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# Writings on Visual Art and Literature



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## visual art

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# 1

## placing expressionism in modern art

The purported theory and philosophy behind Expressionism varied widely between Van Gogh's death in 1890 and the pronouncement of the death of Expressionism by Wilhelm Worringer in 1920. Often its intents and purposes were deeply entrenched in political and social circumstances while at other times they resided more deeply in abstract aesthetic philosophy. In a certain sense, Expressionism actually had no intent or purpose which could be related to a common program or to any collective group or journal. It was, rather, a retrospective, always something looked back upon and described or something already taking place which could still be perceived. Understanding any one of Expressionism's moments gave little license for predicting those that would follow after.

Part of what was Expressionism's early intent was to react politically and socially to the circumstances of the time. The buying and creating of art in the 1890's was dominated by the middle class. "Bourgeois realism" placed the concern of subject matter with the life of and around the middle class artist. The work and interests of many artists began to turn away from such middle class institutions. As artists collected and formed support groups and experimented with such groups, their revolutionary strengths grew. They were able to sustain their turn from tradition largely by their strength in numbers. Many of the artists' groups that formed, like the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* had, as fundamental to their manifestos, some provision for mutual support, organization, and encouragement. The notion of "unified strength" and "opportunity" through group effort as it appears in the well known *Letter* of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* was indeed a unifying spirit of the Expressionist movement.

Another important intent of Expressionism was to make a reaction against the 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition of Realism in art. The departure that Van Gogh's works make from Realism is exemplary of this taste. His series of self-portraits or his "Potato Eaters" take Realist themes and endow them with a more self-reflective interiority, reminiscent of



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Romanticism and its notions of personal presence and emotion. Van Gogh began a movement which extended from Realism toward some sense of identity between self and art. He raised the possibility that self-perception may be the only means of communication. Such is the spirit — and tradition, to some extent, of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* letter which gives attention to the identification with an "inner world."

Edvard Munch prefigured that same "inner world" and its concerns by departing further from Realism and explicit Romanticism and focusing on the problems of recreating interior emotional states. The ideas of the artist "who receives impressions from the exterior world, from nature," as suggested in the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* letter became a key figure in Munch's ideology. Munch was interested in the symbolic (and otherly) transformation of colors as well as that of form and shape. His shifting of form and content were attempts at reconciling the forces and manifestations of nature, of the exterior with the emotional and psychological content of an interior reality.

Hence, in that early period of Expressionism, both of the qualities described in the *Letter* of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* are apparent. The Realist tradition brings a concern for the exterior, for the actual view of shapes and objects which can then be charged with the personal, the interior, and the emotional by some deference to the Romantic tradition. What is more, the Romantic holds high the concern for nature and its influence on emotion. This connection or tension between the interior or psychological and the exterior, "natural" state of matter remained strong both before and after the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* appeal of 1909.

Another important contribution to the Expressionist movement (and the definition of its intents and purposes) was made by the formation and life of the artists' group *Die Brücke* beginning in 1905. Its manifesto and activities in many ways prefigured the statement of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung*. The manifesto of *Die Brücke* (written by Ernst Kirchner in 1906) stressed again the importance of the notion of unity and in that unity a freedom from the physical and spiritual bounds of tradition. Also like the *Künstlervereinigung*, it appealed to the "creative force that is within [the artist]." In accordance with this concern for the interior and the politically and socially revolutionary aims of other groups (including the *Neue Künstlervereinigung*) *Die Brücke* works often represented human forms in relation to psychological, political, and social realities.

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*Die Brücke* was deeply invested in *Jugendstil* as its four founders Kirchner, Schmidt-Rottluf, Heckel, and Bleyl were quite influenced by the revolutionary stylistic movements as young architecture students. *Jugendstil* and Expressionism were manifestations of "youthful force and freshness." That sense of the new and of the young remained with the *Neu Künstlervereinigung* in spirit and literally in the form of its name. Each new artists' group, it would seem, took a name and a posture that would either split from its past and its tradition or project into its future through the notion of youth (or through the image of the "bridge" into the future.)

The artists of *Die Brücke* also looked to nature in an attempt to understand its essence in relation to the psychological and emotional states which they experienced with regard to it. They appealed to and tried to work toward an understanding of the "instinctive" in humans. That is, the intrinsic understanding of the rapport of human emotion and psychology with that of nature. This search for the human-nature rapport resembles quite closely the articulation of the idea of "artistic synthesis" of the interior and exterior found in the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* letter. The artists of *Die Brücke* appealed to the "ecstatic expression of personal symbolism" which they saw in Van Gogh's work — a key influence which ran through the entire history of Expressionism. The human figure was representationally important largely by way of its link to the sources and impulses of nature — many of the ideas which were coincident with the aims and intentions of the German youth movement and nudist cult. Kirchner himself always drew impressions from the external world and then brought his own personal feelings and experience into play with a given work (so he wrote.) He worked toward a vision of the importance of "a synthesis of careful observation of nature and free expression of the imagination" — a virtual paraphrase of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* statement.

Oskar Kokoschka and the *Vienna Secession* of 1897 also took up many of these concerns. The erotic, the impassioned, and the violent all functioned in many ways as liberators of the interior world of impressions. Wassily Kandinsky carried his own concerns for the intuitive personal experiences and impression to his turn-of-the-century formation of the artists' club *Phalanx*. The group had in common with the *Künstlervereinigung* the concern for unifying young talent and "overcoming the difficulties which young artists encounter" The *Phalanx*



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went a long way in getting such work exhibited. Much of that work formed the *Jugendstil* context, attempting to focus on colorful and symbolic emotional painting. Kandinsky regularly used landscape and urban scenes to stage his strongly colored emotional settings and work toward the fusion that the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* letter describes.

Finally in 1909, many members of the *Munich Secession* who disliked its conservative exhibition policies, resigned to form the *Neue Künstlervereinigung*. They included Kandinsky, Jawlensky, Werefkina, Kübin, Munter, Kanoldt, and Erbslöh. The reasons for their departure from the *Munich Secession* and the formation of the new group comprise only part of their announcement letter. Largely, the notion that young, progressive artists must have encouragement and free exhibition policies went wanting. The *Munich Secession* simply no longer supplied this.

The story of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* was, then, a story of the artistic desires for expression voiced by these seven artists (and led by Kandinsky) against the artistic status quo. The history of Expressionism is (aside from the purely aesthetic theory) a history of artists turning away from the old and looking to find more freedom, more breadth of form, and more expression. The artists of the N.K, and their intents were hardly different in this respect from those of past groups or from those who followed thereafter.

It is very difficult to actually find any unifying element in the work of the artists of this group except for their common opposition to the main-stream Munich art scene. Kandinsky's "Improvisation No. 31" pushed further his move toward the abstract in expressionism. The illusionist spaces of his earlier works are progressively abandoned in favor of abstract planes of advancing color. Shapes of trees, hills, and clouds which in earlier works were recognizable, now became more complex unifications of color. His "Composition No. 211" of 1910 further reduces objective content. Natural objects are gone while rhythms and movements of colors take up the role of content. The same ideas appear in "Improvisation No. 12 — the Rider," wherein extraneous detail is virtually eliminated. Colors, shapes, and contrasts combine to form a single image as expression of the "subjective world of personal experience."

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Jawlensky studied in the Russian realist school and brought his own semi-realistic style to bear on his *Jugendstil* influence. Like Kandinsky, Jawlensky's work puts great emphasis on color and contrast though is more bound to *Jugendstil's* spatial relations of black and white than is Kandinsky.

Kübin contrasts from these two in that he has little concern for the interrelating color forms that interest them. His interests were more attuned to the possibilities of a linear form. His "Crushing" and "Mme la Decadence" both show an interaction of this distortion and the dream-like images that it evokes.

Kanoldt's concern, unlike the others, was in delineating the structures of the world both interior and exterior. Influenced by Seurat's pointillism, he expanded the technique into broader color applications though maintaining the desire to understand the underlying frameworks of spatial and color relations.

The repetitive shapes of trees, people, and surroundings in Erblöh's "Tennis Court" emphasizes his belief in the deep resonance of color and light/dark contrasts. He was clearly influenced by the other early members of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* though his concern with "structural buildup" related him most closely to Kanoldt.

Later members of the group included Hofer who asserted his own theories on composition and structure in his work with nudes, Baum who brought his tradition of the dark palette to post-impressionist visions of landscape, and Kögan whose primary interests were sculpture and the possibilities of plastic stylizing through expressionistic forms. As the group continued to grow through 1910 it added the Frenchmen Girieud and Le Fauconnier. If nothing also, their addition gave fuel to the common criticism that the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* was not at all a Munich group. In any case, as the group grew and expanded range, it became exceedingly eclectic, bringing expressionist influences from all over Europe as well as post-impressionistic ideas and forms such as advanced pointillism and cubism. Thus, all things told, it is difficult to say that the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* was able to remain within any prescriptive ideology other than to say what it would not be. Its statement about the fusion of interior and exterior experiences is so very general that it could in actuality encompass and embrace a wide range of forms. The key difficulty in this statement and others like it is the

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problem in reconciling Expressionism with any prescriptive formulation. It may very well be that Expressionism bound by prescriptive parameters is, at once, no longer Expressionism. This seems to sustain the idea that such declarations must remain in a descriptive attitude. That is, to support and advance the kinds of work that is seen and perceived instead of attempting to create the circumstances that will elicit certain kinds of work.

Like so many other groups, the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* fell victim to the inevitable: disputes of the old and the new, the conservative and the progressive. The group broke up and Kandinsky and Franz Marc went on to work toward the establishment of the *Blaue Reiter* and its exhibitions, still another ideologically based formulation of the Expressionist project. Such an occurrence seems inevitable in the situation where there is a prescriptive or instructive charter combined with the open and radically personal ideology of Expressionism. The greatest success of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* and other artists' organizations of the Expressionist movement was, in fact, the non-ideological. It was the financial aid, public exposure, and shared emotional support of artists that the groups most successfully provided. The component of personal expression would perhaps have been best left un-prescribed residing freely in the artists' own vision and will to self-knowledge and expression.

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**2**  
**robert motherwell's**  
**"elegy to the spanish republic #1"**

We do it coldly but they do not, nor ever have. It is their extra sacrament. Their old one that they had before the new religion... the one they have never abandoned but only suppressed and hidden to bring it out again in wars and inquisitions... Killing is something one must do, but ours is different from theirs. And you, he thought, you have never been corrupted by it?

Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom The Bell Tolls*

Life and death are now to me less antagonistic, less sharply opposed: to put it the other way around, both are absorbed by the natural process of living.

Robert Motherwell

The notion that life and death may be anything other than polar opposites is at once peculiar and engaging. Moreover, that life and death both flow and recede throughout the continuum of one's existence may be quite new to Western intellectual development. Robert Motherwell's twenty year evolution through an explication of the coexistence of these elements comes to near maturity in the "Elegy To The Spanish Republic #126", a paradoxical and harmonious marriage and unification of life's sterility and death's ever-intruding visage.

The Elegy thesis is a logically flowing dynamic in itself. It has developed continually since its first conception in "At Five In The Afternoon", a jagged and emotional predecessor to the Elegy series,



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inspired by the Spanish poet Garcia Lorca in a poem by the same title. The 1948 poem relates, at length, the poet's impressions of the tragic goring of a friend in a bullfight.<sup>1</sup> Death, for Lorca, assumes a character which is filled with the moments of his comrade's slow and painful finish. Here lie the underpinnings of life and death as mutual encroachers, neither finding any line about which existence is clearly present or absent:

At five in the afternoon  
It was exactly five in the afternoon  
A boy brought the white sheet  
at five in the afternoon  
A trail of lime already prepared  
at five in the afternoon  
The rest was death and death alone  
at five in the afternoon.

Death is embodied, even corporeal, in an impossible paradox of terms. Does the boy sever death itself or the fleeting life? Or is it the full, throbbing human which, moments ago, battled a bull with fervor that yet escapes realization of the bloody end to life? This is the troubling character which resides in the harrowing masses of "Elegy #126"?

