

Introduction

By ALBERT GUERARD

The week-long conference on "The Creative Process in Literature and the Arts," held at Stanford University November 11-18, 1973, was sponsored by Stanford's Ph.D program in Modern Thought and Literature. This interdisciplinary program assumes the specialist in modern literature (i.e. from the Enlightenment to the present) should have some knowledge of one or more areas of modern thought such as philosophy, psychology, and anthropology. Hence its earlier sponsorship of a November, 1972 conference on "Myth, Symbol, Culture," with Clifford Geertz, René Girard and Geoffrey Hartman as the principal speakers, and with the active participation of many other scholars, writers and graduate students. A happy consequence of this conference was the appointment of René Girard as Professor of Modern Thought and Literature and French. The depth and breadth of his interests—

literary history and criticism illuminated by anthropology, psychology, structuralism—suggest some of the demanding objectives that Modern Thought and Literature has set itself.

The new program also assumes the relevance, to the student of modern literature, of an immediate personal experience with creative writing or with one of the arts, and it is perhaps the only truly academic Ph.D program to encourage, though not require, creative work as part of one's overall progress to the degree. There is something crippling in the graduate student's assumption that he must, for four years or so, subdue or at least conceal his creative impulses. And there is much to be learned from creating even badly. Jencks and Riesman maintained that every English professor should have written at least one sonnet; and perhaps most English professors have, if only surreptitiously. Only the scholar who has written a novel is likely to be fully aware of how intentions may change drastically, in the flash of an eye or while one's back is turned. And only the critic who has written a number of poems may feel along his heart the degree to which words and meter may control meaning and "theme," rather than the other way around. Hence there is something unhealthy about the common separation, in our universities, of departments or sub-departments of literary studies and creative writing, a separation rendered more acute when there is also a "writer-in-residence" (sometimes defensively anti-academic), who belongs to neither group. But the larger separations that exist in universities—between literature and music and the graphic arts and dance and film—might well seem, to a Proust or a Mann or a Gide, even more unnatural. The young literary critic who composes music will know that there too is a "lonely region of stress and strife." But he might also, through normal association with composers and painters and film-makers, escape the often stultifying loneliness of a narrow professionalism. We can learn from each other.

Some such reasonings lay behind the conference on "The Creative Process in Literature and the Arts." A large American university can hardly hope to become a Bauhaus or even Black Mountain, nor can rural California become Paris or New York. But at least we can try to become more aware of each other. In what ways does writing a novel (and writing one *today*, with the genre changing before our eyes) resemble painting a painting (where the impulse to innovate is a hundred years old or more)? What is it like to compose music with the aid of a computer? What is it like to write poetry if you are Black, or Chicano, or Indian, or member of an elite in an underdeveloped country; or if you are a woman? What is the dynamic experience of the man who is the practitioner of one art and critic-theorist of another? Of the three principal speakers of the Stanford Conference,¹ two have had remarkably versatile careers: Michel Butor (novelist, poet, critic of literature and painting and music, film-maker) and Stanley Cavell (philosopher, theorist in aesthetics, critic of the several arts including film, musician and composer). The third, the painter Paul Brach has, with his wife the painter Miriam Schapiro, helped to shape the exciting and embattled California Institute for the Arts.

The Stanford conference, with twenty meetings and over a hundred active

¹Under the Leon Sloss Junior Visiting Memorial Lectureships in the Humanities.

participants, ranged from a more or less psycho-analytic panel on "Unconscious Creation and Distortion" to the reading of new poetry and the live performance (with theoretical discussion) of computer-assisted music: Several panels looked beyond the timeless problems of creation to those of attempting to create in situations of historical or social uncertainty. The Chicano professor and writer Alurista, the American Indian writer and professor Scott Momaday, the black poet-novelist Al Young explored the stresses and strains of writing in special cultural contexts; a panel chaired by Charles Lyons considered the movement from individual to group creative process in contemporary drama; Keith Boyle led four fellow-painters in discussing the challenges to the artist today; and Martin Bresnick four fellow-composers. Significantly the four writers asked to talk about "The Creative Situation in the Novel" (Butor, John Hawkes, John L'Heureux, Leonard Michaels) were unusually evasive, though highly entertaining. They did not want to face directly the problem set before them: the plight of the novelist aware that much in the inherited forms of the novel is obsolete, and who himself wants to "make it new," yet who would also like to preserve some of the old traditional pleasures, even a pleasure in narrative. The speakers dwelt instead on other very real problems, including that of a vanishing readership.

