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**Origin and Authority: An Analysis of the Relation Between Anonymity and Authorship in Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.**

**I. Abstraction**

It is at least curious that an inquiry should take the beginning as its end, the display of the origin as its purpose. This already suggests that one cannot begin at the beginning but rather only achieves the beginning as a sort of atmosphere radiated by the maturity of those concerns which, in their primitive incompleteness, generated the need for the beginning in the first place. To the extent that any inquiry is an act of separation from its origin, it will necessarily seek that origin beyond the particularity of its own speech. This paper considers what first appears to be only a version of the beginning, namely it deals with the origin of narrative. The attempt to render this version mature is troubled by the tension between the love of example and the desire for principle. To see what the example manifests is to see the principle within what it rules; this task is called interpretation by those who think principles are at bottom preferences, those who are unruly (or perhaps unruly), yet amused, by the need for the beginning. When interpretation itself is the example, then the engagement of example with principle mirrors that marriage of the playful and serious which begets the narrative voice. The courtship of example and principle needs to be heralded by the interpreter, who may or may not realize that the voyeur has a problem. The voice of such a courtship is both story and theory; thus the source emerges in the guise of author to witness that match and recast its significance within the difference between speech and silence. What, then, is this beginning but a loud silence which remembers those echoes which once resounded within it? That gap which begot the appearance of a beginning quickly matures into the inarticulateness which is the author's problem. Why indeed should one say anything at all if what one really needs to know is where to begin?

This need to know where to begin invites us to construct and interrogate the modern version of a beginner, that initiator who circumvents his impulse to originate by representing it in another. The modern's projection of origin into alterity makes problematic the status of his reconstituted beginning. In one sense, then, the difference between example and principle is representative of the separation of the writer from his voice; rediscovery of the writer's beginning will demand an appreciation of how the example seeks independence, how it references a possible speech outside that factual content it initially illustrates. In this separation from its concrete referent the example is empowered to point beyond itself and is freed to mean more than any illustrator could intend. This surplus of reference is the writer's reminder that he not only uses, but also is led by the example.

Stories about gods and creation tell us more important stories about how beginnings are conceived. The many versions of the source are the offspring of our need for it; we shape the source to reflect our conception of ourselves as an outcome of it. In this respect the writer's problem is always a problem of genesis, that is, of demonstrating a responsible relationship to the beginning in the sense that his own voice is conceived as one mode of its insistent presence. The extent to which the beginning is bothersome, is an issue that compels, marks the extent to which one recognizes that claims about the source are really claims about our own resiliency or obduracy in the face of those questions which enclose us. For the source is fundamentally a question, the persistence of that lack of completeness which seems perpetually within us. Claims about the source are then claims about our own capacity to enjoy those discrepancies which animate and come to authorize our inquiry. The source appears as the ground of our need to frame our own appearance in practice and in thought. This conviction that example represents the engaged form of principle suggests that the version of the origin relevant to authority must be first located in the particular, in the mixture of the limit and the unlimited. Yet any consciousness which is compelled by the desire to develop will necessarily become contemptuous of the particularity of its beginning; real achievement demands the triumph over particular conditions, private interests, and even favored examples.<sup>1</sup> One can only know that one particular is a better example of the good beginning than another by presuming that such examples can be so treated as to show the order that results from their measure. That the Good is measure is the unexamined assumption with which this paper begins; that the beginning is the highest instance of measure is the formulation it attempts to achieve. That the Good appears phenomenally as standard or measure may indicate that the Good itself does not appear at all and that the

sense in which it is a beginning is concealed by the interplay of its counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

We propose that the conception of origin as lack, gap, or inability is what typifies modern consciousness. The moderns conceive that lack at the core of authorship in a dispersed fashion, as an inability that is without boundary. The modern narrative's love of the unlimited betrays its primitively theological character because it conceives the source as dispersed, unknown, and chaotic. The futility which is consequent upon such a love can be construed as authenticity, the deification of the literal beyond virtue.

Our concern here will be for the origin in the most significant sense possible. We must attempt to look at our relation to our own beginning as revealing the clue to the structure of source-oriented discourse. The central example of this paper, from a modern novel, will demonstrate our commitment to the view that discourse can only aim at the re-discovery of the source. We will imagine our desire to possess the example as measured by our theory about the source. It is so measured in even the initial absence of theory because it is only in the vigor generated by our love of example that our need for theory about that love emerges. The theorist is then responsible only when he can locate evasion, i.e., his own necessary indirection, as an initial moment in the fruition of what is finally one speech. That the beginning as experienced can only be evasion is signaled by the seductiveness of example. The love of example (the exegetical impulse) must become self-conscious if the theorist's authority relative to the source is to know its own genesis.

