

Excerpt from *The Cultic Code, The Living Books of Paul Bowles*, II.V. Hermeneutic vision of substance

## V. Hermeneutic vision of substance

As I have shown, the new paradigm emerges from the colonial dead-end as the resolution of duality, in postcolonial identification. It has also become clear that the new vision, order, and value system emerging is one of insight and synopsis. Metanarrative can be observed in texts as a specific operation (superseding narrative), a specific nature (differentiated time as transformative and autonomous), and a specific structure (cultic, organic). These are the main aspects of the substance I am in pursuit of among the shadows of books, and have confirmed to believe that even unsuccessful criticism is originally in pursuit of the sense and trace of these. But as we have seen, the exclusivity of objective vision (which has turned out to be entirely subjective) is insufficient in interpreting the works of Bowles. An entirely different approach is necessary. The **philological and philosophical hermeneutic tradition** is one that sees the necessity of initiation, inner vision, configuration. It is also one that recognises the key aspects of art as centrality, cyclicity, organic form, transformativity. Furthermore, it is one that accepts the fact that there are strict natural laws as well as an unfathomable freedom in all forms of art. The **total nature of substance** is demonstrated by hermeneutics, and so it is not so much a partial school, but rather a kind of vision, analogous with Huxley's "sacramental vision of reality."<sup>1</sup> The key claims of hermeneutic scholarship are here configured in order to prepare the appropriate approach for the metanarrative reading of Bowles. While the analyses provide a practical textual demonstration, the model of the cultic organism and principles of metanarrative substance provide a theoretical conclusion to the angle presented here.

I suggest that it is time for criticism to leap to a new ground from which it can discover what the organizing or containing forms of its conceptual framework are. Criticism seems to be badly in need of a coordinating principle, **a central hypothesis** which ... will see the phenomena it deals with as **parts of a whole**.<sup>2</sup>

The central, coordinating principle is one to which all the key hermeneutic claims lead. Let us begin by supposing that relevance is what makes art relatable at all, and let us suppose that the target of works is the centring of the individual and the rounding of the world. Where and how is this achieved if not by narrative? For surely it cannot be the overwhelming futility or superficial aestheticism of Western stories, which leads to this target.

A literary work of substance, which is capable of initiation into insight and synopsis, is exact in its organism, therefore scientifically observable, as will be shown. However, finding and defining the metanarrative presence is not mechanical, since it depends to a great extent on the reader's or scholar's capacity for **intuitive perception**, for recognising metanarrative signs,

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<sup>1</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 16.

and for intellectual reconstruction of the hermeneutic or anagogical projection of the work. *Quod non intelligis, cum legis, cognosces in die visitationis.* (Kempis 3/III/4<sup>3</sup>) (What you do not understand in reading, you understand in the time of vision/visitation.)

## 1. Ontology of reading

### 1.1 Experience

It should not be disregarded but kept in view that literature is partly text and partly **experience**, requiring both deduction and induction, synopsis and analysis. Hermeneutics, as I understand and use its terms, offers a creative method in that it maintains the inexplicability and boundlessness of the source of art, and exact in that it proposes a reconstruction of its operation and structure. In other words, it is a way of uniting intuitive and rational capacities. Bowles's novels can only be understood and experienced fully in this mode, through "a comprehensiveness that surpasses even that of aesthetic consciousness. *Aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics* [to do] justice to the experience of art."<sup>4</sup> In hermeneutic experience, therefore, the observed work "does not remain enclosed in the subjectivity... but it is embodied there."<sup>5</sup> In other words, in the subjective experience of the work, a universal significance is conceived and raised into particularity and objectivity.

### 1.2 Participation

In demanding the **participation** of the viewer, cultic art such as Bowles's is par excellence ritualistic. The initiation into the works of Bowles, lacking so tragically in his scholarship, takes place here, in the requirement of participation. As the boundary of the observer's subjectivity is suspended, he will be immersed in the story, and will be forced to find the way out of the narrative labyrinth, in the role of the protagonist. In participation, the **existential relevance of identification** becomes clear. From the dead-end of division and subordination, from the *nigredo* of the empire of the "I", there is an irrational leap of identification: into the "**the world of the You.**"<sup>6</sup> The "you" is the protagonist with whom the reader must identify. The way is through empathy, a selflessness that heightens consciousness – preceded by the awakening of moral conscience. Not only is this act in no way vague or subjective, but it is in fact the original basis of art and science. Gadamer explicates

the concept of **sacral communion** that lies behind the original Greek concept of *theoria*. ...Greek metaphysics still conceives the essence of *theoria* and of *nous* as being purely present to what is truly real, and for us too the ability to act theoretically is defined by the fact that in attending to something one is able to forget one's own purposes. ...*Theoria* is a true **participation**.<sup>7</sup>

**Only participation** can lead to suspending the illusory border between an "inside" and an "outside" of a text. As the "medium as such is superseded,"<sup>8</sup> i.e. the fact of the reading, common substance is revealed, i.e. that the hero's journey out of the narrative labyrinth is our

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kempis, *De Imitatione Christi*, 114.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 164.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>6</sup> Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 232.

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 124.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

own. The desperation of the hero shared, the elevation will also be shared in the passages of metanarrative resolution.

