help them change their situation, than do something in order to improve it. Sensing the need to replace an obsolete Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint, Federico Robles Chacón, an enterprising politician son of the bankrupt banker in *La región más transparente*, creates a new patron saint. Mamadoc, as she is named, is a mixture of Mae West, Coatlicue (ancient Mexican goddess), and the Virgin of Guadalupe. The absence of a protest by the Church implies its inability to curb the excesses of the government.

In Fuentes's future world, economic interests will prevail over cultural and national values. The Americans, with the blessing of the ruling party who profits from this venture, are waging a limited "Vietnam-like" war in the jungles of Veracruz. The states of Campeche, Chiapas, and Yucatán have been leased to Club Med so that the government can pay the interest on an ever-growing foreign debt. Ixtapa is the southernmost city of a new country, Pacifica, which includes the Pacific coast of the United States, Canada, and Alaska, as well as Oceania, China, and Japan. Mexico's fragmentation is completed when we read that Mexican and American states adjacent to the border have declared themselves independent of both Mexico City and Washington. Mexamerica, as the new country is called, serves as a buffer zone, facilitating illegal immigration and providing cheap labor.

As in *Where the Air Is Clear*, the protagonist is the collective whole. Though character development is not important in *Cristóbal Nonato*, it is significant that Fernando Benítez, dean of Mexican intellectuals, appears as a character in this novel. He is Cristóbal's uncle, a dejected elderly man gallantly fighting to maintain Mexican values and sanity in a crumbling society. On the other hand we find Homero Fagoaga, also an uncle of Cristóbal who represents the intellectual in politics: ineffective and self-serving.

Though other Spanish-American writers have experimented with language in a Joycean manner (e.g., Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Fernando del Paso), and with the self-conscious narrative found in *Don Quijote* and in *Tristram Shandy* (e.g., Julio Cortázar and Vicente Leñero), few come close to the linguistic play between English and Mexican Spanish, and in the manipulation of the interplay between reader, narrator, and story which we find in *Cristóbal Nonato*. As for the apocalyptic vision of the novel, some readers will probably dismiss it since it comes from a man who, after all, lives abroad most of the year and therefore cannot possibly experience first hand the present Mexican situation. Such readers will be surprised to learn that Fuentes's vision is the fictionalized account of what sociologists, economists, historians, and poets are also saying to Mexico's leaders: change your course or face disaster!

# Rereading Victorian Fiction: Steven Connor's *Charles Dickens* and James H. Kavanagh's *Emily Brontë*

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These two short books[1] use recent, still controversial critical methods to "reread" classic authors and works and "reread" such authors and works to show the use and strength of such methods. One comments closely on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* using exhaustively the most appropriate recent critical methods; the

[1] Steven Connor, *Charles Dickens*, Rereading Literature, ed. Terry Eagleton. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 184 pp.; James H. Kavanagh, *Emily Brönte*, Rereading Literature, ed. Terry Eagleton. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 124 pp.

other comments selectively on six Dickens novels using representative, characteristically postmodern methods: structuralist, semiotic, deconstructive, Lacanian, and Marxist.

Terry Eagleton edits the "Rereading Literature" series, and his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, with its Marxist "particular case,"[2] is a good guide to the range of recent critical theory behind these studies. A fuller guide comes from the bibliographical annotations of each study, to such metacritics as Jonathan Culler, Fredric Jameson, and Eagleton.[3] Eagleton ends his *The Function of Criticism* with this program for English Studies: ". . . semiotics, psychoanalysis, film studies, cultural theory, the representation of gender, popular writing and of course the conventionally valued writings of the past."[4] Other "conventionally valued" writers and writings found in the "Rereading Literature" series are the Bible, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Jonson, Pope, Blake, Tennyson, and Auden. Thus the series puts an important question about postmodern critical practices: do the authority and complexity of a classic writer's work, and of modern critical responses to it, reduce the most recent critical practices to tautology, modern critical perceptions out of postmodern bottles, or to irrelevancy or trivia? Connor's and Kavanagh's use, or abuse, of any particular postmodern critical practice, towards a stronger reading of any particular writing, can—as we shall see—open out the question, helpfully.

