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Misreading Criticism

I The Critic Conceived

It is difficult . . . to demonstrate sufficiently anything of real importance without the use of examples. Every one of us is like a man who sees things in a dream and thinks he knows them perfectly and then wakes up, as it were to find he knows nothing . . . Example, my good friend, (also) has been found to require an example.¹

Gerard Genette², in attempting to reconcile the two strains of contemporary literary criticism, the hermeneutic and the structural, examines a particular idea of criticism. He calls this criticism “paradigmatic” or “pure” criticism because in it authors and their works still appear “. . . but only as cases or examples of literary phenomena, which exceed them and for which they become a kind of index . . .” (65) To study the work of an author for such a “pure” criticism would be to study a certain idea of *genius* for which one could borrow various characteristics from the individual author, but which would not have the individual creator as its object. This would be to study not “. . . a person, or even a work but, through this person and this work, to pursue an *essence*.” *Genius* would not be the only essence pursued by such criticism, but it will adequately serve as our index for pursuing the character of the inquiry which Genette envisions criticism to be. The relation between the critic and what he criticizes is understood by Genette in terms of an analogy: the critic is to the writer as the *bricoleur* is to the engineer. (5) This means criticism has a distinctly secondary character in that it uses the same materials as the writer (i.e., the produced work of literature) for its own purposes; the critic breaks down and modifies existing structures, extracts useful parts, and re-integrates these as elements in his own literary creation. The critic-*bricoleur* literally deconstructs what is given and re-assembles it anew. The critic’s relation to literature duplicates one of the principal relations within literature itself in that criticism is related to literature in a

figurative way. Just as a given author may use the signs of language in other than a literal sense, so too the critic employs already given elements for new purposes. The critic's activity of interpretation is like a figurative expression replacing a literal one; criticism is itself a figure, or as Genette says, "a sense of figure." (54) Criticism is, first of all, *figuration*; so described, it asserts its kinship with those creations it takes as its material.

We are initially suspicious of such high-handed treatment of author and text because of the possibility that this is a kind of violation, i.e., the violation of the property or product of another. Pure criticism seems to be a ruthlessly instrumental use of literature which disregards the mark of individuality left by each creator upon his creation. We overcome this suspicion when we realize that far from being the author's possession the work is to be understood as requiring the author's absence.

... the author, the craftsman of a book, *is not precisely anybody* - or, again, that one of the functions of language is to destroy its user and designate him as absent. (66)

Genius is the shape that remains once the author completes his exit. The task of pure criticism is to dissolve or displace what is ordinarily called the subject and to seek the invisible genius of his work. Genette calls the achieved essences of criticism *forms*, both in the sense of forms of experience and forms of expression. These two-sided structures, theme-forms, are conceived to be the objects of a new criticism or a new rhetoric (68) and are the real content of the traditional notion of style. (71)

Genette then tries to imagine what criticism with this expressed commitment to essence would look like, or, given such conditions what the relation between critical activity and literature ought to be.

And one might define modern criticism ... as a criticism of creators without creation, or of creators whose creation is in some sense that central void, that profound idleness the form of which is outlined by their critical work in reverse, as in a mold or cast. (73)

The critic is one who seeks a space, a location from which to speak; he inhabits the form of another, but not in the sense that one would use a costume or disguise, rather he treats the proprietor as absent so that he might have a locus for his own thought. The critic exemplifies the imaginative space which first nourished the writer's own thought by indirectly re-inventing it in his own work. He imitates the shape or shadow of the writer's absence from the work.

... the true writer is capable of thinking only in the silence and secrecy of writing; he knows and experiences at each moment that when he writes it is not he who is thinking his language, but his language which is thinking him and thinking outside him.(73)

Thus the critic is not really a usurper of the writer's work, not really a *bricoleur* in a sense distinct from the writer. The writer himself only appeared to be the engineer; in fact, the only writing that is not *bricolage* is Language itself. Writer and critic are engaged in the same fundamental borrowing and the same search, the search for a place where thinking can occur. Any work, author's or critic's, is first of all a location where Language can think beyond its own limits. Any writer seeks to be Language's inside, to be, in his posture of idleness, an example of what Language itself conceives. Like poetry (92) criticism is motivated by the utopian dream of an identity between speech and what it says. Because criticism is figurative with respect to literature it is poetic in its impulse, seeking to narrow the gap between language and meaning. Like poetry this is the transformation of language into a new form, not so much by a deformation of what is, but by "educating" what is given, by inhabiting its center in such a way that Language is led to think beyond its own limits. Critics are then creators whose creation is a well-formed void, an articulate absence generated from the products of others. We have now, in a sense, come full circle; that is, it turns out that the preliminary differentiation between critic and writer cannot justify itself by means of the *bricoleur*-engineer analogy. Yet Genette is not simply claiming to be a poet or a novelist, but showing us that the difference between critic and author must be conceived in different terms.