The tradition of Robert Motherwell lies with the New York School, also known as the Abstract Expressionists, a small group of artists which emerged out of the School of Paris after World War II. The artists, including Pollock, de Kooning, Kline and Motherwell, banded together to form a circle of highly intellectual painters, writers and thinkers.<sup>2</sup> The group was, in general, bored and disillusioned by the expatriotism of the Paris School and had in common their basic goals and means subject to flux and the philosophy of situations.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis of the New York artists was on a concern for the manner in which art could couch its own function. Latent content became extremely important and with its importance came a stress on heavy symbolic, literary, and historical content.<sup>4</sup> The New York artists were often well versed and bore strong intellectual inclinations and prejudices. This sense of internal

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<sup>1</sup> Hobbs, Robert C., *Robert Motherwell*. Stockholm: Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts Wien, 1976, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Lynton, Norbet. *The Story of Modern Art*. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 227

<sup>3</sup> Grohman, William. *Art of Our Time*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1966, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Grohman, p. 12.

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background led to the common ideal of relating the unconscious to the act of creating.<sup>5</sup>

Expressiveness became at once extremely personal. Jackson Pollock built on the imagery of Picasso's cubism in order to elucidate his inner-structures. The concern for enclosure and bondage of ideals, embodied by his characteristic spatter paintings<sup>6</sup> led to the high-potential-energy qualities of works, such as *Guernica*, and gave sensuality and deep personality to the violent texts created there on. De Kooning described the Abstract Expressionist movement as expressing "an intellectual motion or spiritual condition."<sup>7</sup> This sense is carried forth in the high sensual and sexual curves of his *Pink Angels*. His freely registered color shapes signal, in a personal fashion, the forthcoming sensuality-via-shape of Motherwell. Generally adhering to such notions of inner or personal feeling and validity, the New York School, together, created and embodied an evanescent tremor of urgency. Immediacy of philosophical action through emotion became the common energy of work.<sup>8</sup> Subjectivity, it would seem, was no longer trapped as a Platonic ideal but became a motive experience. Robert Motherwell and his emerging Spanish elegies became representative and final flag bearer for that which Jackson Pollock termed "energy made visible."

Like its earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, "Elegy To The Spanish Republic #126" bears strong resemblances to music most particularly in the fashion by which music elicits movement, suspense, and emotion.<sup>9</sup> A difficult challenge is met through Motherwell's discrete ability to strike a chord of emotion and then sustain it across the canvas and, more interestingly, through a temporal span in the viewers extra-canvas environment. The four black, vertical bands at once create a rhythm across the entire painting. The painting's relative enormity, characteristic of the New York School,<sup>10</sup> creates a strong and urgent sense of enclosure for any viewer within 25 feet of the work. The *Elegy* is disproportionately long, (nearly three times longer than it is high,) so

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<sup>5</sup> Grohman, p. 12

<sup>6</sup> Grohman, p. 12

<sup>7</sup> Lynton, p. 227.

<sup>8</sup> Grohman, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Hobbs, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Carmean, E.A., Jr.. "Robert Motherwell's Spanish Elegies, *Arts Magazine*. June, 1976m p. 94.



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that the viewer's eyes are drawn sideways to their horizontal periphery while successively and rhythmically tripping over the overpowering bands. We are strong-armed into the tempo of the painting like meek piano beginners startled into fear by the near insensitive beat-pounding of our teacher, Mr. Motherwell, on the fine surface of our piano. Once we are acclimated, however, to the tempo of the piece, we are free to search out the subtleties and nuances which appear within it.

The strength and solidity of the verticals is, of course, interrupted by the ovals which play somewhat more abstract roles. They are suspended between the verticals with varying degrees of surety and interaction. From right to left, the ovals increase in their "dependence" on the verticals, and, ironically, like life and death, as the ovals become more suspended by the verticals, they become less distinguishable from them. As the rhythmically intervening lines become forced together and as the eye wanders from the less dense areas on the right, the black becomes ponderous and, with the first initiation of color, even complicated thereby causing the continually less distinguishable and subsequently less forbearing to become more uneasily tense,<sup>11</sup> more ambiguous in nature and definition. In a sense, the ovals resist their tendency to swelling pressure by squeezing into the verticals to varying degrees.<sup>12</sup> Through this dynamic tension and the "oozing" that this seems to cause, the instability is maintained and the metaphor for the interrelation of life and death carries on, suggesting resistance and oppression,<sup>13</sup> or, even more obscurely,<sup>14</sup> a sense of hoarding.

The black silhouettes, vivid against the luminous white background are forced to the surface plane by the strength of the sharp contrast between the two. The near abstract flatness of the two-dimensional forms forces an even stronger imperative on the surface motion. As thickness and volume become nothingness, so must we approach the infinity of the marriage of life and death just as with "[the coming of] age," for Robert Motherwell, "[one sees that] death is part of life, not the opposite."

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<sup>11</sup> Hobbs, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Janson, Haw. *Modern American Painting*. New York: Time-Life, 1970, p. 155.

<sup>13</sup> Lynton, p. 227.

<sup>14</sup> Lynton, p. 227.

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The red and ochre colors play a small but important role in the Elegy. The far right column of color allows an unhampered introduction to color as metaphor for distinction or signature, that is to say, for those personable characters of existence which fall between life and death. But no color can shield one from death.<sup>15</sup> The ochre is squashed irregularly in the far left frame, the oppressed victim of the ever-fusing left oval. Only the outline of white through the far vertical bears a remnant of life running through death — highlighting, illuminating, fighting, and reacting. The symbolic red of blood trickles in a cocked line from the corners of the vertical-oval "interaction." Their parallel slope nearly gives a sense of rolling to the left oval, crushing the ochre form and thereby drawing the eye completely across the work to the "healthy," free ochre of the right border. That band looks on untouched, unhindered, but ironically, un-lived. The spontaneity and ecstasy of the ochre and red are entangled and have as final enemies the authoritarianism and death.<sup>16</sup> of the nameless black forms.

The Elegies of Robert Motherwell are funeral pictures indeed. They are laments, dirges, barbaric and austere.<sup>17</sup> Yet these rituals and describers of life, while lamenting the dead, bring life to our own experience. Death, as Hemingway tells us, is "never abandoned, only suppressed and hidden." In the "Elegy To The Spanish Republic #126", it also never prevails or surrenders but flows through the radiant white of life and erotically changes form and character through its interaction with nuances of color. Death becomes a presence through Motherwell's Elegies — a self-awareness of its own oxymoronic dynamics and an invitation to bring the experience of its dichotomy with life itself to bear on all human understanding.

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<sup>15</sup> Hobbs, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Motherwell, Robert, Bigelow, Robert and Scofield, John E., *Reconciliation Elegy*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1980, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> Hobbs, p. 33.



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### 3 The Historical Stages of Art According to Schelling and Hegel

Schelling and Hegel are in agreement on the profound importance of art, its powers, and its necessity. The guiding issue for both is the changing relationship between form and content in the work of art. For Schelling this issue immediately becomes involved with nature. This is because the content of the work of art finds its original source in nature and, ultimately, by way of the ideal, aspires to become nature. By contrast, for Hegel, content is the idea. The idea represents the most profound aspirations of the human mind. In its importance for the discovery of the idea, art is ranked among religion and philosophy. Its task, then, is to see that these "profoundest of interests of mankind" are made available to consciousness. Thus while the perfection of art in Schelling entails the identification of content with nature and the virtual disappearance of form, in Hegel it is the perfection of the ability of art to contain the idea.

For both Schelling and Hegel, this relationship between form and content changes and develops throughout its historic stages. Both insist upon a teleological view of art. For Schelling, art can only be truly understood with respect to its perfected evolutionary end. Nature is, in a sense, the beginning and the ideal end to the evolution of art. It is both the origin and prototype of the perfect work of art.

In praise of the work of the classicist Johann Winckelmann, Schelling envisions the perfect *telos* of the development of art:

Powerfully moved by the beauty of forms in the works of antiquity, (Winckelmann) taught that the productions of ideal nature, of nature elevated above the actual, together with

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the expression of spiritual conceptions, is the highest aim of art.<sup>18</sup>

In Hegel's Christian version of metaphysics, history has a similarly distinct necessity. The development of art, in effect, will be entirely justified by its end. This principle, in turn, gives way to the absolute essence of the work of art:

The higher truth consequently is spiritual content which has received the shape adequate to the conception of its essence; and this it is which supplies the principle of division for the philosophy of art. For before the mind can attain to the true notion of its absolute essence, it is, constrained to traverse a series of stages rooted in this very notional concept; and to this course of stages which it unfolds to itself, corresponds a coalescent series, immediately related therewith, of the plastic types of art, under the configuration whereof mind as art spirit presents to itself the consciousness of itself. (520)

With the horizon of art so clearly in view, both Hegel and Schelling see as important the project of understanding the course of historical development which is leading toward that ultimate perfection. The current trends and values in art (that is, current from an early 19<sup>th</sup> century view) must be weighed and justified as both the pinnacle of development to date and as the indicator and purveyor of the even-more-supreme art which lies ahead. For Schelling, the historic development of art involves the gradual disappearance of form itself. When perfect and absolute content emerges, the development will have come to its peak. The history of art is a story of overcoming:

The forces of passion must actually show themselves, it must be seen that they are prepared to rise in mutiny, but are kept down by the power of character, and break against the forms of firmly founded betray as the waves of a stream that just fills, but can not overflow its banks.<sup>19</sup>

The beginning of art was not simply a kind of lack of sophistication or possibility, there was a certain need for a crude and arbitrary form to permit content a space for existence. Mature content could not simply appear as essence. First, says Schelling, essence strives after

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<sup>18</sup> Adams, ed. *Critical Theory Since Plato*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, Inc., 1971), p. 447.

<sup>19</sup> Adams, p. 452.



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actualization, or exhibition of itself in the particular. Thus in each the utmost severity is manifested at the commencement; for without bound, the boundless could not appear; without severity, gentleness could not exist; and if unity is to be perceptible, it can only be through particularity, detachment, and opposition.<sup>20</sup>

Thus in the beginning, the essence of art is entirely overwhelmed by its own form. It is harshly and inaccessibly bound by this form which is nonetheless necessary to its coming into being. The stages of its development are then structured after this opposition between strict bounding form and amorphous ideal essence. With subtlety and gentleness, the essence gradually comes to its own in content as form slowly recedes. Pure form is, in a sense, no form. The pure and desirable springwater, says Schelling, is that whose taste is undetectable. For Hegel, the idea (that which in the end will be the content of art) can exist without art and without form. It is a "concrete unity," nonetheless carrying with it the determination of its own form. It is, in some sense, always pre-encoded with the information necessary to find and define its ideal form:

... where the idea is not conceived as that which is self-definitive and self-differentiating, it remains abstract and possesses its definition, and with it the principle for the particular mode of embodiment adapted to itself not within itself but as something outside it. And owing to this the idea is also still abstract and the configuration it assumes is not as yet posited by itself. The idea, however, which is essentially concrete, carries the principle of its manifestation in itself, and is thereby the means of its own free manifestation.<sup>21</sup>

Art becomes conscious by means of the idea expressing itself in some concrete form. The idea is not, however, permanently wedded to any one particular form or manifestation. Once it is present in consciousness, it shifts, develops, and matures in a kind of on-going meditation. In contrast to the over-determined form in Schelling's version of the genesis of art, Hegel sees the beginning of art as a conjunction between the defective idea or content and a defective form. The stages of history involve the mutual and inner-determined development of both of these. This is precisely what gives rise to both the structure of artistic development in stages and the correspondence between these

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<sup>20</sup> Adams, p. 453.

<sup>21</sup> Adams, p. 522.

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stages and the doctrine of particular types of art which is so important to Hegel. These types of art are seen simply as different modes of relation which become possible between the idea-as-content and its "configuration or form. This insistence in Hegel, on the principle of division remains among the largest differences from Schelling who insists on no such division.

