Ian Dennis - *The Sexual Market: Three Romantic Moments*

Roman Katsman - *Cultural Rhetoric, Generative Anthropology, and Narrative Conflict*

Melanie Long - *Merchantry, Usury, Villainy: Capitalism and the Threat to Community Integrity in The Merchant of Venice*

Marina Ludwigs - *Adventures in Sainthood: Pascal’s Wager in Eric Rohmer’s My Night at Maud’s*

Edmond Wright - *Generative Anthropology and Triangulation Theory*

*Benchmarks*
Freedom of response to the unfree imperatives of sexual desire, over against various sacral inhibitions thereof, was perhaps aspired to earlier and more persistently than other freedoms in the emergent human market place. Certainly stories of great and greatly transgressive lovers, of Tristan and Iseult or Abelard and Eloise, or of a multitude of more recent romantic strainers against social interest and religious control, including latterly loves daring to speak their own polymorphous (if thus no longer authentically perverse) names, have rather outpaced accounts of the transcendent energies of Captains of Industry, and at least kept up with myths of political and national liberation. And yet, in an endlessly bemusing paradox that has emerged less bluntly for the other categories, it is almost of necessity to the refuge or at least the metaphor of the sacred that the outcomes of such freedom must have recourse. Or so it would seem from the testimonies commonly available. (If Girard and others have dismissed this recourse as "deviated transcendency,"(1) there are many to retort that the deviation goes precisely in the other direction. "If this is a religious experience," cry such skeptics before, say, Bernini’s Ecstasy of Saint Theresa, "We believe we have had it!") At any rate, liberalization in this area of human experience, as it expanded in the forefront of the transformations of the European eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, increasingly represented itself as a resistance to the profanely mimetic forces now operative around the peripheries of an emptying ritual center. As they plunged below or soared above the horizontality of market exchange, however, the celebrants of unmediated love contributed immeasurably to the language with which that market created
itself. It is not perhaps an exaggeration to say that proclamations of one's right and power to follow the arbitrary dictates of romantic desire in the choice of a spouse or sexual partner, and by the same token to resist any and every form of external influence on or limitation of that choice, modeled a posture for the establishment of all subsequent constructions of individual identity and rights. This surely would help explain the early predominance and continuing prominence of the marriage plot in literature and other narrative art throughout the modern period. Given the stakes and intensity of interest involved, it is not surprising that the best artists would also gravitate to this theme and, from the beginning, help articulate the paradoxes and even potential tragedies inherent in this putative emancipation, even while they for the most part accepted its inevitability. This paper will attempt to sketch, from this perspective and in a necessarily preliminary manner, three such accounts, "moments," little crises in the evolution of desire.

Generative Anthropology has had some powerful and distinctive things to say about the fundamentals of the sexual love-relation, about the asymmetrical caring of heterosexual unions and the tenderness towards the beloved's vulnerability. (2) It is in no way to diminish them to observe, though, that the resulting conceptualization of marriage or monogamous "relationship" as an at least quasi-sacral shelter from the competition and resentments of the modern world is widely shared, and probably even more widely and perennially sought for. (To those who resent by word or practice the apparently compulsory nature of such desires, and succeed in achieving similar goals in "friends with benefits" arrangements or other social forms we must, of course, offer our congratulations and good wishes, even while retaining a right to assess outcomes over the longue durée of modern lifetimes.) Nor would it be a stretch to identify this, as the soi-disant "Bronx Romantic" himself might concede, as a broadly Romantic position. If such physical and emotional unions offer to provide their participants with such protection, however, those still seeking or selecting a spouse or partner presumably have not the benefit. Because, now at least, even the most ideal tenderness must firstly have passed through the mimetic flux of attraction, or we should say, of attractions in the plural, of rivalrous claims on the potential lovers' attention and desires—have passed, in short, through the market. One might therefore expect the tensions or contradictions of a project whose aim is, through the free exercise of market choice, to escape the market, to be particularly acute in these stages. Representations of the processes leading, or failing to lead, to the choice, to the establishment of the couple, to the falling into authentic love, even, might seem to promise direct access to certain core ethical issues. Besides, romantic narratives are notoriously silent on the condition of achieved and sustained love. If more recent narratives no longer so often cease at a wedding, they still have difficulty finding traction in ever-extending sessions of unmediated consummation. There are, there must be, problems, others. Mediation, or as Girard might say, triangularity, is the story, still.

Moment One - "Corinne at the Capitol"

This is firstly a shining moment, or a deeply silly one, in the history of the emergence of the second sex onto the public scene. Corinne is the heroine of Germaine de Staël's celebrated 1807 novel of the same name. She arrives at the Capitol in Rome in a chariot drawn by four white horses and led by a crowd of noble male admirers. "Beautiful, striking music" sounds, girls in white run beside her, everyone "lavishly throws perfumes." Breathless bystanders murmur:

She receives homage from everyone, but she gives special preference to no one. She is rich and independent; they even think, and she certainly looks it, that she is a woman of noble birth who wants to remain incognito. Whatever the truth may be, . . . she is a goddess surrounded by clouds. (3)

Mind you, Madame de Staël reminds us, these are Italians—one must make allowances. For her own part Corinne is no passive object of worship. She performs, is famous for it, plays a lyre, improvises poetically, sings, acts, even sometimes lectures. Today she celebrates Italian culture and artistic genius, and is given a crown, to immeasurable acclaim. The female laureate receives not just abstract admiration, nor even just the hotter, more intimate solicitations of what is clearly an early instance of modern popular celebrity, but is very clearly also the object of intense sexual desire, to which, in the safety of her artistic enthusiasm (or perhaps her aristocratic incognito), Corinne is either oblivious or indifferent—at least initially. This of course strengthens her desirability, her grip on centrality.
If everyone in this scene concedes this, though, we are far from expecting that their modeling will successfully inculcate all those reading the book, especially in latter years. It is the modern feminist critic Ellen Moers who calls it silly, this "performing heroinism." (4) Denouncing it as "raw fantasy" (183), Moers summons up the deleterious precedent of

the admiration on which little girls are fed, in treacly spoonfuls, from their earliest years . . . praised, fondled and petted for giving pleasure with the amateur entertainment girls are required to provide in the domestic circle, just as Corinne provides it for all European civilization on the Capitoline Hill (197).

There's obviously justice in this. We may take "raw fantasy" as paradigmatic for the second phase of the originary aesthetic moment, and if subsequent fantasies are sometimes more thoroughly cooked than this one, they are still consumed in the sparagmos which predominates in this highly popular work. We may also observe that the half-life of fantasies is usually shorter than that of paradoxes, and that the category of silliness is largely a function of changing fashion. Fashion, a feature of market societies, is of course bound up with the fraught project of projecting private superiority into public spaces—and this is clearly what Corinne is doing. It's fraught because the public has something to lose, as well as to gain—namely their own share of the center—and will eventually fight back. The centralization of Corinne's inner beauty, her inner scene, is now too easily decoded for its appeal to our desires, producing critiques like that of Moers. But apparently not for most readers in 1807.

Even so, hints of the paradoxes of desire are not entirely absent from Corinne's triumph. She does experience a twinge of something that most little girls don't, quite yet.

In the hypnotized crowd is a chilly English lord, one Oswald Nelvil. Corinne from on high detects his chill, and improvises some verses on death, whose effect is to provoke in Oswald some entirely un-English raptures. Their eyes meet.

Oswald, keenly touched, stepped out from the crowd . . . but an insurmountable embarrassment held him back. Corinne looked at him for a while, taking care, nevertheless, not to let him notice she was paying attention to him. But [as she is led absent-mindedly to her chariot], under various pretexts [she] looked back several times to see Oswald again.

He followed her and, as she was descending the stairs escorted by her retinue, she looked back to catch one more sight of him; the movement made her crown fall off. Oswald hastened to pick it up and, as he handed it back to her, said in Italian a few words, whose meaning was that humble mortals laid at the feet of the gods the crowns they dared not place on their heads (II.IV.34).

"Anyway," as Randy Newman has it in one of his songs, "she dies." (5) That descending, that crown falling off? Foreshadowing. It takes a while—it's a long novel. Dies for love, and because Oswald can't stop being English, is ultimately governed by the wishes of his dead father, that he marry a vacuous blonde Englishwoman. A thousand girl readers may fling aside the book at the latter's literal appearance, as George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver does. "Take back your Corinne," she tells the friend who'd proffered it for modeling purposes,

"you were wrong in thinking I should wish to be like her. . . . As soon as I came to the blond-haired lady reading in the park, I shut it up. . . . I am determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness. . . . Give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs. . . ." (6)

But the rest persist because if you hang in, Corinne's death is just as consumable a fantasy as her Capitoline apotheosis—or really, pre-apotheosis. Maggie is actually being a bit disingenuous, or obtuse, and indeed she herself dies a death very much as heroically romantic—or triumphant—as that of her equally dark-haired sister Corinne. How paltry, by comparison, those blonde "winners"!
Still, one cannot quite ignore the sense that the perfection of Corinne's public triumph, living or dead, the uncontested power of her identity, is genuinely menaced by a private desire which, despite her much insisted-upon self-origination, her purity, is clearly reflected back by her from its peripheral source in a male gaze. The public triumph was revolutionary, rebellious even, precisely because it transcended such desires—Corinne was not in this to get a husband! If one puts centrality to use, especially this use (if one is a woman), one of course risks losing it. (How disappointed the worshipers when, for example, the screen goddess marries, if she marries well and retires into obscurity and child-raising, a condition which they imagine, with horror, might even be satisfying to her. Without them.)

In Corinne's case, her Roman admirers are easily imagined tearing their hair, in particular, to think of Corinne choosing this one miserable Englishman from the plentitude of perfectly good, if largely interchangeable Italians. Does she not see he's just playing hard to get? It is market behavior like this that makes psychologists mythologize about self-destructive tendencies and so forth. Choosing an anonymous Italian, she would not lose the center—or so it looks, from afar. Such a pairing would replicate the structure of her admirers' own relationship with her, and thus be no threat to her dominion over them.

But Corinne, and de Staël, apparently see wider fields of struggle, and thus potentially greater triumphs. From that first, half-volitional glancing back, Corinne chooses fatal desire. From the moment of its possibility, the choice is to follow, or wither. Which is to say, that de Staël can hardly be accused of achieving here the Girardian romanesque, of revealing the mensonge romantique. It is impossible to be more romantic than Corinne. Nor can she be advocating the death-wish of Denis de Rougemont’s Tristan, longing for obstacles in their own right. Rather, the paradox apparently conceded here is pragmatic, and belongs firmly in the realm of anticipated market effects. Indeed, it might be more accurately identified as a (perhaps reckless) embracing of risk. The calculation is that the superiority of a woman’s inner scene is most persuasively witnessed by romantic sexual love—how else but in such passion can it be truly known?—but that this in its fulfilment is inauthentic unless it is seen to hazard the total destruction of the centrality that superiority has won her. This we may suspect to be operative whether there are crowds of lovers ranged on the steps below her monumentality, or only one, who, as in the case of Corinne’s Oswald, threatens to manifest what Eliot elsewhere memorably called "an equivalent center of self."
market, all equivalences are at best only "rough"—even the most apparently satisfactory exchange may lead to uneven outcomes. To individual desire, there is no equivalence at all—only negotiations and oscillations, between model and subject positions, virtual and real appropriations. To engage sexually with an equivalent other, with his own equivalent self, as this narrative features it, is to enter upon the most contingent of all ventures, to risk everything.

But retreat seems worse. Even at the Capitol, as the bystanders' hushed speculations testify, the public Corinne would not be so compelling were she able or willing to rule out sexual love entirely: such a posture would surely be an even more serious liability than that of married and child-bearing domesticity (except perhaps to the little girls in her audience). Implicitly opposing any model of sexual love as an asymmetrical refuge from bourgeois competition, Corinne's story figures submission to that asymmetry as a heroic gesture of victimary self-sacrifice, and thus also of rivalrous transcendence—a continuing of the competition by other means. Needless to say, Oswald comes to rue his choice, is first to bear witness to his own defeat. The novel is in the vanguard of modern accounts of the formation of marriages which narrate the process in this way, making the private political, not merely exalting resentment over love, but even resenting love for its curbs on resentment. No asymmetry on the other’s terms! No sacrifice of our truest self, or any of its claims! If modern marriage is indeed a refuge, competition is ever battering at its gates, exhorting women and men alike to ever more strenuous efforts, to defy the siren’s call, never to abandon the dream of total victory.

In his account of the first "star couple," Heloise and Abelard, Eric Gans suggestively situates the rise of what others call "companionate marriage" or, in his terms "the modern ideal of marriage" as simultaneous with and caused by the rise of bourgeois competition. The key element is even then a facilitating, rivalry-blocking embrace of asymmetry, that of male and female. The acceptance of this asymmetry, the awe-inspiring grace of this gesture "for love," will defer the resentment generated by other kinds of asymmetry—for example, that between Abelard and Heloise’s respective levels of learning and fame. But it is surely to be noted that this "first modern love affair"(9) is between a man and a woman who, in unprecedented fashion, are able to compete in these terms, even if one is certainly stronger. If there was anything the pre-modern world had in abundance, it was gender asymmetry. What is new is Corinne’s possession of the Capitol, so to speak, to spend on what could be either a heroical-victimary gesture, or the deliberate sacrifice of centrality apparently essential to the establishment of a modern marriage. The latter would presumably have been operative had things "worked out" with the dismal Lord Nelvil—a consummation hardly to be wished for, at least in the terms established by de Staël’s overwrought bestseller. But then, there are other stories to be told, and other paths to felicity.

Moment Two — Anne Elliot Pops the Question

The heroine of Jane Austen’s Persuasion (1817) is no Corinne, to put it mildly. Anne Elliot largely avoids the public scene, even in the form it manifests itself in the English gentry life of Austen’s fiction: the balls, the brief duels of drawing-room conversation, the muted demonstrations of superior adherence to a conventional English class-morality or, call it, taste-as-morality, the avoidance of vulgarity as the summum bonum. These are not, despite the intense and surely diagnostic investment the many admirers of Austen’s novels have made in her heroines’ social prowess, the grounds upon which to establish a Corinne-like inner life—they are not Romantics, these women. Except perhaps Anne, who struggles interestingly, as many readers have agreed, at the border of two worlds, or even, two aesthetics.

Anne’s dilemma is very much about the arrival of the market in the domain of romantic love, as against sacral, or quasi-sacral, inhibitions thereof, the usual allies or tools of an Austen heroine.(10) Quasi-sacral, more often, perhaps, as in the conservative social codes of the landed gentry—religiously motivated curbing of desire hardly features here. Readers respond still, at any rate, to the way Austen and her women defy that market: "We can only appreciate Jane Austen’s opposition to the values of her society," claims critic Barbara Hardy, a fairly representative voice, "if we look hard at the apparent balance of cause and effect. The society that markets sexual feeling, markets other kinds of feeling too; the feeling for nature, for religion, for the poor, and for learning and art are all suspect."(11) What Hardy does not acknowledge, however, is that those older, putatively pre-market codes might also be a central "value" of Austen’s society. Nor does she hint at any alternative to the marketing of feeling, although this is something
her author is not nearly so shy about doing, as in her enthusiastic embrace of country-house mythology in *Pride and Prejudice*. So one-sided a reading, of course, is closely allied to the current Austen book-and-movie industry and its fairy-tale appeals to its audience’s own sense of an inner superiority needing no marketing whatsoever.

But here too *Persuasion* is a bit different. In the previous novels it is generally not the marketing per se that is to be deplored, but the vulgarity of allowing one’s marketing to be seen as such. The serenity of the endowed class, of a Darcy or a Knightly, is to be sought because it occludes the action of desire. But these novels *are* about desire, above all about successful strategies of desire—it is the mainspring of their power and the source of their continued popularity. For Anne, though, the graceful models of inhibition are increasingly unreliable, indeed are sliding perceptibly into their own form of vulgarity, although neither she nor one feels Austen is entirely prepared to say this openly, even if it seems clear they see it. Yet the proofs are unpleasantly overt—in, for example, the person of Anne’s vain and irresponsible father, Sir Walter Elliot. Unlike the appallingly vulgar Lady Catherine de Bourgh of *Pride and Prejudice*, Sir Walter does not owe his title and position to the operations of the market, to trade. He is as blue-blooded as Darcy. Even in the absence of such authentic modeling, however, the prospect of independent response to the market world’s proffered desires, sexual desires at that, is still not easy to contemplate. Anne is smitten by Captain Frederick Wentworth, a handsome naval officer on shore leave from the long war against Napoleon. And he with her. But once young gentlewomen start falling in love with brave young sailors without a fortune, the maw of chaos yawns. There is something distressingly random about such transactions, and a discomfort with this sees unmistakably into Austen’s language:

> He was . . . a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy; and Anne an extremely pretty girl, with gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling. —Half the sum of attraction, on either side, might have been enough, for he had nothing to do, and she had hardly any body to love; but the encounter of such lavish recommendations could not fail. They were gradually acquainted, and when acquainted, rapidly and deeply in love. (12)

"He had nothing to do, and she had hardly anybody to love"—Austen’s famously ironic tone and unlocatable point-of-view may serve here, as so often, to defend English decencies against encroaching frivolity. But even to a true Romantic, the narrative implied by this paragraph is queasy-making. To a Romantic the random is actually the fated, an opportunity to demonstrate the inner scene’s independence from the calculations and influences of the outer scene. The random is freedom, even. Not this apparently automatic conversion of boredom and limited choice into rapid, deep "love."

More than Austen’s other novels, *Persuasion* engages directly with the specifics of history, and there is a hint here of the speeded-up, coarsened world of war. The market on octane, strange, shifting imbalances of supply and demand, shortages and surpluses, a sexual seller’s market, impulse buying, a flight from long-term thinking. Anne Elliot’s mother is dead and her father is too selfish to care, so parental control is exercised by a family friend, Lady Russell. This too is part of the moment, showing something amiss—this absence of effective fathering is a sign of the times. More to the point, perhaps, as ineffective fathers do occur elsewhere in Austen novels, is the absence of any effective replacement for such fathers. Lady Russell persuades Anne to reject Captain Wentworth, mainly for fiscal reasons. Wentworth goes off to sea again, offended. Anne sinks into loneliness, rejects other men Lady Russell champions, loses her bloom, suffers, is exploited by her family. Years pass. As Austen comments, she "learns romance" (IV.21).

Romantics justly enough accuse arranged marriage of being a market transaction amongst parents, usually fathers trucking in daughters, for financial or social gain. But then the same critique is leveled at those who truck in themselves, arranging their own marriages for such reasons—the quote from Hardy above is an example. Romantics require, at least in principle, that the true souls, the Annes and Wentworths, immolate themselves in their contingencies. If Anne’s gentility, for example, with so impecunious a husband, would most certainly be destroyed in an onslaught of children and poverty, Romantics profess not to mind this, to the degree they admit it as a possibility. He never loved, who planned ahead.

Austen’s earlier novels have made abundantly clear the folly of such principles—the misery of Fanny Price’s mother in *Mansfield Park* is an obvious result of them. (13) Sense trumps sensibility. Life is hard in any case,
but stoical practicality is best—in the other novels there is no apparent prospect that the Romantics, en masse, might be able to change the whole equation, bend the market to their collective, spontaneous will. But *Persuasion* cannot quite bring itself to acknowledge the complete emptiness of the Romantic posture, or of its potential power. (14) Its terms must be restated, though. The choice, Austen’s last novel implies, is not so much between a brutalizing market and sacral purity of inner authenticity, as between a debased sacral authority and the first stirrings of meritocracy.

Because Wentworth turns out rather an expert sailor, as various French (and perhaps American) captains discover to their rue. In the semi-privatized military of his day, he exploits the Napoleonic cataclysm to get rich quick. Military prowess, as Gans has noted, is the earliest field in which rival centers of value can emerge. (15) War ever after retains its potential to accelerate market development. And Romanticism depends, we must also surmise, on expanding economies, of every sort.

If a Wentworth’s inner superiority can manifest itself in enemy captures, a fortune of twenty-five thousand pounds and upward mobility in the English class system, is there scope for an Anne too in this changing world? But for her, for a woman of her moment and situation, the dramatization of the inner scene’s place in public cannot be vocational. She has been proving her superior competence, as nurse and general organizer and sustainer of her crumbling family. This has been noticed, too, and credited. But it is not enough. Wentworth has returned, newly moneyed and eligible. It seems he may no longer be interested. Other choices beckon. In the climactic scene of the novel, Anne makes a public speech, within his hearing if not directly to him. "It would not be in the nature of any woman who truly loved," she claims, given a conversational opening, to abandon her object of affection. "We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us" (XXIII.155).

She continues for the better part of three eloquent pages. For all its neo-classical balance and restraint, for all its being the least overtly victim of plaints—Anne carefully gives men credit where due, hardly hints of injustice in the disposition of things, is to the end politely respectful of the mores of her society—still, this is unmistakably a paean to the authenticity conferred by inner suffering. She’s no Lord Byron, doubtless, but this is the speech of a Romantic.

It is also a marriage proposal. (16) Wentworth feverishly scribbles his acceptance, furtively slips her the note. Hers is public, his private. Even if, to be fair, hers is not fully understood in its public assertion and his certainly will be, in the usual ceremonies and distribution of property. Nonetheless, the great field now for an Anne Eliot is this: making a love-choice for marriage. Claiming for her sexual desires—or perhaps more precisely, for their sphere of operation—a radical autonomy in the world.

It remains fully to account, however, for the pervasive cast of melancholy much observed by readers of this beautiful novel. Anne’s sadness, her long loneliness are perhaps more memorable than her ultimate felicity, and this, finally, may be the most interesting thing about *Persuasion*.