We get intimations of these different terms when Genette tries to show how the movement and discovery of the place of thought occurs in his own writing by describing the motivating images which allowed his own particular version of genius to emerge.

It was thus, to take an example from my own critical experience (which will at least have the advantage of not compromising others in a theoretical enterprise of uncertain outcome), that I once thought I had found in French Baroque . . . some predilection for a situation that might seem to characterize both its "world-view" and . . . its rhetoric. This situation is the *vertigo*, or more precisely that vertigo of *symmetry*, an immobile dialectic of the same and the other . . . (72)

Genette here recalls how he came upon a *form*, a "way language has of at once dividing up and ordering words and things."(72) For the critic it now becomes paramount to attend to this *essence*, the vertigo of symmetry, rather than to the various instances which manifest it. The example from his own "critical experience" will itself become essential

when it is taken as a code or index of literary forms or essences. In other words, Genette not only treats the relation of critic to text as a figurative one, but even treats his own relationship to his "critical experience" as a figurative relation, that is, a relation in which he employs his own experiences of texts in a non-literal way. He treats his own initial experience of texts as an index or pointer on the way to essence.

This strategy of treating his own experience as if it were really not his own (much in the way the author's writing is not his own, but belongs to Language itself) is more clearly seen if we puzzle out the significance of the parenthetical comment in the preceding passage. The comment seems to say that because the example is from his own experience it will, by that fact, not involve others in any committed way in the pursuit of essence. The experience in question is "critical", but this too is perplexing because we do not know whether it refers to Genette's experience of doing criticism (the *bricolage* that is his trade) or whether he refers to a species of experience in general (in the sense that we all have critical or crucial experiences). The uncertainty about the sense in which the experience is critical is consistent with its intended effect; it will not compromise others because its character is unclear to itself. The presumption here is that in the development of theory we are always safe from what cannot be clearly identified; in other words, the implied claim here is that the personal (one's own experience) has no significant relationship to theory. What is, of course, unnoticed is that this claim is itself a claim about the relation between person and the pursuit of essence and so is a theoretical claim. Theory then, cannot include the theorist's problematic search within himself. Theory becomes desirable insofar as it dismisses as irrelevant the theorist's uncertain relation to his own experience. The critic in this way ignores just that relationship which characterizes the subjects of most literature. The actual body of literature will always fail to instruct the critic with any real knowledge; real knowledge will come only from his own detached constructions.

The other curious element in Genette's parenthetical comment is the view that others should be involved in a theoretical enterprise only when the outcome is certain. Because he is uncertain where his own investigation is going he describes his project by means of a personal example and by doing so treats others fairly by permitting them to remain uncommitted to the enterprise itself; we others are allowed to examine the inquiry from the outside in a disinterested way. We are then protected from any unforeseen miscues in Genette's inquiry because we are invited not to participate in it until it reaches completion. What can this mean except that Genette considers the process of

inquiry to be a personal matter and that it will only be of essential value when it appears as result? We begin now to see the source of Genette's view that literary essences are literary structures; his own critical activity is to be treated as immune to influence as long as it is still on the way. Only when it emerges as immobile form, as structure, will it be subject to our judgment (or, consequent upon Genette's sense of justice, we will not be subjected to it until it attains its pure form).

The theoretical enterprise Genette has in mind here may involve many things, but it will include some account of how the critical impulse is generated in the first place. To illuminate this process Genette gives us another non-compromising example.

In order to throw more light on this notion I should like to draw a second example, again personal and therefore in no sense an exemplary one. The form of the *palimpsest*, or super-impression, struck me as being a common characteristic of Proust's writing . . . , of the structure of his work, and of his vision of things and persons, and it induced in me . . . the "critical desire", only because it organized, in a single gesture, the space of the world and the space of language.(72)

What exactly is being termed non-exemplary here? Surely the form of the *palimpsest* itself is exemplary since it organizes all of Proust (or should we add "for Genette"?). What is apparently not exemplary is that critical desire in Genette which was aroused by the *palimpsest*. However, even this is exemplary in a way because it represents what lies beneath the text that is Genette's experience, what can emerge from it when uncovered. What Genette does not find exemplary is that he too is a *palimpsest*; it is unacceptable that he too be understood to be a mere element of what the form organizes. Genette refuses to see himself as covering over what is exemplary and seeks to eliminate himself so that his desire might become exemplary.

