A Homeostatic Model of Literary Experience

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"God offers to every mind," Emerson warned, "its choice between truth and repose. Take which you believe--you can never have both."[1] Among the exceptions Emerson overlooked was Archimedes' "Eureka," to express his gratification upon finding the solution to a problem in measurement regarding the volume of a crown, and many of us do in fact find satisfaction (i.e., repose) in the acquisition of knowledge (i.e., truth) in a great many areas of inquiry, even taxes and insurance statistics. Nevertheless, Emerson does seems to have been correct in his assumption that any undue exaggeration of either truth or repose is probably at the expense of the other. At the moment Archimedes gasped, "Eureka," for example, his mind was probably more relaxed than usual. One kind of thinking, perhaps typified by beta brain waves, dominated his effort to solve the problem, and a quite different kind of thinking, perhaps typified by alpha brain waves, dominated his surge of gratification once this happened. A useful corollary may also be proposed that these two mental dispositions, noetic persistence and tenacious repose, often function as reciprocals, since a bigger commitment to one tends to produce a commensurate reduction of the other. In the realm of literature the incidental knowledge to be gained from reading fiction provides a sense of fulfillment additional to the gratification produced by its acceptable outcome. As maintained by Kenneth Burke, "the reading of a book on the attaining of success is in itself the symbolic attaining of that success."[2] In other words, relevant to my argument here, the encounter with fiction's repository of knowledge is pleasurable, but no less pleasurable is the sense that such an encounter has happened. But herein lies the crux of the matter anticipated by Emerson: for indeed, our exposure to the contents of fiction produces satisfaction, as does the suitable sense of an ending, but there is even more pleasure to be obtained from the use of this knowledge to overlook what we already know about ourselves. Our literary experience might be "additive" in producing a wealth of new experience, but far more important is what it subtracts by imposing believable alternatives to our normal expectations in life. In effect, we walk out on ourselves while we revel in the experience of fiction. This is why we read novels and attend plays--because our departure from ourselves makes us feel better (Emerson's repose), as if relieved of a burden (the truth) that we cannot quite understand.

The explanation of pleasure as the product of loss rather than gain is hardly new. It was first identified by Hippocrates as "catharsis," a medical term for the elimination of surplus humours. Plato found catharsis in music as an agitation which calms the soul, and Aristotle extended its application to tragedy as vicarious relief produced by pity and fear--pity for the tragic protagonist matched by the playgoer's fear for himself.[3] Aristotle's functional definition of catharsis was sketchy, and the thorough analysis he promised in Politics was either lost or never written, but it established the basis for later efforts to define the unique sense of fulfillment provided by tragedy. Others have since spoken of tension reduction as a universal principle in human experience, for example Ali ibn Hazm of the eleventh century, who is quoted by Karl Menninger as having argued, "No one is moved to act, or resolves to speak a single word, who does not hope by means of this action or word to release anxiety from his spirit."[4] In the nineteenth

century, Gustav Fechner explained the principle on a more scientific basis:

> In so far as conscious impulses always have some relation to pleasure or unpleasure, pleasure and unpleasure too can be regarded as having a psycho-physical relation to conditions of stability and instability. . . . According to this hypothesis, every psycho-physical motion rising above the threshold of consciousness is attended by pleasure in proportion as, beyond a certain limit, it approximates to complete stability, and is attended by unpleasure in proportion as, beyond a certain limit, it deviates from complete stability . . .[5]

In other words, pleasure results from the attainment of stability, while any increase in tension beyond a steady-state equilibrium produces pain or discomfort that leads to the effort to restore equilibrium. If successful, this effort is rewarded by the experience of pleasure.

Sigmund Freud based his neurological investigations early in his career on Fechner's concept of tension reduction, and he drew upon this concept along with the research of Hermann Helmholtz and Ernst BrÜcke in proposing his economic (or "hydraulic") explanation of personality. Fascinated by the so-called "neuronic inertia" of stimulated nerve cells during their recovery phase, Freud tried to apply this concept on a holistic basis to the entire personality, explaining all behavior, both conscious and unconscious, as the effort to obtain pleasure associated with such a recovery phase. According to Freud, deficiency is experienced as desire, and the satisfaction of desire signals the elimination of deficiency. The reality principle takes into account one's awareness of one's circumstances in need of change, while the pleasure principle embraces the dynamics of cathexis that bring into play a recovery phase experienced as pleasure. In other words, reality is used or reorganized by the individual in order to produce pleasure, and, not accidentally, pleasure expresses the elimination of physical and/or emotional deprivation. What we perceive is put to use in order to grant us what we want.

This model of human conscious was central to Freud's metapsychology. He proposed it in The Interpretation of Dreams, published in 1900, and "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," published in 1915, and he summarized his arguments in his General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, published in 1917:

> It seems as though our total mental activity is directed towards achieving pleasure and avoiding unpleasure--that it is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle . . . Pleasure is in some way connected with the diminution, reduction or extinction of the amounts of stimulus prevailing in the mental apparatus, and . . . similarly unpleasure is connected with their increase. An examination of the most intense pleasure which is accessible to human beings, the pleasure of accomplishing the sexual act, leaves little doubt on this point.[6]

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," published in 1920, Freud went so far as to treat tension reduction as an organic consequence of the inorganic principle of inertia:

> The pleasure principle, then, is a tendency operating in the service of a function whose business it is to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation or to keep the amount of

> excitation in it constant or to keep it as low as possible . . . It is clear that the function thus described would be concerned with the most universal endeavor of all living substances--namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world.[7]

Throughout his career Freud persistently adhered to this economic explanation of the pleasure principle, and his more generally accepted "dynamic" model seems to derive from it in most particulars. Virtually every term in Freud's psychoanalytic lexicon may be explained in economic terms. Neurosis, for example, comes from an accumulation of unrecognized tensions; displacement produces tension reduction by shifting cathexis from one mode of discharge to another; the Superego aggravates tension by introjecting parental standards; and the unconscious stores drives and memories whose conscious recognition would increase tension to unacceptable levels. The pleasure principle cannot be deprived of its centrality in Freudian metapsychology, as ego psychologists have tried, without depriving the Freudian approach of its most basic assumptions.

The body's effectiveness in maintaining a steady-state equilibrium has also been fruitfully investigated in the field of biology, first and most notably in the mid-nineteenth century, when Claude Bernard proposed his theory of the body as a *milieux intérieur*.[8] According to Bernard, our skin, the very largest of our organs, is dry on the outside and wet on the inside in order to guarantee the maintenance of a precise "steady state" balance in temperature, salinity, and so on. Good health depends on the successful perpetuation of this steady-state balance, while sickness expresses a breakdown or disequilibrium which obliges restitutive behavior. In 1932 this concept of sustained equilibrium was definitively applied to human physiology by Walter Cannon, who gave it the name of "homeostasis" and traced its complex reflex circuitry for maintaining a healthy equilibrium.[9] According to Cannon, deficiencies automatically produce "negative-feedback" signals in the nervous system which initiate the necessary changes to restore an appropriate balance. Cannon's theory of homeostasis was soon extended to behavioral psychology and applied to the personality as a whole as one particular source of disequilibrium. As early as 1934, Ives Hendricks recognized its close similarity between the concept of homeostasis and Freud's explanation of the pleasure principle, and by 1945 Otto Fenichel could describe homeostasis as the basis for all instinctual behavior explained by Freudian theory.[10] During the early fifties the concept of homeostasis was expanded by G. L. Freeman and Ross Stagner to apply as a comprehensive explanation of the entire personality comparable to Freud's pleasure principle.

