The Orpheus Myth in Milton's "L'Allegro", "Il Penseroso", and "Lycidas"

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A Peircean Reading

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> Well, Phaedrus, the priests in the sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona declared that the earliest oracles came from an oak tree, and the men of their time, who lacked your modern sophistication, were simple-minded enough to be quite satisfied with messages from an oak or a rock if only they were true. But truth is not enough for you; you think it matters who the speaker is and where he comes from (Plato 1973:76).

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ABSTRACT

In this study of John Milton's "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," and "Lycidas," the allusions to the Orpheus myth are analyzed through the perspective of an interpreting sign. The idea of an interpretant proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce and the semiotic relations theorized by Jorgen Dines Johansen serve as the theoretical basis upon which the Orpheus myth will be examined in view of its having been recreated in the poems and in its recreating powers. Since the three poems have different and opposing voices incorporated in the text, the Orpheus myth will be associated with the change of voices, will be assessed as the modeling frame that underlies the transitions from an innocent to an enlightened viewpoint, and will be focused on as the fragmented configuration of consciousness in the process of defining two orders of existence: the human and the divine. The pattern of enunciation of such consciousness is structured in a hesitant dialogics between the twin poems – "L'Allegro," and "Il Penseroso" – and in a dialectics of becoming between the twin poems and "Lycidas."

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Prospect of Various Choices

Recognition of the limits of methodology is essential in literary interpretation. One should not overestimate what any critical technique is capable of achieving. A critical approach may be likely to help the informed reader or critic achieve a particular kind of insight within a piece of writing but it may also leave unattended other modes of experience of the text itself, since there is no such thing as a totalizing methodology or viewpoint. In choosing a critical approach, the critic must bear in mind that it should not only correspond to his immediate intuition of the work, but it should also enable him to draw rational and objective conclusions. The analysis should preferably counterpoint internal and external evidence, methodology and intuition, so as to make text interpretation an act of appreciation and understanding. In the case of the writings of John Milton, the interpretative challenge is doubly internal, for this early modern poet seems to have undergone a process of evading the vision of the literal eye and establishing a (better) vision within whose focal point is music.

Milton's inward gaze may have been a consequence of his life and times, or of his education and religious beliefs. In any case, the poet went blind in his late mature years and composed all of his late writings without the help of his literal eye. John Milton (1608-1674) was born in London, the son of a scrivener from whom he learned how to play the viol and the organ. He went to St. Paul's School and later on to Christ's College, Cambridge, where he was to acquire a part of his scholarly erudition. Within these years and perhaps all through his life, Milton was to be found striving between his self and what he expected from mankind, for besides being studious and unique, he was, both in practice and in thought, not willing to give in to arbitrary authority. Carrying about a feminine quality in his appearance, thinking of man as spirit and hardly ever of man as flesh and bones, Milton could have been blamed for aloofness, but yet he was quite attuned to the circumstances of politics and religion.

Whatever the occasion, the political prose treatises, the religious compositions, and the verse of Milton have already been studied and dealt with extensively. One cannot systematically approach any writing of Milton's without first acknowledging that critical study in Milton scholarship ranges from simplistic readings and stereotyped interpretations to those which, being aware of the political naiveté of traditional literary history, manage to appreciate Milton's work in the context of seventeenth-century England, and not as a subtext of an overpowering poetical personality. Through close attention to the text and a direct regard for historical context, a method of interpretation should be able to survey Milton's own views on the nature of poetry as well as to take into account the many meanings and levels of meaning confined to the poet's choice of a single referent. Milton seems to have found an everlasting delight in the sublime and, especially in his youth, a "keen delight in turns on words or play on meanings as in the mordents, turns, and trills of a court musician" (Steadman 1975:8), but his poetry surpassed these mannerist bouts of composition and reached a point where his political and poetical subject-matter was infused with several interlocking concepts at once.

Milton saw to the several layers of meaning in his writings and was always attentive to decorum, for he was highly genre-conscious. His imaginative energy transformed most of the genres he worked on beyond recognition. This kind of poetic practice, together with the early modern and Classical poetic theory he was acquainted with, gave him ample warrant to rework intertextually the literary models he had at hand. In regard to genre and to Milton's polysemous poetics, the dialectical and dialogical perspectives offered by Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics and Jorgen Dines Johansen's communicative model will disclose Milton's different points of view and the copiousness of his themes, and, hopefully, unfold the guiding interpretative principle through which he sought to establish his inward vision. The Peircean and Johansenean semiotic stances are dialogical and dialectical to the same extent that the Russian genre-theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's propositions are: "the dialogic interaction of forms; the 'polyglossia' of several generic languages within the work; strong connectives linking the poem to contemporary reality; the valorization of process" (Lewalski 1994:81). These points, initially intended for Bakhtin, also hold true for the Peircean and Johansenean models, and they appear to be the proper perspective with which to look upon the Miltonic text. Milton's signposts, whether music, natural or moral philosophy, religion or politics, can be approached as limina, cutting edges that open up into a quasi-parallel world where genre boundaries and poetical voices converse with each other and, in the process, constantly defer meaning forward.

