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Variations: Influence Intertextuality, and Milan Kundera,

Jean Rhys, and Tom Stoppard

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis is in three chapters. Chapter one is about Harold Bloom's theory of the <u>Anxiety of Influence</u>. Bloom's argument is that literary history is shaped by the anxiety of "strong" poets at their belatedness. I show that he depends upon a subjective interpretation of literary production in order to defend a rigidly traditional canon.

Chapter two deals with theories of intertextuality, principally those of Julia Kristeva and Michael Riffaterre. As alternatives to theories of influence, neither proves satisfactory. Both founder on the contradictory goal to explain all literature, at the expense of recognizing literary diversity.

Chapter three concerns literary variations. These are texts which are deliberately premised on pre-existing texts. I focus on three examples from this class of literary texts which is not satisfactorily dealt with by any of the theories I consider. I pursue a less wide-ranging approach in order to unearth important features of literary variations.

Résumé

   Cette thèse consiste de trois chapitres. Le premier
chapitre traite de la théorie de Harold Bloom. Bloom
affirme que l'histoire littéraire est déterminé par
l'angoisse qu'éprouvent les poètes "forts" à cause de
leur naissance tardive. Je démontre que Bloom dépend
d'une interprétation subjective de la production
littéraire pour défendre un canon qui est strictement
traditionnel.

   Le deuxième chapitre traite de quelques théories de
l'intertextualité, en particulier celles de Julia
Kristeva et de Michael Riffaterre. Ni l'un ni l'autre ne
s'établit comme capable de remplacer les théories de
l'influence. Leur but contradictoire d'expliquer toute
la littérature, au lieu de reconnaître sa diversité,
affaiblit leurs théories.

   Le troisième chapitre traite des variations
littéraires, c'est-à-dire des textes que leurs auteurs
construisent sur la base d'autres textes préexistants.
Je me concentre sur trois exemples de variations,
catégorie littéraire pour laquelle les théories que
j'examine n'offrent aucune explication satisfaisante. De
ma part, j'emploie un méthode moins diffus pour mieux
découvrir les particularités de la variation littéraire.

"Why, blame it all, we've *got* to do it. Don't I tell you
it's in the books? Do you want to go to doing different
from what's in the books, and get things all muddled up?"
(The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.)

Introduction

This thesis has two primary concerns. The first is to examine and participate in an ongoing debate about the nature of the relationships between literary works. Such relationships have been a recurrent preoccupation of the literary-critical community for some time, and two theories dominate the discussion, to which I devote chapters one and two. The first is influence, which in its most extreme form has its roots in a view of literature which sees the Ancients as the source of Western civilization, and subsequent literary artists as forming merely a commentary on Homer and Virgil. The extreme form of its rival theory, intertextuality, sees language as a ubiquitous and quasi-autonomous force, and the principal motor of literary production, while banishing the role of individual agents to the margins. The debate takes place largely between these two poles, and often seems to take the form of a contest over a grand theory of literature.

My second focus is a sub-set of literary works which I call literary variations, and which I consider in chapter three by way of three texts--Milan Kundera's _Jacques et son maître_, Jean Rhys's _Wide Sargasso Sea_, and Tom Stoppard's _Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead_--each of which is overtly premised upon a pre-existing work of literature, Diderot's _Jacques le fataliste_, Charlotte Brontë's _Jane Eyre_, and Shakespeare's _Hamlet_ respectively. The

concentration on a narrower field stems from a dissatisfaction with theories of influence and intertextuality, and underlines the failure of overarching theories of literature to account for the diversity of literary production.

In chapter one I seek to unravel Harold Bloom's complex theory of The Anxiety of Influence, and to test his claim to have established a method of practical criticism. I begin by identifying Bloom's initial premise that the "post-Miltonic" poetic age is one of belatedness, and show that he is inconsistent in applying an historical framework to what he frequently claims to be a universal theory of literature. Belatedness is the source of the anxiety which Bloom sees as afflicting all "strong" poets, in a manner which is derived from Freud's "family romance." This anxiety not only explains for Bloom the "modern" poetic impulse, it also accounts for poetic *content*. The most productive distillation of his theory can be formulated as follows: belatedness produces anxiety which leads the "strong" poet to an audacious misreading of his "strong" precursor. His own insistence on what appears to be a deliberately subjective "misreading" of poetic history is, as I argue, plagued by the inherent contradictions of his specious historicism.

At the heart of Bloom's theory is his reliance on the wildly subjective categories of strength and weakness,

particularly as they regard misreading. Strength and weakness as he sees them, and as he relates them to misreading, cannot be defined, since strength somehow entails both an absence of resemblance to a precursor and a simultaneous echo of that precursor. A similar contradiction is to be found in his understanding of misreading, which at times is something that only "strong" poets do and at other times is inevitable and "necessary." It becomes clear that Bloom's way of resolving those contradictions is simply to lay claim to a pragmatism which effectively enables him to do as he pleases with a literary text or author. His "theory" is a profoundly personal one which entails overpowering a text in much the same way his "strong" poets overpower their precursors. His celebration of a deliberately perverse misreading only confirms the idiosyncratic nature of the position he adopts.

After exploring Bloom's ever expanding labyrinth, I move on in the latter part of chapter one to a consideration of the relationship between Bloom and what Frank Lentricchia calls his New Critical fathers and his poststructuralist siblings. In the process I show that many of his contradictions stem from his (anxious?) attempt to distinguish himself, both theoretically and stylistically, from these two critical camps. This analysis also highlights the difficulties attendant on any attempt to pin Bloom down to a consistent position. One area where it is

possible to find consistency in Bloom's writing, however, is his position on the canon. Here again it is a consistency not without contradiction, since he argues both that aesthetic judgements are circular and that the canonical tradition is a natural one. His anxiety in this area seems to be that old certainties would be swept away if we were to permit any discordant voices to be heard in what is a dangerously overpopulated literary world. In the process of articulating his position on the canon he is aggressively dismissive of both feminist literature and "black poetry," and the "dyslexiads" who are responsible for both their production and their popularity.

Running through much of Bloom's work on influence, not exclusively in his discussion of the canon, is a segregation of the fictional and the social, so that he distinguishes, for example, between the poet as poet and the poet as man. I point out in the final section of the chapter some of the negative implications of such a rigid separation of the two domains. In doing so, I look to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar for a fruitful way of repairing this flaw and building on some of Bloom's more creative ideas. Their notion of the "anxiety of authorship" of nineteenth century women writers is one which owes much to Bloom, who ironically would do much to perpetuate such an anxiety among those whose writings offer a diversification of tradition.

Having demonstrated that Bloom is unable to establish

either a coherent theory of literary relationships, or the
basis for a practical criticism, I move in chapter two to
consider some major versions of the theory of
intertextuality. I begin with Julia Kristeva, who roots her
theory in a celebration of Bakhtinian dialogism and
polyphony. She stakes out her position as being in direct
opposition to a view of literature according to which
language is transparent, and claims to concentrate on the
materiality of the text. One of the major weaknesses of her
theory stems from her failure to decide whether
intertextuality is a feature only of what she calls "modern
poetic discourse", or whether it is in fact fundamental to
all literature, as Roland Barthes at times suggests. This
ambiguity manifests itself at times in a false dichotomy
between "modern poetic discourse" and "classical mimesis,"
which depends upon a suppression of any pre-twentieth
century non-mimetic tradition.

One possible resolution of this problem is a
specifically genre-based theory of intertextuality. An
advocate of this resolution whose work I examine is Ann
Jefferson. She claims to follow Bakhtin in seeing the novel
as the basis for intertextuality, and in so doing rejects
Kristeva's historicism. The problem with such a development
is that once intertextuality is identified as a feature of
the novel genre, it must simply be recognized as a
commonplace. This is something which Kristeva resists

because of her preference for what she considers to be the revolutionary quality of the "modern polyphonic novel."

Another approach to intertextuality which I consider is that of Michael Riffaterre, for whom the intertext provides a key to the interpretation of texts, mostly poems. For Riffaterre the intertext actually facilitates the containment of a poem's meaning to a central "unifying matrix," which seems to echo the New Critical emphasis on unity, while also permitting very personal, even esoteric, readings of actual poems. It is here that I identify the main problem with Riffaterre's approach, namely in the divergence between his claims for a theory which explains how readers read poems, and a practice which continually attempts to supplant existing interpretations with his own intertextual readings.

After a brief consideration of some of the values underlying Riffaterre's and Kristeva's theories, by way of a comparison with Harold Bloom, I move to an analysis of aspects of the views of language which are premises for Kristeva and Riffaterre. I argue that the ways in which Kristeva and Riffaterre seek to differentiate between literary and non-literary language are inadequate, and suggest that the notion of intertextuality is appealing precisely because of the frequent correspondence of literary forms to common ways of understanding human experience.

A central issue in the debate between influence and

intertextuality, and one which receives considerable treatment in the important anthology, <u>Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History</u>, is the question of human agency. By way of an analysis of Kristeva's demotion of the agency of the author-subject to the "ambivalence of writing," and that of the reading subject to a linguistic function, I argue for the adoption of Tilottama Rajan's distinction between "actively intertextual" and "passively intertextual" texts, a distinction which I carry through into my final chapter. Before terminating the chapter on intertextuality I compare some of the different views concerning the relation of influence to intertextuality, showing that at times they are not as distinct in their practical application as theorists on either side might wish to believe.

In chapter three I consider the three examples of literary variations in turn, noting that this particular type of text highlights the agency of the author, who deliberately selects the pre-text on which to base his or her variation. I point out how each of the three variations appears to thematize the existence of a range of narrative possibilities, something which is underscored by their own relationship to their narrative pre-texts. It is from Milan Kundera that I take the category of the variation, and after elaborating on some of the distinguishing features of the variation it is to his play, <u>Jacques et son maître</u>, that I

turn. I relate his declared motivations for looking to the work of Diderot, which are rooted in a respect for the rational critical tradition of the Enlightenment, before focussing on the consistencies and differences between Diderot's novel and Kundera's play.

Kundera's political situation as a banned writer in his own country gives a new dimension to Diderot's philosophical analogy between the novel and "le grand rouleau" of fate. He concentrates on the act of storytelling, showing dramatically how the storyteller is implicated in the story he or she tells. One of the ways he does this is by removing the figure of the narrator, so that no single narrator within the play is privileged over the others. The recurring themes of love and betrayed friendship, and the various interpretations offered by teller and listeners, underline the fragility of any attempt to impose a single view of historical events, be they personal or political. It is only in the competition of several versions of a story, he seems to be saying, that justice can be done to what actually happened. Such a view is consistent with Kundera's rejection of the authoritarian imposition of history which is a theme in a number of his novels.

Of the three texts that I consider, Kundera's shows the least deviation from its pre-text, and I consider and reject the view which holds that it does not add a great deal to Diderot's novel. In addition to the movement towards modern

political concerns, Kundera draws attention to the relationship between his text and Diderot's, which permits Jacques an increased self-knowledge, while at the same time limiting his freedom of action. Not only does Kundera therefore bring his pre-text up to date, as it were, he also takes full advantage of the similarities and differences from Diderot's work.

Wide Sargasso Sea, which is the second text I examine, appears to diverge considerably from its pre-text, both in time and in perspective. I argue that, despite the apparent critical consensus around the view, it does more than simply tell "the other side of the story" of Jane Eyre. Jean Rhys complements Brontë's novel rather than supplanting it, by showing that socially established narrative categories, some of which are relied upon in Jane Eyre, are arbitrary and constructed. I draw on the work of Molly Hite in this section, and find much of value in her study, notably her identification of the ideological overdetermination of Bertha's madness in Jane Eyre, and its subsequent subversion in Rhys's novel. Again I see in the later variation an expansion of the range of narrative possibility beyond the pre-text and its tradition.

Before going on to look at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, I pause to consider the question of originality as it occurs in the critical reception of the three variations. In so doing I identify the widespread reliance on an

influence-based view of literary history, which tends to diminish the autonomy of the later writer. This leads me to question the desirability of a value-laden discourse concerning originality, which I do by means of Bruce Vermazen's essay, "The Aesthetic Value of Originality." Vermazen traces the history of the use of originality as an aesthetic concept, arguing that it is in fact inherently value neutral. Wherever originality is valued, he argues, it is actually a feature of the work which is being valued such that it is both good and original. Features that are original and bad or merely indifferent are not celebrated. I conclude that although it is necessary to consider the question of the originality of variations, insofar as one wishes to distinguish between a variation and a mere adaptation, beyond that particular issue any comments about originality need to be very carefully considered.

My approach to Tom Stoppard's variation centres on the obvious narrative determination of his play by Hamlet. Stoppard makes use of this literary determination both to emphasize the Shakespearean analogy between the theatre and life, and at the same time to show up the potential freedom of action within any unfolding story. In addition, Stoppard's play shows how the variation can transform events simply by changing the perspective on any particular incident. One consequence of this transformation to which I draw attention is the rejection of conventional or formulaic

categories of action, something which I develop in my analysis of Jean Rhys's work. The tragedians play an important role in this regard, representing as they do performance and repetition as against moral autonomy. The apparent breakdown of order which Stoppard's protagonists experience is a function of the human awareness of the simultaneity of potential design and potential chaos, and it represents an opportunity for the morally autonomous actor/agent, as well as a danger.

I conclude the chapter by drawing together the common features of the three variations and their relationship with their narrative pre-texts. I apply the suggestion made by Arthur Danto, that differences of literary style may betoken different ways of knowing, to the literary variation, concluding that the latter calls into question a particular way of knowing, which is dependent upon rigid categories established by literary precedent.

It has been my hope throughout this project to avoid the temptation of applying preconceived ideas to my material. This is where, I believe, some of the theorists whose work I consider fall down. There is a fundamental distinction to be made between those theories which spring directly from a person's world view, and often make sweeping claims about a vast canvas, and the more modest responses to a more limited amount of material. I have tried to make my thesis conform to the latter category, in the hope that it

would be more useful.

Chapter One

Any contemporary discussion of influence and intertextuality must inevitably include the work of Harold Bloom. Bloom's suggestive theory has had a powerful impact, both practical and polemical, on debates ranging from literary creativity to canon-formation. Predominantly by way of his tetralogy of poetic influence,[1] he has sought to create space for his own view of literary history. This view is informed by a whole range of acknowledged "precursors"--among them Nietzsche, Freud, Vico and Emerson--as well as by Gnosticism and the Kabbalah. In addition, observers have seen the more repressed influences of Northrop Frye, M.H. Abrams, and the New Critics (e.g. Lentricchia 319-21; Axelrod 291).

Bloom's theory makes claims to a universal practicality, while also acknowledging the deeply personal nature of every poetic and critical "misreading." This is not the only contradiction: Bloom is torn between an avowedly humanist project, firmly located in an affirmation of the subject, and a concentration on the Freudian "family romance" which highlights the unconscious, and privileges relations between subjects over the autonomy of the subject. The result of these contradictions is ultimately a failure to establish any universal theory of influence, which is mitigated by some powerful insights into literary history, themselves balanced by some equally powerful oversights.