## II. Example

The narrative voices of many modern novels conceive of themselves agonistically, that is, as engaged in a struggle to discover the relationship between the truth of events and their occurrence. One such troubled voice is Chief Bromden, the narrator of Kesey's novel *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*.<sup>3</sup> The Chief does not restrict the truth of events to their occurrence, rather what occurs is so chillingly factual that it rejects meaning. It is within the glacial absurdity of an insane asylum that the Chief becomes capable of telling the story that is the novel. The Chief's struggle with meaning is announced early in the novel when he acknowledges that much of what he has experienced and will tell about would be classed as nightmare or hallucination by those who hear him. Still he insists that his story "... is true even if it didn't happen." (p. 8) From the outset there is a recognized incongruity

between the true and the factual; the Chief's account is strictly phenomenal, its truth intrinsic to its shape, and its sense unmeasured by any standard other than appearance. The imaginative as experienced, as inhabited by truth prior to judgment, is the frame for a derived factuality. In this way, before one even has a world, one already has the truth about it, for the truth is more enclosure than enclosed. Thus before the Chief decides to speak the novel he has realized that the truth of events must be dislocated from what others agree occurs.

One example of the Chief's metaphysics is his belief that beneath the floor of the hospital there lies acre upon acre of machinery, like the workings of a huge dam. Everything that happens in the ward and much that happens in the world is mechanically controlled by something the Chief calls the Combine. The Combine aims at regularity and conformity to such a degree that it will even resort to replacing the insides of a man with tubes and wiring to correct behavior. Though the details of this control are peculiar to the Chief, the basic belief that something huge and impersonal orders things is shared by other characters as well, even by McMurphy, who, though not yet a puppet, eventually claims "... there's something bigger making all this mess..." (p. 181). The local instrument of control for the Combine is Nurse Ratched, the Big Nurse, yet even she is a machine beneath her starched uniform, at least as far as the Chief is concerned. From time to time the Chief is able to witness her turning into a tractor and can smell the oil burning in her gears as she roars past him. Most importantly, the nurse seems able to control time and can slow things to an icy crawl; to the Chief she is like the animator of a cartoon in which all the inmates are characters or like the puppeteer who produces life-like motion with invisible wires.

Like a cartoon world, where the figures are flat and outlined in black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be real funny if it weren't for the cartoon figures being real guys ... (p. 31)

The nurse watches the day room from her glass case; the scene before her takes on that blue-steel clarity again, that clean orderly movement of a cartoon comedy. (p. 34)

The technicians go trotting off ... like cartoon men - or like puppets, mechanical puppets in one of those Punch and Judy acts... (p. 35)

The nurse represents the very mortality that all try to evade, time's inevitability, made fast or slow, depending on which is more "therapeutic."

A more particular case of the Chief's bizarre perceptions of what takes place in the ward occurs when one of the other inmates, Blastic,

dies one night. (p. 87) The Chief's version of what happens is that the dormitory floor slides away to reveal the machinery of a slaughterhouse and demon-like workers who hang old Blastic up by his heels on huge meathooks and transport him out of the ward into a waiting furnace. At the same time the Chief is experiencing all this he is also aware that if he were to relate it to others they would consider him a fool or a dreamer. So he chooses not to speak for the moment because the "truth" of his experience is too incredible, yet he wonders "... if they don't exist, how can a man see them?" (p. 87) Thus the Chief seems inadvertently to have stated what is the novel's real concern, namely the story-teller's problem of making the non-existent perceptible. If the writer's perceptions embody true shapes then the writer's task is to make his own silence before what he sees a provocation for narration, to fashion his own experience of shapes and limits in such a way that he will erase his own inarticulateness while at the same time sustaining the difference between his enlivened perceptions and their impoverished and mechanical counterparts which appear to others.

The Chief's movement from the pretense of deaf-mute to the status of narrator means to him that he has once again become "big" enough to resist the forces of the Combine. The Chief, like all true story-tellers, comes from afar, but his strangeness and his journey are conceptual rather than geographic. The novel is the story of his movement under undisciplined imagining to the place of narrative, from a kind of speechless terror to the song of his own self-transcendence. It is his affinity with McMurphy, the swaggering gambler and yarn-spinner, which makes this growth and this journey possible. McMurphy's promise to make the Chief big again is first of all directed toward the Chief's recognition of his own physical stature and strength. What is important is that McMurphy accomplishes this by persuading the Chief to break his silence and become a fellow speaker, an interlocutor who can devise his own story. The Chief's struggle and regeneration, his resumption of his original shape, is quite literally the movement from silence to speech, and his first task as a writer is to recapture that beginning; the first consciousness he authors is that of himself at the time when he maintained the disguise of a deaf-mute. Self-reflection and authorship thus breathe the same air.