Milton's early writings are recreative inasmuch as meaning is a dialectical process whose synthesis is for the better part hesitant and uncertain. This is so because the poet distrusts language and reworks chaos with a view to vivifying and diversifying abundant life, and not just to ordering matter. The densely interwoven linguistic fabric used by Milton seems to count on hesitancy to vivify his poetic nature, and on uncertainty to diversify his poetical worlds. Milton's writings, the work of the least mystical of religious poets, are a motivation for those in search of fully available articulations in recondite allegorical junctions so powerfully expressive that they transform chaos into cosmos. To understand a possible ordering of Milton's poetic cosmos, the following points will be drawn into perspective: the study of myth, the author's biographical and historical contexts, and the configuration of his oeuvre. The search for an ordering recreation of Milton's youthful poetic cosmos is what connects me as an informed reader to this poet's early writings. Thus, Milton's early pieces –"L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," and "Lycidas" – will be analysed with the intention of showing how the poet reworked the myth of Orpheus in these poems so as to order his poetic cosmos, distinguish between two different orders (the human and the divine), and make "the heavenly music of the spheres" close in on him.

1.2. The Famous Orpheus, the Survival of the Myth, and Orphism

The study of mythology customarily exhibits a range of competing theories whose source is exactly the equivocal frontiers between "*une production essentielle de l'esprit humain, nécessaire et inconsciente*," and myth as "*une ancienne tradition divine, forme choisie en vue de persuader la multitude et pour servir les lois et les intérêts communs*" (Detienne 1981:153,154). Primitive mythology was spread by those who told the ancient stories and was listened to by an emotionally involved audience. In this beginning, the mythic illusion of being able to account for natural phenomena, the environment, and the origin of human beings was inserted into a state of pre-logic, that is, logic quite distant from the one twentieth-century man inherited from the Enlightenment. In this early stage of consciousness and reasoning, primitive men did not have the need or the means to "step" outside the oral/aural narrative in order to check its coherence or verisimilitude. Only when these narratives were transformed into written materials was it possible to aim at interpretation, and thus, the creation or re-creation of various myths took place as a particular mode of symbolic activity whose logic or lack of logic could be checked against the written text. "*Un mythe se façonne*," and myth-makers as well as the early philosophers accepted as their role to defend

the city by showing its citizens the proper way to behave: direct exemplars from the gods, heroes, and the like; and rhetorical or indirect shaping of the myth's subject-matter (savage, disgusting, absurd "tales" that represented divinity at its worst).

The survival of two opposing types of mythic narratives – one as unconscious activity and the other as conscious construct – in pre-classical and classical Greece is due to a two-fold tendency: the Greeks could accept the unbelievable as well as the symmetrical logic of the foundational mythic writings of the first logographists (Lévi-Strauss 1974 and Vernant 1984). Contrasting ideas about myth and mythology were born form the category of myth that cannot be pinpointed, that is, if myth is also a kind of language that expresses the world of "becoming," then this protean trait makes it unfit for its late categorization as an object to be analyzed according to fixed tenets. Bearing in mind that in relation to mythic accounts the primitive men,"*eux, ils entendent, et nous, nous lisons*" (Detienne 1981: 230), the myth of Orpheus should be viewed as a process, one that extends from much earlier than the sixth century B.C. up to our own era.

The history of the study of the Orpheus myth displays disagreement among scholars, which ranges from the nature of the evidence as to whether famous Orpheus ever lived to doubts about the existence of an Orphic religion. There are many hypotheses about the myth, but the most preeminent feature in relation to the name Orpheus is the invocational predication commonly used: famous (as in famous Orpheus) is an adjective derived from a Greek word that means "to sound" or "to speak." Given the sparse and partial data on the subject and divergent theories, an adequate prospect would be to disregard the possibility of Orpheus as a historical figure and determine solely the repertoire of narratives that constitute the architectural basis of the myth proper. It follows that the examination of the so-called Orphics and the probability of a set of dogmas determining Orphism would also be needed in these proceedings.[1]

Orpheus' story seems to have found its way west from Asia to Thrace, whence comes his attempt to bring an Apollonian message to the savages who adored the local god Zalmoxis. If one believes that Orpheus was a Hellene installed in Thrace, the line to follow is that "*il tenta de modifier la religion locale en introduisant le culte d'Apollon, et, ce faisant, il trouva la mort*" (Guthrie 1956:349). But the myth runs as follows: it tells of a man who

[1] Besides the texts directly quoted, the following works were also important in the delimitation of the myth of Orpheus, the Orphics, and Orphism: Barnard (1987), Berger (1983), Detienne (1989), Hardman (1990), Hume & Knight (1985), and Ronquist (1985).

lost his wife, the dryad Eurydice, descended to Hades to retrieve her and failed by an act of impatience or disobedience. The legendary Orpheus is the son of the muse Calliope with either the Thracian king Oiagros or the god Apollo. Poet, musician, magician, teacher, and prophet, Orpheus played the lyre and enchanted not only the gods but animals, plants, and even stones. He managed to charm his way through the underworld, get past an array of Pluto's famous victims, win Eurydice back from the gods of the nether-regions, only to lose her by looking back before they emerged from Hades. Eurydice died of a snake bite while evading sexual assault by Aristaeus, an apiculturist, and Orpheus, after having been denied a second entrance to Hades by Charon, introduced a mystery-religion that caused his own death. Whether moved by Dionysus' wrath or by the jealousy of Thracian women who were not permitted entrance to the mystery teachings of Orpheus, those who killed the poet tore him to pieces. His head floated down the river Hebros to the sea, washed ashore on the island of Lesbos, and there prophesied as an oracle until Apollo silenced it.