Belatedness

Bloom's most important premise is that of
"belatedness." As he writes in Poetry and Repression:

> Vico, so far as I know, inaugurated a crucial insight
> that most critics still refuse to assimilate, which is
> that every poet is belated, that every poem is an
> instance of what Freud called *Nachträglichkeit* or
> 'retroactive meaningfulness'. (4)

He situates that belatedness in his earlier works in an
historical moment which he calls variously "post-
Enlightenment" and "post-Miltonic" (Anxiety 27; Map 78).
Such a view of the eighteenth century as the origin of
belatedness (or modernity) is widespread. It is described
by Susan Derwin as a turning point in literary history from
Renaissance *imitatio*, that is the copying of classical
authors, to mimesis, which entails a copying of nature (1).
In other words, Bloom focuses upon an historical period
during which a strong commitment to individuality developed.

The gradual identification which Bloom makes between
his theories of belatedness and poetic influence and
Kabbalah culminates in a relocation of the pivotal moment of
belatedness. By the time he writes Kabbalah and Criticism,
the third book in the tetralogy, he has become more
tentative about his history. At the very least, a tension
arises between the primacy of the post-Miltonic and that of
Kabbalah. Since he maintains that belatedness is crucial to

the Kabbalah, and since the Kabbalah becomes such an important (if originally unconscious) source for his intricate theory, he realizes the need to adjust his temporal frame. This he does in Kabbalah and Criticism in an uncharacteristic moment of uncertainty:

> The problem of original genius in any intellectual area, past a certain date (a date upon which no two people can agree), is always located in the apparently opposed principles of continuity and discontinuity.
>
> (38-39)

Belatedness is no longer peculiarly "post-Miltonic"; it has become for Bloom almost (though not quite) universal.

This shift in Bloom's historical frame at the theoretical level has implications at the practical level which he fails to explore. The underlying problem for his theory at this point derives from the tension between its claims to universality (rooted as it is in Gnosticism, Kabbalah, and Freudianism) and its apparent historical specificity in the period after Milton. Interestingly, his claim that there is no agreement on the date at which individual genius begins to take over Western literary consciousness is false. As I suggested above, most critics are content to accept the eighteenth century as the turning point (e.g. Derwin 1; Clayton and Rothstein 4-5), without obviously attempting to be too specific; and it has become a literary critical commonplace to identify the rise of the

individual genius with the rise of Romanticism in the second half of the eighteenth century. Seemingly because his theory is dependent upon such a consensual view of literary history, Bloom is not prepared to undermine it entirely by carrying through his claims about Gnosticism and Kabbalah. At best, this in an example of disingenuousness. One way he might have resolved the issue is to have characterized literary history as in some ways a cyclical process, or at the very least as not unproblematically linear.

Belatedness is important to Bloom's argument because it is the origin of any "strong" poet's anxiety. Since, in Bloom's view, the figure of Milton looms so large in English poetry, his successors are compelled to create space for themselves by moving that figure aside. Bloom turns to Freud for the terminology to describe this phenomenon:

> I am afraid that the anxiety of influence, from which we all suffer, whether we are poets or not, has to be located first in its origins, in the fateful morasses of what Freud, with grandly desperate wit, called 'the family romance'. (_Anxiety_ 56)

The inevitability of poetic influence is underscored by the analogy with the Father. A poet, as any other human being, he argues, has a father, and a father that _he_ cannot choose (_Map_ 12, my emphasis). The patriarchal nature of the poetic family should not go unnoticed, since, as I shall show later, it is fundamental to Bloom's vision.

Poetic influence, as Bloom is careful to point out, should not be confused with the work of "those carrion-eaters of scholarship, the source hunters" (Map 17-18). These are misguided, and above all outmoded. He is quite explicit and insistent on this point:

> The profundities of poetic influence cannot be reduced to source-study, to the history of ideas, to the patterning of images. Poetic influence, or as I shall more frequently term it, poetic misprision, is necessarily the study of the life-cycle of the poet-as-poet. (Anxiety 7)

It is already noticeable, from a few citations, that Bloom is apt to develop his own key terms to express his ideas. Some of these terms, such as the distinction between "strong" and "weak" poets, or the notion of "poet-as-poet," prove to be opaque and self-serving, ultimately undermining the value of his theory, as I shall argue later. It is sufficient for the moment to note that influence is by no means a purely textual phenomenon; it is profoundly rooted in the realm of the psyche, and stems from the anxiety caused by belatedness.

Belated Anxiety

Belatedness is the underlying cause. The effect is anxiety. As Bloom explains by way of summary towards the end of The Anxiety of Influence:

If this book's argument is correct, then the *covert subject of most poetry for the last three centuries* has been the anxiety of influence, each poet's fear that no proper work remains for him to perform.   (148, emphasis added)

Bloom therefore relies upon the notion of the anxiety of influence not simply to explain the "modern" poetic impulse, but also as a way of understanding poetic content. This appears somewhat reductive. True, he does not claim that *all* modern poetry has the anxiety of influence as its "covert subject," but "most poetry for the last three centuries" is a large category by any reasonable standards.

The nature of the theory as it is expressed in The Anxiety of Influence turns on what he calls his "six revisionary ratios" (14). These ratios are all given esoteric titles: "*Clinamen* or Poetic Misprision," "*Tessera* or Completion and Antithesis," "*Kenosis* or Repetition and Discontinuity," "*Daemonization* or the Counter-Sublime," "*Askesis* or Purgation and Solipsism," "*Apophrades* or The Return of the Dead." Their relative significance varies considerably and it is safe to say that the most important is the Clinamen, or swerve away from the precursor, which can be seen as representative of the whole theory of creative misreading, the term itself being a bizarre appropriation of Lucretius's language.

Of the other ratios, the least obscure are probably

Tessera and Apophrades. In the former:

> the later poet provides what his imagination tells him
> would complete the otherwise 'truncated' precursor poem
> and poet, a 'completion' that is as much misprision as
> the revisionary swerve is. (_Anxiety_ 66)

This is little more than a modification of Clinamen ("the
revisionary swerve"). Apophrades is the most avowedly
metaphorical ratio:

> I mean something more drastic and (presumably) absurd,
> which is the triumph of having so stationed the
> precursor, in one's own work, that particular passages
> in _his_ work seem to be not presages of one's own
> advent, but rather to be indebted to one's own
> achievement, and even (necessarily) to be lessened by
> one's greater splendor. (_Anxiety_ 141, emphasis in
> original)

As I have already suggested, the most practical and
productive response to the absurdities of Bloom's ratios is
simply to distil out the basic principle of creative
misreading or revision, embodied in the "revisionary swerve"
of the Clinamen. Otherwise, the consequences can be
entirely mystifying, as can be seen from _A Map of Misreading_
(especially 106-206). The distilled theory can be put quite
succinctly: belatedness produces anxiety, which translates
into an audacious misreading of a "strong" precursor.

Strength and Weakness

Bearing in mind the importance Bloom places on the distinction between strong and weak poets and readers, it would clearly be useful to establish just what he means by these terms. In what does strength and weakness consist for Bloom? An approximate synonym for his original conception of strength could be originality. It has to do with the extent of the "misreading." His statement in The Anxiety of Influence gives an early indication of this:

> Poetic Influence—-when it involves two strong, authentic poets,--always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. (30)

On this view, it seems that a strong, or original, poet is one who is bold enough to diverge from "his" precursor aggressively. A weak poet would then be unable to create sufficient space for "himself" to distinguish "him" from "his" precursor. In more conventional terms, the weak poet's work would bear a greater resemblance, at least superficially, to a precursor than would a strong poet's.

The obvious difficulty which is raised by this method of distinction is one of identification. How can one recognize the strong poet, except perhaps by process of elimination, if what distinguishes him is the absence of resemblance from his so-called precursor? Bloom does pose a form of this question himself, but offers a curious and

unsatisfying response:

> By hearing in his [the 'true ephebe's'] first voices,
> what is most central in the precursor's voices,
> rendered with a directness, clarity, even a sweetness
> that they do not often give to us.   (_Map_ 17)

Now it appears that there *is* a resemblance between precursor and ephebe (the ephebe is by nature strong), if only in the somewhat intangible way Bloom describes. There is even the suggestion that the ephebe's "first voices" are not entirely strong, precisely *because* the precursor can be heard in them. What is one to make of this confusion? Unfortunately, it is a confusion which not only continues, but actually increases.

The confusion centres on the nature of reading within Bloom's theoretical perspective. At times one is led to believe that it is only strong poets or readers who misread texts, indeed that this is a defining feature of Bloomian strength. He writes, for example, in <u>A Map of Misreading</u>, that a "poet interpreting his precursor, and any strong subsequent interpreter reading either poet, must <u>falsify</u> by his reading" (69). The explanation for this is unequivocal: "because every strong reading insists that the meaning it finds is exclusive and accurate" (69). He seems to be saying that what defines strong poets is their misreading of precursors. To accept this requires a generous, or at least unliteral "misreading" of its own, since it would be easy to

imagine misreadings which were neither strong nor poetic, at least by Bloom's standards.

Fortunately, Bloom does not, it turns out, expect our generosity on this point. Rather, he acknowledges that there can be weak misreadings. Indeed, it should not come as a surprise that weak misreadings abound, particularly in the judgements of other critics. In Poetry and Repression, for example, he contrasts his own "strong misreading" of Blake's "London" with what he calls "the weak misreadings now available to us" (40). Misreading is therefore by no means restricted to strong readers such as Wallace Stevens, William Wordsworth, and Harold Bloom.

Although the revelation that misreading is not necessarily strong comes more as an intuitive relief than as a surprise, it does leave the strong/weak dichotomy somewhat ill defined. It turns out that far from being restricted to the strong, misreading is ubiquitous, an unavoidable occupational hazard of reading, as it were. There are a number of hints at this in Bloom's writings (e.g. Agon 42; Repression 14), but he does not articulate it explicitly until Kabbalah and Criticism, where, in the section appropriately entitled "The Necessity of Misreading," Bloom writes: "Every act of reading is an exercise in belatedness, yet every such act is also defensive, and as defense it makes of interpretation a necessary misprision" (97). This applies equally to the poet-reader and the reader-critic.

We appear to be back where we started, that is
wondering how to identify "strong" poets or readers. Bloom
sets readers adrift, wondering about the value or aims of
any reading. By the end of his tetralogy, there are strong
suggestions of the radical indeterminacy of reading:

> A reader understanding a poem is indeed understanding
> his own reading of that poem....There are weak mis-
> readings and strong mis-readings, just as there are
> weak poems and strong poems, but there are no right
> readings, because reading a text is necessarily the
> reading of a whole system of texts, and meaning is
> always wandering around between texts. (Kabbalah 107-
> 108)

Such a remark would not be entirely out of place within some
of the theories of intertextuality which I shall be
discussing later, and does not sit comfortably beside some
of Bloom's more assertive judgements about the value of
certain readings and/or texts (e.g. Map 38; Recent Imagining
30-32).

A clue as to why Bloom might care to speak of the non-
existence or impossibility of right readings (whatever they
might be) can be found in Agon. There he argues for a kind
of pragmatism, after Rorty, which asks, as if to parody a
former U.S. president, not what I can do for the text, but
what the text can do for me. He says of such questions:

> I confess that I like these questions, and they are

> what I think strong reading is all about, because
>
> strong reading doesn't ever ask: Am I getting this poem
>
> right?   (19)

This statement offers us perhaps the most effective insight

into the nature of Bloomian strength.   Strength as a reader

seems to amount to overpowering the text, appropriating it

for one's own ends, while strength as a poet entails

overpowering the precursor in some macabre, metaphorical

manner.   This is made explicit in <u>A Map of Misreading</u>:

"Poetic strength comes only from a triumphant wrestling with

the greatest of the dead, and from an even more triumphant

solipsism" (9).   Echoes of a Nietzschean will to power can

be heard in these formulations.[2]

It appears that once one has realized the "necessity of

misreading," either as poet or as critic, one can choose

either strength or weakness.   The strong reader, perhaps

empowered by the knowledge that every reading is a

misreading, determines to misread extravagantly.   Bloom

writes in <u>Agon</u>: "By misprision I mean literary influence

viewed not as benign transmission but as *deliberately*

perverse misreading, whose purpose is to clear away the

precursor so as to open a space for oneself" (64 emphasis

added).   If one has a strong will, one will impose it upon

text and precursor alike, motivated by the need to overcome

the anxiety which stems from the belatedness I discussed

earlier.   Bloom apparently sees liberation in such

"deliberately perverse misreading," a liberation which is available to him as a critic: "We need to read more strenuously and more audaciously, the more we realize that we cannot escape the predicament of misreading" (Kabbalah 91). It is surely strength to turn belatedness and the "necessity of misreading" to one's advantage in this way.

While we may now have a clearer idea of what it means for Bloom to be strong, the problem of identification remains unresolved. It may be possible to define strong poets or strong readers, but there does not seem to be a clear way of recognizing them, particularly as we are all condemned to misread and to misread differently. Bloom becomes the sole arbiter of strength. In addition, there are no doubt many who would balk at the suggestion that a "deliberately perverse misreading" should be the mark of a strong poet or even critic. Others might allow this as a necessary condition of poetic strength, on a charitable reading of Bloom, but few could accept it as a sufficient condition. This is a serious problem for Bloom's theory, particularly insofar as it claims to offer a practical criticism.[3] On the question of strength at least, it is highly subjective, even capricious advice. This inevitably encroaches on Bloom's conception of the canon, indeed of literary history as a whole, as I shall explain later.

Critical Influence(s)

It has been my claim thus far that Bloom's view of the relationships that make up literary history is stated in terms of a kind of psychological battle fought by so-called strong poets against their own belatedness, a belatedness embodied in their precursors. I have also pointed out the incursions into Bloom's ideas of tendencies more frequently associated with theorists who direct their rhetoric against a subject-oriented view of literary relationships. An examination of theories of literary history with which Bloom either explicitly or implicitly interacts should explain the motivations behind his formulations.

There are clearly two principal groups of opponents which to some extent help to structure his arguments. The first I have already mentioned, namely the New Critics. Bloom is arguing, at times quite anxiously, against the idea of a poem's organic wholeness, against the idea of the text as an "aesthetic monad." As he writes in Kabbalah and Criticism, "...poems are truly triads, ideas of Thirdness, rather then monads, as the New Critics regarded them, or dyads, as I called them in Anxiety of Influence" (56). It is clearly important for Bloom to read poems and poets not as isolated texts, but as literary events, given shape by what precedes and indeed succeeds them.

He is also concerned to distance himself from certain post-structuralist tendencies, notably those which emphasize

the autonomy of writing. In <u>A Map of Misreading</u> he makes
specific reference to Derrida and Foucault, who, he argues,

> imply for all language what Goethe erroneously asserted
> for Homer's language, that language by itself writes
> the poems and thinks. The human writes, the human
> thinks, and always following after and defending
> against another human, however fantasized that human
> becomes in the strong imaginings of those who arrive
> later on the scene. (60)

Frank Lentricchia characterizes this two-pronged struggle in
a neat conceit:

> Bloom's warfare with his New-Critical father-figures is
> not so much given up in his later books as it is
> augmented by sibling rivalry, another well-known cause
> of family disaster. (326)

It is almost too easy to draw a comparison between Bloom's
strong ephebe poets and his own position, but he encourages
such a comparison by explicitly designating criticism as a
kind of poetry (e.g. <u>Agon</u> 45). This in turn pushes him
closer towards a Derridean position, perhaps not surprising
of someone who draws extensively on, amongst others,
Nietzsche, Freud, and Peirce, albeit willfully "misreading"
them all, especially the last.[4]

When, in <u>Poetry and Repression</u>, Bloom seeks to dispel
the New-Critical view "that a poetic text is self-
contained," he comes near to the post-structuralist notion

of "intertextuality" which I shall examine in detail in a later chapter. His somewhat didactic explanation runs as follows:

> Unfortunately, poems are not things but only words that refer to other words, and *those* words refer to still other words, and so on, into the densely overpopulated world of literary language.[5] Any poem is an inter-poem and any reading of a poem is an inter-reading. A poem is not writing, but *rewriting*, and though a strong poem is a fresh start, such a start is a starting-again. (3, emphasis in original)

Rhetorically, the paragraph I have just cited has much affinity with Kristeva and Barthes, but if one juxtaposes it with what immediately precedes it, the difference becomes clearer:

> A poetic "text," as I interpret it, is not a gathering of signs on a page, but is a psychic battlefield upon which authentic forces struggle for the only victory worth winning, the divinating triumph over oblivion[.]
> (Repression 2)[6]

Bloom here fuses two apparently irreconcilable positions toward poetic texts, one based upon a kind of Derridean *différance*, the other dependent upon an agonistic, inter-subjective literary history, and underscored by the romantic idea of achieving immortality through art; all within three pages (1-3). This seeming "dialectic" is never resolved.