### 1.3 Ontology of art

Having reached the superimposed reality of the inside and the outside of a text, the living, almost breathing existence of noumenal works comes to light. Metanarrative analysis will show that this vital force is not only figurative, but absolutely real, a structured, exact living organism. It is in this sense that we may speak of the **ontology of art**. What is supposed by the **hermeneutic stance** to lie at the bottom of every verbal act, is the totality of form and meaning. The labyrinth of narrative is presented in both its cyclical structure and the experience of circumambulation, while the height and release of the metanarrative leap is presented both in its pointal, central structure and the experience of being vertically lifted out of context, into a realm of liberation and illumination. The distinction between the two, narrative and metanarrative, shadow and substance, provides catharsis, an excess of exuberant energy. This natural process of the self-splitting of the literary unit of the book produces the same phenomenon as forceful atomic fission. For the narrative and the metanarrative parts belong organically together, but it is the intuitive realisation of their distinctness which gives the reader the energy of realisation. This is the revelativity of literature, a par excellence noumenal phenomenon.

Hermeneutics itself sees the initial ontological function of the work as “bringing about an **increase in being** in our vision of the world which is impoverished by everyday affairs.”<sup>9</sup> Gadamer uses the same term as Ricoeur. “The work of art does not simply refer to something, because what it refers to is actually there. ...The work of art signifies **an increase in being**.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the vision of metanarrative emerging from narrative is itself metaphoric, the increase in vision triggering the increase in being. If I manage to catch sight of the noumenon, not only will my textual vision become clearer, but my own sense of orientation in life will be improved, and so the noumenal quality of my being in the phenomenal world will also be raised.

This ontological increase presented in the work should not remain gratuitously objective, as if it merely presented the artist’s self-realization. “Imitation and representation are not merely a repetition, a copy, but **knowledge of the essence** ... a ‘bringing forth,’”<sup>11</sup> i.e. revealing of the substance. The hermeneutist **raises up** narrative into its untransformed reality, “**into its truth**.”<sup>12</sup> The truth of narrative lies in its metanarrative substance.

### 1.4 Transformation of vision

The truth of narrative is its metanarrative: it is at once observable in its textual fixedness, and in the passage which leads to it. The static, lifted state of text and experience is the primary connotation of “truth” as an absolute value, the absolute sense of Gadamer’s fulfilled or autonomous time, and Huxley’s sacramental vision. The other connotation of “truth” lies in its dynamic rise, in its process, the **transformation of vision**. This transformation reorients mentality, driving it now “to get to another way of thinking, noncausal.”<sup>13</sup> The reaching of stillness, and the transformative road to it, may be seen as the double target of literature. “The

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:81.

<sup>10</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 114.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Caponi, Gena Dagele (ed.), “*Conversations with Paul Bowles*,” 97.

transformation is a transformation into the true.”<sup>14</sup> Gadamer refers to the lifted existential state of the ritual participant as its absolute reality: “this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being.”<sup>15</sup>

“Don't think, but look!,”<sup>16</sup> says Wittgenstein. The transformation of vision belongs to a long tradition, which reached Bowles in “Éluard's surrealist doctrine that the poetic function is ‘*donner à voir*.’”<sup>17</sup> It is **insightful and synoptic vision** which is, on the one hand, required for the interpretation of cultic narratives, and on the other hand, provided. This approach, however, is beyond interpretive strategies, as it is the single organic one, the key that opens all locks. In my consideration, insight means the pin-point in-depth accuracy of intuitive subjectivity, piercing **through** the thick **texture** of story, straight to the hidden **material of substance** i.e. specific points and passages. Synopsis means the over-all holistic perception which sees **within** the thick **figure** of story the subtle **body of substance** in concealment i.e. the emerging illuminated and illuminating character of the book, summed up in the enigma of its title.

Modern scholarship excludes intuition as well as creative constructivism, in an aggressive defence of the rational capacity. The speculative mind, however, is incapable of establishing or developing correspondence with the organic world, including the natural and cosmic. Modern man, equipped with technology and science is clueless about his status and role in universal order. He is also clueless about the very fact that art, language, and time might also be organic, noumenal phenomena, i.e. living entities. It will be shown later how and why complete identification with a work is necessary. Two Sanskrit notions of intuitive adequacy spell out the approach, new as much as ancient, to the proper interpretation of art: “to appreciate art, you have to be **an adhikari, an adequate viewer**. You have to be a **sahriday, or of the same heart** as the maker.”<sup>18</sup> The relation between the artist and the viewer is analogy, where their common substance is their “same heart” of intuition. “What comes out of the mouth, comes from the heart.” (Mt 15:17)

As compared to the utter destructivity of Bowlesian scholarship, the origin should be remembered, that “all art ...always demands **constructive activity** on our part.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the transformation of our vision is induced by the work of art, but it also needs active participation on the receptive side. Ritualistic receptivity, therefore, demands a conscious effort from the participant, “an achievement.”<sup>20</sup> This demonstrates that metanarrativity unites the two aspects of interiority and exteriority also as passivity and activity.

## 2. Superseding narrative

The hermeneutic transformation of the story begins with the **suspension or rather superseding of narrative**. It may be said that this is the **metanarrative operation**. Metanarrative qualitatively alters the reader's understanding of narrative reality, releases tensions unreleased in narrative. To find the solution of each protagonist's story, the illusion of linearity, causality, setting, character status, dialogue, and even action i.e. narrative needs to be

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<sup>14</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 112.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>16</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 66.