Rather than have recourse to standard-issue ideas of Romantic melancholy or agony, to Byronic posturing...
and so forth, we might want to continue to focus on the predicament of sexual desire in an emergent market situation. Again, this really is the novel's issue. Let us freely grant Romanticism some of its premises by stressing the "emergent," with all attendant inefficiencies, ambiguities, uncertainties and discomforts—they're still with us, undoubtedly. (Perhaps indeed no market can ever be said to have fully emerged, even if some have emerged further than others.) Still, in an emergent market, emerging gradually from a system of ritually established values and curbs on the free operation of desire, and however the Romantic imagination itself may find it gratifying or useful to characterize such a market's harshness, one is more likely, finally, to encounter persuasion than prohibition. Austen's title presages a long litany of "social pressures" and "stigmas" and "guilt trips," the lamentable warping of else-wise bilateral desires by the hellish gravitational influence of other people. But thus, at the same time, it hints at the weakening of ritual controls, and at a certain ominous passing of accountability to the desiring ones.

Anne does feel guilty—not that this is the end of it. She feels guilty with regard to Lady Russell, and to Wentworth, and to herself. For much of the novel her own potential happiness sadly reproaches her—as it would of course not have done if her father had locked her in a room, or dragged her weeping to a sacrificial altar of some sort. Not that such fathers were ever more than a mixed blessing, but they did provide a certain kind of stability. The Romantic emancipation from the obligations of the public scene confers new obligations, or say, awakens new imperatives—then tends rather to abandon the poor, freed slave of self, to flux and ambiguity, to fending for itself in a daunting field of possibilities some indeterminate proportion of which are generated from within, by the self's own behavior.

Of course, there is more to it than this. It's too familiar and simple, this crazy-from-too-much choice diagnosis. Anne and her creator are strong enough never to be caught singing along with Leonard Cohen's Joan of Arc:

I'm tired of the war
I want the kind of work I had before:
A wedding dress, or something white
To wear upon my swollen appetite. \(\text{[17]}\)

Nonetheless, to be subject to persuasion rather than control does make more difficult, more acute, the discomforts of the market participant who must weigh such rhetoric and those who utter it not so much against—as in the pure Romantic ideology—as amidst the intensifying and somewhat cacophonous representations importuning her even in the well-regulated fastness of English gentry-land. Anne finds she absolutely must make discriminations, must make her separate peace, even after the pragmatic issues have been resolved. "I have been thinking over the past," she tells Wentworth, once their renewed engagement has been announced and approved by everyone, including Lady Russell, "and trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong, I mean with regard to myself; and I must believe I was right, much as I suffered from it"(XXIII.164).

She must have been right to allow herself to be persuaded, she means, even if she now believes that Lady Russell was wrong. One might scoff at such views as incoherent, a self-contradicting conservative nostalgia, timidly unwilling to confront the implications of its own deepest desires. But this would be a bit hard—we're all entangled in such contradictions. So is Romanticism itself. Anne believes she was right to listen to Lady Russell partly because of her sincerity—that is, the authenticity of her own inner scene—because of her ultimate disinterestedness, her desire for Anne's well-being. If one loses one's belief in the selfishness of the prohibitive Other, what grounds remain by which to discriminate one's own inner scene from anyone else's? I presume this is why so much Romantic art tends to slide into melodrama as the nineteenth century wears on—melodrama, with its stark oppositions between oppressive society and transcendent individual and other such comfortingly stable discriminations. The "victimiz[ed] superior individual,"\(\text{[18]}\) otherwise, starts to look neither superior, nor victimized, nor for that matter individual. Now, Anne Elliot unquestionably is all three of these things. But neither she nor Austen is entirely happy about it. Austen, for example, commented disparagingly on her heroine's excessive goodness.\(\text{[19]}\) From the perspective being developed here, though, this is perhaps a pleasing feature of her last novel, as is the discomfort it illustrates and creates. Elizabeth Bennet, the brilliant and never truly nonplused heroine of Pride and Prejudice, seems much more a fantasy. Persuasion is wrestling with issues more germane to the future, to us. Us the intuitively good, trying to decode the implications of that goodness for our own clashing desires.
One other discomfort of the market world highlighted by the novel is the way time works in it. This can perhaps be put quite succinctly, although much more could be said. Desire, which in this world is instantaneous, encounters nothing but delay. In the pre-market world, to generalize the difference, desire itself is delayed, but fulfilment, once permitted, is closer to instantaneous. Hence earlier marriages in the latter, heavy use of veils, restriction of carnal knowledge until the wedding night and so forth. Anne’s sufferings, by contrast, belong with Petrarch’s. It is to say nothing new to note that the market world is a world of longings, of desires produced faster and more variously than they can ever be satisfied. In the sexual domain, serial monogamy only temporarily dams up the flood of market desire—although for such respites we remain grateful, one trusts. But if only Lady Russell had been able to persuade Anne not to want Wentworth!

**Moment Three - Wordsworth and Lucy**

William Wordsworth is a great Romantic who, rather unusually, says fairly little about romantic love. But if we visit him for our purposes, it’s not because we think he’s hiding something. Biographically, his secret came out a good while ago—a passionate liaison in Revolutionary France, an illegitimate daughter, a prospective marriage destroyed by war. We choose him because he helped develop one of the most persuasive and lasting strategies of defiance to the market, making him a considerable market success, of course, but also quite rightly attracting our attention to the details of that strategy. Anything he says, or doesn’t say, is of interest.

And of course he does produce some quite significant poems about love: the "Lucy poems."

The Wordsworthian inner scene, the "egotistical sublime" as fellow-Romantic John Keats famously called it,(20) in potent alliance with a fundamentally benign natural world, has enriched and continues to enrich many lives. Mainly English-speaking lives, no doubt, and of course we may concede the primacy of Rousseau and the plurality of natural prophets. Granting these parameters, what the Wordsworthian scene or strategy provides is a path to respite from desire and resentment in a contemplation of nature clearly enough extended from earlier aesthetic models, in the calm of which may be fashioned an identity capable of returning to social interaction with a reduced measure of rivalry and an enhanced one of sympathy—the capacity to hear "the still, sad music of humanity."(21) This is worked out with sufficient explicitness, especially in his masterpiece, *The Prelude*, as almost to render unnecessary the current author’s habitual reference to Gans’s diagnosis of the "constitutive hypocrisy of Romanticism."(22)

But can sexual desire be compatible with such sympathy? Wordsworth is too good a poet to suppress this question in the interests of his greater vision. He does not retreat, as others might have done, to pastoral pieties—he clearly acknowledges the creep of market choice even into the Lake Country or other such fortresses of authenticity.

She dwelt among th’untrodden ways  
Beside the springs of Dove  
A Maid whom there were none to praise  
And very few to love.

A Violet by a mossy stone  
Half-hidden from the Eye!  
—Fair, as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky!

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her Grave, and Oh!
The difference to me.

Those who do not know or praise or love Lucy, who do not register her death, are everywhere in this exquisite poem. Silent rivals, vanquished rivals one might have thought, were it not for the association of Lucy’s isolation, the speaker’s solitary appreciation of her, and her “ceasing to be.” This is surely as beautiful an evocation of love’s desire to be free of the market as anyone has written: the beloved, “fair as a star when only one is shining in the sky!” But of course it betrays its own insecurity—fair because the only one visible. And even more, in the pregnant phrase, “the difference to me.” Has Lucy’s role in her lover’s struggle for identity in a plural world cost her life? Even or especially in sorrow, it apparently has delivered difference to him. (23)

An early Gans Chronicle provides this statement of the fundamental paradox of love: “Were my love’s aim fulfilled and my beloved rendered invulnerable to death, the scene of my love would vanish.” (24)

This may lead us on to another poem in the sequence:

I traveled among unknown Men,
In lands beyond the Sea;
Nor England! did I know till then
What love I bore to thee.

’Tis past, that melancholy dream!
Nor will I quit thy shore
A second time; for still I seem
To love thee more and more.

Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire;
And She I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire.

Thy mornings shewed—thy nights concealed
The bowers where Lucy played;
And thine is, too, the last green field
Which Lucy’s eyes surveyed!

Here, the scene of his love has not vanished—indeed its beauty, its meaning, like his Englishness itself, is guaranteed, against the myriad unknown men, by Lucy’s retrospective and permanent vulnerability. This is a profoundly tender poem, and profoundly asymmetrical—deeper than the male-female asymmetry, but significantly parallel to it here, is that between the living and the dead. But the tenderness and the meaning, again, are dependent on absence. Lucy’s absence, and the absence of others, of the whole “melancholy dream” of otherness, one might even say.

Although the order of their composition is uncertain, any successive reading of these poems strengthens the connection between the poet’s social monopoly of Lucy, and her corollary association with, indeed, domination by his ultimate ally and rival, the truly heedless model, the coldly tender seducer, Nature.

Three years she grew in sun and shower,
Then Nature said, “A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown;
This child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A Lady of my own.

"Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power

Space lacks to quote the whole poem. The final two stanzas:

"And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell."

Thus Nature spake—The work was done—
How soon my Lucy's race was run!
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm and quiet scene;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

Ally against the social world, making Lucy what he could never hope to make her, a Nature Child immune from mediated desire. Rival, though, denying him anything but her memory, and the natural scene forever qualified by her loss.

Clearly, Wordsworth understood he was wrestling with paradox. We need not quote all of "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" either to appreciate the power of this poor, merely human lover's sense of his own culpability in these effects. Because, without his own only too jealous desire, and the rivalries it thus contains within it, would she not have been safe? This, Wordsworth seems to say, is the dread truth all lovers know. The first and last stanzas:

Strange fits of passion have I known:
And I will dare to tell,
But in the Lover's ear alone,
What once to me befel.

. . .

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
Into a Lover's head—
"Oh mercy!" to myself I cried
"If Lucy should be dead!"

This sense of implication—no longer wayward but inexorable—even more famously and beautifully informs the great quatrains:

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees,
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees.

It is doubtless risky to go much further here, with such deep material, but perhaps we might venture the observation that in some manner or other Wordsworth is encountering, and with typical honesty exploring, the difficulties his larger modeled strategy of desire encounters in the specific instance of sexuality. In such an alliance with nature—senseless rocks and stones and trees after all—the protected self, the secured identity, seems to require a dangerous degree of isolation. Gans is among other critics of the Romantics to notice the penchant among male poets for tributary female figures, protected but at the same time diminished by the sublime poetic ego, unable to achieve an equivalent centrality of self, or even, in Wordsworth's radically undisplaced version, to sustain life itself. It is all very well, one might say, to retreat into the protection of heterosexuality romance, but if one brings another living human being with one, even an unsymmetrical woman, one brings the desires of others too, implicitly, their rivalries, the market. Even if one has retreated to the high country, one brings them in imagination. Wordsworth is both unveiling and reproaching this tendency here. To imagine such security, to imagine one’s love free of the touch of earthly years, is to slumber in spirit, to seal oneself off from that which gave vitality, motion, force, to such love in the first place.

As an even more imperiously Romantic and solitary lover, Byron’s Manfred, has it:

If I had never lived, that which I love
Had still been living; had I never loved,
That which I love would still be beautiful—
Happy and giving happiness.(27)

Other Moments, Unrepresented

It seems rather a dilemma, although of course one may simply hold Romantics like Wordsworth and Byron incapable of the necessary humility or wisdom. Still, the embrace of the beloved’s asymmetry, of her vulnerability, seems almost a screen, with them at least, for an ultimately destructive unwillingness to let go of the desire to vanquish rivals, individual or collective as the case may be—the lover herself or those whose desires flow through her. The Romantic longing to fly free of the gravity of others’ desires thus rebounds upon itself, enslaves and destroys the very passion it seeks to protect. Is there no alternative, then? Perhaps, by a logic of inverse implication, one might arrive at one. A choice not to substitute vulnerability for desire, or to build in a stabilizing asymmetry, but rather to harness deliberately the equally mediated desires of both—a calculated exposure, one might call it, to the mediations of the world, of others, even other potential human lovers, and thus to the mimetic energy they might bestow upon the union. Might this be the half-hidden lesson of all three moments? Not celibacy or friends-with-benefits, but what we may perhaps call an alliance with the beloved. Alliance: an arrangement, merely, whereby internal competition is to some perceptible degree less intense than in the ambient market. A less-than-forceful, partial, tactical (not strategic) embrace, one might also construe it, of the sacral inhibition of resentment and desire. Oswald Nelvil under such a regime would need to accept his lover Corinne’s continued prominence upon the Capitol, fawning Italians constantly at his dinner table. Captain Wentworth, even as he sallied forth again to prey upon French shipping, would ruefully but manfully acknowledge his own wife’s having closed upon him and persuaded him to strike his colors. And Wordsworth be induced now and again to bring Lucy up to London . . . to be admired, or not.

But of course, if arrangements of this ilk were to have been tried, even to have thrived, no true Romantic would ever admit to having been involved, and no Romantic art have recorded it.

Notes

1. Deceit, Desire and the Novel. 289. (back)


14. Laurence Lerner agrees with a number of others when he terms Persuasion Austen's "one romantic novel: the one book in which love is not the product of gratitude and esteem. . . . [A novel] shot through not with the praise of prudence, but with that of impulse" Littlewood, ed. 438. (back)


16. Some have disputed this—for example, again, Barbara Hardy: "Anne's rhapsodic defense of woman's constancy [is] overheard by Captain Wentworth but not designed for his ears." Before Anne begins to speak, however, Austen notes her observe Wentworth pointedly listening to the conversation, and the two share "one, quick conscious look" (154). To claim that her subsequent speech is not for him is to claim for the heroine an implausible immunity to desire, a Corinne-like higher calling, and thus to give voice to the resentment of desire—and those who attract it—which has so often accompanied the rise of women to their current political and vocational freedoms. Anne, as the creation of the indisputably great Austen, must be defended against precisely the sort of aspersions made by the current paper. A Reading of Jane Austen: 55. (back)


19. Anne Elliott, Austen writes in a letter to a confidant, "is almost too good for me." Cited in Patricia Meyer Spacks's "Preface" to Persuasion. x. (back)

21. "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," line 91. (back)

22. *Originary Thinking*. 166. (back)

23. An earlier version of the poem begins, "My hope was one, from cities far / Nursed on a lonesome hearth." (back)


25. But see: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174828 (back)


27. *Manfred*, Act 2, Scene 2, lines 193-96. (back)

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This paper has its initial point of departure in Eric Gans' thoughts on "originary" as opposed to "victimary" rhetoric,(1) in his Signs of Paradox, followed by his discussion of the rhetoric of "white guilt" in the series of seven issues of Chronicles of Love and Resentment ;(2) furthermore, in some notes by Adam Katz on rhetoric against the background of his concept of "firstness," and ultimately resolved in Gans' recently published A New Way of Thinking. Gans begins (Chapter 2 of Signs of Paradox) by defining the relation between thought and rhetoric as that between earlier and later stages of the originary scene, namely between the dynamic of representation and the dynamic of imitation, thus comparing rhetoric to sparagmos (Gans 1997, 34).(3) This enables Katz to speak about the "secondness" of knowing and rhetoric, in order to describe how the minimal hypothesis can work not as reduction but in an inexhaustible manner: "The test of originary method is, in a sense, rhetorical—whether or not it can constitute scenes that are iterations of the originary scene and that are open to everyone" (Katz 2007, 116). However, despite the supposedly secondary nature of rhetoric, in the Chapter 12 of Signs of Paradox, Gans finds it possible to place rhetoric at the heart of originary event:

The originary event allows for no neutral vantage point from which the instrumental force of its rhetoric can be perceived. The persuader is as moved by this force as the interlocutor whose difference from himself he seeks to abolish; the former's priority in the use of the sign leaves him with no residual superiority over the latter in the face of the absolute difference accorded by the sign to its central referent. [...] Persuasion can only be reduced to a repeatable technique once the rhetorical power of the community, as manifested in ritual, has become an object of reflection drained of its sacred aura, no longer revelatory but instrumental. [...] Although the Greeks taught other agonistic arts, rhetoric is the only one that depends on the deliberate reproduction of the critical tension of the originary scene (Gans 1997, 169-170).

Then, in the course of his polemic with Derrida in A New Way of Thinking Gans writes:

This sharing of meaning is a mutual "presence" prerequisite to human communication and to the maintenance of the human community. Language does not place sous nature the "absolute presence" of the first sign; on the contrary, its system of differences extends this presence. Metaphysics' suspicion of writing's secondarity with respect to speech indeed reflects an originary intuition, but this intuition, rather than rejecting différance, seeks on the contrary to retrieve through detemporalization the originary différance that founds the human community. The cure for metaphysics is the retemporalization of its founding myth, not as the rediscovery of originary violence, but as the beginning of the never-ending history of its deferral (Gans 2011, 184).

Of course, these short excerpts hardly do justice to the richness of the rhetorical insights of Gans and his followers,(4) but they do reflect a certain uncertainty regarding what rhetoric is: is it the "firstness" of the "sharing of meaning" or the "secondness" of the "iterations of the originary scene that are open to
everyone"? Evidently, the relationship between Generative Anthropology (GA) and rhetoric as practice and discipline requires further investigation. However, I will try to cope with the task not in the way of the rhetorical analysis of GA, but merely by originary analysis of (particularly cultural) rhetoric, while focusing especially on its recent developments. In this article I will argue that a new model of rhetoric, more appropriate to the rhetorical warfare of our days, should be developed, based on GA. I will suggest first, following the rhetoricians of the Liege Group μ (Dubois et al. 1981) in a merely personalistic way, that rhetoric functions in culture as a practice of destroying language and reconstructing it, and thus as a spiritual practice of forming and deconstructing the subject, in other words, as the self-formation and self-recognition of the personality.(5) Second, a discussion of the generative-anthropological motives of rhetoric will lead to an examination of its chaotic and autopoetic nature, and this will raise the need for a renewed discussion of the link between rhetoric and violence. For this purpose, the primary fundament of a renewed model of rhetoric will be constructed, based on Gans' concepts. Third, in the wake of a critical discussion of Juri Lotman's approach to rhetoric, I will complete this model based on the concept of narrative conflict. And finally, uniting the lines of thought about originary narrative, narrative conflict, and myth creation (mythopoesis),(6) I will conclude my discussion of the violent originary core of recent cultural rhetoric.

What is Cultural Rhetoric?

What is unique about cultural rhetoric? What is it that makes a rhetorical-cultural analysis such as the one made, for example, by Ivo Strecker, Stephen Tyler and their collaborators in their project "Rhetoric and Culture"(7) unique? A rhetorical analysis deals with those figures and tropes intended to engender certain changes in the listener's consciousness and behavior. A rhetorical-cultural analysis is directed at those figures and tropes which help the culture to cause changes in itself—in its epistemological base and its practical base, in the episteme and in its discursive configurations, in its generative (formative) mechanisms. Thus, such thinkers as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault engaged in cultural rhetoric, which analysts and technologists of culture and ideology, experts in political rhetoric, etc. also deal with. In such analyses, rhetorical means known from classic rhetoric are transferred to the sphere of cultural rhetoric. If by rhetoric we refer to the means used by the orator to influence his audience, by cultural rhetoric we refer to the rhetorical means used by a cultural agent(8) (party, minister, Parliament, newspaper, playwright, designer, etc.) in order to influence large social groups that are inaccessible to direct interaction, and hence the influence is exerted indirectly, through changes in cultural configurations (a party changes its constitution, a parliament changes a law, a minister launches a reform, a playwright changes his style, a designer sets a fashion, etc.). In sum, the prevailing assumption is that the attempt of one cultural group to influence another cultural group with the aid of rhetorical means is cultural rhetoric. Election propaganda and an advertising campaign are supposedly typical examples of acts of cultural rhetoric.

The Anthropological Motives of Rhetoric as a Spiritual and Cultural Practice

Linguists like the members of the Liege Group μ are the boldest representatives of the conception in the theory of rhetoric which perceives the essence of rhetoric in the destruction of language ("deviance from level zero") and its reconstruction ("reduction to level zero"). But what is the anthropological motive of rhetoric, in this view? We infer that it is love of dangerous, even deadly games,(9) drives of self-destruction (destruction of the language) and of self-establishment (establishment of the language), an attraction to the borderline and the forbidden. We will examine this issue in detail. The key to the issue is an understanding of rhetoric as a special spiritual practice. Its purpose is similar to the purposes of spiritual practices in European or Far Eastern mysticism: to gain a knowledge of the void. Let us take for example a well-known, widespread practice in yoga. The disciple visualizes a certain god, Shiva for example; then he imagines the dance of Shiva or his love (or war) with another god/goddess. Now he imagines the creation of the world by this god. The next stage—visualization of the destruction of this world by the same god. The god dissolves together with the world he created, and then the disciple dissolves and disappears together with the god and the world he created in his imagination. The final goal of this practice is the disappearance of the self together with the disappearance of the universe (through recognition of its unreality).(10)

The spiritual practice of rhetoric works in a similar fashion. First, rhetoric is invention—the creation of a new name. What is done in the East by mental and physical means is done in rhetoric by discourse: it creates an
Rhetoric creates an imagined, artificial world—an illusion—through language. The new name cannot be created without destroying the old name and the subject. In building the new universe, the subject goes outside of himself or reduces himself to naught and creates a different identity for himself in order to reach the other and convince him, namely to create an imagined reality for him, which he (the other person) will perceive as given. The other also disappears in that imagined world. The self becomes other and the other becomes self in this transcendent act. In rhetoric, the result is called participation or agreement. The referent of the language is not the "real" world, namely the one we knew before the rhetorical act, but the new rhetorical world created by this rhetorical act. At this stage, then, in parallel to visualization in the Eastern practice, the self, the other and the world are destroyed, but a new verbal-mythic world is created.