Were it not for Bloom's explicit comments in which he distinguishes himself from New-Critical fathers and post-structuralist siblings (to borrow Lentricchia's terms), there would be moments when he would appear to be an ally of one or other of these critical camps. He is probably most successful in distinguishing himself from the New Critics. He clearly states in The Anxiety of Influence: "Let us give up the failed enterprise of seeking to 'understand' any single poem as an entity in itself." There is certainly an element of rhetorical bluster in this admonition, since, as Lentricchia points out, many if not most had already given up that "failed enterprise" by 1973 (Lentricchia 320). Lentricchia could, however, be accused of a kind of elitist naivety in his claim that New Criticism was dead by the time Bloom is writing The Anxiety of Influence; it may be true that scholarly journals had lost interest in New Criticism, but even today the praxis of New Criticism lives on in some classrooms and lecture halls.[7]

Bloom's attempts to distance himself from post-structuralists is less successful. He does seek to establish a "Primal Scene" which differs from Derrida's Scene of Writing, calling his scene the Scene of Instruction (Kabbalah 52-54). This scene has its origins in Kabbalah, which works with a different conception of language from that of Derrida's Of Grammatology. Bloom attempts to make the case that the Kabbalah offers an Occidental method of

analysis which confronts the question of writing as opposed simply to speech. Derrida denies the existence of such a method, and this is the source of Bloom's distinction. He relies on the Hebrew concept of the word as *"Davhar"* as being distinct from the Platonic *"Logos"* (Map 42-43). Bloom vacillates, however, between an apparent sympathy with Derrida's ideas, for example when comparing Derrida with "the great Kabbalist interpreters of Torah" (Map 43), and a rejection of the antihumanist implications of those ideas: "influence remains subject-centred, a person-to-person relationship, not to be reduced to the problematic of language" (Map 77). The result is, once more, confusion. One gains the impression that Bloom is not seriously engaging with Derrida, but, as so often, pragmatically using the latter's writings to suit his own purposes.

As Lentricchia implies, however, Bloom is ultimately hoisted on his own pragmatic petard. If his most serious attack on Derrida centres on the role of the subject and on Bloom's own attempt to present a humanist argument, in this he fails. Lentricchia makes the point effectively:

> Bloom's version of the self denies freedom and
> individuality, as it dooms the subject to one activity-
> -the endless and endlessly evasive expression of
> father-figure anxieties over which it has no control
> and which it finally cannot evade. In Bloom there is
> no such thing as a subject--only relations between

subjects: this is the lesson of the family romance.

There are important differences, but both Bloom and

Derrida present, the former unintentionally but as

formidably, antihumanist theories of the self. (336)

This is to avoid the contradictions within Bloom's theory,

however. What is crucial to an understanding of Bloom's

views of influence, as I have tried to show, are precisely

the contrasts, conflicts and contradictions within his own

thoughts, which help to make him at once outrageous and

reactionary.

The Strength of the Canon: Family Values

Luxury, then, is a way of

being ignorant, comfortably

An approach to the open market

of least information. Where theories

can thrive, under heavy tarpaulins

without being cracked by ideas.

<div align="center">Imamu Amiri Baraka[8]</div>

A major reason why Bloom is unable to resolve the

tension between textual proliferation and agential autonomy

is his commitment to an almost sacred body of texts and

authors. The most extreme manifestation of this attachment

to his canon is the distinction he makes between "strong"

and "weak" poets, which I discussed earlier. As we have

seen, poetic strength is the premise for an outrageous and

courageous misreading of a significant predecessor or precursor. Such strong misreadings result in the great productions of poetic history, or those writers that Bloom views as necessarily or inherently canonical.

The views of the canon which Bloom expresses are, as I have been arguing of much of his theory, self-contradictory. On the one hand, he offers the important proposal that aesthetic judgements are fundamentally circular. As he writes in A Map of Misreading, "Though every generation of critics rightly reaffirms the aesthetic supremacy of Homer, he is so much part of the aesthetic *given* for them (and us) that the re-affirmation is a redundancy" (33 emphasis in original). The consequences of such a realization ought to be a suspicion of the arbitrariness and conservatism of canon-formation. This is not so for Bloom, though. On the contrary, his suspicions are directed against innovation in the literary realm, particularly innovation which betrays the institution of the literary family, that is to say, any literature which does not (even subconsciously) share the same conception of literary history as he does or as he maintains "strong" poets do. In other words, he appears to be saying not that the aesthetic standards that we have inherited are arbitrary or circular, but that they are natural and essential.

In the chapter of A Map of Misreading entitled "The Dialectics of Poetic Tradition," Bloom argues for what he

terms a "power of conserving" (27). He sees poetic

tradition as the essential basis for continued creativity.

In other words, he uses his discovery of the circularity of

aesthetic judgements within the Western tradition not as a

call for courageous deviation from traditional literary

standards--something which we might expect him to welcome as

poetic strength--, but rather in order precisely to preserve

those standards, which he sees as being under threat.

When he says, therefore, "You cannot write or teach or

think or even read without imitation, and what you imitate

is what another person has done, that person's writing or

teaching or thinking or reading" (Map 32), he is not making

an observation about some ubiquitous intertextuality, but

rather he is volunteering a normative program for writers

and teachers, one which would preserve the security of the

literary status quo. Such advice should clear up any

confusion of Revisionism with Revolution. It certainly

makes for a re-interpretation of a statement such as that

made in Kabbalah and Criticism:

> A poet is strong because poets after him must work to
>
> evade him. A critic is strong if his readings
>
> similarly provoke other readings. What allies the
>
> strong poet and the strong critic is that there is a
>
> necessary element in their misreadings. (125)

What that "necessary element" might be is unclear; it is

certainly possible that it is really something arbitrary

which Bloom characterizes, ideologically, as necessary. It
might well be the same necessity which is described
elsewhere as "coherence," a view criticized by Peter J.
Rabinowitz: "books that are like other canonized texts are
deemed coherent by similarity, almost as if they shared a
club membership" (Before Reading 227).

Bloom develops his thoughts on literary tradition so as
to make a virtue of the very belatedness which is the source
of all anxiety. He claims that for the belated culture of
the present (which he appears to associate with what he
calls the "consciously late" Romantic period (Map 35))
tradition is essential: "Without it, we cannot distinguish
between the energy of humanistic performance and merely
organic energy, which never alas needs to be saved from
itself" (Map 29). Without the reliable standards of
tradition, he claims, we would be at a loss to evaluate
works of art. Is this an adequate justification for his
conservatism, however? The community he invokes by "we"
must be called into question. It could be interpreted in a
number of ways. My most benevolent inclination is to
understand it as an appeal to a temporal cultural community-
-that is, "we" in our belatedness,--but even this can and
should be put under greater scrutiny. It ultimately appears
to be a somewhat pathetic appeal to the simple security of
earlier and perhaps quieter times. Even on a charitable
reading, it can scarcely be said that an appeal to let Time

be the judge (see Map 28) will suffice when it comes to canon-formation. After all, Bloom himself is hardly reticent about his contemporaries, as his frequent comments on Lowell, Mailer, Pynchon, "black poetry," and "the literature of Women's Liberation [sic]" amply demonstrate.[9]

The founding premise upon which Bloom builds his theory of tradition and its importance is an unstable one. It is evident in his statement that, "To *write* poetry, in the past, was to *read* Homer or Milton or Goethe or Tennyson or Pound, and to write poetry these days in the United States is to read Wallace Stevens" (Kabbalah 102, emphasis in original). What he fails to consider, however, is that changes in social history, such as the gradual (but as yet obviously incomplete) integration into general social discourse of those who have long been systematically excluded, must also have an impact upon literary history. Far from recognize the literary historical moment in which he is writing for its remarkable enriching potential, Bloom hides behind traditional aesthetic categories, without ever questioning the connection which those values might have with particular political or social structures.

It is not that he fails to see the instability of his own contemporary history. Indeed, he actually predicts that Feminism will achieve a fundamental change in the literary canon. One need only see the terms in which he couches this prediction, however, or his projected time-scale, in order

to understand just how that makes him feel:

> I prophesy that the first true break with literary
> continuity will be brought about in generations to
> come, if the burgeoning religion of Liberated Woman
> spreads from its clusters of enthusiasts to dominate
> the West. Homer will cease to be the inevitable
> precursor, and the rhetoric and forms of our literature
> then may break at last from tradition. (*Map* 33, my
> emphasis).

While he sees that change almost certainly will come in
literary tradition, he favours resistance to this change.
His (avowedly reluctant) counsel, in this age in which our
belatedness is subsuming literary tradition (36), is to turn
to Milton for a universality that his theory of misreading
does not appear to permit. His tragi-comic peroration runs
as follows:

> Any teacher of the dispossessed, or those who assert
> *they* are the insulted and injured, will serve the
> deepest purposes of literary tradition and meet also
> the deepest needs of his students when he gives them
> possession of Satan's grand opening of the Debate in
> Hell, which I cite now to close this chapter on the
> dialectics of tradition:.... (40, emphasis in
> original)

To describe this as a misguided and inept universalism would
clearly be to belabour the point.

The restricted nature of Bloom's vision is most apparent when he discusses literature which does not meet the traditional aesthetic criteria which he so respects. He recognizes that his views are not popular, but sets himself up almost as a blind Justice figure, impartial to the ebb and flow of vulgar opinion, conscious only of the universal standards of tradition. As he writes in A Map of Misreading: "It would lead to something more intense than quarrels if I expressed my judgement upon 'black poetry' or the 'literature of Women's Liberation'" (36). He goes on to depict a declining literary society whose "mutual sense of canonical standards has undergone...a fading into the light of a common garishness" (36). He is clearly distressed, then, at the expansion of the literary franchise to both readers and writers whose conceptions of universal literary norms differ from those of Harold Bloom and his tradition. Once more it becomes clear that "courageous misreading" and "revisionism" have their limits.

In an interview published in 1986[10] he is even more outspoken on the subject of Black and Feminist writing. In addition, he marks a departure from his view of reading as a radically indeterminate process by distinguishing between true readers and what he calls "dyslexiads" (Recent Imagining 31-32). He sees himself as a clear authority over what is real poetry and real reading (presumably different from "right reading" which he claims is impossible). Real

poetry does not, for Bloom, include "most feminist poetry"
or "most black poetry," of which he says: "It isn't poetry.
It isn't even verse. It is just...I have no term for it"
(30 my emphasis). He has no place in his poetic value
system for what he calls "ideologues," and clearly his
tolerance of formal innovation is restricted to established
figures from the canon. The fundamental problem is that of
"overpopulation" to which I referred earlier. In an
overpopulated literary world there has to be a way of
distinguishing those texts which are worth reading and those
which are not (31). Bloom prefers to rest on traditional
texts, forms and writers, which he obviously believes to be
free from ideology and hence universal. Needless to say,
there is good reason to be more than sceptical of such a
position. Indeed, Steven Axelrod offers a convincing
interpretation of the ideology behind Bloom's "agon":

> Class is a source of anxiety for Bloom, and the
> literary history that results from his repression is in
> one sense an idealized fantasy: a meritocracy of strong
> poets in dog-eat-dog but fair competition, a liberal's
> dream of entrepreneurial capitalism. (290)

The Fictional and the Social: Worlds Apart

It is evident from the previous section, as well as
from Bloom's writings as a whole, that he sees a strong
demarcation between the poetic and the extra-poetic. While

considering himself to be a somewhat radical feather-rustler
for maintaining that criticism is as much fiction as is
poetry (Recent Imagining 17), he still carries with him the
ruling-class New Critical perspective that there is no
significant interaction between the literary world and the
social. His cryptic distinction between the poet as poet
and the poet as person (e.g. Map 17-18; Agon 120) is clearly
related to this aspect of what Thomas Pavel might call
Bloom's "segregationist" outlook.[11] Frank Lentricchia
describes this feature of Bloom's theory as "aestheticist,"
and sees it as a principal reason why Bloom fails to
establish himself as the humanist that he would like to be
(336). It is certainly a shortcoming of Bloom's theory that
he fails to take into account the social relationships which
inform poetic creation, and it is no doubt symptomatic of
his reliance on the Freudian "family romance." I shall show
in the next chapter that some of the theorists of
intertextuality also fail adequately to account for the
social dimensions of literature.

This missing social aspect, at least as it applies to
women writers in the nineteenth century, is taken up by
Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. They acknowledge Bloom's
sexism, but choose not to criticize him for his inexcusable
anti-feminism, probably because they have more important
ground to tread. They develop some of Bloom's ideas as they
might apply to nineteenth century women writers and arrive

at the illuminating notion of the "anxiety of authorship":

> the 'anxiety of influence' that a male poet experiences
> is felt by a female poet as an even more primary
> 'anxiety of authorship'--a radical fear that she cannot
> create, that because she can never become a 'precursor'
> the act of writing will isolate or destroy her. (48-
> 49)

Bloom's aggressive attempts to exclude from his canon those texts which do not embody the experiences which he considers to be traditional represent some of those forces which help to perpetuate such an "anxiety of authorship." Milan Kundera, whose _Jacques et son maître_ I shall be considering in my final chapter, could be said to have experienced a similar anxiety when the Czech authorities withdrew his books from circulation and tried to prevent him from writing. The example of Gilbert and Gubar's work, and its applicability to a great deal of writing which would be ignored if Bloom's admonitions were followed, shows that whatever the restrictions Bloom places on entry to his literary club, his theory does offer some interesting possibilities for further development.

Conclusion

It should be clear by this point that I believe that there are many shortcomings, inconsistencies and contradictions within Bloom's writings. His tetralogy of

influence, together with <u>Agon</u>, seek to establish a theory of poetic influence which accounts for "post-Miltonic" English literary history. In my view Bloom fails to establish anything which could be described as a theory. His distinction between strong and weak poets must remain a very personal one, since any attempt to extract general principles is doomed to founder on the question of what constitutes evidence for or against poetic strength. His deeply conservative view of tradition appears to transform his own premise as well as to undermine the value he places elsewhere in his work on the notion of an outrageous creative misreading. What is left is, as I have hinted, the personal vision of a creative literary critic with a deep affinity for Romantic poetry and its attendant individualism.