McMurphy is neither totally altruistic in his promise to the Chief nor is he simply a technical aid like a therapist. Rather he provides a model, a medium, against which the Chief can measure himself. McMurphy is the primitive version of a standard, i.e., the standard as model or example. The Chief also sees (p. 208-9) McMurphy as the victim of the same tactics which were used to shrink both him and his father from greatness to insignificance. The Chief, of course, perceives

McMurphy to be huge (p. 207); in the swimming pool incident (p. 160) the Chief presumes that McMurphy must be standing in a hole because he suddenly notices himself to be a full head taller than McMurphy. So what begins as a consciousness of "bigness" simply in terms of size and strength becomes a more profound admiration until the Chief can finally speak about stature or size in a way which excludes the physical sense of "bigness" altogether. The Chief realizes that McMurphy's real grandeur resides in his power to be what he is in spite of what he looks like; at the same time he realizes that his own problems originated in his own entrapment by appearance, his resignation to being what he looked like. One can only become larger than one is by being unconcerned about how large one looks.

I'd think he was strong enough being his own self that he would never back down the way she was hoping he would. I'd think, maybe he truly is something extraordinary. He's what he is, that's it. Maybe that makes him strong enough, being what he is. (p. 152-3)

I was just being the way I looked, the way people wanted. It don't seem like I ever have been me. How can McMurphy be what he is? (p. 153)

He hadn't let what he looked like run his life one way or the other ... (p. 153)

What causes this recognition on the Chief's part is his sudden appreciation of the flowing beauty of McMurphy's handwriting. The Chief is struck by the incongruity between the handwriting and the gnarled paw which guides the pen until he realizes that this incongruity is primarily his own problem. This incident is quite significant in the Chief's development into a story-teller for several reasons. 1) It has finally become clear to him that what he admires about McMurphy is not really his size or his swagger, but rather his command over himself. McMurphy has the courage to be what he is in spite of what other people expect of him. The strong sense of "big" is thus a triumph over appearance altogether. 2) In the incident in question McMurphy is also shown to be a primitive version of what the Chief can become. McMurphy is a writer in a purely formal sense (his penmanship is admirable, but nothing is said about what he pens); this shows the Chief that there is no real contradiction between what his perceptiveness makes him capable of (being a novelist) and what his appearance suggests (something close to figurine). 3) This recognition also redefines the struggle between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched, who all along has also been called "big." Their struggle is not really to see who is stronger in the purely physical sense, rather the bigger will be the one who masters appearance, the smaller will be the one who submits to it

in cowardice. In this context McMurphy is clearly bigger because he literally rips off her disguise (her uniform) when he attacks her and also sees her innate viciousness concealed behind the more complex mask of authority.

The Chief finally admires McMurphy most of all for his ability to tell stories. It is in this sense that the Chief considers McMurphy to be truly "big" because this ability shows that he has mastered the language of appearance as well as appearance itself. What the Chief remembers as the culmination to the fishing trip was that McMurphy, in spite of his frantic exhaustion, "... doled out his life for us to live, a rollicking past full of kid fun and drinking buddies and loving women and barroom battles over meager honors - for all of us to dream ourselves into." (p. 245) Later, during the visit from the whores, the Chief recalls McMurphy and the orderly Turkle swapping tales. Thus McMurphy's talent for replacing the prevailing dread of the ward with the enjoyment of the exaggerated tale makes the Chief grow because it makes him laugh at the foolish face of an authority that is purely institutional. He ultimately begins to wonder who will take McMurphy's place (p. 303) once the nurse inevitably neutralizes him; it is this speculation which brings the Chief to the threshold of narration. What McMurphy's place really is becomes the question which makes the Chief mature and sane.

In terms of his development toward McMurphy's "place" the Chief goes through several stages. He, at first, is able to perceive scenes but does not know their reality status nor is he yet able to order them into the pattern of intelligibility which a story demands. As we have already mentioned, his first attempts to unify his experience are by means of the metaphors of the machine and the cartoon. Though he indeed perceives machines and cartoons which he also acknowledges do not really exist, this still allows him his first sense of distance from what goes on around him because he can look at what entraps him as if from the outside, as if examining the mechanism of a machine or watching an animated scene. Such distance, achieved by charging an experience with already-given sense even at the level of perception, allows the Chief to tell about such scenes as that of Blastic's death without experiencing himself as totally vulnerable to them. He defends himself from such threats by inscribing himself in the world of the ward as a fixture. He adopts a role, the pretense of the deaf-mute, which guarantees that he will be overlooked; he is present in the ward as someone who is almost invisible. We might begin to think of the author as someone who is in the novel in much the same way.<sup>4</sup> The Chief is the story-teller who is guileless towards his hearers yet "cagey" towards

those who threaten his insularity. His disguise as a deaf-mute guarantees a certain immunity from the horrors of the ward.

