ("I just loved Thelma"), Michel discusses the "multiple ways of understanding bisexuality" (54). Some homosexuals feel that bisexuals are simply not out of the closet (55). Other people see bisexuality as, at least, partially heterosexual. Most important in the article is the idea that there exists "the possibility of choosing one's sexuality." Sexuality is not set at birth nor at any age. It is fluid. It is a social construction (Michel, "I just loved Thelma," 56).

Perhaps because of our cultural conditioning, we cannot conceptualize bisexuality or homosexuality as a third nor as a third and a fourth gender. And, as will

⁵ It is necessary to point out that in composition pedagogy, even in MLA sessions, the idea has been promulgated that argument, essay form, logic, and thesis driven writing is masculine and that "it thrusts its point home." Female writing reflects more of the interior world, is not logical but expressive and emotional, and embraces a subject.

be shown shortly, Barnes' language allows for the conceptualization of a third or fourth Other, in fact, a breakdown of most borders of gender definition.

Another issue which has arisen with recent critics is the role of woman in a patriarchal society. Pöder declares that "*Nightwood* exposes the effects of patriarchal misogyny on women and womanhood without the slightest hope for change" (124). For Pöder, the Jewish tradition is represented by Felix Volkbein; Nora Flood represents Puritanism; Jenny Petherbridge, the capitalist system (124). Thus, Pöder sees Robin as an insubordinate wife for not wanting to procreate with Felix, a depraved infidel, for wandering from Nora and whoring, and a commodity whose value is determined by the possessor, Jenny, the Squatter (124). Pöder claims that "no matter how hard the characters in *Nightwood* try to come to terms with Robin they never can thoroughly decode her, since Western patriarchy has successfully destroyed the possibility of direct access to undistorted womanhood" (126). In focusing almost exclusively on Robin as representative of patriarchal oppression, Pöder has distorted the work as well as definitions of "undistorted womanhood." The hostility of this perception of *Nightwood's* characters again does not allow for an assessment

of, nor is it supported by, the language, style, or syntax of the text.

In an essay, Donna Gerstenberger has spotlighted the distortions to which the critics are prone: namely, that the terms the critics use, even when they posit *Nightwood's* radical Modernism, are negative and reaffirm "the dominant text of binary oppositions by which the Western world inscribes itself....The ideal and the real, the beautiful and the ugly, subject and object become irrelevant distinctions" (130). Gerstenberger refers to Shari Benstock's comments on *Nightwood*: the "'perversion *Nightwood* exposes is not the depravity of homosexuality, the horrors of transsexuality, or the ugliness of woman's hidden nature, but the tragic effect of a woman's estrangement from her own self' " (131). Gerstenberger criticizes this view, for "the very terms of her [Benstock's] discourse--perversion, depravity, horrors, ugliness, estrangement--perpetuate the notions of their culturally created opposites" (131) and, hence, definitions of woman, or lesbian, or homosexual are constructed against notions of masculine, patriarchal definitions.

Writing about the style of Barnes' *Nightwood*, Carolyn Allen concedes that she is "not convinced that syntactical and lexical choices are made on a sex-specific

basis without regard to such variables as literary period, class, race, or perceived place in a societal hierarchy" (107). To say there is a sex-determined syntax is to oversimplify the issue. After demonstrating the conundrums and predicament of defining "style" and "women's style," Allen proceeds to look at "a particular woman's linguistic and structural choices and the ways in which they are appropriate, even necessary for her subjects" (107).

Allen seems to attribute to Barnes a choice: the language of irrationality or the unconscious (feminine) over rationality (masculine). "The style of *Nightwood* tried to avoid naming directly, and so concentrates on not-naming, nor using syntactic and semantic structures that signal indirection The principle mark of Barnes' style is the analogy" (108). After describing Barnes' style as heavily metaphoric (107), appositional, with repeated phrases, "sometimes with a shift in meaning," Allen asserts that Barnes' "oblique style makes a crucial point: words do not work" (107). Those of us who appreciate Barnes' writing like to think that her words do, in fact, work, but not in traditional ways--differently. Readers who agree that Barnes' words work have been reoriented by the text. It is this "re-orientation" about which Eliot spoke which shifts our

perception and results in a recalibrated reader, one who does not judge the work against the grain, against assumptions about masculine and feminine writing. If, on the other hand, Allen is maintaining that the words do not work for the characters in their conversations with each other, then Barnes has successfully communicated her perceptions: words fail to offer succor in the human predicament. I am suggesting that to claim that "words do not work" is to judge the "not-naming, the unconscious over-rationality" from a rational, masculine perspective. It is, thus, to miss the purpose of Barnes' style.

Allen also points out that Barnes' use of monologue seems like interior monologue--sometimes considered a feminine form even when Joyce and Proust used it--because, "states of mind are the principal subject of conversation and the talk about them is removed from what we ordinarily associate with everyday conversation" (109). Allen has called *Nightwood's* style "idiosyncratic" (110). All characters seem to speak using Barnes' style, "Barnes' own interior monologue" (110), what Allen calls "indirect narrative observation" which she defines as follows: "Barnes often presents scenes and characters so that the reader seems to be at one remove, as if watching the action through a camera in the

process of capturing a scene" (110). This implies that the reader is extremely aware of a frame around, as well as the artificiality of, each scene.

Allen sees Barnes' style as an "anonymous but personal viewpoint" (110)—oxymoron!—and that the "reader sees the character at a distance" (110). As a result, Allen suggests that the reader is kept from identifying closely with the characters. What Allen describes, via the camera and tableau metaphors, is the reader as Voyeur. I challenge Allen's position because I believe that the reader is not an outsider but an insider, a participant in the intimacy of Barnes's language and vision.

A discussion of Allen's analysis of Barnes' syntax is made easier by reproducing the quotation on which Allen focuses:

On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly over-sung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten--left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives--half flung off the support of the cushions from which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had

turned her head, lay the young woman, heavy and disheveled. Her legs, in white flannel trousers, were spread as in a dance, the thick-lacquered pumps looking too lively for the arrested step. Her hands, long and beautiful, lay on either side of her face (34).⁷

The subject of the first, long sentence, is delayed, according to Allen. "Before coming to her the reader must process [my emphasis] clauses and phrases that refer not to her but to her surroundings" (111). Most of the passage, Allen argues, focuses on the surroundings, not Robin. Robin's passiveness is emphasized by passive voice verbs and participles, "and the intransitive, low-activity main verb, 'lay'" (111). Robin is perceived "primarily by her absence" (111).

⁷ The form conveys as much as does the content. The reader may wish to compare Barnes' passage which I have reconstructed in more conventional syntactical patterns. *The young woman lay, heavy and dishevelled, on a bed which was surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers. The confusion of these things was faintly oversung by the notes of unseen birds, birds which seemed to have been forgotten and left without the usual silencing cover, which, like clouds over funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives. This young woman was half flung-off from the support of the cushions. She had turned her head from the cushions in a moment of consciousness. Her legs were in white flannel trousers and were spread as if in a dance. Her thick lacquered pumps looked too lively for the arrested step. Her hands were long and beautiful. They lay on either side of her face.*

This style is, in fact, very Proustian and has been studied by Yvette Louri . The *convergence*, as she named it in French, is comparable to a version of American parallel structure, admittedly parallel structure to a refined degree. Proust uses *convergence* to weave events of the past with those of the present, a double helix, if you will. In this passage, Barnes' use differs: she weaves the seen and the unseen so that both measure reality.

The nature of Barnes' language in *Nightwood* does not bear out Allen's interpretation. Although I agree with Allen that Barnes' descriptive language "evokes" rather than directly presents character, Barnes' method or style requires reader participation in the meaning-making process. By discussing two elements of the many techniques used, namely *convergence* or parallel structure and the oxymoron, I shall attempt to demonstrate the reader's process of apprehending Barnes' language and, thus, Barnes' point of view about gender.

ANALYSIS

"An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties." (*Nightwood* 111)

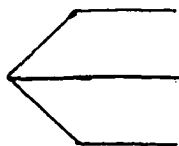
The reader is calibrated by the Modernist, experimental, "difficult" text. How does this occur? First,

Barnes' syntax--the arrangement of the words in the sentence--requires the reader to slow down her reading, even more, to do the work of processing images and conversations. If, as Allen says, Barnes' language "evokes rather than presents" Robin directly (111), then the reader, Allen's reader, is being directed to what is **not** there, rather than what is there. I am suggesting that Barnes' syntax is guiding us directly to what is there, what she wants us to focus on: specifically, the mind in the act of perceiving. Dr. O'Connor expressed it in *Nightwood*, "Life is not to be told, call it as loud as you like, it will not tell itself. No one will be much or little except in someone else's mind, so be careful of the minds you get into . . ." (129) [emphasis mine].

The second way the text calibrates the reader is by the plethora of figurative language which Barnes uses. This includes metaphor, simile but, most of all, oxymoron. Both the woven syntax and the oxymorons slow down the act of reading, both require intense concentration by the reader, and both require an empathy with the narrator's perceptions. The reader experiences a knowledge from inside the narrator's mind, *not outside as observer*. The oxymoron opens up possibilities rather than closes them by forcing the mind to contemplate opposing dualities.

And, finally, readers are calibrated by the overwhelming mass of figurative language throughout the book, language which is embedded in the metaphors and similes of syntax and in the oxymorons. I shall also discuss how a change in degree--the quantity of figurative language--effects a change in kind. Were the reader not also conditioned by syntax to hold images in the mind, the paradoxes of oxymoron would have a closing effect. The final section focuses on syntax and oxymoron with examples from *Nightwood* in an effort to have the text calibrate the readers.

In Allen's selection above, modifiers are layered in a variety of ways, each a variation of parallel structure. In the first, the modifiers radiate from one pivot.

a young woman lay		surrounded ...
		half flung off...
		disheveled

Another form of parallel structure appears in the mirror imaging of the grammar of subject/modifier/predicate in the following:

subjects	modifiers	predicates
Her legs	in white flannel trousers	were spread
Her hands	long and beautiful	lay

The placement of the modifiers also slows down the reading process. And a third type of parallel structure, particularly Barnesian, is the chain effect, where each modifier is linked to an element immediately preceding it. I have diagrammed the passage Allen presented to help the reader see how Barnes is weaving images.

- (1) On a bed,
- (2) surrounded by a confusion of potted plants,
exotic palms and cut flowers,
(plants, palms, flowers) faintly oversung by
the notes of unseen birds,
(birds) which seemed to have been forgotten--
(birds or cages) left without usual
silencing cover, which,
(cover) like cloaks on funeral urns,
(cover/cloaks) are cast over their
cages at night by good housewives
- (3)--half flung off the support of cushions from
which (she/woman)
in a moment of consciousness
she had turned her head,
- lay the young woman,
- (4) heavy and disheveled.

Elements one through four describe the subject—the young woman. (I have italicized the word or words modified and placed them before the modifiers.) In four parts of the sentence, the young woman herself is described: [1] "On a bed," [2] "surrounded..." [3] half flung off," and [4] "heavy and disheveled." The other modifiers loop back to a preceding word. "Surrounded by a confusion" describes "On a bed." "Faintly oversung" modifies the greenery. "Birds" at the end of the last clause is modified by two elements: "which seemed to have been forgotten" and "left without the usual silencing cover." "Like cloaks" describes cover; "are cast over their cages" refers to the "cloaks" because of the use of plurals. The flowers conjure up birds, the birds generate cover, and the cover suggests cloaks on funeral urns. Each succeeding phrase loops back to the previous phrase, not a central pivot, to form a chain effect. The flowers and plants exist in the room as does the woman: they are easily recordable by observation. The second and subsequent modifiers record not what is in the room but what is registered as the projections of the narrator's mind, supplying the feelings and sensations engendered by what is there. The image of the

room is held in abeyance as the narrator, a faithful mirror in the process of perceiving, records what the mind feels. By this weaving of images and of her mind with the readers' minds, Barnes conditions the reader with images of increasing abstraction.

What does the reader do to understand her perceptions? To see Robin, the young woman on the bed, the reader first sees and then holds in the mind's eye, the bed and the surrounding confusion. Next the reader envisions--this itself is oxymoronic--unseen birds, the cover, then the cage itself. Out of this jungle emerges Robin. Through these various kinds of layering, the images accrete sensory, synaesthetic qualities (hearing, smelling, touching), a kind of sensuous texture, as the layering stops time for space to be composed.

But Barnes does not end the description here. By continuing the passage about Robin which Carolyn Allen analyzed in her essay, I can discuss more fully Barnes' style.

The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which

is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface. About her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorous glowing about the circumference of a body of water--as if her life lay through her in ungainly luminous deteriorations, the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds--meet of child and desperado

Sometimes one meets a woman who is a beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory; as insupportable a joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle of trees, chapleted with orange blossoms and bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of fear, stepping in the trepidation of flesh that will become myth; as the unicorn is neither man nor beast deprived, but human hunger pressing its breast to its prey.(37)

In this selection are numerous similes, phrases introduced by like or as, though other indicators of comparison are used such as "seemed," "looking," "sensed," and elsewhere, "appears" or "analogous to." Metaphors abound also. The "body," the "flesh", and the "head" are compared respectively to "fungi," "plant life," and "effulgence as of phosphorous." Each of these three comparisons involves water images, primitive images, and spoilage, such as "malady," "decay," and "deteriorations." The reader holds the images, layering one over the other till they form a sensation, a gestalt. The smells of fungi and of the oil of amber seep into the "inner malady" and into Robin's sleep. Since the world described is probably not one with which a reader is familiar, the reader must submit, emotionally and intellectually, to the language.³ The reader must let go of the world as she knows it--not abandon reason or logic as some critics would have it--and yield to the world which the syntax and figurative language create. Using imagination is not synonymous with abandoning reason.

The same participation is also true for the oxymorons, which permeate the novel. Oxymoron is a figure of speech which "combines incongruous and seemingly contra-

³ This aligns with George Steiner's second and third categories of difficulty, the modal and the tactical.

dictory words and meanings for special effects" (Cuddon 471). From the first page, the very first line, of Barnes' *Nightwood*, oxymoron reigns: "Early in 1880, in spite of a well-founded suspicion..." (1). In once sense, an idea that is well-founded no longer can be classified as a suspicion. A short list of the oxymorons will lay the foundation for an examination of their role in this novel. Some are short statements such as "unrecorded look" (94), "newly ancient" (42), "accumulated and single" (9), "passionate indifference" (139), "complete and dismembering" (64). The oxymorons become more complex and intense with such lines as "the continual process of leaving it" (63), "a reminiscent pardon for future apprehension" (8), "a face that will age only under the perpetual blows of childhood" (134), "Life, the permission to know death," (83), "I have tried to seek and I only find" (132), and "Don't you know your holding on is her only happiness and so her sole misery" (126), and "the more you go against your nature, the more you will know of it . . ." (162).

Oxymoron generates the feeling of a stop, by creating tension between two equal yet opposing elements. One way of describing the reader's operations with oxymoron is to look at a visual version of oxymoron. A reader extends both her hands in front of her, shoulder height,

palms down. While keeping her eyes on *both* hands, she begins to separate them, bringing them slowly to the side. At what point can she still see both hands in her peripheral vision? 90°? 180°? Most importantly, as she focuses on her hands, what else does she see? The answer is, "Everything." Giving attention to both hands at opposite sides opens up the center. Oxymoron forces the reader's attention to open the center between two opposites. This middle image, which exists only by not focusing on it, is the "stop the mind makes between uncertainties" (111). When we read lines such as "Her movements were . . . slow, clumsy and yet graceful," or "the face of an incurable yet to be stricken with its malady" (41), the reader enters into the intimacy of the narrator's knowledge as well as an intimacy with the narrator for participating in the narrator's "thought, which was only the sensation of a thought . . ." (79). The space made by the elements of oxymoron opens all possibilities, erases edges and margins, not only between the opposites in the oxymoron itself, but also between the narrator and reader.

Thus, when Nora, obsessed with the loss of Robin, says of Robin, "but all I knew was that others had slept with my lover and my child. For Robin is incest too; that is one of her powers" (156) or "have you ever loved

someone and it became yourself?" (152), the reader may find it difficult to see these in negative terms. Lover, child, and self become one, yet they should be separate; it is a mutation of the power of the oxymoron. With the frontiers opened by Barnesian syntax and language, the reader can better conceptualize the sense of gender in *Nightwood*. Almost all of the characters in *Nightwood* share traditional gender-mixed qualities. Hedvig Volkbein, Felix's mother, is described as having a "military beauty"; her husband, Guido, was marked at the "centre of his body with the obstetric line seen on fruits" (1). Frau Mann's name reflects gender mixture as does the description of what trapeze work had done to her body: "the bulge in the groin where she took the bar . . ." (13). "Mighty Matthew Salt-of-the-Earth O'Connor" has his "Tiny O'Toole," a non-functioning penis with which he was born, his desire to be a woman. Robin Vote is a lesbian by choice--she wanted a home with Nora--but married Felix and had his child because she had no volition to say no. Jane Marcus refers to Robin's "cross-dressing," by appearing in men's trousers," (42) and other writers have remarked on Robin's masculine appearance. However, Barnes also describes Robin in female clothing: "Her skirts were molded to her hips and fell

downward and out, . . . heavy silks that made her seem newly ancient"(42).

