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PLAYING WITH PLAY: A TEST CASE OF "ETHOCRITICISM"

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HUMANITIES WORKING PAPER 10

May 1978
Revised September 1978

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"Man plays only when he is a man in the full sense of the word and he is really a man only when he plays." (?)

(Schiller: Letters on the esthetic education of Man.)

In the last three decades, literary criticism has shown a gradual shift from the traditional object oriented approach (priority given to the content of the literary text) to a subject oriented approach (priority given to the literary discourse as a solipsistic expression entirely autonomous from reality.) In suggesting an ethological reading of literature, this essay would like to be a tentative challenge to this position, now prevalent among literary critics. But in looking for support outside of the relatively small circle of contemporary literary quarrels, it immediately encounters obstacles just as formidable in other spheres of documentation. The nature/culture issue, that is the extent to which the biological roots of man's behavior can be used as the basis for humanistic studies, is still seething with controversies. For everyone opening the door (for instance Callan, 1970; Fox, 1971; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1973) one finds someone else brandishing a caveat. The full range of methodological difficulties inherent to such an undertaking, from the epistemological problem presiding over understanding in general

and experimental work in particular, to the inferential nature of comparisons, the confusion between homologue and analogue, the quantum leaps in levels of analysis, have all been comprehensively summed up at the threshold of this very journal (Peterson and Somit, 1978). Yet the authors conclude favorably for the necessity to continue such enquiries.

Recent works in psychology reflect the same trend.

J. Bowlby (1969) takes a stand in support of continuity, even in the fuzzy domain of human and animal behavior: "what is far more probably than absence of continuity is . . . that the basic structure of man's behavioral equipment resembles that of infra-human species but has in the course of evolution undergone special modifications that permit the same ends to be reached by a much greater diversity of means. . . . The early form is not superseded: it is modified, elaborated and augmented but it shall determine the overall pattern." (p. 40). Bowlby's volume is, in fact, a detailed study bridging the gap between innate patterns of attachments in mammals and the attachment/loss complex in the human baby -- thus completely displacing or bypassing Freud's focus on the mainly cultural Oedipal situation. Along the way, he offers concrete and convincing descriptions of the mechanisms leading from simple systems to culture-permeated, "goal-corrected" systems in human infants. Piaget on play (1951) and Reynolds on the origins of verbal communication (1971) are other examples of studies that go beyond a wishful thinking about the universality of behavior.

To the extent that literature is also a psychological and

sociological product, one should be permitted to explore the potential of an ethological approach. Because it is the most distilled such product and imaginary by definition, it constitutes a special case. Consequently, the second part of this essay will discuss the parameters of what might be called "ethocriticism," while the first part will sketch an application to the literary domain of some ethological concepts taken as working hypothesis. As to the whole matter of their scientific validity, it will have to remain, along with the burden of responsibility for experimental verification in the hands of scientists.

However, even an outsider would have to keep clear of the "Naked Ape" or "Territorial imperative" syndromes, that is the irrelevance of raw or isolated data transposed from one species to another. . The approach suggested by Callan (1970) as an antidote is "a receptivity towards common themes and structures running through the data." He proposes to extract from as many comparative data as possible the simplest structural units of any given behavior. Once these are minimally defined "we would then be in a position to see more clearly than at present what is specifically human about human societies." (p. 152).

The present study will follow this path but somewhat in reverse. A composite picture of some basic characteristics and some probable functions of play has been sought from a variety of reliable ethological sources. To avoid both the deceptiveness of raw data and the stigma of an anthropomorphic use of the word "play" those features of play have been retained which define it in relation to other kinds of nonplay behavior in the hope that the concept of relation is the least conspicuous approach to comparison.

I will examine if these features and functions are present, (inside the cocoon of culture and of literary invention) in three famous literary French texts: Molière's The Would-be Gentleman, Diderot's Rameau's Nephew and Zola's Germinal.¹ While an ethologist would be bound by the rule of thumb of specificity and would concentrate on the specifically human forms of play, I am taking the cultural expressions for granted and looking at the whole thing from the other end of the telescope. In brief, I would hope for a test case verifying that "even if a species sheds its dependence on instincts, it still has to do the same things that instincts were designed to do. . . . Culture has to do the same job that instinct had been doing." (Fox, 1971, p. 293).