Wholly different accounts of how and why Orpheus died are given by the writings of Lucian, Philostratus, Pausanias, and Aristophanes. In Ovid and Konon, as in the works of some other ancient writers, the reason Orpheus was torn limb from limb is divergent. Some credited Orpheus as a civilizing agent who neglected the sacrificial murders inherent in the rites of Dionysus, whereas others believed that he taught sacred mysteries and preached the evil of human sacrifice. There are even those among the ancients who said that Orpheus was killed because of his ascetic views on sexuality, in opposition to the Maenads' sexual promiscuity. In Roman times, Pausanias devoted a passage to Orpheus while describing the sanctuary of the muses in Helikon. He speculated on the manners in which Orpheus may have died: the wives of Thracians plotted his death, or perhaps he incurred *hubris* and died by Zeus' "thunderbolt for divulging divine secrets" (Graves 1981:113), or he took his own life in grief at the second loss of Eurydice. On the other hand, there are those who believed that his decapitation or dismemberment was occasioned as an actualized repetition of how Dionysus had suffered before.

Orpheus' story may have arisen from the imagination of primitive minds, it may have been the story of a god whom time had demoted to the heroic plane, or it may have been the construct of a group of sages. These sages, who may have been dealing with the fragments of otherwise lost history, fairy tales, or diverse etiological myths (myths that seek to assign a cause), needed to transform the savage cult of Dionysus and jettison religious frenzy and the custom of bestowing live offerings on the altars of the patron deity (omophagia, a late modified form of cannibalism). Orpheus could then be a form of Dionysus himself, a pre-Greek deity of similar function whose place

Dionysus usurped; he could have been the projection from the minds of a group that wanted to hellenize, civilize the barbarous Thracians; and according to Aristotle, he could never have been, for "the poet Orpheus never existed" (Guthrie 1993:58). Therefore, to develop an interpretative hypothesis about the Orpheus myth is not a primary undertaking of the present work, but rather the examination of the existing materials and the evaluation of the textual evidence.

The circumstantial evidence has not found a single important historical person who would serve as a core round which some projections could crystallize; it constitutes a testimony of the existence of the legend of Orpheus. The opinions of ancient authors are sometimes only a systematic exposition of the legend itself, and most of the time, they are marred by obvious bias since each author may have brought to the subject his own lack of discriminating powers as well as an illimitable range of speculation. The authoritative texts on Orpheus seem to have begun with Homer and Hesiod. Nothing earlier than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has been preserved for subsequent ages and they make reference to the expedition of Jason and the Argonauts, a voyage in which Orpheus participated. According to Apollonios Rhodios (c. 240 B.C.), Orpheus saved the Argonauts from the Sirens by drowning out their song with his own, and Valerius Flaccus (c. A.D. 80) tells in a first person poem the adventures of Orpheus with the heroes (Guthrie 1993:14).

It is remarkable how ancient the difficulties are, and how fragmentary the materials on which the myth of Orpheus is openly treated, connected with other divinities, or only mentioned. Diodoros in the first century B.C. relates the myth of Dionysus to that of Orpheus. By his account, Orpheus would be the holder of the mystic initiation ceremonial mysteries as a special gift bestowed by Dionysus on Orpheus' grandfather, and later on handed down to Oiagros and to himself. In another passage, the same author makes a eulogy to Orpheus, a name that occurred to him while he was relating the story of Herakles at the time he became an initiate at Eleusis, under the auspices of Musaeus (either portrayed as Orpheus' son or pupil). Among the earliest evidence for the legend of Orpheus' death, Strabo pictured the musician also as a religious reformer whose excessive zeal or ambition ruined him. In a still later period, Konon blamed Orpheus' misogyny for his dreadful death. Konon credited Orpheus' misfortune with his own wife, and attributed to it the reason for his becoming the foe of the whole sex. On the same path, according to Ovid, one tradition credited the musician with renouncing women in his disappointment, thereby introducing homosexuality in the polis.

Plato and Aristotle were tangential commentators on the legend of Orpheus. Plato spoke of the theological poets as divine men, who together

with the philosophers could lead ordinary men out of the darkness of their cave. The allegory of the cave, his double edged attitude to myth, his theory of Ideas are all said to have various similarities with the teachings of Orpheus, or to what was to be added to the volume of his writings. Besides Plato, Aristotle also spoke of Orpheus frequently in vague terms; both preferred to refer the mythological quotations associated with this legend to the general class of the *theologoi*. Aristotle went so far as to admit that mythical sophistry is unnecessary to the philosopher and that it only confuses the mind of a serious thinker. He not only denied the existence of the historical Orpheus, but was also in disagreement with the Orphic speculation on cosmogony and the nature of the human soul. The creation of the world in the Orphic writings was to a certain extent evolutionary, whereas Aristotle thought it to have taken place *en bloc*, that is, the best must have existed from all time. The other point of contrast between the two is in Aristotle's theory of the soul as the form of the body, a theory that excluded the possibility of transmigration. The Orphic counterpart was that the body is the prison of the soul, and that transmigration is part of man's spiritual development.

The boundaries between the legend of Orpheus in early antiquity and its form in the sixth century B.C. to the very beginning of our era are rather problematic. Accretions to the legend, as well as a whole corpus of commentary, had been made on the figure of Orpheus as a legendary hero, on Orpheus' authorship to the poems entitled *hieros logos*, on Orpheus as a *theologos*, on his mystery-religion and the way he instituted it. Thus, there may be doubts whether "Orphic" refers to the myth proper, without his poetic *cogito* from which his *credo* can be extrapolated, or it is associated with the writings (Orphic Hymns, and the Rhapsodic Theogony appended to the *Orphicorum fragmenta*) so-called Orphic, for there is no decision among scholars as to evidential and substantiating authorship (Guthrie 1956: xiii-xxxiii). It is useful to suggest that the adjective Orphic be seen as the mythologeme accompanied by its diverse versions and be read together with all the mystic-religious supplements that have been added to it.