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence D. Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with art historian Prof. B.N.Goswamy. [livemint.com](http://livemint.com), Dec .16 2011. “Maker” in both the sense of the original God-head of creation, and the author as agent and co-creator.

<sup>19</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 37.

<sup>20</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 127.

peeled away. The narrative paradigm is a trap, insufficient in itself, not an end but a means. Its basic fact is that the “I” narrates itself. This is the means of the reader to become identified with the hero, at once potentially illuminative and potentially destructive, depending on the reader’s success in being able to follow the narrative “I” through the invisible liminal threshold into its metanarrative fulfilment, where the “I” is transformed into a third term, a “third eye”. A contemporary writer says of narrative that

the analog I and the I become one. There’s no distinction. Because the moment there’s a split between them, you don’t have an I but a self—not even a self but the beingness of me, and the I—the space of it—is the interiority. You need to narrate the gap in order to cover it. I’ve never meditated for a moment in my life. I don’t know how it works, but I suppose the gap is closed. ... one of the things you have to do to put yourself in the **meditating mode is stop narrating yourself to yourself**. ... You have to suspend thinking in narratives. The moment you are conscious of yourself the gap opens up. And in this gap, stories are generated.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Differentiation of time

**The temporal cross** of the human condition marks the dilemma of two apparently different sets of reference:

How shall we resolve the paradoxical situation created by the twofold fact that man, on the one hand, finds himself *in time*, given over history, and that, on the other hand, he knows that he will be “damned” if he allows himself to be exhausted by temporality and historicity; that, consequently, he must at all costs find *in this world* a road that issues upon a transhistorical and **atemporal** plane?<sup>22</sup>

What is unanswerable by speculation is present in every act of human creation. While the “malady of space-time”<sup>23</sup> prevails **in the horizontal narrative axis**, the work of art “does not simply exhaust itself in momentary transport, but has a claim to permanence and the permanence of a claim”<sup>24</sup> **on a vertical metanarrative temporal axis**. Therefore in order to solve the riddle of time, to pass between in-timeness and atemporality, into a fullness of time, it is “enough” for the protagonist or reader participate in the literary initiation, which is its genuine mode of being. In other words, a real and proper piece of art automatically guides its audience into the experience of full time, regardless of what is being said directly. The body of the text itself carries its own purpose and meaning, inasmuch as it is an organic unit with a transformative centre of common substance. This alone is the “transcending fact” (Let It 194) of its life.

The narrative or vertical approach, on the other hand, in general observes the ways in which a narrative text represents the flow of time, transporting the reader into the understanding of flow. The problem with this is its illusion that the only kind of time is dynamic, and the only

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<sup>21</sup> Brad Fox interview with **Aleksandar Hemon**, Guernica 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Yoga – Immortality and Freedom*, xix.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 227.

<sup>24</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 126.

kind of experience cognitive. In other words, it does not consider the vertical, apparently static axis of time. But based on the metanarrative principle of interchangeable roles, objective analytical scholarship might easily be seen as entirely subjective. For example, Bowles's novels have strong currents of story, which run into merciless dead-ends. They also have strong passages, scattered, of psychic release, escape, or liberation, which are apparently of no consequence for the story. How to reconcile this paradoxical formula? The critic either underestimates the former, in a primarily vertical, poetic or mystical approach, or ignores the latter, as always happens in scholarship. These are indeed different “**interpretive communities**”<sup>25</sup> but their “interpretive strategies [which] give texts their shape”<sup>26</sup> in both cases fall short of synopsis or configuration. An approach is **either horizontal or vertical, objective or subjective, or both at the same time and more: insightful and synoptic.**

“The calculating way in which we normally manage and dispose of our time is, as it were, brought to a standstill. ...The kind of time characteristic of both the festival and the work of art ... **‘fulfilled’ or ‘autonomous’ time.**”<sup>27</sup> The hermeneutic perception requires “thinking about **eternity and death** at the same time.”<sup>28</sup>

In *The Sheltering Sky*, Port and Kit make “the fatal error of coming hazily to regard time as non-existent.” (*Sheltering* 135) But Amar knows better, that “man was meant to consider only the present.” (*Spider’s* 272)

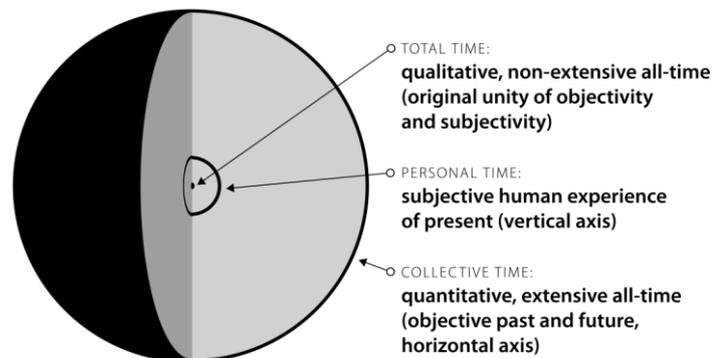


Figure 7. Spheric temporality

Ricoeur's notion of mimesis as the passage into artistic, metanarrative reality consists of time as prefigured, refigured, and **configured.**<sup>29</sup> Configuration as the centre of the process, like the liminal centre of the initiation process, is analogical with the theological notion Gadamer calls the “divine revelation” of “sacred time.”<sup>30</sup> However profane literature seems to

<sup>25</sup> Stanley Fish, *Interpreting the Variorum*, in: David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, 327.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>27</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:87.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:54.