At times Connor's bibliographical annotations to *Charles Dickens* call to mind other readings, in other critical languages; at times we must provide them from our own reading of Dickens or from earlier Dickens critics as divergent as Marcus, Miller, or the Leavises. Often Connor is more pragmatic than competitive: "This book attempts to define and put into practice three different kinds of 'theoretical' reading of Dickens's work" (p. 1). Or later, "a first-person novel like *Great Expectations* would seem the ideal instrument to explore this assimilation of the self into symbolic systems" (p. 118). On the other hand, for *Dombey and Son*, "it should be possible, by reading this semiotic square as a symptom of a more fundamental one, to produce a structure which is 'deeper' and more stable, and therefore more likely to be able to contain all of the multiple transformations taking place on this surface of the text" (p. 28): or more generally, "problematic shiftings between metaphor and metonymy, presence and difference, are *more than just* linguistic issues: they are related to fundamental questions about the nature and formation of identity in society and to specific questions of authority and power" (p. 106; emphasis mine).

This tension between critical theory as end or as means gives Connor's triply armed vision of Dickens much of its interest and exemplariness: "The first section offers a structuralist analysis of *Pickwick Papers* and *Dombey and Son*, the second a post-structuralist or, more particularly, 'deconstructive' reading of *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, while in the third a blend of Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches is used to analyze *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*" (p. 1). With each analysis rises another tension characteristic of postmodern criticism: "But where the thematic critic might want to claim some degree of authorial intention or control at work in producing or maintaining these themes, structural analysis of the kind I have been attempting does not leave so much room for the author as a controlling agent. Dickens himself seems to be in the position of his central character, seeking to explore, absorb and contain a world of signs and discourses, but finding himself always a differential product of those signs" (p. 18-19). Connor articulates more

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[2] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), passim.

[3] Specifically, for Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), *On Deconstruction* (1982); for Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (1972), *The Political Unconscious* (1981); for Eagleton, also *Criticism and Ideology* (1978).

[4] Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso/NLB, 1984), 123-24.

honestly and clearly than many, the ambiguous difficulties that follow upon the alleged "death of the author." (The reproduction of Dickens's famous flourished signature on the cover of this study only intensifies the ironic "presence" of its title.)

What does Connor add to our sense of the powers and significances of these six Dickens works? Apart from his use of the "scientific" terminology of a chosen linguistic ground—he would say given—how do his "binary homologies," his "paradigmatic differential deep structures," of motion/stasis in *Pickwick Papers* really improve, say, upon even Clifton Fadiman's "archetypal symbols" of Cave and Road,[5] or other such symbolic pairs? For Connor "the issues of innocence versus responsibility or of passive suffering versus active benevolence which some writers have detected in the novel might be seen as the symbols or enactments of the binary oppositions" (p. 18); many of us would put it the other way round.

Connor's application of Greimas's semiotic square to *Dombey and Son* significantly complements other critical schemes of that book's social and moral issues and shows persuasively how such a semiotic could organize our thematic sense of any complex fiction, as could, however, other schemes and categories. It achieves, as does all rereading, greater structural, "paradigmatic" coherence at the possible cost of narrative, "syntagmic" energy. But for Connor, "the energy and direction of the narrative derive from the attempts made within it to generate as many variations as are possible within this ensemble of signifying positions, and is [sic] consistent with the need to mediate or resolve the main oppositions" (p. 43).

Connor completes his first, "structural" section by also applying to *Dombey and Son* Jakobson's much-exploited division between metaphor and metonymy, a division Connor turns to often. Out of this critical practice come two questions. First, how much interpretive use is the metaphor/metonymy distinction to a kind of fiction, or even an age of criticism,[6] in which—as Connor shows—the two categories, supposedly in "binary" opposition, can blend and merge? Second, as readers of Dickens, or of any fiction, do we pay too high an ontological price in giving up such interpretive categories as "symbolic" and "realistic" or "naturalistic" for the differentially neater, "structural," metaphor and metonymy? Not, of course, in a critical world in which structure has not shaped substance but has become all the substance there is; a world which, judging by his actual use of metaphor and metonymy as critical implements, Connor may inhabit uneasily. For *Dombey and Son* such structural matters are not always autotelic: "The reconciliation of openness and closure considered as a theme in the book is achieved by a reconciliation in the signifying surface of the book of the open mode of metonymy with the closed mode of metaphor" (p. 55). And by the end of *Charles Dickens*, "the struggle of meanings . . . though in indirect ways, nevertheless re-enacts the real struggles of men and women to understand and possess their lives" (p. 172).