Grace, the transfiguration of the spirit of nature and the medium of connection between the morally good and sensuous appearance, is the key to Schelling's idea of the historic development of art. It is the ineffable, perfect essence which seeks a fully developed form along the march of history through the unfolding of its inward "plenitude and infinity." "Grace is soul," Schelling writes, "although not soul in itself but the soul of form, or the soul of nature." Thus soul as grace and the representation of soul as grace determine sensuous appearance and make necessary the gradations of art which constitute historic development. The less-developed stages are those more constituted by a heaviness of form. In the example of Greek tragedy, the less developed Aeschylus is, by comparison with his successor, Sophocles, more "enveloped in a bitter rind and pass(ing) less into the whole work, since the bond of sensuous grace is still wanting."<sup>22</sup> Still, the cruder form of Aeschylus, the more "severe sensuous appearance" is historically necessary to more advanced appreciation of Sophocles. The former is needed, in effect, to give the rough original form to such a content so that the latter can refine upon it.

The same comparison holds, according to Schelling, for the growth and development of sculpture and other plastic arts. More severe, lower forms of sculpture ultimately give way to the gentle refinement of forms in the later stages—even while the early forms make the later form possible. The paradox which is thus evident in any sensuous form but above all in sculpture is the necessity of its material, its matter. Regardless of how refined and particular the sculpture may become, it is still left with the simple reality that sculpture consists in material and thus that its ultimate perfection must imply its obsolescence and the shift away from it as medium:

For sculpture, representing its ideas by corporeal things, seems to reach its highest point in the complete equilibrium of soul and matter — if it give a preponderance to the latter it

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<sup>22</sup> Adams, p. 454.



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sinks below its own idea — -but it seems altogether impossible for it to elevate the soul at the expense of matter, since it must thereby transcend itself.<sup>23</sup>

Painting, as the next stage in Schelling's view of development, overcomes many of the possibilities with which sculpture itself faced. This is so because while sculpture represents objects through "corporeal things," painting represents through an incorporeal medium — through light and color. The form of sculpture is entirely material; it is, no matter how refined and articulate, nonetheless bound too closely by its form. The form of painting is "in a measure spiritual." Even given the materiality in the substance of paint, the formal effects of light and color partake more of pure essence and content than could the plastic material of sculpture. The presentation which painting offers never occurs as things (like sculpture) but, instead, as pictures — as higher order representations:

From its very nature therefore it does not lay as much stress on the material as sculpture, and seems indeed for this reason, while exalting the material above, the spirit, to degrade itself more than sculpture in a like case; on the other hand to be so much more justified in giving a clear preponderance to the soul.<sup>24</sup>

Thus painting softens representation in favor of the soul. The complex activity of material substance is refined and reduced into "resignation and endurance" so that the work of art provides more accessibility to the more profound levels of the soul.

Schelling sees painting, from Renaissance to Modern, as possessing an "unlimited universality" in its ability to open up and reach out in representation. Where sculpture is limited to the representation of a finite shape or space, painting can represent a small body, an open field, or the infinity of a horizon — its spatial possibilities are endless. As example, Schelling offers Michelangelo's representations of Uranus — "the symbolic foreworld" — and the Last Judgement. Such works demonstrate the potential of painting to encompass the realm of the earth's ages, infinite human energy, open space and time, gods and man.

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<sup>23</sup> Adams, p. 455.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, p. 455.

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As mentioned above, Hegel sees the development of art in history as much more a question of certain types of representation in visual art. These historical types are the symbolic, the classical, and the romantic. Hegel's first type, the symbolic, resembles, in many ways, Schelling's view of ancient Greek plastic art. It is an essence in search of some inaugurating form, some configuration which will give it its first "power of genuine representation." The essence or idea is, in effect, so immature that it can find no power of formation within the essence itself and thus exerts the most of its capacity in trying simply to seize upon a form. The shaping of a symbolic object takes place from material entirely external to it since its essence cannot yet formulate a shape from its internal substance. Thus it often takes shape in natural objects upon which the substantive or essential object is imposed. The crucial departure that this conception makes from Schelling's view of sculpture is the entirely organic relation which symbolic holds with nature. The idea (content) wavers and shifts, trying to establish a firm relation with the natural object. Its failure, ultimately, is that it can never establish such a relation:

... it flounders about in them like a drunkard, and seethes and ferments, doing violence to their truth with the distorted growth of unnatural shapes, and strives vainly by the contrast, hugeness, and splendor of the forms accepted to exalt the phenomena to the plane of the idea. For the idea is here still more or less indeterminate, and inadaptably, while the objects of nature are wholly definite in their shape.<sup>25</sup>

Still remaining within the bounds of what Schelling would consider the problematic of the plastic arts, Hegel's classical type of art improves upon the symbolic in that it more freely embodies the idea in the form. The classical form is simply more adequate to the idea than were the naturally occurring objects of the symbolic type. But it is not simply enough that the form and idea be coalescent. The classical form must be the "original notion itself." That is, the content must be in its essence appropriate to the form. In effect, the proper classical form is prefigured in its ability to take on the idea. The natural shape appropriate to the mind is, of course, the human body. Thus Hegel explains the prevalence of the human form in the sculpture of classical antiquity:

(The form) has therefore to be relieved of all the defective excrescences which adhere to it in its purely physical aspect,

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<sup>25</sup> Adams, p. 523.



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and from the contingent finiteness of its phenomenal appearance. The external shape must in this way be purified in order to express in itself the content adequate for such a purpose; and, furthermore, along with this, that the coalescence of import and embodiment may be complete, the spirituality which constitutes the content must be of such a character that it is completely able to express itself in the natural form of man...<sup>26</sup>

Still, according to Hegel, there is inherent limitation in the principle of unifying the idea with the finite particularity of the human form. Though Schelling would perhaps call this perfect coalescence of the spiritual and the sensuous form an ideal end in the perfection of art, Hegel's advance is to shed light on the way that such a two-poled conception is a constriction on spiritual perfection. A complete union of idea and reality is ultimately limiting. The mind — the spirit — is in the end defined in terms of its own limitation. Thus is inaugurated the highest type of art which overcomes this imprisonment: the romantic type.

To accomplish the overcoming, the romantic type begins by canceling the recognized unity found in the classical type. It does so, very simply, by grasping at content which is beyond the ability of the classical type to express. This inexpressible content is precisely what is found in a shift away from faith in the Greek gods, toward the divine possibilities of faith in Christianity. In Christianity a unity is once again established but now it is an infinite unity of the divine, formed from the inward unity of subjective knowledge. In effect, the advent of Christianity brings with it the ability of form an inward subjective whole, an entirely higher state of knowledge that was ever possible in an early time. It creates a completely new view of man in relation to other creatures of the universe. man becomes aware of his own body and its functions. With the advent of modern sciences, man can now know himself like nothing and like never before. The soul and inner spiritual being thus become completely valid and alive: as the surface of the human form is no longer the limit to human understanding, romantic representation looks beyond the human form always expressed in the classical stage:

If, then, in this way the unity of the human and divine nature, which in the previous stage was potential, is raised out to this immediate into a self-conscious unity, it follows that the genuine medium for the reality of this content is no longer the sensuous and immediate existence of what is spiritual,

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<sup>26</sup> Adams, p. 524.

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that is, the physical body of man, but the self-aware inner life of soul itself.<sup>27</sup>

The soul and the emotional life of man strive for the liberation which the romantic type can provide. This inner human life is the content of the romantic type. By reaching out toward the divine while at the same time delivering the inner spirit, romantic art partakes of a kind of dialectical reflection: always unified, always reaching further inward and outward. The romantic type find its realization in three objective forms: in painting, in music, and — the most highly spiritual-poetry. Hegel finds painting crucial for essentially the same reason as Schelling. The varieties of color and shape display a more ideal quality of differences and permit the liberation from its objective surface. At the same time, painting allows for a content of specificity and particularity. Music, Hegel claims, can reach into even more profound subjectivity and particularity, Sound, in effect, permits the liberation of ideal content from the limitations of objectivity. Poetry is at the pinnacle of spiritual presentation for Hegel. This is because poetry brings with it only sound which is the last external, objective materiality as well as the sign of the pure idea. Poetry is "the universal art of the mind," unfettered by materiality yet connected through the sign to the innermost level of spirituality.

Neither Schelling nor Hegel has reservations about proclaiming that the final and perfect stage of art is here upon us. Not only is it taking place in this era but exclusively in Europe, unabashedly understood as the center of God's universe. For Schelling, that perfect form is that which becomes formless, which gives forth pure content — pure idea. It is the form which dissolves into invisibility. It is romantic painting with its non-objective possibilities in color and shape. For Hegel, the perfect form is that which can release itself from objective material while, at the same time, having endless capacity for containing the infinite spirit. That perfect form is poetry whose sonority and signifying capabilities answer both calls. Hegel, like Schelling, arrived at the possibility of painting as the most developed stage but above beyond it with the recognition that even painting, with all its non-objective representation, ultimately appeals to the material substance of oil paint and canvas. Perhaps Schelling is unwilling to consider non-visual art in his quest for the highest stage. That is not clear from his essay on the plastic arts. Still, considering the perfectibility of poetry or music by his criterion its attainment of formlessness — it is not clear that he would, in the end,

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<sup>27</sup> Adams, p. 524-5.





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#### 4 Civility as a Corporate Theme in *The Iliad* of Homer

Variations on the character of heroic value and its applications to history are explored in several dimensions of epic poetry. *The Iliad* of Homer addresses the transitional nature of moral concerns in its characters through examinations of the heroic notion of dual conflict and dialogue. Thereby, the dialectical nature of human interrelation, manifest in the form of combat, romance, and interpersonal struggle, sheds light on the movement of societal value concerns and their implications. Foremost, in *The Iliad*, is the struggle, on both personal and societal planes, of the Trojan War. Through involvement with its course and subsequent results, Homer creates a medium for discussion of the just and unjust dimensions of war itself as well as the relative civility of society in general. Homer's treatment of the closure of *The Iliad*, however, significantly departs from the dual nature of conflict and conversation and creates, in a sense, a manner of synthesis. This occurs explicitly in the final interview of Priam and Achilles. By means of this narrative device, dynamic in itself, a transition in societal value is illuminated and the epic is concluded with an indication of broad moral potential for society.

Priam and Achilles occupy polar stations in the context of the battle in itself. However, each, by virtue of his role within his respective community, is emblematic of an elevated sense of honor and dignity in justice, within and about the war's arena. Throughout the epic, those representations operate autonomously but as Priam meets Achilles to ransom the corpse of his son, these separate notions converge through both the words and actions of the two in a manner that creates a synergy which both reaches across and transcends the conflicts at hand. The similarities between Priam's grief for fallen Hektor and Achilles' grief for fallen Patroklos create a parallel sense of humaneness despite

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their differences in combat. Achilles is found weeping and rolling about the ground; while Priam mourns and rolls about in dung in a similar manner. Their like expressions of sadness amongst their often ambivalent comrades marks a commonality in strength and resolve which transcends the differences between them.

Priam and Achilles are like one another, also, in their mutual, though independent, sense of wisdom in honor, particularly in their respective attitudes toward death. Achilles, as a model of human compassion and dignity in death, is the only Achaian to remain long after the obligatory war games in remembrance of Patroklos. He offers an idealized respect that outreaches that of the community. He recognizes the importance of those people and ideas gone by. As a heroic model of wisdom, Achilles sees Patroklos' death as an emblem of dignity and human worth. Patroklos was, for him, a warrior who saw worth and even necessity in the apparent absurdity of bloodshed and destruction in war. Priam is found removed from his wife, Hekabe, in a manner similar to that of Achilles and the Achaians. He too embraces a great sense of worth in death. Though Hekabe cannot comprehend the necessity of his mission of ransom, Priam is, nevertheless, concerned with fulfillment of the honorable destiny of all human persons. Priam is a model of age and wisdom, in itself indicating a broader scope of human concern. To him, there are things sacred in honor and dignity that cannot be compromised for secular concerns. In this sense, Priam and Achilles also possess a parallel concern for honor and civility in death, almost to the extent that the synthesis of their ideals is foreshadowed.

Priam and Achilles are both motivated to their interview by means of divine guidance; Achilles by the words of his mother, Thetis and Priam by word of Iris. That divine incitement is the product of unrest and discussion among the gods; which intrinsically attaches a sense of greatness to the mission of their meeting. The divine minds, in deliberation, have resolved that the ransom of Hector is necessary and in so doing, create and enlarged notion of consequence to the interview that is to follow.