<sup>30</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 122.

be narratively, the temporality into which metanarrative takes the reader is truly metaphysical, and therefore sacral.

#### 4. Reconstruction

Having passed through narrative structural deconstruction, now metanarrative “**reconstruction and integration** as hermeneutic tasks”<sup>31</sup> become the goal of theory and analysis. Hermeneutics, however, has yet only theoretically conceived the character of the artistic substance, its practical structural mapping remains to be completed. Ricoeur claims that a “search for some order is possible”<sup>32</sup> in narratives. Frye also states that “literature is not a piled aggregate of ‘works,’ but an **order** of words.”<sup>33</sup> These affirmations provide encouragement to returning to the exploration of Bowles’s “terrain of order”<sup>34</sup>.

##### 4.1 Operation

**The first aspect of metanarrative proves to be operation.** The metanarrative operation may be seen in two distinct ways. Primarily, the suspension or superseding of narrative has already been shown as necessary. To overcome narrative conditions is a “task for consciousness”<sup>35</sup>, for the hero as well as for the reader. The act of overcoming is a leap of intuition, of faith, which is manifest in the immanent metaphoricity of language, in **extension**. In a way, the participant of the literary rite is given narrative ground in order to leap from it, to spring into the metanarrative dimension. So the first aspect of the operation is extension. The second aspect may be observed from the larger perspective of seeing the story’s horizontal and vertical forces. The relation between these is **transmission**. As narrative waves flow into centres of substance (exterior life returning to its interior source of motivation), to be regenerated there (interior life becoming exterior again), direct transmission takes place. The location of this is where horizontal and vertical contents meet, on the border, the membrane of the metanarrative unit. It is clear that extension and transmission differ only in point of view: extension is seen from narrativity, while transmission is seen from narrative-metanarrative synopsis.

To demonstrate this, let us take an example. In *Sheltering*, after Port dies, and after her “silent leave-taking” (255), Kit escapes the “grief and remorse” (285) by escaping the desert fort and town, “to extricate herself from the net of involvement she felt being drawn around her (245), in “an overwhelming impatience to put all this ludicrous décor behind her, out of her consciousness.” (260) The escape itself is an outer circle of metanarrative operation, where extension and transmission may be seen: extension of the possibilities of plot, and transmission of outer events into inner life. In the moonlight, she walks to the “edge of town, where the oasis straggled over into the courtyards.” (261) Here is the border of the ritual passage (262-264), here is where transition from shadow into substance begins. The „sound of rivulets on all sides” induces her desire for water, this desire, as if by magic, presents a break in a wall, where she enters a garden. Narratively, the garden is an idyllic place where “the graceful palm trunks rose high into the air from the sides of a wide pool.” Symbolically, this is Kit’s innermost sanctuary.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 164-169.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:19.

<sup>33</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Bowles, undated manuscript fragment in Lawrence D. Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 127.

Analytically, this is a metanarrative unit, where the two are yoked as objective and subjective reality. All the sensual effects which drive Kit closer and closer into the centre of the scene are means of further extension and transmission. The spiral of the process reaches its end, the threshold of a new beginning, at the core of the passage, where events have no narrative dimension any more, since they do not effect the larger story in any way. (The autonomous core of Kit's self-baptism in the pool will be analysed later.) It begins in the following: "She felt a strange intensity being born within her. ...life was suddenly there". It ends: "She finished her bath in silence, her access of high spirits gone; but life did not recede from her. "It's here to stay," she murmured aloud, as she walked toward the bank." This feed-back is the transmission of substance achieved and revealed in the scene, into the continuing story of Kit's journey. It is also the extension of invisible substance into the visible shadow realm. Perhaps it would be more precise to refer to this regeneration of story not only as metanarrative extension but **emanation**, as the presented "high spirits" of life overflow into stories: not only Kit's story, but into the reader's story as well. Metanarrative leaves no visible trace in narrative, appearing to be a superfluous digression, but the fact of the experience and her sealing it with the final utterance puts its stamp on the whole book. The metanarrative operation, therefore, provides the stairways of ascent and descent between shadow and substance. The primacy of substance before shadow is crystal clear.

This example demonstrates the significance of "a hermeneutics that aims less at restoring the author's intention behind the text than at making explicit the **movement by which the text unfolds**, as it were, a world in front of itself."<sup>36</sup> The operation is the process leading to "extract a **configuration** from a succession."<sup>37</sup> The act of configuration reaches the essence, both source and sum of narrative dimensions.

#### 4.2 Nature

**The second aspect of metanarrative is its nature.** It is central, and autonomous. Its autonomy is given by its sensibility in itself, extracted from narrative, as well as in its inner organism. This inner life is secured by its simultaneous stillness and dynamism, the simultaneous balance and energy which provides the inner rhythm of substance. With the previously demonstrated operative primacy of substance in mind, we may confirm that the overall balance and rhythm of a book is founded and patterned not on narrative, but metanarrative balance and rhythm. This dual nature of the textual substance may be observed in its core-aspect.