What is being argued for is the idea that gender-mixing cues are parallel to and mirror both the oxymorons and syntax of the novel. These elements cannot be ignored because *Nightwood* is suffused with this kind of language. What one reader may designate as gender ambiguity were she not calibrated by the text is, for another reader, "gender oxymoron," even "gender 'convergence'." By this I mean that there are not absolute margins and boundaries to gender identity. What is more important in the work is the passion that know no bounds: the passionate desire of the unloved to be loved. I would, therefore, contend that, even though Barnes writes about lesbian love, the passion from which Nora suffers is, perhaps, little different from the passion of Catherine for Heathcliff, for both Catherine and Nora identify themselves with their loved ones.

Readers are calibrated by the overwhelming body of figurative language throughout the book and the weavings of syntax. A change in degree, the very quantity of figurative language, effects a change in kind, the quality of figurative language, just as a certain quantity of drink permutates to alcoholism or a certain degree of discipline transforms into abuse. The reader's position

is neither one of spectator nor of outsider; rather, the reader's position is one of participant, confidante to the narrator. If a reader were to try reconciling her own reality with the world which emerges through Barnes' syntax, metaphors, similes, and oxymorons, the reader and the characters would be unable to absorb or assimilate the excesses of language. This is a difficulty not covered by Steiner's categories. The reader cannot "figure out" all the references in the text, for the text makes other demands on the reader with syntax and figurative language. The reader would be overwhelmed. This is where the accretion of images tends toward texture in language. Texture in some fabric relates to the woof and warp of the threads. All fabric has texture but, when the threads are not smoothly integrated and are easily discernible, one begins to refer to the weave or texture of the fabric. The weave in perception is similar: the woof and warp of Barnes' writing is the texture of perception manifested in the language, syntax, and content of the novel. Manifested perception allows the reader to follow—to see, feel, sense, think—as does the narrator. More importantly, in order for the reader to follow the narrator, the reader must witness herself weaving her own threads of thought in the process of perception.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRANZ KAFKA'S MIND/BODY PROBLEM

Not a word of contradiction.

Franz Kafka

. . . like all good paradoxes, a splendid performance of the
mind, induced by the castration of logic

Erich Heller

What does not kill us will only make us stronger.

Nietzsche

Paradox is a means, not an end.

Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his
own nature into his pictures.

Henry Ward Beecher

INTRODUCTION

"An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties," according to Baron Volkbein in *Nightwood*. Looking at two extremes such as Barnes' oxymorons allows readers to conceptualize everything in the space between. Similarly, then, in Kafka's works, looking at the opposites locked in an embrace at the center allows readers to visualize the two extremes which parented it. This dense core is the "Kafkaesque" world. It is equivalent to a black hole into which are sucked all thoughts, all feelings, and all actions into a vortex of inaction. Kafka's increased gravity is a result of his solipsism; the increased density of the black hole correlates to the paradox embodied in his works, a paradox wrought from a monomaniacal desire to communicate that solipsism.¹ Increased density results in increased gravity, resulting in increasing density, a self-perpetuating process.

¹ A black hole is a dying star whose gravity becomes so intense that anything near it is pulled into it. Although other critics have referred to the black hole, I believe I am the first to use it this way to make these connections. (See for example Courtemanche in "Kafka and the Mirror of Instrumental Reason" who compares the mirror's negative image with a black hole.)

In this paradoxical place in Kafka's fictions where the law of non-contradiction does not apply, ideas and images seem deeply polarized. As we readers near the intense gravity, we too are sucked into the Kafkaesque world, for there is no way to read a Kafka story except to succumb to its own internal logic. As we struggle to unravel the double helix of Kafka's contradictions, as we attempt to unravel paradox's parentage, our response to Kafka's fictional world is a mix of tension and frustration. We wait for resolution in the stories, but the characters do not resolve their problems.² They endure, not a Faulknerian conscious endurance but a non-conscious Beckettian one. Our responses seem to emanate from the contradiction between the content and the form, between the story told and the discourse used to tell it. In order to address these issues and to understand the Kafka problem, we must examine how paradox fits into the paradigm of difficulty as a Spatial Form.

In the first section of this chapter, I confront the critical over-reliance on Kafka's biography. Traditionally,

² "In a Kafka universe, where non-existence is an ever-present danger, even to exist is a type of closure, even a feeble triumph. This is a very Jewish way of looking at things—even to exist is for Jews a triumph." This response to my study by Professor Eddie Epstein moved me so much that I had to include it.

critics have worked with the belief that collecting more information will help them resolve the tensions and frustrations created by the difficulties of the literature. As with Barnes', Kafka's biography has been one of the fundamental keys to his work. However, we find neither escape nor release from the tension nor are we able to unravel the difficulties of his fiction by searching his letters and diaries or even the facts of his existence. Like the fictions, Kafka's life is also constrained by contradictions.

That writers select from, improvise on, and rearrange the materials of their lives is a given in the creative process, as is the fact that some writers distort their perception of reality sometimes more and sometimes less than others. Kafka's "Biographical Filibustering," as my first section is entitled, is an exploration of his private writings and Max Brod's mining of the Kafka opus. In the works I examine, Kafka has tightened the knit of life to art in such a way that the two sides of the fabric appear to present identical designs.

When the symbiosis of art and life entangles readers in the writing process, when readers scour through the biography to find solutions to the "Kafka Problem," then the focus shifts drastically. Aesthetics vanishes. We must break out

of the snake-eating-its-own-tail cycle of life-illuminating-art-illuminating-life, for Kafka's biography is not a floodlight of reason and explanation but a mirror creating a *mise en abîme* of further complexity. Instead, readers should be exploring the reading process, the movement of art to life, for in the reader's response to the fictions, the focus returns to the aesthetics of, and in, the text.

In this section, I focus on *Brief an den Vater/Letter to His Father* even though this letter was never delivered. Kafka's biography seems to be a psychological battleground through which we have to pass in order to reach the fictions themselves. Clearing the field enables us to confront and explore the paradoxes in the fictions without bias. The life and the art are parallel; nevertheless, the life does not have the literary constructions which the art possesses. I feel compelled to qualify these statements because, in addition to Kafka's own statements about his symbiotic relationship to writing, it is extremely difficult to shake off the feeling that Kafka lived his life as if it were a literary work, not merely his existing through literature as does one who is passionate about a subject. He seemed to respond and act in real life as if he were in the process of creating a fictional character. In his letter to Felice, Kafka

approximates this existence. "'Ich habe kein literarisches Interesse, sondern bestehe aus Literature, ich bin nichts anderes und kann nichts anderes sein.'" ("I have no literary interests, but consist of literature. I am nothing else and cannot be anything else'" (qtd in Kuna 44). Kafka seems to illustrate the difference between obsession and passion.³

In the second section of this chapter, I argue that no amount of contingent, modal, or tactical work will overcome the difficulty in Kafka's fiction, especially since the modal and tactical difficulties meld and metamorphosize into an ontological one. The themes of *Die Verwandlung* are woven through my reading. My interpretation relies on an explanation of the role of paradox as a process which deepens and increases the density and complexity of the subject matter. The form excludes and rejects the content: this is the major paradox of Kafka's writings. Contradictions make us think, not only more, harder, and deeper, but differently in order to open the door for articulating the elusive and the horrific. Paradox forces a Spatial Form reading.

Kafka's literalness of language transmits a horror that

³ See also Gray's essay "Biography as Criticism in Kafka Studies" which maps the parallels between Kafka's life and his stories.

metaphor can never touch or reveal because the use of metaphor means that the horror is mediated by aesthetics and rhetoric. How we are forced to read Kafka's work, how we "think" his paradoxes, shifts our thinking processes just as "thinking" through oxymorons in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* shifts us into the realm of Spatial Form. The symptoms of paradox affect our process of reading Kafka's works. This process involves the reader experiencing Kafka's disconnecting language from the life which the body lives, his emptying out the meaning from the language. In addition to *Die Verwandlung*, I connect paradox to Kafka's "Gib's Auf!"/"Give Up!"

In the third section, "Final Notes," I explore paradox in *Die Verwandlung* in more detail. In Kafka's paradoxes, as with Barnes' oxymorons, we have the marriage of opposites which requires of us a non-logical response or resolution, a spatial reading. "Non-logical," however, does not mean "non-verbal" although the constraints of language's linearity deepens the contradiction. Oxymorons, certain types of ambiguity, litotes represent a variety of literary forms which embody paradox and, in turn, require us to hold two opposing thoughts simultaneously, the very act of which is a sophisticated cognitive function. To not choose, to live

with contradiction without succumbing to madness, requires a stance which accepts the world unmediated by meaning-making. Although this seems to be an extreme existential stance, it is the reader's stance, not the characters'. In *Die Verwandlung*, Gregor's transformation is locked in the center both as metaphor and as reality. The confusion seems to emerge because Kafka avoids metaphor but readers are forced to read metaphorically. In *Der Prozess/The Trial*, the man was denied admittance to the law; as we read, we want to know both why he was denied admittance and why he never asks why. The biggest problem and source of difficulty in Kafka is the conflict between what is told and how it is told, where form betrays content. This major source of paradox brings us back to the literary elements, back to the aesthetics of narration. In the opposition between Kafka's content and his form, as with Barnes' oxymorons, we also find the shift from narration to description. This occurs because the slowed reading process, with the inherent reader involvement, brings us into the territory of Spatial Form.

What's past is prologue.

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (II, 1, 261)

Biographical Filibustering: A Reading of the Life

It is common knowledge that Kafka was a German, Jewish, Bohemian born in Prague, Czechoslovakia (Bohemia) on July 3, 1883. Less known is that his two brothers died in childhood. Kafka's three sisters were much younger and, therefore, did not establish close ties with their brother Franz, nor he with them. That his brothers died young and that he was the only son with many sisters also played a role in the father-son relationship at that time. Kafka's mother was from an intellectual, scholarly family, introverted and quiet. Critics describe Kafka's father, a self-made businessman, as overbearing and authoritarian. In *Brief an den Vater* 1919, we have Kafka's own perceptions and responses to his father and to his upbringing. Kafka calls his father intellectually dominating (20-21), judgmental, belittling (22-23), and insensitive (24-25). Desperate for his father's approval and never receiving it, Kafka was "driven to extremes of loneliness and introspection" (Brod 111). Because this

letter permeates much of the criticism on Kafka, I am presenting a lengthy and often quoted entry which illustrates Kafka's *perception* of his relationship with his father.

Bei Tisch durfte man sich nur mit Essen beschäftigen, Du aber putztest und schnittest Dir die Nägel, spitztest Bleistifte, reinigtest mit dem Zahnstocher die Ohren, Bitte, Vater, verstehe mich recht, das wären an sich vollständig unbedeutende Einzelheiten gewesen, niederdrückend wurden sie für mich erst dadurch, dass Du, der für mich so ungeheuer massgebend Mensch, Dich selbst an die Gebote nicht hieltest, die Du mir auferlegtest. Dadurch wurde die Welt für mich in drei Teile geteilt, in einen, wo ich, der Sklave, lebte, unter Gesetzen, die nur für mich erfunden waren und denen ich überdies, ich wusste nicht warum, niemals völlig entsprechen konnte, dann in eine zweite Welt, die unendlich von meiner entfernt war, in der Du lebtest, beschäftigt mit der Regierung, mit dem Ausgeben der Befehle und mit dem Ärger wegen deren Nichtbefolgung, und schliesslich in eine dritte Welt, wo die übrigen Leute glücklich und frei von Befehlen und Gehorchen lebten.

Ich war immerfort in Schande, entweder befolgte ich Deine Befehle, das war trotzig, das war auch Schande, denn wie durfte ich Dir gegenüber trotzig sein, oder ich konnte nicht folgen, weil ich zum Beispiel nicht Deine Kraft, nicht Deinen Appetit, nicht Deine Geschicklichkeit hatte, trotzdem Du es als etwas Selbstverständliches von mir verlangtest; das war allerdings die grösste Schande.
(26,28)

At table one wasn't allowed to do anything but eat, but you cleaned and cut your fingernails, sharpened pencils, cleaned your ears with a toothpick. Please, Father, understand me correctly: in themselves these would have been utterly insignificant details, they only became depressing for me because you, so tremendously the authoritative man, did not keep the commandments you imposed on me. Hence the world was for me divided into three parts: one in which I, the slave, lived under laws that had been invented only for me and which I could, I did not know why, never completely comply with; then a second world, which was infinitely remote from mine, in which you lived, con-

cerned with government, with the issuing of orders and with the annoyance about their not being obeyed; and finally a third world where everybody else lived happily and free from orders and from having to obey. I was continually in disgrace, for they applied, after all, only to me; or I was defiant, and that was a disgrace too for how could I presume to defy you; or I could not obey because I did not, for instance, have your strength, your appetite, your skill, although you expected it of me as a matter of course; this was the greatest disgrace of all. (*Brief 27-29*)

Kafka wrote this letter in answer to his father's question: "Why are you afraid of me?" A father who corners (*Die Verwandlung*) and pins (*Eliot's Prufrock*) his son in this manner--Gregor is pinned by the apple--psychologically batters him: how can the timid son reach beyond his fear to answer? But here again we have the contradiction built into the situation. As Kafka points out, he himself is afraid of answering why he is afraid: this is a catch 22. But he does, indeed, answer, quite bluntly in the letter to his father, a letter which was never delivered.

"Kafka appears to have lost his self-confidence early in life, exchanging for it, as he himself put it, 'a boundless sense of guilt'" (Rahv 111). This is the traditional view of Kafka. Remarks such as these address the person not the work. I suspect that anyone's life scrutinized and magnified under a critical microscope would exhibit similar inconsistencies and strangenesses. Such scrutiny often distorts the subject and shows the possibility of a multitude of readings. Even though Brod, Kafka's friend and biographer, attempts to mitigate and dilute the pathology of Kafka's life, the overwhelming presence of opposites and contradictions remains. The problem engendered by knotting together the life and the work seems to be one in which critics have read the life through the literature and the literature through the life as a way of explaining the difficulty of each. We readers make endless connections and comparisons between the life and the fictions, or we are bobbing up and down on the seesaw of opposites, but we find no meaning. We are so busy looking at the finger that we have lost the moon. Further, if we follow the arguments and exegeses of the critics, becoming convinced first by one then by another, we will be unable to scrape off the cara-

pace of criticism and read Kafka freely, allowing us to face the problems the works themselves present.

In our late twentieth century mindset, one might read Kafka's *Brief* and respond to him cavalierly, "Get a life!" or "What a whiner!" This is a modal difficulty, resulting from applying our perceptual fabric to Kafka's life. We find it difficult to understand why Kafka did not leave his family, to separate from the father who he felt terrorized him. *Catch-22* again: in Kafka's eyes, his father created that inability to leave, as if Franz were saying, "You have terrorized me. I want to leave but I am too terrified to leave. It is your fault." Again, this is a double-bind situation. Even his friend Max Brod questioned Kafka's need to take his father too seriously, his inability to leave his father.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough the impact of our Emersonian self-reliance, how much it imbeds itself into our thinking, our criticisms, and our judgments. It is unproductive to speculate on "should haves" or impose late twentieth century American social and cultural self-reliant conditioning on a pre-war German Jew living in Prague at the beginning of this century. In addition, such suppositions are part of the rational, linear thinking too often used to

unravel the "Kafka" problem. If we experience this "modal" difficulty in relation to the facts of his life, we feel no sympathy. We cannot adjust our sensibilities to appreciate the content, that is, the story of Kafka's life.

From the letter, approximately sixty-eight pages in book form, one would think that this person Kafka, filled with feelings of fear and loneliness, was incapable of a constructive and productive life. However, the facts of the biography demonstrate that Kafka was an intensely resilient person. He functioned. He received a doctorate in Jurisprudence in 1906 from the German University in Prague and went into law. Kafka chose law because

alles wird mir gegenüber der Hauptsache genau so gleichgültig sein, wie all Lehrgegenstände im Gymnasium, es handelt sich also darum, einem Beruf zu finden, der mir, ohne meine Eitelkeit allzusehr zu verletzen, diese Gleichgültigkeit am ehesten erlaubt. Also war Jus das Selbstverständliche. (94)

Compared to the main thing everything would be exactly as much a matter of indifference to me as all the subjects taught at school, and so it was a matter of finding a profession that would let me indulge this indifference without injuring my van-

ity too much. Law was the obvious choice. (*Brief*
95)

What Kafka describes as indifference is normally, or at least socially, a liability; but in the law, it is an asset. His truthfulness and attention to detail, coupled with his disinterestedness, were perfect for the legal profession. In *Verwandlung*, disinterestedness transforms into "indifference," ("Gleichgültigkeit"). Also because of Kafka's semi-governmental position in an accident-insurance office, Kafka was exempted from World War I military service (Rahv 112).

Kafka's true passion, however, was writing, although even literature competed with his desire for independence and marriage. Here again he functioned. Despite the fact that we may now judge them as neurotic, Kafka had relationships with women, relationships which, in his mind, competed with the writer's life. In *Brief an den Vater*, Kafka asserts that the prospect of marriage terrorized him (97) so much so that "in the superhuman effort of wanting to marry . . . , blood came from the lung . . ." (91). Here, Kafka himself ascribes the fear of marriage as the cause of his tuberculosis. Yet, in a throwaway phrase in this same entry, Kafka speculates that the apartment in Schönbornpalais may have contributed to his ill health. That this is ig-

nored exemplifies and suggests how far critics will go in order to construct a vision of Kafka's pathological, somatized existence.

Even though most of his major works were published posthumously by Max Brod, Kafka published some of his shorter writings. Again, he functioned. Kafka had asked Brod to burn his works and, despite Brod's refusal, Kafka, interestingly, kept Brod as executor of his will (Steiner 122). I believe that Kafka knew that Brod would not burn the manuscripts. This may be explained by a situation in which the roles were reversed. In the biography, Brod includes a letter from Kafka during their university days in which Kafka criticized Brod's work and then warns him not to take the criticism seriously: "For it may often be a sign of friendship not to take a friend's pronouncements too seriously any more" (47, emphasis mine). We are grateful that Brod did not take seriously Kafka's injunction to burn the manuscripts.