In The Vital Balance, published in 1963, Karl Menninger systematically treated neurosis as a product of unacceptable tension levels, and he proposed a new approach to psychotherapy that emphasized the effective reduction of these levels based on the principle of homeostasis.[11] As explained by Menninger, homeostasis plays a dominant role in all human behavior and drives, including sex, hunger, making friends, acquiring wealth, and pondering philosophy at the most esoteric levels. With the autonomic nervous system, which falls short of human intelligence, homeostasis operates as a rigid, invariable signal system for producing the necessary changes to sustain an optimal biochemical balance. For example, as explained by Cannon, excessive salinity initiates a variety of automatic restitutive functions in the kidneys and elsewhere in order to bring sodium and potassium levels back into balance without any conscious effort on the part of the individual. However, as also explained by Cannon, conscious behavior may be included in the feedback loop when behavior is needed either to avoid pain or to satisfy perceived appetites. When consciousness is involved, a wish or sense of need triggers the pursuit of objectives that

result in felt tension reduction. In the case of hunger, for example, a glycogen deficiency in the stomach muscles signals the brain that food is needed, whereupon we become conscious of the desire to feed ourselves. As with the kidneys, the need for modification is signaled by "negative feedback," and the energy expended to send this signal is small compared to its beneficial effect. The only difference is that conscious behavior is included in the loop. Mental activity joins in the effort to produce the restoration of a steady-state minimum, and its reward for a job well done is the experience of pleasure.

Many biologists and systems theoreticians have argued that the concept of homeostasis cannot be extended to include conscious behavior. However, Freudian metapsychology successfully meets the three basic requirements of homeostasis listed by R. C. Davis, a systems theoretician who challenged its psychological applications:

1. We should know what the system is, at least to the extent of identifying its input and output.

2. We should be able to demonstrate that energy ("signal") is, or at least can be, carried in a reverse direction.

3. We should know that this energy has a negative sign with respect to the original process when it re-enters the main path of the system.[12]

Do these requirements preclude homeostasis from the participation of conscious behavior? Not at all. First, a feedback circuitry of one or more "loops" can be identified whose input and output are organized to produce tension reduction; second, restitutive dynamics can be identified that are specifically targeted to produce this result; and third, the limited output of energy (called "negative feedback") needed to carry out this function can also be identified. In the broadest sense, contrary to Davis's thesis, conscious behavior does in fact meet these three requirements. As explained by Freudian metapsychology, for example, input represents instincts (or, more exactly, *Triebe* as organized drives), output represents their fulfillment experienced as pleasure, and "negative feedback" describes the specific behavior which yields this fulfillment through the dynamics of cathexis. If pleasure is the conscious by-product of negative feedback, the success of feedback mechanisms is indicated, though not always explained, when our efforts are rewarded by the sense of pleasure. The more intense our gratification, the more effectively these mechanisms have functioned regardless of whether their exact *modus operandi* can be pinpointed as the source of feedback. Consciousness has performed the needed tasks, and when pleasure is felt, something, somewhere, has brought about tension reduction.

Several reservations nevertheless seem in order when discussing homeostasis as a function of consciousness. First, it must be conceded that conscious (and literary) patterns of negative feedback lack the near-perfect predictability of their somatic counterpart, for example the complex regulatory behavior of the kidneys. When thinking is involved, flexibility takes precedence over reliability, and sometimes to an extraordinary degree. As explained by Robert Waelder's "principle of multiple function," this is often because complex means are used to produce a relatively simple end.[13] The brain's synaptic complexity favors variety over rigid consistency, but its purpose is the same as its somatic counterpart--to expend a modest amount of energy for a more

inclusive surge of homeostatic restitution. Needs produce tension, consciousness finds the means to gratify these needs, and its success results in tension reduction experienced as pleasure. The qualitative difference between mental activity and the simple reflex arc probably results from the disproportionate involvement of higher brain centers when thinking occurs. Because of vast neural dispersion within the brain, a complex network of byways becomes available to complete the feedback loop, activating a stimulus-response sequence whose precise definition cannot be ascertained. Yet this dispersion can act just as effectively to transform tension buildup into tension reduction felt as pleasure.[14] For example, laughter, temper tantrums, and righteous indignation can equally relieve anxieties, if without any clear explanation why. Nevertheless, it may be assumed in each instance that consciousness participates in the feedback loop to produce satisfaction through tension reduction.

Another difference between somatic and conscious behavior is that we sometimes pursue activities to increase stimulation instead of diminishing it, thereby setting in motion "positive" rather than "negative" feedback dynamics. We want to be challenged and to test our capabilities for the sheer satisfaction of doing so. Additional tension seems our goal instead of tension reduction, so homeostasis necessarily plays a more complicated role. Greater strain is pursued in one sphere of experience because it produces relief in another, for example by playing a hard game of tennis to diminish stress from the day's frustrations. The body may be exhausted by physical exertion, but, more important, this exertion relieves anxieties and leads to physical relaxation. Likewise, our analytic skills may be taxed by a game of chess, but by accepting the challenge we can temporarily ignore simpler but more threatening problems. In both instances, the displacement of consciousness to activities of limited stimulation has produced negative feedback leading to overall tension reduction. Such activities are pleasurable not because they stimulate, but because they stimulate to calm. Chess, tennis, and good novels tax our energies in one sphere so we may relax in another. This is why positive feedback can be gratifying despite its apparent stress and excitement. Even if there is no obvious expectation of a later payoff, homeostasis remains the objective.

Finally, mental activity cannot bring about a perfect return to the previous equilibrium, as with simpler modes of homeostasis. Complete restitution of the status quo ante takes place for somatic feedback mechanisms, but for consciousness a new and more inclusive harmony is produced based on new modifications in psychological adjustment. As maintained by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, dean of systems theoreticians, consciousness must therefore be explained as an "open" rather than a "closed" system, since feedback produces growth and increased complexity rather than a constant balance sometimes confused with the "nirvana" principle" (or death wish).[15] Taking into account this difference, Ross Stagner has proposed a concept of "dynamic homeostasis" to explain "an active effort of the entire organism" toward an overall reduction in tension levels.[16] Conscious growth is beneficial to the extent that it refines and improves our adaptability, but it retains the same goal of maintaining a steady-state equilibrium which guarantees our physical and emotional survival. Disequilibrium is beneficial only to the extent that it leads to a more inclusive equilibrium, i.e. a better and more sufficient harmony of organization. Any structure or organism dooms itself if its growth is disproportionate. The pyramid letter club, for example, collapses once it exhausts its potential membership, and cancer ultimately destroys itself by destroying its host body ("no host, no party," quipped a friend shortly before dying of Hodgkin's Disease). Growth is important, but so is adjustment, the effective recovery from

dislocations produced by excessive growth. In fact, growth is beneficial only to the extent that it may be accommodated by these adjustments. For this reason moderate growth both serves and is served by the dynamics of homeostasis. The open-feedback qualities of romance, discovery, and cultural fulfillment advance the human condition, but only if they lead to happiness and stability, once again as dictated bythe needs of steady-state maintenance.[17]