As will be seen in the model of the metanarrative organism, autonomous temporality means stillness towards the outside, but dynamism within. Gadamer provides invaluable insight: "The work of art does resemble a **living organism** with its internally structured unity. In other words, it too displays **autonomous temporality**."<sup>38</sup> Frye recognises that the "balance [of the sentence as containing all its parts at once] implies a neutralizing of linear movement."<sup>39</sup> Peering onto the nature of substance, a quality is sensed first.

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:81.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:66.

<sup>38</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 268.

we cannot judge a quality of style by choice of subject-matter. The real difference is rather in the conception of the sentence. The long sentences in the later novels of Henry James are *containing* sentences: all the qualifications and parentheses are fitted into a pattern, and as one point after another is made, there emerges not a linear process of thought but a **simultaneous comprehension**. What is explained is turned around and viewed from all aspects, but it is completely there, so to speak, from the beginning. In Conrad, too, the dislocations in the narrative – working backwards and forwards, as he put it – are designed to make us shift our attention from listening to the story to **looking at the central situation**.<sup>40</sup>

The central situation, as we have seen, is not a narrative centre, it can be reached only through metanarrative insight and synopsis. The central situation of a textual microcosm, therefore, may be seen as the analogous presentation of the cosmic centre.

Where the “same heart” of the “adequate viewer” lies, is the centre. Eliade notes, “every Microcosm, every inhabited region, has a Centre; that is to say, a place that is sacred above all.”<sup>41</sup> The **microcosmic centre** of books is the place where the original magic of art, the unravelling takes place: the metanarrative substance.

The concentric circles of narratives is where scholarship has been shown to stop. Frye begins the line of thought from here:

**Criticism** as knowledge, the criticism which is compelled to keep on talking about the subject, **recognizes the fact that there is a center of the order of words**. ...Unless there is such a **center**, there is nothing to prevent the analogies supplied by convention and genre from being an endless series of free associations, perhaps suggestive, perhaps even tantalizing, but never creating a real structure. The study of archetypes is the study of literary symbols as parts of a whole. If there are such things as archetypes at all, then, we have to take yet another step, and conceive the possibility of a self-contained literary universe.<sup>42</sup>

In the greatest moments of Dante and Shakespeare, in, say *The Tempest* or the climax of the *Purgatorio*, we have a feeling of converging significance, the feeling that here we are close to seeing what our whole literary experience has been about, the feeling that we have **moved into the still center of the order of words**.<sup>43</sup>

This observation is one of the few metaphysical acknowledgements of literature that is philosophically centred and at the same time completely text-based. “It is as a quest that our whole literary experience is in relation to this “still centre of words.”<sup>44</sup> Once at the source of intuitive thinking and sensing, a conscious process of structuring takes place to build experience and reintegration. “I doubt very much that with no conscious control

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<sup>40</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 267.

<sup>41</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism of the Centre*, in: *Images and Symbols*, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:19.

at any point during the work it would be possible **to construct** [an] **organic form**.<sup>45</sup> The organic form of the work is primarily its directly ritual structure, but even the narrative, causal line of the story shows organic nature in that it always returns to its beginning, through the process of transformation.

To demonstrate the nature of substance, I return to the earlier example, the scene of Kit's baptism in *Sheltering*. I have shown the larger passage as the full cycle (262-264). Its core lies within, extending to less than a page (263-4), its beginning and end, as its borders or membrane. already quoted. This autonomous centre contains the baptism in the pool, where she "immersed herself completely" in the water and in life at once supremely personal and supremely universal. Four different dimensions are shown to converge, two interior and two exterior. Her sense of "intensity," "dignity," and "life" converges with her thought, "I shall never be hysterical again." These inner impulses converge with the outer side of her experience: the act of bathing and singing, and her sense of the "cool water," her own voice, and the sound of water dripping from her body. This strongly involving scene doubly unites interiority and exteriority, still states of feeling and thinking with dynamic processes of acting and sensing. This doubly dual nature of the metanarrative substance is what projects itself into the structure of the passage.

### 4.3 Structure

Metanarrative structure is the third aspect of textual substance. Ricoeur's claim is reconfirmed that "the whole of existence cannot be defined by structures based on rational categories."<sup>46</sup> This would imply that in metanarrative only irrational structure exists, but in fact it is superstructure, rather. As narrative gains its impetus from matanarrative, so it gains its structure. It is not metanarrative which is dislocated from narrativity, but the other way around: it is narrative which is dislocated from its original source and form in metanarrative. Therefore what is normal is not mundane reality, but its ideal model. "**Undisplaced structures** take us back to the gods, being both conscious and bodily."<sup>47</sup> The textual structure of the metanarrative passage and core provide the vertical mould of analogy for the horizontal axis. Likewise, the substance of characters, spaces, events is also founded on the very form of substance itself, its aspects and functions becoming differentiable only in temporal extensivity. In other words, what we see as structure or form is the horizontal projection, the shadow play of substance which comes down from a vertical source. It is no túlzás to connect profane metanarrativity to sacred: they are of the same source, the former presenting the same archetypes in the directly relatable human world, while the presents the same in abstraction. Frye's "great code principle" may be associated, "that the organizing structures of the Bible and the corresponding structures of 'secular' literature reflect each other."<sup>48</sup>

It is not narrative but metanarrative analysis which demonstrates "the central structural principles that give literature its communicating power across the centuries through all ideological changes."<sup>49</sup> Let us see this in our example of Kit's baptism in

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<sup>45</sup> Caponi, Gena Dagel (ed.). "Conversations with Paul Bowles," 57.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 295.