The second stage or dimension of the work of rhetoric is the destruction of the illusory world that rhetoric itself has created. This internal conflict is the deep source of endless intense debates about the essence of rhetoric from Gorgias to Barthes: does rhetoric reveal truth or destroy it? (11) The truth about rhetoric is the very fact that rhetoric destroys itself. It undermines its own authority and power to persuade. The illusion created in the rhetorical act exposes its nullity. This is because every trope and every figure from the outside embodies an element of self-destruction. Every trope is a ticking bomb. A metaphor, for example, is an enormous creative vehicle, but its power is based on destruction of the language and the world. It creates a new reality; however, this reality is not stable but quite volatile. It is, as Juri Lotman would say, "the big cultural bang" (Lotman 2009, 19-24) in miniature. Hence owing to the trait of self-dissolution of rhetorical components, the illusory nature of the rhetorical world exposes and nullifies itself. As soon as the persuasion (the participation, agreement, trust) is born, it already fades and sinks into chaos, in which there is no language, world and subject, but it is the source of all these in the next rhetorical act, thus paving the way to what Kenneth Burke calls "the eternal plea."

Of course, the pragmatics of rhetoric was always important, but was not its major motive and basis. The claim that rhetoric has a utilitarian motive (its use to develop homiletics, to embellish, educate, to control crowds, etc.) is quite limited. It is similar to the claim, for example, that Christian icons were created in order to attract peasants to churches and to impress them. The argument, merely characteristic of the Middle Ages, that the aim of rhetoric is to organize discourse and in general to codify world orders does not stand up to criticism either. Whenever rhetoric filled that role, it became a dust-filled junkyard.

Rhetorical speech is similar to dissipative structure in Ilya Prigogine's chaos theory (Prigogine and Stengers 1997). It is created like order in chaos and it dissipates within the chaos; it is created, coalesces, dissipates, vanishes. This effervescence is the rhetorical act. Those moments in which dissipative structures are created that overshadow the chaos and turn it into background are the moments when rhetoric is invented. If these structures were anticipated and ensured, their appearance would not be called "invention."

The question now is: why are the structures of the rhetorical invention necessarily dissipative? The objective of this trait is clear to us: they have to give the audience the confidence that they are fragile enough so that they can be destroyed. Even the most self-confident speakers, armed with the strongest reasons, must create a sense of instability, a sense of the danger of borderline and transition. They need to do this to create a real dynamic of transition as well as to actually move the listener from one state to another, one doxa to another, from one name to another. Even the crudest manipulation embodies a core of instability—the free will of the addressee. Even if from a pragmatic point of view, the addressee cannot disagree, even if everything has already been decided in his place for him, the structure of the communicative event of a rhetorical act will still have the "unstable" character of a potential "threat" of disagreement. Every communicative strategy assumes the possibility that each of its moves can collapse, if it is taken in a rhetorical situation. The potential of dangerous, explosive disagreement of the addressee plays a formative role in rhetoric.

On the social level, rhetoric works with the boundaries of the private and the public. (12) People create rhetorical worlds, observe the rise of dissipative rhetorical structures, and thus witness the formation of the public space, and of understanding and agreement in the society. At the same time, as they observe dissipative structures, people see them collapse, and thus they witness the renewed establishment of the private, personal, non-social space. Rhetoric is, therefore, a type of strategic game in social and personal reality. The players can make moves in one of the stages of the game or play in the entire game until the
end and discover its real objective. This game is only partially built on the spread of probabilities; it is mainly based on the decisions of the actual players, on their choice of personal strategies. If the speaker knew in advance what the addressee wants at every given moment, what he is likely to accept or reject, he would know exactly what to say. But the speaker's knowledge is limited, and the addressee, along with the aggregate of his desires, changes every minute. Consequently, the speaker makes choices and decisions, also hesitates and changes, invents and performs rhetorical acts again and again. This actually brings rhetoric closer to ethics, turns it into an ambitious competitor of philosophy. In wavering between the private and the public sphere, the speaker moves back and forth between states of expression and non-expression. This spiral movement from non-expression to expression and back is the basis of rhetoric as a spiritual technique of experiencing non-expression and, ultimately, non-being (public).

A rhetorical act can thus be depicted as a chaotic (dynamic, non-linear) and autopoietic system,(13) namely as possessing an ability of self-organization and self-formation. This quality turns the rhetorical act into a living system. The activity of this system advances through many points of bifurcation (split, choice) in which it becomes unstable, and its progress takes on a random nature. The purpose of rhetoric is, therefore, to organize social-discursive acts as a living system. It does not suffice to say that the purpose of rhetoric is to change the consciousness or behavior of people; we need to add the direction of this change—the survival, replication and development of human (or humanistic-religious, as perceived by Burke) forms of life. For this purpose, rhetoric necessarily also serves as a way of recognizing life. And since rhetorical activity exists through the system vis-à-vis itself, it can be defined as self-organizing, self-recognizing and self-developing. Self recognition characterizes the rhetorical system as autopoietic. In rhetoric, the main motive of cultural action is revealed—self-protection and reproduction by means of organization and self-creation. But if the culture was only organization, it would very quickly cease developing. Hence, culture is in essence a chaotic system, in Lotman's terms (Lotman 2009), and hence it is not frozen in entropy nor does it become a structure of mathematical or discursive formulae, a dusty storeroom of tropes and topoi. This inexhaustible nature of rhetoric as the living, autopoietic system is based on the inexhaustibility, as Adam Katz wrote (Katz 2007, 101), of the "minimal hypothesis" proclaimed by GA.

Rhetoric and Generative Anthropology

We have discussed above the anthropological motive and function of rhetoric. Now we will go on to discuss its anthropological roots with the aid of GA. As mentioned, as far as we are concerned, rhetoric is a spiritual practice of breaking down the language. This assumption enables us to turn to theories of the formation of culture by (deferral) of violence, because it defines the source of the discursive practice in terms of violence. I am taking the liberty of quoting a rather long section from one of Gans' books, in which he presents the main points of his conception:

The originary hypothesis affirms that humanity and its institutions are most parsimoniously described as originating in a singular event. When the mimetic conflicts generated by the lability of protohuman appetite can no longer be contained by the pecking-order arrangements of protohuman social structure, a new means is needed for preventing the breakdown of the social order. This means is representation, and the first representation is that of the sacred. To represent is to defer mimetic violence until it can be focused on the shared destruction and consumption of the material center, while preserving the ideal or spiritual center from which meaning and with it, the human, emerge. In this generative scenario, the desire-object at the center becomes the victim of appetitive violence; what we call God is what subsists in the aftermath of this violence as the indestructible because transcendental source of the meaning of the sign that designates the center. The first sign is the name-of-God; re-presenting the material center of desire gives it the meaning of the subsistent center of the scene of representation, thereby undecidably discovering and inventing its significance. Hence there is a non-mystical sense in which, since all words derive from the representation of a central object of desire, every word is a name of God (Gans 2008, 177-179).

In the rhetorical act, language breaks down. The object of violence in rhetoric is a sign. From the standpoint of generative anthropology, then, the rhetorical act is in the second stage of the origination of the language. The first stage was the originary scene, in which the sign was created indicating the abortive
appropriation of the object of desire. Now the mimetic desire and the violence are directed at the sign. The aim of this violence, in the case of rhetoric, is the creation of a state of choice for the subject. A rhetorical act undermines the self-identity of the language in order to create dual identities and conditions of truly free choice. Rhetoric creates a double language, a double myth, and a double world. "Ordinary" and "non-rhetorical" language is merely a movement along one myth. But the listener can be given a choice between two myths, two languages can be created; the language can split into two. All the tropes serve this goal. The aim is to liberate the listener from the language, to take him beyond its boundaries. When he goes out of the language, the listener is supposed to find himself face to face with the identities, which in this case are only personalities prior to the creation of the myth. So that the listener can be face to face with these personalities, between which he is going to choose himself, his position and identity, the language must be put in parentheses, must be rejected. The breakdown we spoke of is in fact deferral or suspension. That is what makes possible a direct, unmediated confrontation with the personalities of choice.

In this way, the listener again finds himself in a state of conflict: two contradictory forces operate on him, two strategies are available to him, two modes of thought, embodied in the two identities. The listener returns to the originating conflict, the one that precedes the signs and generates them. In the rhetorical act, the listener returns to the originary, pre-linguistic event, in which the encounter with the other is not yet mediated. A truly free choice is the choice prior to the language, even if this "prior" is only an imagined hypothetical scene. The face-to-face event lasts only a very short time (relative to the duration of the entire rhetorical act); it is very unstable. As soon as he makes his choice, the listener sinks into one of the myths. What is happening is mythopoesis. The mythopoesis stops when the listener stops it and designates: This is the myth, this is the sign! This statement signals the return of the language.

An obvious example of this mechanism is President Obama's campaign slogan "Yes, we can!". The audience is provided with a new, highly potent future identity and invited to create a new myth of itself to replace the previous identity and myth. But the main point is that in order to choose a new identity and create a new myth, a listener must return to the originary scene of his love for himself and resentment at his impotence in order to realize this love. This demagogic mirror of narcissism, being placed in front of the listener, ruins the language in which it is engraved, for a short moment eliminates the discourse itself, and turns the personality into the wordless, but energetic and irresistible, image of itself.

Another, more elegant, example would be a passage on Isaac Babel from Cynthia Ozick's Fame and Folly: "Whether or not Babel's travels with the Cossacks—and with Bolshevism altogether—deserve to be termed heroic, he was anything but blind. He saw, he saw, and he saw" (Ozick, 145). Ozick's sermon moves through a chain of images to the main point of persuasion: "Bolshevism was lethal in its very cradle" (ibid., 146). The persuasiveness of this idea, discursive and ideological by itself, is based, however, on the witnessing power of seeing: He saw, he saw, and he saw. Ozick's argument is: irrespective of the sincerity or otherwise of Babel's speech, of which his narrative consists, and which always remains in its "secondness," his originating seeing of violence, possessing authentic pre-lingual "firstness," is ultimately truthful. The rhetorical refrain "He saw, he saw, and he saw" breaks down the language in order to create Babel's personality and myth of witness, and to cause the reader to identify with it in the originary scene of witnessing the violence.

To sum up, the active stage of the origination of the personality in a rhetorical act is a stage of the conflict that continues until the moment of choice-identification, when the listener claims, in the form of, in Gans' terms, designative ostensive: "This!," "This is mine!," "This is I!," "This is my (new, proper) name!" The gesture of this designation turns the personality into the object of the designation, namely a myth, and at that moment the language returns. But the language never returns to "itself," as it was before the rhetorical act. It is a new language, or the language of the new myth, a new sign; it is "re-figuration" of the world, in the terms of Ricoeur's mimesis (Ricoeur 1984, 70 ff.). The rhetorical act moves from the existing sign back to the originary scene, and forward to the new sign. The personality disappears again behind the new language, until the next rhetorical act.

A Topos from the Standpoint of Generative Anthropology

A topos is a common place, which does not belong to anyone and at the same time belongs to everyone.
This means that the topos is the most non-personalistic place in the entire sphere of rhetoric. It can be accepted by every one of the participants in the rhetorical act. Nonetheless, a topos constitutes a basis for invention. Every rhetorical invention emerges from a topos, since it defines the boundaries of the agreement. However, to the extent that the speaker aspires to achieve agreement elsewhere, outside of the topos, he is forced to cross the boundary and establish a new place of new agreement (or disagreement, thus provoking resentment). An invention is in fact the invention of the personality, of myth—mythopoesis.

For example, when the head of Hamas, Khaled Mashal, says that "Hamas rejects any attempt to settle Palestinians in other countries, in particular in Jordan. Jordan should remain Jordan, Palestine—Palestine,(16) he ostensibly just uses the topos of identification (based on the ostensive) in its extreme form—tautology. However, in fact, he invents, first, the equation between the legal and political status of the two—Jordan and Palestine, and second, the distinction between the population of Jordan and the population of Palestine,(17) thus inventing the distinct personality of the Palestinian people.

Hence the question: how can the most non-personalistic place in rhetoric (topos) serve as a basis for invention of the personality (perhaps the most personalistic place in rhetoric)? Apparently, a fundamental trait of rhetoric derives from this paradoxical affinity, and we need to analyze and understand it.(18)

From the standpoint of generative anthropology, rhetoric works with signs, namely with the stage that follows the originary event. Rhetoric, including both the speaker and the listener, receives the topos from without; for rhetoric, it is the given. In a certain sense, a topos is transcendent to rhetoric, just as the language itself can be transcendent, as Eric Gans asserts. The speaker and the listener, then, receive the topos as an existing sign. Invention is a regression from a sign to a personality. From the viewpoint of generative anthropology, the regression takes the form of a second stage of the cycle of the origination of culture, the stage in which the violence is directed at the sign. Putatively, in the case of rhetoric, we should speak about the violence directed at the topos, about a certain type of violence—the appropriation of the topos by the speaker. However, in actual fact, the situation is more complex. The gesture of appropriation directed at the sign is arrested when a new sign is born. The act of invention is, in Gans' terms, the abortive gesture of the appropriation of the topos. In his failed attempt to appropriate the topos, the speaker creates a new sign, because the topos cannot be appropriated based on its definition and its transcendental nature. A topos cannot be appropriated, but anyone who speaks must try to appropriate it and pay the price for that in the invention/performance of the new identity, of the new name.

This is apparently the nature of the transition from topos to invention: the topos is not utilized, not appropriated and not given as a gift, but rather nullified, removed. In this act, the speaker supposedly returns, together with the sign, to its "source"—to the pre-linguistic personality, or to be more precise, the sign-as-name becomes a personality in its own myth, it becomes an identity that opens itself to the listener as the possible object that is pointed to. This identity will again become a sign as soon as it is chosen by the listener in his gesture. Thus, in the example mentioned above, the topos of tautology is nullified, because in the newly invented myth, the same is not the same anymore, due to the creation of a new personality—the Palestinian People. Another example: Dostoevsky's well-known statement, "Beauty will save the world" (The Idiot), based on the eschatological, temporal (of the arrow of time) topos, takes the reader back to the personality of the Savior, tries to appropriate it, and to cause an oscillation between Him and the figure of Beauty. Since the appropriation of the personality (the Name) succeeds, but the appropriation of the topos cannot succeed, the identification of the Savior with the newly created personality of Beauty replaces or cancels the need for Salvation, thus emptying the topos of the time arrow of its meaning.

To sum up, if a sign is a gesture of pointing to the personality that is chosen, the power of rhetoric lies in its ability to restore the pointer to the last moment of hesitation before he points, to the moment of originating the gesture, to allow him to make a new choice. Rhetoric puts the world created in the gesture in parentheses in order to recreate it. It leads man to pure personalistic existence, to presence without (common) place, to utopia.

**Rhetoric and Violence**

On the one hand, rhetoric is not violent nor does it exist in conditions of violence. On the other hand,
rhetoric seems to be emerging from violence and preserving the violence within its genetic core. (19) Eric Gans' generative model shows the direction for resolving this difficulty: rhetoric is intended to block and process the violence, and hence it must always remain at the heart of the conflict and waver between violence towards a personality and violence towards the sign. In any event, this difficulty has to be clarified.

There is no such thing as violent rhetoric and non-violent rhetoric. All rhetoric is non-violent, but it is also always "violent." Every figure or trope takes over the listener's imagination. A strong image captures the consciousness at least for a limited period of time, and no rational reason, argument, claim, explanation or analysis is capable of overcoming it. Let us take an example. During the military operation against the Hamas in Gaza, known as "Cast Lead," in January 2009, and during several years of a siege of Gaza that preceded and followed the operation, a slogan was going around that can be summed up as follows: "Israel has turned Gaza into a concentration camp." An image like that draws its power from sources of emotion, memory, language, a personal and collective subconscious, dominant epistemes, cultural archives, canon, stereotypes, conventions, prejudices. All reason is weak in the face of these enormously strong mechanisms.

Rhetoric is hypnotic, the image is its gesture of appropriation, and the here-and-now of the present is the victim of its violence. If rhetoric would only appropriate the object of the speech or the topos, they could be rescued, reconquered, restored. But it appropriates and destroys what cannot be restored—the present of speech and of recognition. The image appears as a gesture by a cruel, accusing finger, which fills the entire horizon, concealing every event. What comes after it cannot be anything other than a desperate attempt at justification, a hopeless self-defense; everything will be like the last words of someone doomed to die.

The image paralyzes and silences the language in order to return the listener to the utopia of the originary scene. There, on the stage of the hypothetical past, man sees himself at the height of the conflict, making his gesture of desire. In its amazing spectacle, its skillful illusion, rhetoric transfers the blame for the violence from itself to the listener and to the object of the violence, from the present to the past. It is impossible to say that rhetoric lies: the event in the past "was," always "was." What one can say is that there is no essential rational connection between the originary event in the past and the object of the speech in the present. However, any statement, including the previous sentence, is as naught compared to the image of tragedy.

If so, we can sum up rhetoric's mechanism of violence with the following diagram:

The speaker creates an image >> The image resurrects a violent originary event >> The listener identifies with one of the subjects of the event and takes responsibility for the violence (as a victim or executioner) >> The responsibility cancels out the present and suspends the language >> Any rational reasoning is blocked and fails.

At the center of this chain of actions the listener identifies with the past, with the other, and puts on the mask of the strange identity. That is the ethical focus of rhetoric, the place of free choice. Hence it is also the weak link in the chain; only through it is it possible to damage the action of the rhetorical image. This damage means denial of the tradition, cultural blindness, forgetting. That is the price the listener may have to pay for resisting the power of the image, for his disagreement with the speaker, his victory in the argument. Another price is emotional imperviousness. Not many are prepared to pay that price, so the image is dominant, and the problem of rhetoric, the kind that not only leads to agreement but also enables disagreement, is at the core of every linguistic and semiotic event. This is why Hamlet's ghost's rhetorical act ends with the command to remember ("remember me"—act 1, scene 5), and when Hamlet completely identifies with his father in death, thus ultimately fulfilling the obligation, speech is suspended: "The rest is silence" (act 5, scene 2).

In this case, can we still talk about persuasion and not about "submission"? Does such an image really leave the listener free choice? All of rhetoric is on the thin line of separation between convincing and succumbing. This separation is not ensured, not granted, but is bought by the listener at the price of cooperation. Although the power of images such as those we gave here as examples is invincible, the speaker who uses them may lose the war, even if he wins the battle. The problem stems from the
"topography" of this sort of image, in its legislating its place, or even one can say in its place of legislation. In principle, the rhetorical image ought to legislate, engrave the boundaries of the common place—of the topos. If the topos is not binding (legal)—Hamlet's "I am bound to hear" (act 1, scene 5)—it is neither valid nor effective. If the topos is not the place of the law—the sacred center of the discourse—it cannot serve as a forum for cooperation and agreement. The problem of the traumatic image is its place on the periphery, or more precisely, in the compulsive oscillation between center and periphery. In order to accept his image, the listener should go out of the center, out of himself, adopt the observation point of the other, to pass to the unlegal/unlegislated place. That is a place of revolution, destruction, violence, war; it is not a place of solidarity and creation. Hence an image like that is in fact a rhetorical failure. Despite their supposedly self-evident availability, in times of war and revolution, the images like that of Gaza as concentration camp cannot nor are they intended to establish agreement. They generally cause the sides to entrench themselves in their positions, duplicating and multiplying the violence and increasing hostility. That is schizophrenic rhetoric that incites a quarrel between a man and himself in order to paralyze and silence him, and thus to remove him from the discourse, not in order to gain his agreement. That is terroristic rhetoric (not only the rhetoric of terrorism), in keeping with the Marxist-Leninist tradition of persuasion through intimidation: if you do not join in the violence, the violence will be turned against you.

However, rhetoric of this type also has a "positive" goal. If it cannot or does not intend to persuade its adversary that the idea is the right one, then it can capture public opinion—the constant third (vanished or present) side of the rhetorical act, which observes from the sidelines and is silent, not meant to make decisions or accept responsibility. It is the one in whose name or for whose sake the argument supposedly is conducted, the one whose favorable attitude will decide the outcome. Speech intended to satisfy public opinion and gain its favor at the expense of reasoning and persuasion is called demagogy. Even when two adversaries argue with only one another, the speaker is apt to fall into the trap of demagogy in front of the imagined inner audience that exists in him, out of the desire to satisfy himself, to gain a moment of self-sympathy, self-affirmation/gratification. This narcissistic rhetoric can be called auto-demagogy. For example, Dostoevsky's well-known "Double"—the "double thoughts" (The Idiot), "the ideal of the Madonna and the ideal of Sodom" (The Brothers Karamazov)—which was defined by Mikhail Bakhtin as an ambivalent character, and mistakenly identified by him as carnival and, even more mistakenly, as dialogue, is no more than a typical narcissistic auto-demagogue. In contrast to the true choosing between two really different possibilities in Hamlet's "To be or not to be," there is nothing of dialogue in this self-reflexive oscillation between two different (high and low) ideas or personalities (myths) that struggle for the agreement and benevolence of the third—the observing subject.

What is the source of this narcissistic-demagogic need? There are two: a) infantilism, the inability to pass through the stage of the mirror (in the concept of Jacques Lacan) and establish the real other; b) a lack of confidence, a dearth of authoritativeness, hesitation, a weak self-image, an undefined identity. A demagogue has no identity (myth) of his own to offer his adversary as a choice. He also does not have, for one reason or another, the ability to create a new identity, the ability of rhetorical invention. The sole behavioral pattern available to him is the narcissistic mirror, and hence he can only adopt a strong identity that already exists in the consciousness of the audience and place it as a mirror for himself and the audience. In this move, there is no danger, just as there is no real free choice. In this mimetic triangle, apparent in the "Yes, we can!" example above, the audience points to its own identity, because it sees itself in the mirror pointing to its own identity. Quite economical. The outcome—stagnation and atrophy, which is the absolute opposite of the aims of cultural rhetoric as formulated at the beginning of our discussion. Therefore, a new model of rhetoric must be developed, one that takes into account its power of originating violence, as discussed above.