Of course the pleasure principle is irrelevant to the dynamics of homeostasis which occur independent of consciousness, for example with the functions of the liver, kidneys, pancreas, and so on. However, when consciousness is included in the loop, any experience of pleasure indicates by its felt payoff that homeostasis has occurred here too. When a particular act seems enjoyable, we know that it has served its purpose well enough for consciousness to be rewarded with the experience of pleasure. Our quest for pleasure leads to the fulfillment of needs we might otherwise ignore, since pleasure acts as a signal system, the language our body uses to instruct consciousness where to concentrate its effort. Pleasure is the body's incentive for setting consciousness to its appropriate tasks, and without explaining why these are important. Our mind is thereby encouraged to pursue ends it need not understand, and pleasure takes on importance of its own as payment for having attained them. By means of pleasure, the body compensates mental activity for the role it plays in maintaining a balance of functions ultimately crucial to our survival as individuals and as a species.

2.

But does homeostasis bear any relationship to literary experience? Can a concept borrowed from biology really help to elucidate fiction? Very definitely, I think, since the principle of homeostasis underlies any experience of pleasure, even the most attenuated moment of intellectual satisfaction. Let the reader finish a novel with nothing more than the sense of relief that it is over and done with, and the pleasure principle is operative at least to this extent. As opposed to the cognitive and affective aspects of literary response, its conative input features a quest for satisfaction which, when resolved, produces pleasure. Even more basic than Gerald Else's Aristotelian sequence from *hamartia* to anagnorisis is the sequence from need (conation) to satisfaction (catharsis) as brought about by literary form.[18] What complicates homeostasis in literary response is its catalytic function in an exterior milieu--the written text--that brings into play the negative feedback dynamics which produce satisfaction.[19] Unlike somatic feedback circuits, the physical existence of the text is located outside the body, yet it, too, guides and sustains the reader's feelings in a fixed linear circuit which produces biological restitution. By concentrating their attention on the text in its forward momentum, word for word, episode for episode, readers lock their entire conscious-perceptual apparatus into automatic pilot and let their experience of the text do the work for them. Paradoxically, what happens is both active and passive. Through their effort to project themselves into a work of fiction, they become passive beneficiaries of its essentially linear journey toward satisfaction, just as one must walk to a roller coaster and stand in line before riding on it. True, readers draw upon their own experiential background to comprehend it, but the text itself thereupon assumes central responsibility in organizing the necessary feelings, encounters and relationships for producing satisfaction. Readers experience pleasure while the process completes itself, but this feeling slackens and disappears once relaxation occurs. No problem, however--other novels can fill the void. Shall I read Fowles or Burgess?" the reader asks, trying to ascertain which of them is the most suitable antidote for the

mood (or sense of need) he experiences at that particular time. The choice is made, the book read, and the reader comes away from it with a feeling of gain. As a catalyst, the story takes effect without being used up. Its text is consumed, but it also remains to be used many times again--as long as it can be expected to produce tension reduction.

The dynamics of homeostasis also provide a functional explanation of narrative form as a story of events brought to a resolution which most readers find satisfactory. This can be seen, for example, with Aristotle's theory of catharsis as the audience's sense of relief once a tragic protagonist learns to accept his fate.[20] Here, a transition in feelings occurs based on the advancement from tension to relaxation resulting from discovery (*anagnorsis*), reversal (*peripetia*), and, worst of all, the combination of the two in the discovery of reversal, as for example in the moment when Oedipus finally realizes his parenthood. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Peter Brooks has persuasively argued that all plot, not merely that of tragedy, provides such a transition, since it necessarily originates in tension that seeks quiescence:

> For plot starts (must give the illusion of starting) from that moment at which story, or "life," is stimulated from quiescence into a state of narratability, into a tension, a kind of irritation, which demands narration. Any reflection on novelistic beginnings shows the beginning as an awakening, an arousal, the birth of an appetency, ambition, desire or intention. . . . [Thereafter] the development of a narrative shows that the tension is maintained as an ever more complicated postponement or *détour* leading back to the goal of quiescence.[21]

Every work of fiction organized by plot somehow features the linear movement from disquiet to relief, from dissatisfaction to its elimination felt as pleasure. Such an outcome terminates stories of romance, martyrdom, triumph, moral insight, existential despair, and righteous vindication, all of which entail one invariable function--the experience of change that produces gratification. When a book fails to produce both change and gratification, we abandon it (unless assigned to read it for a literature course). "It was boring," "I just couldn't get into it," and "It was going nowhere," are a few of our stock excuses for setting it aside as being irrelevant to our needs. A pleasant experience had been our purpose, and not enough was offered to justify sticking with the book.

Most conscious activities fragmentize, recombine, and put to trial a variety of routes to gratification. The brain is free to operate in countless ways, and, as earlier indicated, any number of alternatives can be explored for producing roughly the same results. In contrast, fiction drastically curtails independent conscious freedom in order to stretch the resources of the imagination to their limit. Paradoxically, the sense of liberated verbal expressiveness is enhanced by the author's creativity, but only within a fixed linear pattern--the immutable one-dimensional sequence of words, sentences, and episodes that constitutes the story as told, word for word, scene for scene. And in the most inclusive sense the reader's relatively amorphous feelings and impulses are organized by the text's irreversible advancement from Aristotle's "beginning," characterized by high tension, to Aristotle's "end," producing relief and the restoration of a steady-state minimum. Like the simplest feedback loop, the text as a fixed sequence of words mediates the necessary passage between the two. Variety can (and must) be tolerated in one's response to a text, but only to the extent that it can accommodate this linear advancement, since mounting tension (the principal aspect of Aristotle's "middle") must finally culminate in an experience of release that reduces

tension levels to the anticipated steady-state minimum. In its role as an agent of negative feedback, plot organizes consciousness to bring about this result.

Usually there is considerable local satisfaction experienced by readers as they linger over the verbal accomplishment in a work of literature from page by page, as insisted by Coleridge in Biographia Literaria:

> A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.[22]

More specifically, as explained a few lines later:

> The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward.