Although Genette solves the problem by eliminating himself, and so revealing the essential beneath the personal covering, what really emerges here is a new formulation of the critic. Rather than *bricoleur*, who dismantles and re-constructs the original, the critic is now taken to be a superimpression upon the original. The critic conceives of himself as writing-over and concealing the original text (the text he criticizes); he sees himself as essentially a substitute for and rival with what he talks about. The most appealing solution to one guilty of such violence (akin to painting cartoons over the surface of a great masterpiece) is to make his superimposition an erasure of himself; if the character of personality is eliminated from the *palimpsest* of criticism, then no identifiable voice will be responsible for the defacement of the work of art. In fact, the critic can now conceive of his work as directed

by the need for transparency; not only does the critic himself seek absence, but the very language which permits his exit also attempts to erase itself so that we can see, through the window of critical speech, Language consorting with itself; the critic is not himself *voyeur*, but openly assists the eyes of those who would be. For Genette the image of the *palimpsest* is exemplary, because it orders the world of Proust; for us the image is exemplary because it allows us to organize the world of Genette and the critic. What is not acknowledged in either case is that Proust has ordered both Genette and ourselves by already imagining each concealing the other, that is, by treating super-impression and concealment as essential elements in any intelligible ordering of discourse.

We can then see why Genette sounds as if he sacrifices himself when he writes criticism; because the critical enterprise is conceived as the inscription of one text over an already existing text, the critic is then potentially guilty of obscuring what is exemplary in the original. If he is to be exemplary in his own relation to the exemplary then he must imagine himself as obligated to eliminate himself. The critic is then a willing victim of the text's continuance, a transparent space of appearance for Language's attempt to exceed itself.

These two remembrances are also examples of how Genette came to think of his examples; the critic finds his motivation in these examples from literature (these are exemplary), yet the remembrances themselves are not exemplary, but have the status of occasions or situations in which the exemplary emerged. These non-exemplary examples are valued by Genette because they called him forth toward the exemplary. We might begin to ask why such a treatment of examples appears rational to Genette; why does he find it necessary to supply us with examples which he tells us are untouchable or at least irrelevant for theory?

Our own discourse here will be many-layered because we will try to imagine what rationality directs that subject who not only takes examples as his beginning, but who also seeks to protect us from them while inscribing the exemplary within them. We seem at first to be imagining a subject who would keep us from what we seek until he can deliver it to us. What we see at first is that the consciousness of the critic displays an interest in separating the exemplary from the personal; these stand to each other as form stands to inspiration or motive. Genette discovers in the wholeness of the form (the vertigo and the *palimpsest*) the integrity of his own project as a critic. The critic, too, is "one who writes and is silent" (73), one who has abandoned his personality to the exemplary dimension of the form. This interest in separating the personal from the exemplary is due to the opinion that there is some-

thing deceptive in the idiosyncrasy of the personal and that it must be supplemented by the clarity of an already achieved theory if it is to be allowed to appear at all. He requires of his "personal" examples, and so of himself, that they become marks of genius, not self-deceptions; he attempts to turn these examples of the inside into examples of the outside. In short, he attempts to turn himself inside-out by transforming the internal intensity of the experience to form into the form's objective character. This move from the personal to the exemplary is analogous to the writer's move from author to voice in such a way that the subject who writes is no identifiable person, but more like a special function of language itself, a special tropism of language trying to exceed itself within and around that space that once was the author's now-departed consciousness. There is then something funereal, perhaps even morbid, about the critic's project in that he only begins to flourish given a figurative necrosis within language itself.

When the example is exemplary it will, according to the critic, maintain the split or gap between language and what it says; the example becomes the sustaining figure, the standard to which the critic directs his desire. A writer's work is to be understood as the obverse of this gap, an embodiment of the space which the example energizes.