Kafka died of tuberculosis on June 3, 1924. Even in his death, we can find parallels to Kafka's life. In *Brief an den Vater*, Kafka writes about his father's behavior towards his employees. Kafka said that the swearing and cursing offended him. He also noted his father's lack of compas-

sion for a clerk who, like Kafka later, had tuberculosis.

"'Er soll krepieren, der kranke Hund.'" / "'The sooner he dies the better, the mangy dog'" (54-55).

Kafka's biography seems to swell into fathoms of impenetrable material when we turn our attention to his relationship with his father. Because of his diaries, Kafka's work has been explored in tandem with his life: both feed the urge to see analogies with "the structure of dreams" (Sokel 9). Kafka's diary entries and letters complicate the issue because, by discussing his own dreams--he was familiar with Sigmund Freud's writings--and by commenting on both his own life and his dreams, Kafka blurs the line between the life lived in reality and the life lived out in the mind or in fiction. For Kafka, they were the same.

"Franz Kafka" is "the name of a problem," according to Gray (46). Gray further divides the Kafka problem into "the interplay between literature and biography." The literary aspect is the "life of the soul; the biographical, empirical experiences" (46). This leads us to a clearer picture of the problem for our own concerns: Kafka's fictional writings present us with a corpus of literature to read aesthetically; all other writings by and about Kafka function as a keyhole to view his life psychologically.

My reading of Kafka's life is that he was a professional victim. In his essay "The Joys of Victimhood," (1989), Joseph Epstein analyzes the changes which occurred in the situation of victimization.⁴ Epstein opens his essay by discussing people's inability to register "shifts in social attitudes and concerns" (20) as a seismograph measures earth's geological shifts. One such shift, however, had set Epstein's seismograph pinging: the shift moves "victims" onto center stage from their marginalized position. "The rush to identify oneself as a victim is rather a new feature of modern life . . . to position oneself as a victim is to position oneself for sympathy, special treatment, even victory" (21). Epstein cites the Palestinians, Gandhi, and even the civil rights movement in America as examples of victimhood, the latter of which "changed the tenor, the quality, the very nature of victimhood in the United States" (21).

Being a victim of a crime or of an injustice means being a recipient. However, this article radically changes the connotations of the word "victim" so that one is actually victimizing oneself. Epstein sees victimhood as an ap-

⁴ Epstein's essay is useful for understanding Kafka, but the political values it expresses are questionable.

peal to pity rather than an appeal to conscience. Other, more marginalized groups subsequently have claimed victimhood: "60's students, feminists, homosexuals, Vietnam veterans, handicapped, even artists" (21). The idea is that, if you can't "fight 'em," then you should "join 'em" (21). Therefore, people position their own groups as victim groups. The move has been from pitying victims to desiring to be part of a victim group, and finally to identifying one's own small group as a victim group.

In the second section of the essay, Epstein discusses the pleasures of victimhood, one of which is that victimhood imbues "one's life with a sense of drama" (21). Another pleasure or benefit is that victims "never blame themselves for their conditions" (21). In essence, victims are not responsible for their situations. A third, subtle benefit is that victims shift their complaints into demands.

Despite some astute insights into "victimhood" as a professional stance, Epstein tends to lose his persuasiveness in several instances. For example, he is amused by the then (1989) new euphemism for handicapped: physically challenged. Illustrating unclear thinking, Epstein equates being in the majority as a contradiction to being a victim. "Victims have traditionally been minority groups, but in fact women, who in

the United States are a slight majority, have been deemed victims, whereas the Jews and the Chinese in America, though clearly minorities, are not counted as victims . . . " (21). It appears that Epstein confuses quantity with quality in the latter case.

How does Epstein's account of victimhood relate to Kafka's life and works? Kafka was perhaps a professional victim, oppressed by his physical self, by his father's harsh personality, and by his geopolitical situation. Kafka's life circles tightly around indecision which imbues his life with a sense of drama: primarily the "victim," that is, Kafka, can continue to lay out the injustices and continue to weigh alternatives. His dilemma sits in the spotlight at center stage. Second, Kafka blames primarily his father for his situation: this avoids Kafka's taking responsibility for his indecisiveness. Even in blaming himself, he blames his father. And third, Kafka's complaints become demands, usually through his fiction, in a passive-aggressive stance such as Gregor Samsa's in *Die Verwandlung*.

Reading Kafka as a victim is not as far-fetched as it may initially seem. The victim stance connects to a masochistic one. In "Kafka and Sacher-Masoch," Mark M. Anderson

has argued that if we view Gregor's metamorphosis through the eyes of Sacher-Masoch,

it is possible to see how this punishment [the change to a species of vermin] as brutal or warranted as it may initially appear, contains an element of pleasure, indeed, of erotic pleasure. Why, we must ask, does Kafka write clearly autobiographical works in which he is repeatedly humiliated, punished, exposed, mistreated? And why do his heroes repeatedly accept, even welcome, such treatment? The component of masochistic pleasure in Kafka's writings has not been completely ignored, but . . . need[s] to be reformulated with greater precision and force. (Anderson 132)

Anderson presents his case well. It is surprising to reread the novella through this perspective, and it is more surprising that often the interpretation answers several of the readers' questions. Anderson begins by connecting the photograph of a woman with a fur muff in *Die Verwandlung* with Sacher-Masoch's popular novel *Venus im Pelz*. Anderson provides examples of masochism and the erotic in *Die Verwandlung*. He interprets as erotic Gregor's crawling on the wall

to save the picture of the woman in furs. He also discerns a "triangle of desire and punishment" which exists in the fictions of Kafka and of Sacher-Masoch. As Anderson points out, Gregor Samsa's mother, who suffered from asthma, already had her dress removed by Grete so she could breathe. The mother then "rushes to her husband, tripping over the petticoats which she loses on the way, to unite with him in a clearly sexual union . . . " (Anderson 130). Anderson then replays the scene from Kafka's novella wherein the mother embraces the father begging for her son's life. It is at this point that Gregor's sight begins to fail: the mother has chosen the father and Gregor is rejected. The point which interests us here is that the concept of masochism, the idea of pleasure in pain, is itself a paradox.

We work at adjusting our taste or sensibilities, the modal category, in order to appreciate the work and not impose our perceptions against Kafka's reading of his own life. This endeavor is made more difficult because, first of all, Kafka constantly diagnoses his own situation and, second, his life and his fiction mirror each other so closely that separating them seems futile. His fear and his "victimhood" color everything in his life, and they color our reading of his fiction. We are conditioned by his perspec-

tive. Through this *mise en abîme*, we seem forced to interpret and psychoanalyze Kafka's life, his personal writings, along with his fictions. This requires of readers a special effort to read without bias, Kafka's or our own.

Max Brod says that the "subjective truth" of Kafka's *Brief an den Vater* "when confronted with the sober facts, remains in spite of everything ambiguous and ambuscaded" [ambushed] (17). Brod also claims that he told Kafka repeatedly that Franz "overestimated" his father. Brod also remarked to Kafka "how stupid it is to despise oneself." (23). Yet later in his biography of Kafka, Brod emphasizes Kafka's "absolute truthfulness" and "scrupulous conscientiousness in all affairs" (47). How do readers confront such contradictory information about the family portrait as presented by Kafka's best friend? Is this portrait true?⁵ The details which Kafka renders are numerous and exact, confirming some basis in reality. However, whether or not his father was in fact psychologically abusive, harshness and ruthlessness are what Kafka remembers. His writings and his responses are

⁵ Readers assume that Max Brod is correct in his assessments when, in fact, he may be quite shortsighted and unable to sympathize or he may be writing through hindsight and reconstructing Kafka, as did Ted Hughes with Sylvia Plath. For literary, financial, or egotistical reasons, Brod's vision of Kafka may be distorted.

based upon his *perceptions* of his experiences and his memories, whether or not they correspond to reality. Rather than trying to determine the accuracy of Kafka's perception of his father, it would be more productive looking at how *Brief an den Vater* is written and how readers respond to it.

The closest analogy for explaining why we should dismiss this unnecessary need for biographical accuracy and its parallels with the fiction comes from the critical body of work on *Tristram Shandy* by Sterne. Theodore Baird represents an example of extreme Sternian studies over the centuries as well as the self-annihilating interpretations which have not helped to explicate the novel. Baird uses eighty-two footnotes in a seventeen page essay, "The Time Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source," in order to prove that Sterne organized his novel around true historical events and that Sterne's presentation was "carefully planned and executed." (803). We know that getting to the truth is part of the humor and results in Tristram's digressive style. If Sterne's historical data were inaccurate, the meaning of the novel would be the same and the reader's responses would remain constant. Compare Baird's reading to Karl's interpretation of Sterne's novel, in which Karl states that ". . . the siege of Namur in 1695 is not significant to Tristram as a

historical event in the struggle between England and France; its importance lies in Uncle Toby's having been wounded there on July 27" (210). Karl's interpretation has more meaning. For him, the dates stress "the relativity of all experience." (210).

Kafka studies seem to follow this same extreme path. Let me illustrate. From Kafka's background, many factors coalesce relating to authority: his jurisprudence degree, his authoritarian father, his "Talmudic training," (Albérès 10). In *Der Prozess* and in *Die Verwandlung*, for example, authority is a central issue and there is no scarcity of criticism focusing on it. Yet it is not enough to tease out all the elements from the works which portray the conflicts imposed by authority because, once they are spread out on the table, once life is paired with art, readers still have to make them mean something beyond puzzle parallels. Once we have pulled at each thread, unraveled each possible source, what then? Have we understood the meaning of the work any better? Or have we merely understood Kafka's food for thought, his process? We have not gotten closer to the reasons why Kafka responded to authority as he did. Another person in the same situation may have rebelled totally. The eugenic element in the eugenics/euthenics argument still re-

mains a mystery and will hardly be solved in a study of Kafka's fiction. The bottom line is that critics need to attend more to the significance of what is presented in the texts rather than search for sources and parallels in Kafka's life.

Universal parental protestations aside, and with strong invocations to R.D. Laing, we cannot dismiss the control and influence of family. In *The Divided Self* (a paradoxical title!), Laing argues that a person within a dysfunctional family—yes, a very contemporary term—develops survival behaviors which, outside the walls of the home, often seem bizarre, schizophrenic, or even psychotic. Within the family structure, his behaviors seem quite normal. If we frame Kafka's response to his family in this way, then we can assert that his family is responsible for some of his thoughts and actions and that there is some truth to Kafka's criticisms of his father and mother. The details of *Brief* lend credence to this idea. Kafka lives in and with the dysfunction as evidenced by his diaries and letters while distancing himself from the dysfunction in order to create fiction. We must remember that Kafka's weakness, his inability to escape his family physically or psychologically, differs immensely from his genius for expressing that inability. If

Kafka were merely pretending to be psychologically imbalanced or abnormal (or lonely or despairing or weak or imprisoned), we must recognize that such pretenses themselves are not emotionally healthy. Healthy people do not wish to be or pretend to be neurotic or psychotic.

What we can see in Kafka is the immense and intense fidelity to "absolute truthfulness," scrupulous conscientiousness, particularly to artistic detail: these can be seen as intrinsic to one who must preserve control, to avoid being swallowed up by his father and all that he represents or, for that matter, by the fast-changing modern world. Kafka's purification of language avoids metaphor because metaphor facilitates change and multiple interpretations. In its own right, such control exhibits its own authoritarian bent.⁶ In Kafka's world where cause and effect, reason and logic, seem not to prevail, detail and truth, that truth being the direct parallels to his life, are the life preserver to which he clings. This may be the source for Kafka's literal style.

⁶ One of the interpretations to explain anorexia--given "The Hunger Artist" and Kafka's appearance, the connection to Kafka is plausible--is that the anorexic, by not eating, exerts control over not only herself but over other people. I have used the feminine pronoun because male anorexics are extremely rare.

When we look at the contradictions of the life, we realize that they reveal a man who is in hiding, who does not wish to show himself, who does not want to be seen as vulnerable. The paradox is that Kafka hides behind truth, a description of reality without significance. He also hides behind vulnerability, using it like a shield. His literal style of language further erases any entry into his psyche, leaving readers trying to anchor through language the Kafka world which is devoid of cause and effect.

As with Barnes' *Nightwood*, critics often turn to biography in order to explain difficulty in Franz Kafka's work. Even though I favor close analysis of the effects on the reader of the rhetorical elements, Kafka's life, with its psychological, religious, and social dimensions, reveals richly rewarding clues to understanding his work. Unfortunately, the downside to the biographical illumination is that his life sits in tandem with the work and requires as much interpretation as do his stories and novels. We find in the biographical and autobiographical materials the same difficulties that appear in the literature. Since the life and the fictions point to paradox, then through an investi-

gation of paradox, we may find some revelations to help us understand Kafka's fictions.⁷

Paradox

What is a paradox? One classic example often appears in college classrooms: students pass around a paper, on one side of which is written, "The statement on the other side of this paper is false." And, of course, on the other side is written, "The statement on the other side is true." This may remind people of the classic paradox of The Liar: A man says that he is lying. Is what he says true or false? Two statements, both of which seem to have been arrived at logically, directly contradict each other: this is paradox. No amount of research or thinking unlocks the two elements in their combined lack of resolution, their inability to become one or the other. A visual example of this, found in first year psychology texts, is the vase/face or the young lady/old woman optical illusion. Both images exist simultaneously, locked together if you will, but how do we perceive them?

⁷ One might view Kafka as the Woody Allen of Modernism. Just imagine Kafka in therapy and with access to a movie camera.

Franz Kafka's work mirrors the problems inherent in the anomalies of paradox. Embedded in his stories at all levels--plot, characterization, theme, symbols--are these contradictions which are so numerous and overwhelming that they transcend ambiguity and polysemantics. These contradictions are a double-edged sword. Precise attention to detail can be seen as pettiness. The door which locks one out or in is also the door to escape one's outer and inner prisons; Gregor's metamorphosis itself is both a blessing and a curse as well as escape and death. As we progress forward through Kafka's plots, we are simultaneously seeing the present and the past which created the characters' present--that the physical present reveals the emotional past. What is absent reveals what should have been present.

. . . Little need is there for chasing or courting paradox, that, on the contrary, he who is faithful to his own experiences will find all his efforts little enough to keep down the paradoxical air besieging much of what he *knows* to be the truth. No man needs to *search* for paradox in this world of ours. Let him simply confine himself to the truth.
(DeQuincey 598)

Absurdity emerges from this microscopic, exacting, and contradictory examination of life, details scrupulously presented, yet these same words which swing doors open also slam them shut, putting an end to truth.³ The emotional reality is erased as the physical reality accrues details.

These kinds of dichotomies and polarities in literature force readers to question the purpose of literature in general and modernist literature specifically. The reader asks, "Why am I reading this work if it is so difficult, so frustrating?" My choice of answers is limited, paradoxically, by more general questions: "What is the purpose of literature? Why do we read?" We are familiar with some answers, such as those I discussed above: for example, Hall outlines and discusses informational, philosophical, literary, and narcotic readings. Traditionally, however, the most famous and common explanation is Horace's *dolce et utile*: the purpose of literature, its use, is to please and to instruct. In addition, we are familiar with a different, more modern aesthetic for literature: "l'art pour l'art" or in Kant's aesthetics, purposefulness without purpose.

³ For example, Samuel Beckett's permutations in *Watt* demonstrate the up close, overwitnessed, and hyper-detailed reality which appears absurd in the telling.

Do Kafka's fictions fit into any of these categories or do they force us to question further the purpose of reading literature? His works are so disturbing that one might tend to rule out the idea of the *dolce*. On the other hand, his works are so finely tuned and constructed aesthetically that they "please" readers' literary sensibilities, giving a pleasure in the area of tactical difficulty. And yet, we should admit that appreciating the aesthetic beauty of Kafka's works requires its own paradox: we must distance ourselves, holding at bay the terrifying world Kafka creates while marveling at how he creates it. If we attribute a useful purpose to his works, we then may ask, "What is Kafka instructing us to do or to think or to feel?" Kafka's break with literary realism and use of parables, particularly parables about animals, supports the didactic nature of his works. However, if his works do educate readers, it is by opposition: "Do not get into this situation. Do not think, act, or feel in this way, for the horror is devastating."³ Our education is not one of beauty or contentment but of

³ If Kurtz (Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) were alive and rendered speechless by "The horror! The horror!" would he be Kafka's K? The two responses to the horror—two different horrors—seem to be the same, for both Kurtz and Gregor, for example, have been paralyzed to death.

pain and emptiness. We learn by wrestling with the paradoxes in Kafka's works which means that we must learn that paradox is the rule.

Part of the difficulty in reading Kafka's works rests in trying to understand why or how the world, society, or even the legal institutions seem to violate the characters and, of course, why the characters respond so passively. We follow the perfectly clear, unadorned, literal language which, in Kafka's hands, assaults readers because it is so calm and rational, so void of the emotions of panic, shock, terror, or confusion appropriate for the situations. The Man before the Law waits, yet never questions his wait, never becomes angry or frustrated. Gregor never feels shock or repulsion or madness in response to his metamorphosis. Kafka's literal use of language ends up questioning the very notions of communication.¹⁰

Behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and actions are imbued with language. Ontologically, words, sentences, syntax, and concepts are functions of these feelings, actions, and

¹⁰ It is possible to look at Kafka's literal language as the embodiment of the loss of "aura," what Walter Benjamin identified as the art object's "distance from the observer as a quasi-sacred cult object embedded in the matrix of cultural tradition" (Jayne 28). In other words, the "artiness" of the object is lost.

thoughts. Does a slap in the face or a slap on the cheek exist as a slap in the face without language? "Slap" implies hand not paw; "face" suggests human not animal. The language is also gendered, at least in the twentieth century where men do not challenge each other to a duel with a glove slap. Men do, however, slap each other on the back jovially. A slap tends to be a female's action. Women slap men, babies, and other women. The "assault" is on the face or cheek, not the "jaw" or "mug" or "snout." We begin to see how language wraps itself around and permeates our experiences, and how culturally and socially language attaches to experience.