Indeed, the "local" satisfaction described by Coleridge is not to be discounted, especially in the experience of poetry, since each local context bears its impact, both heightening and satisfying tension within the compass of the readers' short-term memory. However, local effects are quickly forgotten except for the relatively few which are retained in the long-term memory, most of which help to clarify the story being told, thereby reinforcing the anticipation of narrative outcome at the expense of these effects.[23] As explained by Stephen Booth (and paraphrased by Stanley Fish), there is a "temporal experience in the course of which meanings become momentarily available, before disappearing under the pressure of other meanings, which are in their turn superseded, contradicted, qualified, or simply forgotten."[24] Moreover, once a narrative context emerges, the mounting anticipation of closure as suggested by words and incidents dominant in the long-term memory increasingly crowds from consciousness the significance of other local effects (metaphor, imagery, etc.) that are less relevant to the expectation of closure. These compete at a disadvantage for time and space in the short-term memory, and soon enough they become forgotten. As plot advances, tension is increasingly brought to focus on the thrust of narrative possibilities--the relatively simple understanding of Hamlet's crisis, for example, upon the completion of Act III, Scene 2, that he must be careful now that he has alerted Claudius of his knowledge of his fratricide and, upon the completion of Act III, Scene 4, that his task is almost impossible now that he has killed Polonius. This narrative focus continues to lurch forward from one discovery to the next until it produces its final payoff in suitable closure. Local effects are thus absorbed in the momentum toward a resolution whose culminating satisfaction crowns and gives final definition to the memory of the entire text.

Critics such as I. A. Richards, Norman Holland and David Bleich have emphasized the broad range of response among readers to any particular text. Each reader presumably brings to fiction his own unique mixture of personal associations, and no two individuals can be expected to

share exactly the same response. This is true to a certain extent, but the more the reader's attention is fixed on plot's linear organization of words and episodes toward acceptable closure, the more predictable (i.e. "universal") his response becomes. In effect, plot consolidates audience response. The more intense one's anticipation of the story's eventual outcome, the closer its linear dominance of consciousness resembles a simple reflex arc more or less shared by all readers. Granted, there might be enormous variety in the personal associations which readers bring to bear upon this linear sequence, and their intellectualized retrospective assessment of the text can be expected to reflect this variety, but while narrative form asserts itself *in medias res,* during the telling of what happens, a shared anticipation of acceptable closure takes precedence over this variety. At least in their experience of mounting tension and homeostatic relief, readers do not significantly differ from each other, just as happens at a football game when a fourth quarter touchdown would guarantee victory. Before and after their exposure to a text, thei ideas and feelings of readers might be different; however, these converge while the story is told, and sometimes to an extraordinary degree. Why? Because fiction's conative dimension (the pursuit of wish fulfillment) takes precedence over its cognitive dimension (the reader's personal knowledge relevant to the story being told).

Readers need not be ashamed of the way they have focussed their interest in the story. For only by projecting themselves into its narrative momentum can they benefit from its negative feedback, guided word for word, episode for episode, from one end of its "loop" to the other. Every phrase, every described event, becomes important only to the extent that it helps to refine and modulate the advancement toward a suitable resolution. For this reason, readers can take up a text wherever they please, confident that they are joining a narrative loop destined to complete itself. They can also risk trying out a text, aware that they are free to break the circuit at any time. This is the ultimate freedom offered by fiction--its escape clause for those who find they are unable to suspend disbelief.

The narrative momentum of a text almost inevitably produces an "allopathic" centering of the reader's dissatisfactions on either a single problem or a relatively limited group of problems. A large assortment of diffuse concerns is brought to focus in a single problem that can actually be solved. As David Hume proposed in his classic essay, "Of Tragedy," subordinate movement is converted into predominant movement whose relative simplification produces a better sense of control over an undefinable spectrum of personal difficulties.[25] Like the scapegoats of ancient ritual, fiction consolidates all aggravations into a tangible substitute whose elimination brings a sense of relief. Random non-specific irritations in real life with job, money, family, friendships, and quality of life converge in a definable literary crisis whose resolution, equally literary, produces an improved sense of personal worth. There is also "homeopathic" relief in the sense that the problems solved by fiction almost inevitably exaggerate real-life circumstances. The sense of crisis must be intensified in order to obtain relief. Most readers' emotional needs are normal, and fiction's antidote, like aspirin, is likewise relatively superficial. However, ordinary difficulties must be intensified in order to be eliminated, usually by converting affect (a feeling or disposition) into active emotion triggered by specific events of a dramatic nature. For example, horror stories convert the reader's timidity into outright fear that can be denied by acts of courage, success stories convert the reader's mild dissatisfaction into intense frustration that can be denied by great achievement, and so on. In effect, fiction hyperbolizes--it imposes stories of acute crisis to exemplify the chronic problems familiar to readers. By exacerbating these problems to a sufficient

degree, it justifies the pursuit of a solution that is sufficiently dramatic to diminish anxieties and thus help readers to maintain a healthy and normal lifestyle. If ordinary events are recounted at a level of intensity comparable to our daily expectations, the story would probably bore us and its resolution would produce little if any tension reduction. The minimalist fiction in vogue today might seem an exception to this rule, but it, too, hyperbolizes, and perhaps more than its advocates realize. To the extent that it actually succeeds in avoiding exaggeration, its uncompromising dedication to aesthetic purity deprives it of mass audience appeal. Both the allopathic concentration of experience and its homeopathic exaggeration are needed to guarantee a sufficient dose of homeostasis.

Many critics reject the cathartic explanation of fiction in favor of its appeal resulting from the excitement it provokes independent of any sense of closure. Morse Peckham, for example, has emphasized disorientation rather than satisfaction as fiction's most important feature. According to Peckham, literary disorientation improves the reader's adaptive skills.[26] Tension predominates instead of its narrative closure, and as a result education (utile) takes precedence over escapism (dulce). The value of fiction presumably derives from exposing readers to new experience so they are better able to cope with the new experiences they constantly encounter in real life. Obviously, this creative priority appeals to literary specialists and a small coterie of sophisticated readers who seek out confusion, allusion, and exotic juxtapositions instead of linear coherence and narrative closure. However, as in the case of minimalism, this pursuit is irrelevant to the needs of most readers, who are bored by excessive aesthetic dislocations. What most of us seek is temporary escapist gratification, and this gratification comes from reading as an immediate adaptive response based on the imposition of improvements here and now, rather than the postponed adaptive response of educating ourselves to deal with future uncertainties. How many readers tell themselves they want to enhance their adjustment strategies for coping with life, so maybe it's time to read another novel? Very few. Most fiction draws readers because it subordinates positive feedback to the homeostatic benefits of poetic justice, happy endings, and the usual stereotypes taken for granted in the experience of fiction. Closure and simplification predominate, and their homeostatic benefit comes from a rage for order (i.e. the achievement of gratifying results), not from any rage for chaos.

3.