A few words are in order here to explain how these three works (purposely chosen as disparate) feature the theme of play. In the Would-be Gentleman Jourdain, a rich bourgeois obsessed by the desire to become a nobleman, apes the mannerisms of aristocrats and, thanks to his money, avails himself of all the tangible signs of nobility: sumptuous clothes, lessons in various social graces, jewels, a mistress and finally a fake title. He energizes his entourage (which follows him with various degrees of reluctance or indulgence) into a grotesque but good-humored Turkish ceremony, at the end of which Jourdain is given the fancy Turkish title of Mamamouchi and his daughter married to a man finer than her father. In Diderot's Rameau's Nephew, a resigned, reasonable and almost excessively "adult" philosopher (named I) encounters in a public park a Bohemian sycophant and unsuccessful musician (He in the dialogue) supposed to be a nephew of Jean-Philippe Rameau the famous composer. In the course of a rambling conversation on a wide range of subjects from gossip and social

satire to esthetic and moral considerations, the Nephew goes through numerous episodes (actually fits) of mimicry, among which are four famous "pantomimes," all involving music and dance in various combinations, some several pages long and extremely complex. Diderot leaves the dialogue open-ended and the critics are still arguing which character represents him and whether the Philosopher or the Nephew has the last word and last laugh. Germinal, Zola's somber and generous epic of the coal miners' hardship and revolt in the North of France in the 1860s, shows a subgroup of children, led by the most assertive one Jeanlin. In the midst of the class struggles and a strike, they continue to be involved with the parallel dramas of their games and secret world. They are depicted as extremely animalistic, "prowling along the roads . . . their eyes blazing like those of young wolves" or with "monkey's snout . . . protruding ears and tiny greenish eyes." However, the adult world and the children's world converge at some point: Jeanlin ends killing a government trooper, thus precipitating the bloody repression of the strike and the final capitulation of the miners.

The simplest forms of play seem to be automatic, repetitive and more involved with the movements than with the goal (Hinde, 1966; Hutt, 1966; Van Lawick-Goodall, 1968; Dolhinow, 1971). Jourdain's constant posturings and his inability to scheme, the Nephew's sudden and repeated attacks of mimicry fit this description. So do the uncontrollable

roaming and practical jokes, the "buggering about together," of the children in Germinal, punctuated by the screams and cuffs of their helpless mothers. (70-72, 209, 211-12, 224-25, 321).

While a psychologist would call playful only those experiences recorded as pleasurable, there is speculation that pleasure is not a necessary element of play (Groos, 1901; Vygotsky, 1966; Dolhinow, 1971). And indeed, if it is clear that M. Jourdain radiates pleasure when parading in his magnificent dressing-gown or his Turkish headgear, it seems very doubtful in the case of the pantomime episodes of Rameau's Nephew. "Worn out, exhausted, like a man emerging from a deep sleep or a prolonged reverie, he stood motionless, dumb, petrified" (68). He will sob after impersonating his wife (86). Neither could the intense cynical world of the Germinal gang be defined as pleasurable:

For some time, though, Jeanlin had been going too far. He beat Lydie as though she were his wedded wife, and he took advantage of Bébert's credulity to get him involved in all kinds of nasty scrapes, finding it amusing to make a donkey of this strapping boy who was so much stronger than he was and who could have crushed him with one blow . . . but neither he nor she would have dared disobey Jeanlin; and so, . . . they did not even put their arms around each other, but walked side by side, yearning and despairing, sure that if they so much as touched each other their captain would clout them from behind (216-17).

Most play includes some imitation of adult behavior (Van Lawick-Goodall, 1968; Lancaster, 1971; Bruner, 1972). For instance when Jourdain demonstrates for the benefit of his servant Nicole what he has just seen a well-tipped fencing master do (26), the scene stands in the same

relationship to the real duelling of noblemen as the playfight of animals to real aggression. Comparable to a sequence reported by Miller (1973), the Molière episode ends in a real riposte from Nicole, too naive to comply with the "this is play" message parenthesized by Jourdain -- or more probably eager to ignore it. Rameau's Nephew, by pretending to play a violin, then a piano (first pantomime), to sing a fugue (second pantomime), to be a whole opera in himself (third pantomime), and finally (fourth pantomime) to be both the choreographer and the corps de ballet, actually apes all successful musicians and artists and, through them, his most resented uncle the famous and real Rameau.