The critic as *bricoleur*, as one who begins with the already given, is not in this respect different from anyone who seeks entry into a discourse already completed; he shares qualities with any other outsiders who position their own thought in such a way as to gain access to the discourse of another. To aim at penetrating the particularity of this other discourse so that its personal center is revealed would be to confuse the exemplary with the psychological. It is this very confusion that Genette seeks to avoid in his distinction between the personal and the exemplary. The modern critic seeks to be an initiator, not an auxiliary to the writer, for there is finally no one who initiates out of nothing. All who write initiate out of the personal and all gain their motion from the private force of the example's opening out to the form. Genette tries to locate the author-subject (including the critic) within language, that is, as a function of language. To do so he must appeal to the creativity or productivity of language itself for in this way he can describe language as speaking the writer. This view of writing is almost a duplicate of that in many modern novels where the subject at the origin of the voice is not determinable, but rather is a non-recuperable impersonal other. The extreme form of this is when displacement or absence itself is taken as the center. In all these cases the form is conceived as *figure* and so as shaped or closed, yet novels are known to be inadequate in their achievement of form.³ The best novels

are finally ironic about the writer's failure to close the figure into the recognizable shape.

II The Inconceivable Made Clear

The movement we are tracing in Genette (from *bricoleur* to *palimpsest* to disappearance) duplicates in its essentials what Foucault has noticed with respect to narrative.

Our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death. Writing has become linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life; it is now a voluntary effacement which does not need to be represented in books, since it is brought about in the writer's very existence. The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer . . . the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.⁴

Here Foucault seems to be describing what we characterized as Genette's disappearance, his abandonment of individuality for the sake of "pure" criticism. Genette demands of himself the same disappearance which he demands of his examples; in fact, disappearance, figurative self-annihilation, is instituted as a critical standard. It may strike us that we are in a somewhat odd universe where the primary breach of the rules is to be present at all. The author who refuses to allow his writing to execute him has violated an aesthetic standard and deprived Language of the empty grave it requires to respond to its own echo. However Foucault also reminds us that

It is not enough . . . to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers.⁵

We might well leave such a task to Foucault and focus our efforts on assembling the leading elements of this rivalry between literature and criticism for the purpose of discovering what makes the disappearance of the author necessary in the first place. In our own example we can see that Genette's relation to the personal duplicates in several respects what Foucault describes as the author's relation to his own voice. For instance, the anonymity and detachment that Genette seeks for theory (the refusal to include others until the outcome is certain) duplicates the subject's portrayal of the role of the dead man talked about by Foucault. In effect, we never attribute either art or theory to a person, except accidentally, but rather assign the achievement to the entombed

movement of his genius. In addition, we can see the *sacrifice* mentioned by Foucault duplicated in the self-sacrifice Genette finds is necessary for the sake of pure criticism, not to mention the sacrifice of the subject of criticism (i.e., literature) for the sake of isolating form. In short, the abstraction from self and individuality that Genette finds necessary to purify the critical task has a murderous undercurrent. Modern criticism has promoted a crisis of identity for both criticism and literature by dissolving the boundaries between critic and artist, text and author. Theories of the text become one with theories of the self (cf. Lacan), intersubjectivity becomes one with intertextuality, thoughts become things, figures (like authors) become functions of things (texts). The refusal to preserve such differences, or the claim that they are illusory, seems to generate transcendence or authority because the author and the critic, now disembodied shapes, voiceless functions, become filled with the voice of another, the voice of Language itself. At least, this is what is hoped. Thus it is as if neither really speaks but rather is spoken to or spoken through. Here the ancient notion of the muse, and the not so ancient notion of inspiration, are combined in the modern notion of vacuum as the precondition of visitation. This becoming clear, this transmutation of self into reflective lens, turns self into cinema. Perhaps we should take yet a closer look at Genette to discover how this transparency is achieved, how a protected lucidity can generate a transcendent authority.

We are interested in understanding Genette's relation to example, especially his view that an example which is personal cannot be exemplary. He has made it quite clear that the personal examples may give him the "critical desire" necessary to discover essence (what is exemplary), but this is not itself the same as the exemplary. Because the personal examples have in their first moments the power of pointing beyond themselves, they are in a way self-abstractive in that their personal significance is only appreciated when they are understood as requiring reference to the exemplary. Personal examples are first of all instances which have significance (because they signify), but which exceed their own occasional qualities when their reference appears.

Our own task also concerns an example, namely Genette, and requires either that we emulate his project and lead our example from the personal to the exemplary, or that we locate example in some different series of generations. As we begin to understand that subject who takes example as his beginning we realize that this subject is necessarily conceived as already beyond his example; the subject is already a middle between the personal (the subject for whom desire arises) and the exemplary (the desire in freedom from its bearer). As Genette situates himself in relation to the project of pursuing the

exemplary, so he also attempts to situate us for whom his work, he supposes, must at first be non-exemplary. Yet we who are interrogating Genette's separation of person and essence can refuse the invitation to fall into either category. We would not then be claiming to be already exemplary, but would be refusing to be characterized by this difference in spite of knowing what this difference is. We can then refuse confinement to either world; in fact Genette must permit us to be in no world at all for he allows us to absent ourselves from what we re-invent. Our first real test of Genette's view will be to see whether our own absence from Genette's world will make Genette become clear.