The present *Mosaic* symposium, though using some essays that were prepared independently, and though foregoing many of the issues raised at the conference, will at least suggest how far apart approaches to the problem of creation can be: from Hugh Silverman's structuralist reasonings ("Artistic Creation and Human Action") to Norma Leistiko's intimate and extraordinarily vivid account of creating a dance. In 1963 (Spring) I edited an issue of *Daedalus* which in some ways resembled this one, though it was not based on a conference. It too was concerned with the creative process (five essays on "Intention and Unconscious Creation in the Novel"; six on "The Novel Today"). But how much in twelve years has changed! Few participants in the 1973 conference were eager to speculate on the dynamics of unconscious creation, possibly because this was now more taken for granted, possibly because they preferred to give vivid, existential accounts of moments of conscious creation or, as with Hawkes and Butor, to look retrospectively on the patterns they had made. So too the preeminence of the experimental and anti-realist American novelist is more fully established than in 1963, while the fortunes of the French *nouveau roman* may have declined. David Littlejohn in 1963 saw Hawkes's "hyper-sensitivity to ugliness, deformity, and decay" as an "insurmountable block to otherwise willing and appreciative readers"; but Hawkes's readers have since then multiplied many times. In 1963 Peter Brooks gave Michel Butor's novels just and lavish praise. But the one thing that is clear in 1973 is that Butor cannot be tied down to any single genre or zone of accomplishment. In 1972 it was my pleasure to attend his *soutenance de thèse* for the doctorate, in Tours, the *thèse* being simply the corpus of his own writings. The examination, which lasted over five hours, was among the most impressive intellectual performances I have ever witnessed.

The great difference of the 1963 *Daedalus* symposium was that there was then no specific discussion of black or third world writers, and none of women writers as such. In the 1973 conference, however, as in the

present symposium, women thinking intensely about their particular problems as creators (and reading poems usually far more risk-taking than those of the men) were absolutely central. Ellen Rogat, who organized and moderated the panel on "Women and the Creative Process," here presents aspects of the classic "case" of Virginia Woolf: a writer critically conscious of masculine and feminine styles. Seeking to define an androgynous ideal, she is yet eager to preserve a feminine identity and have too a room of her own. The sweeping generalizations and authoritarian rhythms that grandly override resistances and ignore nuances—these may indeed be deemed "masculine." And it is doubtless true that woman's "place" in the Victorian home (sharing the common sitting-room) would make her specially sensitive to the delicacies of inter-personal relations. But "masculine" and "feminine" may transcend biological sex. Flaubert, James and Proust (two of whom certainly had rooms of their own) are great feminine writers.

The excitement generated by the panel on "Women and the Creative Process," the spontaneity and vigor and humor of the four speakers, their distinct rich personal voices carrying accents of total sincerity, the freedom from academic circumlocution or personal embarrassment—all this, which had the tone of a genuine cultural breakthrough, demanded that the transcripts of the tapes be left virtually unedited. There is a kind of joy, Susan Griffin remarks, "that women are feeling slaughtering the angel in the house," and all four speakers joined in the fun. Susan Griffin's poems and commentary evoke with extraordinary directness the life of the tired, harassed woman writer, and of her need to free herself from a docile, considerate role. Norma Leistiko, in talking about how she creates dances, and dance classes too, insists on the initial need to *de-program*: to overcome preconceptions as to what dancing is like and overcome stereotyped images of one's body. She gives amusingly specific examples of new dances coming "right from immediate experience." Virginia Woolf and more recently John Hawkes have theorized on the relationship of a writer's "voice" to bodily as well as mental rhythms; and it is noteworthy that Norma Leistiko the dancer, in her free colloquial rapid speech, had as personal a voice as any participant in the conference.

Ntozake Shange richly represents both women and the third world, but also, as a teacher, an independence from academic tradition. Thus her two courses at California State (Sonoma): "Dance as Metaphor and Movement" and "Androgyny in Literature." Her poems even more than her commentary evoke the price black women have to pay for success as artists. The poems, while politically revolutionary—"there is not a black poem or Latin poem written that's not a political statement"—call also for a revolution within. Movingly Ntozake Shangke appeals for third world youngsters "to allow themselves their own fantasies, to die with your own fantasies, to go through them and come out again." And she too, like Susan Griffin and Norma Leistiko, insists on "the ability to be in your *woman's* body." Women must escape programming, entrapment in function and role, must be allowed to be inside themselves. "Cause we've been so busy being revolutionaries or being reactionaries, or being 'ladies,' that we forgot about it."