So there he is, seated at the keyboard with bent legs, staring at the ceiling as he read his notes there, singing, improvising. His voice went like the wind and his fingers flew over the keys, leaping from treble to bass, dropping the accompaniment to stress the melody. On his face successive emotions could be read as they passed: tenderness, anger, bliss, sorrow. One could distinguish piano from forte, and I am sure that a cleverer man than I could have recognized the piece by the tempo and dynamics, by the grimaces and the phrases that he sang out from time to time. But what was strangest was that every so often he would stumble and grope around, as if making a mistake and being annoyed at his fingers' forgetfulness (25-26).

Zola's Jeanlin, Bebert and Lydie ape their parents: they have secret hangouts where Jeanlin can be the master of the group -- with a dominance pattern among them concentric to the one existing in the outside world between the capitalistic bourgeois and the miners (100-01, 221). As for Bebert and Lydie, they are content to play little husband and wife (340-41), Bebert "always thinking of squeezing her in

his arms the way he'd seen grown-up couples do." (217)

Play behavior, however, is always distinguishable from the corresponding nonplay activity (Hinde, 1966; Sade, 1973; Piaget, 1951). It is exaggerated (Jourdain's clothes are grotesque, his gentlemanly manners overdone), or incongruous (Rameau's Nephew performs out of context, in the gardens of the Palais Royal, amidst astonished chess players and passersby; he forces the expressions in the opera) or incomplete (in Germinal, the children do pretend to make love but are not yet physiologically capable of it):

She was his little wife, and in dark corners they attempted together the lovemaking they saw and heard at home behind the partitions and through the cracks in the doors. They knew everything, but were still too young to do much of anything, so they groped and played for hours, like vicious puppies. He called it "playing mama and papa." (101)

Indeed the distortion is necessary: it serves as one of the signals that "this is play" without which the play activity could elicit the same serious consequences as the normal activity (Bateson, 1955; Hinde, 1966; Dolhinow, 1971). Thus is perhaps explained the tragic and nonplay ending into which the Germinal play episodes climax. Committing a real murder (of the sentry guarding the mine), Jeanlin foregoes the play signal. In other words, here ends the play; real life takes over with Bebert and Lydie (shot in the repression of the strike) as its first victims.

In human as in animal play the short-range product is less important than the process itself (Poirier and Smith, 1974; Wilson, 1975).

Anthropologists or psychologists prefer to dwell on the nonutilitarian aspect. Thus, Huizinga (1955) one of the best-known advocates of the civilizing function of play declares that play is superfluous, stresses its disinterestedness, sees it as the antithesis of the appetite process satisfying in itself and ending there. Yet ethologists agree in assuming a long-range adaptative value for it, since it was not eliminated by the evolutionary process. In his classical and lapidary statement, Groos (1898) does not hesitate to claim that "animals cannot be said to play because they are young and frolicsome but rather, they have a period of youth in order to play" (p.66). This difference in point of view, the clearest cleavage perhaps between ethological and anthropological play, should be given particular attention.

The adaptative value assigned to play by various sources falls more or less into two categories. The first one defines it as the exercise of important instincts before the individual seriously needs them, that is before the adult society is ready to integrate him. (Groos, 1898; Millar, 1968; Dolhinow and Bishop, 1970). "For this reason, play appears to be most common and most intense at times of disjunction and discontinuity of one kind or another, changes that imply, foster or force changes in behavior." (Norbeck, 1974, p. 270). "In this respect, the case of *Geminal's* children needs no special explanation, since their activities are in keeping with their age. On the other hand, *Jourdain's* and the *Nephew's* childlike behavior raises some questions. In spite of sporadic occurrences of adult animal playing, many of these involving interactions with the young (Schiller, 1957; Hinde, 1966; Loizos, 1969), play seems to decrease sharply with increasing age in the animal world. But

there is a correlation between the evolutionary position of mammalian forms and the intensity and incidence of play--primates playing more and longer than lower evolutionary ranks. Man not only plays more than other species, but continues playing after physical maturity is reached. (Norbeck, 1974). One would therefore have to admit a departure here from the more general pattern and perhaps recur to the concept of neoteny (Lorenz, 1965; Reynolds, 1972), that is the human characteristic of retaining in adulthood features associated with youth.