The right to use the name religion has been rendered senseless in relation to those who followed the dogmas and precepts of life appointed to the Orphics. There is no evidence of priesthood, nor assemblies of those called Orphics. If the myth of Orpheus proper is traced back to pre-classical Greece, the Orphic writings were to be known from the sixth century B.C. on, and they were not popular among the classical Hellenes. Orphic initiatory rites and beliefs were too demanding for the down-to-earth majority of people in classical times. In short, although the word religion is used in relation to Orphism, it is more properly associated with a sect, a minority, or a dispersed group of followers who either thought Orpheus' teachings appealing or

approached with enthusiasm the set of beliefs and conceptions ascribed to the name Orpheus.

Orphism maintained an essential belief in the latent divinity inherent in the human being and in the immortality of the soul. Its origins are obscure, but it probably developed round the sixth century B.C., when an abundant Orphic literature could be found. In the Orphic doctrine, the abstract principle Time preceded all things. The multiplicity within this One – Time – formed an egg from which the gods proceeded. The theogony begins when Time, otherwise named Phanes or the Protogonos, was swallowed by Zeus, or the Olympian Dionysus. Zeus and Persephone had a son, Dionysus-Zagreus, who was torn into pieces and his limbs eaten by the Titans. The goddess Athena saved her brother's heart and brought it to Zeus, from which the new Dionysus was born. The Titans were reduced to ashes by Zeus' thunderbolt; and from this divine retribution, from the ashes of both gigantic monsters and god, mankind was formed. Thus, man has something of the divine, derived from Dionysus, and shares some of the savagery of the Titans. Dionysus' essence was supposedly three-fold: *Erikepaios* (or early swallowed, and by extension, Dionysus-Olympios, Zeus himself), Dionysus-Zagreus, and the chthonian Dionysus, Hades. The multiple in One, or the various "incarnations" of the same divinity, may have led the Orphics to profess the idea of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls for the human race. The Orphics thought the transmigration of souls, retribution in a future life after the expiation in the chain of reincarnations, and final liberation from man's Titanic inheritance (man would finally acquire a position in a kind of Elysium) would only be possible through the observation of strict purity (Nilsson 1985:133-141).

To abstain from meat is the main commandment of the Orphic doctrine, since any human soul could have been transmigrated in that form. Besides this all-important rule, the Orphics thought that "*pour faire dominer en nous la divinité (...) il nous faut donc favoriser le côté dionysiaque de notre personalité et nous débarrasser de la fâcheuse influence des Titans. Pour atteindre ce double but, il fallait participer aux rites d'initiation ou de communion et à ceux de purification (télétai et katharmoi)*" (Guthrie 1956:351). Besides the rituals of purification, the initiates were taught magical prayers to be said at the time of their meeting with Hades' consort, the right fountain to drink from at the threshold of Hades, the proper quantity to drink from the waters of Lethe, and above all, the prohibition against interring or introducing in sacred places any fabric made of wool. The Orphic doctrine never preached an easy gospel; it did not teach man to be content with his mortal state. On the contrary, it taught men the means to cleanse themselves of the terrestrial element. For this reason, the Orphic purifications

and prohibitions were accused of giving much importance to the individual and as a consequence, neglecting the moral welfare of the state.

In post-classical Greece, even with the attempts of the Neoplatonists to revive the doctrine built around the figure of Orpheus, Orphism was viewed by the common Greek as a superstition. The small band of these religious devotees had an unusual and yet original message to deliver in the growing city-state, but "Orphism was too philosophical for the masses, too mythological for the intellectual pride of youthful philosophy" (Guthrie 1993:238). Orphism made its first appearance in Southern Italy or Athens after the sixth century B.C., whereas the myth of Orpheus with all its literary potential existed long before Orphism. The Orphics, with the borrowed authority of centuries-old antiquity, and Orphism are both corollaries of the famous Orpheus, a seeker who embodied man's desperate wish to control time and outwit death. If the product of his quest was his own head floating down the river, the process of his double losses has much to say. Death avails nothing if one dies before one's prime, and the core of the myth's narrative seems to teach the extent to which poetry (art and music) can do or be brought to do in its power to evade circumscription. Through the rhetorical device offered by the story of Orpheus, Milton seems to have felt the fertile ground offered by the myth and decided at the end of his famous elegy that death never avails anything, but only marks off the separation of two orders of existence.

1.3. The Choice of Peircean Semiotics over French Semiology

So far as methodology is concerned for the study of the Orpheus myth and Milton's "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," and "Lycidas," Peirce's semiotics should serve as a perspective through which a signifying system, the texts in question, will be assessed. From this perspective, there may then follow an ordering of the process of demarcation and construction of meaning in the texts. The Peircean chain of interpreting signs will enable the contextualization of the present process of meaning construction. Through Peirce's concept of an interpreting sign, the basis for an account of meaning may be seen as a looking glass focused on process instead of the Saussurean semiological magnifying lenses that appear to focus solely on product. The present choice of the semiotic program proposed by Peirce amounts to the mediating representation of a third term responsible for the dynamics of signification, a term that interprets the relation between sign and object in its dialogical and dialectical processes.