This insistence on the body and its rhythms links the four panelists;

creation demands the discovery and acknowledgement of self. The painter Miriam Schapiro tells of organizing a collective project, "Womanhouse," in which each artist was encouraged to decorate a room exploiting "fantasy at its highest level, without any fear of any kind of male criticism." Rooms became extensions of the body, as a sculptured fried egg for the kitchen, transformed to breasts—experiments to the consternation of some male visitors to a subsequent exposition. One artist, "a particular kind of woman, interested in a very singular thing," transformed her entire room into an abstract impressionist painting. Miriam Schapiro's account of the changes in the creative process in herself is compact and moving. A strong male identification had served her well until three years before (father and husbands as artists and generous men). Thus her very large paintings. "It became increasingly a necessary thing for me to do, to paint in the boldest, the largest, the most magnificent way I could envision and dream I had; and skill was very important": authoritarian, masculine work. The "womanhouse" experience for her was an opportunity to do the exact opposite of everything she had done before: to be invisible, unnoticed, freed from pressure, free from performance. "All of the male strivings, I wanted to have that done with." What she created was a dollhouse: an acceptance of her feminine side, and of a part of her life she had always dismissed as unworthy. The result was a period of intense creativity after fourteen sterile months. And the work itself, with even fabrics introduced into the painting, permitted her to see herself "as another kind of artist, as a woman artist, very much connected to those women who had made quilts, who had made samplers, who had done all of that women's work throughout civilization, who are not honored, but whom I honor, and I honor them by continuing their tradition."

Another segment of the conference seemed worthy of preservation in its entirety, though in somewhat edited form: the two meetings devoted to Michel Butor's *Passing Time (L'Emploi du Temps)* and John Hawkes's *Second Skin*, with the authors in attendance and responding extemporaneously to the speakers' remarks. The novels had been chosen as representative of very different fictional rebellions, that of the French *nouveau roman* and of American anti-realism. But neither the speakers nor the authors concerned themselves with such categories, but instead concerned themselves with the texts, their structures and proliferating meanings. The authors replied at length and with an exceptional mastery of large audiences: Hawkes in powerful, almost incantatory rhythms, Butor in an English of exceptional clarity and beauty, and which even in the many moments of mispronunciation seemed a very precise instrument.

Michel Butor responded to the cool clear reasonings of Kathleen O'Neill and to the ingenious structuralist configurations of Susan Witt with useful allusions both to *Passing Time* and to other works. One felt at once an imaginative critical mind (the mind capable of reimagining the writing of Montaigne's essays) and a lover of mathematics and music, of occult correspondences and secret designs. An essential question for readers of *Passing Time* was hardly solved: to what extent Jacques Revel's perceptions were those of paranoia, to what extent those of a structuralist *sans le savoir*, to what extent those of a realistic observer of phenomena. (The reality of

Manchester, where Butor lived for two years, was far worse than that of the fictional Bleston.) The response to Susan Witt's paper reveals the lover of involution and conceptual harmonics, working out his modern version of the unities. The indebtedness to *Ulysses* gratefully acknowledged suggests a deeper affinity than the common use of myth. A lover of intellectual ordering, however hidden, and determined to juxtapose space and time, Butor is also a master of the atmosphere of place. His graceful lecture on "Travel and Literature" displays these same impulses, though in a rather less rigorous way.

Where Butor emphasizes involuted structure and conceptual harmonics, John Hawkes speaks of chordal insistences. His 1966 Stanford lecture on *The Floating Opera* and *Second Skin*, until now withheld from publication, engages in a humorous play of correspondences such as might delight a Butor. Taken together with Hawkes's recent essay on the genesis of *Second Skin*, "Notes on Writing a Novel" (*TriQuarterly* 30, Spring, 1974), it represents a richness and subtlety of self-analysis comparable to that of Malcolm Lowry's famous letter on *Under the Volcano* or of the prefaces of Henry James or of Andrew Lytle's brilliant analysis of *The Velvet Horn*. The tortured self-questionings and recapitulations of Dostoevsky's *Notebooks* or Hawthorne's *Dr. Grimshawe's Secret* take us much closer to the dynamic process of creation, but while that process was still not understood by the authors in a retrospective, controlled way.