There may be further justifications for the sort of play found in the Would-be Gentleman and in Rameau's Nephew. Erikson's thesis (1977) is indirectly helpful. The thrust of his study is to proceed "from the ontogenic patterns of playfulness to phylogenetic forms of ritualization in private and in public life," and to "explain the life-and-death importance of human make-believe" (p. 60). Nevertheless, in subsequent pages, Erikson denies that the child's playfulness is later channelled only in deliberate games and rituals involving a formal performance. To the contrary, he thinks that an adult performing in a deliberate way is "playing at playing," while true youthful playfulness "pervades any kind of activity related to the future"(pp. 62-63). It seems clear that Jourdain and the Nephew's unselfconscious make-believe are closer to Erikson's latter definition and it will be shown later how their play activities are indeed related to the future.

In fact, both Erikson (1977) and Piaget (1951) equate the passage from sensorimotor play to symbolic play with an increased capacity for representation, that is an increased separation of the signifier (symbol) from the signified (object). Human language, with

its characteristics of pure representation and arbitrary signs precipitates this process by its parallel but independent growth. Indeed, Piaget finds in the play activities of chimpanzees and young children some evidence that while the symbolic function grows along with language, it does not depend on it. Returning now to Molière, and Diderot's characters, it is worth pointing out that their play consists in mostly sensorimotor make-believe in the first case (parading, preening, imitation of dancing, of fencing, of curtsying, etc.) and totally so in the second case (pantomimes). In this regard, the famous lesson in philosophy at the beginning of the Would-be Gentleman (17-18) is revealing: Jourdain totally confuses the physical articulation of letters with their arbitrary representational function; he equates a mere word with the thing it stands for (a nobility title for instance). All of this suggests not only a psychologically regressive (infantile) form of play, but also a phylogenetic regression to an infrahuman behavior.

The connection of their infantile behavior with the future is partly the result of the division of the human species into what Erikson calls "subspecies" or "pseudo-species" (1977), that is exclusive ethnic or cultural groups. Jourdain and the Nephew are caught in a social "encapsulation" (to use another biological image). A great deal has been written on Jourdain as the prototype of the rising bourgeoisie in seventeenth-century France, one which already has the dynamism of its class without having conquered its lettres de noblesse, nor lost its complexes towards the aristocracy. One can plainly see the similarity with the context of play described above. It throws an additional light

on one critic's idea that Jourdain is the winner and not the loser of the play (Gossman, 1963; Simon, ed., 1957), since Molière's play ends with the noblemen joining in the joyous Turkish ceremony. Thus in a period of transition Jourdain's antics are, unbeknown to him and to the arrogant noblemen, a biological assertion of the forthcoming advent of the Bourgeoisie as the dominant class.

The same disparity between the maturing instincts of the individual and the unwillingness of society to accept him as a full-fledged member exists in Rameau's Nephew. Locked in his sycophantism, regarded as childish by his patrons, unappreciated as a musician in spite of his obvious talents, Rameau is reduced to play. The role of the pantomimes as a psychological valve and an esthetic resolution did not escape several critics (for instance, Joseph, 1969). But other interpretations, the Hegelian one for instance, insist on the political charge of the text: if I stands for the self-satisfied consciousness and He for the disintegrated consciousness (as Hegel himself puts it),² the synthesis of the dialogue transcends both through the superior consciousness of the author. (Duchet and Launey, eds., 1967). An ethological reading would descend to a deeper layer and see the Nephew's play not only as venting his social frustrations and (politically) as announcing the Hegelian dream of the recognition of all by all, but, at a more basic level, as helping the immature individual to practice his instinctive skills lest they should atrophy, until society has some use for them.

While the matter of survival rests on the relative similarity of the social contexts of the two characters, the difference between Molière's ebullient ceremony and Diderot's frenetic pantomimes could be

blamed on the differences in their contexts. Without going into the detail of specific studies (for instance Barker et al, 1943; Van Lawick-Goodall, 1968; Suomi et al, 1971), both animal and human play are clearly affected by various environmental deprivations and frustrations. Subjects have been observed, then, to respond to these conditions by displaying solitary and regressive forms of play. It is clear that the misfit Nephew is much more deprived by his environment than the prosperous and well-loved Jourdain, therefore his quasi-autistic and unproductive stance. Using another ethological concept, the analogy of play with a syntax (Kalmus, 1969; Bruner, 1972), one would be tempted to call Jourdain's play, which generates counter-play, "transitive" and the Nephew's play "intransitive" since it fails to affect his environment.