With Kafka, language does not seem to make these attachments. Language is outside of activities or thoughts, and readers can only observe or witness. This is a mind/body split and manifests itself in a content/form dichotomy. Perhaps if the absurdity--Gregor's transformation into a vermin or the man before the Law's interminable patience--is expressed cleanly, clearly, literally, then the clear, affectless language would anchor the experience, and it would no longer be absurd. If I give enough details, it will be real.

We are, then, in the territory of Steiner's ontological difficulty: language violates the contract of communication

between writer and reality, between speaker and spoken about. Words and language seem to have their own existence, detached from reality. Reality should have significance and, therefore, meaning but it does not because the words only record the event, not the meaning in the Kafka world. Kafka's language, straightforward and literal, is like the camera's eye and the recorder's ear, seeing and hearing but not giving meaning. Words just do not work; at best, they refer to or they witness. The author/narrator in Kafka seems mute, unable to respond to life, merely re-creating what happened. He tries to focus the experience as if saying the words will make it real. We readers are also factored out of the equation. We too are mute; worse, we are irrelevant. Audience matters little in Kafka's solipsistic world.

The contradiction between literal language and horrific content is the core paradox of Kafka's discourse. In "Notes on Kafka," Theodor W. Adorno discusses Kafka's literal language.

The principle of literalness . . . finds support in many of Kafka's texts. At times, words, metaphors in particular, detach themselves and achieve a certain autonomy" (97-98)

The most important paradox in Kafka's work is the literal language which totally opposes, even denies, the horrific content. Literal language eliminates the use of rhetorical tropes. Allowing writers to break the boundaries of thought and inscribe new ideas into the very fabric of words. Literal language is largely referential: words point to, or substitute for, an object. A writer uses words without their figurative or secondary meanings. Kafka's use of details carried to us in literal language denies us the opportunity to read figuratively.

Paradoxically, because we come to the text as readers trained in literary tradition and because texts like *Die Verwandlung* present readers with the difficulty of understanding Gregor's metamorphosis, we read Kafka's work through a literary and aesthetic lens. Specifically, we read figuratively, through metaphor. To not read Gregor's change into a monstrous dung beetle as a metaphor seems contrary to the aesthetics of our literary tradition and to our training. The hunger artist and Gregor, for example, are portrayed as experiencing various kinds of physical hunger. Traditionally, we interpret the hunger in psychological terms: they need emotional and social sustenance and succor. We do not, however, read this as fantasy, myth, or science fiction because the

story offers no clues to the readers to suggest that they do so. Reading Gregor's change as metaphor solves some of the novella's problems because metaphor mediates for the uncomfortable situations in the story. Metaphor is how we make sense of a man's change into a monstrous bug. To discern the metaphor is to tame what we might assume is Kafka's attempt at defamiliarization of reality. Our seeing metaphor returns us to the comfortable territory of literary interpretation.

On the other hand--and this is where paradox enters--to see *Die Verwandlung* as a metaphor or even a dream is to remove the horror of the transformation as well as the horror of its consequences. According to Cocteau, "the introduction of anything startling in the form of a dream removes its sting" (qtd in Adorno 98). The world Kafka creates is all the more intense because it is unmediated by fictionalizing pretensions and artifice. In other words, Kafka's use of literal language preempts, on one level, our reading his work through a literary lens. The intensity increases because the world he presents is a place where experiences are so horrific that the most tireless literal language or literary devices are unable to give meaning to, to rationalize, to envelop either the experiences or their inherent horror, a terror magnified in the responses of the family, the hired

help, and the boarders. They are appalled, yes, but they also accept the change as possible--disgusting and repulsive, but possible. The unmediated literal language articulates Kafka's unbelievable reality. That the articulation is literal allows us entry into his bizarre world.¹¹

Kafka's relation to language is akin to that of the child who shouts, "The Emperor has no clothes." Kafka "unadorns" reality from significance; he strips language of meaning so that reality sits naked in the spotlight but, as it sits there, its nakedness is its lack of meaning. Emotion is stripped from words. Perhaps the emptiest, most frightening, and most devastating thing we can imagine is to act, think, and feel without this act, thought or feeling having any significance or consequence. This is a bleak world. Even to use "imagine" gives meaning, control, and some shape or pattern. To imagine gives hope and, for Kafka's characters, there is no hope. The horror is that a literal use of language never connects objects, actions, or feelings to any significance or value. Beckett's permutations in *Watt* also attempt to connect words to reality and

¹¹ Kafka's literal style may be connected to Walter Benjamin's ideas in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. See the articles by Jaynes and by Jennings.

fail. In Kafka, as in Beckett, things just exist; even characters just exist as objects. Readers only approximate the characters' feelings by reading meaning into gestures: the head hanging, the glance out the window, the splayed bug body over a photo on the wall, the father's arm throwing apples, the man sitting, talking to the doorkeeper, the policeman and the traveler on an empty street corner. Since we read from literary tradition, we interpret while fighting the current of Kafka's literal language.

What kind of language is so literal? "The art . . . that Kafka tried to introduce is effectively no longer an art that proposes to 'express' (a meaning), to 'represent' (a thing, a being), or to 'imitate' (a nature)" (Deleuze xi). Many critics such as Courtemanche have written about Kafka's "relentless 'purification' of his art by removing all recognizable names, politics, religions, and locations from his stories" (16). Kafka himself refers to the "impossibility of writing in German."

Courtemanche discusses the efforts of Mark Anderson, Sander Gilman, and Wolf Kittler and others who try to "reconstruct the world in which Kafka wrote" in order to replace the specificity which he erased (16). In this way, the readers and critics are "refusing to be sucked into the

abyss of the infinite" (16). This abyss, this infinite, is the black hole to which I referred earlier. But why return all specificity if Kafka removed it, for then we are reading through a glaze that should not be there? Kafka obviously had a purpose, conscious or unconscious, for rejecting details of time, place, and person. Our being uncomfortable with the lack of specifics gives us no right, in essence, to rewrite or reconstruct Kafka's work which "does not lend itself to domestication" (in Deleuze xi). In fact, our discomfort is the very manifestation of his art and instrumental in our attempting to find his aesthetics and meaning.¹²

The words on the page in Kafka's fictions are, I would argue, an empty shell language. Language is ineffectual. Part of the problem finds its source in the rapidly changing modern world--trains, photographs, electric light, cars, phonographs, the zeppelin airship, and the ideas of Freud--which the Modernists confronted in and with their art during and after the turn of the century. Modern language trails behind reality, unable to reach it in order to absorb or express the changes. Kafka's problems with language are

¹² One might wish to associate Walter Benjamin's "deauratized work," the unmediated camera eye, point of view, with Kafka's purification process and literalizing of language.

complicated by his being a German Jew in Prague. "The Jew writing in German was misappropriating and misusing another people's heritage" which Kafka called "stealing a stranger's baby out of the cradle" (Pawel 227).¹³

Being a German Jew in Prague has often been seen as an explanation for the themes of Kafka's fictions, that is, "acute alienation from life" (Kuna 62). I agree. We also find in Kafka's heritage a clue to his discourse, his unique use of language. Martin Greenberg, in "Art and Dreams," explains the connection between Kafka's style and being a German Jew in Prague as well as his style and the period in which he wrote. Greenberg argues that Kafka was reacting against "literature" in general. Everywhere in Europe (and America) around the end of the nineteenth century, literature had become literary-affected and unreal, conventional and false. . . . (68). [Further], in Prague . . . , German was, actually, a foreign tongue, "a kind of officially subsidized language employed in holiday occasions

¹³ Pawel discusses the influence of Karl Krauss, the editor of *Die Fackel* (*The Torch*) 1899-1936, on Kafka and notes that, later in his life, Kafka's ideas about the German language were close to Krauss'. For further details, see Pawel, 225.

. . . dry and artificial, a foreign element"

(Wagenbach as qtd in Greenburg 76). Greenberg goes on to show the interrelationship of Kafka's linguistic heritage and style:

One reason for the starkness of Kafka's style is his renunciation of metaphors. For Kafka, metaphors were embellishments that obscured rather than revealed the clear lines of things; they were not 'true.' In rigorously excluding figures of speech from his prose, he was reacting against the turgid rhetorical style cultivated by his Prague contemporaries, among whom were Franz Werfel and even Rainer Maria Rilke. The German dialect spoken in Prague by a narrow official and bourgeois class at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Bohemia made part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, formed a little island in the Slavonic sea and was not a truly living language; the Prague writers, in straining to surmount its linguistic poverty, jumped over into extravagances and artificiality (Greenberg 67).

Kafka could write ornate prose, as exemplified by his earlier short stories, but later he "purified" his language. In 1904-05, Kafka wrote "Description of a Struggle."

At about midnight a few people rose, bowed, shook hands, said it had been a pleasant evening, and then passed through the wide doorway into the vestibule, to put on their coats. The hostess stood in the middle of the room and made graceful bowing movements, causing the dainty folds in her skirt to move up and down.

I sat at a tiny table--it had three curved, thin legs--sipping my third glass of benedictine, and while I drank I surveyed my little store of pastry which I myself had picked out and arranged in a pile.

Then I saw my new acquaintance, somewhat dishevelled and out of shape, appear at the doorpost of an adjoining room; but I tried to look away for it was no concern of mine. He, however, came toward me and, smiling absent-mindedly at my occupation (*Stories* 9)

The style of this prose, the use of connotation and figurative language, his first-person narrative point of view,

even the social situation, mark both an earlier use of language (with echoes of Poe) and the position of an individual in society, all of which accentuate the differences between his early fiction and his later, more famous fictions.

Greenberg's description of Kafka's linguistic style coincides with the concept of a "minor literature" as presented by Deleuze and Guattari. A minor literature is not a literature written in a minority language such as creole or any Native American language. It is a literature that a minority group constructs within a major language, which is "deterritorialized" (16-17). Kafka, a member of a minority, was writing in German while living in Prague, was using a major language and relying on its tradition. Such enclave writing is marginalized--that is, it exists on the edges of the major and literature.

Deleuze and Guattari list two other characteristics of a minor literature: by its nature, it is politicized, and it "takes on a collective value" (17). Kafka's language was deterritorialized because the "German language in Prague" had "a withered vocabulary, an incorrect syntax" (22). The authors also point out that the language of a minor literature is not representational, because the world is different from the expression of it or the ability to express it.

"Language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits" (author's emphasis, 23).

Kafka's father inserts yet another obstacle between Kafka's experience and the available languages to communicate that reality. Gray points out the language confusion which Kafka experienced:

A Jew, he was cut off from the Germans whose language he spoke. Living in Prague, he counted as a German, and was thus cut off from the Czechs who formed the main population of the country He was not an orthodox Jew, or a German of either the Austro-Hungarian or the Wilhelmine Empire, or a native Czech, or even an accepted son in his own family. (63)

In addition, in *Brief an den Vater*, Kafka notes his father's negativity towards all the cultures:

Du konntest zum Beispiel auf die Tschechen schimpfen, dann auf die Deutschen, dann auf die Juden, und zwar nich nur in Auswahl, sondern in jeder Hinsicht, und schliesslich blieb niemand mehr übrig ausser Dir.

You were capable, for instance, of running down the Czechs, and then the Germans, and then the Jews, and what is more, not only selectively but in every respect, and finally nobody was left except yourself. (20-21)

Further, in "Kafka's Babel," Whitlark writes on the effects of living in a multicultural and multilingual society. He focuses on the thematic effects of fragmentation, disorientation, and distrust of words whereas I am using the allusion to the Tower of Babel to explain a rhetorical structure of paradox. Whitlark discusses those Kafka's stories which he sees as evoking the biblical story of Babel. The author touches on the idea of the "ineffability of reality," as Kafka himself has put it (67). Whitlark notes that Beaujour, grounding her argument on linguistic, psychological, and neurological studies, argues that "bilinguals have a greater tendency to separate 'sign and referent'" (71).

Any person who is living in a language which is not her own realizes its far-reaching ramifications.¹⁴ Learning a language for one's own pleasure in a classroom differs greatly from learning a language in a new country or in an

¹⁴ This is beautifully and, at the same time, terrifyingly expressed by Eva Hoffman in *Lost in Translation*.

intensive language school. In the latter two situations, the student has no choice; she must learn another language to survive. She learns by necessity because no one around her understands her. Her native language is emptied of its meaning. In this new context, her words, her sentences, even her syntax, lose any communicative function. She lives in the Tower of Babel.

Other effects occur during the process of having one's language removed and another one replace it. The individual may find it difficult to express personality because personality, formed also in part by culture and socioeconomic considerations, is caught up in diction, word choice, syntax. Further, individuals may find difficulty communicating nuances of thought and feeling. Even when the students do learn some of the second language, their language use is still referential, broad-stroked, and sketchy.

As we grow up naturally in a language, words correlate to experiences, feelings, and other words. Families of thoughts grow with these experiences, becoming entangled with feelings. One does not really learn a language until one lives in it, falls in love, feels anger, joy, sorrow, and pain, learns its culture and traditions. This may help us better understand the notion of deterritorialization in

language. We may know the words but we may have no feel for where they live. Kafka's problem was intensified by having not two but three cultures and languages in conflict. Yes, it is true that, like so many people in Central Europe, Kafka's experience was enriched, and his range of cultural understanding was enlarged by his immersion in several cultures and languages. Nevertheless, his work reflects the problems, not the benefits, of multiculturalism and multilingualism.

The use of literal language in literature strikes us as barren. Kafka's extracting the figurative language from his works, particularly metaphor, draws our attention to its absence. We bring literary perceptions to the text while Kafka is busy stripping the literary from the text. We still need to consider why metaphor does not function, despite its virtual presence, in Kafka's works. Readers are obliged to ask this question, especially in *Die Verwandlung*, because our perceptual fabric includes a literary frame. What is the nature of metaphor that confounds its use in Kafka?¹⁵

¹⁵ What is not there is as oppressive and significant as what is there!

Metaphor is a comparison without the use of "like" or "as." This ship plows the sea. (The ship cuts through the ocean as a plow cuts through the soil.) The Aristotelian notion of metaphor sets up an equivalency formula.

A : B :: C : D

ship sea plow soil

In "Metaphorical Thought," Hugh Bredin examines a variety of theoretical perspectives of metaphor. Bredin refers to MacCormac who delineates two responses to metaphor: one in which we "hold two disparate things in the mind at the same time," echoing the earlier discussion of Barnes' oxymorons, and the other which is "'the [imaginative] ability to transform one referent into another'" (97). These relate to the analogous and the assimilative theories of metaphor. Bredin is trying to answer the question, "What kind of meaning does metaphor convey?" The answer according to Bredin, is that "metaphors are descriptions" (106) "Metonymies and synecdoches pick out, but metaphors describe, their objects" (107).¹⁶

¹⁶ Bredin refers to Nelson Goodman's observation that the way metaphors sort things is more relevant to how metaphors are produced rather than how they are received. In other words, emphasis is on the writer, not the reader. For a

Bredin's article is useful for distinguishing among the theories of metaphor. The two main notions of analogy and assimilation, which differ greatly, provide an opportunity to reflect on the functions performed by how readers receive metaphors. However, whether we examine analogy or assimilation metaphors, we are dealing with "conceptual domains," which Bredin associates with Max Black's idea that one topic is "'seen through'" another (100). A is seen through B; B leaves traces on A. A has not become B (assimilative); nor is A superimposed on B (analogous).

When writers create metaphors and when we read them, the two elements compared are less important than the gesture or gestalt in-between on which we focus. We concentrate and experience or involve ourselves with the patterns, gestures, or feelings where they overlap. This seems to be a metonymic association. We are not experiencing the two objects as elements themselves nor in the actual overlap. (This is not a matter of unions and intersections familiar to mathematicians.) With Black's idea that one topic is "seen through" another, we begin to see how the traces which

different perspective on rhetorical structures and Spatial Form, please see Lynda S. McNeil's "Toward a Rhetoric of Spatial Form: Some Implications of Frank's Theory."

B leaves on A are secondary qualities, rather than primary ones. "The ship plowed the sea" or "Her flesh was the texture of plant life" (Barnes' *Nightwood*) illustrates how an elusive quality, perhaps even an ineffable one, functions as the trace. Metaphor seems to be a lens through which we view a second subject, that lens, perhaps, being a gesture, an image, a cause, an effect not inherent in the objects themselves.

To see any element of the world as influenced or colored by a second element undermines Kafka's literal use of language. Transference of qualities of one object to another would, first of all, exercise an organizing process, that is, pattern-making which would, secondly, establish "some" meaning and project it into the object. The effect of this would be to remove that object or person from isolation. However, paradox reinstates itself because we readers bring our traditional reading practices--metaphors as explanatory, descriptive, transformative process, to our reading of Kafka. At such a point, we are in battle with Kafka's discourse. We cannot penetrate the wall of literal language for access to the profoundly terrorizing content. In fact, we must surmount the literal to experience first the horror of the content--a man changes into a species of

vermin, for heaven's sake!--and then we are confronted by the equally paralyzing horror of Gregor's disavowal of his metamorphosis. The absence of figurative language leaves us vulnerable to be assaulted by content and then by a form which allows that content to be unmediated.