At the first meeting of Priam and Achilles, Priam does not hesitate but immediately clasps the knees of Achilles and kisses his hands, the hands that were, "dangerous and manslaughtering and had killed so many of (Priam's) sons". In so doing, Priam sets aside his enormous personal feelings of animosity over Hektor's murder. The gesture is one

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of great humility and self-control and demonstrates, again, a call to a larger order of valor. Priam describes, himself, the apparent weight of his own action: "I have gone through what no other mortal on earth has gone through; I put my lips to the hands of the man who has killed my children". In kind, Achilles is stirred to understand the dignity with which Priam comes forth.

The common nature of their concern is, for the first time introduced explicitly as they kneel in mourning, "and the two remembered". Their separate nature is, at this Point, obliterated as they, together, mourn the dead as a common idea, setting aside their personal passions in a communal tribute. The two each have individual sorrow over death as it has come to the fore, however, the notion of respect for the dead is amplified as Priam and Achilles reach beyond the differences in their reasons for mourning and embrace a more glorified sense of compassion and respect for the dead, regardless of origin.

In a gesture of gentle compassion, Achilles orders the corpse thoroughly cleaned and anointed even though that very morning he had dragged it about the tomb of Patroklos in a fit of rage and sadness and thrown it in a heap on the beach. Only in light of a divine-like sense of civility and respect could he reproach himself in such a way. He overlooks his personal grief and anger in favor of a broader respect for the dead, in particular, Hektor. As Achilles gently lifts the corpse of the man he slew in revenge for his companion's death, he entreats the dead Patroklos to dispel all anger because the exchange is an event that, in the heart, must take place, a mission more important than the bond of their lifelong companionship.

Achilles appeals to Priam to dine with him, a ritual representative of life giving and human continuity. The gesture manifests a realization of the need to continue in the human adventure despite the worldly tragedies that befall man. Nutrition is a human need that symbolically crosses all boundaries and disagreements and hence the occasion of their mutual partaking, as enemies, together at the same table, symbolizes the ability of man, in a supremely civil way, to look beyond the differences that affront him and embrace the timeless truth of similarity and common cause that he shares with his brother."And therein they put their hands to the good things that lay readily before them". Without the humane, communal sense of their meeting, which reaches beyond the ordinary, that understanding of what actually is before them and readily before

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their society would elude them. "Now I have tasted food again... before I had tasted nothing". Before the communion of Achilles and Priam in this dimension of civility, such an understanding was impossible for either alone.

In the self-indulgent mutual admiration ritual that follows, Priam and Achilles admire one another's physiques, going so far as to indicate that one is "like an outright vision of gods". This divine sort of self-representation indicates, in a certain dimension, an elevation beyond actor status in the epic, to a position of knowing the idea that perhaps Priam and Achilles, like Hellen; have the ability, in a constricted way, to embrace their position in the epic and their role as civil and moral actors in civilization.

Achilles, understanding and appreciating the importance of proper respect for the dead, regardless of national status, offers to delay the fighting in order that the Trojans can allow Hektor the proper burial ritual. In this final dialogue of the interview, Priam and Achilles again put aside their differences in favor of a common sense of right. The notion that the two, both of great honor and valor can overcome the barriers before them for the sake of moral respect and civility draws forth an enormous sense of humaneness and civility in human culture. Their moral dispositions, in concert, provide an image of value that, in light of their great political differences, stands aside from an ordinary understanding of morality in modern civilization.



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## 5 Divergent Moral Postures in Euripides and Sophocles

Through the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* initiates several complex moral conflicts. The plausible variations of justifiability of the murder are explored throughout the play and in the subsequent plays of the Orestes trilogy. The murder itself and the vengeance which it elicits create a theater for the examination of the moral equation of matricide and the relative justification of the consequences which it demands. Orestes and Elektra, in the trilogy, are placed in the position of potential operatives for this moral equation. The dramatic result holds many possibilities.

Sophocles and Euripides, in their respective treatments of the Elektra-Orestes theme, explore two possibilities for dramatic and moral resolution of the equation as it is posed by Aeschylus. The degree of difference is less than great, nonetheless the variation in dramatic theme between the tragedies allows some understanding of the moral question itself, unavailable in Aeschylus, as well as a look at the moral postures of Elektra and Orestes and their behavior as tragic characters in light of the actual difficulty of the problem which they confront.

Integral to an evaluation of Elektra and her moral disposition is a study of her relationship to her brother Orestes. In both dramas, he is the long awaited figure of active retribution around which the plot centers. It is he for which Elektra longs so and it is he that, of complete free volition or not, performs the actual acts of murder whilst Elektra stands by. In another sense, however, Orestes

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represents a complementary agent to Elektra's personality. He is the champion of her disposition, in essence representing the assertive dimension of human capacity which she does not possess. He is, in a manner, the operative figure of their combined posture.

In both plays his arrival seems to symbolize the holistic completion of the moral attitude that is assumed by them and consequently as it is expressed. Sophocles portrays Elektra lamenting not only her father's death but also the prolonged absence of Orestes. In expression of the latter, a degree of self-sorrow arises as though Elektra is, to a degree, capable of weighing the death of her father against the unhappiness which she faces in its aftermath: "alone to bear the burden, I am no longer strong enough, the burden of grief...". Orestes is posed as the only agency that can free her of her self-imposed moral and psychological bonds. He is her "champion", and his action is necessary in the sense that she is incapable of action on her belief in justification. Her posture is lacking the completeness that only Orestes can provide.

Sophocles' use of language allows the exploration of a somewhat more implicit dimension in the relationship of Orestes and Elektra. Elektra laments, excessively, the lost years of her youth in waiting for Orestes: "like a nightingale, robbed of her young", "I have awaited... til I'm past childbearing, til I'm past marriage". A parallel can be drawn between the lack of husband and offspring and the lack of moral requital to be manifest in Orestes. Elektra's "loss of life" is similar to the absence of her complimentary self found in Orestes. Therein, the unity that they achieve morally is an incest-like marriage of the selves: "Brother your pleasure shall be mine. These joys I have from you.". Orestes is in fact the "champion" husband of which she is void. Their unity creates a single moral picture; Orestes the operative agent and Elektra the passive. Further, by passing by her childbearing years, Elektra has surrendered her own life-giving potential, denying the continuity of her philosophical disposition and therein tempering the actual weight and consequence of her action toward justification, Euripedes poses Elektra apart from the constraints of the palace found in Sophocles. In itself, this dramatic positioning allows Elektra an added degree of figurative autonomy. Though she did not choose her station as wife of and laborer for a poverty-stricken Mycenaean farmer, the absence of her dependence on Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and the grief to be

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found in their household contributes credibility to her conception of the justification of vengeance. Here she suffers a conscientious martyrdom, "a wedding much like death". The position of her husband, the farmer, in relation to her and her father also lends credibility to Elektra's lot and her plans for vengeance. The farmer holds a glorified perception of the deceased Agamemnon: "sacked the glorious city of Dardanus". "high towering shrines". The farmer's opening speech creates an apotheosis of Agamemnon and thereby contributes an additional perspective of reason in Elektra's vengeance. Aegisthus' intention was to have Elektra murdered in order to guarantee her inability to mother nobility that would threaten his life and throne. Her marriage to the farmer represents a compromise of her life for the ordinary husband. In a figurative sense, Aegisthus' acceptance of Elektra's survival as a — consolation for choice of offspring, in itself, is a compromise of his value posture, which creates an emblematic concession of his station and a foreshadowing of his subsequent demise.

In comparison to Sophocles' unity of Orestes and Elektra, suggested above, the farmer-husband of Elektra assumes a mediating role in a similar complimentary relationship. Elektra waits in misery in a similar fashion and longs for the fulfillment of the death of her father's killer. Orestes, however, actively searches the countryside for his sister in a manner different from that presented by Sophocles. Orestes, here, seems to be the more needy pursuer of Elektra's complimentary fulfillment. He intends, eventually, to "take her as his partner", and in so doing, raises again the incestuous power dimension in their relationship. In Euripedes, though, it is Orestes who seems to require the complimentary portion of justifiability found in Elektra. The Mycenaen farmer amplifies the forthcoming figurative marriage of the two in his existence: "I suffer (Orestes) grief, I think his thoughts".

Indeed, in a sense, he is Orestes in a surrogate configuration and in that role he bears the capacity to dramatically point toward the unison of Orestes and Elektra in the fulfillment of like notions of justice in vengeance.

The overriding divergence of the two Elektra themes seems to be Elektra's ability or willingness to put forth the volition to carry out the act which she is represented to believe in. Sophocles presents

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Elektra as disabled by the hardship that she has tolerated. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra have "destroyed (her) utterly". They have, in a sense, dismantled the strength that she held in want of requital. Her captivity at the palace has imposed an intellectual stance upon her which has weakened her apparent fiber. She is perpetually weakened and aggravated by the "ultimate act of insult, (her) father's murderer in (her) father's bed.". She wants for the moral and psychological requital of Orestes' presence because it is he alone that will play the active part in the murders to follow. Elektra can only stand aside and play spectator as Orestes confronts their like convictions with the action of the murder itself. Orestes acts and is prepared to accept the consequences of his action. Euripedes portrays Elektra as a woman of greater moral responsibility for her convictions. She decides to "be the one to plan (her) mother's death.", and bears her conviction to the extent of offering her own life if the murder scheme were to fail. She is less the possessive member of the marriage of the two as found in the Elektra of Sophocles. As Orestes is taken by the weight of the matricide, Elektra stands beside him in his deed and exalts his action. Throughout the execution of their plan, Orestes is restrained by fear and guilt yet Elektra encourages him in her apparent strength. The relation of Elektra and Orestes, in both tragedies, is one wrought of power, both individual and corporate. The strength of their intellectual attraction to one another is extraordinary and demands recognition in the holistic perception of their actions. Elektra and Orestes have an unquestionable sense of control over one another which modifies the command and direction of their murderous mission and the moral judgments Elicited therein.

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## 6 Troy, Carthage, Rome, and Contra-Temporal Continuity

In the opening book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas' mission to Italy is interrupted and rhythmically bisected by his encounter with Queen Dido and the people of Carthage. The relationship between Dido and Aeneas proliferates and resolves itself within the first four books of the epic. Though the affair severs the continuity of Aeneas' destiny in Italy for nearly a year, Virgil, through its utilization, is nonetheless able to create repeated counterpoised circumstances between Dido and Aeneas and their respective actions and words which enunciate the conclusion of Aeneas' voyage and the realization of Rome, and bring to bear on its premonition a sense of validation and justification.

Though Queen Dido and the people of Carthage have, in several respects, suffered a plight parallel to that of the Trojans, the richness of their counter-relation bears enormous potential within the framework of its divine origins. Juno is sympathetic to Carthage and its people in so far as they were her "favorite". Her disposition towards them opposes her feelings for Aeneas whom she knows is destined to "destroy the citadels of Tyre" and "annihilate her Libya". She raises a sense of home and propriety in Carthage where "she kept her chariot and armor" which functions contrary to the homeless wandering of Aeneas; without a city and without a kingdom. Juno decides to create more disorder for Aeneas, which in the context of her relation to Jupiter, who in book twelve raises the balance of justice in Aeneas' favor, creates further dysfunction in the Dido-Aeneas dichotomy.

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When Aeneas and his men finally make way to the shores of Libya, their eyes meet a scene contradictory in its elements: "the back drop-glistening grove, thick with bristling shadows". The elements of light posed against the elements of dark inversely join the resolve of Juno and the "black night (hung) on the waters" by Aeolus and the mission of Aeneas. Similarly, the nymphs which greet Aeneas during his flight rhyme with those used to appease Aeolus and his powers of destruction .

As Venus sees her son troubled by the Libyans, she makes an appeal to Jupiter which serves centrally in the epic's configuration of time and events, and in the face of Aeneas' destined future, she entreats him with her worry over Juno's anger. The chronology of events past, present, and future, sympathetically pivots about Libya and Carthage's temporally central position, reaching back to the refugees from Tyre rhymed with those from Troy and looking toward the realization of Rome as a counter-civil phenomenon. The past reaches toward the future using the present as operative.