**The Rhetoric Model of Juri Lotman: A Critical Examination**

Why do we need another model of rhetoric? In any case, it is a long way from the theoretical models, even the best, such as those of Kenneth Burke and Chaim Perelman, and their practical application. What can we do, if we do not want to conduct an endless and aimless dialogue for the sake of dialogue in the Rorty style,(20) and are unable to conduct a rational Habermas-type polemic? The only thing that can justify the development of a rhetorical model is the changing reality. And the world is indeed changing before our eyes, and I want to focus on only one corner of that world—the conduct and solution of violent conflicts,
and in particular on one aspect of this sphere—a narrative conflict.

The science of war in our time is undergoing a radical change. As we all know, besides the battles there are high technologies, psychological warfare, and also public relations and narrative warfare. Rhetoric skips over the fences of diplomacy and enters spheres that until recently were controlled by the gun and the sword. For example, terrorists and various types of resistance groups invent an abundance of provocative stories (which surely would not meet Habermas' claims of validity)(21) and through them conduct narrative conflicts, which are neither diplomacy nor politics, nor are they physical violence, but they succeed in very effectively advancing their war aims. They succeed in persuading, moving others to cooperate and join in action. These stories are not an ideology; they are not connected to the ruling institutions, but they are also not opposed to them. They create their own battlefield, and their maps cannot be read by rhetoric or by neo-rhetoric. Narrative conflict seems to belong to ideological rather than historical discourse, being a weapon of political rather than academic struggle. For example, among the narratives of Holocaust deniers, the most typical is the narrative of the so-called Nakba (catastrophe, in Arabic)—the mass flight of the Arabs because of the war declared by the Arab states on the newly-proclaimed State of Israel in 1948—presented as the Palestinian Holocaust or Catastrophe.(22) It is known that these events cannot be compared by any measure to the Holocaust of European Jewry; however, a narrative conflict, appealing mostly to emotions, is not about the facts but merely about the names. Appropriation of the name involves the appropriation of the status of victim and thus originates the victimary rhetoric.

In order to draw closer to the formulation of a rhetoric theory that is more appropriate to the new reality, we will first turn to the model of rhetoric built by Juri Lotman in his book *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, in the chapter "Rhetoric as a mechanism for meaning-generation." He writes there: "A pair of mutually non-juxtaposable signifying elements, between which, thanks to the context they share, a relationship of adequacy is established, forms a semantic trope. Tropes are not, therefore, external ornaments, something applied to a thought from the outside—they constitute the essence of creative thinking, and their function extends beyond art. They are inherent in all creativity" (Lotman 2001, 37). Further on, Lotman explains the nature of these elements and the nature of the adequacy created between them: "A trope, therefore, is not an embellishment merely on the level of expression, a decoration on an invariant content, but is a mechanism for constructing a content which could not be constructed by one language alone. A trope is a figure born at the point of contact between two languages, and its structure is therefore identical to that of the creative consciousness itself" (Lotman 2001, 44). Lotman rapidly moves from the structure of the trope to rhetoric in general, and the mechanism, which Lotman has just discovered, closes on itself: "Rhetorical organization is produced in the field of semantic tension between 'organic' and 'foreign' structures, and its elements can thus be doubly interpreted. The 'foreign' element, even when mechanically introduced into a new structural context, ceases to be equivalent to itself and becomes a sign or an imitation of itself" (Lotman 2001, 50). Lotman uses the concept "mutual untranslatability" to define the relationship between the two languages or the two organizations that construct the trope and rhetoric in general, namely the impossibility of translating, mediating, moving back and forth from one to the other.

A critical discussion of this model will lead us to a new understanding of the mechanism of rhetoric.

1) Lotman's approach is too formal, lacking any functional insight. It refers to the phenomenon of the untranslatability of various languages, but says nothing about the role of this phenomenon. It says nothing about persuasion, and as a result, rhetoric is not differentiated from poetics or any other phenomenon of heterogeneity, of absurd and paradoxical combinations, etc., which do not necessarily reveal a rhetorical character. And in general, the placement of untranslatable elements next to one another does not always and does not necessarily call for translation, and even if it does, that does not necessarily signify the establishment of rhetoric. And now the second point of criticism.

2) A specific character of the relations between untranslatable elements is derived from the mere fact of mutual untranslatability. This character can be different. On the one extreme—absolute alienation, when one element does not even turn to the other, does not call for translation, is isolated in total autonomy. On the other extreme—a relationship of type and category, part and whole, detail and generality, namely, when one is not perceived without the other, or when one is only a different expression of the other (when the means of expression of the one are not translatable to the means of expression of the other).
3) Lotman takes rhetoric outside the boundaries of language and moves it to the level of the text. On the one hand, rhetoric is presented as a mechanism that creates meaning, when we have very small semantic elements such as phrases, and in this case we cannot speak about the level of the text, namely, this mechanism of meaning-creation already operates on a very low level (even on the lowest level, such as phonemes, as the members of the Liege Group μ showed). On the other hand, Lotman is forced to move to the textual level, because he has to lead the discussion to a level on which it is possible to speak about untranslatable languages. When speaking of language, he has to speak about grammar and syntax, and hence the transition to the higher level is unavoidable. However, this high level, the textual level, is characterized by certain functionality, different from that of the lower levels.

4) It turns out, then, that both on the low and high levels untranslatability does not serve any purpose other than creating the effect of untranslatability, and it only attests to itself. As Lotman himself says, signs appear as witnesses that they are signs. The function of signs in rhetoric, then, is no different than the function of signs in poetics or in any other discourse.

We shall now see how to positively resolve these problems. First of all, we will replace the negative concept of untranslatability with the positive concept of conflict. In doing so, we immediately define the character of untranslatability, the character of the relationship between its various components, and also expose a dynamic-temporary dimension of occurrence in it. In reply to the question, on what level does the conflict occur—the level of the language or the level of the text—we give the following solution: the conflict occurs on both levels since it establishes a generative relation between them. In other words, the source of the conflict, the motive, its genome, is the struggle over the appropriation of the word-name on the linguistic level, while the conflict itself takes place and develops on higher levels, in the form of a struggle between the various realizations of the word-name, i.e., between different myths or narratives. If so, then that untranslatability that Lotman talks about and which, in his view, is the source of rhetoric, must be narrowly defined as a narrative conflict.

This relationship also explains the mutual attraction of the two untranslatable elements, and the need for translation. A conflict is in itself already a partnership. The requirement for translation appears because different elements begin to seek a solution to the conflict. Translation seems on the horizon to be a solution to the narrative conflict.

Moreover, the concept of conflict introduces functional orientation into the game. The conflict has a pragmatic meaning: every side tries to appropriate the name in order to create a more persuasive narrative, namely, one that will cause the audience to believe in it and identify with it in opposition to another competing narrative. Each side encourages the audience to choose one of the suggested myths. This pragmatic orientation to a defined choice is the rhetorical persuasion. It is what separates a narrative conflict from other types of untranslatability, and first of all from poetic untranslatability. Poetics lacks this functional-pragmatic orientation for the choice of a narrative. Non-adequacy, poetic untranslatability, and poetic conflicts do not stem from the practical need to appropriate the name (on the linguistic level) and to develop the name(23) (on the textual level). It seems we can mark a clear boundary of the rhetorical manner of language appropriation, as disparate from the poetic manner. For instance, the rhetorical, persuasive efficiency of Francis Bacon's or Thomas Hobbes' famous aphorism "Scientia potentia est" (knowledge is power) lies not in the poetic (metaphoric, in particular) juxtaposition of two untranslatable languages— spiritual and physical, but in the invention of the modern narrative of force and movement as opposed to the ancient narrative of substance, in creating or expressing the conflict between the two narratives, and involving the audience in this conflict.

The model we propose overcomes Lotman's formalism, also in the way that it endows his static model with a temporal, dynamic dimension. Untranslatability in itself definitely does not assume temporality. Conflict, on the other hand, requires time to develop, to move between various phases of struggle and appropriation. This is not only because of the physical, "organic" duration of the gesture of appropriation, but primarily because of the temporal nature of developing the name—the myth. After all, it is the realization of the personality in history. The historical essence of narrative is that it is not reduced only to the organics of consecutively adding one word to another. All narrative actions, including a narrative conflict, require time and establish temporality. On the ethical-pragmatic plane as well, a rhetorical act requires time because both the persuasion of the speaker and the audience's decision-making require time.
Towards the Dynamic Model

In what way does narrative conflict differ from dialectics, discussion, sentence, instruction, argument, reasoning? What is the advantage of its terminology? The concept of narrative conflict defines the originary scene, the "pre" stage of a rhetorical act: the stage of creating the distance, in the terms of Kenneth Burke,\(^{(24)}\) in relation to the adversary, on the one hand, and on the other, it is the stage of ingratiating behavior towards the "third audience," the one that putatively is not a party to the conflict, but whose sympathy and affinity are important to both sides in achieving their goals. In other words, narrative conflict has the structure of demagogy. But lest we err: as such, it constitutes only an initial, albeit formative, stage in the overall act, which is absolutely defined as a true rhetorical act. We need to understand the essence of narrative conflict and its resolution, if we want to understand this rhetorical act. It seems that "narrative identification"\(^{(25)}\) is such a problematic and uncertain stage because the narrative as such emerges from conflict and preserves it in its signs, as Eric Gans has already shown (Gans 1997/1998). On the other hand, somewhat mysteriously, the narrative also contains the secret of the resolution of its conflictuality.

Kenneth Burke discovered the relevance of the concept of myth to rhetorical theory, and described the myth as the "rhetorical reinforcement of ideas" (Burke 1953, 15-20, 203-208), but his approach is limited to a closed, harmonistic, and abstract understanding of the myth. The unifying iconicity of the myth is not its major or essential trait. Myth is concrete and unique, and hence it is forced to struggle against many other myths in the narrative arena of culture. Therefore, we can merge the conceptions of rhetoric discussed above into one model to show that rhetoric is an effort directed at resolving a narrative conflict, which was consciously re-originated by means of a mechanism of mythopoiesis (the creation of myths). The process unfolds in four stages. Let us take as our example Einstein's "God does not play dice with the universe":

1) The first stage of the rhetorical act is the creation of the myth (defined, following Alexei Losev, as the story of a personality that realizes its transcendent purpose in empirical history, or in Losev's succinct definition—as a developed magic name). At this stage, the personality created in speech is absolutely identical to its name, a word identical to meaning. (God is realized in the name of God.)

2) This leads to the next stage—to the narrative conflict, namely a conflict between two myths: the old myth, in which the audience believes, and the new myth, suggested by the speaker. A name (meaning) becomes an object of violence. (Two narratives or images struggle on our mind: "God plays dice" and "God does not play dice.")

3) The following, third stage stems from the mechanism described by Gans: the violence is blocked and the conflict is frozen. This happens owing to the renewed separation between personality and name, between word and meaning. This breaks the language down, creates a deviation from the direct meaning of words, and thus rhetoric is created. (The narratives are being separated from the meaning: it is not about the image of playing God, but about the idea of the universe as cosmos as opposed to the idea of the universe as chaos.)

4) The blocking of the violence makes it possible to lead the audience to the fourth and last stage of this model: a free choice of one of the two identities created in the two myths. The listener chooses an identity and regards it as his realization, and hence this stage is conducted again by the forces of mythopoiesis, only this time the originating and realization of the personality bring about the resolution of the narrative conflict. (I choose the idea of, for instance, chaos, and therefore I reject the proposed new myth, thus deferring the violence between two myths, identifying with the image of God playing dice, finally realizing anew His personality in a non-conflictual way.)

To clarify this process, let us go back to Losev's theory of myth, and emphasize again that he defines a miracle as the realization of the transcendent purpose of the personality in empirical history. If so, the creation of the myth is the becoming of the personality in words, or to put it differently, the invention of
the name. It is the beginning and foundation of rhetoric. However, as soon as the name takes on existence in public scene, its unity with the mythic personality is undermined, and it becomes the object of the mimetic desire of other players in the public arena. Losev's theory helps us understand the unique value of the myth; it does not derive from its power to explain or justify natural and linguistic phenomena; that is a secondary purpose. The value of the myth lies in the becoming of the personality, in the miracle of the embodiment of the transcendental in the empirical. In this situation, the personality has "exclusive ownership" of the name. Moreover, a personality is realized in its appropriation of the name, as if it belongs to it and only to it, and as if it realizes and represents only it. At this stage, violence does not exist yet, because the concept of violence does not exist. However, as soon as the process of the becoming of the personality (the creation of the myth) is observed/heard from the side by others, they perceive the appropriation of the name as violence (for example, the myth of playing God turns out to be, or to seem to be, an appropriative, violent image, and thus turns into the object of problematization, i.e. of a violent attempt at re-appropriation). The reason for this, of course, is the awakening of mimetic desire. The others fight for their right to invent/appropriate a name, for their "firstness," as it is applied by Adam Katz to GA.(26) This right is identified with the right to be realized and to exist, and thus they view it as justified and well-grounded. This right and the myth itself are no longer perceived as negotiable objects. It is here that the conflict begins. When the appropriation of the name is viewed as violence, the entry of other players into the arena is paradoxically perceived as an act that balances, restrains and blocks the appropriation and prevents the violence. If in the first stage the symbol was, in Losev's terms, an organism, the living unity of the personality and the name, in the second stage the symbol is an object of exchange between the sides. But the exchange is not yet a discussion or a compromise: in the narrative conflict there is no compromise, because every myth, every name, every personality is unique and hence non-communicative in principle. In this way, Soviet ideologists appropriated the Western word "peace" not only because it successfully disguised their revolutionary military plans, but also because they could not allow their opponents to use this powerful word unilaterally; they were uncompromising in their intention to make this word theirs. So, every Soviet man knew that the true desire for "peace in the entire world" belonged only to the Soviet people. This rhetoric (demagogy) was motivated by the logic of warfare: you cannot effectively fight if you do not have at least the same weapon that your enemy has.

The Levels of Narrative Conflict

I conclude this study with a proposed primary typology of narrative conflict. It is possible to talk about a narrative conflict on four levels:

1. A conflict that is represented by narrative means, namely a story about a (narrative) conflict;
2. A conflict between two or more contradictory or opposing narratives;
3. A conflict within one narrative, an internal contradiction in the story that turns one narrative into two (or more);
4. A conflict in relation to the narrative, a struggle over its content, over its affiliation or its appropriation.

In rhetoric, each of these conflicts is very deliberately and consciously established, motivated and conducted, and in this case one cannot speak about an error or misunderstanding. It is a war. Modern rhetorical warfare is a distinct example of a narrative conflict. All four types of conflict appear in it at one and the same time, out of a desire to overcome the destructive conflictual power to the greatest extent possible. This works in the following way: (1) One of the sides in the warfare (let us call him "the fighter") creates a narrative on his conflict with the other side; (2) he confronts his adversary with an/other narrative/s, usually those that he himself creates and attributes to the enemy; (3) in each of the confronting, conflicting narratives, the fighter structures an internal contradiction that is meant to prevent a rational, well-reasoned solution of the conflict, and to turn it into a permanently unsolvable problem; (4) in doing so the fighter moves the conflict from the represented plane ("the reality") to the representative plane, namely to the narrative itself, turning the war into struggles over the appropriation of the names, narratives, and the definition of their contents.(27)
The aim of this war is not to block violence, nor to reject it but rather to perpetuate it—in two senses: to make it permanent and to document it, engrave it on the cultural memory. Both of these motives support one another. Permanence calls for consecutiveness, and the latter demands collection/production, accumulation and transmission of information, which calls for documentation and the creation of archives. The narrative is the document of the conflict, namely of itself. On the other hand, documentation requires constant attention, interested observation, which is acquired by means of imbuing the conflict with a permanently unsolvable character. I fight, therefore I tell; I tell, therefore I fight. The circle is closed. Narrative conflict is thus a method of establishing and conducting conflicts.

Conclusion

One can therefore sum it all up by saying that all rhetoric is cultural rhetoric, since all rhetoric is based on the anthropological element of the emergence of culture from violence, on a complex (chaotic and essentially autopoietic) system of generating, appropriating and destroying the name. From a more specific observation point, cultural rhetoric, in particular that which characterizes the contemporary culture of rhetorical warfare, emerges as the establishment of narrative conflicts and as recurrent attempts to resolve them, to re-establish and perpetuate them.

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Notes

1. This distinction paves the way to the juxtaposition of Gans' Generative Anthropology and Kenneth Burke's cultural-anthropoligical theory, which has been probed by the students of GA, but never reached the specifically rhetorical realm. See: Mishler 1999, Oort 2007. Although it is close to GA (more than Rene Girard’s theory is, as Oort notes), Burke's rhetoric supposedly belongs to the "victimary" type. More detail comparison can be found in Mishler's paper, which intentionally avoids, however, any reference to Burke's rhetoric. (back)


3. In his Chronicles of Love and Resentment no. 130 (March 28, 1998) Gans writes: "Turning the tables on unexamined certitudes like 'phallogocentrism' is the very soul of rhetoric, the 'art of persuasion,' which functions by arousing our resentment against what it presents as a heretofore unchallenged usurpation of central authority." Compare this notion with Michel Foucault's conception of "fearless speech"—parrhesia—as revolt against authority: "In parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy" (Foucault 2001, 19-20). Foucault seeks for problematization of the rhetoric, but in fact just emphasizes its very essence, its conflictual and victimary/originary character. (back)

4. For application of the concept of victimary, mastery, or heroic rhetoric to esthetic-poetic analysis see, for example, the works by Ian Dennis on Byron (and others) (Dennis 2007 and 2009), followed by the work by
Emma Peacocke, on how Byron "subverted the rhetoric of victimhood and suffering" (Peacocke 2010). See also Andrew Bartlett's study on Frankenstein (Bartlett 2006/2007, Spring/Summer 2007, Fall 2007, 2007/2008). (back)

5. I will not discuss here the problem of the concept of personality in GA, but I agree with Andrew Bartlett that this problem deserves special investigation (Bartlett 2011). (back)

6. I define myth, following Alexei Losev, as a miraculous personalistic history transmitted in words, where miracle is a realization of a personality's transcendental purpose in empirical history (Losev 2003, 185-186). (back)

7. The project stemmed from the early works of Stephen Tyler (Tyler 1978) and Ivo Strecker (Strecker 1988). Their efforts to establish "a school of the study of culture based on rhetoric and the study of rhetoric based on culture" gave rise to a series of publications, the most exhaustive and programmatic of which is Strecker and Tyler, eds. 2009. (back)

8. "Agent" and "agency" of a rhetorical act are classical terms of Kenneth Burke (Burke 1953). (back)

9. On rhetoric as a game see Huizinga 1964, 146-157. (back)

10. For a detailed description and analysis of this practice, see Eliade 1969, 207-216. (back)

11. Among the recently published books on the subject of rhetoric and truth, one of the most interesting is Wouter H. Slob's Dialogical Rhetoric: An Essay on Truth and Normativity after Postmodernism. The author, a Protestant minister, theologian and student of culture at Groningen University in Holland, deals with the problem of the loss of truth in the normative aspect, and examines the possibility of re-establishing it through what he calls "dialogical rhetoric," as a replacement for dialectic rhetoric. He claims that he does not mean to negate the latter, but only to fully develop its main idea. The truth will not be revealed in any kind of mysterious way "at the end of the day," but will exist within the polemic itself, and hence there is some point for developing arguments for discussion, refutation and reasoning (Slob 2002, 175). (back)

12. See, for example: Habermas 1962, Sennett 1974. For Gans, the "public" has the constitutive, not the contextual, meaning (see Gans 1981, 126 ff.). (back)

13. The theory of autopoesis is a biological-cognitive theory, which studies nature and man for the aim of providing an answer to the question, what is life. According to this theory, which draws upon contemporary theories of life as well as ancient philosophies, a living system is every autopoetic system, namely, a closed system that creates its own components and hence grows stronger, develops and reproduces itself, and adapts itself to changing environmental conditions. The idea of self-reproduction is underpinned by the well-known theory of "the machine that reproduces itself" of the American mathematician John von Neumann. To a large extent, the founders of the theory of autopoesis, the Chilean scholars, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, based it on the synergetic theory of the German physicist Hermann Haken and on the theory of social systems of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (Maturana and Varela 1980). (back)

14. Gans distinguishes between the indicative ostensive (e.g. the cry "Fire!") which "does not appear to modify the world to which it refers," and the designative ostensive, analogous to John Austin's performatives (e.g. the proclamation "I now pronounce you man and wife!") that "transforms their objects" (Gans 1993, 66). (back)

15. In this view, I can identify myself as an "anthroponomastic realist," in the terms proposed by Matthew Schneider: "At the core of the anthroponomastic realist's view, then, lies a conception of the scene of representation—and, by extension, human interaction—as oriented toward the ritualized, sacred center, with proper names deriving their power to manifest essential identity from their status as repetitions of the originary name-of-God" (Schneider 2009). (back)


17. Thus, Mashal appropriates, as many others do, the name "Palestine"—the British name for the Land of Israel, the result of the earlier, also well-known, appropriation of the name of the Biblical Philistines. (back)

18. Ernst Robert Curtius' proposal in his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* is intended to solve this paradox (Curtius 1953). His idea of topos as fossilized and revived personal experience, based on Jungian individuation of archetypes of the collective unconsciousness, does not connect the question of why should and can a topos revive, with the question of the origin of the paradox mentioned above. Thus, the origins of both topos and paradox remain in the dark. (back)

19. This issue of rhetoric and violence apparently was born together with rhetoric. We need to stress that we are not referring here to the trivial cases of "the rhetoric of violence" or "rhetorical violence," namely rhetoric that serves violent social bodies, and rhetoric that uses violent terms and images and violent technologies of persuasion. These terms can be found in most critical studies—feminist, post-colonial, post-national. They tend to discern "rhetorical violence" in the subjects of their research. On the other hand, the socialistic and revolutionary discourse is very readily identified as "rhetorical violence." See, for example, Cobb 2006 (on violence against homosexuals); Rowlett 1996 (on the violence of nationalism and of identity shaping). (back)


21. Jürgen Habermas' claims of validity are: normativity, truth, and truthfulness (sincerity) (Habermas 1984, 90-100). (back)

22. See, for example, the speech of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) in the UN, September 23, 2011. (back)

23. Alexei Losev's shortest definition for the concept of myth is "a developed magic name" (Losev 2003, 185-186). (back)

24. Bryan Crable shows that the formative element in Kenneth Burke's famous book *A Rhetoric of Motives* is the irrevocable distance between speaker and listener. Although this element is not entirely clear, only based on it can Burke speak about the rhetorical act as an "eternal plea" that is never fulfilled (Crable 2009). (back)

25. Kevin McClure applies Burke's concept of identification to narratology and establishes the concept of "narrative identification" as stemming from Burke's own approach and as describing the rhetorical processes at the core of the narrative (McClure 2009). (back)

26. See also on the struggle for the right of firstness in the monotheistic religions, with regard to the Holocaust, in postmodernism, and concerning 9/11 and jihad in our days, in Gans 2007, 41-53. For this issue in connection with the white guilt problem see: Gans 2005. (back)

27. See, for example this quotation from the UN speech of Mahmoud Abbas (September 23, 2011): "We entered those negotiations with open hearts and attentive ears and sincere intentions, and we were ready with our documents, papers and proposals. But these negotiations broke down just weeks after their launch. . . . We positively considered the various ideas and proposals and initiatives presented from many countries and parties. But all of these sincere efforts and endeavors undertaken by international parties were repeatedly smashed against a rock by the positions of the Israeli government, which quickly dashed the hopes raised by the launch of negotiations last September."