Adorno calls Kafka's cosmos "deranged" (100). This immediately recolors our perception and reading of Kafka's works as well as of Adorno's comments. "Deranged" is negative, judgmental, and distanced. The real terror inspired by Kafka's works is that we cannot step aside, step outside, much of his fiction, particularly *Die Verwandlung*. As shown above, the reader's entry into Kafka's world is an entry into a place where we must be conscious of not reading figuratively. This act imprisons us in the fictive world.

Kafka's narrative point of view also reinforces this imprisonment. Pascal argues that "almost everything we know is passed on to us via the consciousness of Gregor. To his thoughts we have direct access; the others we know as Gregor sees them through the open door and overhears their conversation" (95). This non-personal narrator is subordinated to the chief character, Gregor, and identifies with him: the reader "sees and hears through his eyes and ears" (95). Only in the "coda," after Gregor dies does the non-personal

narrator stop being filtered through Gregor's point of view (Pascal 95).

Pascal sees the impersonal narrator as a necessary convenience in order to give bits of information--Gregor is a salesman--to narrate events after the death of the main character (99) and, in general, to confirm "the character's situation." Narrators function traditionally to relieve tension but, according to Pascal, in *Die Verwandlung*, the reader is freed from "the mediation of Gregor" and from metaphor. In other words, if this were a first-person narration, readers normally would identify with the main character. However, with Gregor's turning into a species of vermin, readers have more difficulty identifying with Gregor as narrator and with his situation. Readers have even more difficulty feeling sympathy. We are imprisoned in the text, but the impersonal narrator gives the reader breathing space which allows us to feel sympathy yet to make judgments about Gregor and his situation.

This is yet another paradox in the story, for the reader feels sympathy and, simultaneously, anger--"Say something, Gregor!" According to Pascal, the objectivity of the impersonal narrator informs readers that someone else, not Gregor, sees both Gregor's transformation as well as the

family's responses. The non-personal narrator from Gregor's point of view and the literal language leave no room for the reader to escape. We have no excuses. If we should say, "This is crazy. People do not turn into bugs," or "This is all a big metaphor or a horrible dream," then we step outside of Kafka's work and are no longer engaged in the reading process. Our being held by the narrative stance and the literal language while being repulsed by the content is the very source of the paradox of reading Kafka.

When language is inadequate to life, either a new language or a new life is needed. The work insists vehemently on life as Kafka perceived it. As a result, Kafka as writer creates and we as readers confront, are forced to confront, a new language. The literal use of language and the impersonal narrator are elements of the new language. But more to the source is that Kafka forces us to stare at "causes." He does this by having us concentrate on "effects": these are the absences which reveal what should be present. When we read *Die Verwandlung*, as numerous critics have noted, we begin with the climax. "Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt." ("As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself trans-

formed in his bed into a gigantic insect.) (6-7). This transformation into an "*ungeheurer Ungeziefer*," this monstrous bug, is one of the most famous in fiction outside of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. As we witness, inspect, and interrogate the effects, the facts as the impersonal narrator presents them, we are reconstructing causes. Gregor is alone. Gregor has no girlfriend, only a magazine photograph of a female. Gregor does not like his job. Gregor is the only one working in the family. Gregor metamorphosizes. In this case, finding causality means looking for and finding meaning, trying to reconstruct "why" these things happened. As we read forward, we read backwards.

This kind of construction can be described less as traditional plot and more as an image. According to John Hibberd,

Kafka represents and explores situations and problems in images, by analogy and imaginative exaggeration; by a curiously logical pursuit of relations between the concrete and the abstract, mental events and the external world. He takes metaphor literally and uses it to move from a picture of a condition to the generation of a story.

(12-13)

These are intriguing observations, the most intriguing being that Kafka takes "metaphor literally," an oxymoron in its own right. My earlier discussion explained how the paradox embodied in this statement can exist: that metaphor lives side-by-side with the literal language: that we enter the text through our literary tradition but then are forced to continue by the literalness of the language and our being caught up in trying to confirm reality. The presentation of effects as we try to reconstruct causes creates a reading paradigm which again splits our attention much as Djuna Barnes' oxymorons or paradoxes do.

Hibberd's emphasis on the "relations between the concrete and the abstract, mental events and the external world"--and here I shall add the relation between the story told and the form in which it is presented--lead us closer to the meaning of Spatial Form, as defined and refined in chapter three: Spatial Form in literature is determined, not by description or even primarily the slowing of time, but by reader's involvement engendered by a level of difficulty transcended not by the quantity of work but by a different quality of reading. It is a difficulty "which cannot be solved by the intellect but which holds its attention while higher faculty takes over . . . , thereby attaining a flash

of awareness beyond duality" (Humphreys 185). This difficulty is "thinking" paradox.

Where falls the literature of Modernism, the ontological difficulty in its spatial manifestation? If we put the koan and the parable under an "instructive" rubric, we are locking it within the "utile." However, if we recast the entire issue, if we reframe the purpose not in terms of ends or goals, but of means and purpose, then modernist literature has the very function of making us think differently. We are not looking at the product--what we have learned or what we think--but at the process--how we have learned it and how we were thinking. Paradox may express the ineffable for the author but, for the reader, we are experiencing the trace element, the gesture, of the ineffable. Within this atmosphere, the connection between modernist literature and the emergence of reader-response literature appears to have been inevitable.

Trying to explain a different function and process of thinking, a kind of thinking outside traditional experiences, without making it appear to be an exaggeration of what we already know is similar to trying to explain red to a blind person or the triumphant sadness of the second movement of Beethoven's 7th to a deaf person. The problem and

the difficulty involve people's attempts at forming a concept, through the tools of words or pictures, of something about which they have no prior experience. It is one thing to synthesize information, to imagine, to use creative abilities by recombining or integrating old information: this uses existing information or materials to create new forms. It is quite another to create new forms through new methods. For example, allusion in literature is common. Yet, when Eliot brings allusion to another realm with his collage technique, then we see new forms created with new methods. Paradox and contradiction, thinking about them and confronting them, brings readers into those uncharted depths.

Eastern philosophies and religions have far fewer problems appreciating or accepting the value and purpose of paradoxes and contradictions. Chinese Kung Fu, for example, is a martial art in which strength is based on softness, the end of one move is the beginning of the next, and yielding to an opponent's aggression is the premise of control. In fact, the whole concept of harmony and of balancing opposites is predicated on the principle of letting go of the need to control and to dominate, to take a position and to defend it logically.

Where Western thinkers want to resolve any either/or dilemma, Eastern-oriented thinkers strive for balance and harmony between opposites. Their parameters permit living without resolution. Our Western tradition began in this manner with the Stoics' emphasis on moderation and being in harmony with the world: Marcus Aurelius exemplifies such thinking. Despite the rich tradition of paradox in literature--from Cicero through Erasmus, Donne, Dryden, DeQuincey, Marvell, even Eliot, it is not a cornerstone of Western thinking. Paradox reveals an approach to knowledge beyond stretching boundaries, eradicating edges, reshaping the envelope of traditional thinking in contrast to following rules and rearranging givens. Paradox goes beyond even endurance. It requires a different kind of human constitution and thought to live with contradiction.

One response to contradiction is the either/or (see/saw) effect: "The sentence on the other side is true. The sentence on the other side is false. The sentence on the other side is true" . . . *ad infinitum*. The same occurs in *Die Verwandlung*: it is a metaphor; it is not a metaphor; it is . . . *ad infinitum*. Choice is available but not in the way we normally think of choice even in something as simple as, "Would you prefer vanilla or chocolate?" With

paradox, choice differs because the two elements are locked into each other as mirror opposites. With paradox, choosing one element--if choice were possible--does not reject the other. Each element defiantly escorts its opposite. Whether we choose one or the other, or choose not to choose, embracing neither, our Western tradition rarely considers embracing both.

Kafka's characters do not choose nor do they derive either peace or contentment from their passivity as do Eastern thinkers. Their acceptance of paradox brings them into the twilight zone. Kafka's characters are searching for a new way of dealing with disorder, the game of life without rules or with unfathomable rules, in a mind/body disassociation, because the old methods leave them in an abandoned state. Kafka's genius rests in his being able to communicate this disassociation not merely by telling us about it but by making us experience it through suffering the contradiction of language against content. For other cultures, the paradoxes and absurdities of existence are centuries old; for Western

culture, they seem to have been born at the turn of the century.¹⁷

The Eastern Yin/Yang image, ☯ half black and half white, symbolizes the unity of opposites. Yang represents sun, motion, upward, hot, male, hard, fire, sweet, angry; Yin represents moon, stillness, downward, cold, female, soft, water, sour, sad (19).

At any moment, the elusive quality of Yin or Yang can be discerned in everything that we experience. . . . The Yin/Yang theory is a model of the constant process of change. In this particular sense, Yin and Yang merely mark two points--at any one moment--in the transformation of energy. Nothing is fundamentally Yin or Yang in and of itself. Nothing exists in separation from the rest of the universe. Even if we could isolate anything, we couldn't prevent it from changing"

(Chuen 19)

We could no more think of only the yin half or only the yang

¹⁷ I wish to emphasize paradox in the literary tradition and individual writers' fascination with it is distinct from paradox as a given in the culture and philosophy as it is in Eastern thought.

half of the symbol than we could think of a chubby Barbie Doll or Ahab in EST. Even the existence of the symbol as a whole manifests a contradiction: it identifies the harmony the marriage of opposites while, simultaneously, not dismissing the individuality of each of the two elements, the yin and the yang. Paradox tests our ability to cope, to understand, to make meaning of the individual elements; it also challenges our ability to discern its existence as a unit. Kafka's paradoxes exhibit this inseparability. The rhetorical devices in Kafka's and Barnes' work stop the reading process. This is Spatial Form. It is also the start of the thinking process and the beginning of non-linear apprehension. Thus, Kafka's subject may be his alienation from life, but we read the alienation through his literal style. We experience it because the text alienates us.

The embodiment of contradictions, other than in works such as concrete poetry or art, is made more difficult by their verbal presentations because verbal language is linear and automatically precludes setting up the problem in a different structure which may help one to work with it. (The design of the problem determines the design of the solution.) By bouncing back and forth between the opposites--it

is literal; it is metaphoric--and between the whole versus the parts, the reader evades resolution. Meaning in the traditional sense or through traditional methods (the web of reason, the *logos*) is unavailable. Evading resolution, we saw earlier, also allows a person to avoid the responsibility for making a choice. The Eastern philosopher who chooses not to choose, to become one with the contradictions, differs greatly from the person who avoids choosing.

Reasons and causes are offshoots of verbal constructs. We do not find reasons and causes articulated even when we confront the visual arts. Causes differ from reasons. "Why were you late for the test?" may be answered in two ways. "My car would not start" qualifies as a cause; "I am afraid of exams," a reason. Car problems are physical; fear, psychological. Thus, causes are physical; reasons, psychological. Despite the physical and psychological element, both require the chain-link linearity of cause and effect. Interestingly, visual representations, and here we may include Spatial Form in literature, do not open up or lend themselves to rationalizations.

Reasons and causes are time bound to narratives and connected to historicity. As soon as a writer evades, removes, or ignores reasons and causes, she simultaneously ex-

tricates the literary work from the narrative, time bound elements. This a-historicity is further consummated by figurative language such as metaphor, difficulty as in Steiner's modes, or koans as with paradox. Kafka's literalness falls into this latter category.

Critics have often discussed the lack of the historical and of causality evident in the literature of Modernism. And, according to Wilhelm Worringer, the erasure of reason, in the chaos of the real world, thrusts the artist into the abstract which, in itself, is not connected to time. The diachronic collapses as the synchronic expands. Connectives and comparisons are yoked together across metaphors, across difficulties, and across paradoxes rather than by any causality. This description may allow readers to sense the shape of Spatial Form in fiction not because of the absence of historicity and narrative causality, but because of what replaces it. Ontological difficulties may take forms other than spatial. At this juncture, Gardner's varieties of intelligences begin to make sense as they take their place in the paradigm or approach to thinking about thinking. We also begin to realize how the logical/mathematical model of intelligence has invaded and pervaded our linguistic one.

When we confront paradox, we may be desensitized to the problem, we may have apprehended an answer non-rationally as in an epiphany or, in frustration, we may concede. In our resolution and judgmental grounded Western tradition, where thesis/antithesis/synthesis dominate our thinking processes, the idea of living without resolution is extremely alien, but possible. I am not suggesting living in frustration with the seesaw effect but resolving not to resolve, accepting the existence of contradiction, and relinquishing the desire to control it or having power over it. As long as we continue to search for reasons, asking "Why?," scouring biography for answers, certain works of Modernism will elude us. I am not asking for freedom to write or read New Wave gibberish, postmodernist ramblings, or drug-induced epiphanies. I am asking for freedom from the tyranny of reason which is product- or thesis- oriented in order to advantage the process or the "way" to knowledge. We need a Spatial Form of reading.

Kafka's work offers no contingent difficulties to readers unless readers are without a translation and have no knowledge of German.¹⁸ There is very little need to look up

¹⁸ For those interested, Gerhard Schepers has written a fascinating article, "Translating Kafka into Japanese."

words and allusions, even though critics have seen depths of allegory: the man before the law is a symbol of humanity knocking at the cosmic door of reason; Gregor is metamorphosed into a giant dung beetle which is a physical manifestation of his emotional existence. The literal language poses no problem.

However, Steiner's second category, the modal, does present problems to readers because they may find the behavior of the characters frustrating. The characters demonstrate a seemingly eternal patience and an infinite ability to wait through adversity and exhibit little rebellion. This emotional presentation of self contradicts their physical dilemmas. Readers may sense the martyrdom of the characters but feel no empathy, for the characters exhibit little rebellion.

The third category is Steiner's tactical. The aesthetics of language is the literal discourse of the unmediated object. The modal (sympathetic/content) and the tactical (aesthetic/form) difficulties seem to fold into each other. The desperate, traumatic moment, or even relating entire lives in calm, bureaucratic, almost clinical prose style conflate the modal and the tactical. It is the betrayal of language, a language which is terrified into a corner by re-

ality, stiffened, a language frozen into presenting what it is ill-equipped to represent. This is an ontological difficulty.

Difficult literature, in simplified terms, is difficult to read. We must recalibrate our thinking processes away from the linear, logical streams, as Martin Gardner would argue, into one of the other "intelligences." We have been defining and explaining difficult thinking as a harder, more intense, spatial intelligence, one which confronts and understands complexity. Barnes' or Proust's prose exemplifies the layering of difficulty, structural sentence elements embedded within one another. In Kafka, the difficulty is generated by the paradoxes, primarily of the locked polarity of content and form. At some point, the change of quantity--we might call this the degree of complexity--transforms into a change in quality--the kind of obstacle. The shift in the shape of thought is not merely a reconfiguration of how thought functions, but a new process which redirects the thoughts themselves. We find it difficult to think about thinking. Even more challenging is that we find it difficult to think about thinking when we cannot use words or pictures, sentences, or images. If I am used to verbalizing thoughts, linearity shapes my thinking process.

Imagine that you are reading my mind--and here we are in highly speculative territory--you may not be "reading" as is traditionally experienced. In other words, you may not be reading printed or written words on the page of my mind. Perhaps you may be reading pictures. However, these too would represent my experiences. The possibility exists that in mind reading, you might experience my feelings, the gestures of my thoughts, perhaps a more direct apprehension of what I am knowing *as well as how I am knowing*.

The ontological difficulty of paradox falls into this area. How reality exists for us or makes itself known to us seems greatly changed in spatial texts. Here I am talking about how writers perceive their worlds and transform these worlds into literature and, equally, how we as readers perceive literature and absorb it into our intellectual and psychological lives. The language and the reality are in constant battles whether because of cultural changes or because of linguistic ones.

"Gibs auf!": An Elliptical World

"Gibs auf!" is a fragment of writing that was found after Kafka's death. Politzer says that it is "simple enough" at first sight. "It does not make any extravagant demands

on the reader's sensitivity or imagination, nor does it lead to any staggering conclusions" (1). Politzer proceeds to analyze the fragment in an original and creative way as if he were responding to a Rorschach blot. Let us read this fragment, look at several of Politzer's interpretations, and then recontextualize it for the designs of this chapter.

Es war sehr früh am Morgen, die Strassen rein und leer, ich ging zum Bahnhof. Als ich eine Turmuhr mit meiner Uhr verglich, sah ich, dass schon viel später war, als ich geglaubt hatte, ich musste mich sehr beeilen, der Schrecken, über diese Entdeckung liess mich im Weg unsicher werden, ich kannte mich in dieser Stadt noch nicht sehr gut aus, glücklicherweise war ein Schutzmann in der Nähe, ich lief zu ihm und fragte ihm atemlos nach dem Weg. Er lächelte und sagte: 'Von mir willst Du den Weg erfahren?' 'Ja,' sagte ich, 'da ich ihn selbst nicht finden kann.' 'Gibs auf, gib's auf,' sagte er und wandte sich mit einem grossen Schwunge ab, so wie Leute, die mit ihrem Lachen allein sein wollen.