All psychological displacements bear homeostatic value in fiction--otherwise, they would not be brought into play. But denial is probably the most primitive, hence most basic, of these displacements because of its flat rejection of unacceptable experience (I am not cowardly, I am not lonely, etc.). In the context of literary form, denial functions as the affirmation of contrary experience (not cowardice à bravery, not loneliness à love, etc.). Anything affirmed by a text bears careful examination as a potential act of denial, and a wide diversity of readers can be satisfied by the relatively abstract function of the denial displacement embedded in narrative form. As a result, fiction appeals to mixed audience, and for a variety of reasons based on what needs to be denied. One reader seeks out adventure stories because they deny ennui, another because they deny a stultifying daily routine, another because they deny parental authority, and yet another because they deny all three, or any combination of them. Each reader harbors his own unique panoply of problems to be denied, and each turns to fiction in order to deny certain traits or feelings that he finds uncomfortable. When a novel helps him to do this, its structure has played a

useful role, but when it falls short of helping him, he is likely to turn to other books more amenable to his style of evasiveness. If science fiction and horror stories fail to improve his sense of personal worth, he can turn to historical adventures and Gothic romances. If Dreiser cannot refract and disguise his problems and inadequacies, let the reader try James, or Joyce, or Joyce Carol Oates. All provide the opportunity for denial, but in different ways and to a different degree with different readers.

A broad spectrum of unacceptable experience may be denied by fiction, and often several felt inadequacies may be denied simultaneously. For example, fiction's heightened purposefulness denies habit and indifference, its narrative focus denies random meaninglessness, its closure in a happy ending denies the perpetual need for compromise, and its exaggerated morality denies the pragmatic shortcuts of day-to-day behavior. We also enjoy fiction's sensitivity because it denies obtuseness, its profundity because it denies banality, its glamour because it denies drabness, and its romantic love because it denies loneliness and impotence. The literary convention that persistence finally pays off denies the truth that dogged persistence is often a waste of time; the literary convention that crime never pays denies society's inability to cope with crime; and the literary convention that wealth and status can be gladly sacrificed to true love denies the reality that true love is often poverty's first victim. In each instance affirmed values gain particular importance because they help to reject our more realistic expectations in life.

Those readers whose personalities are relatively unencumbered by the denial displacement are likely to be disinterested in literary experience. Since they do not read to deny, they are more prone to consider plot development to be artificial, warm emotion to be histrionic pointlessness, and vibrant characterization little more than predictable stereotyping. For such readers, dramatic confrontation is likely to seem over-dramatized, insight pseudo-insightful, and lucky accident the absurdity of the *deus ex machina* swinging out of control from the rafters. As in the case of both Emerson and Bertrand Russell, for example, fiction's truths are likely to be examined, poked once or twice, then set aside for something more meaningful to contemplate. This disinterest is perhaps offensive to professional students of literature, but it seems roughly comparable to an adult's disinterest in children's fiction. It is also exemplified by our changing taste as we grow older. Only such major figures as Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Tolstoy seem versatile enough to accommodate our needs throughout our entire lifetime, and even these are vulnerable to abandonment in our advancing years.[27] We can all observe our indifference to authors whose denial skills have lost their relevance to our mature needs, for example Dumas, Hugo, or Gabril Kabran. For some of us, Poe, Shelley, and perhaps D. H. Lawrence represent similar milestones in our emotional development--profound when we first read them, and forever to be cherished for this reason, but somewhat embarrassing in later encounters. Most of the authors we read possess an appeal at one stage in our lives that becomes almost inexplicable at another. Dostoevsky might seem extraordinarily insightful to the reader at twenty-five but lugubrious at forty, Jane Austen deliciously ironic at thirty but rather too prim at fifty-five. Or vice versa. And who is to say which opinion is the most valid? For any poem or novel to engage our imagination, it must vitally deceive us, and this means it must help us to deny feelings relevant to our present needs, right now, at this point in our lives. The cumulative result is literary tradition, the overall history of books which have consistently performed this task at one time or another in the experience of readers.

Paradoxically, affirmation usually serves as the vehicle of denial, disguising its aim with

what seems a straight-forward positive choice. Why affirmation? Because it not only denies, but rejects the very possibility that denial might be intended. "Think positive," the programmed optimist declares, ignoring the abundance of aversions and dislikes implicit in every positive declaration he makes. "We work hard around here," he declares, making it plain that sloth is unacceptable. "Everything turns out O.K.," he declares, making it plain that whatever falls short of turning out O.K. is not to be discussed. "They are lovely people," he says, making it plain that their many defects--their marvelous assortment of inadequacies--are not to be discussed. He always talks positive, but it soon becomes apparent that his dominant effort is to impose avoidances, and the more positive his outlook, the bigger his avoidances. Sir Francis Bacon explains in Novum Organum:

> . . . it is the peculiar and perpetual error of the human intellect to be more moved and excited by affirmatives than by negatives, whereas it ought properly to hold itself indifferently disposed towards both alike. Indeed, in the establishment of any true axiom, the negative instance is the more forcible of the two.[28]

And since fiction eschews the rigorous establishment of true axioms, it is free to resort to affirmatives via the double negative, the so-called *Negationsnegierung* proposed by Engels: a rose is not-not a rose. The hero is likewise not-not a hero, the lover not-not a lover, and so on. Replace not-not with truly, or finally, or most decidedly, and dialectics becomes amenable to literary solution based, as later to be explained, on the Affirmative Fallacy.[29] Avoidances can be particularized and vitalized by focussing on alternatives bigger and more dramatic than life.

Psychoanalytic critics have emphasized a variety of displacement strategies as the source of literary gratification, but without tracing their origins--each and every one of them--to the denial displacement. However, as the primary agent of homeostasis, denial should be recognized to provide the initial impulse that is both particularized and resolved by these strategies, all of which complete the action of denial by means of diversionary effort elsewhere. In each instance, it is the denial displacement that initiates the effort to find a new aim, for example with one particular behavioral disorder or another, but also, in the case of literature, with the choice of stories, characters and outcomes. The particular channels involved in this displacement strategy are important, but these remain contingent upon the original act of denial itself, which both initiates and energizes the effort to eliminate unacceptable feelings. First there is an impulse to disavow an idea or impulse, and then a specific displacement takes place to satisfy this impulse by shifting our attention elsewhere. Sometimes denial occurs alone (e.g. the cowardly lion's proof that he is not cowardly), but it is usually preliminary to the imposition of a diversionary positive aim that is brought to completion by one of these other displacements. And of course fiction guarantees the preeminence of the denial displacement by its stretched-out advancement from one state of affairs to its opposite. By dominating the forward inertia of narrative form, denial both subordinates these other displacements and provides ample opportunity for them to flourish, each after its own fashion.

The role of the Oedipus complex in literary experience, for example, as emphasized by Simon Lesser, Bernard Meyer, and Frederick Crews, originates with denial. A wide variety of neurotic symptoms characterize the Oedipus complex, but their source remains the simplest and most basic displacement--the denial of parental dependency, necessitating the quest for an identity

of one's own. First comes denial, then the complex adjustment that determines one's mature relationship with others. By means of self-discovery, a new role substitutes for an earlier one, producing reversal as the transition from one state of affairs to its opposite. In the case of Hamlet, as explained by Ernest Jones, the ambivalent behavior of the mother and the stifling dominance of three father figures--Hamlet senior, Claudius, and Polonius--express a denial of filial subservience intense enough to necessitate a tale of justified revenge. By accepting the obligation to obtain revenge (i.e. to justify his identification with his "good" father), Hamlet finally realizes his status as his father's rightful heir in the process of losing his life. Similarly, the oral fixation featured by Norman Holland in The Dynamics of Literary Response produces denial by emphasizing fantasies characterized by abundance and nourishment as the reward for passive trust. Plenitude is both promised and rewarded, but its efficient cause is denial--the elimination of strain and disappointments through regression to infantile dependency. Likewise, the anal fixation denies mature responsibility by fastening on order, cleanliness, accumulation, enumeration, respect for authority, and the creation of stable boundaries. The initial step is to deny the give and take of mature relationships, followed by the gratifying pursuit of limits associated with the anal stage of development.