To understand the choice between the theories of Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure, it is necessary to differentiate the terms semiology and semiotics at

the very beginning. The term semiology designates a theory of language and its applications in signifying systems. The semiological level is constituted by primary unities of signification that are formative of figures at the core of a word. Inscribed in a theory of communication, the semiological sign has become primarily involved with linguistic systems despite Saussure's assertion that he approached semiology as a "science that studies the life of signs within society" which "would show what constitutes signs, and what laws govern them" (Saussure 1966:16). What constitutes and governs a sign in any semiological system "could be determined, Saussure argued, by taking linguistics as a 'master-pattern for all branches of semiology'" (Sullivan 1983:89). On the other hand, the term semiotics is more far-reaching, for the semiotic project designates not only any manifested entity available to human knowledge and its posterior description, but also the contextualization of the means this knowledge made possible (Greimas & Courtés 1982). It can be said that whereas semiology privileges the product (the linguistic systems), semiotics privileges the process.

Process and product, and representation and mimesis, are terms that need to be clarified as a point of departure. Representation and mimesis have become interchangeable concepts in literary criticism, thus "concealing the performative qualities through which the act of representation brings about something that hitherto did not exist as a given object" (Iser 1993:236). In this case, mimesis refers to a mere duplication of a given object, whereas representation seems to move beyond mimesis since it does not refer to any object given prior to the act of representation; it focuses on performance. Representation does not refer to an ontologically given object, but to an operation, and therefore cannot be identical to what is produced. The terms mimesis of product and mimesis of process have also been used by Linda Hutcheon (1980:36-47) as narratological tools to examine the paradoxical implications of metafiction. In view of the rather common practice of equating representation with mimesis, let us tentatively differentiate them as a compositional relation in opposition to a depictional relation: "the relation to 'represent' is a *compositional* relation" and the relation 'to depict' is "reflexive, symmetric, and transitive" (Rossholm 1995:124). In sum, whereas “to represent” is closer to “to recreate” and “to write upon,” “to depict” and “to be congruent with” are similar concepts. Whatever the formulation, I will use the terms in relation to representation *qua* succession, progression, emanation, and recreation as opposed to mimesis, which is the simple objectifying representation or the finalized product of such an act. To provide a solid basis for the importance of theoretical models whose objects of study are product and process, an overview of the history of representation is needed.

In classical theories of representation and mimesis, the creation of a fictive or poetic illusion only simulates a reality. The notion of a recognized fictionality in antiquity did not have the intention to deny the possible and probable links between the literary and the empirical. It was perhaps merely the degree of self-consciousness regarding their quasi-parallel natures that aroused the diverse critical interests of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and Plotinus. Art as mimesis: classical rhetoric granted liberty to the imitators or inventors of nature by sanctioning deviations so long they had instructive or delighting purposes. Poiesis, the act of making, intervenes whenever the process of inventing, representing nature is in question. Hence, the diverse perspectives upon "imitation" could be summed up in the difference between the terms mimesis of product and mimesis of process.

Mimesis of product – the identification of characters, actions, settings being imitated, and a recognition of their similarity to the "equivalent" in empirical reality – may have been the means for a judgmental validation of literary worth. Such judgement might account for Plato's charge against poets on the score that they produce only unsubstantial images, and so presenting the external and superficial for the whole, the unreal for the real. Plato contended that art, since it holds up a mirror to nature and always falls short of grasping the original "form" or "idea" that exists only in the mind of the Creator, had debilitating effects: "they fed and watered the passions instead of drying them up, and let them rule instead of ruling them as they ought to be ruled, with a view to the happiness and virtue of mankind" (Plato 1892:606). Such assessment reveals the equivalence of art and life in negative terms.

The concept of mimesis of product, *avant la lettre*, is further enhanced by Plato when he opposed inspiration to art. Reason and censoring principles should take precedence over inspiration, a mere frenzy originated by an attendant deity. The presence of an authorial figure in the work of art should be then narrowed down to the instant of apprehension of the worthy parts of the sensory experience of life on earth, whose manifestation should serve only for instruction (Adams, H. 1971:5-20). A previous "puritanical" restriction upon reality should serve as the governing basis of enthusiasm to produce the artistic imitation.

Plotinus' critical activities took up Plato's standpoint insofar as he thought of art in terms of emanation. The ultimate knowable "One" is the dictator of everything that, in its essence, should take part in the imitation of reality. However, Plotinus sifted Plato's theory by moving from the unattainable to the valuable, but still imperfect, "imitation." The artist, for Plotinus, is capable of imposing on his materials whatever he feels lacking in nature (Plotinus 1973:100-106). The artists' adding to nature counts more than the object or matter copied or shaped, for beauty is the closer one gets to the

"One." In the realm of the ideal exemplar, the artist should contemplate a kind of supervening reality and acquiesce in the bidding of his nature (intellect, knowledge) to recreate as an act of diminishment. In a sense, artistic merit is but an accurate decoding of what was first contemplated and then transfixed into the object of art. The idea of the artist taken over by a demiurge or of the artist able to use his own independent faculty of reasoning is at once dismissed.

If Plotinus, a Neo-Platonic philosopher, considered the possibility of the acceptance of creation, it is nonetheless a recreation in terms of mimesis of product, for he thought that to admire a representation is to admire the original upon which it was based. Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, was the one to introduce a different orientation to mimesis; he underplayed Plato's distinction between *mimetikon* and *diegematikon*, that is, mimesis ought never to be limited to an ingenuous or tyrannized copying at the level of product alone.

Aristotle perceived the instinct to imitate balanced by an impulse toward ordering, that is, an aesthetic involvement between the parts and the whole in view of a harmonized integration. It is not that he placed more emphasis on the creating imagination than on mimesis *per se*, but he seemed willing to accept the irrational and the impossible for the reworking of nature (Aristotle 1973:50-66). The organic whole thus constituted was bound up as follows: human life in all its manifestations as objects of poetic imitation, man as the poet's subject matter, and nature imitated in creative processes. The selection and ordering of such processes (natural and human) are what validate art. Diegesis, or the process of narration itself, would be also highlighted as a part of, and make up the conceptual entirety of, mimesis as transmutation, or rather the mimesis of process. Imitation of actions would enlarge the range of objects of imitation from those of the empirical world to include the thematization and "actualization" of the processes undertaken by the poet.