As the whole speech unrolls the well-known Palestinian narrative (1) against the other, presented by the speaker as the Israeli narrative (2), the quoted sentences point to the insincerity of the Israeli government, its infidelity to the "hopes," while at the background the question remains about the inconsistency of the speaker's discourse: why all these "various ideas and proposals and initiatives presented from many countries and parties" were initially necessary at all (3); and so the conflict moves from the plane of reality, which cannot be changed by this speech (and the speaker knows it), to the plane of the names and their
meaning appropriation: the right to determine the meaning of the words, such as hope, sincerity, peace, law, aggression, race (see also the continuation of the speech) that belong to "us"—the sincere, open-hearted, and "open-headed" people. (back)
Merchantry, Usury, Villainy: Capitalism and the Threat to Community Integrity in *The Merchant of Venice*

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In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare creates a microcosmic model of early modern society through which he explores not only the readily evident theme of anti-Semitism, but also the changing economic face of Europe. The interactions between Antonio, Shylock, and Portia—that is, between merchant, usurer, and landlord—play out the new set of economic interactions that accompanied the birth of capitalism. The play's portrayal of these interactions and of the Venetians' reactions to Shylock and Antonio position the comedy as an exploration of the cultural anxieties surrounding the historical emergence of free markets.

It is in inquiring into the nature of these anxieties, their causes, and their potential pitfalls that Eric Gans' originary hypothesis can serve as a productive lens for reading *The Merchant of Venice*. The shift from feudalism to capitalism brought with it, in broader anthropological terms, a movement from a ritual system of social organization to a market system. As power shifts from the ritualized center of the public scene to market exchanges along the periphery, the Venetians of the play fear that violence will not be successfully deferred as a result and that unstable fluid hierarchies will dominate. Shakespeare explores this tension, both illustrating popular criticisms of the market system and recognizing the oppressive constraints of rigid ritual hierarchies. Expanding on the work of economic historians and New Historicians by framing this play in terms of generative anthropology (GA) demonstrates how *The Merchant of Venice* can be a prime subject for what Gans calls the essential ongoing study of "the evolution of political, economic, and cultural institutions in terms of the originary dichotomy between central meaning and peripheral exchange" (*Chronicle* 193).

At the time that *The Merchant of Venice* was written, England was the site of a major ideological conflict: the feudalism of the Middle Ages was in the last period of its decline while early capitalism was beginning to develop. The process began as early as 1000 CE, fueled by such changes as improvements in agricultural technology, the development of long-distance trade, and the emergence of predecessors to factory production. The latter innovation—also known as the "putting out system"—importantly began the process of taking artisans out of the guild system and allowing them to work from home with contracts and materials provided by the merchant. (Although the guild system was not directly tied to the feudal hierarchy, it played a similar purpose in inhibiting free markets by placing restrictions on artisans.) For some time, feudalism and capitalism existed in two distinctly separate spheres of society: proto-capitalist "free cities" grew and developed markets within their walls that were unfettered by the dominance of feudal lords. This separation, however, did not prevent the growing merchant trade from chipping away at the once solid foundation of the feudal manor system. Moreover, a substantial working class (i.e., a class of persons free to sell their labor on a market) emerged from the English Enclosure Movement as lords pushed serfs off previously farmed land in order to turn that property into grazing land for an increasingly lucrative textile industry—a shift itself spurred by market pressures on feudal lords.

Although the free market's first green shoots were sprouting in England, *The Merchant of Venice* is set in Venice instead, and for an obvious reason. The Italian city-states, including Venice, featured the most
developed of Europe’s mercantile city centers. In fact, Venice had already acquired a notable reputation for guaranteeing a free-market environment for commerce, complete with civil courts to enforce contracts. The English traveler Fynes Moryson describes the Venetian judicial system in his 1617 work An Itinerary. He reports that Venice is greatly revered for "their strict observing of justice" and that its courts have "singular justice in cases of debt and have particular judges over merchants’ bankrupting" (109). Venice’s mercantile activity was already so well developed by this point that a renowned judicial system had developed to support it. If Shakespeare’s play is in fact an examination of the free market, then Venice is the perfect backdrop for that undertaking, as it extrapolates from Venice the future growth of the market system in England.

But England’s transition did not come about without significant resistance from entrenched feudal social institutions, especially the Catholic Church. Jacques Le Goff writes that "the sudden eruption and spread of the monetary economy threatened old Christian values. Capitalism, a new economic system, was ready to take shape . . . [but] made wholesale use of practices that had always been condemned by the church." While the feudal hierarchy feared "the growing threat of indebtedness facing both aristocratic landlords and, above all, small independent producers," the Church feared the destruction of a socioeconomic system which had inherently reinforced religion’s predominant social role by claiming God’s sanction for the wealth of feudal lords and the "paternalistic" care they offered serfs; what threatened to replace the Church was individualistic capitalism (qtd. In Rich). Religious authorities placed numerous restrictions on the activities of merchants, including, for instance, the "law of the just price": merchants could only earn as much as the poorest of knights. The church’s aim was obvious: to stifle the merchant class’ social mobility and, in consequence, to maintain feudal social relations.

Restrictions like the law of the just price reflect the fundamental social transformation that paralleled the economic shift from feudalism to capitalism. Economic historian Karl Polanyi argues that as free markets spread, the economy grew to become an autonomous mechanism increasingly separate from the social and political aspects of society. He writes:

> The conceptual tool with which to tackle this transition . . . is the distinction between the embedded and the disembedded condition of the economy in relation to society. . . . In a market economy the production and distribution of goods in principle is carried on through a self-regulating system of price-making markets. It is governed by laws of its own. . . . Not blood-tie, legal compulsion, religious obligation, fealty or magic creates the sociological situations which make individuals partake in economic life . . . (68)

As Polanyi explains, this transformation from the embedded to the disembedded would not be fully complete until the nineteenth century, but the first steps towards that free-standing economy were evident even in the 16th century. Sir Henry Summer Maine stated the same dichotomy in different terms: whereas ancient society was founded on "status" relations, modern society developed "contractus" relations, in which "rights and duties [were] derived from bilateral arrangements" (Polanyi 69). That is to say that in the feudal system, social status markers determined wealth; with the development of markets, exchange and contracts (and, by consequence, wealth) determined social status. No longer would religion, social structure, or tradition dominate the functioning of the economy.

What Polanyi frames in terms of an economy’s embeddedness in culture and explores as an economic historian resembles more generally the extent to which humans have a ritualistic relationship towards the center of the scene of representation. In other words, the movement from embedded to disembedded economy parallels what Eric Gans describes as "the never-completable transition from the ritual system of distribution inaugurated in the originary scene to the market system" (Chronicle 34). The ritual system places authority in the sacred center as the source of meaning and thus justifies hierarchies and systems of economic distribution in terms of that center. By contrast, the disembedded or market system minimizes the role of the central authority and instead allows distribution to be determined by the exchange of signs along the periphery of the scene. The law of the just price is a prime example of this difference. The ritualized feudal order required that the church stamp out any signs of social mobility, since such movement would represent a disturbance of the existing hierarchy through peripheral exchanges and empowerment, without the sanction of the ritual center. The ritual constraints that defined pre-market societies may not disappear completely, and indeed may be, as Gans notes, internalized by participants in the market, but the point
that GA makes and Polanyi's findings support is that early modern Europe indeed witnessed a shift towards a market system liberated from social variables. In the play, Antonio, Shylock, and Portia play out the apprehensions of a society witnessing the falling away of ritual constraints and the empowerment of individuals at the periphery to act without regard to community values.

To understand this bigger picture, we must explore the characters behind the ideological drama, especially the rivals Antonio and Shylock. Critics have come to a variety of conclusions on the significance of this problematic pair of characters: Shylock is routinely seen as representing capitalism, feudalism, or neither of these systems; Antonio is described by one reader as noble, by another as criminal, and by another as synonymous with Shylock himself. Regardless, it is difficult to deny that the play indeed villainizes Shylock and casts him in the role of the stereotypical avaricious usurer. Shylock lives up to popular perceptions of both usurers and Jews in the early modern period: he treasures wealth as much as, if not more than his own daughter and hounds for a Christian's pound of flesh in an echo of the "blood libel" that fueled early persecution of Jews.

Underlying this characterization are also compelling, if more subtle similarities between the merchant and usurer. Take, for instance, the play's recurring interrogation of spirituality among the Venetians. Although Shylock is widely condemned for his greed, Antonio too is motivated by an irreverent materialism that privileges the exchange of earthly goods over transcendental spirituality. He does not express this mindset outright, but rather seems to share it with his friends in Venice—Salerio and Solanio. In the play's opening scene, Salerio comments that, were he a merchant, he would be distracted by the thought of his ships crashing against the rocks, even while attending church. He considers it normal that a capitalist would be so distressed by the potential loss of capital and revenues that his worries would eclipse other arguably more elevated aspects of life. This materialism contrasts with feudal relations in which the church was central. Feudal lords were no doubt as susceptible to avarice and worldly concerns as the early capitalist, but feudal society erected at least a pretense of piety—a set of ritual and ideological appeals to the authority of God and the church that legitimized the hierarchy: Salerio's irreverence snubs divine authority while erecting commerce as a new idol.

Tellingly, Antonio does not question the implications of Salerio and Solanio's conjectures, casting doubt on whether Antonio can in fact be both Christian and a merchant. He responds to his friends' concerns by saying:

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Believe me, no. I thank my fortune for it.
My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,
Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate
Upon the fortune of this present year.
Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad. (1.1.41-5)
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Nowhere does Antonio chide his friends for their arguably un-Christian materialism. For a play so heavily grounded in Christian theology (e.g., in allusions to the transition from Old Testament Law to New Testament mercy), Antonio's mercantile mindset and that of the entire Venetian community merits additional attention: the New Testament firmly warns against materialism, as when Jesus warns during the Sermon on the Mount, "You cannot serve both God and Money" (NIV, Matt. 6.24). Of course, Shylock's spiritual integrity is questionable as well. Despite the frequency with which he champions his faith, he repeatedly violates the dictates of the Torah, which include dietary restrictions and calls for mercy similar to those of New Testament Christianity.

Antonio's relationship to Shylock also points to doubts about the merchant's spiritual integrity. Antonio tells us that his relationship with Shylock is strained because he has "oft delivered from [Shylock's] forfeitures / Many that have at times made moan to me" (22-3). The merchant highlights his role as an anti-usury activist of sorts, disrupting Shylock's business because he finds it morally objectionable. But Shylock portrays Antonio somewhat differently:

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Signor Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances
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...You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,  
And spit upon my Jewish gabardine,  
And all for use of that which is mine own.  
Well then, it now appears you need my help. (1.3.101-109)

As with Antonio's description, Shylock cites Antonio as condemning his usury. However, he subsequently suggests that Antonio has gone beyond business to make this a personal and religious attack. Antonio acknowledges that he has indeed spit upon and sought to humiliate Shylock ("I am as like to call thee so again, / To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too") (1.3.125-6). Gary Rosenshield takes up this issue and concludes that "Antonio seems to have specifically chosen Shylock; there is no mention of his having humiliated any other usurers, Jewish or Christian . . . to Shylock, Antonio is a symbol of Christian hatred." Rosenshield adds that Antonio is driven by a degree of "personal hatred [that] seems quite out of keeping for a Christian merchant in a play in which the Christian merchant is being advanced as an ideal" (39).

Beneath their surface rivalry, then, Antonio and Shylock share a disregard for religious taboos. This similarity implies that merchant and usurer alike are ushering in and are in turn reliant upon a new form of social organization. Ritual constraints--like the dictates that both characters seem to violate--stem from the originary center, from the sacred, and reinforce existing hierarchies. But by moving away from recognizing the authority of the sacred, Antonio and Shylock both support a market system in which the exchange of signs is the principal means of deferring conflict. Indeed, every aspect of life in Shakespeare's Venice is contractual if not commercial in some respect, from Antonio and Bassanio's friendship to Jessica and Lorenzo's love affair. All of these relationships are described in terms of "bonds" between characters. Bassanio is bonded by friendship and debt to Antonio, who in turn owes money (and later flesh) to Shylock; Portia gives a metal band, or ring, to Bassanio to mark their imminent marriage; and even Lancelot seeks to break his bond with Shylock to serve Bassanio instead.

The various bonds formed in this manner are all, despite their differences, essentially exchanges of signs that create value. Unlike ritual societies, where value is created at the center, Gans reminds us that market societies create value on the periphery in the process of exchange. Shakespeare thus draws attention to the variety of often competing transactions and agreements created among members of the community--i.e., along the periphery of the public scene of representation. In privileging commercial transactions and exchange values over transcendental values that emanate from the center, Antonio, Shylock, and other Venetians illustrate the shift to a market system that so unnerved cultural institutions like the Catholic Church. Unlike feudalism, proto-capitalist merchantry was secular; feudal lords were said to be paternal figures in a divinely sanctioned social hierarchy; merchants have no such role, as these three Venetians illustrate. Therefore, to the extent that Christianity is a community value, capitalist concerns disregard those values and erect a new, fluid hierarchy in which standing is not tied to the sacred. Market-style social organization is the emerging norm in the world depicted by The Merchant of Venice: the single bond of worship directed towards the center disintegrates with the coming of myriad market exchanges.

With this backdrop, Shakespeare sets the scene for an exploration of the community's response to these changes. He leaves his own position unclear while probing the cultural anxieties surrounding capitalism. The Venetians turn a blind eye to Antonio's complicity in the market system and instead demonize Shylock, constructing a scapegoated Other on which to blame the perceived faults of the free market system. They decry Shylock's greed, Judaism, and usury despite the fact that the characteristics of capitalism that the Venetians so distrust--that is, the market system's tendency to erode ritual constraints on resentment--result from the individualistic system as a whole. So although anti-Semitism drives the play's surface conflict, in reality Shylock is merely a scapegoat for the community's distrust of the free market and the fluid hierarchies that it inaugurates. Rosenshield supports this conclusion, claiming that Antonio "engages Shylock so intensely because he needs to define himself as the antithesis of the Jew, to see himself as a merchant and not a usurer. . . . Shylock is a constant reminder of the fine line dividing the Christian merchant and the Jewish usurer" (39-40). Rosenshield suggests that the merchant's attempts to differentiate himself from Shylock are forced, almost desperate overreactions to the pair's similarities. As a result of the Christians' collective characterization of Shylock, he becomes a particularly villainous character, when in fact he is simply acting in an economic system that he supports alongside Antonio.
Indeed, Shylock simply doesn’t seem to fit the pattern of Shakespeare’s more clear-cut villains: he takes at best an indirect role in scheming against Antonio, while the typical tragic villain is more actively antagonistic. This comparison reinforces the notion that the usurer is a scapegoat for the play’s larger villain. Iago of Othello and Edward of King Lear follow similar patterns as antagonists: both characters actively plot and act against the play’s protagonist (or one of the secondary protagonists) in order to achieve their given end. By contrast, in a work like The Comedy of Errors, there is no singular antagonist in the form of a character. Instead, all of the characters wrestle with an antagonistic situation. Merchant falls somewhere in between these two categories of plays. Shakespeare crafts a generally villainous character, a protagonist who suffers at his hands, and a resolution that sees the antagonist defeated. Yet, unlike Iago or Edward, Shylock does not plot to get revenge: he enters into the bond telling himself, "If I can catch [Antonio] once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him" (1.3.40-1), but Shylock is just as surprised as Antonio when the merchant’s ships are supposedly destroyed. Shylock’s revenge is enabled not because of his own scheming—which does not involve an inherently evil act—but because of the strict language of the contract and Antonio’s apparent bad luck. Shylock simply takes advantage of a situation that offers an opportunity to kill Antonio. What the play seems to suggest, without necessarily recognizing it outright, is that the actual culprit behind Antonio’s misfortune is the economic system that justifies the actions of individual actors on the periphery of the public scene of representation and ignores the ritual prohibitions that stem from the sacred center.

Antonio’s trial in civil court further distinguishes between Shylock’s perceived villainy and the disconcerting changes brought about by the market system. When Shylock demands the payment of his bond, Antonio’s supporters must sacrifice their moral outrage and personal love for Antonio in order to preserve the integrity of the city’s laws. Shylock warns the court, "If you deny [my bond], let the danger light / Upon your charter and your city’s freedom!" (4.1.38-39). The "freedom" which Shylock leverages alludes to Venice’s reputation for rigorous civil courts and unfettered free markets, much as Fynes Moryson described in 1617. Accordingly, while the Duke doesn’t conceal his preference for the Christian defendant, he is reluctant to endanger Venice’s reputation for upholding contracts; he hesitates before yielding to what critic Michael Ferber describes as "the dissolution of the traditional ‘organic’ society into an aggregate of individuals who do as they like" (459). Shylock’s instruction to the court to consider his insistence on Antonio’s pound of flesh as his "humor" underscores this conflict between individual freedom and community well-being (4.1.43). The Duke’s dilemma reflects the transition from an embedded to disembedded economy: a commercial contract can legally override the values, desires, and social strata of the community because the economic sphere has separated from the cultural sphere. The defendant and his supporters fear that Shylock’s likely success in killing a popular and supposedly righteous merchant speaks to the amoral nature of the free market. Mercy has no sway in such a situation because, as an emotional appeal, it is outside the realm of commerce.

In this context, Antonio and Shylock illustrate what an Elizabethan audience may have seen as the undesirable leveling and destabilizing effects of capitalism. Since contract laws and market mechanisms are disembedded from social relations, the feudal hierarchy’s fears are realized in Venice: merchants can exceed knights in wealth, and Jews can legally threaten Christians. In the rising tension of the courtroom, the play would like to attribute violence between the members of the community to Shylock but implicitly recognizes that the Venetians’ fears stem from the necessity that they acquiesce to the demands of the contract as a means of social organization. Martin Yaffe’s reading of the play supports this notion; he argues that the trial is in fact a judgment on "whether priority should be given to public-spirited friendships as opposed to private profits." He proposes that the trial asks "whether the community at large is better served by strengthening the bonds that unite citizens as citizens or instead by reinforcing those bonds that unite citizen and stranger alike simply as freely contracting individuals" (51). Yaffe uses this notion to support his broader argument that Shakespeare is in fact challenging the popular attitude towards Jews; although I disagree with his ultimate conclusion, his specific point about capitalism’s effect on community is an apt one.

In GA terms, the critique of the market system that emerges is that violence can no longer be deferred successfully due to the uncontrolled accumulation of resentment between competitors in the market. The individual freedom of the free market appears to come at the price of the instability of the community that results from release of accumulated resentment. Adam Katz writes that ritual society was capable of deferring violence by containing mimetic desire “within collectivities whose sacred center could explicitly
The Duke and Venice as a whole have been tasked with fostering the liberation of the free market in the form of contracts, but they are clearly torn between this task and that of upholding the cultural order for the sake of deferring the resentment that has exploded in the conflict between Antonio and Shylock. The play envisions dangerous consequences from relinquishing those prohibitions and unleashing mimetic desire—taken to a symbolic extreme in the form of Shylock’s demand for a pound of Antonio’s flesh.