These essays, and Hawkes's responses to the excellent papers of John Yarborough and Ron Imhoff, remind us of the degree to which his motivations are artistic, poetic, verbal . . . rather than thematic.² The novels regularly invite comments of novelistic vision of the world (deterioration, entropy, and the like) or on novelistic psychology (such as Oedipal anxiety, and regression); and I have contributed a good share of these myself. There is an incorrigible tendency to connect even the most innovative writer with the worlds we know, be it that of our friends or that of the old-fashioned socio-psychological novel. Hawkes importantly insists that *Second Skin* should not be read as a realistic psychological novel; and he will doubtless bemuse past and future readers by describing Skipper as "a god-like figure, an androgynous figure." Are the novels of Hawkes, in a literal sense counsels of despair and visions of collapse, disheartening? To some lovers of his work they suggest instead that the imagination, and words, can triumph over the most keen awareness of loss, can triumph over everything.

Some of the most interesting meetings of the conference did not, regrettably, lead to formal essays: the vivacious panel on the education of artists, for instance. The exciting lecture of Paul Brach depended on slides. So too the novelist and film critic Clive Miller's analysis of revisions of his story, "Where They Bury the Dead," requires a knowledge of the text. But Martin Bresnick's "Cage's Unexpected Offspring: Content, Periodicity, and Space" gives a valuable expert reflection of the concert (live and tapes) —discussion organized by him, with five composers actively and good-humoredly participating. The collective excitement of breaking ground, of

²Imhoff's essay as here published differs considerably from his paper delivered at the conference. Part of Hawkes's response, though directed to that earlier version, seemed worth preserving.

exploring new techniques and discovering new worlds of acoustic pleasure, gave this meeting an unparalleled immediacy and excitement, and led to much informal discussion after the meeting had ended. It is true this is music for a trained and specialized audience, a "musical theatre of the mind." But even the most uninitiated could experience the "new parameter of artificially created sonic space." Some listeners, Bresnick notes, "actually duck their heads in an effort to avoid being struck by the imagined sonic object" in a John Chowning composition. Charles Lyons's essay, "The Movement of the Creative Process from Playwright to Actor in the *Avant-Garde* Drama of the Sixties and Seventies" usefully seizes history (and creative process) in the making. Group-centered drama rejected the basic modernist and contemplative concern with illusion and reality in favor of a creative and collective exploration of self. Lyons's valuable article sees the creativity of writer and actor and spectator as all indispensable. More than most theorists on the theater, Lyons insists on the close relationship between writing plays, acting in plays . . . and living.

Four essays on single novels, though prepared independently of the conference, are related to its interests and preoccupations; and all at some point deal with the creative or disabling force of contradiction. Ian P. Watt's "*Almayer's Folly* and Memory," abridged from a long comprehensive chapter on that novel, part of his book in preparation on Conrad, combines biographical information with the study of literary influence, fictional technique and prose style. Watt emphasizes illuminatingly large conflicts in literary model (the simultaneous impact of popular romance and of Flaubert and other French writers) and personal irresolutions too, especially concerning the pessimistic dreamer Almayer, with whom Conrad subtly identified. Conrad's insistence on commemorative piety (as against self-expression or fictional invention) may, Watt suggests, derive from a need to reassure himself of his personal identity. Thomas C. Moser's "Conrad, Marwood and Ford: Biographical Speculations on the Genesis of *The Good Soldiers*," also abridged, offers a valuable corrective to the criticism that relies solely on biographical inferences or solely on demonstrable literary influences. The intricate symbolic recasting of painful personal relationships, with Conrad and Arthur Marwood, cannot be dissociated from Ford's indebtedness to Conrad's (and Marlow's) impressionistic method. My own essay on the composition of *The Idiot* also stresses conflict and contradiction in the creative process, notably between Dostoevsky's conscious reasonings on his characters and plot and the very different intuitive discoveries of the novel's strangest moments. Paul Armstrong's essay on E. M. Forster's *Howards End* also sees the facing of contradictions as central to novel-writing. Armstrong, well-trained in formal literary analysis and later in Freudian and post-Freudian psychology, has gone beyond exclusive attention to any one of these to reconcile literature, psychology, philosophy. I myself found conflicts of sympathy and judgment were of value to Hardy, Conrad, Gide, but there are instances enough of conflict and contradiction reducing the divided writer to silence. What, one wonders, would Gide have had to say of Armstrong's definition of Forster's polarities? Gide, repudiating all notions of a golden mean, preached the simultaneous cultivation of extremes

to produce such a tension as would surrender, as on a trembling wire, the finest tones.

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