(It was very early in the morning, the streets clean and deserted, I was on my way to the rail-

road station. As I compared the tower clock with my watch I realized it was already much later than I had thought, I had to hurry, the shock of this discovery made me feel uncertain of the way, I was not very well acquainted with the town as yet, fortunately there was a policeman nearby, I ran to him and breathlessly asked him the way. He smiled and said: 'From me you want to learn the way?' 'Yes,' I said, 'since I cannot find it myself.' 'Give it up, give it up,' said he, and turned away with a great sweep, like someone who wants to be alone with his laughter. (as qtd in Politzer, 1)

Politzer's interpretations or suggested interpretations move far from the text and present an alternate universe at work behind the scenes. For example, he sees the character's comparing his watch with the clock tower as a sign that "he no longer believes in his personal time; without even the slightest hesitation he accepts the impersonal time as correct" (3). Politzer reads Kafka's "shock of uncertainty" as surrendering to "panicky haste" (3). Like the clock, the policeman "represents a system of order ruling the world outside" (5). Politzer associates the character of the "I" wanting to leave town because he was suffering "from acute

claustrophobia" and substantiates this claim on the grounds that Kafka was "a German Jew living in Prague, Czechoslovakia—a triple ghetto: the Jewish community was encircled by hostile Slavs, who in turn were hemmed in and held down by the Austrian bureaucracy that ruled the city . . . " (9).

Politzer's reading is typical of critical exegesis that reads literature through the lens of life. Problems arise with this at two basic levels. First, life is not art. Politzer himself implies this as he criticizes the misuse of "extraliterary raw material of personal confessions" (11). The creative process marches, limps, hallucinates through selecting and combining the bits, fragments, or chunks of life and metamorphosizes them into art. Even though the creative process reveals the parallels of life with art, the difficulty of the literature cannot be explained by the life: the difficulty must be examined in and through the art.

According to Politzer, "the psychological interpretation goes a long way in elucidating the origins from which Kafka's visions sprang, but fails to explain their horrible individuality . . . " (11). Second, each season brings new ideas to criticism and refashions the reader's perceptual fabric. The biographical and psychological dressing to this

interpretation seems to adorn the "Gibs auf!" fragment with more meaning than the original warrants.

Politzer argues that "ambiguity became the very essence of his [Kafka's] language" (15). As a result, Kafka could "straddle the two realms of his experience: the pseudomythical underworld of his childhood, where the father held sway, and the cryptoreligious universe of his poetic vision, where God reigned in perfect inaccessibility" (15). I agree with Politzer that Kafka avoids "discharging this tension tragically" (15). I disagree that Kafka allows it to burst upon the reader. In fact, it **seems** that the tension never dissipates, but when it does, it is with a whimper, not a bang. "Thus this tension betrays the inexpressible without expressing it" (15). Tension surfaces because paradox expresses the ineffable, a mind/body split which we so desperately want to reconnect.

Politzer invokes Wittgenstein's notion that the inexpressible "'shows itself'" (15). "The mystery of existence may appear but cannot be translated into the logic and grammar of coherent language" (15). This returns us to the descriptive, non-narrative elements of Spatial Form and to Kafka's gestural images. Further, Politzer notes that Kafka's narrative does not indulge in "self-explanatory" lan-

guage (17). Critics of Kafka's work, as with Barnes', have hinged arguments on the narrator's alleged inability to express what they intended and, by re-quoting the entire "Gibs auf" entry at the end of his essay, Politzer invites us just to read the text.

The policeman asking, "*Von mir willst Du den Weg erfahren?*" (From me you want to learn [to experience] the way?") and his response, "*Gibs auf*" ["Give up" or "Give it up"] to the "I" answering, "*Ja*" leaves readers perplexed. Because we are reading this first-person tale which seems like a narrative of a dream, we readers are seduced into the perspective of the "I." It is difficult not to sympathize with the narrator for, even as Politzer has pointed out, we have all been in similar situations, lost in a strange town and asking for directions. However, our seduction is also our abandonment of our own perspectives; suddenly, we are viewing Kafka's piece at a cosmic level colored by his biography--if we know it. If we do not, then the lack of logic makes us circle back to the text in order to "make sense" of the fragment. That it is a fragment does not seem to dissuade readers from attempting a reading with closure.

We do not need to look up any words or references. They are literal. Therefore, there is no difficulty at the

contingent level. We may find, however, that the estrangement or defamiliarization occurs at the modal level, at the level of sensibility. This modal difficulty has been elevated and metamorphosed because the work is short, because the policeman laughs, because leaving from a train station implies having arrived there, and because not being able to leave, move on, further suggests imprisonment. This reading engages our literary selves. We are reshifting our sensibilities to function on a universal level rather than at a personal one.

Upon closer examination, readers find a pattern of illogicality, a lack of continuity or rationality. This is the Kafka world, achieved by ellipses, blanks, and gaps. One of the most obvious ellipses is the entire sequence of events leading up to the first sentence of *Die Verwandlung*. In "Gibs auf," the first sentence demonstrates an ellipsis of a sort, not uncommon in German prose. Two complete clauses frame a central phrase.

Es war sehr früh am Morgen,

die Strassen rein und leer,

ich ging zum Bahnhof.

(It was early in the morning,

the streets clean and deserted.

I was on my way to the railroad station.)

One predicate in the framed or middle phrase--"the streets clean and deserted"--would change the phrase into a clause: "die Strassen waren rein und leer." With the predicate, three clauses are linked in succession; without the predicate, the middle phrase may be seen as an elliptical clause rather than a phrase. Readers may see the parts of this sentence functioning as an anacoluthon, that is, the shift of one construction to another ("You really ought to. . . oh, do it your way.") This broken sequencing of thought is a slippage. It also marks a reversal of the order of events: 1) early morning 2) traveling to the train station 3) noticing the clean and deserted streets.

The next few clauses are strung together "breathlessly." (In English grammar, this is considered a run-on or fused sentence.) Everything up to this point seems normal. As readers, we are caught up in the minor dilemma of being lost in a somewhat unfamiliar town. The more significant slippage of reality occurs with the policeman's answer to the narrator's question. Why would the policeman question the stranger's query? More important, "der Weg" (the way) itself becomes defamiliarized and cosmic. As a result,

we have filled in the ordinary meaning for the narrator: the "way" is the direction to the train station. The way for the policeman is a spiritual and existential journey. Our transformation of "the way" is yet another ellipsis which makes reality elusive, but our interpretation comforts us.¹⁹

When the policeman responds with "*Gibs auf, gibb auf*," "the way" is locked into an existential meaning and is locked out of the reality of getting directions to the train station. We make sense of the fragment by universalizing the particulars. The last line describes the policeman as someone who wants to be alone with his laughter. "*Gibs auf*" resounds in our ears. We return to these words in part so that we can make sense of the policeman's comment ("From me you want directions?"), but also because the policeman's turning away, in the narrator's point of view, to seek isolation with his laughter, turns us back to the words ringing in our ears.

It is true that the policeman's response seems odd: he has turned to be alone with his laughter. We think that laughter is normally better when shared; it is tears with

¹⁹ I am reminded of *The Twilight Zone* or *The Outer Limits* television shows wherein normal, very common, everyday events suddenly take a sharp turn into an unfamiliar world or a nightmare.

which we usually want to be alone. As evil laughter at the narrator's expense, perhaps, the policeman's turning away seems understandable. However, we must remember that the narrator, the "I," has planted the notion that the policeman prefers his solitary laughter and, therefore, it is the narrator's assumption and projection, not necessarily the policeman's reality.

Let us examine "*Gibs auf*" from another perspective. Imagine a Buddhist monastery in the last decade of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth century. A monk relates this tale to a disciple. This parable is not an irrational fragment but a *koan*, a paradox that cannot be understood or yield knowledge by reason or by linear logic, but by sudden apprehension. This is further reinforced by the spatiality of its form: the dead stop in which all the details accrue into a tableau.

Monks' laughter at disciples is not uncommon in the literature of Buddhist parables. The world is absurd. All our thoughts about the world are, in fact, narratives by which we try to construct meaning and coherence out of the random threads of life. That Kafka's characters refuse this responsibility or that they are ill-equipped to function at

this level does not change one's discourse about the universe.

I see Kafka's "*Gibs auf*" fragment through a different lens. The policeman is not evil, nor callous, nor mad. The difficulty of this piece is not a result of a world gone insane or of a "Kafka-esque" existence of man in relation to authority. It is a typical parable, a teaching tool, but not one common to the Western tradition. Why do we take it so seriously, or should I say, so Kafka-esquely? Not only does "the way" denote the route to the train station, it is a metaphor for or connotes "the path of life." The lesson which the policeman teaches the narrator, or rather forces him to experience, is that each individual must find or learn "the way" on his or her own: no one can show you the way which is right for your life.

Whitlark has connected Kafka's writings to Eastern thought and writings in "Kafka and the Taoist Sages." The author attempts to show that a number of "Taoist themes, such as fasting, patience, and the ineffability of ultimate reality are very similar to Kafka's" (32). That Whitlark makes comparisons seems sensible when one considers that Kafka worked with parables and aphorisms. Whitlark's case seems well made on the surface, but his connections seem

tenuous: specifically, he confirms through biography that Kafka knew of Lao Tzu's and Chuang Tzu's works. Whitlark's next step, demonstrating parallels to Kafka's works, turns on a single word or concept instead of deep structures. That word is "dream."

Whitlark discusses Chuang Tzu's famous Taoist parable: Chuang Tzu dreamed that he was a butterfly; when he woke up he wondered if he, Chuang Tzu had dreamed himself as a bug or, as a bug, he had dreamed of himself as Chuang Tzu.²⁰ Whitlark compares this to Gregor's metamorphosis in *Die Verwandlung*. Gregor awakens from a disturbing dream; so does Chaung Tzu. That the Kafka story ensconces itself in a completely different psychosocial realm, manifesting a pathological study of inertia--I am reminded here of *Oblomov*--does not seem to bother Whitlark. The two tales may begin with awakening from a dream but they proceed to diverge greatly. We should also not find it impossible to think of Kafka's work as both paradoxical and as metaphorical since the metaphor is largely responsible for creating the paradox.

²⁰ The original may be found in *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, Trans. Burton Watson. NY:Columbia UP, 1964, 45.

In addition, Whitlark asserts that "Kafka also found life dreamlike" (30). To prove the connection, Whitlark refers to the following anecdote about Kafka:

"Once while visiting his friend Max Brod, young Kafka awakened Brod's father, who was asleep on the couch. Instead of apologizing, Kafka gentle [sic] motioned him to relax, advanced the room on tiptoe, and said softly: 'Please—consider me a dream.'" (qtd in Whitlark, 30)

To see this as the reincarnation of the Chuang Tzu parable is also to force a comparison on the turn of a word. If anything, it demonstrates Kafka's incredibly intimate familiarity with the workings of dream states and a concern for Brod's father. I would argue that Kafka's interest in Eastern philosophy emanates from his fascination with the Eastern attraction to paradox both as a teaching tool and as a fact of life. The paradox is the aesthetic gesture, the trace. The metaphor is in the form, not the content.

Before I begin my analysis of *Die Verwandlung*, I wish to distinguish between reading "Gib's auf!" metaphorically as a *koan* and the struggle readers experience reading *Die Verwandlung*, that is, their urge to read metaphorically while the text denies that urge. Both works employ paradox

as their means of communication. Kafka has built into *Die Verwandlung* restrictions against reading it as allegory because the literal language constantly drags the reader back to a non-metaphorical reading. In "*Gibs Auf!*" those restrictions are not present: it is shorter and, whether or not we consider it a fragment, it functions as a parable. Even though we can read Kafka's novella as a parable also, we would be working with only one of its many levels, an easier one. If we confront the paradox of *Die Verwandlung*, we are obliged to read through a literary, ontological level. We find it difficult to read some of Kafka's works as we would parables, particularly Eastern Koans, because one major obstacle stands in the way: Kafka. His biography, his frustration, his repressed existence, the very myth of "Kafka-esque" blocks our reading his works on their own terms. His works are strangled by his life.

Die Verwandlung/The Metamorphosis: Final Notes

"The story does so many things, represents so many ideas and points of view, is allegorical, symbolic, as well as historical and sociological, that we would be mad to 'interpret' it." According to Karl, *Die Verwandlung* "refuses

interpretation," (263). And yet classroom discussion and critical publications continue trying to make sense of this work. The aesthetic elegance of Kafka's novella is that it is wrought with all the traditional literary devices, particularly symbolism. Simultaneously, it embodies non-traditional elements, that is, the paradox which creates Spatial Form. In this section, I wish to examine how some of the traditional elements in *Die Verwandlung* also embody paradox.

The essentials of the story are that Gregor is a traveling salesman who is working to pay off his parents' debts; Gregor hates his job, which is tedious and boring, and keeps him away from home although he is a conscientious worker; Gregor, his sister Grete, and his parents live in a large apartment of Gregor's choosing and apparently one larger than their needs (126-127). They have in their employ a cook and a maid although they are on a budget. No one else in the family works but Gregor; after his change, everyone is employed. Even in the essentials, paradox appears in the narration of plot.

The first section of the story opens with Gregor's awakening from "unruhigen Träumen" ("unsettling dreams") to find himself transformed. The narrator presents Gregor as a

passive recipient of this transformation. Yet, it is, simultaneously, an assault on his family, a punishment for and an escape from their parasitism. Sokel has also noted the paradox of Gregor's metamorphosis which

expresses a number of contradictory tendencies in the single image of the giant bug. Gregor's transformation gives shape to his wish to abandon responsibility as breadwinner and supporter of his family, and thereby returns Gregor's father to his former position as head of the household. At the same time, however, his metamorphosis embodies Gregor's opposite wish to avenge himself on his family's parasitism by turning parasite himself. In the former case the metamorphosis functions as submission; in the latter as aggression and rebellion. (8-9)

It is common to see Gregor's transformation as an escape as well as revenge although it is a revenge taken in a passive/aggressive way. This in itself is paradox: one behavior is both attack and withdrawal, offense and defense. His change offends his family by his huge size and by his bugness, but it also punishes his family because he is no longer able to support them. It is defensive, albeit non-conscious also,

because he is no longer suffering at his job and as his family's financial ballast. His physical change has no corresponding conscious transformation of spirit, mind, or character. He seems to become more human only because he seems less isolated from the family, but is he? He is in the home but equally as alienated. The first-time reader may deal with the slippages of reality by assuming this is a dream within a dream sequence or a metaphor, but these literary devices offer no long term aesthetic succor.

Gregor obsesses more about the fact that he can not get to work than he does about the fact that he now has a segmented hard body with numerous thin legs. From the beginning, readers are placed in the awkward position of having to adjust to the dichotomy between Gregor's change into a vermin and his response to it, a response which is both human (thought and speech) and inhuman (without feeling or at least avoidance of appropriate feelings). This is another slippage or defamiliarization with reality against which the reader attempts to construct meaning. The common specifics of the room (described in the second paragraph) bring the reader back to reality. This either/or, back and forth pattern continues incessantly: in the third paragraph of the novella, we find Gregor struggling to turn himself over, but

he can not. This is the reality of the vermin body, a reality with which the next paragraph in the story toys by allowing readers to think that Gregor is exhausted from his job and not thinking correctly; therefore, the change is not real--a dream or, perhaps, an hallucination.

Kafka presents Gregor calmly, with detailed descriptions of ordinary reality while we readers recognize that Gregor has been placed in profoundly extraordinary circumstances. The details of the ordinary are too close to our own existences to signal to us that we should read this work as parable, as myth, or as fable. We are familiar with salesmen, their sample cases, offices, photographs, trains, and clocks. Gregor is being intensely sensible, even responsible to worry about his position at work. On the other hand, we readers are appalled by this sensible reaction which denies the terror of his metamorphosis.²¹ The more details accrue reinforcing the non-metaphoric reality of Gregor's change, the more Gregor evades that reality by wor-

²¹ Late twentieth century science fiction has taken up this once mythical theme of metamorphosis, the violation of the body by alien entities (aliens substitute for animal forms). One terror occurs at the moment when the human realizes that the alien will consume him or her. This is one death. By far, however, a more terrible death is the one in which the alien takes over the body and the mind, yet the mind of the human is intact and aware of the invasion.

rying about his job. The truth of his vermin-ness imprisons him in a lie of non-consciousness. He escapes into the ultimate somaticization of his illness: the monstrous vermin. The physical enormity of his bug body does not quite register with readers because Gregor's psychological predicament eclipses it. It is mitigated further by the fact that the possibility still exists that this is a metaphor, a possibility reinforced by the second reference to waking up and restatements that "this was no dream" which, to trained readers, flags a case of "methinks he doth protest too much."

How does the language in Kafka's work reflect this inability to disentangle the conflation of cause and effect? Kafka's descriptions of Gregor's change anchor the change in the real world. The narrator's ability to perceive details, to be so very conscious of the physical reality, is inversely proportional to Gregor's inability to respond emotionally, to be unaware of the metaphor. This is the conflict of mind against body. Gregor's reality is his abysmal automaton life: this is the cause. He transforms into a bug, the metaphor for his life: this is the effect. The cause results from the mind's inability to be conscious of the horror of his existence both before and after his meta-

morphosis; this is in the story's content. The effect manifests itself in the split between what the body experiences and what the mind perceives, a split which we recognize through the literary form. This back and forth pattern wherein we read both the literal and the metaphorical is the lack of resolution inherent in paradox. The problem becomes more complicated because readers are acutely aware of the mind/body dichotomy.

What is not in the story shouts volumes. Neither Gregor nor his family disbelieves the transformation in spite of their being shocked by it. Their lack of doubt and the narrator's details further affirm the reality of the change, that it was no metaphor. The lack of disbelief also epitomizes their desperation to maintain the status quo but, most of all, it marks their madness.