As Dido's past unfolds, the inverse nature of her relation to and pending action toward Aeneas begins to take shape. The violation of Dido's marriage to Sychaeus, whom she loved with "much passion", by her brother Pygmalion is comparable to the proud propriety felt by Aeneas and the Trojans and its subsequent intervention by the Greeks. Both Dido and Aeneas flee with what they can though the gold which Dido takes from her brother is contrasted by the bare utility of Aeneas' mission and in such, an origin of the divergence of their destinies arises, foreshadowing the exigency of the realization of their figurative opposition.

Carthage itself stands as a contra-Rome in its very existence. In a symbolic gaze forward in time, Aeneas "marvels at the enormous building, once mere huts and at the gates and tumult and paved streets". Several temporal oppositions may be isolated here. Aeneas stands amidst a rising metropolis' own destiny, and yet that which he has not. Life and commerce proceed with fervor around him while he and his men stand passively about, waiting fate to direct their courses: "how fortunate are those whose walls already rise". Juxtaposed, Aeneas stands beside the rising walls of this rich new city wondering at the realization that his own city stands beyond



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much toil and hardship. He stands in the midst of the reality yet is without it.

At the center of Carthage, standing as a figure of centrality, is the "thickly shaded wood", seen upon arrival by Aeneas. It then, as now, emblematically stood as a directive for his voyage: "this was the place where, when they landed, the Phoenicians first hurled by whirlwind and by wave-dog up an omen that Queen Juno had pointed out: the head of a fierce stallion", the same fierce stallion which Dido rides on the hunt which consummates her figurative tie to Aeneas. So for Dido's people this is an emblem of wealth, fame, and longevity and as a counter-figure for the Trojans, it is a vision of the hardship and misfortune that they have faced and must further endure before their realization of wealth and fame.

Within the temple to Juno, at the center of rising Carthage, Aeneas finds "sanctuary" in the epic of the Trojan war, painted on its walls. The work is that of "rival artists" yet it is that work from the hands of artists contrary to his station which elicits overwhelming emotion from him. The artwork functions here as a universal operative, transcending time and illuminating the juxtaposition which causes Aeneas' response. The notion of art here implies an ideal medium setting Aeneas momentarily apart from the Carthage-Rome dichotomy, therein pointing up a continuum of individual civilization and civic leadership which surrounds the figurative disparity in which he finds himself

The beginnings of Dido's emotional attachment to Aeneas and its contrived requital illuminate more clearly the positive/negative nature of their figurative tie. The fruition of that relationship functions inversely with respect to the realization of their respective destinies. As Cupid speeds on his mission of affecting "luckless" Dido, she is described as "doomed to face catastrophe" Dido "can't sate her soul" in essence because that satiation would implicitly countermand the livelihood of her own city.

At the opening of book IV, after Aeneas has ended the rendition of his own history, Dido is completely overwhelmed by her feelings for him. The implicit convergence upon destiny vis-a-vis their tragic love is formally initiated here. It represents the birth of a relationship the perpetuation of which emblematically predicts the decadence of the

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life-giving foundations of Carthage and the vitalization of Rome and its future. The relations are incommensurable just as "the queen is caught between love's pain and press. She feeds the wound within her veins". The vitalization that she herein gives to her love implicitly dismantles the life of her empire. The procreative motion of Carthage is literally halted by Dido's longing for Aeneas: "Her towers rise no more; the young of Carthage no longer exercise at arms or build harbors ... the works are idle" Her emotions constrict even her own cognitive ability as "she grieves alone and falls upon the couch that he has left", and threaten, in every way, the actual future of Carthage.

Juno decides to unite Dido and Aeneas and thereby foil Aeneas' destiny by contriving a distortion of weather conditions during their hunt. A "black rain cloud" is intended to bring the two together in a bond of marriage. The raincloud seen here rhymes with that seen twice before by Aeneas at sea and resounds with the catastrophe that it both symbolized and actually caused previously. As Aeneas and Dido meet in a wilderness cave, their shelter from the storm, a zenith in their figurative relationship is reached. In a great flash of lightning and fire, their sexual copulation and consummation of divine deceit simultaneously points, with enormous fury and passion, toward the realized completion of Aeneas' mission and the downfall of Dido's Carthage: "That was her first day of death and ruin. For neither how things seem nor how they are deemed moves Dido now".

With Mercury's warning to Aeneas, the epic begins what is to become a more active study of the destiny of Dido and Aeneas through explication of Aeneas' concern for propriety in ancestral continuity: "if you cannot attempt the task for your own fame, remember Ascanius growing up, the hopes you hold for lulus, your own heir, to whom are owed the realm of Italy and land of Rome". The implications, to Aeneas, of the paternal bond shared with Ascanius and the symbolic continuity of human ideals implied therein weigh heavily on Aeneas. His disregard for his plan to build Rome would not only deny its wealth to him but, of greater consequence, constrict the potential for development of the cultural wealth of his peoples' destiny. In that context, his copulation with Dido taints the relative validity of that procreative continuity and threatens more than the yet un-raised walls of Rome. Hence, Aeneas begins to



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recognize the potential which Dido represents and becomes frightened for the future of his mission: "The vision stunned Aeneas, struck him dumb".

He sees that Dido represents an operative temperance of all that he knows to be right. The weight of Aeneas' rational ties to his mission of continuity, manifest in his son, is again symbolically opposed by Dido's failure to conceive a son herself. The force of this dichotomy of opposition measured in terms of the equations, Aeneas = contra-Dido; Rome = contra-Carthage, once again predicts the failure of Dido and the subsequent fruition of Rome: Dido cannot conceive the son that will validate Aeneas' existence in Carthage. The father-son dialectic heretofore discussed moves now from progeny, to progenitor perspective: "my father's anxious image approaches me in dreams. Anchises warns and terrifies". The movement backward in ancestral construction from Ascanius, through Aeneas, to Anchises, represents an ascendant convergence which directs the role and destiny of Aeneas in a corresponding fashion. As the terms of the human continuity consideration become more ancestrally basic, so grows the specificity and consequence of the implied resolve.

Dido, having become exceedingly distraught, "her mind helpless, raging frantically, inflamed" contemplates suicide with growing fervor, calling "out at last for death" and "(plotting) with herself the means" of death. Her behavior symbolizes an initiation of the downfall of Carthage itself, but also points toward the death of Turnus prior to the raising of Rome. Within that same temporal glance forward, a correspondence between the fall of Dido's rule and the fall of Turnus' rule can be seen in a manner such that the confusion and unrest in Dido's people rhymes with that of Turnus' followers.

Dido's death and the implied demise of Carthage come about as foreshadowed throughout book IV by means of her clamorous, bloody suicide. She dies upon the sword that Aeneas left behind and thereby her symbolic sexual self-violation represents the tragic, rhythmic resolution of the conflict initiated by their brilliantly divine sexual union early in book IV. But Dido is alone in this final act, her procreative sterility borne figuratively against the rich heritage of Aeneas and the strength of resolve in his forbearance at Carthage.

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## 7 Shakespeare's *Richard the Second*

Shakespeare's *Richard The Second* lends itself to a study of role-playing in the sense that King Richard couches his reign in a persona which lies across the personality spectrum from that which seems necessary in order to successfully execute the duties of his throne. His sense of reality springs from a fantasy of drama which rests in opposition from the forceful, concrete realities which become required of him. The dramatic journey through his imposition of what he believes to be divine justice, his pilgrimage to Ireland, and finally, his confrontation with Henry Bolingbroke, parallels the virtual convergence and subsequent *crossing* of the dramatic forces of his spirit and the Machiavellian demands of the throne.

Richard's underlying personality is based on mercurial fantasies, temperament, and poetic self-indulgence. He is driven by a quasi-romantic inclination toward human emotions. In an over-dramatized fashion, he puts his *own* response to his heart ahead of any requirement of judgment, rationale or taste.

Richard does not bear within him the strong, decisive, and forceful qualities required his throne. He therefore must *play* the role of king, a concrete identity which can only clash with the emotionally responsive interior poet of its player. The characteristics of the king-figure become evident mostly through Richard's failure to embody them. He is unable to make a firm decision and bide by it; moreover, his ability to make any decision is blurred by sentimental rhetoric, overemphasized emotional response, and even an unclear cognitive process.

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Richard's intercession into the controversy of Bolingbroke and Mawbrey becomes overshadowed by the dramatic elements which he conjures in an attempt to realize his own idealized visualization of himself. He requires the nearly absurd formalities of a duel which seems to be based on reconcilable differences. While in the midst of the self-aggrandizing pomp of the ritual, he neglects the actual values of the case. Upon applying himself to the matter of the disagreement, he sees fit to call off the duel and settle the discord via non-violent means. Bound to his emotions, Richard is incapable of making a clear decision, a fault which eventually leads to a loss of his kingly credibility. In fact, he finds great difficulty in ruling on the Bolingbroke — Yawbrey case of Act I, at all. In the first scene of Act I, Richard suggests that the two in dispute should, "purge this choler without letting blood," and moreover that the men should swallow their respective prides and "forget, forgive; conclude and agree," when only a moment thereafter he agrees to the duel which again brings another change of heart. Bolingbroke and Mawbrey become enraged — a model of the crumbling respect assumed by many of Richard's followers allowing Bolingbroke to unseat him.

Richard sees himself as exemplary representative of the divine hand of God and therefore feels free to answer his fantastic or sentimental inclinations. No matter how he oscillates as king, his principle personality can only bear forth the "unstooping firmness of [his] upright soul." For Richard, his kingdom is a paradise on earth and his reign is the instrument of the doctrine of divine right which his personality puts forth. His incompetence as ruler and military, (as well as civil,) strategist is equaled only by his confidence that regardless of his blunders, the providential hand of God presses gently on his back: "Yet know, my master, God omnipotent, is mustering in his clouds on our behalf." His belief that God's will is done in his kingdom through him, further exacerbates the humility and emotional collapse which occurs as his guise fails. It is this emotional quality which rises in the end and creates a victory of his essential personality via the sympathy of the audience despite the utter failure of his kingly role.

Sentimentality provides a major sense of importance for Richard as a basis for his personality. After again displaying a decisiveness of which both his subjects and audience are clearly suspect, he regresses on his sentence for Bolingbroke: "Uncle, even in the glasses of thine eyes I see thy grieved heart. Thy sad aspect hath from the number of his

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banished years plucked four away..." Again, later, Richard further sympathizes with Bolingbroke as he seems to "dive into ... hearts with humble and familiar courtesy." Richard bears particular fondness for the impressions of his own heart in both his perceptions and evaluations of circumstances which surround him and in his attempts at objective royal decision-making. The return from his journey to Ireland finds him with gentle contemplations of his kingdom. He is a "longparted mother with her child play[ing] fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting." The utility of his role as king seems to be completely misplaced as he "weeping, smiling," greets his kingdom. With thoughts of Bolingbroke far from his mind, the essential personality of Richard comes brimming forth through "tears," "smiles," and the sincere inclinations of his heart. His mask is briefly forgotten. 'For him, "the earth shall have feeling." Only when he is reminded of his troubles with Bolingbroke and his deserters, shortly thereafter, does he return to a sense of the bareness of his visage without the callous mask of king.

The overplay of rhetoric and poetic icons by Richard serves as an agent for an illustration of the transparency of his throne. In a double-edged manner, his thin rhetoric operates as both an illumination of his self-indulgent interior and, at the same time, as a natural instrument of facade and deception. His over-fondness for words carries forth, quite obliquely, his underlying character and his attempt to wear the guise of king:

No, it is stopped with other, flattering sounds, As praise, of  
whose taste the wise are fond, Lascivious metres. to whose  
venom sound The open ear of youth doth always listen; Report  
of fashions in proud Italy, Whose manners still our tardy apish  
nation Limps offer in base imitation. Where doth the world  
thrust forth a vanity (So it be new, there's no respect how vile)  
That is not quickly buzzed into his ears?

Tragically, Richard takes words for the tangibles which he needs in order to give the throne power and glory. The result is a dilution of the meaning of his discursive language and a corresponding slide in the respect borne for him by his subjects.