Shakespeare’s solution to the threat embodied by the market system is to turn to Portia and the aristocratic world of Belmont. The relationship between Belmont and Venice is embodied in Bassanio. Several critics have observed that Portia and Antonio appear engaged in a contest over Bassanio’s love. Antonio reluctantly parts with Bassanio as the suitor leaves to court Portia, and Portia follows Bassanio when he returns to Venice. However, Bassanio also becomes the subject of a veiled tug-of-war between capitalism and feudalism. At the play’s opening, his motivations for courting Portia are convoluted. Bassanio is not a merchant, but he does have something of the spirit of acquisitiveness and concern with worldly things about him, as illustrated by his mixed attitude towards Portia. The first words we hear from Bassanio about Portia is that courting her is a way to “get clear of all the debts I owe” (1.1.134); she is “a lady richly left; / And she is fair and, fairer than that word, / Of wondrous virtues” (1.1.161-163; emphasis added). Bassanio is not entirely materialistic, but he tellingly describes her wealth before her beauty or virtue. If a culture wary of capitalism defines a healthy community as one that finds meaning in the originary center, then it seems that Bassanio is not only caught between giving priority to wealth or love, but he is subsequently caught between ritual and market systems. While a market system presupposes that monetary exchange value can be established in the process of exchanging signs or goods, a more idealistic perspective elevates the transcendent notion of love above any possibility of being traded. By virtue of his relationship with Antonio in Venice, Bassanio is accustomed to sealing friendships with the exchange of coin rather than through appeals to the sacred. Moreover, much as Antonio’s eyes are looking to his merchandise rather than to heaven, the suitor initially seems to prioritize the baser of Portia’s qualities. In these ways, Bassanio shares traits with the commercial environment of Venice.

Bassanio’s transition from this commercial mindset to the feudal ethic begins while choosing among Portia’s caskets. He announces, regarding the silver casket, that he will have “none of thee, thou pale and common drudge / ‘Tween man and man” (3.2.103-4). He denounces the very act of commercial exchange. Bassanio suggests that silver (currency) is a lifeless (“pale”) substitute for relationships revolving around emotional or spiritual concerns. It is helpful to contrast the interactions taking place in Belmont with those in Venice. Whereas the bonds connecting Antonio, Bassanio, and Shylock suggest that even friendship and hatred can be converted to economic terms, the casket game is oppressively ritualistic. Gold is notably not the correct casket, because the transcendental values that the lead casket embodies cannot be expressed in economic terms. Of course, the effects of ritual constraints are also illustrated here in the form of Portia’s distress at being under the dead hand of her father. Despite this, the casket game serves as a ritual device that prevents unfettered competition and thus prevents resentment among the suitors by calling upon Portia’s dead father as a central source of authority. Bassanio becomes a convert to this system; he condemns the effects of exchange on the relationship between individuals, and he expresses his romantic love for Portia, having thrown off the cloak of borrowed wealth. Of course, Belmont’s heiress is not bereft of wealth herself. The distinction between capitalist and feudal systems is not wealth itself, but rather where and how that literal and figurative value is created in the realm of exchange. Instead of value stemming from acts of exchange and the effects of market forces, Portia advocates a stable, sacred source of value that legitimizes bonds and preserves the interests of the community. Belmont and Venice thus represent two battling social and economic structures—the latter capitalist, or exchange-oriented and the former aristocratic, or center-oriented.

The rivalry for Bassanio’s affections (and ethics) begins anew when he returns to Venice, impelled by his both commercial and personal bond with Antonio. Portia conclusively wins the ideological contest only by saving Antonio in the courtroom. She must leave the “Beautiful Mountain” (the name Belmont itself suggesting moral/spiritual elevation) and enter the world of commerce to save the Christians, who are enmeshed in the troubled world of capitalism. Tellingly, Portia’s appeal to Shylock for mercy—her appeal to sacrality—fails. Instead, she is forced to engage in exacting legalese to find a loophole for Antonio to escape from his bond. But the fact that she works within the internal logic of the peripheral contract does not redeem the free market or suggest that ritual and market culture can comfortably coexist. On the
contrary, her legal exactitude verges on a reductio ad absurdum. Distinguishing between taking flesh and
taking blood underscores the perceived arbitrariness of creating value on the periphery and the potential
instability of such bonds. The ease with which Portia undoes a supposedly hard and fast contract is a
criticism of the free market as a means of social organization and encourages contrast with the—for better
or worse—inflexibly rigid social contracts of ritual societies.

After Portia dissolves the contract, Bassanio is no longer held under a financial bond with Antonio, but is
under the new yoke of a marital bond with Portia. Antonio is similarly freed from his material bond with
Shylock to enter a bond on his very soul with Portia (5.1.252). Both of these shifts move the bonds from
drawing on peripheral exchanges to generate their importance (i.e., monetary exchange or the exchange of
symbols) to drawing on the authority of the sacred. Portia, as the advocate of the center’s primacy,
emerges the most powerful from this conflict: Venice is left behind, and the protagonists gather in the
aristocratic haven of Belmont. The play ends, then, by settling both the ideological and personal dramas.
Shylock loses all around, having been further ostracized and punished, but Antonio does not enjoy a clear
cut-victory. He has survived, no doubt, but at Belmont, Antonio is alone among the other couples, having
lost Bassanio to Portia. This ending recognizes Antonio’s complicity in the market system for which Shylock
received the majority of the stated blame. Antonio is still a virtuous merchant in the eyes of the Venetians,
but he is nonetheless an outsider in the ritual environment; he is thoroughly a product of the market
system.

In fact, the nonchalance with which Antonio and Shylock are cast aside, the questionable nature of Portia’s
legal intervention, and the underlying causes of Shylock’s grudge against Antonio suggest that there may be a
disconnect between what the anti-market Venetians considered an ideal conclusion and what the play as
a whole leads us to question about their anxieties. The Venetians warn us that if the usurer had just been
sufficiently marginalized and discriminated against, then Antonio would never have been at risk: contracts
broke down the rigid hierarchies of the ritual society and unleashed the conflict that appeals to the sacred
are supposed to avert. The Venetians’ (and, by extrapolation, England’s) anxieties are understandable,
considering the magnitude of the social and economic shifts they were witnessing, yet they are not
necessarily sound. Although it is true that the free market naturally breaks up collectivities into aggregates
of individual actors, this liberates individuals from the repressive ritual relationship to the center. The
alternative is the implementation of the same rules that regulated embedded economies like feudalism: a
contractus social structure in which serfs are born as such into a hierarchy continually purged of resentment
by appealing to the sacred.

Moreover, the competition that a transitioning Europe feared for its tendency to create resentment may not
have been to blame for the play’s conflict from an anthropological perspective. What was apparently
perceived as “ unholy capitalism” in the form of Shylock was really only an embryonic free market, not yet
entirely free of the fetters of ritual. The Venetians suggest that the source of conflict is the peripheral bond
between Antonio and Shylock, but the resentment actually stems from the rigid hierarchy that relegates
Jews to the role of money lenders and ostracized them while failing to purge the resulting resentment. The
commercial competition between the two characters is merely thinly veiled religious conflict and personal
hatred. Notably, Shylock’s desire for “ revenge” (3.1.45) is further fanned after Jessica leaves home with the
Christian Lorenzo: for Shylock, enforcing the bond is as much a strike at the Christians as a whole as an
attack against Antonio himself. In a fully disembedded economy, resentment would be recycled into the
system to be deferred by further production and consumption. This helps explain why modern readers of
the play often find themselves sympathetic to Shylock’s plight: market relationships are increasingly
commonplace and ritual hierarchies increasingly archaic. Though readers do well to keep this caveat in mind
while considering cultural critiques of capitalism as a whole, a reading of The Merchant of Venice through
the lens of the originary hypothesis provides a promising anthropological perspective on these anxieties as
they functioned in Shakespeare’s historical context.

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The film My Night at Maud's is the third installment by Éric Rohmer in his 6-part Moral Tales series—one of his most popular films, made in 1969. It takes place in Clermont-Ferrand, the birthplace of Blaise Pascal, between Sunday, the 20th of December, and Sunday, the 27th of December.

Like many of Rohmer's films, this film is about a moral choice that its protagonist is facing. The protagonist of the film is an engineer, Jean-Louis, played by Jean-Louis Trintignant, who moves to Clermont-Ferrand to take a job with Michelin after living for a long time in Canada and South America. He is both a devout Catholic and an amateur mathematician, who works with probability problems in his spare time. His dilemma is whether he can remain faithful to Françoise, a beautiful young woman whom he notices on the last Sunday of Advent, at mass.

Françoise, whose name he does not know yet, is standing next to him in church in an early scene of the film. After the mass, he tries to follow her, but is unsuccessful—she disappears on her scooter. He becomes obsessed with meeting her again and starts searching for her everywhere in Clermont-Ferrand. The next day he sees her passing him, on her scooter again, and has an epiphanic moment. The voice-over comments that "On that Monday, December the 21st, I suddenly knew, without a doubt, that Françoise would be my wife."

Later he runs into an old school friend, Vidal (played by Antoine Vitez), whom he hasn't seen in many years. Vidal is now a philosophy professor at the local university. At Vidal's instigation, they attend a concert. Jean-Louis agrees to come along because he hopes to meet Françoise (after Vidal tells him that pretty college girls attend these events). Then they go to midnight mass, this time at Jean-Louis's suggestion. But Jean-Louis does not meet Françoise on either of these occasions. Finally, his friend invites him to visit a female friend of his, Maud, a recently divorced doctor. Jean-Louis is forewarned that she is a very beautiful, smart, and interesting woman, and that Vidal and she have had a brief affair, but things have not worked out. The three have dinner at Maud's place.

The atmosphere during the dinner is charged with sexual tension. It is obvious that both Vidal and Jean-Louis are attracted to Maud. The conversation turns to religion. Jean-Louis affirms his commitment to Catholicism, saying that he has not been chaste in the past, but neither has he been promiscuous, insofar that he has only had a few long-term relationships. He says that he is not a saint. But he will no longer succumb to temptation, because he is now converted and wants to meet and marry a Catholic woman. Vidal and Maud, who are both atheists and sexually liberated, start teasing him by saying that he must have already met this woman, because he has a dreamy look, as if he is already in love. Jean-Louis vehemently denies it.

When it starts snowing, Maud begs Jean-Louis to stay, saying that it is too dangerous to drive to his distant suburb of Seyrat. Vidal leaves, and the protagonist ends up staying the night. The key moment of the film is the moment of temptation. It turns out that Maud does not have the spare bedroom she has promised him. He first tries to sleep in her armchair, then, at her invitation, lies down next to her in bed. At one point, it appears as if something is going to happen between the two, but he resists the temptation, pushing her away.

The same morning he accidentally runs into Françoise and introduces himself, asking for a date to go to church on Sunday. The rest of the day, is spent with Maud, Vidal, and Vidal's female friend. In a typical Rohmerian moment of moral ambiguity, Jean-Louis is shown flirting with Maud in a physically affectionate way and even kissing her, which makes his earlier act of renunciation less convincing. On his way home, he runs into Françoise again, and, ironically, ends up spending the night this time in one of the spare bedrooms of
Françoise’s student house. She offers the spare room after he has given her a ride home, because his car gets skids and gets stuck on an ice patch. The situation is ironically reversed now. She seems to think that he wants to seduce her, as he walks into her room late at night, looking for matches. But that is not his intention.

After this night, when Jean-Louis and Françoise start dating, he accidentally finds out that before she became his girlfriend, she had been the mistress of Maud’s husband. This means that she is not a perfect Catholic virgin he thought she was. It is Françoise herself who tells him she had had a lover who had broken up with her. He figures out who the lover was.

Five years later, the protagonist and Françoise are married and have a young son. They accidentally run into Maud in a seaside resort. Françoise is tense, expecting him to reveal his knowledge of the affair. He withholds it and tells her instead that Maud had been his last fling before he met her, making it sound as if they had been lovers. In this ultimate gesture of generosity toward his wife, he attempts to make her feel better about her own sin by presenting himself to be a bigger sinner than he really is. Perhaps this is the real moral choice that he ends up making, which is more important than the earlier one of resisting temptation.

This storyline is punctuated by the subtext of the philosophical debate about religion, resolution, temptation, luck, and, ultimately, the nature of faith. Most of the action in the film is constituted by conversations on philosophical topics. The central theme of these discussions is, in one way or another, the problem of choice. Jean-Louis’s imaginary counterpart is Blaise Pascal, known for his ascetic ways and the wager problem that he formulated. The wager refers to Pascal’s argument for believing in God.

The argument takes the form of what in modern philosophy is called game theory. According to its pragmatic logic, we should wager that God exists because it is the best bet. If God does exist and you have bet on his existence ("betting on his existence" needs to be interpreted further: does it imply the mental state of faith or the choice to lead a Christian life?), you have won the lottery, that of an eternal life in Paradise. Another possibility is that God does not exist, but you have bet on his existence. You still lead a Christian life but do not get any reward in the end. In this case, you have not lost anything other than forgone possibly pleasurable but sinful experiences. Following the same logic, if God does not exist, and you have indeed bet on his non-existence, you would not have lost anything because there is nothing you would have done differently. However, if God does exist, but you have bet on his non-existence, that is to say you have led a sinful and unrepentant life, you have lost your very soul: you have lost everything. You are now sentenced to an eternal life of hell and damnation. From the point of view of game theory, which uses the logic of mathematical expectation or expected utility, it makes the most sense to err on the side of God than otherwise. The win, in the case you wager on God, is positive infinity. The loss, in the case of wagering against God, is negative infinity. The first choice is only rational.

The idea of wagering involves both calculation and contract—the former because you need to know the chances and mathematical expectations of various outcomes before you bet, and the latter because you need to ensure your wager’s binding nature. In the end, it must be honored by all participating sides, necessitating some kind of a presiding authority. Significantly, the themes of betting, statistical analysis, and moral
accounting are foregrounded in the film. For example, one of Jean-Louis's hobbies is mathematics, especially statistics. We see him at home, working on mathematical problems (involving the Pascalian binomial distribution and the calculation of mathematical expectation, according to the close-up of the pages). We also find him in a bookstore, leafing through books on statistics and theory of probability.

Importantly also, the idea of Pascal's wager has a concrete embodiment in Jean-Louis's moral dilemma. After he first encounters Françoise, it is suggested (but not spelled out directly) that he makes a kind of wager with God (or forces of fate). He decides to stay faithful to her, even though it is very uncertain, at this point, that he might ever meet her again, let alone marry her. The reward in this bargain, presumably, is having the clear conscience of celibate integrity when he hopefully gives himself to her later. The irony of the situation is, of course, that Françoise, having just emerged from an affair with a married man, is not a pure Catholic virgin he has supposed her to be. But Jean-Louis turns this situation into another kind of transaction, telling Françoise that he is glad that she is not a virgin. Since he is not a virgin either, this makes them even.

When he meets Vidal in a café for the first time in many years, he tells him that he likes to dabble in mathematics in his spare time. Statistics, of course, is central to the theme of Pascal's wager, insofar as the latter is mathematically transcribable in a game-theory matrix of payoffs. But not only that, Vidal suggests that Pascal's wager can and should be generalized as a philosophical problem, applicable to other areas of life—even for a Marxist like himself. As a Marxist, concerned with social justice and the transformation of society, he needs to believe that history has meaning, otherwise his life's project becomes meaningless. He must choose between two hypotheses—one that society and politics are meaningless, and the other that history has meaning. Personally, he explains, the former makes much more sense to him. He ascribes to it the probability of 80%. Yet he must stake his life on the less probable hypothesis to justify his actions and choices, because the gain, to him, is infinite.

But does the very idea of "wagering on God" present a conundrum? A belief that we are free to make choices, such as a choice against sinning or a choice to lead a moral life, implies a voluntarist perspective—a worldview that says that we are masters of our actions—which is a position not completely compatible with Pascal's Jansenism. Jansenism was a religious movement during Pascal's lifetime, originated by Cornelius Jansen, a Dutch theologian, which was later condemned as a heresy. Pascal subscribed to its tenets and is commonly viewed as a Jansenist. The adherents to this movement advocated a theology quite similar to Calvinism in several important respects. Among other things, they believed in a form of predestination and irresistible grace, which went together with their view of the total depravity of human nature. It is only divine grace that enables human beings to act morally: on their own, they cannot make morally-sanctioned choices. Jansenism was a semi-Protestant movement within Catholicism, insofar as its doctrine did not sanction belief in salvation through works and thus disavowed free will.

Thus, on the one hand, we have Pascal advocating the doctrine of predestination and irresistible grace, which precludes free choice. On the other, we have him promoting a wager, which is a voluntarist act involving choice and free will. A question suggests itself: can we choose to believe in God? The very precondition of Pascal's wager as a contract stipulates faith. We wager with God on God's existence, while holding God as the underwriter of our transaction, which is problematic. It is also problematic to assign probabilities to the existence vs nonexistence of God, which would be assigning probability to hypotheticals. According to Jean-Louis, who thinks that Pascal's wager is too mercantile ("what I don't like about Pascal's wager is its calculated exchange"), it only works if the probability of salvation is more than zero. It can be infinitesimally small, but it cannot be zero, because zero multiplied by any number is zero. But since an atheist cannot allow even the slightest possibility of God's existence, the wager is not valid for him.

But what if one believes that the possibility of God's existence is more than zero? Is it then possible to choose faith as a state of mind? Or is the wager based on nothing more than the rationality of "calculated exchange"? Pascal seems to think faith is sure to follow. And the portal through which it will enter is simple: imitation. He therefore enjoins his reader in the Pensees to abandon reason and start performing rituals unthinkingly. As you start with mechanical actions, according to him, your thoughts will eventually follow, forming mental habits and gradually leading you to faith. Thus, in a bookstore, Jean-Louis opens Pascal's Pensées and reads:

You would like to attain faith, and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they...
believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. (gutenberg.org)

Another question is whether we are capable of the very act of deliberate choice, that is to say of mastery over ourselves? It is not accidental that predestinarian doctrines also stress the underlying depravity of human nature. Can I choose to leave behind my sinful behavior and bad habits? According to Calvinism and Jansenism, human beings simply do not have the willpower to change and transform themselves unless assisted by irresistible grace. Pascal seems to be aware of this difficulty, as well. The quoted passage continues: "This will naturally make you believe and will stultify you . . . this way leads you to faith, let me tell you that it will lessen the passions which are your stumbling-blocks" (gutenberg.org). In other words, Pascal appears to be saying that passions can lead us astray. People who have no assurance of salvation can seek refuge in ascetic, anti-hedonist practices. They can only read indirect signs of their election, and they hope that one such sign is constituted by their virtuous behavior achieved through rigorous "warfare against the flesh."

In the film, this topic is raised at dinner. Ironically, Vidal, who is an atheist, likes Pascal, while religious Jean-Louis is put off by his asceticism. He explains that, having lived in Clermont-Ferrand, Pascal has certainly drunk its excellent Chanturgue wine, but, according to the memoirs of his sister, he never praised it, nor did he ever notice what he ate, unlike Jean-Louis himself, who loves good food and drink and, in general, enjoys both the sensual and intellectual dimensions of life. But even intellectual pursuits can be the devil's snare, according to the extreme ascetic ethos of Jansenism. At the end of his life, Pascal, the great mathematician, rejected mathematics itself as yet another worldly temptation, a useless intellectual diversion that needlessly excites passions.

And last but not least there is the question of whether we should, or can, choose at all. How is a wager possible within the constraints of a predestinarian doctrine? Must one choose? Why must one choose? Is the very notion of choice not a contradiction? Yet Pascal's predestinarianism seems to convolute into a conviction that it is the wager itself that is not optional, not a choice. You cannot not choose, as he states in Pensees: "Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. You are in the game. Which will you choose then?" Vidal quotes a similar passage: "If there are not infinite chances of losing compared to winning, do not hesitate. Stake it all. You are obliged to play. So renounce reason if you value your life." The latter passage is reminiscent of God's injunction to choose life, issued in Deuteronomy 30:19: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." In not being able or allowed to avoid choice, we cannot escape the givenness of our original spiritual condition. Our situation is such that we are always already launched into "the game" of moral choices and must therefore choose.

Pascal's philosophical formulation of choice underscores the very issue of whether Jean-Louis is capable or incapable of moral choice, which is central to the film. Jean-Louis himself would certainly like to avoid or postpone choice. At the very least, he would like to deny its enormity. As Maud needles him about his being a "shame-faced Christian" who refuses to take responsibility for his actions, he grows irritated. "I thought every Christian was to aspire to sainthood," says Maud. Jean-Louis answers that he cannot be a saint. Not everyone could be a saint, and he is apparently among those who cannot aspire to sainthood. He acknowledges his spiritual mediocrity and his "halfheartedness," qualifying it by saying, "I am a man of the times, and religion acknowledges the times."

Critics such as T. Jefferson Kline and Glen W. Norton have pointed out and debated the meaning of the visual effect of light behind Jean-Louis's head as he is saying that he must have fallen into a snare of the devil, otherwise he would be a saint—adding that he cannot be a saint. Right before this admission, Jean-Louis is standing next to a painting of a glowing circle, which, in the idiom of religious iconography, reminds us of a halo over a saint's head. But as the protagonist steps in front of the picture during his disavowal of sainthood, his head, instead of "filling" the empty halo, becomes misaligned with the source of light behind it. The halo does not "fit." Whether this witty touch serves as an ironic underscoring of Jean-Louis's failure at sainthood, according to the first critic, or a commentary on the paradoxical status of sainthood's "impossible possibility" (25), according to the second one—in other words, whether it is ironic or in earnest, the misalignment does illuminate an underlying conflict of a double-bind character that every Christian has to face.
As lived experience, moral choice is central to the daily struggle of a Christian. Jean-Louis, for example, likes women, and has had several extramarital, albeit long-term and monogamous, affairs. How then will he be judged? Has he forfeited his eternal life? To justify his life and his choices, he has articulated two self-serving theories. One of them is that a Christian is judged not on one deed but cumulatively, on his entire life, with its preponderance, hopefully, of the good over the bad. His other theory is the so called "predestination" of luck. God or fate have been easy on him, as he explains to Vidal and Maud, and later to Françoise. He never had to face a temptation that was strong enough and would lead to a more serious sin than sins of indulgence. Therefore his moral choices have not required too much effort from him so far.