It is important to discuss the family's lack of horror. The family represses one level of the horror: they are repulsed and disgusted but the real horror--the truth is he has changed into a monstrous dung beetle!--does not register with them. If it had, paradoxically, they would not see this "bug" as their son; their response would be more realistic. His family's repression of the horror and Gregor's own disavowal of it widens the distance between the charac-

ters and the readers. We readers are caught in the middle because we are appalled by the family's response. We are conscious of what they repress.

Some readers experience humor from this story. If they do, it tends to be of two kinds: as a result of disbelief or as comic relief. Readers either begin reading the work as a fairy tale, a reading which they cannot sustain to the end of the novella, or else readers laugh because they are uncomfortable from the despair. Karl, unlike other critics, emphasizes the horror of a human changing into a bug, an emphasis which results in shifting our focus back to the aesthetics of the text.

Readers struggle to understand Gregor and his family's responses to the horror. Because we are conscious of the horror that they deny, we respond in a way that feels safe: we frame and ensconce the story into a literary context. We fall back onto metaphor. As soon as we do this, however, we also realize the metaphor is not stable. We cannot continue to see it as a metaphor because the details of the story connecting it to reality continuously intrude. The small white spots on his belly, the change in his voice, all the legs waving, rocking back and forth to get out of bed, using his mandible to turn the door handle: such details affirm the re-

ality of his metamorphosis. Just as the reader is dragged back to the literary context by the metaphors, so too is the reader pulled back to its reality by the details. That the readers struggle with this paradox --literal or metaphor-- cannot be emphasized strongly enough because it addresses the difficulty we have in viewing Kafka's literal language while permitting a metaphoric reading. In fact, we can only make sense of the work when we read literal and metaphor simultaneously.

Another paradox occurs in the substance of the change. Kafka gives us a picture of Gregor as a hard worker, with little social life, so little that he has cut out a picture of a woman from a magazine and put it on his wall. As his mother expressed it, "Der Junge hat ja nichts im Kopf als das Geschäft" ("The boy thinks about nothing but his work") (22-23). Each of these existences, human and bug, embody a paradox. As a human, Gregor has few human contacts and an unemotional existence although he does admit, to some liaisons and flirtations while travelling as a salesman (92-93). Obviously, one does not need deep emotional intimacies for these kinds of relationships. Although Gregor is a bug, the human element begins to emerge in his longing to be part of the family at any cost. The operative words here are "at

any cost," for he sacrifices himself in an attempt to retrieve his humanity. Gregor hides in order not to frighten his sister or his mother; he is also interested in the family's activities and attempts listening through the door; and, of course, his sister's violin playing draws him out of his room. This mirrors his desire before the metamorphosis to be with the family and please them at any cost, that is, the price of a conscious human existence.

Gregor's room is at the center of the apartment, and yet he longs to escape it. It is both his prison and his refuge. He is at the hub of the family and, simultaneously, isolated from them:

Oder er scheute nicht die grosse Mühe, einen Sessel zum Fenster zu schieben, dann die Fensterbrüstung hinaufzukriechen und, in den Sessel gestemmt, sich ans Fenster zu lehnen, offenbar nur in irgendeiner Erinnerung an das Befreiende, das früher für ihn darin gelegen war, aus dem Fenster zu schauen.

Or he nerved himself to the great effort of pushing an armchair to the window, then crawled up over the window sill and, braced against the chair, leaned against the window panes, obviously

in some recollection of the sense of freedom that
looking out of a window always used to give him.

(62-63)

The backdrop of Gregor's longing for freedom is the fact that his family needs him to pay their debts to "the firm" for which his father had worked. Gregor never brings to his conscious mind the fact that his family used and manipulated him into the role of financial supporter. It would have driven him to a different madness than his denial of his "vermin-ness." Gregor sees his parents working or hears that they have saved money. However, these are just words whose significance and horror Gregor does not acknowledge. He locks the meaning out of words. The phrase "locks out" is too aggressive: rather, Gregor ignores the significance embodied in the words. If they had meaning, he would not be so passive. The anger is displaced: he is transformed into a bug; he punishes his family and himself.

Despite the seeming extravagances, when Gregor's thoughts turn to his family's predicament--at best they could only live for a year or two on the principal of money his father had saved from Gregor's salary--"he felt so hot with shame and grief" ("denn ihm war ganz heiss vor Beschämung and Trauer" (62-63). He has feelings of desper-

ately wanting to help his family even though his family has little to no contact with him before and after the change. Yes, his sister takes over the job of feeding him and cleaning his room but, when she enters, he hides to protect her from having to view him. By the third section of Kafka's story, Gregor feels occasional rage that his family is neglecting him. It is only the charwoman who is not only **not** repulsed but who treats him as a pet, calling him to her: "Komm mal herüber, alter Mistkäfer." / Come along, then, you old dung beetle!" (96-97). For this charwoman, Gregor was never originally Gregor nor did he ever metamorphose.

Of all the symbols--rooms, locks, food, music--the apples in the story seem most to function also as allusions. Adam and Eve in the Bible ate a fruit, traditionally an apple, from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As Kafka himself has said, "Sometimes I feel I understand the Fall of Man better than anyone." For Gregor, knowledge or truth would be devastating, that knowledge being that his family used him to live but gave little thought to his needs for, if they had, they too would have worked, moved to a smaller apartment, and not had hired help. A more devastating knowledge involves the fact that Gregor should be becoming more aware of his host role to his parasitic family, is un-

able to respond with appropriate feelings, that is, feelings which would preclude his metamorphosis and his death. Gregor is guilty of an indifference ("Gleichgültigkeit") which permitted his mind and body to separate.

Gregor does not "eat" the apple. His father throws apples at Gregor and one lodges in his back, symbolizing Gregor's receiving unwanted knowledge, particularly of his father's contempt for him. We see, in the apple-throwing scene, ending the second section, that his mother aligns herself with his father. Though begging for Gregor's life, his mother is "in complete union with him [her husband]" ("in gänzlicher Vereinigung mit ihm") (86-87). One by one, the people who seemed to mean something to him abandon him. In this scene, his mother forsakes him. After the violin scene, Grete abandons her brother when she refers to Gregor as "it" ("es"), rather than "he." Paradoxically, by the time Grete uses "it" to refer to Gregor, Gregor seems psychologically human although this view is replete with paradox. She separates the Gregor she knew from the "creature" ("Tier") with the logic that, were this really Gregor in this condition, he would have left of his own volition. This is an astounding paradox: Grete assumes that the animal, as Gregor, is capable of reasoning that his presence is

offensive to the family and, further, of reasoning that he should remove himself from their presence.

Gregor's death scene is the final paradox. Despite all the knowledge available from his circumstances, he is still alleging feelings for his family: "An seine Familie dachte er mit Rührung und Liebe zurück."/"He thought of his family with tenderness and love." (116-117). It is the final denial of his own life forces and the complete reversal of the entire narration which has revealed the family's manipulative and parasitic ways. We readers are conscious of Gregor's horrible predicament, both before and after his metamorphosis, but Gregor is not. Even at his death, Gregor refuses to recognize the horror of his family's behavior. At best, it reinforces his own guilt; it affirms his inability to accept that his family has treated him abominably.

As we read *Die Verwandlung*, our knowledge of the paradoxical situation increases in proportion to Gregor's denial. As I have shown, the story reveals the absences in Gregor's life by describing his activities in the present: we readers are acutely aware that the emptiness of Gregor's life, his isolation and lack of succor, are directly responsible for his condition. Many critics focus on the photograph of the woman whose hands disappear in the fur muff.

Equally as many critics have noted the parallel between her symbolically being devoured by an animal and Gregor's transformation into an animal (creature). Oddly, critics see Gregor's clinging to this picture as representing his clinging to his humanity. But it is only a photograph from a magazine and, in that fact, readers become painfully aware of the absence of significant, fulfilling human contact in Gregor's life. We attribute to Gregor one more circumstance contributing to his condition. In his indifference to knowledge and his rejection of it, he denies responsibility for his metamorphosis and his death.

Gregor's physical condition shortly before the violin scene is one of those descriptions frozen into a gesture into which we read meaning.

Er wunderte sich kaum darüber, dass er in letzter Zeit so wenig Rücksicht auf die andern nahm; früher war diese Rücksicht auf die andern nahm; früher war diese Rücksichtnahme sein Stolz gewesen. Und dabei hätte er gerade jetzt mehr Grund gehabt, sich zu verstecken, denn infolge des Staubes, der in seinem Zimmer überall lag und bei der kleinsten Bewegung umherflog, war auch er ganz staubbedeckt; Fäden, Haare, Speiseüberreste

schleppte er auf seinem Rücken und an den Seiten mit sich herum; seine Gleichgültigkeit gegen alles war viel zu gross, als dass er sich, wie früher mehrmals während des Tages, auf den Rücken gelegt und am Teppich gescheuert hätte. Und trotz dieses Zustandes hatte er keine Scheu, ein Stück auf dem makellosen Fussboden des Wohnzimmers vorzurücken.

(104)

He felt hardly any surprise at his growing lack of consideration for others; there had been a time when he prided himself on being considerate. And yet just on this occasion he had more reason than ever to hide himself, since owing to the amount of dust which lay thick in his room and rose into the air at the slightest movement, he too was covered with dust; fluff and hair and remnants of food trailed with him, caught on his back and along his sides; his indifference to everything was much too great for him to turn on his back and scrape himself clean on the carpet, as once he had done several times a day. And in spite of his condition, no shame deterred him from advancing a little over the spotless floor of the living room.

This is the one scene in which Gregor places his desires-- that is, to hear Grete play the violin--above those of his family or their boarders. For this, he must die. He has ceased to be a host for his parasitic family. And, in some ways, this is his most human moment: for this, he is punished with death.

Once he does emerge, the response by the boarders is initially one of amusement and then of anger: ". . . diese gar nicht aufgeregt waren und Gregor sie mehr als das Violin spiel zu unterhalten schien" (108) (" . . . they were not at all agitated and apparently found Gregor more entertaining than the violin playing) (109). They, like the charwoman, were unaware of this vermin's existence as Gregor.

The image of Gregor is devastating. His body is dust-covered, with food trailing behind him. The apple has rotted in his back, as has his wound. His escape, looking out the window, is denied him by his loss of sight which, in itself, can be interpreted as denying himself insight into his situation. Gregor's denial of his human self-worth is the ultimate denial: the denial of life itself. He is pathetic, the ultimate victim at his own "hands."

One final note on the ending of *Die Verwandlung*. After Gregor dies, the family leaves the apartment and takes the

tram to the countryside. Mr. and Mrs. Samsa become aware of their daughter's vivacity and womanliness.

Stiller werdend und fast unbewusst durch Blicke sich verständigend, dachten sie daran, dass es nun Zeit sein werde, auch einen braven Mann für sie zu suchen. Und es war ihnen wie eine Bestätigung ihrer neuen Träume und guten Absichten, als am Ziele ihrer Fahrt die Tochter als erste sich erhob und ihren jungen Körper dehnte.

They grew quieter and half unconsciously exchanged glances of complete agreement, having come to the conclusion that it would soon be time to find a good husband for her. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their young daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body. (126-127)

Although most critics see this as the beginning of a new life, I would dispute such a reading. Given the parasitic past of Gregor's father and mother, the youthful bloom which Grete's parents perceive is, for them, Grete's entry into marriage and, therefore, another source of sustenance for them. The extreme measures which forced them into independ-

ence, if one could call it that, are not likely to be duplicated. Gray supports this reading, that Gregor's parents had "their minds half-fixed on what advantages a suitor may bring" (67).

As readers we are immersed in the experience as well as removed from it by the objectivity of description which allows us to relive the experience with no emotional interference. This in itself is contradictory, for we have just read a tragedy of a man's self-deception and the total lack of solace from anyone near him. One of the great assumptions about *Die Verwandlung* is that Gregor is spiritually starved: he receives no love from his family. We are intensely aware of the emptiness of the human circle and this makes our reading of both Gregor's metamorphosis and death even more paradoxical. Whence comes our discomfiture in reading Kafka's novella? I have argued that the separation of content and form, mirroring the body/mind split, creates the major paradox of our reading experience. Parallel to this is Hibberd's argument that "the nightmarish horror of the situation is graphically captured not least by the registering of the disconnection [paradox?] between mind and limbs" (15). The body is changed; the mind has not. The body accepts; the mind has not.

E.H. Lockeridge has summed it up well: "The divorce between reality and meaning is the divorce between thought and action, mind and body" (72).

CONCLUSION

My intention in this study has been to explore the difficulty particular to Modernism through the works of Djuna Barnes and Franz Kafka against a background of other modernists. I have redefined Frank's Spatial Form in light of George Steiner's classifications of difficulty because both of their works open the door to address how readers deal with paradox. Paradox is the shape of Spatial Form in the literature and, equally as important, paradox demands spatial thinking. Discussing the shape of the literature and the shape of the thinking must remain distinct but related factors.

Even though the notions of visual and spatial intersect, they are not identical. Likewise, spatial does not exclude the verbal. Wrenching language from its primary linear "verbal" uses, stimulates a reader's thinking processes. Various techniques of rhetoric, semantics, and syntax "defamiliarize" language and make our reading more difficult. With literature defined as Spatial Form, the quantity of defamiliarization has increased exponentially and metamorphosed into a different quality. As a result,

the ontological difficulty in modernist literature never resolves; it always remains difficult.

This study has shown that paradox is the source of Spatial Form, causing difficulty, which readers experience through spatial thinking. The first paradox is that language stimulates a visual apprehension not by the descriptive powers of language, nor by the lack of narrative continuity or plot linearity, both of which are evident in modernist texts, but by forcing readers to deal with the contradictions in the text. In *Nightwood*, oxymoron and the overwhelming use of metaphors create much of the fragmentation. In *Die Verwandlung*, we sense the fragmentation between the subject matter and the form of the narrative. We superimpose images of the described life against what occurred before the climax of the opening lines. We also read Gregor's story against what Gregor denies but of what we readers are conscious.

Works with any of these contradictory and, hence, fragmented structures demand that the reader yoke together the elements in order to assemble and construct meaning. Spatial Form readers are similar to visual artists who can look at five objects in five different rooms, combine them in their mind's eye, and create a meaningful work from them.

When we read spatially, we also reassemble and recombine. We conflate the multiplicity of images onto a single screen in the mind's eye even when those images are concepts or abstractions. Even the leap from literal to figurative is spatial since our minds build their own bridges to make sense of the figures.

We move ideas and images like pieces on a chessboard; we experience the visceral tension of paradox. This is the reader's space for reading. It is those openings in our thoughts where we allow the process of thinking, not remembering, to occur. With traditional linear works, there is no room for the process to take place because one thought or image is knitted to the next more clearly and sequentially. The opening suggests the three-dimensional aspect, a quality that gives space to our thoughts. It is also the criterion for deciding that the activity is spatial rather than visual.

The space for thinking in Spatial Form does not necessarily erase time; it erases the traditional and historical plot structures within the work. Connections are not in the shape of the narrative. Readers must do the work of assembling and superimposing, connecting and inferring: it is how we make meaning from the disconnected pieces of the work.

Further, the meaning we make, the sense we find, or the experience we have is of a particular kind. Since we do not resolve paradox traditionally through the Western either/or paradigm, the struggle with paradox pushes us to another kind of knowledge through a different process of knowing. This I have compared to Eastern *koans*.

The "mind's eye," by manipulating the shape of paradox, also opens up the space, the dimensionality of reading, reminiscent of Hall's philosophic reading. I am not suggesting that the content of Spatial Form literature may be compared with philosophy. I am, however, arguing that readers process literature and philosophy spatially.

The difficulty in language's being wrenched away from its primary use results in our having to work with language against tradition, against logic, against linearity, against commonality, against communication. If we are assembling the elements presented to us in the text, we are still in the process stage: we do not receive the literature as a product and respond to it but construct the literature in the act of reading. When we focus on the rhetorical modes which create paradox, we are occupied with the materials of writing, the medium itself. As we are deeply in the midst of experience, we are not conscious of time.

Critics have accused modernist writers of composing works that are elitist. I agree with those critics who judge modernist works elitist. However, I disagree with their definition of elitism. Literary elitism assumes that, with proper and sufficient education, readers can acquire enough information--whether historical, cultural, literary, or rhetorical--to understand a difficult or elitist work. With this kind of learning, the argument asserts, readers will have far fewer difficulties understanding works such *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses*, *Nightwood*, and *Die Verwandlung*. While it is true that a classical education helps readers deal with literature in general and the works of Modernism on some levels, it does not help surmount or resolve paradox: the difficulty which never ceases being difficult.

In addition, the elitist objection addresses only the first three of Steiner's categories of difficulty. The contingent difficulty requires a reader to look up unknown words and allusions. However, modernist literature is not the only literature manifesting difficulty because a reader does not know allusions or unknown words. Medieval or Renaissance works, for example, often present such problems.

In the second or modal category, the feelings, attitudes, concepts, behaviors, or perceptions presented in al-

legedly elitist texts are foreign to the reader's disposition and mind set. "These are snobby books with snobby thoughts and feelings. Such *Weltanschauungs* are alien to me. I cannot adjust my sensitivities to appreciate these works." Audiences survive modal difficulties depending on their ability to loosen their taut/taught perceptual fabric and be willing to experience emotional, social, cultural, and intellectual differences. A person's ability to adjust sensitivities is a learned response, a conditioned attitude. They are less a product of an academic education and more one of a psychological kind. The modal, like the contingent category, also pertains to works that are not modernist or elitist. Constant's *Adolphe* or Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* baffle contemporary readers who find it difficult to accept the protagonists' obsessive love. Modal difficulties are not the deciding factors for judging a work as modernist.