The final flaw which brings to reality the evanescence of his guise as king is the uncontrollable nature of his transitory temperament. His conceptions and cognitions change as quickly as the events which surround them. As the events of Act III become tense through the

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confrontational moments with Bolingbroke, Richard's ability to accurately perceive his environment and subsequently make decisions regarding his men falls apart as a symbolic indication of the decay of his royal mask. No longer do concrete perceptions but, instead, imagination and a fantasy view of himself, guides his thoughts and actions:

"Tis very true: my grief lies all within; And these external manners of laments Are merely shadows to the unseen grief That swells with silence in the tortured soul." In the midst of the crisis of deceptions, Richard's fleeting inner self-dramatization blossoms to the surface allowing the mask of his king-role to fail. His mercurial temperament zig-zags in panic from outward fear; "woe, destruction, ruin, and decay: the worst is death and death will have its day," to great strength and hatred; "villains, vipers damned without redemption: dogs easily won to fawn on any man." At last the final collapse of Richard's reign comes as the symbolic failure of the king-ruler as he can no longer find reason not to look "pale and dead." — neither in his fantasy world, nor through his divine justice, nor through high flung language. At last, he concedes his own upheaval and the firm realization of his inner-self: "awake thou coward majesty."

From the very onset of *Richard the Second*, the gradual un-masking of the royal Richard-role-player never stops. Indeed, his basic personality is couched in characteristics which can only be pushed forth as the demands of the throne increase. The inevitable failure of his throne, (and, in kind, his mask,) comes because those basic personality traits are inconsistent with these required of a king. As Richard's essential self becomes realized,, in the final conflict of Act III, so does the transparency of his self-indulgent charade bring to bear the tragic incompetence of his role on the harsh demands of royal reality.

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## 8

### The Marquise de Merteuil and Vicomte de Valmont in Laclos' *Les liaisons dangereuses*

In Laclos' *Les liaisons dangereuses*, The Marquise de Merteuil and Vicomte de Valmont play out the episodes of courtship and sex with a near absolute absence of moral concern. Their individual variations on and manifestations of amorality relate them in a manner which highlights the differentiation of their characters. Merteuil and Valmont engage in a kind of sexual objectivism approximating, in a sense, game-playing with all its strategies and rewards. However, the variables in their game are irrational human components which create irrational problems for those games and their players. and, in analysis, allow the delineation of their individual characteristics.

An examination of male and female characters must, however, base itself on the *a priori* consideration of moral disparity caused by the, 18th 'Century gender gap. Merteuil and Valmont must be analyzed some extent, within an appreciation of the relative moral postures prevalent. An apparent equivalence in behavior cannot be considered actually equivalent in light of the social and moral disparity which discriminates the sexes.

Mertueil and Valmont are marked by a nearly identical lack of respect for and stock in love as a valid human dimension. Merteuil dispels the conventional courtship of Gercourt as a "stupid presumption," a perpetually vain attempt at attaching. Similarly, meaning to his notion of respect and commitment Valmont finds love "a ridicule," an unjustifiable representation of the lengths that a -an will be driven by "thwarted desire." They both equate the abstraction of love with the fruition of lust.



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Love is, to Merteuil, "the art of encouraging nature," and to Valmont an undertaking whose reward is egoistically centered.

Merteuil and Valmont embody a kind of critique of moral value so acute that it approaches absurdity and even an inversion of conventional values which for Merteuil, makes "tyranny adored" and allows Valmont's conventional sins to give him potential as "the patron of some great city" or, at best, a "village saint." He extols the notion that sin exists "only to be forsaken," fear exists "only to be overcome," and virtue exists "only to be trampled under foot." He embodies a sense of irony, of convention in the idea that society constructs structures of value which are only plausible (or realizable) in the face of their fall. He is the errant "trustee" of the personal justification of sin and guilt. Merteuil is amoral to the extent that her treatment of moral convention simply turns value inside-out. She investigates what "the strictest moralist demanded of us," only to be able to know what needed to "be overcome." Though Valmont's desired end is ultimately sexual, his actual desires are ironically sexless, though driven by nothing approximating sexual desire. His "desire" arises only from the enjoyed resistance of his objective and the dominance of his ego over hers. He uses all of his expertise in the arts of adulation, seduction and ridicule only to "charm" and "intimidation."

The "game" convention borne by Merteuil and Valmont pervades their perceptions of loving and pursuit of the opposite sex. In reference to his goal of enjoying the favors of President de Trouvel, Valmont describes her as "an enemy worthy of me," and Merteuil describes her passion for male pursuit as a fondness of the "well executed attack." The "battle" image and the notion of sexual counterpart as adversaries surrounds their perceptions of all liaisons as deference to their "favorite passions: the pride of defense and the pleasure of defeat."

While Valmont's actions are motivated by the challenge of high risk situations and the allure of the unknown, Merteuil acts in a discreetly intellectual, calculating manner giving all the forces of beauty and intellect to bear on her ultimate goal Valmont pursues egoistically centered ultimatums which become not only self-aggrandizing but which "thrive on themselves," therein becoming self-justifying within the conditions and events of his debauched reality. Merteuil finds Valmont's letter's full of "reckless absurdities" — unacceptable to her analytic character. Valmont bows less to the intellect and more to what may seem to be



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the slightest essence of feelings for Madame Trouvel. In this sense lies a dissimilarity in their characters. While he is moved, to a slight degree more, by passion, she adheres strictly to the cunning of her intellectual prowess Merteuil and attempts to bring her preoccupation with the rational to bear on Cecile's romantic difficulties. She tells Cecile "all her faults," that is, the Intellectual and academic shortcomings that, in Merteuil's view, are potentially damaging to her relationship — aligning the -passion of love with lucidity and rationale. Similarly, Merteuil evaluates Valmont's progress in an analytical fashion, stressing its "strategy" and judging it a 'masterpiece of prudence.' As Valmont struggles to "vanquish" Madame Trouvel, his egocentric perspective now and again slides into a mode of inadvertent sentiment of which Merteuil is incapable. He is surprised by his own reaction to his discovery of his past love letters to Madame Trouvel: "surrendering to a callow impulse, I kissed the letter with a rapture I had ceased to believe I could feel". He is not a perpetual representation of the stoic, calculating creature that he, in general, embodies. In another break from his emotionless pursuit of Madame Tournel in the form of anger and vengeance, calling her. during the course of their relation, a "monster" and "she-devil." The differentiation between the salvation of his ego and the actual preoccupation he emotionally bears of her becomes difficult to isolate. As a result of his ploy Valmont is moved in an important way by to make an "object-lesson" of Madame Trouvel's effort to have him followed. After rescuing a village family from the tax collector a hypocritical gesture of little consequence to him and more exemplary of his inverted value posture than anything else, he returns to find the fruition of his well planned misconception. The family itself raised him to an "image of God," and all are taken back by the thought that the act was merely another step in his quest toward the sexual domination of Madame Trouvel, he now finds an uncharacteristic "-pleasure to be derived from good," another glance at his minute ability the face of his analytic pursuit of sexual "victory," this compared with a posture more often evident: "., am never ashamed of a good deed as long as it entertains me or tries my capacities."

Though the basic moral. and social characteristics of the Marquise de Merteuil and Vicomte de Valmont emerge in approximate equivalence, attention must be given to an understanding of the lengths to which Merteuil, an eighteenth century woman, must be required to go in order to achieve the sort of moral parity that she has with a man of the same era. She bears a great independence and pride in her morality: "I shall



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be a judge of great integrity and you will both be weighed in the same balance," ironically judging yet unjudged. She is set apart from the other characters and, to an extent Valmont, by her singular absence of moral deference existing hand in hand with her outspoken ability to apply herself to moral problems. Her rise to intellectual predominance over many of the men that surround her allows her to allege a superiority in "performance" and morality over Valmont because nothing has stood in the way of his rise that would ever merit comparison to her "difficulties." In order to escape the "chains" of convention Merteuil takes enormous pains, having "to undertake great risks and suffer in fear and trembling." "She attempts to be rid of the man her heart so violently rejects." She allows herself, somewhat arrogantly, to raise herself well above the stature of Valmont in light of the difficulties she has borne: "Since, then, you have seen me controlling events and opinions turning the formidable male into the plaything of my whims and fancies; depriving me some of will, others of power... I who was born to revenge my sex and master yours, have been able to discover methods of doing so unknown even to myself." She further isolates herself from Valmont by rejecting any sort of devotion toward the slight recognition he has of his own feeling and those of theirs who call themselves women of feeling who invariably confuse love with a lover imagine that the man with whom they have found pleasure is pleasure's only source." Her principles of morality "are not like those of other women found by chance, accepted unthinkingly, and followed by habit. They are the fruit of profound reflection. She is a self-sufficient, self-justified moral figure, singular because she is not the product of her society but created in and of a unique individuality void of the restraints of moral dependency. She has "created (her)self."

Even the unbridled debauchery which seems to be worshipped by Merteuil and Valmont is, in the end, compromised by the demands of their own egos. Just as "good intentions make blackguards of us all; our weakness in carrying them (called) probity" so does idealized absence of morality invert their characters in obligation to the figurative enslavement of volition to their imperfect egocentricity.

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## 9

### Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Critic of Society

Rousseau's impressions of society are subject, throughout his *Confessions*, to the same broad range of emotional and psychological fluctuations that affect his personal relations. His perceptions of value and importance in human pursuits change with his changing relations to those who surround him, through his various loves, friendships, sexual experiences, and political endeavors. His criticism of society and the tenets of social do not converge conclusively until the latter part of his life, or, at least not until The Second Part of the *Confessions*. As Rousseau natures and accumulates his array of experiences and impressions, he settles, slowly, toward subscription to a basic outline for social order which he refines to a model for behavior and subsequently to a fantasy, of sorts, which dominates his idles thoughts. Throughout the *Confessions*, Rousseau cultivates the notion of Nature as a model. In Nature is verity and only through pursuit of truth and sincerity as represented to us by Nature's manifest actuality can value be realized in society. To Rousseau, social existence is clouded and confused by layers of "insincerity" and "so many prejudices and simulated passions." In order to achieve the society that he feels necessary, individuals must apply themselves to the underlying motivations of social behavior where they will find, beneath the layers of rhetoric and delusion the real values of life in society; the individual must be a skilled analyst of the human heart to disentangle the true feelings of Nature." Moreover, it is required of man to become a part of the society which he must, in the end, transcend. In order to "detect the niceties of feeling," one first must command "a delicacy of understanding that can only be acquired in the school of the world."

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Certain elements of behavior, Rousseau asserts, follow immediately from this emulation of Nature and man's relations to it. It is the absence of society's adherence to those elements against which Rousseau also bears criticism. He argues that society's members do not pursue sincerity of the heart to an extent necessary to attain understanding of others. These ideas are developed quite egocentrically; the "others" are predominantly developed as Rousseau's concerns for himself and society's frequent inability to understand him. Rousseau, as a public figure, finds himself subject to a wide range of judgment from both his audience and his peers. Such judgment inevitably comes to bear on his career and that element certainly figures in his concern for reformation of the ignorant: "Paris ladies with all their intelligence, have no idea of this state of things; and by trying to spare my purse, they succeeded in ruining me."

Rousseau does, however, extend his criticism to the prejudices of society in general which, he claims, are clung to no matter how "weak and false." He is critical of society's "gentlemen" who, when they bear less prejudices than many, cling to those which they have, "as a compensation." As a man who passes a great deal of his life in a fervent attempt to educate himself, he takes great offense at a society which not only often fails to live up to his standards of knowledge and perception but which speaks and behaves with the presumption of understanding and knowledge of all circumstances at hand. He is "astounded" by the ability of those with whom he converses to refute his arguments "with the help of high-sounding phrases, without in the least understanding them." Rousseau even refuses to concede the value of education in the general sciences, insisting that Plan exclusive but profound knowledge of subject is a greater aid to correct judgment than any learning derived from scientific principles even when it is not combined with the particular study of the subject under consideration." His requirements of knowledge, however, fluctuate from cursory knowledge to an esoteric depth of understanding: "nobody is capable of understanding or judging anything outside his own field." Even so, though the degree of concern is variable, the subject of his criticism remains consistent.