The various double-bind aspects of the wager encapsulate the paradoxical and transcendent nature of representation. An ultimate kind of wager is a wager with God himself, which is guaranteed by God and which challenges God, at the same time. It is a paradigm for all choice, because every act of decision takes place on the scene of representation vis-à-vis a symbolic central authority invested with transcendent attributes. Entering into this wager requires the mathematics of hope (mathematical expectation is l'espérance mathématique), negotiations of faith, and self-election into sainthood.

The three aspects of a wager—mathematical expectation, faith, and self-mastery—can be represented by three mimetic triangles, where the position of the sacred apex is occupied, respectively, by God-the-lawgiver, God-the-judge, and God-the-superego. This is based on the triple nature of transcendence—a) the unreachable (evolved from detached cognition), b) the other (the theory of mind), and c) the center (joint attention) (see
While each triangle focuses on one specific type of transcendence, it incorporates all three types of transcendence, since all three are inextricably interrelated. This point is made by Heidegger in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, when he compares and contrasts theological vs. epistemological transcendence (which correspond to the unreachable and unknowable transcendences, respectively). Heidegger notes that the two types of transcendence cannot be considered separately. He explains that as soon as we resort to the idea of the Other (epistemological transcendence), it forces us to think of an Absolute Other (with the Absolute evoking the theological meaning of transcendence).

Now both conceptions of transcendence, the epistemological and the theological, can be conjoined—something that has always happened and always recurs. For once the epistemological conception of transcendence is granted, whether expressly or implicitly, then a being is posited outside the subject, and it stands over against the latter. Among the beings posited opposite, however, is something which towers above everything, the cause of all. It is thus something over against [the subject] and something which transcends all conditioned beings over against [the subject]. (162)

I will now develop Heidegger’s analysis further, extrapolating it to make a similar argument for the third transcendence, which differentiates the center from the periphery. The reason I am expressing the transcendent relationships as triangles is because the triangle is the minimal configuration representing participants on the scene of representation.

Thus the first triangle expresses the first type of transcendence, that of detached cognition, which relates to calculation and reasoning based on causal chains. The rational aspect of Pascal’s wager involves the calculation of probabilities and mathematical expectations, which is connected to the first transcendence. Probabilities rely on stochastic laws. We cannot calculate a frequency of an event unless we can be assured of its regularity through some kind of a transcendent law. The central position in the triangle is occupied by God the lawgiver, who guarantees lawful regularities. The first position at the base of the triangle, that of Agent 1, represents myself, who needs to calculate probabilities, and who is also subject to lawful regularities. The second position represents the other, either human or a personified force of nature, who must also obey law in order to make it possible for me to calculate probabilities.

This cooperative mode of behavior (Agent 1 and Agent 2 cooperating with the law-giving center) can be represented through an orchestra paradigm: the center is occupied by the conductor, while the various members of the orchestra collaborate with the act of musical performance from their peripheral positions. Even though the transcendence I am focusing on is that of detached cognition, the other senses of transcendence, as per Heidegger, are also invoked. For example, the differentiated nature of this configuration, where God-the-Lawgiver occupies the central position, comes from the third sense of transcendence, while the other, who has a mind of his own but who must, nonetheless, cooperate and obey the law, is conjured up by the second transcendence. It is only by invoking all three types of transcendence that the idea of the laws of nature could be articulated.

The interaction of the three transcendences can be seen even more clearly when calculating probabilities. While
Deterministic laws of nature have to fire every single time, the stochastic laws are not equally reliable. If a certain action of mine does not guarantee a 100% certainty of success, making a decision in its favor involves the philosophical problem of counterfactuals with its paradoxical logic. If the plane I am on malfunctions and is hurtling toward the ground, would thinking about the statistical safety of air travel soothe me at that moment? What would it matter that my chance of arriving safely is 99.9%, as long as I fall in the remaining 0.1%? In some important respect, the domain of calculation and the domain of actual experience do not intersect.

And yet I make real-life choices, deliberately selecting situations that are not 100% safe. What am I thinking? According to the above model, I personify the distribution of probabilities as the first triangle. High probability is personalized by me, interpreted as God who has taken my side and has subdued the other (a looming catastrophe?) to prevent him from interfering. I suggest that we tend to personify probabilities in this fashion whether or not we are animists, conventional believers, or atheists, and whether or not we do it consciously, semi-consciously, or unconsciously. Any risk-taking decision arrogates to itself the benevolent God's protection and the compliance of other actors on the scene of representation. Even the language of probabilities reflects this optimistic belief that God is on our side. When we speak of mathematical expectation or mathematical hope, we no longer mean the indifferent law-giving God but a concerned, providential God.

But the other side of God's divine superintendence expresses the double bind, associated with this triangle, the double bind of freedom. Namely, if God governs the behavior of others, he must also be governing my own behavior. It is because God is in charge as the law-giver that it is possible for me to make future plans based on calculations, according to my capacity for detached cognition, and thus exercise my freedom. On the other hand, if I am also governed by divine law, then I am not a free agent, after all. Thus I am both free and not free.

The second triangle foregrounds the second transcendence, which represents the mystery and the ultimately unknowable nature of another mind, amounting to the problematic of trust. The model of the wager can also be seen a representation of the problem of trust/faith, which is the lynchpin of all kinds of exchanges and contracts. By taking up a wager, I enter into a free contract with another participant on the scene of the market. How can I be certain that the other participant will hold up his end of the bargain? Do I place my trust in him implicitly or must I secure a central authoritative figure as the adjudicator? What underwrites my conscience is God-the-adjudicator, who is at the head of the second triangle, which represents the contractual nature of the wager.

But who is the second participant of this triangle? It is also God, with whom I conduct a wager. This dual role of God as both the judge and the participant testifies to the double-bind of faith, which has to do with an undecidability between faith as a performative act and faith as implicit trust. Placing my trust in the one with whom I conduct a transaction, as a limiting case of the exchange model, underscores the groundlessness of all grounding. Declaring my faith entails thus an oscillation between aligning myself with the center, which represents my conscience and is not in need of bargains, on the one hand, and fulfilling my part of the wager (a promise of good Christian conduct) on the periphery in deference to God-the-judge, on the other.

As in the first case, the focus on the second transcendence admits the interaction with the other two types of transcendence. Firstly, in order to set up the conditions for a wager, some antecedent calculations need to be performed, which necessitate the thinking-ahead of detached cognition, the first type of transcendence. In addition, the idea of centrality has already been invoked, which is that of the third, mimetic type of transcendence. In itself, the theory of mind, which underlies the second transcendence, does not require a third, mediating, member. But as soon as one posits two subjects opposite each other, the adjudicating center is brought into being.

The same reasoning holds for the third mimetic triangle, which focuses on the act of self-mastery—the ability to give up sensual pleasures and take control of amorous impulses in order to choose the life of a saint. To represent the dilemma of self-mastery, I choose Freud's conceptualization of consciousness divided into the three compartments of the ego, id, and superego, because it seems to me a very apt representation of the problematic of self-mastery. The id is the animal part of us, which demands immediate satisfaction. The superego is the moral aspect of the psyche, which personifies societal prohibitions. It is the seat of moral consciousness, which prohibits satisfaction. The ego is the "self" of the subject, which is caught between the desires and constraints created by the id and superego.

Insofar as the ego employs the so-called "reality principle" in order to calculate the best ways of satisfying the
id's desires without committing grave social transgressions that would affront the superego, it avails itself of the first transcendence, because it is the first transcendence that deals with calculations and advanced planning. And insofar as it divides itself into three "persons" that are involved in negotiations and conflicts, it can be said to resort to the second transcendence, that which is invoked to describe our dealings with individual, unpredictable consciousnesses.

The paradox that this configuration embodies is that of the double-bind of mastery. What this refers to is the fact that the self cannot represent itself as fully masterful. If the ego takes the upper hand over the id, it is the superego, which emerges victorious, as the faculty which forced the ego to suppress the id's desires. In the opposite case, when the id succeeds in pushing through its demands, it is the ego again that fails in its exercise of control.

In the last analysis, the superego is the place-holder for the voice of conscience, which calls us to choose faith. (In Heidegger, the faculty of summoning is also integrated into his analysis of subjectivity. The connotations of passivity and submissiveness in the word subject have arisen out of this interactive aspect of consciousness. Subjecthood, in other words, involves being subject to an occasional call of conscience which enjoins the self to engage in authentic action). Responding to the call to faith voluntarily, in a mood of agreeable inclination, almost anticipating it before it is issued, is a gesture of sovereignty and self-ownership. Such a response constitutes a genuine action—an act of accession to the center in the self-elected role of saint.

The three mimetic triangles combine, separate, and superimpose over each other, creating the contradictory configurations of action vs. suspension of action, inclusion vs. exclusion, trust vs. mistrust, free will vs. constraint, reluctance vs. compulsion of choice, etc., all of which epitomize the problematic of wagering and are explained by the originary paradox of the sign, expressive of the fundamentally untenable situation of human desire being structurally predicated on its impossibility of realization.

The oscillation between an imaginary prolongation of the acquisitive gesture toward the central object and the desisting gesture of recoil from the sacred center or "the oscillation between the contemplation of the referent as formally designated by the sign . . . and the imaginary contemplation of the referent alone as content" creates the paradoxical structure of the sign which lies at the heart of representation.

The back-and-forth movement gives rise to the phenomenon of dual perception that differentiates between two states. I would like to refer to these two states as acquisitive vs. reverential. In the reverential state, all participants on the scene of representation step away from the central object in the spirit of veneration that recognizes its sacred status. This state expresses the collective consciousness of the originary scene. In the acquisitive frame of mind, the participant perceives the distance between himself and the center as theoretically breachable and can imagine himself acceding to it. The other participant on the scene has become his rival, and the original participant envisions himself as excluded from the scene by an imaginary collusion between his rival and the center, similarly to the way Cain felt excluded by a perceived fellowship between Abel and God.

In My Night at Maud's, this oscillation is captured by the theme of proper vs. improper centering. The improper centering is created by the mimetic triangle between Maud, Vidal, and Jean-Louis. Even though Jean-Louis resolves that he will find and marry Francoise, who is still a stranger at this point, he almost succumbs to the temptation of becoming intimate with Maud. From the very start, there is a certain suggestiveness to their introduction. By adumbrating Jean-Louis and Maud's meeting in the way he does, Vidal plants a seed of anticipation in his friend's head. He stops just short of suggesting that something might happen between these two. But after he notices that she is flirting with Jean-Louis, he appears to have had a change of heart, becoming himself flirtatious with her and acting in an affectionately physical way. Jean-Louis and Vidal's triangular attention is focused on Maud as an improper center.
The key detail is that Maud does not have a separate bedroom. She sleeps in her living-room, and her bed is prominently displayed there. At some point late in the evening, Maud says that she is tired but not sleepy, and would like to go to bed, but would also like the men to stay and chat with her, so pretending this to be a "salon from the olden days."

She leaves and comes back, dressed in an ostensibly simple but sexily short nightgown, and climbs into her bed. Her bed thus becomes a center stage on which the desiring gazes of the protagonists have converged—an improper center stage, insofar as it performs an illegitimate inversion between private and public spaces. The bed, an intimate piece of furniture, with its occupant wearing an intimate article of clothing, do not belong in the living room.

This scene is later mirrored by a symmetrical scene in which the protagonist walks into Françoise's bedroom. Françoise's posture, facial expression, and even the glimpse of her fussy nightgown leave no doubt that, in this case, he has intruded into a deeply private space.

It is the impropriety of Maud's bed as the center that has created the momentum of mimetic contagion. Vidal grows sullen and starts drinking, and finally leaves abruptly. He seemingly jokingly pushes Jean-Louis back into an armchair and orders him to stay, as if usurping the central God-like position of throwing the other two together.

Maud's interpretation of his taking leave is that it was "pure bravado." According to her spin on things, she is the one who has rejected Vidal, who had been in love with her. As she is talking about his rival, Jean-Louis, who has a moment ago been trying to convince her of his conversion to celibacy, gets up from his seat and sits on her bed. As he responds, he is leaning toward her and speaking in a very seductive way. She stops him by switching the conversation to a more impersonal topic.

In the end, Jean-Louis crosses over the barrier to the mimetic center when he accepts Maud's invitation to sleep next to her. In the scene that is reproduced on some posters and DVD covers of the film, Jean-Louis is depicted lying next to Maud in bed. Jean-Louis wraps himself pointedly in an individual blanket and tries to face away from Maud. Yet on awakening, he almost succumbs to temptation.
An almost complete inversion of this scheme occurs in the church scene with Françoise. After the protagonist spends the night in Françoise's otherwise deserted dormitory, she realizes that she has not mistaken herself in trusting this complete stranger. In the morning, she is almost giddy with happiness. Jean-Louis has passed the test in her eyes. This is the first Sunday after Christmas, and they go to church together. Now we have the third, and the most important, church scene in the film. In each scene, we are shown the same priest, perfectly centered. This is especially apparent in the first scene, when we are shown the priest conducting the ritual of the sacrament while being in the perfect center not just of the film frame but of the whole interior architectural ensemble, where he appears properly in his place, properly centered and thus invested with the proper authority of God's representative that induces respectful distance from the congregation.
In the final church scene, we just see a close-up of him (also centered) giving a sermon on being called to sainthood. Both Jean-Louis and Françoise are in a state of rapt attention. They are listening not as two separate people but in an attuned awareness of each other. Their body language reproduces the scene of joint attention, the third-order attention that is one of the most important evolutionary milestones on the way to language. It is this reciprocal attention that lays the foundation for the verticality of language (allowing the participant to switch attention between the other participant and the central object) and the differentiation between the center and the periphery. Jean-Louis and Françoise seem to communicate through subtle body-language cues. In a complete reversal of the bed scene, it is the priest now who is in the middle, with the two protagonists on the periphery, and, instead of being turned away from each other, they are slightly turned toward each other, listening to the priest as one unit.

What is the significance of the final sermon? The priest says: Christianity is not a moral code. It is a way of life, which is an adventure in sanctity. The sermon functions as an invitation—an invitation to be admitted to the center, by becoming a saint. It is an invitation that cannot be refused. The priest calls this path "a linking, a progression" that carries one along to holiness. But this progression is not the same as the progression of a mimetic contagion. It is the irresistible progression of faith, the irresistible working of grace. And the admittance to the center is not effected through an acquisitive gesture that excludes the other and obliterates the difference between center and periphery. It is brought about via an act of absolute inclusion that René Girard describes as an act of Imitatio Christi—imitating Christ not so much in the sense of imitating his good works but rather in the sense of imitating his non-acquisitive desire to resemble God the Father. This act of inclusion both preserves the worshipful distance to the sacred center and, paradoxically, invites the faithful to accede to it.

My claim is that the undeclinable and irresistible invitation to become a saint is a way out of the wager's economy of calculation (as quoted above, what Jean-Louis does not like about Pascal's wager is its economy of exchange) into sainthood's logic of singularity. Despite denying Maud's earlier claim that "every Christian is to aspire to sainthood," Jean-Louis is not fully honest with himself. It is his fear and reluctance that are speaking. His friends too challenge him on his small prevarications. "You stake nothing, you give up nothing," as Vidal chides Jean-Louis. Jean-Louis postpones and delays because becoming a saint is an act of sheer audacity.
Even the priest says that one has to be insane to choose this path.

In linguistic terms, it is the audacity of arrogating the subject position, of speaking the "I." It is only the subject that can tell a truly original narrative, breaking free of the mimetic economy of contagion. Staying on the periphery leaves one forever entangled in imitating already existing narratives. One of the striking images of this film, returning under several guises, is that of pursuing the path of desire and not being able to stop. In one of the striking early scenes, Jean-Louis is shown chasing Françoise in his car through the narrow winding streets of Clermont-Ferrand as she weaves through traffic on her scooter and eventually disappears. A similar idea is evoked by recurring allusions to slippery roads and losing control while driving, such as when Maud asks Jean-Louis to stay. A relevant and fascinating sequence in this respect is the one where Jean-Louis is looking for matches in the spare dormitory room of Françoise's house where he has been placed. He really must smoke, but the matches are in Françoise's room. He does not speak, but the viewer can literally read his thoughts, which are almost palpable, in the way he hesitantly approaches her room. "If I knock on her door, she will think that I have some designs on her. She will become scared, thinking that she has made a mistake, inviting a complete stranger to sleep under her roof. And yet I really want to smoke." This I find to be an especially vivid example of how anticipations are formed mимetically out of a finite repertoire of already familiar narratives.

In contrast to that, only someone in the position of a saint can tell a truly new narrative. Genuine newness, according to the priest, is the real meaning of Christmas. In the sermon that he gives on Christmas eve, he tells his congregation that the joy he wishes them is the joy of newness. It is not the nostalgic joy of childhood memories or pious adherence to traditions. It is a celebration of new beginnings, a celebration not only of the birth of Christ but of our own rebirth. When in his last sermon, the priest refers to Christian life as an adventure, he means a truly new adventure, not one constructed according to old models but one that has never been told before. Becoming a saint involves the self-confidence of daring to tell a narrative for the very first time, but also a vulnerability of exposing yourself to the position of a scapegoat.

The final episode of the film proves that Jean-Louis has taken the priest's sermon to heart. His allowing Françoise to think the worst about himself and Maud in order to make her feel less guilty is an act of true meekness, modeling itself on the lamb who takes away the sins of the world—the ultimate sacrificial position.

The centering of the subject position is achieved through a self-grounding narrative. In Rohmer's film, this grounding is effected through the device of epiphany. In one of the early scenes, the protagonist tells us that he has just had a sudden insight about marrying Françoise. Yet at this moment he does not yet know the name of the woman he has fallen in love with. This signals to the viewer that the scene should be viewed from the perspective of the narrative past. The narrator already knows what has taken place. But his alter-ego hasn't lived through this yet. It is clear that the epiphanic realization is a narrative post-construction. But this is exactly how epiphanies ground choice. They are convoluted paradoxical structures that set up the dual perspective of prospective and retroactive movement. (See my article, "The Limit of Explanation: Following the "Why" to its Epistemological Terminus," *Anthropoetics* 10, 1.) A possibility is materialized by converging the past and the future into one point and presenting it as something that has already happened. If something has already happened then the possibility under consideration was the only viable possibility to begin with.

But there is a visual aspect to this epiphany that acts at cross purposes with the semantic one. The narrative voice says "On that Monday, December the 21st, I suddenly knew, without a doubt, that Françoise would be my wife." "Suddenly, without a doubt" is the rendering of the French "brusque, precis, definitive,"—words that clearly mark a specific moment. Yet nothing is happening visually to punctuate the meaning of the voice-over narrative. The camera is showing us the nondescript view of a curb as Jean-Louis's car speeds along a dark street. It is only the next second that Françoise's scooter appears suddenly alongside it. The visual misalignment, reminiscent of the other ironical misalignment—that of Jean-Louis's head and the halo—subverts the authoritative status of the epiphany, reminding us that it is perhaps impossible, after all, to arrogate to oneself the center.

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The aim of this article is to take Eric Gans’ theory of Generative Anthropology, especially as regards its proposal about the origin and nature of language (Gans, 1985, 1993, 2007, et al.), together with my own explorations, called Triangulation Theory (Wright, 2005, 2008, 2011), and to suggest what overlaps, intersections and divergences might be discerned between the two.

I begin with a quotation from Samuel Beckett’s novel Watt:

Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott’s pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, Pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly. For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, Pot, and be comforted. It was in vain that it answered, with unexceptionable adequacy, all the purposes, and performed all the offices, of a pot, it was not a pot. And it was thus this hairsbreadth departure from the nature of a true pot that so excruciated Watt. For if the approximation had been less close, then Watt would have been less anguished. For then he would not have said, This is a pot, and yet not a pot, no, but then he would have said, This is something of which I do not know the name. And Watt preferred on the whole having to do with things of which he did not know the name, though this too was painful to Watt, to having to do with things of which the known name, the proven name, was not the name, any more, for him. For he could always hope, of a thing of which he had never known the name, that he would learn the name, some day, and so be tranquillized. But he could not look forward to this in the case of a thing of which the true name had ceased, suddenly, or gradually, to be the true name for Watt. For the pot remained a pot, Watt felt sure of that, for everyone but Watt. For Watt alone it was not a pot, any more.

(Beckett, 1958, 88-89)

Ontological anguish of so fastidious a quality, we seem sure, is certainly not ours. Such a passage would seen to belong more to a Lewis Carroll pedagogue than a modern philosopher—one thinks of the Turtle teacher in Alice in Wonderland with his "Will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you...?"

Yet, if we consider the actual implications of the situation in which a single person uses a word in the common language, which brings with it the obvious fact that he or she must have a way peculiar to them of understanding the common word, then the word ‘common’ itself becomes questionable.

I Stereoscopy real and metaphorical

In an earlier Anthropoetics article (2008) I drew from Gregory Bateson (Bateson, 1978: 79-81) the metaphor of Stereoscopy to make clear the structure of a dialogic interchange in language between two speakers. Each person has their own understanding of the common word at issue in some new would-be-informative utterance, but it is this very difference that lies behind the impulse to communicate it to the other, who is presumed to miss some key criterion.