This last remark leads us to the second definition of the adaptive value of play: the educative function. Play represents a trial and error period for the development of social skills and of the use of tools in primates and humans. For this reason, its context must be pressure-free while providing at the same time some challenge (Dolhinow, 1971; Fagen, 1976). This means that Jourdain's and the Nephew's frustrations cannot entirely cancel their freedom. The Would-be Gentleman enjoys the freedom of money and the relative security of the bourgeoisie, while feeling the challenge of social emulation. Rameau's Nephew is presented as a free-roaming individual whose animalistic and capricious temperament is constantly emphasized: "the next morning [after sleeping in a stable] he still has bits of his mattress in his hair. If the weather is mild, he perambulates all night up and down the Cours-la Reine or the Champs-Élysées. Daybreak

sees him in town, all dressed from yesterday for today and from today perhaps for the remainder of the week' (9). Nevertheless he cannot resist aping other musicians and probably being innovative in the process (or so he says and Diderot hints).

As for the Germinal gang, Zola describes their freedom as follows:

At first they had been content to roll about in the coal stacked in the yards of Le Voreux, or to play hide-and seek among the stores of timber, where they could get lost as in a virgin forest. Then they had taken the pit-bank by storm, sliding on their behinds down the bare parts which were still hot with hidden fires, living doggo all day long, busy with quiet little games like mischievous mice. And then they widened their field of conquest: went and fought bloody battles among the piles of bricks, ran wild in the fields, eating all sorts of juicy herbs just as they were, without bread, hunted in the canal banks, caught fish in the mud and swallowed them raw, roamed for miles as far as the tall forest of Vandame, where they gorged on wild strawberries in spring and nuts and bilberries in summer. Soon the whole vast plain had become their territory (216).

Such passages best verify Wilson's statement (1975) that at its most free-ranging form, "play loosens the behavioral repertory of each generation" (p. 167).

Furthermore, play must remain penalty-free so that individuals can practice switching social rank from superior (alpha) to inferior (beta), a mechanism necessary for adjusting to the hierarchy of the adult society (Bertrand, 1969; Loizos, 1969; Dolhinow, 1971). Jourdain, indeed, behaves in turn obsequiously with the aristocrats and imperiously with his family and servants. The rule of play is flexible and can be altered by mutual consent, as shown by the group's acceptance of

Jourdain's wishes. To the contrary, not only are the Nephew's pantomimes solitary, but they all assume an "alpha" role (virtuoso, conductor, ballet master), and thus lack educative value.

Finally the freedom of play preserves the openness of the mind to the surrounding world. In this fashion, it insures the registering of details which would seem irrelevant to the adult mind. (Sylva, Bruner and Genova, 1976). Jeanlin and Bebert are precisely the first to pick up, in the behavior of the two mine horses, minute signs of the forthcoming disaster (151-152). Subsequently, Jeanlin miraculously escapes death, while the adult Chicot is killed (154).

C. R. Alcorn (1969) has an inkling of this when he points out that Zola's children have a broad intimate knowledge of their ecological milieu. As an example he uses Jeanlin, more at ease in the monstrous, minotaur-like world of the mine than the adults, finding protection and nourishment from it, whereas the adults are physically and psychologically destroyed by it. Here again, an ethological grid allows an even more precise interpretation. For instance, it throws an interesting light on the fact that Jeanlin, again the "predatory animal" in Zola's words, is the only one to survive the double trauma of the strike and the flood. The end of the book shows him with a surface job, while his middle-aged and physiologically-ruined mother has herself gone down to work in the mine (422). In contrast with Jeanlin, the timing of the other children's death is in inverse proportion to their precociousness. The most altruistic, most adult and least playful child, Alzire, is the first to die (of malnutrition) (322). Zacharie and Catherine, who have gone to work and reached adulthood

prematurely, also die prematurely (317 & 394). So do Bebert and Lydie, shot in the strike, who were less animalistic and more sentimental in their play than Jeanlin. Symbolically, we find in this development a telescoped version of the waste and time delay involved in evolutionary perspectives. Even apart from the individual fate of Jeanlin, there will be progress for the group: "They might be beaten, they had lost their money, and some of them their lives, but Paris would never forget the gunshots at Le Voreux for they had inflicted a mortal wound from which the Empire itself would lose its life-blood." (426). My final contention here is that in the evolutionary dimension (which transcends the ideological one), Jeanlin's intense play may have contributed more to the future of the group than Etienne's political faith, his reading of Darwin (365) or the miners' sacrifices.