Genette claims his critical desire originates in the examples he terms personal; however, as we have already noted, there is an apparently more original desire which he does not question, namely, the desire to separate the personal and the exemplary in the first place. For Genette, that the personal as such should be taken as exemplary is irrational and inconceivable, because then discourse would devour its own beginning. In other words, Genette must suspect that a discourse which attempts to speak about itself, and yet remain within itself, would be a discourse that addresses no one and that finally would not know, but annihilate, itself. Yet this resembles, or *figures*, what one imagines about a writer when one takes up criticism. Whatever his reasons, Genette must see himself as already in a kind of dialogue, a dialogue in which the discourse which is exemplary is imagined to be addressed by the discourse which is personal. That the personal is "in no sense exemplary" indicates the level at which Genette considers the dialogue between person and essence to occur; they are worlds apart. In addition, we, who seek to be his interlocutors have already had our entrance into the personal proscribed by theory's imagined rule over its own origin.

In general, Genette appears to defend the personal, to protect the discourse of person so that the exemplary may emerge, or perhaps defend the exemplary against invasion by the personal. Genette does not really show us how the personal and the exemplary belong together; in fact, to understand the relation between person and essence in such a combative way indicates that they do not properly belong together at all. Genette defends the discourse of person and insulates it from the exemplary (because the enterprise is of "uncertain outcome"), since he predicts that the conversation resulting from their intermix will be digressive and, perhaps, will look too much like psychology. In this respect, insofar as significance depends on defense, Genette shares the perspective of other critics.

. . . Meaning wanders like human tribulation, from text to text, and within a text, from figure to figure. What governs this wandering, this errancy, is defense, the beautiful necessity of defense. For no just interpretation is defense, but meaning itself is defense, so meaning wanders to protect itself⁶

The interiority and privacy of the person must be quieted and ignored if the exemplary is to appear; we are to place no stock in these "personal" examples because they result from an imprisoned mentality, a mentality bound by the textuality of its own experience. Such a view takes the exemplary, the essence, as juridical standard, as a discourse which makes a charge or claim which person wishes to answer. However, person's answer is not of interest for in its isolation it understands the essence as *accusation*. In order that essence not charge person with insufficiency or fault, essence must be conceived as independent of individual instances of lawfulness.

In spite of the difficulties involved in thinking of the essence as juridical, even if we could justify doing so, it would be impossible to imagine such an essence as having any kind of immediate relation to person. It is at this point that Genette detaches one from the other. The essence by its nature has direct relations only to kinds and types, to those particular forms which might be embodied in the person but are never identical with him. Genette then concludes that essence and person have no relation at all. What is overlooked here is that the particular forms or types are related to person, that they gain their particularity only by having the double reference to both person and essence. These "intermediary forms", much like any mathematical, require both embodiment and essential purification.

In effect we are claiming that Genette has a questionable notion of the middle between person and essence; he divorces the "personal" example from the pursuit of essence without acknowledging that it is only by this medium that essence is achieved. Although Genette says he finds in the *palimpsest* an instance of an essence, a second glance reveals that what he has really found is an image of his own relation to essence. Were he to imagine himself as capable of being re-written by the exemplary, rather than separate from it, he would find in this re-writing, in this *palimpsest*, a way to measure person and essence. Genette, then, treats the particular as the personal, and so can only account for the appearance of essence as a chance event. In collapsing this difference Genette oversimplifies the speaker's relation to discourse for without such intermediate particularities (non-personal and non-exemplary examples or middles), the subject who finds his limits in the simply personal can only be terrorized into disappearance by the essence. For such a subject the middle would not be his own, except to

the extent that he might view the intermediate form as concealed and disfigured by the personal and so view the personal as baggage to be stored out of the way of particularity's leap toward essence. This view of the middle as concealed or covered by the personal could be rational only on the assumption that the beginning (the personal treatment of example) was naive and unreflective in the first place. In short, Genette would have to look at person in a mechanical way, as a voice which was incapable of a decisively chosen departure and so by its nature could not assist itself. The person is "in no way exemplary" for the person is altogether incapable of a decisive relation to its own conceptions. We begin to wonder if this is a person at all?