In the visual and acoustic stereoscopic sensations, it is the whole-field mismatch between the input from left and right sensory organs that enables the brain to create the sensory ‘space’ that gives such a spontaneous guide to a region of distribution in the real. We are hardly ever aware at the conscious level of...
the sensory differences: to take visual stereoscopy as an illustration, some philosophers of perception have claimed that, when by chance you see a finger as double, you are doing no more than ‘seeing one finger twice’ (Ryle, 1966, 107; Pitcher, 1971, 41), but, in fact the two images are not identical at the level of the actual sensations you are having. Not only are the degrees of focus and colour responses not purely identical, but the angle at which the finger is viewed is different.

The metaphor is an appropriate one, the reason being that two persons’ perspectives cannot be the same since, firstly, the histories of their learning are peculiar to them, and secondly, their sensings equally so. It is precisely because the histories differ that one wishes to update the other, since it has apparently become plain to the speaker that some key criterion has not been perceived by the other, that it is not present in their memory. The criterial difference that one person makes plain to the other effects a change in their objectifying. This is the goad that Watt is feeling when alone, he does not see the pot as a pot ‘any more’; in the mundane public acceptance of the name he now finds something amiss.

II The assumption of singularity as a method of obtaining convergence

As I made plain in the earlier article, the number of entities presumed to be perceived is not necessarily preserved through the transformation of the utterance. The singularity of any entity is thus not guaranteed by our seeming agreement; the very singleness of a thing or any entity, even that of the self, is a needful illusion that is not ontologically secure. This mutual pretence of convergence is required by our having together to assume a single element in our sense fields in order to get a rough correlation of the selections we are making. When the match is close enough, which means when it answers, ‘with unexceptionable adequacy, all the purposes, and’ performs ‘all the offices’ of the thing we have ‘identified’, such as a pot, we deem that we have perceived ‘the same thing’ together.

Note that purposes, that is, desires and fears, our motivations, have a part to play in the mutual validation of the word’s applicability—and, notoriously, those too are particular to the bodies involved. It is polite to neglect any lingering reservations we might have, as to point up the possibility of difference can look altogether too like distrust. However, once this provisional agreement, this mutual hypothesis of motivational harmony has been set up, the speaker at once alters it. He or she does this by providing a clue that transforms the hearer’s understanding of the word in that present circumstance. To quote a dictum of mine here: ‘It is by a PRETENCE of complete success that we partially capture the REAL’ (Wright, 1978, 538). A form of trust between speaker and hearer is thus indispensable in the interchange, even if it be two enemies talking.

III Motivation as the sine qua non

It perhaps is plain now what the relevance of Beckett’s fantasy is to our present concern. He has imagined Watt as hypersensitive to the differences that remain even when all seeming agreement about how a word ‘refers’, as we say, to some fuzzy region of the real has been mutually checked out. In view of the central place of motivation in this scenario, it is no surprise that Watt is ‘anguished’ by the minutiae of the disparity between his understanding of the word ‘pot’ and that of others in the language-game. Notice, too that he is ‘tranquillized’ when he is taught a new word, for then the agreement of him as student with whoever as teacher updates him appears to be a soothing one that has no obvious hint of conflict or consequent violence in it. No obvious hint, because the differences have not been banished, merely adjusted—‘unexceptionable adequacy’, yes, may have been reached for the time being, but not logical identity. Indeed, the pretence of logical singularity must be repeated all over again with the next stage of adjustment of word to world. This is why Watt cannot shake his suspicion that ‘the pot’ as an element of the real fails to live up to the supposedly ideal agreement embodied in the word: he couldn’t say ‘Pot, pot, and be comforted’; and why it was painful to him to find that ‘the known name, the proven name’ no longer had the safe meaning he had so far assumed—which is as much to say he had discovered an unexpected discrepancy in his ‘approximation’ and that of others. Is Gans’s way of putting this ‘an aborted gesture of appropriation’? (Gans, gaintro.htm)

Here is another similarity between the two analyses. The fact that even the most mundane statement involves a putative clash of motivations makes it plain that it is mistaken to think of language as basically a
matter of moving from true to false, with declarative—or as J. L. Austin would have said ‘constative’—
statements as the foundation of language. As Richard van Oort has persuasively argued (van Oort, 1997), it
is better to regard language as fundamentally ‘performative’, to use another term from Austin, in that, in
speaking, one performs a speech act similar to the ‘naming of a ship’ (an example of Austin’s). It can be
seen that, since the utterance is a method of altering someone’s motivations, one is undoubtedly
performing an act. One can thus say that every declarative statement (Austin’s ‘constative’) is a re-naming
of some portion of the real, and is therefore covertly a performative. The relation between the real and the
word has, hopefully for each person concerned, been moved on—for those persons are concerned, as Watt
is.

IV To each an idiolect

But we can now, temporarily, stand at a safe philosophical distance and accept that every time we use the
word ‘pot’, we cannot ignore the fact that criteria in our ‘identification’ of this mundane object cannot
wholly match those of our fellow-speakers. If I may make again a reference I have made before:

As George Steiner has cogently argued, we each speak an ‘idiolect’ of the ‘standard’ language;
he adds, ‘[t]here are no facsimiles of sensibility, no twin psyches’ (Steiner, 1975: 170). It is not
that we are speaking a ‘private language’ so berated by the Wittgensteinians of the last century:
we are speaking a private version of the public language. Steiner likens it to a form of
translation (ibid.: 47). (Wright, 2008)

As is argued in my 2005 book on narrative, perception and language, the Joke makes capital out of this
variance of understanding across persons, especially because we are reliant on context to help us
disambiguate; witness the removal of ‘a’ and ‘the’ from in front of ‘pot’ in the Beckett passage would
suggest at first glance that cannabis (a slang term from Spanish potaguaya, an infusion of cannabis buds)
was the topic of the passage.

Watt’s anguish reveals something else about the ‘teaching’ of a word, of the very nature of the Utterance.
In such an act, to ask another to update his or her use of a word, is to alter their purposes, their pattern of
motivation. You could say that it was, peformatively, a warning. The implication is clear, that to do so we
must at the least trust each other in this particular move in the language-game—for it is usual to trust a
person who warns us—and, on top of that, we ask the hearer to join with one in an initial mutual
hypothesis that we both mean the same by a word (as mentioned above, to obtain the rough overlap of
our selections from the real to allow the proposed adjustment of it to go through). This constitutes an
overlap with Eric Gans’s analysis of the origin of language: a difference in motivation is a potential source of
conflict, and the entrance into the mutual hypothesis is a deferral of possible violence (Gans, 2008,2).

V The Joke as a familiar exemplar of the paradigm

We need the Joke example to make plain the structure of the originary moment, for a joke is a
performance in little of its essential character. Peter Gilgen (1993) opened a review of Eric Gans’s Originary
Thinking with a pun:

Eric Gans, whose recreational activities include distance running, has covered a lot of ground
during the past decade.

The analysis of any joke can reveal ultimately (for there is often a range of variations) a simple structure.

(1) There will be an region of the real that is the focus of attention for the speaker. It will form
the node about which interpretations will play. For the Hearer it may be either (a) a region he or
she has paid no attention to at all, just a part of the unperceived chaos of sensing that the
philosopher of perception calls the ‘non-epistemic’ (no-knowing), a sensing without perceiving.
As a simple example, take your experience on waking in an unfamiliar room; you are looking at
the room sideways, and for a moment you are quite unable to recognize anything you see (your
field of vision may be doubled anyway, with one eye half-covered by the blanket). Or (b) it may
be a feature in the sensory process that you have already fixed a percept upon, a memory-gestalt that has guided your actions up to now, and one you are now to have updated. In this case the ambiguous region (type b) is 'Eric Gans . . . has covered a lot of ground'; this is the sound-sequence over which rival interpretations will play. I call this the Ambiguous Element.

(2) There will be some apparently secure indication of the general context that is taken at first to be relevant in the interpretation of (1). In this case it is patently the context of the journal, in which academic activities are being carried on, in particular the work carried on by Eric Gans in the theory of the origin of language. I call this the First Clue (to a relevant context);

(3) Then there is another clue which sets (1) in another context and thus, if the clue be of type (a), induces the Hearer or Reader to project a percept where there was none before (put another way, enables the Hearer to pick out from his or her visual field some portion that had been so far ignored), and, alternatively, if the clue be of type (b), induces the Hearer to change an existing percept into another or others (the latter must be included since there is no given preservation of singularity across the transformation, as in the example given in the earlier article where the apparent sight of what was seen as one bird is transformed into ‘two-and-a-bit leaves’). Here this clue is ‘whose recreational activities include distance running’. The metaphorical meaning of (1) ‘covered a lot of ground’, namely, has spent much time and effort over a wide range of research and made considerable progress is changed to its literal meaning, has run a considerable distance. I call this clue the Second Clue (one that reveals another possibly relevant context). Many jokes are of this form, taking advantage of the latent ambiguity of tropes.

This triangular structure can be found in all jokes and stories (see Wright 2005, Chs 1 and 2, for a thorough investigation of the diverse forms it can present itself).

VI The transformation of the Hearer's understanding

It is this that is found in the first utterance, at the origin of language. The joke works because it rouses a Watt-like ‘anguish’ which is dispelled (or not if the joke is black) by a return to a comforting, mundanely relevant context.

Since there is no need to multiply examples, let us briefly quote that given in the earlier article (Wright 2008). A female and a male of some early hunting group are together in the forest: the female notices, as we would say, a stag hidden within a bush not far from them, the stag not yet having become aware of them (for her what we call the ‘stag’ may be non-linguistically, that is, wordlessly conceptualized only as prey or food, the ‘bush’ perhaps merely as non-rigid obstacle). Then she notices that her male companion does not realize that the animal is hidden there. She, having been as a child one who was fond of play of every kind (and we know well that animals have the capacity to play), now raises her hands to the sides of her head in the form of antlers. This is the necessary ‘transparency,’ the Second Clue, which is itself ambiguous, being at once merely open hands by her head and also a stag's antlers. She foregrounds her mimetic performance as clearly as she can, perhaps sniffing like a deer, mock-nibbling with her mouth, and twitching her nose to improve the suggestion. This is the sort of thing perhaps she often did as a child in play. She then looks in the direction of the deer. She cannot point with her hands for that would be a symbol before symbols had come into existence. If now the male anthropoid tumbles to what is being said, and especially if now they make the attack together and the stag brought down, the first linguistic communication has gone through with great success. As Gans correctly insists, there is no necessity that the first statement be phonic in character (Gans 1999, 7). An updating of one agent's mode of attention, and thus, his concept and percept, had been brought about by another agent employing a transparency in a situation where the 'speaker' was aware that the 'hearer' needed updating about a region of the real. We have to say that the female was certainly meaning that a familiar source of food was before them even before her male companion picked up the clue (even though she had no words for source of food, or even
stag, only the concepts of them), so it is strictly possible to mean before a fully functioning language has come into existence.

This triangle is at the core of the first utterance of language. It is, as Gans puts it, ‘a mimetic triangle’, because the first move is for Speaker and Hearer to enter into the (strictly false) hypothesis that their understandings of the word that refers to the putatively single referent are identical. It is as if Speaker and Hearer *imitate* each other in their singling out from the real of the ‘same’ element. This is where their mutual trust—or, ethically better—*faith* can be said to show itself, firstly for the Speaker, in his or her belief that the forthcoming transformation will be to the Hearer’s advantage, and secondly for the Hearer to accept the same outcome.

**VII Why faith and not blind trust is requisite**

It has to be an act of faith and not blind trust since even the most loving partner in dialogue cannot, as we say, ‘in all good faith’, know that the transformation that the utterance proposes will be to the Hearer’s benefit. Nothing can guard against Hearer’s and Speaker’s understandings being subtly at odds *without either of them being aware of it*. This is where Watt’s ‘anguish’ about the degree of ‘approximation’ can be shown to be well justified. One may feel that one has taken adequate account of the other’s perspective in this ‘joint attentional scene’ (Tomasello, 2003, 25-8), but there is no security in this. Many a comedy and tragedy makes plain the anguish that can result from an understanding presumed to be perfectly in common turning out as a result of time’s whirligigs to be unexpectedly irreconcilable. This is where it becomes only too plain that the shifts of words upon the world cannot be securely predicated, and that, for all those engaged in dialogue, not only is blind trust at its heart self-serving, but ontological surprises can enforce the choice of unpalatable sacrifice (see *King Lear* or *Oedipus Rex*). This can be said to be the ‘mimetic crisis’ that Gans speaks of (Gans 1995, 7).

It is worth here quoting a closer analysis of his of this originary moment:

> Reduced to the mimetic triangle purged of all naturalistic elements, the originary hypothesis may be formulated as follows: the sign originates as the solution to the ‘paradoxical state’ or ‘pragmatic paradox’ engendered when the mimetic relation to the other mediator requires the impossible task of maintaining the latter as model while imitating his appropriative action toward a unique object. Put in geometric terms, the parallel lines of imitation must converge toward a single point. The mimetic model is both model and (potential) obstacle; it is the moment when this contradiction prevents action that the human linguistic sign appears. (Gans, 1997, 20)

We have to see the uniqueness of the object, ‘the single point’, as a figment of human imagination, for, if the two agents were in perfect agreement about the focus of their interest (‘the impossible task’), *no utterance would be required*. It exists in their imaginations in its ‘sacred’ perfection as a timeless ‘referent’. Yet the mutual projection of that illusory uniqueness is paradoxically needed so that the Speaker can correct the Hearer’s take upon the region of the real from which each agent is making a different selection. What is further necessitated is that Speaker and Hearer share a measure of trust so that the correction (with its aura of rivalrous mismatch) can go through. But this trust is inadequate if it is a blind one, hiding the possible threat of subsequent disagreement over this ‘unique object’.

Blind trust fakes certainty without realizing it. So determined not to face the fear, it regards any suggestion that ‘truth’, ‘the facts’, ‘sincerity’, ‘objectivity’ and the rest are not certain as a symptom of unethical betrayal, a ‘relativist’ hoax performed by a double-dealer, who cannot be trusted in turn. But that kind of trust is a Dickensian ‘great expectation’, always open to subversion, and, as for Pip in the novel, a subversion that can always ambiguously undermine one’s own interpretation. When cross purposes emerge unexpectedly, as they did for Pip, then the tragic confrontation may demand a sacrifice for which one is utterly unprepared. For Pip the tragic conflict reached inside his self as so far conceived, pitting love of Estella, the stellar symbol of his rise in social status, against his responsibility to the convict to whom he owes that rise.

By now perhaps one can see that partners in dialogue do indeed ‘sacralize’ the putative referent at its
corner of the triangle in that this focus of their attention is held to as an ideal never to be instantiated, and one that draws them into a commitment of faith that will not be ignored without ethical consequences. Their ‘rivalrous desires’ are to be laid aside in this dramatic performance of a unity of motivations converging on a ‘singular referent’, one that they should know full well is a mutual hypothesis and not an ontological given. This makes the ‘sacred centre’ as human as the ‘periphery’. After all it can be argued that the human came into existence with the first utterance, the first entrance into the fictive, the first projection of the impossible linguistic ideal. We play the imitation of the desire of the other, knowing all the time that it can never be achieved.

No wonder that Gans should be tempted to attach ‘the name-of-God’ to the word in this dramatic performance (Gans, gaintro.htm) for in ‘singling’ out a logically perfect referent, it is as if they have attained to one of the eternal namings within God’s omniscience. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.’ This performance is what Alfred Schutz, in wishing to identify the strength of the social bond in language, has called ‘the Idealization of Reciprocity’ (Schutz, 1962, 3-47), the acting out of an ideal harmonization of intentions guaranteed by its promise, not of eternal agreement, for we have seen how that is unattainable, but of willing acceptance of the possibility of unknown future sacrifice, when till then unknown ‘rivalries’ come to the surface.

To see this idealization as actually utopian, as pointing at a real heaven as the goal of all language, is to turn the performance into a real superstition. Sometimes it does look as if Gans, in a Hobbesian manner, privileges the sacralizing of the ‘vertical’ sign-centre over the ‘horizontal’, peripheral ‘rivalrous desires’, which are thought of as ‘animal’ (Gans, 2008, 3-4), but it must not be forgotten that the ideal goal of the dramatic performance of a unique referent is to enable a transformation of it to satisfy those very desires in their transformation. It is easy to forget that it is the human body that is providing the dynamism of the whole process.

This is where Thomas Bertonneau moves too far in his suspicion of ‘appetite’ (Bertonneau, 2009); it is a mistake to think that the social must always take precedence over the biological. In the theory of language there is no detaching the two. Poor old Watt was induced to opt out of the game by this oppression of the majority, when he had as much right as anyone else to adjust the definition of ‘pot’.

IX ‘The deferral of violence’

This is the nature of the ‘deferral of violence’ essential to generative anthropology. The ‘oscillation between object and word’ (Gans, op. cit.) arises precisely because of this underlying mismatch which the act of faith must embrace. To quote Beckett again, ‘But he could not look forward to this in the case of a thing of which the true name had ceased, suddenly, or gradually, to be the true name for Watt’—but the fact is that he does have to face up to this possibility when he speaks at all, both when he has either to accept another’s meaning, or when he has to challenge that new meaning. A mimesis of the desire of the other can never be achieved. The responsibility for deciding between these two outcomes is an ethical matter, contingent on the circumstances, which may issue in a paradoxical conflict, as Gans insists. It is not always possible to purge resentment in a pure catharsis.

X A dark conclusion

This is a dark conclusion since it allows for tragic confrontations where to favour the goals of one side over another would amount to brain-washing. Is this the mise en abyme that Gans speaks of? (Gans, gaintro.htm). He says elsewhere that ‘violence is never eliminated’ (2008, 2), and this would explain why. It is no surprise that, rather than face up to what a genuine faith demands, some would rather call this argument ‘relativist’ or ‘solipsist’, yet it places the self and its identifications as inextricably involving the stance of the other.

Neither does a sacrificial martyrdom have a divine reward. At the most it may offer the fragile hope that one’s example may work in the great social game after one’s death, which is the only form of ‘immortality’ that one may have (Wright, 2011, 39). Where the ‘departure’ of Watt’s understanding from that of the other is only ‘hairsbreadth’, a comic compromise can perhaps be effected. In the tragic case, we have to
endure the stubbornness of the paradox, since there is no other way of playing the language-game.

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Anthropoetics XVII, 2 Benchmarks

This issue contains four articles derived from presentations at last year's Generative Anthropology Summer Conference at High Point University, as well as one by a new contributor.

Ian Dennis' third essay for Anthropoetics deals in his usual elegant and masterful fashion with three key moments in the history of the romantic erotic marketplace. Marina Ludwigs pursues her attempt to differentiate among varieties of transcendence with an analysis of the late Eric Rohmer's most philosophical film, Ma nuit chez Maud. Edmond Wright is already known to our readers as well as our conference attendees for his witty Batesonian excursions on the paradoxical aspects of human behavior made possible by our creation of signs; here he pursues his reflections on such "triangular" phenomena as jokes and the necessity of faith as a basis for linguistic understanding. And we are very happy to welcome Melanie Long, a sophomore at Westminster College who, under the tutelage of Peter Goldman, has authored an incisive analysis of market relations in The Merchant of Venice. I am also very happy to welcome Roman Katsman to our list of contributors. Roman has long been interested in GA and integrates it provocatively into his analysis of the conflictive nature of rhetoric.

About Our Contributors

Ian Dennis is Professor of English at the University of Ottawa, and was the Chief Organiser of the 2009 GA Conference there. He is Secretary-Treasurer of the Generative Anthropology Society and Conference (GASC). He is the author of four novels, of the Girardian study Nationalism and Desire in Early Historical Fiction (Macmillan 1997), and of Lord Byron and the History of Desire (Delaware 2009), a work of literary criticism making substantial use of both Mimetic Theory and Generative Anthropology.

Roman Katsman is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Literature of the Jewish People, Bar-Ilan University, Israel. He is the author of the books The Time of Cruel Miracles: Mythopoesis in Dostoevsky and Agnon (2002), Poetics of Becoming: Dynamic Processes of Mythopoesis in Modern and Postmodern Hebrew and Slavic Literature (2005), At the Other End of Gesture: Anthropological Poetics of Gesture in Modern Hebrew Literature (2008). Two other books are in press: 'A Small Prophecy': Sincerity and Rhetoric in the Works of S.Y. Agnon, and The Hollow of a Sling: A Principle of Alternative History in Literature. Beginning with his article in Hebrew on GA in Agnon's works (2001), Katsman has written on the issues of GA in almost every one of his publications in English and Hebrew. Currently, he is working on the problem of laughter and violence in the stories by Isaac Babel, as well as on the concept of minimal origin as applied to the works by Etgar Keret.

Melanie Long is a sophomore at Westminster College of Salt Lake City, where she is studying economics with minors in applied mathematics and French. After being introduced to Generative Anthropology by Peter Goldman, she presented a work combining GA and economic anthropology at the 2011 GA Summer Conference.

Marina Ludwigs teaches English Literature at Stockholm University. She has a PhD in Comparative Literature from UC Irvine and has worked with, and presented papers on, both Girardian theory and Generative Anthropology. She is currently writing a book on the anthropological structures of epiphanies.

Edmond Wright holds degrees in English and philosophy and a doctorate in philosophy. He is a member of the Board of Social Theory of the International Sociological Association, and was sometime a Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for the Advanced Study of the Social Sciences, Uppsala. He has edited The Ironic Discourse (Poetics Today, 4, 1983), New Representationalisms: Essays in the Philosophy of Perception (Avebury, 1993), Faith and the Real (Paragraph, 24, 2001), and The Case for Qualia (MIT Press, forthcoming, May 2008), and has co-edited with his wife Elizabeth The Zizek Reader, (Blackwell, 1999) and is author of Narrative, Perception, Language, and Faith (Macmillan, 2005). Over sixty articles of his have appeared in the philosophical journals. He has also published two volumes of poetry.