Similarly, following from Nature's ideal example, Rousseau criticizes the sincerity of society's members in their relation to himself, first, and then to others. To Rousseau, sincerity follows from Nature as a concern for commitment to relations as truth of word. What man says must be

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consistent with actions in the same way the Nature appears to us with "sincerity." This ideal, for Rousseau, is arrived at in a suitable idealized manner, that is, by "comparing man as he had made himself with man as he is by Nature." He encounters, through his life, a society whose sincerity disheartens him more than many of its other offenses: "the cabals of men of letters, their shameful quarrels, the lack of honesty in their books, and their looks, and the important airs they assumed in the world were so disgusting and antipathetic to me..." Even those from whom Rousseau would claim the most devout obligation to sincerity betray him as a resounding representation of society's fault. His friends and colleagues, of whom his valuation also fluctuates, offer to him "little gentleness openheartedness, or sincerity." At the peak of his political career, moreover, Rousseau takes great pains toward and subsequently prides himself at his own sincerity and public honesty. During his brief diplomatic effort he goes to great lengths toward that end and finds himself rewarded for his effort which he represents as a model for society: "By remaining irreproachable in a position fully exposed to view, I deserved and won the esteem of the Republic and of all the ambassadors with whom we were in correspondence."

Finally, Rousseau criticizes the simple personal regard which society's members accord one another. There is, in his view, a lack of respect for individual concerns. Moreover, to Rousseau, that personal regard is mandatory if the individual is to live in society and with himself with dignity. Personal decency must be preserved, "and without decency there can be no dignity." Rousseau takes to term society's demand for esteem in the absence of any resolution to offer respect to others: "I liked decency and dignity on occasions that required them, and that I was exacting of the respect due to me as I was careful always to pay others the respect I owed them." It is Rousseau's strong opinion on the matter of decency which moves him, in fact, to leaving his diplomatic career: "as soon as I saw that he intended to deprive me of the honor I deserved for my service, I resolved to resign."

As Rousseau becomes more enamored of his solitude, he retreats, with increasing frequency, into his own contemplation, and having become "exalted by these sublime meditations," looks down from that height on members of society "pursuing the blind path of their prejudices, of their errors, of their mistakes and their crimes." He, in his meditations, revels in the divine notion of the ideal society: "I took such pleasure in thus soaring into empyrean in the midst of all the charms that



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surrounded me... losing all memories of anything else." The ideal, however, falls down around him, to some extent, as he perceives society's members as "wretched mortals appearing to hold (him) down to earth." In a sense, he reaches, through his contemplation, a limit to the perfectibility of society, at the point where he can no longer divorce himself from the imperfection. That is, society abruptly halts against the far-reaching idealizations of Rousseau's imagination and leaves him as a social criticism in need of a renewed sense of pragmatism in his evaluation of others in relation to himself.

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## 10

### **The self-destruction of Bahard Sartoris in Faulkner's *Sartoris***

The brief life and death of young Bayard Sartoris is, in part, a story of the life and death of his twin brother, John, wrought of their symbolic moral dichotomy. The variations of their intra-character relationship before and after John's death, color Bayard's perception of heroic quality and moral judgment and regulate his actions in a world torn apart by the absence of his brother.

Prior to the war in which they take part together, John and Bayard grew up together as companions and rivals. They lived inseparably and competed viciously and in so doing, constructed, of themselves and their personalities, a duality, from which arose a corporate sense of character and therein, a psychological interaction and interdependency. John's subsequent demise creates, for Bayard, an enormous and painful deficiency of character heart, and moral identity which becomes impossible for Bayard to fill.

Bayard's arrival home introduces his need to come to terms with his brother's death in combat. He occupies himself with blame for the death and from that perspective, attempts to build for himself a worthiness of the loss. As the train bearing him home from war rolls into town, he jumps off it and secretly stalks off into the woods, "jes like he woz trash." Simon's observation comes quite close to Bayard's evaluation of himself in light of the weight of John's death upon him. He feels as though he is "trash" or without worth and attempts to begin the psychological journey towards self-justification in the shadow of the justified heroism in John's death. In the context of the reality which he has imposed upon himself and the reality



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which he feels he is coming home to, he is the "trash" of which Simon spoke. John, through the actions of his life and death, has constructed an arena within which Bayard must now live the rest of his life. Bayard is aware that he must take action to reconcile the difference in the quality of reality of the mystique created in his brother's heroism and the homestyle existence of the Mississippi origins to which he returns.

When Bayard first meets his grandfather, old Bayard, he, without greeting, begins to speak of the episode of John's death: "I tried to keep him from going up there in that goddam. popgun." This marks not so much a feeling of responsibility for his brother's death but, moreover, his feelings of frustrated rage in his powerlessness to take action of the weight that John did in his act of death. He is void of that dimension of human character that John asserted in his death. John's death is the emblem that Bayard must struggle with until the end of his days, a constant reminder of that part of him that he cannot seem to locate in life, which, he subsequently discovers, can only be realized in his own death.

Bayard is occupied, for some time by the lack of sensibility found in John's actions. In many ways there was no rationality or sense in John's actions. The mission itself betrayed probability and therein, to Bayard, it should not have taken place. What he understands but is unable to embrace is the notion that John was acting upon certain intangible ideas which prescribe, without rationale, human behavior in many forms. John was motivated by glory and honor and in so, died a heroic death. Out of that heroism, Bayard generates a mythic figure embodying all the facets of human character that he cannot find for himself. John's behavior betrayed that which Bayard perceived as sensibility but the subsequent end was just. Therein, much of Bayard's haphazard behavior is explained. Bayard becomes preoccupied with justifying his very existence in terms of John's. Bayard, subconsciously measures all that he does against the ideal of his brother's actions. Even as he stands alone in the room that he had shared with John, overlooking the memorabilia from the lives of his own wife and child, he envelopes himself with John's presence and the abstraction of his life weighed against Bayard's: "He was only to be a little savagely ashamed of the heedless thing that he had done to her, he was thinking of his brother..." For him, the

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important moments were spent longing for John and the identity that John brought to him.

During his life, John had been, to Bayard, an idol within their competitive and vicious love-hate relationship. He loved John so deeply that he fought him to assume what he thought to be his stature. His feelings of ineptness grew throughout the, "young masculine- violence of their twinship," and the competitive failure of these, "violent, complementary," days of his youth came to a point in his mind after the loss of his only potential for survival: his brother, himself. In John's absence, he can only live for the idealized notion of his existence. Bayard finds his brother's past everywhere and randomly brings forth notions and images of it. He identifies that past, which came through his brother, with all elements of his present existence and allows it to "obliterate," his own sense of the past and the origins of his personal identity which stem from that past.

The "violence" of their lives together, in many ways, seems to have lacked the fulfillment that Bayard required. He seems to bear a need to relieve himself of that unrequited fury of his past: "He came in bringing that leashes cold violence (which she remembered)," John's death left him, in yet another dimension, without the ability to requite his pent-up emotions and fulfill the needs of his struggling identity.

The car which Bayard acquires serves as an expression, an outlet for his, "slowly brooding violence," as well as a medium through which he can approach the fleeting bounds of death itself. It allows him to approach the ideal of his brother's death in flight, to bring himself as close as possible to the agency which his ineffectual malady has prevented him from attaining. As he races about the roads below the effigy of his grandfather John, standing in the cemetery he symbolically, again and again, brings himself closer to the grave stones which mark the deaths of his brother and others who went before him. The car, it seems, serves as his emblematic vehicle in which he may arrive at that heroic notion of death of which he is void. But again he is ineffectual. He does not possess the human capacity necessary for attainment of the ideal and his frustration is exacerbated by the only realized reflection of his assertion — the destruction of his grandfather.

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Simon and his reaction to the symbolic automobile indicate a dimension of Bayard and his reactive failure. Simon, after great argument, finally agrees to a ride in the car and is simply terrified by the experience. Moreover, Bayard fails to accommodate or provide him any comfort at all. Simon operates as a sort of semblance of the past and a continuity of all time. Bayard's failure to make contact with Simon and his terror over the excursion creates a sense of Bayard's incapacity to adhere to and deal with the "real" past; excluding the myth of John and the old world before the war. He is aware of his effect on Simon and feels, "savage and ashamed," but is nonetheless powerless in his disability.

After drinking several tollys with McCallum on a certain afternoon, Bayard speaks again of John and the war: "Not of combat but rather of a life peopled by young men like fallen angels, and of meteoric violence beyond heaven or hell and partaking of both: doomed immortality and immortal doom." In a sense, Faulkner draws together all of Bayard's lot in these words. For him there will never be an idealized place in time or space, no "fallen angel," or, "meteoric violence," but a never-ending struggle against the natural forces which temper the magnitude of human action. This is the existence in which Bayard is trapped; he can never realize any glory in life or death because of his brother's action and hence is forever doomed, moreover, he must live his life with the knowledge of his timeless demise of actual impotence.

With the realization of his powerless posture comes also the awareness that he can never be fully capable of fulfilling his notions of self potential in life. His death, however, completes the duality that has gone unanswered-since the day of his brother's death. Bayard's suicide unites the moral extremities of John and Bayard in a manner not found in mortal experience. Their poles are fused in a Hegelian-like thesis, antithesis and subsequent synthesis. The synthesis here, however, provides no worth in life and in death, only a tempered compromise of the ideal. Compromised idealization within the crude, timeless melting-pot of the dead.

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## 11 Faulkner's Isolation of the Real

Toward an understanding of the transmission of knowledge and truth, the consideration of perception may be more consequential than that of action; conception more than intention. Faulkner, throughout *Absalom, Absalom!*, applies narrative as a multi-nested function in an attempt to differentiate those elements and draw an understanding of human motivation through subjective interpretation.

Quentin Compson must be the primary concern of an investigation into the sense of reality in the novel though other characters are important because they provide information through action and words. All those around Sutpen and those affected by those around him bring a certain dimension to bear on Quentin and his sense of the real because their thoughts and words are subject to their own circumstances and those in turn are subject to Quentin's. The assimilation of emotional needs and understanding of Quentin provides the most firm framework for arriving at Faulkner's notion of reality and his attempt to communicate it.

In chapter one, Miss Rosa Colfield initiates the second and third person-form of narrative account which is the operative force throughout the novel. Each chapter represents not only an isolated segment of motion, but the personal representation of an individual. Nearly all of the dramatic content of the novel is represented in this "looking-glass" fashion. Through its broad potential for, the equally broad potential for cognitive variation can be explored. Miss Rosa is still bound, in a sense, by her father's ideas in a manner which she is not even aware of and over which she has no control. She sits in her "office" because "her father called it that" and she has never known differently, creating an awareness that an isolation of her truth requires an appreciation of her



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perception of her father and his impressions of truth. Her posture represents a direct imposition of her father's reality and definition on her own. For Miss Rosa, Sutpen represents a means of motivation for her story. "The recapitulation evoked" by the "long dead object of her indomitable frustration" affects, in turn, Quentin's perception and subsequently alters the nature of his discourse with Shreve through which the truth of the story is more formally pursued. Miss Rosa is driven by a desire to satisfy her need to unravel the facts of and reasons for her past experience.

Faulkner concedes a potential for story-book impressionism in the mind of Quentin and the reader. Miss Rosa's narrative may be enlarged, enunciated, or colored in the way "a school prize water-color" may. This is Faulkner's intent. That potential prevents the strict imposition of an immediate conception of the real upon the reader's perception of variation. One must be aware, Faulkner asserts, that there exists no unifying field theory of truth but more an impression of variation that is as naturally obfuscating as it is enlightening.

*Absalom, Absalom!* is impressionistic in the sense that it avoids an objective evaluation of human and physical circumstance in light of Faulkner's belief that no such objectivity exists at all. He brings to bear the enormous breadth and depth of characters' impressions on the isolation and illumination of his personal understanding and realization of his existence.

Faulkner explicates the absence of realizable objectivity in the notion of "two separate Quentins," one affected by his idealized perceptions of the ante-bellum South peopled with "garrulous outrage baffled ghosts" and that which he installed, less than firmly, in the transition of the South from that prewar ideal. The existence of two separate postures from which to approach Miss Rosa's narrative, each communicating to the other "not (person)," speaking in "not language" raises an awareness of a dual basis for perceiving, considering, and judging reality. This is the same dialectic which comes to a point in chapters six and seven, Within the attempt by Shreve and Quentin to arrive at the truth which Quentin's dual self manipulates at that time. This dichotomy, an apparent contradiction in understanding, is however, validated and subsequently validating in and of itself. Quentin's perception must be considered in both contexts. The dialectic of the two is resolved in chapter eight, requiring the former two ideas placed against the narrative of Miss Rosa

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as it was constructed. It is this conflict within Quentin, the primary use of which is made in the final chapters, which allows a more likely awareness of the manner in which Quentin understands the story of his past and an appreciation of the direction he takes in order to come to terms with that understanding. In that sense, Faulkner's use of the "two-peopled" Quentin and its confrontation with the stories of Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson affords a closer look at the personal origin of the real in Quentin.