<sup>47</sup> Northrop Frye, *Words with Power*, 142.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

*Sheltering*. Four different dimensions have been shown to converge in the autonomous core of the cycle. This complexity of structure, two interior and two exterior senses, provide the inner mould for the membrane of the passage. The surface of such textual parts is, therefore, the outer side of a level projection, the two sides of which are undifferentiated and concentrated in what we may call the configuration of the central passage. The linear structure provides a cross-section, a horizontal structure which is the projection of the vertical, and the two ultimately configuring the total form or full structure of the metanarrative passage as a round sphere of text and experience. Therefore, in holographic terms, the centre proves to be the *holon* of the passage, and the passage the *holon* of the book. The operation, nature, and structure of these *holons* or metanarrative units is exactly the same. These unchanging aspects define the metanarrative unit.

## 5. Poetry

The metanarrative parts in Bowles have the immediate effect of intense poetry: phrases and passages which linger in the mind and on the lips, their sense inexhaustible, their pronunciation delicate. But the poetry of substance is essentially not a stylistic or atmospheric quality, rather a mode of expression in which its **pure ethereal matter is embodied** in words. Although words can also only circumscribe the essence, nominal-verbal embodiment<sup>50</sup> is a natural process. Natural and organic, as the operation, nature, and structure of substance and of language are analogous. Subtle matter takes on a thicker form in language, and the closest to its subtlety is poetry. Contrary to the common contempt for poetry, it contains substance more directly than narrative, just as the sacred is more directly to the point of existence than the profane. Bowles is entirely sacral in these hidden places of poetic immediacy, like Dante and Giotto, “poet and painter [who] share the ability to pare down their images to a compact essence, all the more vivid because of its brevity.”<sup>51</sup>

The metanarrative textual parts in Bowles’s novels are essentially poetic. Let us see what the attributes of poetry are. I suggest that the primal attribute is **autonomy**, i.e. that the form can stand alone, carrying a unit of an existential message without any explanation or addition of information. The metanarrative parts may be taken out of context, interpreted and considered without loss of meaning: they are proper poetic fragments, proper poems. The narrative context adds a story with which the reader can only identify from a distance: what can and must be related to directly and instantly are metanarrative elements. Further essential aspects of the poetry of substance are specified in the following.

### 5.1 Non-informativity

Bowles says, “What’s *in* a novel is not important. ...It’s **how** it’s told, how the words go together, what makes a good sentence. After all, there’s nothing in writing except words, patterns of words.”<sup>52</sup> Synoptic vision is absolutely necessary in the reconstruction of the “how”. „Do not forget that a poem, although it is composed in the language of information, is not used

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<sup>50</sup> “Nominal-verbal” stands for the regular meaning of “verbal” i.e. taking shape in word. Yet the whole point of substance is that it unifies the object and the subject, as poetry aims to do so as well. So using the incomplete form “verbal” does not do justice to the complexity which lies in the linguistic unit.

<sup>51</sup> Levey, Michael, *From Giotto to Cézanne*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Caponi, Gena Dagele (ed.), “*Conversations with Paul Bowles*,” 213.

in the language-game of giving information.”<sup>53</sup> Instead, or rather beyond sheer cognitive information, poetry provides experience. Poetry is the form of literature that is purely and par excellence cultic, i.e. initiatory. It is also essentially philosophical: sheer sensual impressivity cannot merit the genre. A deeper understanding of the phenomenal, narrative world is necessary. “Philosophy ought really to be written only as a *form of poetry*.”<sup>54</sup>

## 5.2 Transgressivity

The orphic poetry of Rilke is based on the transgressivity between the immanent linguistic total world, individual interiority, and the external phenomenal world. Their analogy suggests that poiésis is the basic nature of language, not descriptivity, vertical sacrality being definitive of its balances and harmonies, not horizontal profanity. In poetry, the immediacy of formal transgression carries the urgency of substantial conversion to metanarrative existence. It is this implicit linguistic and existential relevance of poetry which can rehabilitate the poet as oracle, and redefine poetry as the magic of ritual presencing.

In an absolute congruence of passive and active presence, beyond verbal expressivity, sensual perception, cognition and reflection, there is only a **sixth sense receptivity**. Rilke writes (or perhaps rather recites) in *To Music*:

You stranger: music. You heart-space  
grown out beyond us. Inmost thing  
outstripping us, surging onward— (7-9.)

## 5.3 Metaphoricity

Metanarrative is the place where the **immanent metaphoricity, immanent poetry** of text is revealed directly. A text is metaphoric, primarily poetic due to the basic metaphoricity of language. Let us observe the metaphor as such, to see what *happens* and what *is* in poiésis. The primary event is the **metaphoric** operation, the horizontal-vertical leap. In the metaphor, the leap or extension is made within a unit, by an **internal movement**. For example, in a metanarrative phrase of the *Sheltering*, “almost hear the sky cracking,” the limit of the hero (not hearing in “almost”) is surpassed by the reader (hearing in “the sky cracking”). The narrative fact is leapt over by the poetry of the phrase. In another example from *Up Above*, “the difference between them ...next to nothing,” the limit of the hero (“difference” and “next to”) is surpassed by the reader (configuring the identification). Bowles verbalises beautifully the point of metaphor: that **distance is**, in the dimension of substance, **non-existent**. There is no real difference between hero and protagonist, one person and another, one liminal experience or organic unit of matter and another. Distance belongs to horizontal narrativity, to the world of “seems”.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 160.