He spends his days pushing his broom affecting a distracted daze; he, of course, cannot maintain his distance in all circumstances and so occasionally loses himself in the fog and ends up at the shock shop. He is, then, almost anonymous to the staff yet is the observer of all that goes on as well as of those things which are true "even if they didn't happen." Here the writer's figure is that of a man struck speechless with clarity; as we will see, the subject, the voice that narrates, will emerge into clarity as the hero (McMurphy) disappears and becomes inaccessible.<sup>5</sup> The clarity of the subject is made present by the implied dialogue between the writer and his narrative voice; when we come to see how the narrative voice is the writer's other, we see his own recounting of how his own possibility for enrichment emerged within his own consciousness.

A striking parody of the Chief's visible inscription in the ward occurs when a group of residents and a visiting doctor tour the ward. They pass the Chief as if he were some sort of insect and he pushes his broom beyond them down the hall towards a picture of a man fly-fishing in a mountain stream. As he criticizes the fisherman's technique, the Chief has a strange experience (though he seems to accept it as commonplace and a reason for enjoyment). For us his relation to the picture can be viewed as an emblem of his first undeveloped relation to the place of narrative, the place to hide.

There's a path running down through the aspen, and I push my broom down the path a ways and sit down on a rock and look back out through the frame at that visiting doctor talking with the residents ... I can't hear what he says because of the crash of the cold, frothy stream coming down out of the rocks. I can smell the snow in the wind where it blows down off the peaks ... It's a real nice place to stretch your legs and take it easy. (p. 122)

This kind of entry into the picture is consistent with the Chief's disguise as a deaf-mute and with his inability to distinguish the factual from the imaginary. For the Chief the world of the picture is an alcove of the ward, a safe place where he can relax his guard; to the Chief's mind the space of art is continuous with the space of ordinary experience. When he looks back into the ward through the frame of the picture, he seems to be both inside and outside the picture. He is the eye at the edge of the picture, the intersection of art and life. The picture has become so much the context of his gaze that he does not exist at a distance from it, rather he has become invisible and immune by becoming the look (the push) of the picture against the world.<sup>6</sup> Something in the depth of field of the picture grasps him and transports his



consciousness to the point where the landscape is something other than the picture; he becomes more like the screen or hinge that is the mediator between the picture and the ward. The Chief imagines he disappears from the ward by inscribing himself in the painting on the wall; since the Chief sees picture and world as continuous (i.e., he does not judge the reality of his perceptual field), this entry and disappearance into the look that is the picture is an emblem of the Chief's inscription into the picture that is the hospital ward. The entry into the picture displays in miniature how the Chief deals with the complexity of the larger scene that is the ward. The Chief imagines himself as drawn into, or written into the picture; in other words, he begins to conceive of himself as possessed of a consciousness which can take him places.

Through the pretense of speechlessness and deafness the Chief is able to situate himself in the mechanics of the ward; he then has a place within a literal account of experience (the nurse's account) in spite of his own dislocation with respect to the factual. Disguise and deception (the Chief's caginess) provide a kind of entry, an infiltration by camouflage, into the world of the ward. To those in the ward (with the exception of McMurphy) the Chief has been reduced to the signification "deaf-mute." His successful pretense creates security and anonymity because he is not categorized as a signifier at all and so presents no threat to other signifiers. He does not have an active position in a system of speech and sense which would engage others in the ward. His mimicry has reduced him to the status of a thing, a pure signified,<sup>7</sup> and it is this thing-like beginning that makes him capable of a transcendence denied to those already speaking. That he pretends to begin as less than he is, allows him to become more than he could be without that pretense. He is not in the picture (the ward) as an active element of its movement, but rather is an element in the framing of the scene; he becomes identical with the broom he pushes. He is officially a mutilated remnant of the ward's past violence, but because he is still able to conceal himself by representation of his own design, he acquires a power and an authority over his own beginning. He has been able to render his hiding place holy and invincible to all save McMurphy, whom he considers to be the one who can lead him forth safely. The hero can be the mute subject's interlocutor because the hero is conceived of as savior.

### III. Principle

It is then more than ironic that the Chief is the consciousness which tells the story of the conflict between the nurse and McMurphy. The

Chief who is our story-teller must be imagined to be one who has overcome the need for the disguise of speechlessness and has emerged as a voice which can comprehend and enjoy the memorial of that necessity. Yet the Chief who is our story-teller does not achieve this voice in a linear fashion, i.e., in the mode that would think of what is transcended as thereby eliminated from the consciousness which lives the moment of the act of narration. Rather the Chief's narrative "strategy" is to re-establish the strength of the consciousness which sought disguise as its "strategy;" his story must preserve the moment when deceit was essential because it is this hiding which is the beginning that is the story's frame. In effect, the Chief re-invents himself in the disguised consciousness (he once again disguises himself, but this time as one disguised) and imagines that speechless figure as the first moment in the genesis of the unmasked speaker who can reproduce his own generation in the monument of narrative. The picture he enters here is not one on a wall, but rather is that of his own primitiveness, his own hiding in the inarticulate origin he now attempts to present as offspring.