That is not to say that Bloom's writings should be ignored. His main contribution is encapsulated in the title of his best known book, <u>The Anxiety of Influence</u>, a notion which itself offers one possible approach to modern or belated literature, and which has provided a springboard for others, not least that of Gilbert and Gubar.[12] At his best, Bloom transforms "influence" from a mystical transference from the dead to the living into what might be called, borrowing the phrase from Charles Taylor, the "malaise of modernity," namely belatedness. He provides the basis for a study of innovation which he fails to pursue,

burdened as he is by his polemic with New Critics and poststructuralists alike. Finally, when all the contradictions have been identified, and the various claims evaluated, we should realize that literary criticism cannot ignore the relationships which form what we know as literature. To restrict oneself only to the relationships which Bloom himself considers important is not enough, because poets and writers do not restrict their writing in this way.

Chapter Two

The introduction of the concept of intertextuality into the language of literary studies was touted as a revolutionary overthrow of the oppressive hierarchy of the old guard. It promised to combine the rigour of the sciences with an understanding of literature as a social phenomenon. Some twenty seven years on[13] it is tempting to observe that the revolution has not yet taken place, and that intertextuality has failed to fulfil its early promise. There are several reasons for this, not least the significant differences of opinion over what exactly the term means. I shall explore these differences over the course of the chapter that follows, with reference to some of the major competing versions of intertextuality as presented in the writings of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Michael Riffaterre, Ann Jefferson, and various commentators on their work.

The principle area of disagreement over intertextuality is the extent of its applicability. Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, seems to hold the view that intertextuality is a genre-specific phenomenon, applicable only to the novel, by virtue of its dialogism. He receives support for this view from Ann Jefferson, who disputes Kristeva's reading of Bakhtin. Kristeva, for her part, although not entirely consistently, seems to take Bakhtin to be pointing to a more

general, unspecific, even all-encompassing intertextuality, a position which she shares with Barthes. I locate Riffaterre's position somewhere between the two, since he advocates a literary-specific theory of intertextuality, and in practice makes poetry the focus of his analysis. What these three broadly marked out positions have in common is their attempt to generalize across a wide field of literature. I shall show that such attempts are destined to fail.

Beyond a general mapping of the leading theories of intertextuality, I shall call into question Michael Riffaterre's claim that the intertext provides the key to the interpretation of poetry. My examination of Riffaterre's methods will reveal that, as with Harold Bloom, the claims which Riffaterre makes for a practical criticism are heavily value-laden. Indeed, the theoretical differences among the critics I examine often stem from the competing premises on which they operate, and, as I shall explain, nowhere is this more apparent than on the question of human agency. To round off my treatment of intertextuality I shall consider some of the views of those who have attempted either to distinguish intertextuality from influence or to "treat those two imposters just the same," before looking to another possible paradigm for the study of a particular class of text, namely the literary variation.

The Intertextual Dialogue Begins

It was by way of her introduction of the works of Mikhail Bakhtin to a Western European readership that Julia Kristeva first drew attention to the concept of intertextuality ("Bakhtine"). For her it was closely bound up with Bakhtin's discovery of a "dialogism" within the novels of Dostoevsky, that is a dynamic linguistic structure which allowed several voices into the novels' discourse, creating a "polyphony" which, according to Bakhtin, represented a break from the "linearity" of Tolstoy. In Kristeva's words:

> Cette dynamisation du structuralisme n'est possible qu'à partir d'une conception selon laquelle le 'mot littéraire' n'est pas un *point* (un sens fixe), mais un *croisement de surfaces* textuelles, un dialogue de plusieurs écritures: de l'écrivain, du destinataire (ou du personnage), du contexte culturel actuel ou antérieur. ("Bakhtine," 439, emphasis in original)

It is clear from this citation that Kristeva was rejecting what she saw as a traditional view of literature as the product of an author to be consumed by a reader.

Underlying her adoption of Bakhtin's ideas is an insistence on the materiality of the text, in direct contradistinction to the mimetic conception of literature whereby the text is somehow transparent, or at best acts as

a faithful mirror. As Leon Roudiez puts it in his
introduction to Kristeva's Desire in Language: "It [poetic
language] is the language of materiality as opposed to
transparency (where the word is forgotten for the sake of
the concept designated" (5). The images which Kristeva uses
to characterize literary language and texts all reinforce
her emphasis on materiality; she writes for example: "tout
texte se construit comme une mosaïque de citations, tout
texte est absorbtion et transformation d'un autre texte"
("Bakhtine," 440-41). She also speaks repeatedly, following
Bakhtin, of "polyphony" and "polymorphism" ("Ruin," 109),
and seems to echo in her usage the Latin roots of the term
"text" in weaving, while concentrating on the "productivity"
of texts.

In an issue of Communications devoted to the concept of
le vraisemblable[14] Kristeva concentrates specifically on
this "productivité", which she claims has been ignored in
Western criticism. She writes, for example:

> La consommation littéraire et la sciénce littéraire
> passent à côté de la productivité textuelle; elles
> n'atteignent qu'un objet modelé d'après leur propre
> modèle (leur propre programmation sociale et
> historique) et ne connaissent rien d'autre que la
> connaissance (elles-mêmes). ("Productivité," 60)

She argues that texts should be read and understood as
processes rather than effects, but she does not really

explain how that should be done.

It is clear that *le vraisemblable* is itself important to intertextuality, because it appears to provide a potential insight (albeit one that has been ignored) into the productivity of texts. The existence of the concept of *vraisemblance* offers proof, in the terms of Kristeva's argument, of the different levels of discourse which operate within the novel and which go together to make up Bakhtin's "dialogism" or "heteroglossia". As Kristeva explains, "le vraisemblable, sans être vrai, serait le discours qui ressemble au discours qui ressemble au réel" ("Productivité," 61). The referent of the discourse of the novel is seen not as some external object or series of objects collectively construed as reality, but rather as a series of pre-existing discourses, both external to and constitutive of the novel itself. In a material sense, that which constitutes the "vraisemblable" is not the discourse of the author-subject, nor that of the reader-subject, nor even that of the addressee of the narrative discourse. It is therefore identified as part of yet another discourse which loosely corresponds to that of the sociolect, the term used by several theorists of intertextuality to designate some approximate social store of knowledge or ideology, or what Barthes calls the "déjà lu" (*S/Z* 28).

Tzvetan Todorov, in his "Introduction" to the same issue of *Communications*, explains succinctly how a

discussion of verisimilitude invariably impinges on notions
of intertextuality. He writes: "Le second sens [du
vraisemblable] est celui de Platon et Aristote: le
vraisemblable est le rapport du texte particulier à un autre
texte, général et diffus, que l'on appelle: l'opinion
publique" (2). Jonathan Culler goes as far as to say that
the *vraisemblable* is "the basis of the structuralist concept
of *intertextualité*: the relation of a particular text to
other texts" (Structuralist Poetics, 139). And this view
receives support from Peter J. Rabinowitz (Before Reading,
74 and 227), and William Ray (Literary Meaning, 116). Again
these writers recognize a shift of emphasis from the
mimetic, or the relationship between the text and the world,
to the intertextual, that is the relationship between texts.
The problem with the position that Kristeva articulates is
that she is equivocal over whether the shift away from the
mimetic is a function of a particular historical moment, or
rather the result of the addition of a new theoretical
dimension (through Bakhtin).

A Novel Theory or Theory of the Novel?

Kristeva's most consistent position on this point is
that literature has entered a new phase, with writers such
as Proust, Kafka, and Joyce having transformed literary
practice. Indeed, she is at times quite explicit on this
point, for example in "Bakhtine", where she distinguishes

mere dialogism from the modern polyphonic novel:

> Une coupure s'est opérée à la fin du XIXème siècle, de
> sorte que le dialogue chez Rabelais, Swift ou
> Dostoïevski reste au niveau représentatif, fictif,
> tandis que le roman polyphonique de notre siècle se
> fait 'illisible' (Joyce) et intérieur au langage
> (Proust, Kafka). (446)

Later in the same essay, however, she implies that the
distinction is merely a matter of degree when she writes:

> Le roman *et surtout le roman polyphonique moderne*,
> incorporant la ménipée, incarne l'effort de la pensée
> européenne pour sortir des cadres des substances
> identiques causalement déterminées afin de l'orienter
> vers un autre mode de pensée: celui qui procède par
> dialogue (une logique de distance, relation, analogie,
> opposition non exclusive, transfinie). (461, emphasis
> added)

Nothing she says at the theoretical level, however, bearing
in mind the reliance she places on (her reading of) Bakhtin,
appears to give substance to the claim that there is
anything more than an historical distinction. This is by no
means a problem unique to Kristeva. Most critics who seek
to establish a new category of literature--be it termed
'modernist', 'post-modernist', 'metafictional' or whatever--
and to delimit that category within a period of recent
history are always faced with the problem of what to do with

the novelistic tradition which includes, for example, Cervantes, Sterne, and Diderot. All too often the reader is seemingly referred to the Emperor's iterative new clothes. Kristeva's resolution seems to lie in the disingenuous opposition "modern poetic language"--"classical mimesis" (<u>Revolution</u>, 58), which simply effaces any pre-twentieth century non-mimetic tradition.

One critic who resolves this problem, at least to her own satisfaction, is Ann Jefferson. She is content to see intertextuality as "having a central and genre-specific function in the novel" ("Intertextuality", 235), something which Bakhtin also appears to advocate, but which is apparently too imprecise for Kristeva. It is not that Kristeva sees intertextuality as a feature of other genres; she quite clearly follows Bakhtin in focussing on the novel ("Bakhtine," 449), but she adds an additional, historical criterion to her definition. It is unclear from her writings why this should be the case, and it might be said that the only justification for such a step is to distinguish herself from Bakhtin, her Bloomian "precursor".

The problem becomes a contradiction within Kristeva's work when she writes in <u>Le Texte du Roman</u>: "Il n'y a pas de roman linéaire, n'est linéaire que le récit épique, et tout roman est déjà, plus ou moins manifestement, polyphonique (polygraphique)" (176). The contradiction probably stems both from Bakhtin's distinction between Tolstoy's monologism

and Dostoevsky's dialogism, and from her own desire to favour a particular, non-mimetic style of writing. The idea that the genre of the novel might be closely linked to the concept of intertextuality, receives support from Jay Clayton. His claim that:

> the genre's typical subject matter--its focus on
> manners, morals, class, race, gender, and the
> constituents of the self--may prefigure
> intertextuality's emphasis on the role of anonymous
> cultural codes in writing ("Alphabet", 45),

is a convincing one, and few would argue that Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert, three apparently pre-intertextual novelists in Kristeva's frame, constantly invoke and at times undermine "anonymous cultural codes", not least the *déjà lu*.

> Ann Jefferson makes a similar point:
> Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (which I take to be as
> representational an example of realist fiction as any)
> is full of repeated disclaimers of specific novelistic
> conventions whose mimetic effect is complemented at the
> same time by the use of conventional realist
> strategies. Over and over again, the text draws
> attention to the differences between conventional
> fictional accounts of human emotions and experiences
> and the real or authentic version of these emotions.
> ("Intertextuality", 244)

It is interesting to note that while Jefferson in this essay rejects Barthes's *scriptible/lisible* distinction in favour of a genre-specific intertextuality after Bakhtin, she is closer to Barthes than to Kristeva in her insistence on the ubiquitousness of intertextuality in the novel form. One of the most frequently mentioned ironies of <u>S/Z</u> is Barthes's selection of one of the most solidly bourgeois mimetic novelists of the nineteenth century for what is effectively a discussion of intertextuality.

There are two points which follow from the previous observation. First, there are obvious political considerations in Kristeva's privileging of certain "modern polyphonic" novels. Just as Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence provided support for a restrictive canon, so Kristeva's favouring of Joyce, Proust and Kafka appears to drive her theory. This undermines the claim that intertextuality often makes for a democratization of literature. Jay Clayton explains this claim as follows:

> The novel's lack of decorum, its willingness to mix all
> levels of style, may look forward to the democratic
> character of intertextuality. And the novel's formal
> inclusiveness--its incorporation of history, biography,
> diaries, letters, court proceedings, and other non-
> literary forms--may prepare the way for the
> anticanonical impulse within intertextuality.
> ("Alphabet", 454)

I am not suggesting that Clayton is being naive or disingenuous here; he is after all explaining how theories of intertextuality emerged from the practice of the novel. The reality, however, is that even before Kristeva wrote about intertextuality, Proust, Joyce, and Kafka were powerful figures in the canon. Rabinowitz offers a convincing explanation for the actual conservatism of those who, like Kristeva, speak of subversion and revolution:

> Behind the valorizing of coherence, then, lies a preference for works with disjunctures, with at least some surface ruptures and inconsistencies. This preference is just as strong in New Criticism as it is in post-structuralism. The two critical camps may be moving in opposite directions, the former trying to smooth over the gaps, the latter trying to widen them; but their differing critical activities tend to be nourished in the same literary soil. This is why post-structuralism, in contrast to feminism, has not led to any significant shift in the canon, even though it may shuffle the respective rankings of particular writers. (Before Reading, 146-47)

In addition to the political aspects of Kristeva's position, there is an important theoretical consideration, which might explain Kristeva's desire to restrict the scope of intertextuality, at least on the practical level. If one pursues the implication of Barthes's or Ann Jefferson's

insistence on the identity of intertextuality with the novel form, the impact and importance of Kristeva's theory comes under threat. If, as appears to be the case in the view of Barthes and Jefferson, intertextuality is, as it were, a commonplace of the novel, then there is little for the would-be theorist to do once it has been identified. The observation, in other words, itself becomes a commonplace. Hans-Georg Ruprecht pursues this line of argument when he claims that Barthes undermined the concept of intertextuality by making it too wide-ranging (16). It is probably this eventuality which Kristeva is resisting in differentiating between those novelists whose work exhibits intertextuality and those whose work does not. It is unfortunate that in so doing she does not specify more clearly what distinguishes the modern polyphonic novel from its polyphonic forbears.

According to Thais E. Morgan, intertextuality extends far beyond the boundaries of the genre of the novel. She argues that:

> *culture* itself, or the collection of signifying
> practices in a society, *is radically intertextual*. For
> instance, we cannot explain music except through verbal
> language; we probably use hand gestures to support our
> discourse about music; we wear clothes that affect our
> interlocutors' response to our discourse, and so on.
> (8-9 Emphasis added)

While the examples she chooses are not entirely convincing, the point is a valid one, and one which many semioticians consider fundamental. It is difficult to imagine a situation where a literary work did not draw on knowledge of some aspect of "the collection of signifying practices in a society", as it is inconceivable for any meaningful or significant action to take place outside of any cultural context. Such a recognition underlies Culler's inclusion of "presuppositions" in his discussion of intertextuality (Pursuit 100-18). He combines the implications of the two terms by referring to "pre-texts" (118).[15]

Intertextual Interpretation

In contrast to Bakhtin, Kristeva, and Jefferson, Michael Riffaterre does not restrict intertextuality to the novel genre; for him it reveals the essence of the literary. Much of his work involves the elucidation of poetry with extensive reference to intertextuality, as for example in his explanation of Rimbaud's prose poem, "Bottom", through the "intertext" of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream (Semiotics of Poetry, 101-05). One of his numerous definitions of intertextuality runs as follows:

> Intertextuality is the reader's perception that a literary text's significance is a function of a complementary or contradictory homolog, the intertext. The intertext may be another literary work or a text-

like segment of the sociolect . . . that shares not
only a lexicon, but also a structure with the text.
("Interpretant", 41)

His explanation of the "intertext" adds an important
dimension of tangibility and specificity lacking in
Kristeva's writings. It is both easier and more practical
to imagine reading a text through the prism of an intertext
than it is to picture, in the manner of Barthes, the
"blending and clashing" of numerous anonymous discourses
within a single text (see "The Death of the Author", 146).