Aristotle touched upon poetic inspiration almost as derived from his theory of mimesis of process. There are, for instance, "great wits," whose works are consciously under the control of a higher reason, and the "enthusiastic" poet, who is possessed by his subject and whose work is dominated by his emotions. The inference plainly is that the Platonic "higher" truth should perhaps not be sought *en bloc*, but identified with, and indicated by, the imaginative processes of the poet.

In reflecting also human imagination instead of telling a secondhand tale about what might be real in a quasi-parallel world (which is indeed quite another) or struggling to depict an object thrice removed from reality, Horace and Longinus stayed within the boundaries of poetry as a picture, and the sublime in poetry, respectively. If Horace stressed the sense of decorum (the rightness of each part to the whole), and cautioned against too faithful an

imitation, Longinus underlined the importance of systematic selection united with skill in invention.

Horace was in favor of copying not solely from nature, but also from ancient authors (Horace 1973:68-74). What drew him closer to the concept of mimesis of process, however, was his keen analogy between the poetic and the pictorial. He introduced "movement" to poetic criteria, instead of a fixed object in time and space; he occasioned an object that was (is) only grasped in close-up or distant views. This kind of mimesis of process seems to play apperception against the perceptual processes of apprehension. Longinus, in his turn, departed from mental representations that give birth to speech, commented upon discourse as something that transcends the human (image, imagination, the imaginary), and ended up by stating that poets should be attentive to the divine afflatus of inspiration from the ancients – their impression of the beautiful (Longinus 1973:76-98). In short, Longinus seems to agree on the idea of mimesis of process; he thought the sublime in poetry was achieved through the interplay between the poet's imitation of nature and his guiding knowledge: the power of forming great concepts, vehement and inspired passion, due formation of figures, noble diction, and dignified and elevated composition. In his words, artistic creation is the process of the "spur and curb" upon reality.

From Plato to Plotinus, from the time of Aristotle to the first centuries of the Christian era, and even in the twenty-first century, the artistic mimetic product seems to have undergone a transformation. Literature, it seems, has always acquiesced to the fact that language is "already" irreal. Viewing Plato's theory as mandatory statements against poetry, or judging any philosopher, or theoretician, who remains at the level of mimesis of product on the basis of "blindness," is but to avow one's own inability to see the process of product becoming process anew. It is for this reason that in the act of representation, a recreation in its own right, the relation between a sign and its object, or the distinction between *signum* and *signatum*, lacks a term that would mediate the relation and provide the means by which process may be considered as well as product.

It is in relation to *signum* and *signatum* that the trademark of Saussure's thought is a dichotomy constitutive of the sign: the signifier stands for the acoustic image and the signified for the concept. By excluding the notion of a referent, Saussure's theory leaves the actual world behind and lets us assume "that the objects of linguistic investigation were created by the linguist's point of view" (Ryan 1979:29). In a sense, this sign system grants each of its terms absolute freedom in the incessant movement of signification. Such arbitrariness is intelligible with the idea that "in language there are only differences" (Saussure 1966:120). The play of differences within language

resumes the relational basis of the linguistic system by stating that a term is defined once one knows what it is not. According to this theory, not only would the language user have to have in mind all the linguistic possibilities, but he would also be caught up in this autonomous linguistic movement so as to become a mere servant of language.

The other important dichotomy introduced by Saussure in his semiological studies is that between *langue* and *parole*. For Saussure, *langue* would stand for the aspects of language, its geometry, architecture, and sets of rules. On the other hand, *parole* would be the actual spoken everyday language, the improvisations of each language user, as he would tap into the immense storehouse of *langue*. Theoreticians such as Jonathan Culler, Colin Falck, and many other post-structuralist thinkers find this opposition to hold true in terms of a suitable object of study, but to be quite inefficient when one thinks that the idea of *langue* collapses every time *parole* is at use, or that *langue* exists only because *parole* can be actualized. In his *Course of General Linguistics* Saussure maintains such a distinction as a valuable premise to work from, and he also privileges *langue* over *parole*.

Saussure's definition of the sign has influenced the development of semiological studies. Since his doctrine relates to language at the level of product, that is, language as a differential and relational "store of signs with their grammatical properties" (Chomsky 1964:23), the gradual changes and proceedings of language, and the diversity of signification seem to have been denied. Jonathan Culler (1979) suggests that the linguistic sign, composed of two inseparable planes, does not entail arbitrariness solely in the relation between signifier and signified. Each of the two terms, he claims, is itself arbitrary and precludes any autonomy of one part over the other. In addition, he argues that the two planes of the sign being inseparable do not lead to the idea of symmetry. Culler concludes that Saussure's distinction between signifier/signified and between *langue*/*parole* is a semiotically acceptable principle but has a limited range of applicability since this linguistically based semiology overlooks motivation. In semiotic systems, both motivated and unmotivated signs may be at play.