From the perspective of the problem of writing the Chief is an icon of an ideal narrator because he imagines himself as the enclosing awareness who is in dialogue first of all with the verbally deprived, yet perceptively lucid, part of himself. Time and history are the modalities which separate such speakers in fact, but the Chief imagines their relation to each other as timeless. In order to write, he somehow must re-invent himself in the position of awaiting his own story. So the speechless Chief's inability to say is in reality his refusal to lose the original sense of his experience, his first knowing,<sup>8</sup> in the inscriptive process of writing or speaking. The Chief's inscription of himself in the ward is then the primitive intuition of how he is to appear in his own narration. He must show himself as successfully concealing himself from the nurse of self-indulgence which is both custodian and threat.

On the other hand, the super-Chief (or as the orderly Washington calls him, the 'soopah-chief') then narrates *as if* he were the one who had not yet chosen to speak; the super-Chief can only be the author's figure if that figure is imagined to be itself capable of figuration, i.e., capable of conceiving itself as someone capable of disguise. Kesey's figure is thus a self-conscious figure, a figure which can see narration as a problem, as the *aporia* which only the deceit of silence can enliven ironically. The Chief is to be seen as shaping his own silence into his muse.

The super-Chief (the figure who narrates) and speechless Chief (the character in whom the narrating figure invests his difficulty as ironically overcome) are thus a picture of the relation between the writer

and his voice. The novel then contains a *mimesis* of the disappearance of Kesey's voice into that of the Chief; he vanishes by investing the voice he needs to possess in the consciousness that is the Chief. Just as the dreamer is one who finally does not see,<sup>9</sup> that is, is the one who is not aware of himself as the consciousness which dreams the dream, so the Chief who narrates also must imagine himself as one who is in the ward in the guise of one who neither hears nor speaks. In turn, the author can be said to be in the book as one who does not write.

The Chief's narrative is then the picture of Kesey's full awakening to the notion that the other is discourse; narrative in this novel is shown to be miraculous because it exemplifies the triumph of the writer over his own incapacity to speak by the inscription of that inability in the story told by another (i.e., the story the Chief's pretense allows him to tell). This process is best demonstrated in the Chief's speculations about "taking McMurphy's place" near the end of the novel.

He was in his chair in the corner, resting a second before he came out for the next round - in a long line of next rounds. The thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn't come out anymore and somebody else had to take your place. (p. 303)

The Chief is already certain of McMurphy's ultimate disappearance, the disappearance of the one who "doled out his life for them to dream themselves into." The departure of McMurphy means that the Chief must accept or reject the responsibility for having his own voice. When the burned-out body of McMurphy is brought back into the ward after the lobotomy, the Chief refuses to believe it is really McMurphy and instead calls it a "crummy sideshow fake." The Chief eventually smothers the life out of this "replica" by covering it with his entire body; he does so because he knows what McMurphy would want. This symbolic merging of the Chief with McMurphy portrays one serious temptation for the development of the Chief's consciousness, namely, he could simply replace McMurphy on the ward and so offer himself as another sacrifice to perpetuate the resistance to the nurse's authority. He even contemplates this for a moment, as is shown by his attempt to wear McMurphy's cap. However, the cap turns out to be too small and the Chief leaves it behind; so he realizes that this imitation would once again be an attempt to derive what one is from what one looks like. He cannot be Murphy and, as the ill-fitting cap indicates, has outgrown his need for him; he is now "bigger" than his model. As his own subjectivity grows to maturity and finds its own voice, the model vanishes into the inaccessibility of vegetation and death. The Chief assassinates the faded image of his mediator,<sup>10</sup> to free

his own voice from the stranglehold of imitation. Thus, taking McMurphy's place is not a real possibility for the Chief because his own lucidity demands a return to his own beginnings, not the taking up of the life of another, unless a further disguise becomes necessary. He resolves to go back to his home along the Columbia and watch his tribesmen spearing salmon in the spillway of a hydroelectric dam. He says about his source, "I been away a long time." (p. 311)

For the Chief, McMurphy is an example in the sense of a model and the Chief encounters a problem analogous to that of the writer who wants to understand the proper relationship with example. Both the writer and the Chief must merge with their respective examples, yet they must not do so in a way that would reduce or limit them to the boundaries the example provides. The relationship with the example must be nourishing rather than absorbing in such a way that the story of the example's desirability allows an independent voice to emerge. As McMurphy is the Chief's first model of what he will become, so the example is the writer's first formulation of what he wants to say. One can only be nourished by and grow "big" because of the example when the example can be seen as a necessary moment in one's own emergent novelty; otherwise, the example is no more than idol or slogan.

So for the Chief "becoming big" means both returning to his own origin and, by doing so, becoming capable of telling the story of his own emergence as subject. The Chief's different conceptions of his own size serve to indicate different relationships to his own limits. To fear speech or refuse to speak to protect oneself is to be small, while to be gigantic is not only to speak but to create whole worlds (novels).