For Riffaterre, intertextuality is crucial to the
reading process; it is the key to interpretation. In order
to discover the significance of a literary text, as opposed
to its surface linguistic meaning, the reader must use his
or her literary competence (Semiotics, 4-5). The reason for
this is that literary writing is not simply mimetic (or
transparent), it contains what Riffaterre calls
"ungrammaticalities", which can only be deciphered by way of
the reader's literary competence. According to Riffaterre:

> Wherever there are gaps or compressions in the text--
> such as incomplete descriptions, or allusions, or
> quotations--it is this literary competence alone that
> will enable the reader to respond properly and to
> complete or fill in according to the hypogrammatic
> model. (Semiotics, 5)

The clear implication of such a statement is that the goal

of reading is to provide a "proper response" to a text.
This is a far cry from the invocation of revolution which,
as Morgan observes (24), was associated with the early uses
of the term intertextuality.

The attainment of this proper response is, for
Riffaterre, the result of a two-stage reading process. The
first stage is the "heuristic reading", during which the
reader apprehends the (linguistic or referential) "meaning"
of the text. It is only through the second, "retroactive
reading" that the text's "significance" can be grasped. It
is this second stage that Riffaterre calls the "truly
hermeneutic reading" (5), and the result is an arrival at
the text's structural unity, for, as Riffaterre says,
"whereas units of meaning may be words or phrases or
sentences, *the unit of significance is the text*" (6,
emphasis in original).

It is an unlikely event, one might think, for a
theorist who relies heavily on intertextuality to finish the
reading process with a neat and unified matrix of
significance. This is hardly the "unlimited semiosis" that
Peirce and after him Barthes and Eco have pursued. It
appears on the contrary to be closer to a New Critical
approach, and clearly amounts to an assertion of control
over the meaning of a poem or text in the way of a Bloomian
"strong reader". Although Riffaterre's analysis of the
process of reading could initially be thought of as an

empowerment of the reader, it seems instead to empower only one particular reader, himself. He is therefore vulnerable, though probably to a lesser extent, to the charges levelled against Julia Kristeva that she has abandoned the reader in her analysis of intertextuality, as I shall explore in more detail later on (Clayton and Rothstein, 21. Rajan, 66-68).

A number of critics have pointed to the esoteric nature of many of Riffaterre's readings of poems. As Culler puts it:

> There is clearly a tension in Riffaterre's writing
> between the desire to outdo previous critics by
> offering a new and superior interpretation, and the
> desire to develop a semiotics of poetry that would
> describe the processes by which readers interpret
> poems. (Pursuit, 94)

Hermerén sees a kind of "ideal reader" embodied in Riffaterre's writing (Art, 78-79), while Uri Eisenzweig is in no doubt that Riffaterre uses the full power and privilege of the academy to lend his readings an authority implicitly far beyond the reach of any "ordinary reader" ("Concept", 166). However it is stated, there is a gap between Riffaterre's theory and his practice, which inevitably puts either one or both into question.

Underlying this discrepancy in Riffaterre's writing is his somewhat confusing, not to say disingenuous, use of the term "literary competence" (e.g. 5). The linguistic analogy

is by no means exclusive to Riffaterre,[16] but his practice shows up a greater divergence of literary competence than one would ever expect in the linguistic competence of ordinary language users. In other words, he does not appear to acknowledge a (relatively large) group of competent readings of a particular poem, all of which are to be distinguished from those readings that are clearly incompetent, although this is what his terminology might lead one to expect. On the contrary, because he reduces the meaning of a poem to a single unifying matrix, often relying on some arcane literary or cultural referent or "intertext" to do so, the set of competent readings he envisages appears to be radically reduced to admit only his own reading. If an otherwise competent reader were to fail to identify the "key" which Riffaterre so consistently provides, then it seems impossible that the reading could be a competent one, at least within Riffaterre's own system of interpretation, since it would have failed to identify the poem's matrix of meaning.

Intertextual Values

The question which Eisenzweig raises about the elitist nature of Riffaterre's approach has implications for the theory of intertextuality. There are two points to be made here. First, if one is committed to a method of reading which recognizes the importance of other texts which predate

one's current reading, then the crucial decision to be made
is how to limit those texts which one can legitimately
consider. With Riffaterre, as with Bloom, the "intertextual
grid" is canonical and erudite, one might even say
deliberately so. Similarly, when Kristeva examines the work
of Lautréamont, in her <u>Revolution in Poetic Language</u> and
elsewhere, she looks back to Pascal, Vauvenargues, and La
Rochefoucauld, in a manner which is hard to distinguish from
traditional source study, as both Culler (<u>Pursuit</u>, 107) and
Hermerén observe (<u>Art</u>, 83). That is not to say that such
approaches do not yield interesting results; the rhetoric of
intertextuality, however, whether in Kristeva's self-styled
revolution or Riffaterre's semiotics, lays claim to a more
radical program.

While Eisenzweig perhaps doth complain too much about
Riffaterre's erudition, he makes an important point, which
would not be lost on a large number of prominent
semioticians (one thinks of Eco, for example). He writes of
detective fiction:

> Le récit policier est ainsi traversé, *dans son essence
> même*, par l'intertextualité. Est-ce à dire qu'il
> s'agit là de la manifestation suprême de la
> littérarité? Je suppose qu'une telle proposition ne
> serait du goût, ni d'un Michael Riffaterre, ni d'un
> Harold Bloom. Mais qu'en est-il alors du 'mécanisme
> propre à la lecture littéraire'? *Qui est-ce qui décide*

de la qualification, de la selection du corpus étudié?

(168, emphasis in original)

If Riffaterre considers intertextuality to go to the heart
of the literariness of a particular text, then in some ways,
Eisenzweig argues, the most literary texts would be texts of
detective fiction. Riffaterre's own "intertexts", while
showing an impressive facility with a highly specialized
canon (as Eisenzweig acknowledges (168)), are unlikely to be
those of any but the most highly trained academic reader.
In some ways this amounts to the imposition of artificial
limits on the sociolect which undermines the force of
Riffaterre's theory. Again we can see that the promised
opening up of the field is not realized.

In addition to this, and not unrelated to it, it
becomes clear that intertextuality is a value-laden term.
As Thaïs Morgan puts it, "intertextuality is no more a
value-free, innocent critical practice than historicism or
New Criticism" (2). Riffaterre claims that he is able,
through the methodology that I outlined above, to "account
for literariness in texts that hardly depart from non-
literary discourse", texts which, he argues, "would fall
through the net of conventional poetics" ("Interpretant",
47). In spite of this claim, the texts which he considers
have all long been established as literary texts and he
seems to be slower than many others, notably feminist
critics, as well as perhaps Eisenzweig and certainly

Rabinowitz, to expand the body of texts he considers worthy of study beyond those already entrenched in the academic canon.

Capturing the Essence of Literary Language

An important premise of both Riffaterre's and Kristeva's theories of intertextuality is that literary language is in some way special or unique.[17] Unfortunately, however, this presents problems when the repercussions of their theories are examined. Riffaterre considers literary language to be a special case of a kind of non-literal use of language. In it, the semiotic aspect surpasses in importance the mimetic aspect (Semiotics, 14). It is only once the reader has passed the literal or mimetic sense or meaning of the text that he or she can understand its significance *qua* literature; hence the two stages of reading which I mentioned above.

While it may appear to be intuitively correct to apply such a view to poetry, other genres do not so easily fit this mould. Indeed, there are several poems where the mimetic or referential force of the words are essential to many readers' interpretations. For example, the opening stanza of Maxine Kumin's poem "In the Absence of Bliss" reads as follows:

> The roasting alive of rabbis
>
> in the ardor of the Crusades

> went unremarked in *Europe from*
>
> *the Holy Roman Empire to 1918,*
>
> open without prerequisite
>
> when I was an undergraduate.[18]

The poetic form of these lines tells us we are dealing with literature. In Riffaterre's terms, the literariness of the text resides in its conventionally poetic form. The words of the poem could conceivably, however, appear outside of any obvious literary context (which might vary historically) and the very same language would not be designated as literary. Indeed, there could quite easily be two texts, identical linguistically and formally, one of which would be read, presuming Riffaterre's definition of the literary, as literary, and the other as not specifically literary.[19] In other words, the "ungrammaticalities" which are of such importance to his view of the reading process may not even be present in a text which might nonetheless be generally considered as a literary text. Alternatively, they may be present in many texts which he would not recognize as literary. Riffaterre does not encounter this problem, however, because on his definition only a text with identifiable "ungrammaticalities" would be literary. His definition is, in other words, a circular one.

This is not the only problem posed by Riffaterre's definition of intertextuality and its relationship to literature. While I consider his discussion of the

"intertext" which a reader may use to understand the significance of a particular text to be illuminating, I suspect that the same process may often be followed when reading a non-literary text. That is to say that just as I may use my knowledge of other poems, then other sonnets, etc. in order to understand Baudelaire's first "Spleen" poem as a poem, a sonnet, etc., so I would use my knowledge of the context or form of any other utterance (be it written or verbal) to decide, for example, whether I was reading an opinion column or a piece of sardonic, self-reflexive, journalistic satire. In short, we are back to a different manifestation of the problem which I identified earlier, namely that once the genie of intertextuality is let out of the literary critical bottle, so to speak, it appears to fill every nook and cranny of textuality and become merely a common feature of all writing (and speech as well).

For Kristeva, the situation is more complex. She argues that what she calls "modern poetic language", which as I suggested earlier is to be distinguished from "classical mimesis", "attacks not only denotation (the positing of the object), but meaning (the positing of the enunciating subject) as well" (Revolution, 58). She makes this claim partly in an attempt to distinguish what is different about Joyce, Proust and Kafka, as I mentioned earlier, but it is clear that for her there are other types of writing which achieve a similar effect. She writes

earlier in <u>Revolution in Poetic Language</u>, for example, that:

> Magic, shamanism, esoterism, the carnival, and
> 'incomprehensible' poetry all underscore the limits of
> socially useful discourse and attest to what it
> represses: the *process* that exceeds the subject and his
> communicative structures.   (16, emphasis in original)

There is a tension within this theory between the idea that

"dialogism" à la Bakhtine involves a polyphony of competing

discourses and the view just quoted, namely that a

particular type of language (even without insisting on the

historical distinction which the previous quotation might

encourage us to collapse) is of a radically different

nature. Dialogism suggests precisely that the essential

nature of social and literary discourses is the same,

although works of literature can and do often "quote" from

other discourses. It does not require a giant leap of

imagination to concede that other discourses, say the

political, often involve quotation and appropriation from,

for example, literary discourse. Again one is drawn to the

conclusion that intertextuality cannot be contained.

There are reasons to doubt whether it is true that the

language of Kafka, Proust, and Joyce attests to the

repression by socially useful discourse of the process which

exceeds the subject and his communicative structures, to

paraphrase Kristeva. One might conclude that,

notwithstanding the attempts by Kristeva and Riffaterre to

demarcate the boundaries of literary and non-literary
language, intertextuality is appealing as an idea precisely
because of the ubiquitous interrelationship between literary
and non-literary discourse. As Linda Hutcheon explains in
her analysis of metafictional novelistic discourse:

> autoreference and intertextual reference actually
> combine to direct readers back to an outer reference;
> in fact, they direct the readers outside the text, by
> reminding them (paradoxically) that, although what they
> are reading is only a literary fiction which they
> themselves are creating through language, the act
> itself is really a paradigm or an allegory of the
> ordering, naming processes that are part of the daily
> experience of coming to terms with reality. (10)

If Hutcheon is correct in assuming that fictional forms are
important models of the way in which human beings organize
and understand their experience, and it is an appealing
proposition, then Kafka, Proust and Joyce are not so
subversive as we might have thought. After all, the term
"Kafkaesque" has entered common parlance as a means of
understanding an otherwise bewildering set of experiences; a
smaller, though still significant number of people are able
to recognize their "Proustian" recollections, triggered by
external sensual impulses such as the taste of a madeleine;
and the term which is most frequently applied to Joyce's
writing, namely "stream of consciousness", if it is to be

believed, indicates precisely that that particular mode of writing presents a recognizable way of dealing with human experience.

The Case of the Disappearing Subject

Of the two theorists whose work I have been considering in detail, Riffaterre seems to adopt a traditional approach to the question of the subject. He addresses the reading process in such a way as to assume the agency of a reader, even though that reader may not be entirely common, as I observed earlier. His view of a reading which is dependent upon an intertext also does nothing to disturb the agency of the author. Kristeva, on the other hand, projects a diminished agency for both reader and author.

The authority which Kristeva looks to in her demotion of the agency of the author is, ironically one might say, Bakhtin,[20] while underlying both her rhetoric and her linguistic theory are Lacan's views of language and the subject. Her articulation of the point also invokes, if in a muted tone, the *influence* of Barthes, when she writes:

> Continually listening to his own times, as to past history and what was to come, Dostoevsky (and indeed every polyphonic writer) gathers in ideologies so as to make them into 'prototypes' or cases of language in use. This allowed Bakhtin to say that Dostoevsky (the 'scribe', as one would now say) does not *think* (with

> ideas), but *prepares confrontations* (of points of view,
> of minds, of voices: of texts). ("Ruin", 114, emphasis
> in original)

This is not a total rejection of agency, although she does
come close to that position in "Bakhtine", where she says
that Bakhtinian dialogism tends to imply a view of writing
as intertextuality which in turn causes the notion of a
"person-subject of writing" to fade away to be replaced by
the "ambivalence of writing" (444). Such a view can be seen
as an alignment with, or rather as a precursor to Barthes's
claims as stated in his famous essay, "The Death of the
Author".[21] This would then offer an explanation for her
favouring of a language or discourse which is subversive of
"useful social discourse" and which she sees in Joyce, Kafka
et al. This "useful social discourse" would then probably
be characterized in a particular historical period as
"bourgeois liberal humanism" or "Protestant individualism"
or "capitalism". One cannot help observing that this is a
somewhat elaborate and ultimately futile way of attempting
to subvert these ideologies, though their evils may be well
documented by now. More problems follow if one contemplates
the intentionality of this so-called subversion.

Curiously, it is not only the author who fares ill
under Kristeva's scheme. The reader is also somewhat
marginalized, being reduced to the role of addressee
("destinataire") of the narrative discourse:

> Ce destinataire n'étant rien d'autre que le sujet de la
> lecture, représente une entité à double orientation:
> signifiant dans son rapport vers le texte et signifié
> dans le rapport du sujet de la narration vers lui. Il
> est donc un dyade (D1,D2) dont les deux termes étant en
> communication entre eux, constitue un système de code.
> ("Bakhtine", 449)

The reading subject appears on this account to have been
replaced by a reading function in the language of the text.