<sup>54</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> This, I suggest, is the point of other scientific theories such as quantum: that at the core of quantitative extensivity lies qualitative extensivity (quantitative non-extensivity), as at the core of narrativity lies metanarrativity. The immanent leap contained in the metaphor represents vertical limitlessness, and may be seen in yet more condensed form in the symbol, and in the radix of agglutinative languages.

The metaphoric operation reflects the implicit linguistic **freedom** that any phenomenon may be identified with any other, based on the evocation of a common nuomenon. The path to this open space is the extension of meaning in the suspension of phenomenal borders. Bowles's protagonists become metaphorical in that they extend themselves at definite points in the stories, by which they become temporarily reintegrated i.e. the borders of their consciousness are suspended. A totality of meaning is manifest in these passages of **extension**, and the text becomes a ritual recital, a live act. The synoptic vision of the world is metaphoric in the sense that metaphor propagates identity between distant but analogous figures.

The metaphoric movement is **transportive** of meaning and existential sense. "Does not the recourse to participation ... imply a return to metaphor?"<sup>56</sup> The metaphor in every case reveals the order of verticality, and integrates expression into its universality. In this sense, the more particular and unusual a metaphor is, the more active participation it requires from the passive reader or listener. This clarifies what is meant by the universality of a metaphor: not an emptying of meaning in generalization, but a dynamic extension of meaning into **relevance**.

"In descriptive language, metaphors are something of an obstacle because of their ambiguity."<sup>57</sup> In non-descriptive, **revelative language**, however, the two (or more) fields of reference e.g. the hero's and the reader's, are not on the same level, therefore there is no binary uncertainty in the metanarrative leap or extension. On the contrary, it is the "ambiguity" of metaphor which yokes the expression into its "truth," as it yokes the book into its truth of being at once textual and experiential. It may be suggested that the motivation of the metaphoric leap is **metaphoric synergy**: a surplus of semantic and existential energy, where cognition is illuminated, and the reader encouraged and uplifted. The metanarrative conjunction of opposites is precisely "where the subject and object are not clearly separated, and there are forms of energy common to both. ... As we think of words, it is only metaphor that can express in language the sense of an energy common to subject and object."<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, it is only the metanarrative field that can directly express in textuality the sense of energy common to subject and object, author and reader. The common linguistic phenomenon of the metaphor demonstrates the immanent poetry of language as such.

#### 5.4 Poetic figures

Let us explore a couple of specific **poetic figures used by Bowles** to provoke the leap of intuition into metanarrativity. The most significant figure is the properly dialectic **mental paradox**, a key instrument of Bowles. In it, reason is brought to a halt, the calculative capacity of the mind is forcefully suspended, and a direct identification is made between a couple of rationally non-convertible, contradictory elements on a new plane of perception. It is an equation where a truth comes out of a logically impossible union. Its synergetic effect is immense, it is a "miracle" of poetry which leaves rationality flabbergast, and releases higher understanding. This higher understanding is the revelation of common substance, its fact that it is present in the most unlikely places. The situative paradox acts as **saving superimposition**, taking unresolvable narratives and incompatible characters to the point of absolute juxtaposition. It is, therefore, essential in reaching a resolving break-through and regenerating new narratives. Bowles is a master of the paradox, using it in all four novels to reach the

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<sup>56</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*, 277.

<sup>57</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Great Code*, 55.

<sup>58</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Great Code*, 6-7.

metanarrative operation. The short story *He of the Assembly* demonstrates Bowles's method, as he uses three proverbs, logically unresolvable formulae as the bases of the narrative build-up. The paradox opens a par excellence metaphysical space: "Here the impossible union / Of spheres of existence is actual, / Here the past and the future / Are conquered, and reconciled." (T.S. Eliot, *Day Salvages*)

A visual form of paradox is the **scenic spiral** of the *mise en abyme*, another particular aspect of metanarrative passages. The *mise en abyme* is where the juxtaposed elements are revealed mirror images of each other, not necessarily explicitly, but implicitly. As literary conceit, it points to a non-sensory, non-cognitive field of connections. It reveals the constantly gaping gap of narrative, which must at all times be bridged by metanarrativity. Vertigo over the abyss of juxtaposed elements is induced not to distance the reader, but to evoke the emergency of metanoia, the urgency of having to overcome the limits of narrative and existential limitations in intuition and empathy. For example, the desert experience is such, where the visible space is directly analogous with the psychic space: the shock of outer infinity induces the recognition of inner infinity. In its mirror-effect, the endlessly repeated dyads of space allow no stable point or zone of reference: *mise en abyme* pulls the rug from under the feet false security. Here the solution is entirely left for the participant to be figured out. The most characteristic example is the central scene of *Up Above*, where murderer and victim are directly juxtaposed. Looking into each other's eyes, Soto and Day enter a spiralling vortex, where "the difference between them [is getting to be] next to nothing." Even though the scene has no explicit narrative effect, the fact that the two identify with one another turns the entire story inside-out, inducing also a metanoia of vision in the reader. These poetic figures, therefore, are by no means gratuitous, but exist for the existential benefit of the reader. In other words, they are par excellence ritualistic, cultic.