It is only in the Chief's narrative that the speechlessness of Kesey, the going-out of oneself necessary for writing, can truly be heard; Kesey is able to "write" the book only by pretending that his own inability to write or speak is the disguise of someone who is able to write and speak. Kesey becomes big enough to write by imagining his inability already overcome in the Chief. In this way the Chief mimics Kesey when he disguises himself in the ward. Just as the pose of the Chief allows him to blend almost invisibly into the ward, so the writer contrives his own disappearance into the book by imagining his own speechlessness as the disguise of one who speaks the book. The author then doubles himself into a scene which others regard; he exteriorizes in art the limitations which excluded him from its initiation and by so doing animates the transformation of his own consciousness into a more developed form. Thus the dialectic of Kesey's creativity is imaged by the Chief's emergence from silence into story.

This is to imagine oneself as somehow authored, fathered, by one's own creation; the offspring, the invented voice, is the progenitor of the

author's best self, the self which writes. This reversal of outcome into source is possible because the art which produces the book must embrace that lack which forestalls and conditions the work of writing. So the writer must imagine his own limitations as the tone or hue, the screen of possibility, which permeates a consciousness beyond those limits and which delights in them as its own invention. This struggle of the writer to displace his own silence is exemplified in the novel by the juxtaposition of the Chief's achievement of speech and the loss of speech on the part of Nurse Ratched. She can no longer speak because of McMurphy's attempt to strangle her. When she appears at the end of the novel, she is forced to write her responses to Harding's questions on a notebook. She literally has become "one who must write" because she has lost her vocal power, yet her writing is purely technical, i.e., it functions only instrumentally to communicate information.

'Hum,' Harding said. 'Our conversation was a bit spotty, it seemed. But then, when you are told that you are full of bullshit, what kind of written comeback *can* you make?' (p. 307)

The nurse's writing is a writing which is necessitated because speech is excluded organically whereas the Chief's story-telling power coincides with his recovery of and commitment to the power of speech. To the extent that the nurse represents this purely instrumental view of writing (much as McMurphy earlier represented a purely formal view), the novel recommends that the writer must silence the nurse in himself. That is to say, the writer must attempt to obliterate that tendency he has to treat himself in a custodial fashion, the tendency he has to indulge himself in proper care to evade the insistence of his voice.

Working at the limit of the novel, then, are two voices within Kesey himself: the voice which creates the narrator-character and in doing so evades the paradox of attempting to be what it says; the more concealed voice, represented by the Chief's story-telling voice, which realizes the weakness of the evasion and which addresses that evasion by impersonating a character who conceives of it as necessary.

We finally claim that modern narrative conceives of the source as a kind of contrived speechlessness; the pretense that such silence is contrived is the means by which the writer measures his better self against his own insufficiency. Only by representing that insufficiency before the source as already overcome can the modern novelist evade that meaningless chaos he intuitively senses at the heart of things. The modern question is thus how evasion can be construed as measure.

#### IV. Synthesis

Our analysis of the Kesey example has displayed a pattern of tensions each of which manifests the doubleness enclosing any task of self-conscious representation. We need now to envisage, or perhaps invent, that consciousness which can sustain the opposition between example and principle, evasion and commitment, in an enjoyable (i.e., *measured*) and significant way. It is not accidental, but essentially instructive, that this task resembles that of the novelist who must shape his characters in such a way that they are independent of his inventiveness, yet mastered by its measured use. It is not enough that the writer have a "genius" for the construction of characters, though he may indeed have this, but such genius must be measured by the inherent demands of the display. Thus genius is measured by the structure of that spectacle it needs in order to exemplify itself. Contrariwise, ingenuity about structure (if we could imagine some novelists as impassioned system-builders) must be measured by continuity in character. The writer's task is then to understand stage and character as things which only appear together, indeed things which only have their being in this togetherness.<sup>11</sup>

Our task is then much like that of the dramatist when he realizes that his characters have overrun and obscured his stage; or perhaps more accurately, when he realizes that he has never shown the sense in which he is offstage, and consequently has inadvertently been pursuing his task in the disguise of a character all along. The merit of our stage, the Kesey example, is that its inventor has staged his drama in such a way as to represent his own disappearance from it and so has become its author by exemplifying his own exit. For the theorist, where character becomes example, the problem is how to manifest one's own exit from the example in the example itself in such a way that the release from the example is not evasion in the sense of escape but rather an evasion which creates the distance necessary for Reason's eyes to focus. The theorist's problem is how to become his own audience without merely showing-off to himself; this means that the theorist must be his own example.

If we are to become our own examples then we must reformulate the oppositions generated by our treatment of the Kesey novel in such a way that they show the double evasions of entering and exiting this example as complementary goods. We have described one type of initiator as he who evades his impulse to originate by re-directing it into another in whom it is embraced as renewal (we called this initiator the *modern* or he for whom art is measured by evasion).