The motivation for Miss Rosa's narration is somewhat in question and is therefore subject to Quentin's interpretation and that, in turn, affects the final consequences of it. He has some understanding of her relation to Sutpen and subconsciously brings that to bear on what she tells him. Parts of the story obviously must be left untold simply by the nature of narrative itself. Words have limitations as they are placed in temporal movement and when they are applied of the subject of a multiplicity of human generations and events, their shortcomings must be circumvented by the unlimited quality of human emotion which provides the potential for moving back to the broader frame of time itself. Faulkner looks inside this abstract movement from action in time, to words, and back to the emotional recovery of ideas. He discovers, with some success through *Absalom, Absalom!*, the agility of humans, specifically characters within the novel, to reach across the limits of language and even human experience to locate an understanding of what it is that is happening around them, both perceived and unperceived. In reorganizing this quality within the novel itself and unraveling the complexities of narrative, language, and action therein encountered, it is possible to step outside the fiction and view it as acting or operative thesis within the context of the thesis itself. Subsequently, with some imagination, it may be postulated that all human understanding and perception of reality must include the imposition of fissures in continuity; that all knowing comes from a source which in turn has a source, the transition from which was subject to emotional cognizance and that this 'Subjectively is the key to the variations on truth and reality that we now must appreciate. It is that subjectivity which Quentin and Shreve attempt to circumvent in the final chapters. They attempt to apply language to the action, events, and feelings which Sutpen created in the old South.

Their discourse does in fact yield an account, at the end of the novel, of what transpired. Its adherence to actuality is certainly in question but not,

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in the least, at issue. It is Quentin who, within his own moral and psychological framework, bridges the final gap between language and a personal understanding of what is real. That is the movement that legitimizes the form of the novel in the face of Faulkner's purpose.

Most of the context from which Quentin perceives the words of Miss Rosa and the speculation of Shreve originates in his upbringing in a home and environment deeply affected by Sutpen and his action. It was "part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man Sutpen." He is touched by an overwhelming array of perceptions of Sutpen and those he has touched: "his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names." That context conditions him psychologically for what he is to encounter with Miss Rosa at her home and at Sutpen's Hundred, but there can be no preparation for the realization which comes upon him on that cold night in Cambridge with Shreve. That realization has no equal because it comes of himself, of the capsulated sense of perturbation, collation, and resolution of all the sensations that he had encountered up until that moment. Faulkner's use of the context of Quentin's thoughts about truth allow an additional understanding to the origin of idealistic resolve in human cognition and, in as much, provides the requisite for a behaviorist/existentialist posture in the consideration of that rule.

Quentin's receipt of a letter from his father announcing the death of Miss Rosa initiates the discussion between he and Shreve about Miss Rosa, the South, and Thomas Sutpen. It is that discussion which brings Quentin so close to what one may consider his truth about Sutpen and the South. Shreve enters the discussion with a perception of Quentin's past which is virtually untainted by any of the elements that have touched Quentin. For that reason, his reactions to and actions toward Quentin and his story allow the illumination of his journey toward what is real. Important here is Shreve's actual desire to isolate what is real in Quentin's story. In one sense, this provides a perspective of omniscience countered by his emotional inclination which tends to, sometimes against his will, plunge him into a personal regard for its circumstance. Faulkner uses this both literal and abstract dialectic to model, in a sense, the movement of human thought in a convergence upon truth. Shreve and Quentin represent two dimensions of human thought; Shreve, the subjective, emotionless omniscience and Quentin, the colored, vulnerable conscience. These, however, are their absolute

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postures only at the onset of the discussion. As it proceeds, each becomes affected by the other in a gradual convergence toward a unifying combination of the elements of emotion and rationality, the culmination of which defines a relative sense of truth and reality. Their discussion is an exploration little of which is premised on factual information. Most of the knowledge and understanding which Quentin brings has already been affected by the variations in its origin. Quentin's father constitutes a major portion of his source and is subject to the interpretation of Shreve and the emotional affectation of Quentin. Shreve sees the world of the South in a somewhat more objective fashion than Quentin. He listens to and interprets Quentin's words in a manner which caused him to react to the way that Quentin reflects on and interprets his own library of images from the past.

To Shreve, Quentin's tales of the South represent revelation. Beginning from his strictly objective posture, he is at once only affected objectively. He decorates the conversation with levity which seems to change character as he learns more of Quentin and the South and begins to manufacture, from his omniscience, an affected understanding of the circumstances described. Shreve assembles facts and circumstances and reports them calling Sutpen "the demon" and Rosa Colfield "Aunt Rosa." He jests at this time but the effect of his objective levity on Quentin is enormous. Quentin is affected by the way in which Shreve emotionlessly tosses about his generalizations. His sense of what has happened is so tangled by that past itself that he is startled by the way that Shreve isolates its verities. This raises the realization for Quentin that the circumstances of his past have indeed affected that past. The real, imposing itself in a manner that requires the thinker to become an operative in it. This is the manner in which Quentin is emotionally involved in the same reality that he attempts to isolate. But the two cannot be divorced. In a closed universe, cognizance requires this quality of itself, implicitly imposing a limitation on what can be explicitly verisimilitude.

Quentin and Shreve are both forced to speculate on many portions of their explanations of the past. Some of Shreve's speculations impose upon Quentin in the same manner that some environmental perturbations weigh on the human heart, complicating its resolution. Some of Shreve's hypotheses are commensurate with Quentin's perceptions and subsequently the two converge, laboriously, on a convention.

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Truth is affected in many ways in *Absalom, Absalom!* and Quentin is forced to clash with the contradiction between what is perceived and what actually may be in his quest for an understanding of what has occurred in his past and its relation to the South. He finds that reality is affected by human perception of it, the same agency that desires to attain it. It is colored by emotion, human conflict, myth, and the imposition of various elements on its application. Therein, its acquisition or isolation becomes a reflexive function of the self; a turning of the human mind and emotional posture upon itself. Quentin and Shreve are a part of their own quest: "Quentin knew he had stopped, since as far as the two of them knew, he had never begun since it did not matter (and) possibly neither of them conscious of the distinction which one of them had been doing the talking." It is impossible to separate the problem from its resolution since they are sympathetically one and the same. Quentin and Shreve project themselves implicitly on the truth, making the analysis reflexive in nature and parcel of itself. Faulkner, through his structural design and narrative technique creates a medium for the implied personal and societal self-evaluation requisite for the understanding of the complexities of an isolation of reality in any one human conception. Therein, through his multi-layered construction of explication he converges on a model of the nature of a glance into the real.

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## 12

### Eskimo Verse and Emily Dickinson

I will here make two comparative comments on the Eskimo verse poems and selected Emily Dickinson poems. My concern will be matters of narrative content and the problem of rhythmic intensity in verse. In general, Dickinson and the Eskimo canon show a concern for the expression of the relation of humanity to nature and the universe. The three Eskimo poems, "A Song of Men's Impotence and the Beasts They Hunted," "The Dead Hunter Speaks Through the Voice of Shaman," and "Words From Seven Magic songs," each address, in some sense, the notion of humanism as suggested by Alex Preminger.<sup>28</sup> Dickinson is not largely concerned with humanism itself, yet actively treats her own relationship to God and nature in a way similar to the spirit of the Eskimo verse.

In "Song of Men's Impotence," the relation between man — the hunter — and his relation I with his potential, the ideal man, is posed. Udinuligaramé shirks, "full of dread" at the ideal man, Pamerfiugame, who is "full grown." The "Dead Hunter," in his verse, who gives his address through the medicine man, seems to exist in a state through which he has transcended sub-human "men's fears" via the paradox of a humanist heroic ideal which also includes death.

In No. 412, "I read my sentence — steadily," Dickinson describes an episode in which the human first learns (like the humanist) of its ideal possibility — death. Unlike the "horror" of the Dead Hunter, Dickinson's soul and death become peacefully acquainted, "Meet tranquilly as

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<sup>28</sup> Alex Preminger, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 253



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friends." In No. 1593, "There came a wind like a Bugle," the forces of nature, like the testing ground for the Eskimo hunter, are a personified reminder of the more strict duality of the human and the "Beyond" of the Dickinson universe. Thus, in the Eskimo verse, nature is both the arena and final judge for achieving humanist ideals; in Dickinson, the human and the ideal are at peace but strictly bifurcated.

In some case, changes in rhythmic intensity also affect the relation of the human to his or her ideal. Particularly in the Eskimo verse where it is evident that percussion and chanting are integral to the actual poetic performance, rhythm helps to shape that relation. In the chant, "Words From Seven Magic Songs," the rhythmic refrain "Big man," and the succeeding repeat intoned each time with a mark of exclamation builds in its affirmation of man. The verse moves from its invocation of the graphically spaced "man's mind" — and — "a magic song," through the chimes of affirmation to the "thoughts" — "smooth out;" providing possibility or hope for humanity's attainment of "magic." For Dickinson, "magic" or Paradise can only come through the giving up of the self to Christ-the "Abdication — Me — of Me," in No. 642, "Me from Myself to banish." Thus, though the Eskimo hunter may have to flirt with death in order to realize the "human," the Dickinson ideal can only come through victory over death and eternal salvation.

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## 13

### Architecture/Arche-texture:

I would like here to make some comments about the texture of poetry, specifically in Mandelstam's "The Admiralty", and Stevens's "Gray Room." The comparison will make its departure by examining the way in which the notion of architecture, in various forms, relates to the poems' structures. By texture, I mean those poetic elements which cannot be ascribed to structure. Instead, texture is what contributes to the tone, feeling, and color of a poem.

In "The Admiralty", the elements of architecture — material and space — provide the underlying conflict between man's architecture and nature's. Though man's work is an attempt to bring mastery of the earth, it can ultimately only provide texture, or nuance to nature. Similarly, in "Gray Room," the material and spatial elements — the architecture — contribute the texture nuances to a basic structure.

That basic structure is comprised of the first and last lines of "Gray Room": "Although you sit in a room Mat is gray / ... / I know how furiously your heart is beating." Even though the room is at once an architectural element, it serves more force fully as a frame within which the nuances of material and space can play. The subject of the poem, ("you,") is posited in a "room" in the first line. The room is "gray," monotonous, empty, homogenous. As the poem continues, that structural imagery is continuously modified as the room is "filled" with architectural images. Here the architectural elements qualify the texture of the poem as they "qualify," that is, fill up and complicate, the space of the room itself: "straw-paper," "beads," "fan," "branches," "leaf." Not to mention the colors that give further nuance to these forms, by distinctness of the bare "structure" of the room is



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impoverished as the spatial modifiers are placed in prepositional phrases that become clauses in the first sentence: "of ...straw-paper," "at your ...gown," etc.

In a different way, Mandelstam uses the unstructurable infiniteness of nature and the universe as a foundation which is then given "color" and nuance by man's "architecture." There is a building (or some other monumental man-made creation) standing in the first stanza. It is man's attempt to make concrete form-structure. A monument to himself. The object is, however, "lost in the leaves." It is made a nuance — a texture by the age-old poplar-tree. The "four sovereign elements" — fire, water, air, earth — no longer have authority over man's creation. Another element — "a fifth" — has been added. It is man's architecture. Man's work does not take "dominion," as the poem questions, but is, instead, a force that tempers nature as nature tempers it. The "capricious jellyfish," like the "anchors" are the timeless "angry" strongholds which nature maintains — permitting man only nuance — not dominion.

Thus architecture provides the color and nuance for these poems. In "Gray Room," its effect of filling of the room with spatial objects permits a modification of the room with the recognition that it can never be completely changed. In "The Admiralty?" architecture is again a vehicle for coloring and giving nuance to nature. Yet there the question of nature's mastery over man's artifices — its "dominion" — is actually threatened.