Such a marginalization of the reading subject is
surprising when one considers the strong anti-Formalist
thrust of some of her early statements. She writes in "The
Ruin of a Poetics", for example:

> While for linguistics, language is a system of signs,
> for literary science--and for every science of the
> development of ideologies--language is a practice in
> which one must take into account the people involved
> (especially the person addressed), and the way they re-
> order the sign system. (106)

The hint is already present here, however. Despite the
explicit contrast with linguistics, she does appear to be
referring to the addressee of the novelistic discourse, who
in conventional terms is only a grammatical or linguistic
"person" after all. This is why, in effect, she can talk,
along with Bakhtin, of a dialogue between texts and
discourses, where the subjects have been abstracted away.

Later in the same essay, Kristeva goes on to explain precisely how the diminished importance of the subject is fundamental to Bakhtin's dialogism. She explains how the "word/discourse" proliferates, necessitating the fragmentation of the subject of any particular word or discourse:

> What Bakhtin listens for in the word/discourse is not a linguistics. It is the division of the language-user, divided firstly because it is made up of the other-self, only to become, in the end, his own otherness, and thereby multiple and elusive, polyphonic. The language of a given novel is the place where this fragmenting of the 'I'--its polymorphism--can be heard. (109)

Such a view has prompted Tilottama Rajan to argue that a subject-reader should be re-inscribed into Kristeva's theory. Rajan not only rejects Kristeva's abdication of a position vis-à-vis the reader's agency on ideological grounds, unsure "whether it is an oversight or is symptomatic of a residual ahistoricism in poststructuralism" (66), but also sees an internal incoherence in Kristeva's theory on this issue (66-73).

One of the most pertinent points of Rajan's criticism of Kristeva is the observation that a theory of intertextuality devoid of agency fails to account for the differences between "two kinds of texts: those that are

'passively' and those that are 'actively' intertextual"
(68). The texts which I shall be examining in the final
chapter are quite clearly "actively intertextual". It is
such texts which demand a greater precision than is in
evidence in those theories of intertextuality that are
merely genre-specific (Bakhtin and Jefferson); literary-
specific (Riffaterre); or entirely unspecific (Barthes and,
arguably, though inconsistently, Kristeva). The activity or
passivity to which Rajan refers must be seen as applicable
to both readers and writers, requiring some basic
acknowledgement of intentionality as well as of agential
readers (over and above any consideration of the reading
function).

Rajan's view that there is inconsistency vis-à-vis the
subject within Kristeva's writings on intertextuality is
modified by Thaïs Morgan. Morgan observes that, when viewed
against a background of structuralism and deconstruction,
both of which are notorious for their exclusion of the
subject, "the work of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva may
be seen as an attempt to reinscribe a trace of the subject,
especially the sexual and political subject, into the space
of intertextual relations" (18).

The Relation of Influence to Intertextuality

Before concluding this chapter, I should like briefly
to consider the possibility, raised by Hermerén but also

hinted at by a number of contributors to the collection

Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History,[22] that

intertextuality is little more than influence study by

another, perhaps more palatable name. Susan Stanford

Friedman explains with a great deal of clarity that the

discourses of influence and intertextuality are unavoidably

intertwined. Among the evidence she brings to justify this

claim are the observation, made by Culler (Pursuit, 107) and

then Hermerén (Art, 83), that Kristeva "often relies heavily

upon the methodologies of influence in her own intertextual

studies" (154), and the apparent overdetermination of the

insistence by Barthes and Kristeva on the distinction of

intertextuality from influence (150).

Hermerén's analysis of some of the most influential

writings on intertextuality is filled with remarks which

note the similarity of work done in the name of

intertextuality and that done under the banner of influence

or "comparative methods" (Art, 69-88). (It is perhaps worth

noting in passing that his elision of any differences

between "influence" and "comparative methods" is

contestable, or at least denotes a lack of precision.) At

the theoretical level, however, he distinguishes influence

and intertextuality in the following way:

> Studies of influence focus on genetic aspects of the
>
> creative process, whereas studies of intertexts focus
>
> on the description and interpretation of the meaning

> and meaning potentials, especially from the point of
> view of the readers, of the work in question. (Art,
> 85)

He then goes on to distinguish three basic aspects of
intertextuality, the first being a "reader or reception-
focussed conception of intertextuality", the second a
"context"-focussed conception, and the third a "system-
focussed conception of intertextuality" (Art, 85-87). He is
also careful to explain that influence study is by no means
as uncomplicated as its detractors might suggest, and takes
pains to respond to a number of criticisms made of influence
by Michael Baxandall (64-68). He is equally critical of
those people from either camp who fail adequately to
consider the "influence" of the non-literary, be it in
strictly "textual" form or not (Art, 88).

Eric Rothstein is not alone in suggesting that a
particular writer's attitude towards the question of agency
will invariably determine whether their thoughts are phrased
within the context of influence or intertextuality. His
position is that: "To describe human beings as at once
programmed and productive, for a start, turns influence into
a form of intertextuality, and vice versa" (140).

It is not all that difficult to extract a consensual
view from the various commentators on the debate, which is
probably that both methods should and do partake of each
other's jealously guarded procedures, and that the extreme

positions in both camps are the ones least likely to lead to productive results. Such an encapsulation inevitably reduces some intricate and informative discussion to a somewhat anodyne observation, but offers a brief summary to be considered in the light of what precedes it.

Conclusion

At the start of this chapter I claimed that the revolution promised by intertextuality had not taken place. I have tried to show, principally through the work of Julia Kristeva and Michael Riffaterre, that not only is intertextuality as a concept itself contested, but it is also anything but a panacea to the problems posed by a traditional mode of literary study based on influence. That is not to say that it does not offer theoretical benefits. It is certainly preferable to recognize, for example, that creative literary activity is not restricted to the effects of personality and incerpersonal relations, but is affected by the discourses which circulate through all aspects of social life.

The dichotomy to which many proponents of intertextuality return, namely between a naive mimesis or representation and the more sophisticated poststructuralist cult of *écriture* is itself an oversimplification. Literary agents have long displayed an awareness of the complexity both of literary form and of language itself, and there has

always been a continuum of literary production ranging from scrupulous linearity to a more expansive, often playful tendency towards circularity, self-reflexivity, and *mise-en-abyme*.

What the theorists of intertextuality show, although they do not appear to follow through on it, is the importance of considering the reader's contribution to the significance of a literary text. Intertextuality as proposed by Riffaterre makes it clear that the significance that a text yields will depend upon the literary competence and intertextual grid of the reader. That observation is of very general range and applicability. Similarly, Kristeva's championing of Bakhtinian "polyphony" does little to advance the pursuit of literary studies *per se*. If we can glean from intertextuality and influence that a literary text is neither entirely anonymous nor entirely the product of an exalted Individuality, then we ought to be in a sober enough state to profit from a more nuanced approach to literature.

In the chapter that follows I shall approach three literary texts, Milan Kundera's play <u>Jacques et son maître</u>, Jean Rhys's <u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u>, and Tom Stoppard's <u>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead</u>, all of which pose problems for those theories that seek to explain literature in broad strokes. I shall be arguing that these three texts have strong similarities which justify an attempt to characterize a sub-category of literary text to which they

all belong, namely that of literary variations. Such a sub-

category must inevitably be informed by the theories I have

been discussing, but it is not satisfactorily dealt with by

any of them.

Chapter Three

In the two preceding chapters I discussed the problems inherent in some important attempts to bring together all of literature under the banner either of influence or intertextuality. As general theories, both Bloom's idiosyncratic resuscitation of the moribund notion of influence and the various versions of intertextuality pose at least as many difficulties as they claim to overcome. What I hope to show in this final chapter is how a narrower focus can be realized. Starting from Tilottama Rajan's useful distinction between "passively" and "actively" intertextual texts (68), and building on some of the insights, both positive and negative, of the theorists whose work I have been discussing, I shall consider three "actively intertextual" texts in turn, namely, Milan Kundera's _Jacques et son maître_.[23] Jean Rhys's _Wide Sargasso Sea_, and Tom Stoppard's _Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead_. These three texts will serve as examples of literary variations,[24] demonstrating the range of narrative possibility even within a deliberately limited literary framework.

One important point that has emerged from my analysis in the first two chapters is that it is dangerous to trust the generalizing instincts of even the most learned reader. Readers differ in what they bring to a text, and,

inevitably, in what they take away. There can be many correct interpretations, but these will necessarily be partial, and this is something which the three texts I have chosen clearly demonstrate. Underlying my treatment of literary variations is this realization of the value of what Robert Scholes calls "centrifugal reading", an approach which "sees the life of a text as occurring along its circumference, which is constantly expanding, encompassing new possibilities of meaning" (8). The three texts which I have chosen invite such an approach, each one repeatedly altering perspective and encouraging the reader to follow suit.

To adopt the method of "centrifugal reading", according to Scholes, one must abandon its opposite, "centripetal reading", or the pursuit of "an original intention located at the center of [a] text" (Scholes, 8). It is unlikely that anyone would actually advocate such an approach, but Riffaterre's reductive search for a poem's matrix does, at times, tend towards the centripetal. It goes against the general view which sees literature as polyphonic. As Thomas Pavel puts it:

> The writer as an individual, the authorial voice, the
> narrator, reliable or not, the voices of the
> characters, distinct from one another or more or less
> mixed together, undercut any attempt to comment on
> fiction as if it had one well-individuated originator.

(23)

If, as a consequence and in addition to this, we accept the diversity of readings available for most literary texts, the option which offers itself is to study the process, not, as Kristeva wou..d have it, of writing alone, but of reading as well, with the necessary awareness of an enforced particularity.

Narrative Pre-texts

What distinguishes the three texts I have chosen is, at base, that each one is premised on and to some extent determined by a pre-existing work of literature. Kundera's text is, of the three, most closely related at the narrative level to its pre-text, although _Jacques et son maître_ is a play and Diderot's _Jacques le fataliste_ a novel. _Wide Sargasso Sea_ is the most subtly dependent on its pre-text, _Jane Eyre_, and is the one of the three which is most likely to be read as entirely detached. Although some critics make value judgements concerning the relative independence of a text from its pre-text, as we shall see later, I consider an approach which focusses on difference from the pre-text as a benchmark of originality to be unsound and unhelpful. I do, however, follow Kundera in distinguishing between adaptations and rewritings, the former being a simplified summary in the manner of _Reader's Digest_, the latter making an existing work the theme for a new and "sovereign"

variation.[25] The three texts are all variations in this sense.

It might be argued that works of literature, such as the three I shall be discussing, which *explicitly* partake of literary history by their overt reference to existing, often canonical literary works, are acknowledging what I recognized in the previous chapter as the banal first principle of intertextuality. In other words, the fact that an obvious literary relationship is established by the writing of these texts might be taken as evidence that the existence of literature or a literary tradition is a premise for all literary texts. As I have made clear, I do not consider this to be anything more than a commonplace: in order to identify something as literature we must have a category to which it can be said to belong or not to belong.

An aspect of intertextuality to which the existence of these texts might more significantly speak is that of agency. Conscious intertextuality or variations distinguishes the author subject from either the scribe role posited by Barthes and Kristeva or the strong victim role of Bloom's poetic family romance. The author makes a clear decision to focus on particular themes or a particular tradition. Of course, this may only be a limited autonomy or agency on the Kristevan model, and in itself merely an extension of the decision to write, or to write in a particular style or genre. It does, however, seem plausible

that this is more than an unconscious or default choice, and
that the writer is more than a mere scribe.

A useful definition of the kind of text I am dealing
with is provided by André Topia, who writes:

> Le texte--qu'on hésite alors à appeler original, ou
>
> parodie, ou citation--devient un lieu où l'auteur se
>
> contente de faire jouer des discours les uns contre les
>
> autres, en les détournant toujours légèrement.   (352)

Again, the author's agency is stressed, and another
important point is suggested. Topia introduces the idea of
play, something to which Kundera appeals in his invocation
of the novelistic tradition of Cervantes, Sterne and Diderot
(12). Play is not frivolous for Kundera, however and this
is where some of the political implications of variations
emerge. He responds to a criticism of Tristram Shandy as
not being a serious work, claiming that what is meant by
serious in this context is "croire à ce que le monde veut
nous faire croire" (12). He argues that he and the
"playful" tradition with which he allies himself resist such
gullibility. He states, with the conviction of a man who
was confronted by an overt political system which regulated,
often with violence, what was an acceptable narrative and
what was unacceptable: "De Don Quichotte à Ulysse, le roman
conteste ce que le monde veut nous faire croire" (12-13).

With this in mind, I shall show that the literary
variation amounts to more than the presentation of an

alternative narrative for a given theme or situation.
Literary variations actually thematize the existence of not
simply one alternative or "other side" to the story, but of
a whole range of narrative possibilities inherent in any
situation. That is not to say that they necessarily urge an
equivalence on these various narratives; there will
frequently be an identifiable moral framework which favours
one approach over another. The one single approach which
they consistently undermine is the narrative which is
imposed simply by virtue of the authority of the particular
storyteller.

Milan Kundera: Variation as Rationality

One of the reasons which Kundera offers for his choice
of pre-text for Jacques et son maître is his preference for
Enlightenment rationality over what he calls Christian
sentimentality (8-10). He feels that once sentimentality is
given a positive value as a criterion of truth, the door is
opened for brutality and intolerance. He identifies an
alternative in the critical, playful tradition I mentioned
earlier, a tradition which he sees as offering the values
required to oppose an authoritarian version of reality or
history.

The distortion and [mis]appropriation of history are
concerns in many of Kundera's works, notably The Book of
Laughter and Forgetting, The Joke, and The Unbearable

Lightness of Being. The particular circumstances of the writing of Jacques et son maître make the theme an especially acute and appropriate one. Following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Kundera and a number of other writers saw their works removed from circulation and prohibitions placed on future publication. This is why I suggested earlier that Kundera may have been suffering from what Gilbert and Gubar call an "anxiety of authorship" (45ff). Kundera tells of how when he reread Dostoevsky's The Idiot, after it was suggested to him that he might adapt it for the stage under a friend's name, he was repulsed by the sentimentality and turned instead to Diderot's Jacques le fataliste (7). He resorted to an established literary figure as a form of disguise, much as acting troupes in England avoided the censor by performing Shakespeare, but chose Diderot over Dostoevsky (and others) for philosophical reasons.

In the discussion of intertextuality and the novel genre, Diderot's Jacques le fataliste is frequently cited as a polyphonic, anti-mimetic, self-conscious novel, of the type which is deemed either subversive or reactionary navel-gazing depending on whom you consult. Kundera made an important change in the title,[26] which reflects a shift in his focus. As any reader of Diderot's novel would testify, the master is really only master by name, being effectively led by the nose by Jacques. By changing the title so as to

remove the reference to fatalism, Kundera draws attention to
the master-servant relationship, which is brought into
question during the course of the play. Both Diderot's
novel and Kundera's play show a contest for control of the
narrative between master and servant. The difference in the
play is that Kundera removes the figure of the "master"
narrator or author-figure so that it is eventually the
servant who achieves narrative mastery, albeit within the
confines of the human condition, and clearly not in a
violent or autocratic way.

The elimination of the narrator in Kundera's variation
is the subject of critical debate. On one side of the
debate is Mimi Kramer, who decides, partly on the basis of
the lack of narrator, that it is simply not a very good
play. She says:

> because there is no narrator, no single, controlling
> intelligence directing the shape of events, Kundera's
> attempts to approximate the narrative experience of
> stories-within-stories doesn't come off. (51)

Fred Misurella, on the other hand, views the absence of the
narrative speaker as a positive feature of Kundera's play,
which makes it "reverberate with twentieth century
intimations of the absurd and the death of God" (94). In my
view, the latter interpretation is more appropriate, since
the fatalism which was at the root of Diderot's satire has
become less persuasive in the intervening centuries.