We have here implied (and elsewhere stated)<sup>12</sup> that the apparent opposite of such an initiator is one who not only credits his own impulse but is able to construe it as the consequence of habitation by another and so is inspired from without rather than from a contrivance within (we could call this initiator the epic actor or the classic figure).

Given the descriptions of two such figures there must exist a consciousness which authorizes such description. There must exist an initiatory consciousness for whom these alternatives are distinct yet productive, a consciousness which finds its stage or life in these embodiments. This is to say that the consciousness which presumes to theorize about such figures must embody evasion by turning evasion into principle and must embody principle by the exemplification of evasion in the story of other originators. This initiator must be one who begins by considering given alternatives as already an outcome and captures authority by so enlivening the alternatives that the good of each appears. This is to say that such a consciousness takes the alternatives as something accomplished and seeks to address those grounds which render this accomplishment achievable. This voice will be one for which the figures of the display are developed in such a way that they become characterizations of overcome self-interests; the activity of such a speaker will be neither heraldry (interpretation) nor heroism (creativity) simply, but rather a consciousness committed to the continual recapitulation of the moments of its own development.

In a way, then, the articulation of the differences between the consciousness of a modern novelist and that of the epic voice discloses a subject which does not yet know itself. This subject experiences its own emergence when it interrogates its own interest in concealment and evasion; if principle and evasion are to know their own necessity then that subject which emerges must be one which needs their belonging-together in order to posit itself. Initially such a subject wants to know how it can love example (the modern novel) when the example is disclosed as incomplete and grounded in negativity. What this consciousness initiates is an inquiry into the good of the modern's undisguised refusal to appear undisguised and its apparent sense of futility in the face of the self's refusal to be encapsulated. This inquirer finds its continual animative source in the recognition that the writer always outstrips and outdistances his creation; such difference between the mind and any speeches it can invent is the given which is brought out of hiding by the subject which finds that rationality is its master. In more immediate terms if we are to become such subjects, we must know why those terms which render the example satisfying are not themselves satisfying. Why is it that when we imagine the pursuit of example as an end we find that what we have become in order to take

such an end as good is not itself good? Why does the love of example only render us better in a random and accidental way?

This amounts to saying that we are not yet satisfied with our own relation to the Kesey example and that the auto-characterization "lover of example" is not yet fully explicit. Although we have not yet achieved precision about our own relation to example, we have at least distilled several less developed forms of that relation within our own analysis. The character McMurphy personifies a kind of relation to example in the way his speech is punctuated by stories; McMurphy's stories are his examples and these range from quite elaborate tales to one line wisecracks. Within the mechanistic and determined world of the ward, McMurphy is a random factor in that his speech and responses to speech are unpredictable. In this way McMurphy might be seen to represent action itself, i.e., the interruption of a determined process by a free act. McMurphy may not then hold any more general principle which he could articulate, but his relation to example is strong in that his stories and ironies are random miracles<sup>13</sup> resisting absorption into the congealed determinacy of the ward. Yet McMurphy's relation to his own examples is finally instrumental, i.e., he uses the stories as a kind of defensive weaponry and as a seduction to his own ends. These are tendencies that our own relation to example should overcome. McMurphy is more a user than a lover of example and is consequently oriented more to display; McMurphy is eloquent, inspired, and compelled by examples but never develops an affection toward them.

The Chief's example is McMurphy himself, the man who has not limited what he is to what he looks like. The Chief's consciousness is finally more developed because his speech not only uses example, but also is about example, i.e., about McMurphy, his primordial model. The Chief asks himself what his relation to example ought to be and does so by narrating that history which produced the separation of the model from himself. The precondition of this achieved independence from the model is remembered as a fellow speaker, not in the sense of another conversationalist, but as one who evokes speech about oneself in the first place and so causes to appear the outline (the cartoon) of what one needs to be. The Chief's relation to example is more developed because it produces self-animation; prior to the entrance of McMurphy the Chief perceived the ward as a kind of cartoon theatre, though he was not yet a figure in its drama. Because of his developed capacity to become McMurphy's interlocutor (i.e., because he conceives of his example as interlocutor) he is able both to imagine his own cartoon replica in the ward and to begin imagining what the cartoonist, the animator of figures (the novelist, perhaps), must be like. He then begins to see that the idea of a speaker or story-teller must



exemplify its own transit into exemplification. However, the Chief's relation to example is also incomplete for he loves this specific example, that is to say he is bound to McMurphy and the particularity of that model's personality, but he does not love exemplification itself. The Chief is then the icon of a developed, but still immediate relation to example; he knows that he must be independent of the origin of his voice (i.e., he cannot become a mere imitator of McMurphy), but he cannot formulate what shape that independence will take. The Chief cannot even pose the question of re-integration with his origin because his status as one of its products is not yet clear to him; in Kesey's writing we experience the Chief as one who is still being produced, as a voice still speaking, a voice without the sense that it could be the example loved by another.