Saussure's view of language as a disembodied product and as a context-free process has inscribed his theory in-between reality and transcendence. By denying referentiality or extra-linguistic reality, and by subscribing the dimension of human presence within the relational structures of language, "Saussure's programmatic work provided precisely what was needed at [the beginning of the century], namely a set of general principles sufficiently abstract to be acceptable to linguists of various persuasions" (Percival 1981:45). With Saussure's exclusion of the referent, theoreticians of this persuasion have analyzed language primarily as form: a sensory impression

that precedes substance, and have almost neglected or placed substance on a secondary plane. Whether substance or form is to be privileged, the semiological line of study has definitely proved useful in many fields of linguistic and psychological enquiry, especially in the French school of semiology. In any case, out of the relation between substance and form, the semiological conception of the sign faces a disconcerting gap if one thinks of the communicative and interpretative processes of signifying systems.

Whereas Saussure was caught between reality and transcendence, Peirce worked within the same boundaries more to his advantage: with the help of a third term, Peirce's semiotics may as well speculate upon the interpretative processes of semioses. Peirce locates the state of being in reality, something impossible to be apprehended in itself. Peirce, like Immanuel Kant before him, approaches the epistemological problem in relation to Being by a simple "denial that objective, nonrepresentational knowledge is possible" (Solomon 1988:189). Being is known after Substance, that is, not only relational structures are at stake, but also quality and representation. Peircean semiotics further departs from Saussurean semiology by its focusing upon substance and not upon form.

Peirce's semiotic scheme differs most markedly from Saussure's semiological paradigm in its insistence on the possibility of a unity in human cognitive apprehension. By creating a similar sign, or a more developed sign, the diversity of human sense impressions is particularized. This created interpreting sign, or interpretant, is the means by which the mind conceptualizes experience, so as to make the perceived empirical manifold intelligible. The mere speech act, or its superimposition within communicative processes, suffices to turn the representation of a given reality into an interpretation. In an article discussing referentiality as the basic semantic mechanism of the literary mimesis, Michael Riffaterre concludes that in literature "representation of reality, (...) for all its objectifying stance, is essentially an interpretative discourse" (1984:159). Mimesis of process in the literary text is activated by words that refer to already structured systems of signs, and not to things alone. In this case, the referent of Peirce's sign is not neglected; it resembles or adjoins the object.

The Peircean sign may be thought of in terms of product and process, whereas the Saussurean sign contains only that which was pre-established as meaning, that which is decodifiable in a pre-existent shared code. The model of the sign proposed by Saussure leaves no room for complex subtleties as to context and dialogical interrelations. The dialogic, as well as the dialectic, structure of the sign – a structure that can account for the objects of experience at different levels – is required in a study that examines the product but also enables the analysis of the process. In relation to process and

product in semiosis, the intellectual legacy of Plato and Aristotle is still a preeminent debate in the twenty-first century. Whereas Plato pointed out that the mimetic relation between the sign and its object is directed towards the essence of the latter, Aristotle shifted emphasis to argue that the mimetic relation is based on what belongs to the sign's characteristics and refers to the sign's object. Ever since antiquity, the pendulum swings either towards essence and product or towards reference and the process of referring. In both cases, no matter how the problem of representation is approached, it is always already pointing towards its own essential immateriality, towards its “irreal” aspect. The immateriality of an essence and the irreality of a reference prove that, after all, representation is already an act of interpretation, inference, and recreation. The Peircean sign, in its triadic aspect, seems to take the concurrence of representation, interpretation, and recreation into question, and be very much at ease in the "irreal" realm of relations and references.

CHAPTER TWO

PEIRCEAN AND JOHANSENEAN SEMIOTIC MODELS

2.1. The Semiotics of Peirce

Interpretation and mediation rule over signs. Mediation brings something into effect by action, and what is effected cannot be of the same kind as something evident: it becomes somewhat different from what it might originally have been. If a sign does not stand for something else than itself, it is not a sign. The evidence of something that stands for itself differs greatly from the idea that an object of experience can never be grasped in itself: for X to be a sign it cannot stand for X, but it could stand for something other than X. In addition, once the sign X has been apprehended, it is apprehended as an X'. The object grasped by a sign is not the object in itself, "because each sign is only a direct cognition and it cannot reach the real object" (Buczynska-Garewicz 1978:10). What the sign apprehends is only the representation of the object. Mediate cognition is indispensable to the epistemology of Peirce's theory of signs, of which the idea of an interpretant is the most useful conception.

Peirce set forth his semiotic scheme in scattered unpublished material that was later to become the eight volumes of his *Collected Papers* and now the planned twenty volumes of the *Writings*. Given the amount of written materials and the extended length of time the North-American philosopher was at work delineating, among other things, his semiotic project, epistemological consistency is somewhat at fault. However, Peirce's relatively incongruent use of certain concepts does not mar an objective and clear understanding of his theories. Within the scope of this work, only a very small part of Peirce's theory of signs will be presented.

Peirce divides the first among the multiple triads in the *Collected Papers*, into sign, object, and interpretant. The sign initiates the play of meaning through its interaction with object and interpretant:

> A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign that stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representation (*CP* 228).[1]

The object, through the sign, communicates a form to the interpretant, that is, a potentiality. The sign is related to its object under the condition that the sign represents the object and the object in Peircean theory is every thing made known by a cognizant mind.[2] This representation is enacted in reference to a sort of shared idea. To understand the action of the sign, or semiosis, the observer must refer the object to something known, to social practices, to observable phenomena. Although the ground of reference is important for the identification of signs, for "the ground is the common quality in reference to which all signs signify," it is not a fundamental prerequisite on account of "Peirce's understanding that signs signify by means of any of a variety of relations" (Shapiro 1980:243, 244). In this way, the object determines the sign and the sign represents its object, but this process is never a complete reconstitution.