Kundera does not entirely eliminate the humorous analogy between playwright and author of destiny, but he places more emphasis on the recurring narratives of friendship and love and the effects that they have on their actors and tellers. The change in the title also supports this view of a diminished role for fatalism in the play.

Kundera's play is a distillation of Diderot's novel, in which the value and authority of narrative are also revealed as distinctly problematic. It shows to great theatrical effect, by means of an interaction between the narrative present, portrayed on the main stage, and the narrated past, portrayed on an ancillary stage, that the storyteller is always implicated in his or her story. The stories which the characters portray all speak of love and betrayed friendship; they are not all that different in their theme and basic action. Each one is offered from a different perspective, however, and it is the storytelling itself which becomes the object of the audience's attention. The effect of the varied perspectives which are presented is to encourage a balanced reflection which questions the moral conclusions each teller draws from his or her tale.

It could be argued, however, that <u>Jacques et son maître</u> does not really go much further than Diderot's novel. Robert Alter, for example, argues that Diderot "recognizes no less than Cervantes what a problematic notion the 'truth of the story' is," although he claims that Diderot "sees

truth as the unstable product of a constant dialectic," emphasizing the dualistic nature of the competition over narrative truth based, as in Cervantes, on the master-servant relationship (67-68). Kundera also focusses on the vulnerability of narrative, but he reduces the relative significance of the master-servant duo by giving greater weight to the other characters' narratives than would be proportionate to the novel. Even if one considers Diderot's novel to be a greater, more important work, which is probably the accepted view, this does not make Kundera's play any less of a variation as opposed to a mere adaptation. After all, few who value Stoppard's contribution to literary history in <u>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead</u> would argue that it supplants <u>Hamlet</u>. I shall pursue the implications of such a discussion later in the context of those who regard variations as unoriginal and parasitic.

There is, of course, an additional dimension to Kundera's characters' stories. In each case they are retelling stories which have already been told in Diderot's novel, and in so doing, they are redefining and recreating themselves as characters. Eva Le Grand highlights that distinction as it is manifested in the character of Jacques:

> Tandis que pour le Jacques de Diderot le déterminisme
> de cette écriture n'opérait qu'a *posteriori*, après
> l'action, le Jacques de Kundera sait, lui (savoir qu'il

> partage avec tous les héros de Kundera mais aussi avec
> tous les héros des grands romans de l'Europe centrale
> de ce siècle) qu'il est *programmé a priori*. ("Milan
> Kundera," 351)

The implication is that the freedom of action which a
fatalistic philosophy promised is denied in the later text,
where the great scroll has become an authoritarian history
maker. As she goes on to say in the same essay:

> De possibilités plurielles, le grand rouleau est devenu
> écriture *monologique* et par là même *autoritaire*. C'est
> cette nouvelle réalité qui informe sans cesse, à chaque
> interrogation, à chaque variation, l'aventure nouvelle
> de Jacques et son maître. (351)

Here she has identified the increased self-knowledge which
Kundera has given to his Jacques, a self-knowledge which, in
an authoritarian situation, only serves to accentuate the
potential anguish.

Jean Rhys: Variation as Herstory

The authoritarian nature of established history, which
is in part implied in Kundera's play by its dependence upon
Diderot's already narrated novel, also shapes Jean Rhys's
variation of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. The basic
premise of Wide Sargasso Sea, as Molly Hite's suggestive
title implies,[27] is to tell the "other side of the story"
of Jane Eyre. The critical response to the novel reflects

this view. Molly Hite introduces her study of three
contemporary women writers with the claim that:

> experimental fictions by women seem to share the
> decentering and dissembling strategies of postmodernist
> narratives, but they also seem to arrive at these
> strategies by an entirely different route, which
> involves emphasizing conventionally marginal characters
> and themes, in this way re-centering the value
> structure of the narrative. (2)

This is clearly true of _Wide Sargasso Sea_, which recasts the
Jane Eyre story with the marginal character of Bertha
playing the central role of Antoinette.

This interpretation of the novel receives widespread
support. David Leon Higdon, for example, echoes the view
expressed in Hite's title when he writes that, "Rhys wished
to restore the balance and tell the other side" (113).
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the novel a rewriting of "a
canonical English text" (253); Louis James describes it as
"a radical _revaluation_ of _Jane Eyre_ and its European
attitudes from the perspective of a West Indian Creole"
(111); John Thieme argues that "the novel re-writes the
relevant parts of Charlotte Brontë's masterpiece" (118),
while Judith Kegan Gardiner says that Rhys "tells us what
has never been said or said falsely" (123).

This apparent critical consensus in itself does not
tell the whole story of _Wide Sargasso Sea_. Rhys's novel is

not simply a re-telling of the story of <u>Jane Eyre</u> from the perspective of Rochester's first wife. It does not simply offer "the other side of the story." The longest section of the book is actually presented from Rochester's perspective, not from that of Antoinette, and while this differs from <u>Jane Eyre</u>, it is more complex than "the other side of the story."

Most critics refer to Rochester's narrative as evidence of Rhys's evenhandness in characterization. As Michael Thorpe puts it:

> All seems prepared for a treatment of Edward
> [Rochester] that will redress Brontë's bias against
> Bertha, but instead Part Two, which takes us at once
> into his consciousness, makes possible a sympathetic
> insight into him also. (106)

There is more to it than that, however. Rhys's novel shows an awareness that replacing one partial narrative with another, equally partial, if enlightening and informative, narrative is inadequate. In re-writing Bertha's story from the perspective of Antoinette (the name she prefers, but which Rochester denies her), and in providing a more complete background for Rochester, Rhys is not *replacing* Jane Eyre's or Charlotte Brontë's narrative, she is *complementing* it.

Molly Hite comes close to an articulation of this point, but periodically reverts to a somewhat essentialist

aspect of her theory of "the other side of the story." She writes: "The 'other side' thus has a venerable history of being the woman's side, the version that discloses how the heroine is constrained by a set of narrative givens not of her own making" (6). This conveys only a partial truth, however, as can be seen both from Kundera's "anxiety of authorship" and from Rhys's presentation of Rochester's other narrative in addition to Antoinette's. Hite tries, not always successfully, to negotiate a path between an essentialist view of women's writing and a critique of narrative ideology. She criticizes what she calls, after Mary Jacobus, "the autobiographical 'phallacy'," namely the claim that women's writing tends to be autobiographical and hence less universal than men's, while simultaneously trying to establish the distinctness of women's writing by virtue of their "other" perspective (14). She is more convincing when she questions narrative assumptions than when she attributes these assumptions or their subversion to gender.

Central to Hite's interpretation of Wide Sargasso Sea is her claim that: "The disorienting, uncomfortable quality of Rhys's writing derives finally from Rhys's exposure of the easy and ready-to-hand interpretation as an ideological construct" (54). Here it is clear that Rhys is struggling against the combined forces of the socially given and established literary "fact". Charlotte Brontë's version of Bertha's life, a version which goes unchallenged in Jane

Eyre's narrative, conforms to the social conventions of
women's sexuality and its links with insanity. The effect
of Rhys's rewriting of the story is not simply to show that
the accepted categories which Brontë calls upon are false,
but that the very nature of such socially established
narrative categories is arbitrary and constructed. After
all, Brontë's novel itself confronts some powerful social
stereotypes in its presentation of an independent and self-
empowering woman, albeit at the expense of the vilification
of another woman.

An important example which Hite offers of Rhys's
exposure of the ideology latent in certain recurring
narratives is that of Bertha's madness. She explains how
Rhys, "by allying madness with rebellion," made it "the
effect, not the cause, of her female protagonist's outcast
status" (32). This subversion of cause and effect lies at
the heart of any dissection of ideology, and it calls into
question the narrative tradition of the sentimental novel
which requires consistency of character and a strong
causality of action. If Kundera is to be believed, and
there is certainly evidence in Jean Rhys's novel, this
critical questioning is one of the functions of the literary
variation, which locates its ancestry in a competing
tradition.

The suggestion that Rhys calls into question the
tradition of the sentimental novel has ramifications which

extend beyond the naturalizing deception of confusing
effects and causes. The traditional sentimental novel does
not frequently present a protagonist who is cruelly
manipulated by those around her and ends her life in a
disturbing act of violence. Typically, such novels present
strong-willed and independent heroes and heroines who are
able to overcome the vicissitudes they face. In short, they
master their own destiny, something which is a distant dream
for Antoinette right from the very start of Rhys's novel.
Molly Hite describes the revelation in Rhys's work of this
incompatibility between certain characters and traditional
narrative presentation as a realization by Rhys "that
categories of literary and social determination
interpenetrate" (27). Peter Rabinowitz takes a similar
position towards literary tradition:

> This coincidence between plot and implied social value
> means, among other things, that the actions of those
> with access to power (with its corollary, violence)
> lend themselves to sharply outlined patterns of the
> sort we have been taught to seek in literary texts. It
> is easier, that is, to write a traditionally well-
> formed story about a businessman or a cop than it is to
> write one about a housewife who doesn't seem to *do*
> anything. (Before Reading, 225, emphasis in original)

What this means for Wide Sargasso Sea is that Antoinette
does not fit the convenient narrative structures which were

available to Brontë for example, and that Rhys did more in
her novel than simply tell "the other side of the story:"
she expanded the range of narrative possibilities to reflect
a more sophisticated view of human nature and action. The
telling of Antoinette's story is not the end of the matter;
rather it enlarges the story begun by Brontë, a story which
could be further enlarged by, for example, Christophine, as
Spivak hints (253).

The Question of Originality

As I have suggested, critics are sometimes disturbed by
what they see as the derivative or parasitical nature of the
literary variation. The dependence on an existing literary
text often leads them to make value judgements about the new
text. Mimi Kramer's view of Kundera's play, for example,
questions Kundera's claim, itself supported by Fred
Misurella and Eva Le Grand, among others, that he had
written a variation worthy of consideration and theatrical
production. She devotes most of her time to Diderot's
novel, although ostensibly reviewing the later play, and
makes her position quite clear from the start: "Actually,
there isn't very much to _Jacques and his Master_: it is
really more of a *divertissement* or *bagatelle* than a
variation" (46).

Wide Sargasso Sea and _Rosencrantz and Guildenstern_
attract similar charges, often more specifically directed to

the question of originality. Even where the variation is not criticized as such, the question of whether it should be treated as an original work is often posed. Those who argue for the originality of Rhys's novel, but who nonetheless feel it necessary to bring up the issue, include Margaret Paul Joseph, who writes that "Wide Sargasso Sea absorbs us on its own merits and does not need a prop from British literature to give it support" (43); and Clara Thomas, who assures us that "a reader who had never heard of Charlotte Brontè or her work could find [Wide Sargasso Sea] a self-contained, haunting, tragic story" (342). The view that the relationship between Rhys's novel and Brontè's detracts from the later work is articulated by John Thieme, who talks of a "debt to Jane Eyre" (117). Thieme also cites the more extreme view of Walter Allen that Rhys's novel "cannot stand apart from Jane Eyre as an autonomous work in its own right" (119). Between the affirmers of Rhys's originality and their gainsayers are the more equivocal views expressed by Michael Thorpe (99-100) and John Hearne (325). It is not surprising that critics should refer to the relationship between the two texts; what is significant is that they consider it relevant to the value of Wide Sargasso Sea as a novel. Interestingly, this line of thought is informed by a general adherence to some form of theory of influence, such that the "influenced" text is assumed to be diminished in value from the Ur-text.

The most outspoken value judgement concerning the originality of Tom Stoppard's play comes from Robert Brustein. He describes the play as a "theatrical parasite" (Bareham, 93), and goes on to say that: "In outline, the idea is extremely ingenious; in execution it is derivative and familiar" (94). His judgement receives support from Normand Berlin despite the fact that Brustein goes on to make the somewhat illogical criticism of Stoppard that he is not faithful to Shakespeare's characterization of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and that he omits the recorders scene from Hamlet, something which no doubt makes the play disturbingly original and unfamiliar.

Despite his inconsistency, Brustein does tap a rich vein of critical comment. Most observers are agreed that Stoppard's play has echoes of Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of An Author, as well as taking its premise from Hamlet. Just as with Wide Sargasso Sea, so too when writing about Stoppard commentators seem to draw extensively on the vocabulary of influence. Robert Gordon, for example, writes: "Although much influenced by Waiting for Godot, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is certainly not unknowingly derivative" (20). This particular formulation contains a rare acknowledgment of the tendency of advocates of influence to diminish the agency of the subsequent author. Joseph Duncan, while commenting on the evidence of a "strong

influence" from Beckett, also credits Stoppard with considerable autonomy in his selection of material from <u>Hamlet</u> and <u>Waiting for Godot</u> (Bareham, 76-77). He argues that Stoppard "consciously depended on Beckett and expected his audience to be aware of the dependence," but nonetheless presented "thought, action, and a theatrical experience distinctly different from that in <u>Waiting for Godot</u>" (77), which would make it a variation.

Unfortunately, the concentration on the question of whether Stoppard's play is derivative, whether he is merely clever and not profound, often leaves little room for a fruitful engagement with the text. This applies even to those who maintain Stoppard's originality, such as Susan Rosinko, who comments: "the fusion of the source [Hamlet] and influences [Beckett and Pirandello] results in a wholly fresh play" (31). Such a striking trend, namely the concentration on the originality of a "variation" seems to indicate that influence theory, with its tendency to value the established literary figure over the newcomer (or ephebe, to use Bloom's term), is more prevalent than its sister theory (or theories), intertextuality.

It lies outside the scope of this paper to establish whether literary history has turned full circle, and whether the literary variation has become the late twentieth century equivalent of the Renaissance *imitatio*. A brief glance at contemporary cultural production would at least provide

evidence to support the claim. Aside from the three texts I am considering, <u>Kiss Me Kate</u> and <u>West Side Story</u> come to mind from the realm of musical theatre, and a host of films, ranging in tone from <u>Play It Again Sam</u> to <u>Prospero's Books</u> and including <u>My Own Private Idaho</u> and <u>Men of Respect</u>. Such an observation could potentially lead towards a reaffirmation of Bloom's claims for the belatedness of modern culture, or to a somewhat contradictory (if only for stressing the end of the "modern") embrace of an obsessively metafictional post-modernist aesthetic. My intention is not to proceed in either direction, but is rather to claim that the notion of originality is a generally unproductive criterion by which to judge works of literature, especially when what is understood by originality is frequently that which is unfamiliar (but only within limits, because if a text is too unfamiliar it is deemed nonsensical or "incoherent").

One convincing critique of the attachment of aesthetic value to originality comes from Bruce Vermazen. In his paper, "The Aesthetic Value of Originality," he argues that originality or novelty *per se* ensures neither a positive nor a negative aesthetic value. Tracing the origins of the critical category of originality to Edward Young and Immanuel Kant, Vermazen observes that "[t]hough Young allows for the bad but original and Kant countenances 'original nonsense,' at some point in its career 'originality' became

the name of a property presumed valuable in itself" (270).
Thus, to say of Stoppard's play, for example, that it is not
original should not, following Vermazen, entail a negative
judgement of the aesthetic quality of the work, despite the
tendency of many to assume that it does.