At the end of this exploration, we have to raise, if not answer, some questions looming behind the undertaking. They seem to organize themselves into two concentric circles, the questions from within and the questions from without.

The questions from within examine the potential of application of ethocriticism without challenging its raison d'être. For instance: if literature is to reveal characteristics or processes claimed as common to men and other species, the size of the literary sampling becomes relevant, as when Levi-Strauss finds universal cultural structures by analyzing a large number of disparate myths. In this respect, my sample is insignificant, but choosing works as dissimilar as my examples

was a small step in the right direction. In other words, the same method would apply in establishing the basic pattern of literary play as in establishing the basic pattern of animal play. Then, if the criteria here is the scientific (realistic) correctness of the literary characters, how could this approach be used with a deliberately surrealist work, with poetry? On the other hand, it would seem that the less likely the literary ground for their application, the more convincingly the results would show themselves. A further question would be: do literary episodes centered on the topic of play really demonstrate the play instinct of the author? Here again a less biased choice of material -- for instance either some theme other than play or some aspect of the form structured like the model of animal play could be stronger arguments. It is in this particular direction that the method is beginning to gain ground, as witnessed by the studies which have preceded my own cautious excursion. Both S. Langer (1953) and M. Peckham (1967) see comedy and art in biological terms as an adaptational mechanism which helps man cope with a hostile environment. J. Campbell (1960) compares the symbols of mankind to isomorphs or innate images imprinted in the brain of animals. The most detailed such study to my knowledge (A.B. Kernan, 1973) follows a parallel between the characteristics and functions of literary satire and the ritualization of aggression in animal species. It concludes that an approach presenting a literary genre as involved with the survival of the human species can hardly be labelled "reductionist"! These illustrations of the method consider some elements of literary forms as human correlatives of specific kinds of animal behavior, thereby respecting the specificity

of literature as a media (or mediator) and of man as a species. Moreover, because of the focus on the literary forms, this approach would sort out mediocre works, while an approach focusing solely on the content would not discriminate between good and bad literature.

In this light, the theme of play appears to be a privileged one for a number of reasons. First, the paralinguistic communication constituted by the largely sensorimotor play prevalent in my examples is known to be phylogenetically related to the communication system of nonhuman primates (Hinde, 1972; Reynolds, 1972); it therefore is less susceptible than other literary content to be severed from its biological roots by the linguistic and literary process -- especially if one keeps in mind that even the structures of thought have their roots in sensorimotor mechanisms which are deeper than linguistics (Piaget, 1967). But even more pertinent is the fact that the forms of animal play and the forms of drama (Molière's and Diderot's "play") and for that matter of all literature have common characteristics. If play is repetitious, so is art: the transformation of linear (historical) material into its ritualized artistic form involves the circular repetition of the performance, or the rhymes, or the stanzas, or of the individual reading of a poem, etc. Play is "free," liberated from an immediate pragmatic goal and emphasizes process; so does the literary discourse in relation to ordinary communication. Play announces its intent not to delude by special signals; the literary conventions have the same function. Play allows for the exercise of unused instincts in the same way that, in tragedy, catharsis allows for a harmless expression of human passions. Finally, from the teleological point of view of evolution, play is just as important

as serious behavior; similarly, a long tradition of criticism from Aristotle to present day scholars find in the stylization of art the triumph of teleology over the randomness of reality.

The questions from without boil down to a single awesome query: does explaining literary material by ethological concepts amount to a gross confusion of levels -- as would be, for instance, accounting for levitation in fairy tales by the principles of aeronautics? Whether a literary text has any connection with the "truth" outside it hinges on a holistic theory of language and a huge "chicken and the egg" question about the order of appearance of reality and textuality.