## 6. Feed-back into narrative: total form

Now that we have seen from a hermeneutic point of view the autonomy of metanarrative, we must see what the function and nature of narrative is, in relation. In order to see the total form of a work, its metanarrative body must be **reintegrated into its containing narrative**. Hermeneutics envisions narrative as being indirectly but essentially metanarrative. Logically, as the whole of language literature is essentially metaphorical, even narrativity must be seen as metanarrative. This idea proves to be true by metanarrative analysis, showing that there is **direct transmission** between horizontal narrative waves and the vertical effect of substance. In effect, the sacred and the profane, the transformed and the untransformed are not qualitatively different but present different statuses on a scale: their position is a question of **degree**. Towards fulfilment, phenomena lose profanity and gain sacrality, therefore the **scale** is absolute and irreversible.

The **linearity of narrative may be seen as part of the circumference** of a metanarrative cycle. "The fundamental form of process is cyclical movement, the alternation of success and decline, effort and repose, life and death which is the rhythm of process."<sup>59</sup> Frye confirms "a **cyclical movement** within the order of nature, and a **dialectical movement** from

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<sup>59</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 158.

that order into the apocalyptic world above.”<sup>60</sup> The long narrative genre has the scope to manifest the qualitative thresholds of experience, as well as the mechanisms of the full rites of passage from which liminal points emerge.

It is somewhat surprising to find connection, even dependence between narrative and metanarrative aspects. As the metanarrative form is **infinitely more concentrated and complex**, it is obviously the source of narrative form. In fact, the latter can only be fully understood from the former. Narrativity is a baser, less intense form of metanarrativity. While narrative operation is the direct horizontal transmission of vertical movement, and narrative focus centres around character and situation, narrative structure is held together by causality. Ricoeur recognises that the source of narrative process is metanarrative, in claiming that “**even causality has to be thought as analogical**.”<sup>61</sup> This puts narrative time into a new perspective: sequentiality is the horizontal transmission and infinite variability of the **initial organic impetus and pattern** represented by the metanarrative model. The horizontal narrative passage goes from exposition, through development, to closure. The vertical passage proceeds from preliminal, through liminal, to the postliminal phase. “[Literature’s] adventure seems to have brought [itself] to blur the limits between genres, and to contest the very principle of **order** that is the root of the idea of plot.”<sup>62</sup> In another context, the evangelical passage “**render** to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22:21, also in Mk and Lk) distinguishes between the power of the visible (as narrative) and the invisible (as metanarrative), by making their order, the hierarchy clear.

Narrative may be seen as the **diffusion** of metanarrative into horizontal temporal extension. Marking the two as counterpoints offers to reveal the **rhythmic** formulae of the novels, suggesting that Bowles’s prosodic dynamism is provided by the syncopation of narrative and metanarrative parts. Synergetically, narrative and metanarrative parts of the novels cooperate like the physical and the subtle body of a living organism: conditionment and unconditionment acting at once. There is a **symbiotic** relation between the two. Bowles expresses this in the following: “life for life’s sake, the transcending fact of the living individual. In the meantime you eat.” (*Let It* 194) Gadamer speaks of a “genuine text,” which is “a woven texture that holds together.”<sup>63</sup> Now it is clear what really is woven together: shadow and substance.

The hermeneutic vision of literature considers the work of art as a complete entity of its own autonomous balance, cosmic reference, and full validity. This is connoted when Frye claims, “literature is a **total form**.”<sup>64</sup> To this I add, owing to my analyses, that it is also a living, organic entity. This view is the key which opens the hermetic metanarrative spaces of Bowles’s novels, and transforms the critical ride on their narrative waves into a potential initiation for all readers. Furthermore, this view not only highlights the directly initiatory, metanarrative aspects of literature, but reintegrates them into narrativity. Thus the basic philosophical or existential question is solved, of being part of the narrative of time while simultaneously also being part of metanarrative time.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*, 277.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2:7.

<sup>63</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 142.

<sup>64</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 118.

## 7. Limit of hermeneutics

With all its invaluable insight and synopsis, all its brilliant subversion, Western hermeneutics is historically, politically, and linguistically part of the colonial tradition.

However disciplined by taste and skill, **the experience of literature is**, like literature itself, **unable to speak**....The presence of incommunicable experience in the center of criticism will always keep criticism an art, as long as the critic recognizes that criticism comes out of it but cannot be built on it.<sup>65</sup>

The ritualistic approach of this dissertation, however, attempts to point out that the apparently inexpressible metaphysic of experience does in fact speak. Indeed, it does not speak the language of imperial, linear, strictly horizontal discourse. Through the reconstruction of the ritual process which Bowles was or was not himself conscious of using, I attempt to demonstrate the existence of an organic system of transgressive experience, a triadic concentric system of transgressive operation, nature, and structure, which is the exposition of mimesis as a rite of passage. Thus criticism becomes a key instrument in re-harmonizing the sensual experience of literature with its cerebral processing, reuniting the beauty and the truth of art: material and formal essence. The revelativity of textual substance resolves the hermeneutic limitation, and consoles Gadamer who confesses to believe “we are still divided as individuals as far as our day to day purposes are concerned.”<sup>66</sup> We do not have to be, should not be divided either internally or externally, because we are, in fact, not. Division is a human self-imposition. The roots of this holistic mode of interpretation and experience must be sought in a re-interpretation of the closest tradition which did not begin but ended with Platon.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 27-8.

<sup>66</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 40.