A comparable pattern of denial takes place for the compulsion syndrome emphasized by Angus Fletcher, among others. The repetition compulsion helps to protect our sense of personal worth by preventing variety and disruption from aggravating our anxieties to an unacceptable extent. By ritualizing behavior through the use of literary convention, we can reject emotional difficulties in a safely predictable fashion. Their threat is cast from thought by resorting to habit andrepetition compulsion. First comes denial--"Those are not my problems"--followed by "undoing" in the dedication to tried and proven formulas--"Only to these alternative outcomes am I willing to devote my attention--over and over again." Almost inevitably the pattern reduced to habit is limited to formulaic plots typical of adventure stories, love stories, detective stories, and the like--all of which feature a gratifying predictability. And finally, Hans and Shulamith Kreitler propose in their book Psychology of the Arts that literary experience pleases because of its homeostatic value in more efficiently organizing our impulses. Aesthetic harmony is emphasized to deny problems associated with the less organized world we live in. Once again, denial serves as a preliminary displacement mechanism, followed by seeking action to find an agreeable substitute, in this instance the perfection of aesthetic form.

As maintained by W. K. Wimsatt in his study of Samuel Johnson's prose style, the dialectic between denial and affirmation seems unavoidable in verbal discourse:

> By every affirmation . . . something incompatible is implicitly denied; and what is denied, or what would be relevant to deny explicitly, varies with what it is relevant to affirm. . . . The negative defines the positive. The more peculiar and complex the affirmation the more it may need the emphasis of negation, the more negation itself, elaborated in its own aspects, may become a relevant and parallel meaning, until which is superior and which is subordinate is hardly to be told . . .[30]

Johnson's use of Ciceronian antithesis is Wimsatt's topic here, but the principle applies in a more inclusive sense to almost any expression of feelings. It may be proposed, in fact, that the pleasure gained through affirmation is almost always symptomatic of denial, whether the topic be religion,

patriotism, family, employment, or personal relationships. Beneath the declared affirmative lurks the operative negative, giving homeostatic value to one's positive outlook. The more strenuously this connection is disavowed, the more likely its relevance. And when an author's sincerity is at stake, such as in published fiction, the denied alternative is the most imminent, and the dialectic it necessitates the most intense.

The invisibility of the denial displacement is important, since its homeostatic benefits can only be guaranteed if we remain oblivious to the specific reasons for its appeal. Our heightened involvement in a story must be matched by oversight as to exactly why we want to share in its satisfactory outcome. By concentrating our attention upon fiction, we can avoid recognizing our reasons for doing so. Vice versa, we cannot effectively deny our feelings if we recognize what we are doing. One cannot say, "Right now I am thinking this in order to deny that." Suddenly that leaps into the equation again. By admitting denial, we necessarily cancel out its value except as an intellectualization which brings denial to a new level of abstraction. The moment we recognize, for example, that we enjoy Tom Jones's fist fights because we avoid such encounters at all costs in our own lives, our satisfaction substantially diminishes. Only by diverting our attention to a separate issue, for example by confessing, "I know my cowardice gives me pleasure in identifying with Tom Jones," are we able to salvage enjoyment with a new and more inclusive act of denial to be admired as the candid admission, "I am not so blind that I cannot recognize my limitations." If confronted with our evasiveness in conceding this, too (since there is probably far more than cowardice to be confessed), we are likely beg off altogether by diverting our attention to an entirely different topic. In comparable fashion, denial finds its appropriate level in the enjoyment of fiction based on the particular needs and versatility of readers, some more complicated than others, some more dependent on literary gratification than others. In all instances, denial is best carried off if we think we have kept our two worlds separate from each other--the fiction we enjoy and our personal circumstances whose denial guarantees its enjoyment. But of course this isn’t the case. Again, as Nietzsche insisted, we indulge in fiction lest we perish of the truth--lest we perish of the truth.

Plot is necessarily fiction's principal agent of denial, since it tells a success story that leads from aggravation to false confidence, from positive-feedback threat to negative-feedback satisfaction. Plot thrusts action forward toward a satisfactory conclusion, a closed-system victory over open-system impediments--the compromises and qualifications which cannot otherwise be avoided. Open-system surprises and challenges might be featured, but only to be brought under control by literary convention. Both in the story itself and in the minds of readers, there is shift from confusion to clarity, from problems to their solution, from minor aggravation to temporary relief. Reversal leads from uncertainty to closure at a new plateau of experience which produces an improved sense of personal worth. Through plot, the denial displacement is achieved as well as told, affording a transformation which is stretched out and brought to dramatic realization both through and beyond language. "I am not cowardly" becomes "the hero discovers he is brave," or, better yet, "the hero learns to be brave." This transformation dramatizes the rejection of our problems by leading from one state of affairs to its opposite, producing homeostasis by justifying a sense of accomplishment significantly at odds with real experience. If I recognize that I am a coward, tension increases; however, if I can deny my cowardice with credibility, a modest dose of homeostasis occurs. And if I can identify with literary heroes who gain the courage to meet some kind of challenge, homeostasis can be intensified with little threat to my sense of personal worth.

This happens, for example, if I can identify with Hamlet when he resolves to take his fate into his own hands, or if I can identify with Tom Jones in one of his foolish, if justified, fist fights.

Obvious examples of plot's linear organization of denial include the roving cowboy who guns down a band of rustlers and the Rider Haggard adventurer who helps lost tribes to gain their freedom from traditional adversaries. Other examples include lovers who overcome family opposition, troubled individuals who transcend themselves through heroic self destruction, and even TV sit-com families who sweep away their relatively trivial misunderstandings over the course of an hour, advertisements included. In more sophisticated plots, characters become liberated by learning to accept their weaknesses, by discovering that liberation is not their goal, by committing themselves more sincerely to the quest, or by acknowledging that such purposefulness has been futile and meaningless. But even here closure occurs, and once this happens satisfaction can be felt as the expression of the pleasure principle.