Even Kesey, who perhaps can see that the Chief is his own example, cannot be characterized as a lover of example in the full sense because Kesey loves his examples (his characters) from afar and in an abstract way. In the projection of his problem and his speech into the voice of another, in imagining the voice as already achieved in another, he has disembodied himself. There is no identifiable voice of Kesey in the novel, but this in itself is not restrictive unless we are also excluded from any access to the lover because of the beauty of the beloved. We tried to see the relation between the Chief and McMurphy as representing the relation between Kesey and his narrative voice, but we were hindered here by the absence of any account of the differences between the two. It is impossible to treat such relationships proportionately if the original ratios are not somewhere displayed. The Chief's voice lacks an essential alterity which could allow Kesey's own voice to emerge in an indirect and ironic way. Example in the sense of character is thus limited by the necessary immediacy of the character's voice; to overcome his own silence the novelist must empower a character with a voice and so evade the paralysis of his own speechlessness, yet this same invented voice is incapable of developing any fruitfully ironic relation to its own source. In short, the novelist sacrifices so much in the evasion necessary for speech that the voice which emerges is immediately orphaned and incapable of accounting for its own incompleteness.

The theoretical subject, which we seek here, has in example the same opportunity for disappearance which the novelist has in his character, his narrative voice. Theory in the fullest sense (i.e., in the sense that it preserves the good of those stages it transcends) must sustain the tension between the love of lack (the otherness the example recalls) and the love of the full (the sameness the theorist finds in his witnessing). This amounts to the balancing of unlimited vacuum with limited

precision, without ever identifying the Same with the Other, or imagining that the precise is a lack. Rather theory must envisage what is lacking in the precise (in this case in the interiority of the psyche, elsewhere the limits of any method which refuses to interrogate itself) and what is precise about the lack (in this case the refusal of the modern to intrude into what he displays as other, elsewhere the belief in any disembodied intelligible). In short, this is to say that the theoretical attempt must be a kind of narrative, the narrative of the theorist's rise to and embrace of his own endeavor as exemplary. This would be to see theory as agency, thought as the highest kind of action.

The theoretical consciousness will resist the temptation to unstory the example by an appeal to expertise or to idolize method to the extent that it pretends that every topic (even its own inquiry) can be taken explicitly. In our own struggle with example it will now make sense to see the exegetical (the unstoried example) and the methodical (the example in the service of conventional limits) as the disrobed figures of what we have called the modern and the ancient. The ancient voice can be understood as an icon of the methodical because it sees itself as in the service of a speaker who has already defined the intelligible limits (epic convention, ritualization, the figure of the muse, would be elements in this mythically-grounded methodology). In the weakest sense the ancient voice would see itself as the work of a cosmic ventriloquist; in the strongest sense it would see itself as enacting the will of a non-human voice, as the selected inheritor of a gift.

The modern voice can be understood as exegetical because it thinks that talk with itself should be unequivocal (i.e., the modern has a precise, a methodical, an ancient conception of its own voice), that it should achieve a single voice as its outcome. Yet at the same time it is clear that this is also a kind of conceptual death because such a voice would finally generate no otherness, no character other than its own grammar. Thus the modern seeks to evade this emergence and confrontation with the death of its voice by remaining within its own example, that is within the character which confronts death as the writer's scapegoat and his hiding place. If the emergence of the subject from that fiction which is termed the "modern world" can only be seen as his dissolution, then the novelist's task is the avoidance and postponement of this appearance in the most artful way, even to the extent of showing another subject emerge. The construction of replicas for a kind of existential dismemberment makes the modern a consciousness intoxicated with its own escape to the extent that the icons generated by that escape seduce the hearers of such a speech into deifying the source of this almost ritual sacrifice. The modern novelist is our Bromius and we his Pentheus; having pursued the fugitive author into

the circularity of his own origin, we find only a landscape strewn with dismembered replicas and somewhere nearby we sense, but never see, a smirk.

## NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (Markham, Ontario: Penguin), 52-3.
2. Arendt, *op. cit.*, 109.
3. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books, 1973). Page numbers cited in my text are from this edition.
4. In an analogous way, any writer might be construed to be in his work in such a camouflaged way, or the origin might inhabit the particular by residing in it as something silenced by the particular's own concrete character.
5. Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 231-2.
6. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977), 96.
7. Lacan, *op. cit.*, 207.
8. Russel Hoban, *Riddley Walker* (New York: Summit Books, 1980), 17.
9. Lacan, *op. cit.*, 75.
10. Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 101.
11. Arendt, *op. cit.*, 152. Here the inarticulate character of principle is discussed and distinguished from the action it engenders.
12. Thomas Scally, "The Epic Future" in *Maieutics* (Winter, 1981), 86-110.
13. Arendt, *op. cit.*, 169.