Before "Conclusion: Reading in History," Connor has two chapters "Deconstructing Dickens" and two on the relation between "Self and System." From considering the "instability" of "closed" metaphor and "open" metonymy in *Bleak House*, Connor moves to explicitly poststructural, deconstructive, well-known Derridean concerns: the logic of supplement, speech and writing, presence and *différance*, and language as negation, and applies them to *Bleak House*. These concerns "disrupt the stability of the thematic structures" (p. 66) and thereby deconstruct "the opposition between the public world of Chancery and the private world of Bleak House" (p. 67). Such applications hover ambiguously between exact analysis and

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[5] Clifton Fadiman, "*Pickwick* and Dickens," *Party of One* (New York: World, 1955), 212-15.

[6] See, Jonathan Culler, "The Turns of Metaphor," *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 188-209.

rough homology or even allegory, by the end of which Connor's Dickens may have deconstructed Connor's Derrida.

Leaving *Bleak House* "deconstructed," Connor takes out of our mouths the obvious question, "don't we all mean more or less the same thing when we talk about *Bleak House*?" (p. 89) and reaffirms "the particular ways in which the conflict between presence and difference is established in texts, and in which the awareness of that conflict is then repressed" (p. 90). He retests this deconstructive theory against *Hard Times*, for which "as with *Bleak House*, metaphor and metonymy provide a good starting point" (p. 91). But again *Hard Times* may, by its "metaphoricized metonymy" and its "illusively" coherent Dickensian presence, deconstruct its deconstructors.

Connor's structuralism and deconstruction are presented as in part both provisional and prolegomenic: ". . . the problematic shiftings between metaphor and metonymy, presence and difference, are more than just linguistic issues; they are related to fundamental questions about the nature and formation of identity in society and to specific questions of authority and power" (p. 106), that is to say, to "self and system."

"Can consciousness therefore be considered as an entity in itself or is it more accurate to think of it as an effect of linguistic and other signifying systems?" (p. 110). For Connor, "a preoccupation with these issues structures many of Dickens's texts" (p. 137). More specifically, Lacan's "narrative concerning the psychological passage from speechlessness to language . . . is anticipated and embodied in important ways in Dickens's works" (p. 111). More specifically yet, *Great Expectations*' "attempt to find some integration of an individual self into social life" can, by using "Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic and his account of the passage from one to the other," be read "in a new and profitable way" (p. 137). How new, and how profitable? George J. Worth's recent Great Expectations: *An Annotated Bibliography* makes only too clear how much this critical ground has been trod; since 1940 with New Critical and post-New Critical zeal.[7] Thus Connor's phenomenological explication of the opening paragraphs of *Great Expectations*, his Empsonian exploration of the ambiguous textual career of Magwitch's leg-iron, and his rhetorical analysis of the divided point of view show exemplary care and thoroughness but in spite of the latest terminology do not in themselves surprise. More to the poststructural point, if too brief, his Lacanian rereading of Pip's *Bildung* calls interestingly to account both the interpretive strength and "scientific" authority of Lacan's post-Freudian, linguistically grounded "story" of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and of Connor's own move from "systems of signs" (p. 139) in themselves toward actual "alienating systems" (p. 144) such as "the capitalist world . . . of fluctuating value and unattached signifiers" (p. 143) and, one must add, social injustice.[8]

With *Our Mutual Friend* we come even closer to "reading in history," to Eagleton's "determinations of material history in the very processes of signification" (p. v), progressing from the Imaginary and the Symbolic toward the Real,[9] from systems of signs toward signified social systems. Now "the system which dominates the novel" is "the financial or economic system . . . of capital investment and return" (p. 146), while "language itself is also a very important determining system" (p.

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[7] George J. Worth, Great Expectations: *An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1986), 81-239.

[8] But see Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982), 338-95.

[9] Jameson, 383-95.

156). A slight but welcome shift in emphasis that collapses into "systems of signification, financial, legal, physiological, familial, and linguistic" by or through which "the centrality and authority of the individual self is continually destructed" (p. 158), by history. One way, but as Arnold Kettle and Raymond Williams have shown, not the only way, possibly not the most important way, of reading Dickens in history.

Crucial to the overall theoretical coherence of Steven Connor's *Charles Dickens* are the accumulating homologies between his separate structuring or deconstructing concerns: openness and closure, metonymy and metaphor, syntagm and paradigm, Imaginary and Symbolic, self and system. But beyond their working will still be the phenomenal, pragmatic, centering coherence of a postdifferential, postdeconstruction, post-poststructuralist, ever-present "Dickens"; who wrote and who is read and reread and reread.