The combative understanding of the relation between person and essence considers the subject as helpless in the pursuit of essence because the subject is helpless about its own personal dimension. The subject hides from essence in its shame at being dispersed within a sea of purely ornamental examples. This posture requires that the interpreter be separated from what he interprets and presumes that particularity (the way to essence) is detachable from the endeavour (the person) which constitutes its reference to form. What one loses in this approach is that possibility in the subject for outgrowing the limits of the personal by becoming ironic about those limits. The essence can mean nothing to a subject closed off from growth, a sort of closeted dwarf confined with examples no one else is allowed to find relevant. Is it any wonder that this demi-subject, tainted by a self-deception which cannot be taken ironically, sees his own dissolution in the essence as the only way out? Better to be a non-personal essence than a non-essential person. Here the subject's power of concealment and deception (his capacity for hiding and reserve) has been mistaken for deception itself and is amputated in the service of the essence which the subject imagines to be without such weakness. What is overlooked is that the essence is only conceivable given the eyes such a hideaway provides. In short, this approach imagines the person to be merely a *thing*.

The martial moment in the pursuit of essence plays the order of person off against the order of essence (this is the subject interested in distinction-making for its own sake) and in this play deceives itself because it conceals from itself the need to formulate an all-embracing discourse (an essential discourse) beyond the imagined need for retribution upon the person's inherent limits. Thought takes vengeance on itself for not being all thought at once. The best such a combative subject could do would be to claim that its real interest had not been to conceal its particularity in the personal but really to strengthen it by beginning with the illusion of being unreflective in order to constitute

the most belligerent otherness possible. This subject would achieve self-development by watching this illusory self reach the inevitable cancellation which the resistance to naivete would demand. The combative stance would claim that it had concealed the character of its own beginning in order to re-direct the discourse to that concealment which is an element of all beginnings. This rhetorical ploy is sometimes called Deconstruction; here defense becomes an ideology, evasion its leading virtue.

At this point it no longer matters whether Genette thinks in precisely the way described or not for we are not required to engage in the kind of protectionist discourse which we find Genette exemplifying. We are, however, responsible for acknowledging the honorable character of his motivation; Genette casts himself as a self-less speaker whose "critical desire" for essence propels him from self to structure. His desire to be party to the dialogue of genius renders his own voice silent for he conceives language itself to be impersonal and by its nature purified of duplicity. He has a high *ideal* within which persons are not allowed. Any "personal touches" would always be identified as extraneous to the discourse and would at best be diagnostic clues to the speaker's biography. Genette is then the *heraldic* speaker, the one who is clothed as a person but who wants to be understood as the messenger of a voice beyond himself. This poetic impulse is an attempt to reach the exemplary by *imitation*, by duplicating that impersonality which his own limits force him to imagine that the exemplary possesses. In so far as the messenger is an occasional speaker, one who speaks only when sent, he is a speaker who reports what others tell him to say. In this respect Genette exemplifies the age-old tension between poetry and mathematics; his heraldry is inspired yet ruled by structures, theme-forms which are the distillations of a theory not yet able to displace the intuitions his poetic impulse requires.

Genette wants a criticism which aims at the achievement of form, or more precisely, theme-forms, those ways language has of at once dividing up and ordering words and things(72). The discovery of exemplary forms, essences, is the emancipation of the subject from both person and particularity (or, if we like, the emancipation of poetry from non-discursive intuition). We describe this as a protectionist policy with respect to the person as well as an unreflective mingling of the personal and particular. More importantly, we see this as the reduction of poetical to the mathematical, the absorption of inspiration into rule. For this speaker the standard, the exemplar, is a substitute for himself, a substitute purified of the idiosyncratic and disfiguring substance of the personal. We might describe this as a

figurative relation to the standard or exemplar in that the speaker expects the essence to speak for him. He imagines himself to be at his best when he has no voice of his own at all; his voice then acquires authority by a ruse of displacement, by the figurative re-location accomplished by assimilation into the essence. This is much like the more prevalent claim that ordinary usage only becomes intelligible when recast as proportional function. This is really no relation at all because one becomes the form itself or at least the herald or agent of its discourse and this amounts to the desire to be one's own standard. The speaker accounts for his own activity by evoking the muse of "critical desire" to explain his abandonment of himself. What the critic needs in order to rehabilitate his own voice is a deeper understanding of the essence's relation to its embodiments so that the appearance of the essence in the personal is not considered a misfortune or digression, but one of its own enhancements. The critic does not see that the opposition between exemplar and person requires a middle, a sense of example which is neither individual taste nor refined essence, but rather an intermediary, a messenger, which images the empowering source which is the intelligibility of both. The critic needs to develop the sense that the heraldic character of his own speech is itself a "figure of literary discourse."