The span of the still raging "structuralist controversy" is excellently summed up by M. Krieger (whose moderation and honesty should be a constant example to all critical projects) in the last chapter of Theory of Criticism (1976). It is his panorama I shall use to situate ethocriticism in relation to various theories. According to him, the Saussurian opposition between the synchronic langue and the diachronic parole (somewhat cursorily exported from linguistics into literature) continues to underlie the debates of literary critics. Among them, the Geneva School (or "School of consciousness") clings to a dualistic (Cartesian) distinction between subject and object and can therefore conceive a pre-linguistic (atemporal) subjective consciousness as the point of origin and return of the literary creation. To the extent that an etho-critique would affect the writer as subject, there is no reason why it could not be used within the framework of this approach. Then, another group enters the scene, that of the "genetic" (mainline) structuralists led by L. Goldmann. They are more interested in the synchronic langue

than in the diachronic and are convinced that the genesis of a literary text, far from being a free individual process, is, in fact, embedded in the matrix of collective communication which is of course determined by history and society. So that most literary structures, particularly those involving social and economic facts, are always transindividual: their existence is, so to say, indistinguishable from the system of verbal communication which has mediated them from the beginning. These structures (which I will call horizontal in the hope of clarifying the picture) appear in the text as networks of purely linguistic and rhetorical clues and consequently lend themselves only to a textual (immanent) analysis. However, in "Structures, Human Reality and Methodology" (1970) Goldmann, himself makes an allowance for a different, individual sort of structure which one might call "vertical": "The existence of significant structures is not linked to that of a symbolic system or to the possibility of communication. Such structures already exist at the level of animal behavior previous to language and continue to exist in men as biological structures which integrate language"(324, my translation). They are also modified by the symbolic system of literature (especially when they have become unconscious) but they do not depend on it. In order to decode the literary disguise which they wear in the text, one may use a "vertical" approach and refer to some system of explanation outside of the text capable of connecting the tip of the iceberg to its base. In this respect, ethology would provide as legitimate a grid as psychoanalysis has for many critical studies in the past.

But ethocriticism will not fare as well with more radical theories. The latest wave of structuralism, the "critical" or

"deconstructionist" school follows from Derrida's philosophy of language (1967 and 1968) and in turn challenges the partiality of the previous group to the synchronic, in fact, denies its relevance as the origin of literary texts since there is no way to apprehend it except precisely through individual texts. Based on the quasi-schizophrenia of the letter, of the word, of the sign, texts shall be strictly self-referring, opaque, duplicitous but also free from the necessity to mean anything. Needless to say, this extreme position which merges the signifier and signified and keeps the utterance adrift from any pinpoint origin would exclude the very idea of ethocriticism as fraudulently "meaningful."

M. Krieger's attempt at holding a middle ground may leave us on a more hopeful note. He argues that saying that A is like B with respect to characteristic X does not prevent A and B from remaining distinct and keeping their different characteristics -- other than X. In terms of literary criticism, this means that "we are not to take the metaphor for life, but we see life the more acutely for the metaphor and through it" (p. 243). To the delusion of verisimilitude, he opposes the maintaining of a self-conscious esthetic illusion, which in an existential way, by the active process it demands of the reader, ends being more present and more real than a by now unimportant reality. He celebrates "the poet's metaphoric reductions, reality as vision present and prescient . . . Within his sphere man transforms the nature and the time he suffers, and lives in the light of the forms that work his inventive miracles" (p. 244). Applied to ethocriticism this path would suggest detailed studies on how literature elaborates metamorphosed versions of whatever biological forces men share with other species. Thus, both the questions from within and the question from without bring us back to formal problems.

If ethocriticism is ever to become a facet of contemporary criticism, its future certainly lies in this direction.

Outside the arena of theoretical jousts, for those of us who are not dizzied by the binary opposition of "the absence of the presence" and the "presence of the absence" of the word (Krieger on Derrida, pp. 230-31), no argument was necessary and even in their sketchy form, my examples may have thrown a bit of additional light on three masterpieces.

NOTES

1. Quotations in the text refer respectively to:

Five Plays, Trans. J. Wood (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953), I-62; Rameau's Nephew and Other Works, trans. J. Barzun and R. H. Bowen (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 8-87; Germinal, trans. S. and E. Hochman (New York: New American Library, 1970).

2. Hegel's original interpretation is in The Phenomenology of Mind, 2 vol. (London: 1910), II, 488-533, esp. 496, 527-28. See also Marx to F. Engels, letter from London, 15/4/1869 (various eds.).

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