For Fredric Jameson, "the only philosophically coherent alternative to such an interpretation out of the social substance is one organized on a religious or theological basis," and only one of them is right.[10] Conveniently putting aside Emily Brontë's remarkable poetry, James H. Kavanagh rejects all "transcendent" (p. 3) readings of *Wuthering Heights* for ones "in terms of social and libidinal energies" (p. 20) with which the book obviously abounds. Do such energies, then, take the forms and meanings Kavanagh gives them? Do such forms and meanings, in the special critical languages he feels obligated to use, add to previous, post-transcendent readings. And do they, in their new "social and libidinal" clothes, give a final accounting of *Wuthering Heights*' "curious form" (p. xi) and "considerable power" (p. 1), the concerns of all criticism?

In his "preface" Kavanagh fills two " 'gaps' that make this book precarious, and at the same time make it possible" (p. xiii). For the second, between "a late twentieth-century male" and "the writing of an early Victorian woman," he will "attempt to address questions of critical theory, of the relation of feminism and historical materialism, of history and the unconscious" (p. xv). The first gap, between "everyday 'natural' language" (p. xiii) and "the specialized language of psychoanalysis, structuralist and poststructuralist textual theory, and contemporary Marxism" (p. xv), rejects " 'commonsense' language as the unavoidable jargon of the dominant ideology" (p. xiii) for "a dense and resonant style" that is "a necessary part of the critical project in which this monograph participates," of "the reading of Emily Brontë made possible by this strategy" (p. xv). Theoretically more committed, polemically more insistent, Kavanagh asks more of our stylistic patience than does Connor, much more than, say, Leo Bersani. Does "libidinal energy" really say more than Bersani's desire,"[11] which Kavanagh also uses? Is Heathcliff as a structural "node of conflicting forces . . . who occupies one of the most heavily traversed character-positions" (p. 20) and a narratological "primary agent of the narrative work, of what we have called the text's libidinal/ideological apparatus" (p. 29) really less ideological, less parochial, less unavoidably jargonistic, more "dense and resonant" than as Bersani's post-Aristotelian "hero"? For Kavanagh there is no question. Out of the Fryeing-pan into the critical practice.

Suspending, willingly or not, whatever "discomfort" or disbelief Kavanagh's "different *words* . . . different *languages* . . . different *meanings*" (p. xiv) may call up, with Kavanagh's guidance we reread *Wuthering Heights* structurally and poststructurally to psychoanalytic and Marxist ends: ". . . recognition both of the inevitable, unforseeable return of repressed phallic desire within the Oedipal family, and of

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[10] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 401-04.

[11] Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976), esp. 197-215, 221-23, 229.

the constant cycle of disruption and renewal that capitalism—not the elements—imposes on the social family" (p. 96). Kavanagh conducts this project with energy and zeal, and a kind of completeness Connor's approach to Dickens did not allow. Some, however, take the inevitabilities and constancies affirmed above more as myths of concern than truths of correspondence. Such readers will assess Kavanagh's rereading not by its deductive, syllogistic coherence but by its inductive, empirical "hermeneutic" persuasiveness. Is this—forbidden question—how *Wuthering Heights* strikes us?

Kavanagh rejects earlier transcendent, metaphysical readings but does carry on two other traditions in criticism of *Wuthering Heights*: one roughly from Van Ghent through Bersani, the other roughly from Kettle through Eagleton. Combining the two lines, he would go beyond either. The socioeconomic conflict between Heathcliff and the houses of Earnshaw and of Linton has long been taken as not just a plot device of Heathcliff's melodramatic revenge; but instead as the embodiment of some kind of significant, signified historical forces. The social facts are there, on the narrative's surface; only their exact weight and meaning call for comment.

For Kettle, "*Wuthering Heights*, then, is an expression in the imaginative terms of art of the stresses and tensions and conflicts, personal and spiritual, of nineteenth-century capitalist society."[12] For Eagleton, more complexly, the "critical conflict" over *Wuthering Heights* "as a social and metaphysical novel . . . mirrors a crucial thematic dislocation in the novel itself . . . that is itself a profoundly social fact": "The novel projects a condition in which the available social languages are too warped and constructive to be the bearers of love, freedom, and equality; and it follows that in such a condition those values can be sustained only in the realms of myth and metaphysics . . . The actual is denatured to a mere husk of the ideal, the empty shell of some tormentingly inaccessible truth. It is an index of the dialectical vision of *Wuthering Heights* that it shows at once the terror and the necessity of that denaturing, as it shows both the splendour and the importance of the ideal."[13] For Kavanagh, however, responding to Eagleton, "*Wuthering Heights*'s much-remarked transgressive power lies elsewhere, in the risks it takes with psycho-sexual 'idioms' that threaten to destabilize the subject's imaginary coherence" (p. 12), as "it revolutionizes, renews, and/or restores the subject's imaginary identity, position and possibility within a disrupted sexual and social order" (p. 13). These psychosexual, Lacanian psychoanalytic concerns govern the argument of Kavanagh's "version of critical Marxism" (p. xiv) and the tendency of his bibliographical and theoretical annotations.