One of the principal advantages of plot is its gradual and carefully articulated realization of the denial displacement. It is stretched out in linear fashion so that the negation of X through the affirmation of Y is cumulative instead of instantaneous. There is metonymic advancement in the sense that new events re-signify old events, until the final stage in this sequence imposes an entirely new situation which denies (or "designifies") the original state of affairs. Because of this elongated reversal process, denial yields the appearance of growth and improvement: "Henry Fleming was a coward until he was taught under fire to be brave"; "Squire B. played the seducer until Pamela convinced him to be an honest man," etc. With ordinary denial, an individual quickly rejects unpleasant alternatives, worried that others might doubt the truth of his assertion. On the other hand, with literary denial experience can be more effectively modulated to produce reversal as a cumulative achievement. A better interplay can occur among somatic, conscious and literary modalities, each brought to culmination in its own sphere: (a) the negative feedback needed to produce homeostasis, (b) the denial needed to produce a felt sense of relief, and (c) the narrative closure needed to produce the satisfaction of having read a good novel. Stated in the simplest possible terms, narrative closure consolidates denial as a psychological displacement governed by the pleasure principle. Not accidentally, literary denial provides negative feedback toward homeostasis, and affirmative closure brings both to a close with an affirmative sense of accomplishment. The entire process is unified in a hierarchy of actualizations, and each of the three levels represents one phase, or dimension, in the orchestrated satisfaction of the text.[31]

4.

Positive-feedback mechanisms which impede plot as an agent of denial are usually more difficult to recognize, partly because they feature open-system ingredients characterized by complexity and elusiveness. Here a certain measure of Peckham's rage for chaos may emerge, but suitably restricted to its subordinate role as resistance to an affirmative outcome. In popular fiction, positive feedback usually consists of the obvious hurdles to be overcome by heroes and heroines, but in more ambitious works it also includes the surprises and countervailing insights which temporarily draw attention to themselves at the risk of distracting the reader's attention from the risk of plot development.[32] Puns, images and metaphors, for example, often divert the reader's attention by expressing an attitude in conflict with the success story associated with closure. If there are any confessional implications that bear this impact, these may be described as "leakage,"

as defined by Paul Ekman in his recent book Telling Lies.[33] Ekman proposes that, without realizing it, a liar reveals himself by means of kinesic signals beyond his control--by his voice, facial distortions, slips-of-the-tongue, and various emblematic gestures. This is why it has become a sport in recent decades to watch politicians' faces on television while they make their arguments. We are looking for kinesic "tells" that might indicate what they really think. In fiction this leakage instead occurs through its texture of overlooked connotations that contradict the theme and basic thrust of the story. With each new disclosure of wayward intentions there is a surge of countervailing awareness that is usually soon forgotten because of narrative form's cumulative momentum toward an acceptable resolution. If enough leakage accumulates, however, an overtone theme emerges as the open-system acknowledgement of repressed truths that resist the use of closure to deny them. Tension increases between this partially recognized cluster of repressed honesty and the sequential organization that disposes of them. Positive feedback expressive of this honesty is not totally absorbed and reorganized by negative feedback, nor are "open-system" freedom and volatility entirely harnessed by "closed-system" dynamics. But the subtext is felt--the experience becomes more complicated than it might seem. Of course, plot eventually succeeds at the expense of countervailing leakage, but without entirely drowning it out. A compromise formation results by which the negative appeal of local contexts reinforces the more inclusive satisfaction produced by narrative closure as the denial of these contexts. Fiction actually gains by this complexity, since what is denied reinforces the act of denying it. The expression of problems intermingles with the narrative momentum toward their solution, producing a wonderful resonance typical of most works of literary genius. If the dialectic works appropriately, simplification is better realized at the expense of complexity, deception at the expense of the truth--in sum total, negative feedback mechanisms at the expense of positive-feedback risk and expansiveness.

Each literary genre offers its own possibilities for such a compromise formation, but only within the most challenging of its works. In simpler works, pleasure almost entirely derives from the success story implicit in narrative outcome, with countervailing (i.e. positive feedback) instances almost entirely limited to the behavior of villains and other such blocking characters. In simple detective stories, for instance, denial is based on a variety of optimistic assurances: that evil is caused by somebody else, that it can be eliminated by his exposure, that doing so is entirely within the capacity of the detective, and that the universe is at least temporarily benign because of detectives who can root out such evil. For a countervailing subtext that suggests a more complex situation, we must turn to the most sophisticated detective stories, such as Oedipus Rex and Crime and Punishment. Likewise, simple adventure stories offer optimistic assurances that deny a spectrum of concerns including loneliness, purposelessness, boredom, impotence, and the lack of independence. The greater our frustration, the more we enjoy accounts of successful struggle against apparently insurmountable odds. But we must turn to more sophisticated tales of adventure, such as The Odyssey and Moby Dick, to observe the fullest complexity of what is happening. And relatively uncomplicated stories of tragic self-sacrifice deny a variety of problems including triviality, excessive compromise, and empty daily habit. Again, only in more complex tragedies such as Hamlet and King Lear is tragic failure expanded to a more inclusive sense of inadequacy implied by pun, metaphor and incidental references. Each genre offers its own pattern of affirmation whose accomplishment guarantees its audience appeal, but only in the best and most profound works are problems and their denial brought into the necessary equipoise for preventing homeostasis's easy achievement.

Footnotes

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Intellect," in Emerson: Essays and Lectures (New York: The Library of America, 1983), p. 425.

2. Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941, 1967), p. 299.

3. The classic explanation of catharsis is to be found in "The Function of Tragedy," chap. 6 of Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and the Fine Arts, by S.H. Butcher (New York: Dover, 1951), pp. 242-59. Here Butcher proposes a "lustrative" theory of purification comparable to Jacob Bernay's theory of catharsis as pleasurable relief, first proposed in 1857.

4. Karl Menninger, Martin Mayman, and Paul Pruyser, The Vital Balance: The Life Process in Mental Health and Illness (New York: Viking, 1963, 1967), pp. 83-84.

5. Quoted by Sigmund Freud in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. by James Strachey 18 (London, 1955), pp. 8-9--hereafter cited as Standard Edition.

6. Freud, Standard Edition 14, p. 356.

7. Freud, Standard Edition 18, p. 62.

8. Claude Bernard, Lecons sur les proprietes physiologiques et les alterations pathologiques des liquides de l'organisme (Paris, 1859).

9. Walter Cannon, The Wisdom of the Body (New York: Norton & Co., 1931--revised and enlarged in 1939).

10. Ives Hendricks, Facts and Theories of Psychoanalysis (New York: Knopf, 1934, 1958), pp. viii, 96-100; Otto Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1945), p. 13. Other useful articles with psychoanalytic applications of the theory of homeostasis include Douglass W. Orr, "Is there a Homeostatic Instinct?" Psychoanalytic Quarterly, ll (1942): 322-35; John M. Fletcher, "Homeostasis as an Explanatory Principle in Psychology," Psychological Review 49 (1942): 80-87; and R.M. Lindner, "Psychopathic Personality and the Concept of Homeostasis," Journal of Clinical Psychopathology, 6 (1949): 517-21.