Some aspects of the object are highlighted, whereas other parts may be merely supplemented in its reconstitution or representation by the sign. The plurality of characteristics of the object, as it has been rendered by the sign, stems from the impossibility of the sign of fully comprehending the object; the "real" object goes through a type of adequation. In Peirce's view, the object is represented by the sign as a piece of the surrounding world, and thus, the idea of adequation is as if one thought "of an object as, for example, a 'moment,' or as participating in a *plurality* of series, at the crossroads of diverse and innumerable semiotic processes" (Shapiro 1980:242). That is why an object may be either immediate or dynamic. The immediate object of the sign is the one that first comes forth in the context of a single semiotic event.

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[1] I follow the convention of referring to The *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* by letting the number left of the decimal designate the volume number, while the number to the right designates paragraph number. The *Collected Papers* will be abbreviated *CP*.

[2] Although I use the term cognizant mind, I am aware of the possibility of the absence of mind in Peirce's definition: "I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediated by the former. My insertion of the term 'upon a person' is a sop to Cerberus, because I despair of making my own broader conception understood" (Peirce 1977:88-89).

This object may be said to be the very representation of the sign inasmuch as it is the reference or idea upon which it has been constituted. The immediate object is prone to undergoing supplementation or adequation since the acts of representation and interpretation are closely interconnected with a very subtle "moment." On the other hand, the dynamic object, fairly independent of the representation of the sign, is the "real" object that partakes of some of the characteristics of the immediate object and concomitantly influences the representation of the sign. Although the dynamic object is nearer to the object in real life situations, or is what a final study would prove it to be, it does not transcend all possible experience; it simply goes beyond the content of a single signifying process. That is, "signs have 'real objects' which 'determine' them, or to speak bluntly, *cause* them to be" (Callaghan 1986:136), and in this sense, the dynamic object is the originator of a given semiosis since it has forced into the representation a bit more than mere perception would reveal. In short, the dynamic object is the cause of a sign, while the immediate object is the sign's first and direct reconstitution of an object.

Objects and signs still lack the basic idea of the interpretant, that of an interpretation or translation of one sign into another sign. This idea leads directly to a dialogical form of communication: a sign is perceived by an observer, and this observer in turn calls forth another sign (as an idea in his mind or as a mediating correlate sign within the signifying system), more developed than the first, or carrying more information. The interpretant may be thus equivalent to information. The level of accuracy, or the awareness of the entirety of information being processed, determines the most important division in the concept of the interpretant. Peirce defined the immediate, the dynamic, and the final interpretant as follows:

> The *Immediate Interpretant* is the immediate pertinent possible effect in its unanalyzed primitive entirety. In the case of a sign interpreted by a mind, that idea (in a very extended sense) which must be apprehended in order that the sign should fulfill its function, this idea being presented whole and unanalyzed. It may be a quality of feeling, more or less vague or an idea of an effort.... The *Dynamical Interpretant* is the actual effect produced upon a given interpreter on a given occasion in a given stage of his consideration of the sign. ... The *Final Interpretant* is the ultimate effect of the sign, so far as it is intended or destined, from the character of the sign, being more or less of a habitual and formal nature.... [3]

The immediate interpretant is the one that primarily comes forth in the understanding of the sign itself; it may be termed the meaning of the sign.

[3] This is Peirce's entry in *The Logic Notebook* (Ms. 339d: 546-547) referred to by Johansen (1985:247).

The dynamic interpretant, placed one step further in a given signifying process, is an active response on the part of the observer, and a response induced by the sign. The final interpretant is the ultimate effect produced by the sign. This effect suggests that the representation of the object of the sign by the representamen, and its interpretation, would be flawless. If the immediate interpretant renders the ordinary meaning of a sign, it may be said that the final interpretant renders the sign's truth.

The translatability of a given sign into one or more of its attending interpretants suffices to make representation an act of interpretation. But the final interpretant seems to play the role of a destined goal, always pushing forward the signifying process. According to Peirce, interpretation is a teleological process, and the final interpretant would be this ideal causation. The ever-forward movement of interpretation in the direction of a final or ultimate interpretant is indeed a theoretical projection, for "apparently there could be no such thing as an *absolutely* final or ultimate interpretant of intellectual concepts" (Callaghan 1986:155). The sign, object, and interpretant triad posits a relationship between each component in such a way that a movement back and forth in the chain of signs is a possibility. Of course, one can trace through the interpretant some precedent signs, but an infinite regress, and an *ad infinitum* semiosis, as well as the idea of a final interpretant, hold true only in theory.

Hanna Buczynska-Garewicz proposes a reading of these three possibilities of the interpretant in a manner that shifts the focus away from truth *in abstracto*. To make Peirce's coherence explicit, she proposes that "the final interpretant is the meaning itself, the immediate one is the intention of meaning involved in a sign and the dynamical one is the understanding of a sign" (Buczynska-Garewicz 1981:195). By this reworking of concepts, Buczynska-Garewicz seems to have left for an ultimate interpretant the hard task of carrying forth the *telos* of signification. No matter what perspective is used in the understanding of the categories of the interpretant, there is always shifting room to ascertain the continuity of the play of meaning.

The quality of endless commutability of the interpretant and the point Peirce stresses, which is that "[t]he meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation (...) the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along" (*CP* 1.171), make the interpretant participate in different realms of reality. For this reason, a multitude of sub-categories of the interpretant is possible. For example, the emotional interpretant links the process of signification with the sphere of feelings, the energetic interpretant is associated with the empirical world of actions and the logical interpretant focuses on habit-changes (Buczynska-Garewicz 1981:198). These interpretants, however, halt the process of