Among the best of an earlier generation of critics, Dorothy Van Ghent read *Wuthering Heights* less "interrogatively" than do Bersani, Kavanagh, or Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar,[14] and found in its symbolic form and archetypes: ". . . the first germs of philosophic thought, the thought of the duality of human and non-human existence, and the thought of cognate duality of the psyche."[15] But whatever its social, mythic, or philosophic resonances, in structure, theme, and characters *Wuthering Heights* is first and last a family romance in literary and psychological terms. Kavanagh's psychoanalytic rereading of this family romance, too long to

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[12] Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), I, 155.

[13] Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontes* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 120-21.

[14] Catherine Belsey, "The Interrogative Text," in her *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), 84-92; Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 248-308.

[15] Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Rinehart, 1953), 170.

summarize or paraphrase, is systematically, exhaustively, uncritically, almost obsessively couched in Lacanian terms and constructed on Lacanian principles, partly by way of Jane Gallop's *The Daughter's Seduction*.[16] Against all this, however, should be set Bersani's cautions: "*Wuthering Heights* is both almost embarrassingly vulnerable and astonishingly invulnerable to psychoanalytic interpretation," for "it is not enough to say that this sort of evidence exists in *Wuthering Heights*; we have to consider its *status* in the novel," and "to the extent that the novel does dramatize a fantasy of the self triumphantly 'leaving' itself for other forms of being, both familial drama and the sexual symbolism connected to it appear almost irrelevant to a gluttonous yet almost ascetic, erotic and yet sexless, passion for otherness."[17]

Kavanagh's psychoanalytic tunnel vision opens out some as he joins "the psycho-sexual problematic" of *Wuthering Heights* "with class and social concerns" (p. 49). In only too characteristic language Heathcliff, it is claimed, "enacts both the primal Father's incestuous desires and an oppressed class's resentful vengeance," while Nelly supposedly "enacts the phallic Mother's defence of the Law against incestuous desire, and a class project orientated towards moderate upward mobility within accepted parameters of class domination" (p. 51). But even granting these possible interpretations—and I can entertain their substance more than their style—the exact interrelation of these "economic and libidinal registers" (p. 50) is dangerously ill defined. What historical (Marxist) or literary (thematic) significance is implied by their formal textual interrelations and critical coupling? Metaphysical allegorical myth, classic realistic consanguinity, superstructural expressive causality, exasperatingly vague "homology," traces of the political unconscious, or what?

In some way, we are told, the book's "class and social questions . . . are *intrinsic* to its figuration of the Oedipal romance" (p. 56); its "major transformations are determined as much by its social as by its libidinal instance, by its 'infrastructure' as much as by its 'unconscious' " (p. 77). But no amount of hyphenative ("libidinal-ideological," "socio-ideological," "socio-libidinal"), conjunctive ("social and libidinal"), or adjectival ("oppressive phallocentric", "patriarchal elitist") coupling can, by itself, tell us how or why. Nor can the final full chapter's crescendo of terms of connection: "embedded," "symptomatic," "inextricably bound," "affiliated," "unavoidable association," and even a "membrane" that is "permeable." By Kavanagh's rereading of *Wuthering Heights*, for all the story's own narrative resolutions of plot and myth and property, we get beyond "the psycho-sexual and socio-ideological tensions that constitute the novel" (p. 96), and which are the bases and the strengths of Kavanagh's energetic, difficult, willed, controversial critical project, only to "a peculiarly 'produced,' imperfect and imaginary resolution" (p. 97).

# A Note on W.P. Kinsella's Humor

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The Canadian author W.P. Kinsella has published two novels and over one hundred short stories, anecdotes, and brief "surreal" sketches (which he calls Brautigans after the late American humorist) since he first began to publish fiction in the mid-1970s.[1] Kinsella revitalizes old images and situations (the joy of playing

[16] Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

[17] Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976), 215.

[1] For a detailed list of Kinsella's works, see Don Murray, *The Fiction of W.P. Kinsella: Tall Tales in Various Voices* (Fredericton: York Press, 1987).