In addition to maintaining that originality is
inherently value neutral, Vermazen considers the historical
perspective of claims to originality. He makes the point
that even if a work were original and valued as such in its
reception, it would have to be aesthetically valuable beyond
that particular moment if subsequent observers were to
continue to value the work. In other words, the feature
which is pointed to as being original must be both good and
original for it to be valorized. As he says of "those who
count originality as a value . . . . They do not envisage a
case in which the new property is bad or indifferent, but
where the newness nevertheless results in an originality
which is good" (271).

As far as variations are concerned, it is
understandable that the question of originality should
arise. This is, after all, implied in Kundera's distinction
between the variation and the adaptation. Once a reader is
satisfied that he or she is dealing with a work which
interacts with its pre-text in a productive way, unlike the
reductive summary of the adaptation, then any discussion of
originality becomes considerably more complex. At that

point one would have to articulate just what it was that one considered original about a particular work, and how this originality were a good thing. If Vermazen is correct, then it would soon become clear that what had previously been identified and praised as originality was in fact an independently positive aesthetic feature of the work.

Tom Stoppard: Variation as Destiny

No matter what position one takes on the question of originality, there is no denying that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is, at least in its broad outline, narratively determined by Hamlet. The title makes this quite explicit. Even before the play begins we are made aware of the fact not only that the protagonists will die, as in, for example, Shakespeare's The Tragedy of Richard II, but that they are already dead. There are two ways which this title can be read, as Normand Berlin explains: "They died their off-stage deaths in Shakespeare's Hamlet and therefore must die here, victims of a literary determinism. But they are also men, and men must die" (Jenkins, 44). In other words, the title does not necessarily indicate a restriction on the freedom of action of the protagonists, although this is how it is frequently read.

As Victor Cahn points out (56), Stoppard deliberately highlights the analogy of literature and life, in much the same way as Jacques's recurrent "Il est écrit là-haut" is

consciously ambiguous. Both Cahn and Robert Egan indicate
the significance in the role of the Player and the
tragedians in recalling the Shakespearian motif of *theatrum
mundi*. Two moments of many where the interaction between
Guildenstern and the Player bring this out occur in the
second half of Act Two. In one, Guildenstern asks of the
Player, "Who decides?" to which the Player responds,
"Decides? It is *written*" (79). The other, itself
explicitly recalling Hamlet, sees Guildenstern state
somewhat indignantly, in response to a graphic depiction by
the tragedians of a love scene, "I'd prefer art to mirror
life, if it's all the same to you." The Player replies:
"It's all the same to me, sir" (81).

All three texts are framed by the inevitability of
their resolution which is already written into literary
history. This·is not an overwhelming limitation, however,
as it would be for an adaptation. One of the fundamental
realizations of the variation is that the same events can be
transformed by means of a change of perspective. Stoppard
gives Rosencrantz and Guildenstern freedom to act, to change
their destiny, as it were. Of course, this can be fitted
into the story of Hamlet, because it merely requires an
assumption that during the course of the action of
Shakespeare's play, which culminates (for them) in their
off-stage death, they would, as human beings, have been in a
position to act. Stoppard speculates on the possibility

that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discovered that their task
was to take Hamlet to England to be killed, but failed to
act to save their friend. It becomes clear that even the
failure to act involves a choice, as William Gruber points
out (Bareham, 90).

Gruber also discusses Guildenstern's attempted murder
of the Player in terms of freedom of action.   He writes:

> Guil seems here to hope to win dramatic stature by an
> act of violence, to gain identity from a conventionally
> heroic act of will. In fact, Stoppard seems to be
> saying, such conventional heroism is not necessary; all
> that was required of Guil was the destruction of a
> letter. (90)

The suggestion is persuasive. All the two courtiers appear
to have as models for action after their bewildering call to
the court are the tragedians and their melodramatic and
repetitive following of conventional patterns. Clearly
there would be nothing gained from killing the Player, but
it is a gesture which momentarily offers Guildenstern the
feeling of autonomy. If, as Stoppard's play suggests, we
are simultaneously both central characters in our own drama
and peripheral characters in other dramas,[28] then there is
clearly no more significance to (Stoppard's) Hamlet's action
in exchanging the letters than there would have been in
Rosencrantz or Guildenstern's destruction of the letter in
the first place. It is therefore not simply a matter of

their having been caught up in a drama written by someone else.   In other words, Stoppard does not simply give "the other side of the story" of <u>Hamlet</u>; he points out the range of other possibilities inherent in the situation. Established narratives and the conventions which surround them are not the only possibilities for action.

The Player has an important function in Stoppard's play.   Robert Egan argues that the Player and his troupe represent a particular approach to existence in which "play [is] a means of ordering and coping with reality" (Bareham, 99).   This is not the same "play" which Kundera celebrates, because it merely entails acting out the already written. It does at times offer an important critique of the actions and decisions of others, but it is limited by established literary precedent.   It is certainly true, as Susan Rosinko reminds us (31), that the Player is always in character, or at least in costume, so that it is not entirely inappropriate to consider "play" as his approach to reality. As such, however, he ultimately represents an impossible extreme, since the most "real" of his actions is his dramatic (and dramatically acted) death.   The negative example he provides in this sense raises the possibility of deviation from the literary norm as a desirable course of action, at least in the minds of the audience, if not in the minds of the protagonists.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern could be said to face a

similar dilemma to Hamlet. Their moral challenge is action, and in particular how to respond to a situation in which first their friend's life and then their own is in danger. Just as the powerful tradition of the revenge tragedy overshadows Hamlet, its requirements transposed into a cultural force restricting Hamlet's freedom of action,[20] so do the two courtiers face the weight not only of Hamlet the play, but of its entire cultural, even mythical significance, which helps to determine their actions. Indeed, Stoppard makes a theme (albeit often ironically) of the literary influence of Hamlet on his protagonists. Stoppard's protagonists occupy a far less coherent world than Skakespeare's, however, as Richard Corballis argues: "There are in the play several explicit and even spectacular demonstrations of the coherence of the Hamlet world *vis-à-vis* the shambles of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's" (40), and so the possibility of avoiding literary historical fate is not excluded. When the artificiality of a coherent picture of the world has started to disintegrate this should present not only a moment of crisis, but a substantial opportunity for decisive and creative action. That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fail to grasp that opportunity does not mean that the audience fails to recognize it.

Conclusion

Having, as I promised, narrowed the focus of my

investigations from the sweepingly theoretical to the particular, it is now appropriate to show that it was all worthwhile. Certainly, the three texts I have examined have proved to have fruitful similarities insofar as the sub-category of literary variations is concerned. Each one builds upon its premise, which is the literary context which its author has sought out, and raises questions about that premise and its epistemological value. In no instance, not even in <u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u>, could it be said that the variation undermines its literary premise or pre-text, but neither can the literary edifice of the pre-text be viewed in precisely the same way again.

The variation with the most powerful impact on the pre-text is arguably Jean Rhys's novel, but as I have argued, it is by no means a mere inversion or reversal of <u>Jane Eyre</u>. Kundera's main achievement is the dislodging of the authority figure from Diderot's novel, namely the narrator, but it is a dislodging which is has its seeds in the extensive unmediated dialogue in the original. Stoppard's apparent concern is action, but action which is determined by the knowledge which is often its pre-requisite. In each case, pre-established narrative offers no relief for those who seek certainty.

On the evidence of these three texts, the variation is a particularly literary text, and deliberately so. In his essay "Philosophy as/and/of Literature", Arthur Danto

suggests that those philosophical texts which are generally
considered to be literary might be such for a reason. He
argues that the literary style betokens a way of knowing
which is an important dimension of the knowledge being
presented. He writes that:

> the concept of philosophical truth and the form of
> philosophical expression are internally enough related
> that we may want to recognize that when we turn to
> other forms we may also be turning to other conceptions
> of philosophical truth. (6)

I should like to make an analogous suggestion for the
literary variation. Each in its own way, <u>Jacques et son
maître</u>, <u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u>, and <u>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
Are Dead</u> question the way of knowing which is represented by
established literary conventions, conventions which turn the
accepted views of a "classic" canonical text into cultural
givens, to be drawn on whenever an authority is sought. The
questioning occurs not simply at the formal level, as a
theory of intertextuality might require, but also at the
thematic level. In this respect, the three texts which I
have been discussing are both deeply literary, while at the
same time calling into question a literary way of knowing
which relies on rigidly established categories of character
and action.

Conclusion

I began by expressing my intention to avoid the pitfalls of grand theories. I spent much of chapters one and two pointing out precisely such pitfalls in the work of first Harold Bloom and then Julia Kristeva and Michael Riffaterre. In the case of Bloom's theory of The Anxiety of Influence it soon became clear that his is more of a subjective history than a theory of literary practice. The main reason for this is his attempt to impose his world view onto an unco-operative literary world. The strengths of his work lie more in occasional insights and suggestive images rather than in any serious attempt to engage systematically with a body of literature. Indeed, when Bloom actually confronts poems in an interpretive manner, the results are perhaps more mystifying than his theoretical writing. As I suggested in chapter one, arguably the most significant contribution of Bloom's writings on influence is the suggestive title of his best known book, namely The Anxiety of Influence.

In chapter two I showed how Julia Kristeva is unable to reconcile her different preconceptions into a coherent theory of intertextuality. She finds the logic of her historicism clashes with her attempt to universalize, while her effacement of the subject makes it impossible to consider smaller classes and sub-classes of texts which do

not necessarily fit her pattern. The literary variation is one such sub-class. Michael Riffaterre's theory suffers from some of the same weaknesses as Harold Bloom's. The desire to provide practical tools with which to approach literary texts is undermined by his determination to produce new and eye-catching interpretations of established members of the poetic canon. Both his and Kristeva's, together with Ann Jefferson's theory of intertextuality, despite their differences, all face the ultimate danger of theoretical triviality, because of the tendency of each of them at times to seek to offer a universal picture of all literature.

The three texts which I turn to in my final chapter, insofar as they are literary variations, all establish a relationship with a specific pre-existing literary text. In so doing they inevitably open up the possibility of other variations of the same basic content or themes. They can be distinguished as literary texts which are far less likely to entrench a particular version of a story or character, because they both compete with and complement their pre-text, while also looking forward to potential future variations. In this respect they represent a way of knowing which consists in a continuous questioning of the literary or narrative status quo.

If I were to suggest a direction which future work in the area might take, it would be both to test this claim of variations and of other, more passively intertextual texts,

as well as to explore further the question of originality as it relates to actively intertextual texts. Clearly much work needs to be done until the question of the relationships between literary texts can be satisfactorily answered. I hope to have laid some of the ground for such work, at least as regards the literary variation.

Notes

1.The Anxiety of Influence, A Map of Misreading, Kabbalah and Criticism, and Poetry and Repression.

2.Bloom explicitly acknowledges Nietzsche at several points in his various books. See, for example, Repression (2), Agon (124).

3.A Map of Misreading opens with the following claim: "This book offers instruction in the practical criticism of poetry, in how to read a poem, on the basis of the theory of poetry set down in my earlier book, The Anxiety of Influence" (3).

4.See particularly Kabbalah 56-58.

5.Overpopulation is a concern which recurs in Bloom's musings, as will become apparent in my discussion of his views of literary tradition and the canon.

6.Jonathan Culler makes the same juxtaposition, but he does not reveal the proximity of the two citations within Bloom's own text, adducing the two citations as evidence of a shift (implicitly a development in Bloom's theory) from texts to subjects:

> Here we can already detect that shift from text to persons which will assume greater importance until it becomes the central feature of Bloom's theory, setting it in radical opposition to the theory of his French predecessors. (Pursuit 108)

I am arguing not for a progressive shift from (inter)textuality to the subject, but rather that Bloom constantly moves between the two apparent poles, earnestly seeking to establish his own position.

7.It should be noted that the overriding premise of Lentricchia's study, entitled After the New Criticism, was precisely the demise of New Critical practices, a demise which could not be effected simply by willing it, however lamentable that may be.

8.Imamu Amiri Baraka. "Political Poem." The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry. Ed. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair. 2nd ed. New York and London: Norton, 1988. 1443-44.

9.Bloom comments on Lowell, Pynchon and Mailer in the chapter on "The Dialectics of Poetic Tradition" (Map 27-40), as well as scattered comments in other places. He also mentions women's writing and what he calls "black poetry" in this chapter; this issue is quite a polemical one for Bloom, and one to which I shall return.

10.A Recent Imagining 1-47.

11.In his <u>Fictional Worlds</u>, Pavel describes the "classical segregationist" view as one according to which "there is no universe of discourse outside the real world" (13). Taken from its context, the label could be said to describe Bloom's rigid separation of poetry from any external social reality.

12.Toni Morrison's recent essay on American literature, <u>Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination</u>, for example, also contains echoes of Bloom's ideas among others. Like <u>Madwoman in the Attic</u>, it diverges considerably from some of Bloom's conclusions.

13.Julia Kristeva is generally credited with introducing the term in her 1967 essay (see for example Laurent Jenny), although Hermerén disputes this claim (Art, 69).

14.<u>Communications</u> 11 (1968).

15.For an interesting discussion of the importance of context and presuppositions to even the most basic communication of meaning, see John Searle's "Literal Meaning", and <u>Intentionality</u>, (especially 141-59).

16.See Culler's <u>Structuralist Poetics</u> (113-130).

17.This is clearly more pronounced in Riffaterre's writing, where it is effectively a major premise of <u>Semiotics of Poetry</u>. It is true that he seeks in the first instance and sporadically thereafter to distinguish poetic language from literary language and in turn non-literary language, but his attempts are undermined by his practice. In Kristeva's case the situation is less clear. It is true that Bakhtin had rejected the Formalist view of poetic language as being distinct from ordinary language, as Rajan points out (63), but Kristeva is equivocal, at least, and her emphasis on "modern poetic language" does suggest a resurrection of the Formalist distinction, albeit something implicitly denied by her theory.

18.Maxine Kumin. "In the Absence of Bliss." <u>The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry</u>. Ed. Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair. 2nd ed. New York and London, 1147 (lines 1-6).

19.Jonathan Culler discusses a similar situation in <u>Structuralist Poetics</u> (129)

20.For a thought-provoking explanation of this fact, see Susan Stanford Friedman, particularly 67-68.

21.See Susan Stanford Friedman.

22. The possibility could be said to provide a premise for the anthology (Clayton and Rothstein, 3), is considered implicitly by Rajan (61), and is once more raised and analyzed by Friedman (150-73).

23. The reason I cite the French version of the text over the English translation is that Kundera himself was directly involved in the writing/translation. The connection with Diderot obviously provide additional reasons for preferring the French over the English edition.

24. Kundera calls his play a "variation" of Diderot's novel; I follow this usage throughout this chapter and argue that the three texts I focus on are all "variations".

25. Kundera discusses this question in his introduction to the 1981 edition of the play ("Introduction à une variation", 15-17).

26. Diderot's novel is generally known simply as _Jacques le fataliste_, although its longer title is _Jacques le fataliste et son maître_. Kundera chose to highlight that aspect of the title which is usually ignored.

27. Hite, Molly. _The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narrative_. Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell UP, 1989.

28. Peter J. Rabinowitz makes this point when he writes:
    But Stoppard goes a step further. While we are the central characters in our own lives, we simultaneously play minor roles in larger stories that baffle and confuse us: there is a larger pattern behind our lives, but we lack the vision to see it. ("Hecuba" 257)

29. For an elaboration of this interpretation of _Hamlet_ see René Girard. _A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare_. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991.

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