The critic has a dialectical task which is not really other than that of any rational inquirer in that he must show how he has taken the measure of the relativity of person and the permanence of essence, or in general, the need of both Same and Other for interpenetration. Such an "in-between" is neither the inside or outside of subject or of Language, but is the plane of juncture which is presumed when any sides appear at all. The person and the essence come to reflect each other in such an intermediary form. That Genette in particular wants, though cannot articulate, such a synthesis is shown when he later discusses Benveniste's distinction between narrative and discourse (138-9). The objectivity of narrative consists in its absence of reference to any narrator, even to the absence of the narration itself. The subjectivity of discourse consists in the presence of a voice which acknowledges possession of the discourse. Genette notes that these two forms intrude into each other and that neither exists in a pure state. Genette envisages a criticism which would map the intrusions of one form into the other, especially the modern tendency to absorb narrative into the present discourse of the writer. What Genette is trying to imagine here is a projection of his own need for a particularity where person and essence might converse. This particularity has a name, *criticism*, but it as yet has no sense of itself, except perhaps the wonder that it might be

narrative without story, or the worry that it may end up being a replica of mathematics.

III The Storied Critic

If we attempt to develop this particularity, the critical figure, for Genette and for ourselves, we see that the defensive posture will be overcome as soon as we can readily treat essence and person as equals. This does not mean they are substitutes for each other, for we do not imagine the equality to be mathematical, but rather that each is able to find itself in the other. We imagine a conversation in which the personality of the exemplary becomes available to the essential nature of the person. To address the particularity of this imagined discourse demands that our own discourse be one which continually transcends itself in the sense that it will always be able to characterize and anticipate the moments in the conversation's development. Such a discourse will provide the boundaries and theatre in which the potential of the new conversation can develop. This discourse will then be narration, for its speakers will be moments of its own transcendence; to locate itself at the boundary between personal essence this higher discourse must construe the boundary as a primitive version of the whole. In other words the boundary between person and essence is only *between* for person and essence; for use the boundary is the *all* in so far as person and essence only achieve themselves when their need for each other takes the shape of a discourse about the requirements of each.

We have discovered that the critic treats example in the way he does primarily because he conceives of his struggle with theory as external to any embodiment in literature. This is not to say that the critic cannot imagine a caricature of himself in a literary work, but rather that he does not conceive of his own movement into theory as one of the figurations of narrative itself. When we say that the critic has a weak sense of the middle we mean that he has, of all things, a weak sense of story, in that he presumes theory to be external to any story he may understand. What the critic overlooks is that literature can embody that voice which inhabits the gap the critic presumes. The critic needs to imagine the boundary between person and essence as a speaker; in short, the critic needs to hear what is said in a making the difference between person and essence.

If we are to exemplify that speech that is the boundary between person and essence we must imagine difference itself to have needs and requirements; once we have imagined difference as able to speak for itself we can begin to develop a figurative relation to the opposition

between person and essence. The voice which speaks for difference must be conceived in such a way that it has the cognizance of the grounding particularities of both person and essence. This voice will seek to speak essentially and so will be high-sounding; indeed, the high-sounding, the vacuous abstraction, will be its constant temptation. At the same time such a voice will be able to restrain itself from the temptation of the high-sounding by continually acknowledging the appeal and the grounding power of its own examples. Genette, for example, feels compelled to give us "personal examples" yet does not know why. We now know why, for we see that the rationality of this boundary voice will not be *representational* in the ordinary sense that it will enclose difference in forms or patterns which are momentary inventions. This would be to reduce the relation between person and essence to a type of distinction (e.g., concrete-abstract, or sensible-thinkable) and would beg the question in a merely clever way, ignoring the fact that it was the problem of distinctions (the personal-exemplary) which originally generated the need for a voice whose concern is difference. The voice of distinction itself must indeed be *distinctive* but its distinctive character will lie in its power to rule over rather than to be subject to distinctions.