Steiner's tactical category seems more conclusive for defining the difficulty of modernist texts. This difficulty involves the disruption of traditional rhetorical and semantic forms in order to defamiliarize, as Shklovsky termed it, the materials that stimulate the reader's consciousness. We may consider this difficulty as elitist only insofar as the

reader needs specialized literary backgrounds. Otherwise, readers will perceive the defamiliarization not as a literary device but as a source of boredom or incoherence. There is no apology here. Every professional--critic, chef, actor, artist, athlete--develops and evolves more difficult forms to challenge abilities and appreciate more complexity in each field.

There is one caveat to this point of view: experimental forms often, not always, trickle down into popular culture. I would agree with this with two qualifications: the popular culture accepts radical innovation when the innovation is on a small scale, perhaps only a part of a work and when it is diluted in the work. In this way, the non-expert can figure out the "smaller" version or simply dismiss it with no detriment to the understanding of the entire work. I mentioned in an earlier chapter the conversation in Alfred Bester's science fiction novel *The Demolished Man* which was presented in a shape similar to concrete poetry. Even the rearrangement of typology from concrete poetry now appears in advertising. This is one small innovation easily dismissed or easily digested with no ensuing necessary consciousness-raising.

If Modernism does claim elitism as its purview, then it is through the ontological difficulty that it is possible to do so. At this point, the change in the quantity of difficulty results in a change in the quality. Barnes' use of convergence, an overwhelming number of metaphors and, above all, oxymorons create Spatial Form in *Nightwood*. The contradiction between horrific content and non-emotional form creates the Spatial Form in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*. Paradox is what causes us to resort to reading spatially because paradox dislodges language from its primary linear use and opens up a space for us to work at building and shaping sense. On a small scale, paradox is not an unusual occurrence in fiction. However, when it predominates as the main shape or gestalt of a work, it forces readers to confront it as an integral literary element.

It is possible to argue that paradox requires a special kind of intelligence. Gardner has written about spatial intelligence, one which seems to come through the writer into the work and is appreciated by a reader from the same sphere: a visual mind in a verbal medium rewiring language in an interdisciplinary territory. Readers do not resolve difficulty but apprehend or appreciate it through non-traditional thinking processes.

Gardner points out that some people are proficient or even exceptional in more than one area. To cross categories and to work with two intelligences together demonstrate an able and creative intelligence. Thus, the cross of verbal and spatial to create Spatial Form results in an unusual aesthetic effort on the writer's part in composing and on the reader's for understanding the work. What Gardner's generally-accepted theory offers to us is a clearer picture of spatial thinking not so much confined to the visual arts but as a kind of problem solving strategy which can be exercised beyond the fine arts. This is valuable especially when we consider that the ontological difficulty has built into it the idea of an inability to communicate and spatial thinking addresses this and helps us to become aware of the limitations of linearity in language. The ontological difficulty also shares with existentialism the idea that the individual suffers a loss of meaning that shifts the burden and responsibility of establishing meaning to the individual consciousness.

Finally, as I have been suggesting, the interdisciplinary nature of Spatial Form literature coincides with problem solving cognitive functions. Once we make the distinction between the existence of Spatial Form in the literature

and spatial thinking in the reader, then the problem begins to unravel its knottiness. Paradox itself is not Spatial Form but it is interpreted through Spatial Form thinking which, in itself, parallels or conflates with abstract problem solving. The kinds of readers who appreciate Spatial Form literature is a special group but no more or less elitist than readers who love mystery novels, science fiction, or medieval romances. Each has an audience with a mind attuned to a specific form. Spatial Form literature may be seen as a subgenre since it too has a specific structure, primarily the shape of paradox.

Of what value is my argument for an ontological reading of the literature of Modernism? What does the scholar, the teacher, or the student do with this new paradigm? Working with ontological difficulties or interdisciplinary thinking (multiple intelligences) means that we need other strategies for unraveling what language attempts to express. One strategy involves being aware of the spatial intelligence, where awareness is entrance into its functioning. Another strategy involves the experiential crisis of existentialism; we learn by directly confronting the paradoxes. A third strategy takes the form of letting go of our preconceived notions of what literature should do and should be or ways

in which literature should function and what purpose literature should have. In essence, we recontextualize the question "What is the function of literature?"

Can spatial thinking, specifically, be taught? Some thinkers have approached the problem head on such as Edward deBono in *Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step*. Others, such as Betty Edwards' *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, have approached this problem through their discipline.

Looking at Gardner's research offers us a paradigm of kinds of intelligences. What we have not addressed directly is the concept of degree in intelligence. Intellectual growth moves from concrete to abstract, from knowledge of the Self to knowledge of the Other, even the self as Other in Lacan's mirrored self. This continues in increasingly concentric circles: self, other, family, society, world. To maintain one's sense of self within these increasingly foreign domains is part of the maturation process. Even the words "family," "society," and "world" increase in abstraction. Can we experience "world" other than in fragments and often as abstract?

A reader who struggles with the abstract is one whose mind is capable of creative or problem solving mental opera-

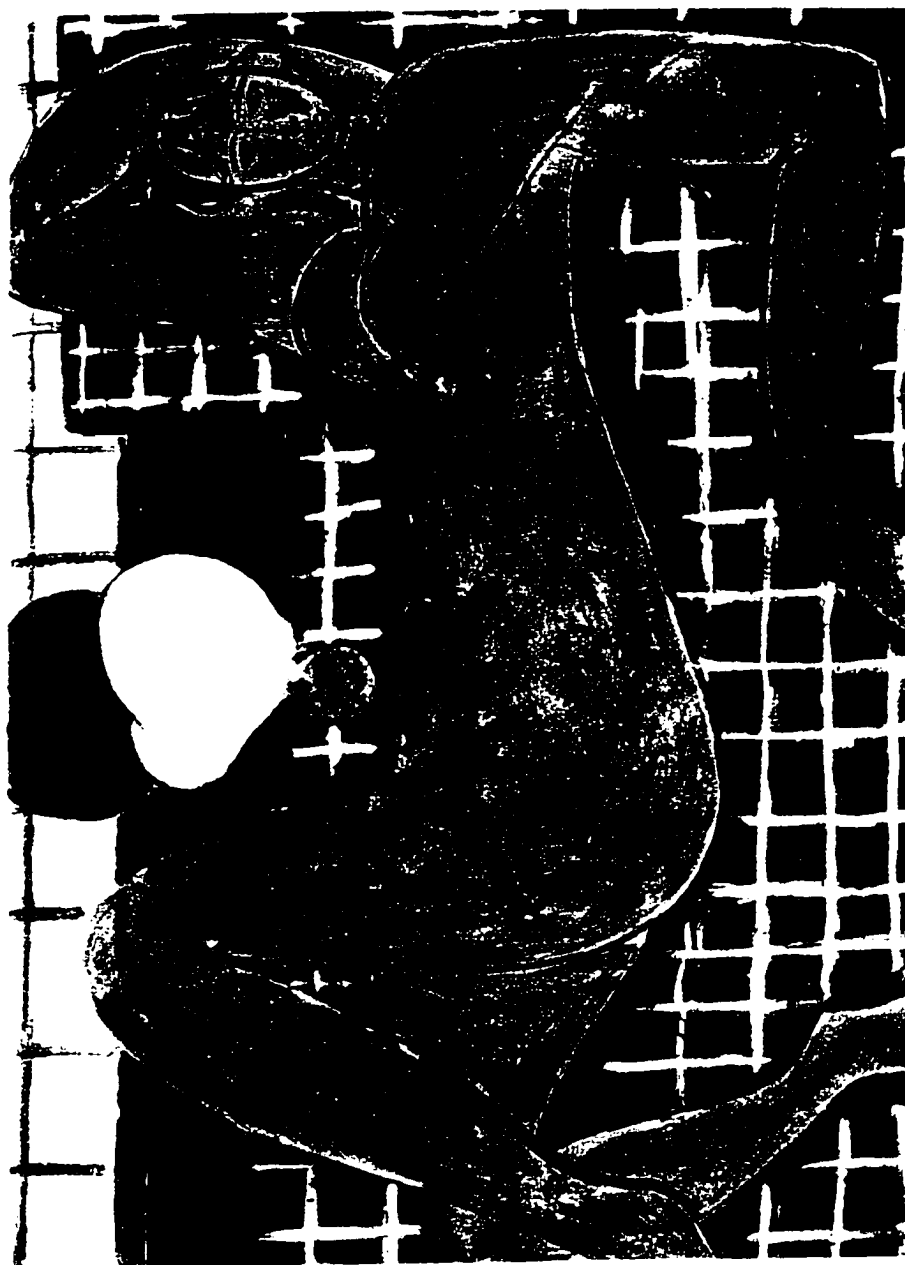
tions. If kinds of intelligences are mapped on the horizontal and degrees of intelligences are mapped on the vertical, we get a clearer picture of my argument. For the sake of the argument, we democratize Gardner's intelligences, giving them equal importance, then we are less likely to feel that expertise in reading difficult works is elitist. We can all walk but we are not all Fred Astaire or Judith Jamison. We can all doodle, but we are not da Vinci or Picasso. We can all talk and use our voices, but we are not Barbra Streisand or Caruso. Why should reading hold to different criteria of evaluation? Paradox in modernist literature values readers who have a problem solving facility.

The major obstacle in this study has been that I have examined Spatial Form in literature and "spatial thinking" processes by using the linear medium of language in a traditional argumentative mode of discourse. That I analyze spatial forms through linear techniques is itself paradoxical. My main argument has been that paradox in a variety of forms creates the insolubility of the ontological difficulty. Paradox is the source of the spatial both in the form and in the reader's thinking. As Benjamin Franklin said: "Our limited perspective, our hopes and fears become our measure of life, and when circumstances don't fit our ideas, they

become our difficulties." It would be an aesthetic tragedy if we allowed our limited perspectives to deny us the rewards locked in the difficulties in the literature of Modernism.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I



Henri Matisse. *Pink Nude*.
Baltimore Museum of Art (Cone Collection), Baltimore.



Eyck, Jan van. *The Arnolfini Portrait*.
The National Gallery, London.

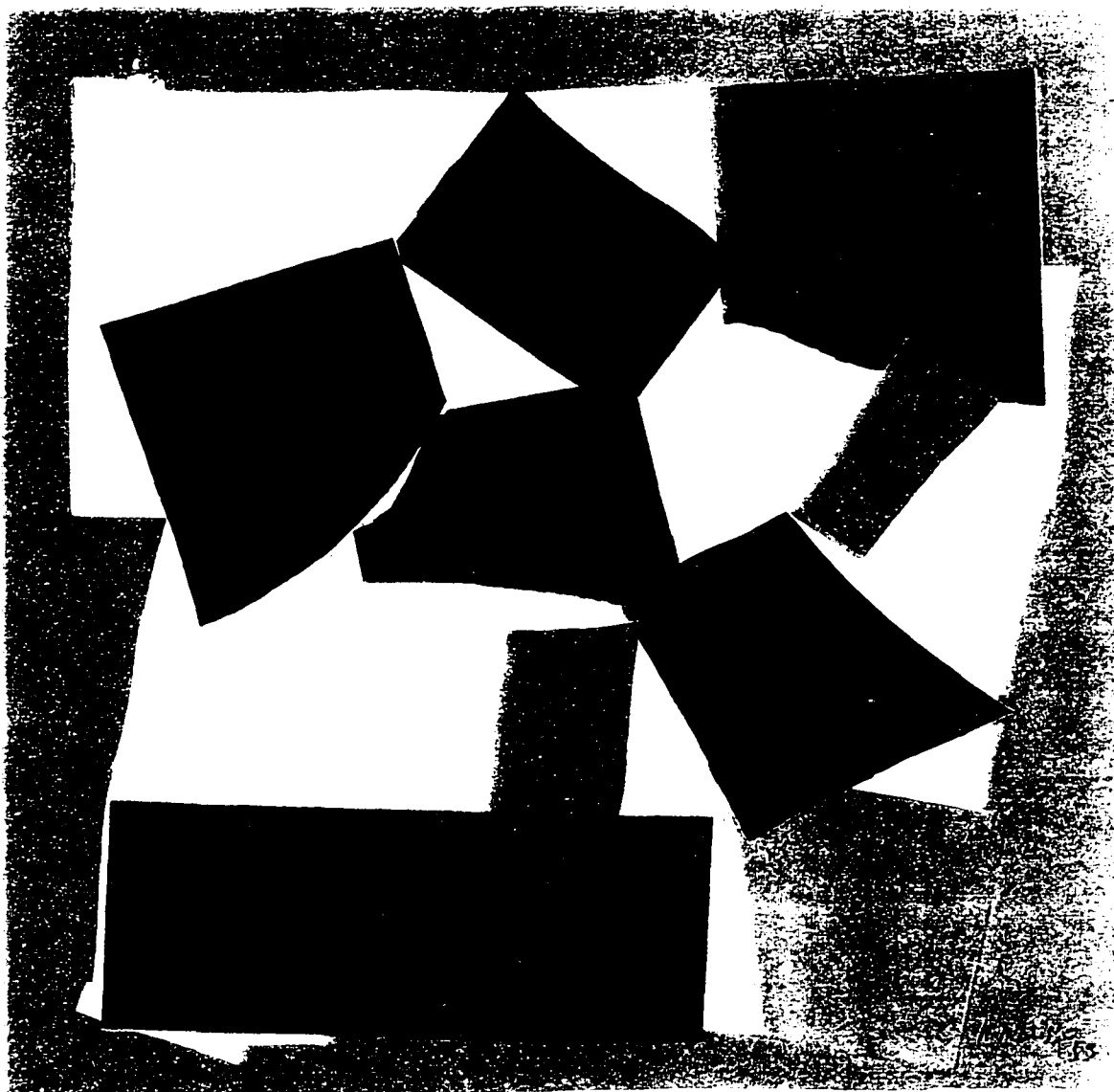
APPENDIX III



Picasso, Pablo. Guernica.
Prado Museum, Madrid.



Jackson Pollock. #5.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Henri Matisse. *The Snail*.
The Tate Gallery, London.

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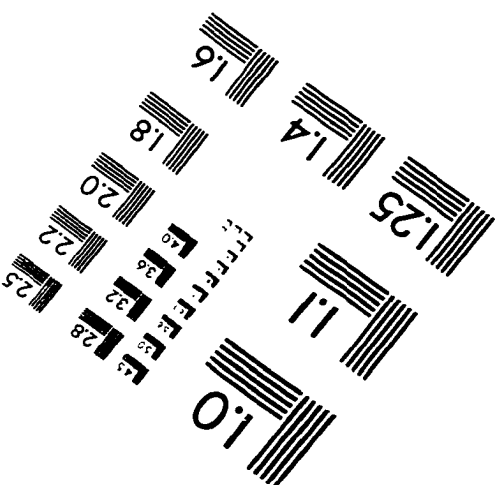
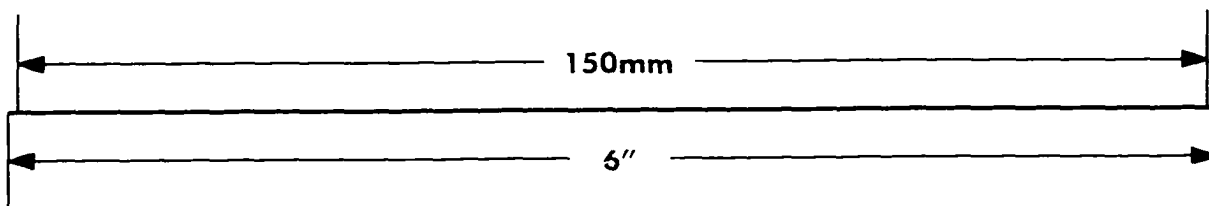
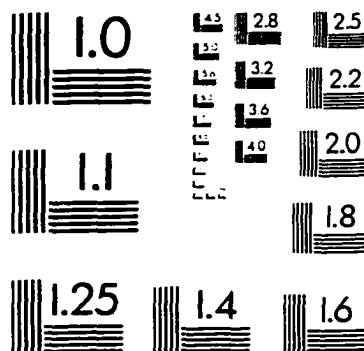
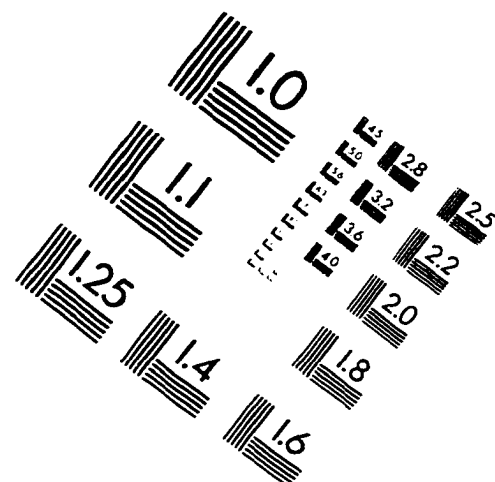
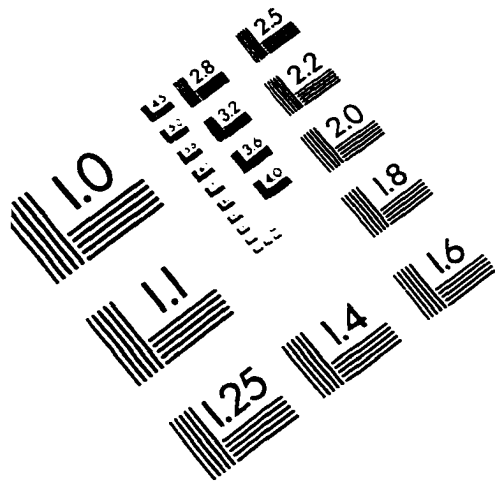
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