11. Karl Menninger, The Vital Balance (New York: Viking, 1963). Two other texts proposing the function of homeostasis in personality include G. L. Freeman, The Energetics of Human Behavior (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), and Ross Stagner, "Homeostasis as a Unifying Concept in Personality Theory," Psychological Review 58 (1951): 5-17. Critical evaluations of the theory are offered by J. R. Maze, "On Some Corruptions of the Doctrine of Homeostasis," Psychological Review 60, no. 6 (Nov. 1953): 405-12; "Psychology: A Review and

Critique," Psychiatry 18 (1955): 81-91; Robert W. White, "Motivation Reconsidered: the Concept of Competence," Psychological Review 66 (1959): 297-333; and Ludwig von Bertalanffy, "General System Theory and Psychiatry," chap. 43 of American Handbook of Psychiatry, ed. by Silvano Arieti (New York: Basic Books, 1966), pp. 704-21. Bertalanffy's position is stated at greater length by Charlotte Buhler in "Theoretical Observations about Life's Basic Tendencies," American Journal of Psychotherapy 13 (1959): 561-81. Chaps. 5 and 6 of The Vital Balance, op. cit., pp. 76-124, offer a more dispassionate appraisal of the concept as applied to psychology. It should be added that many of the arguments against a psychological concept of homeostasis are anticipated and disposed of by Stagner in his 1951 article, which deserves a more sympathetic reading than it has received by his critics.

12. R.C. Davis, "The Domain of Homeostasis," Psychological Review 65, no. 1 (1958): 8-13--another of the papers critical of homeostasis from a systems theory approach.

13. Robert Waelder, "The Principle of Multiple Function," Psychoanalytic Quarterly 5 (1936): 45-62--cited by Norman Holland in Poems in Persons (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 45-48.

14. There has recently been considerable effort to determine the specific effect of enkephalins and endorphins (amino acid molecules located exclusively in the brain) upon the experience of both pleasure and pain. Apparently "opiate receptors" exist in the limbic system which evoke the sense of pleasure when stimulated by these molecules, suggesting that tension reduction somehow causes the production of these molecules to provide the "signal" demanded by R.C. Davis (i.e. energy carried in the reverse direction) for indicating that nervous deactivation has been satisfactorily carried out.

15. Bertalanffy acknowledges that homeostasis can occur in an open system, but he claims in his paper, "General System Theory and Psychiatry," op. cit. (see note 10 above), that there are particular limits to its application at this level: "In general, the homeostasis scheme is not applicable, (1) to dynamic regulations, that is, regulations not based upon fixed mechanisms but taking place within a system functioning as a while (for example regulative processes after brain lesions), (2) to spontaneous activities, (3) to processes whose goal is not reduction but is the building up of tensions, and (4) to processes of growth, development, creation, and the like. We may also say that homeostasis is inappropriate as an explanatory principle for those human activities which are non-utilitarian, that is, not serving the primary needs of self preservation and survival and their secondary derivatives, as is the case with many cultural manifestations." Obviously, one may disagree with these exceptions listed by Bertalanffy. The existence of homeostasis does not depend upon the ability of psychologists or neurologists to trace its pathways, any more than falling trees need to be heard for sound waves to have been emitted. Moreover, if consciousness is involved (i.e. included in the loop), the experience of pleasure can be loosely accepted as evidence of its occurrence regardless of whether the source of this pleasure can be exactly identified. In answer to item 2, spontaneity usually affords relaxation; in answer to item 3, suspense stories build tension so it can ultimately be reduced; and, in answer to item 4, creativity brings about a gratifying sense of accomplishment. None of the exceptions Bertalanffy mentions seems to preclude the principle of homeostasis.

16. Stagner, "Homeostasis as a Unifying Concept in Personality Theory." Harmony's advantage over disharmony was first demonstrated by Parmenides at the expense of Heraclitus, by the Goddess Nature at the expense of Dame Mutabilitie in Spenser's final cantos of The Faerie Queene, and later (and most problematically) by Marx at the expense of Adam Smith and Say's Law in explaining the result of unconstrained growth in social crisis.

17. The misguided ideological aversion to this simple thesis is obvious, for example in the apparently unpublished paper by Robert R. Holt, "A Review of some of Freud's (Erroneous) Biological Assumptions and their Influence on his Theories," in which Holt concludes with the explanation, "An open-system approach makes possible an economics of abundance, in which one is free to observe that loving tends to be a positive feedback system: the more we give, the more we have both for ourselves and for others." Professor Holt's analogy between love and "an economics of abundance" rather effectively dates his argument as a product of the fifties, previous to our collective recognition of retrenchment's occasional necessity in both economics and personal adjustment. If love means perpetual growth, it also means perpetual adjustment to dislocations produced by this growth.

18. Gerald Else, Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 224-32, 378-85. As earlier indicated (see note 6 of chapt. 1), my emphasis of conation (drive or motivation) derives at least in part from James's Ward's taxonomy in Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., s.v. "Psychology," in which he proposes a tripartite division of psychology into three complementary dimensions, cognitive, affective, and conative. In my opinion, one of the principal defects of current literary criticism is its virtual abandonment of conation in favor of either affect, as in the case of response theory, or cognition (i.e. the pursuit of perceived associations), as in the case of most post-structuralist approaches.

19. The "catalytic" function of a literary text was of course first suggested by T.S. Eliot in both "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "Hamlet," in Selected Essays of T.S. Eliot (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), pp. 7-8 and 124.

20. Op. cit. Else, Aristotle's Poetics, pp. 224-32, 378-85.

21. Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot: Questions of Narrative," Yale French Studies 55/56 (1977): 291.

22. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Litteraria, ed. by J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1907, 1954) 2, pp. 10-11.

23. I explore this pattern based on statistical samples in my article, "Psychostylistics: The Possibilities of a Beahvioral Science," Style 18, no. 1 (Winter, 1984): 83-97.

24. Stanley Fish, "What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable," in Is There a Text in this Class (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 353.

25. David Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 231-55.

26. Morse Peckham, Man's Rage for Chaos: Biology, Behavior, and the Arts (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1965).

27. In a recent conversation, I was told by Kenneth Burke, now ninety-four years old, that the only two texts that really matter now in his opinion are the Bible and the American Constitution. I respectfully treat his selection as a mature judgment not too dissimilar from what I myself might conclude at his age--plus Aristotle and any compilation of fragments by the pre-Socratic philosophers that is sufficiently inclusive.

28. Sir Francis Bacon, Novum Organum, First Book, 46--in The New Organon and Related Writings, ed by Fulton Anderson (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1960), p. 51; also in Advancement of Learning, Novum Organum, New Atlantic (Chicago: Encyclopedia Brittanica, The Great Books, 1952), vol. 30, p. 110.

29. In Chapter Seven I discuss this use of the double negative as the Affirmative Fallacy.

30. W. K. Wimsatt, The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale, 1972), p. 38.

31. The hierarchy I am proposing here is not to be confused with the "hierarchy of actualizations" discussed by Francis Fergusson in The Idea of a Theater (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 36, which features the relatively superficial categories of plot, characterization, and language, all of which play major roles in the more inclusive hierarchy I am proposing.

32. The deviationist theory of literary style suggested here is usually associated with Victor Shklovsky, Michael Riffaterre, and a host of other critics. Its psychological effect is also explained by Max Eastman in his paper, "Art and the Life of Action," included in Enjoyment of Poetry with Anthology, (New York: Scribners, 1951). To Shklovsky's explanation of attention triggered by distraction, Eastman adds the explanation of how attention then dissolves into inattention.

33. Paul Ekman, Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage (New York: Norton, 1985).

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