Our first step in imagining the kind of speech such a distinctive voice might make is to notice what it would resemble. It will at first seem to be re-inventing the person-exemplar enterprise which first brought the problem of difference to light, except now we imagine the voice to have difference as its essence, rather than thinking of it as an example of the difference (as we conceived the critic's voice). We are then imagining a voice that can *see* as well as *be* the difference that our example embodies. A thinking which is simply representational will always insert the difference between person and essence even when the discourse is nominally about difference itself. The difference between person and essence brings into focus the limits of the representational approach, any attempt to describe one order of rationality by the ready formulas of another. The most basic relation between person and essence can only be discovered when representation is reciprocal. Rather than a method one order uses to grasp and reduce the other, representation is better understood as the power of each to inhabit the other. Each order must be imagined as endowed with the power of self-characterization so that, for example, person does not simply picture or image essence for itself, but instead is able to represent to itself what it would become in the relation between itself and essence. What each order requires to be self-reflective about its relation to the other is a *daemon*, a critical voice, which conceives of representation, not as picturing or classifying, but as an *enabling enactment*. The

direct exemplification of one order by the other will always leave one accidental to the other when the problem is to discover the way in which each is necessary to the other.

Perhaps what is most instructive about our consideration of person and essence is the way in which each order maintains its sameness even when genuinely directed to the other. In the undeveloped relation between person and essence each voice considers its difference as detachable, as something which can be represented by the various forms which reside in its own sameness, but never imagines itself as related to the other together-with its own sameness; the person continues to be guarded and protected. To move the relation between person and essence beyond this representational stand-off we must imagine that both voices persist by means of a deep interest in unconcealment. The desire for disclosure of interest is really the affirmation of reciprocal concealment.⁷ We can then begin to imagine the relation between the two voices as sustained by the sameness of their concern for concealment; this means that person and essence must be conceived as texts and as readers. Each is able to read in the other the other's sense of the first's requirements. The combative moment is overcome when each is understood to manifest the difference of the other in its own sameness. Difference is then not obliterated by the cancellation of one by the other, but rather is now conceived as an element of the Same's own relation to Otherness.

For Genette, the writer writes and is silent because the relation between person and exemplar appears to be irrational, and to engage in discourse without first placing person in a parenthetical world would be to acknowledge assimilation or promote dispute. When Genette places the personal in brackets (both grammatically and conceptually) and so cuts any literal or figurative ties with the exemplary, what is forgotten is that this very positioning of the person and its examples is already both characterization and theory. Because Genette thinks of this positioning as natural and accomplishes it in an automatic way he never conceives of the bracketing as itself a theoretical move which requires examination and criticism. Instead he apparently perceives this separation as a pre-condition for any theory which will emerge. We might begin to wonder if it is not Genette's conception of theory which permits him to treat the personal in this manner. Since the locating of the personal with respect to the theoretical happens in an automatic and unreflective way, what this beginning overlooks is the possibility that it might mistake an impersonation of the person for person itself. In sealing off the personal from the exemplary the critic obligingly forgets that person, too, is an effect of his own characterizing power. What Genette is really doing is defining the limits of his own

theoretical movement without realizing he is doing so. In forgetting his own characterizing power Genette takes mere self-perception to be self-knowledge. To become party to the spectacle of the exemplary the critic's version of person excludes what is dramatist in the person and conceives person as pure audience, as uncreative with respect to the passing spectacle. What such self-concealment accomplishes is called theory, but it is achieved only by ignoring what is essential to the person, namely, the power of self-characterization. In the move from person to theory Genette seems to be unaware that he has already characterized himself as one who finds essential discourse to be impossible in person. Essential discourse, if not exorcized of personal demons, will always be subject to the suspicion that it is not the voice of genius after all. As genius is not the same as any work of genius, so theory cannot be the same as any work of person.

The critic, locked in the combative protection of person, imagines he can find the form or structure indexed in the work he examines, yet he refuses to find such form or structure in himself. Because his own desires are merely personal they cannot be understood as having the same coherence as is evidenced in what this desire seeks. The critic "motivates" his desire for the genius of the author by refusing to consider himself as a text that must be read, as a location where the exemplary can be found. Essence, for the critic, is the habitat of genius and the critic's ingenuity at locating its dwelling requires that he conceive of himself as vacuous. The critic refuses to let person challenge essence; the theoretical product must be cleansed of the very drama that engendered it. This mathematics is homeless.

NOTES

1. Plato, *Statesman* (377D), trans. by J.B. Skemp (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977), 36-7.
2. Genette, Gerard, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 64-5. Further references to this work are indicated by parenthetical page numbers.
3. Carroll, David, *The Subject in Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 80.
4. Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author" in *Textual Strategies*, ed by Josue V. Harari (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), 142.
5. Foucault, 145.
6. Bloom, Harold, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 82.
7. Blum, Alan, *Theorizing* (London: Heinemann, 1974).