

Third Agents

Third Agents:
Secret Protagonists of the Modern Imagination

Edited by

Ian Cooper, Ekkehard Knörer
and Bernhard Malkmus



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INTRODUCTION

1. “THE THIRD” AND MODERNITY

BERNHARD MALKMUS & IAN COOPER

The Brazilian author João Guimarães Rosa’s thought-provoking story “A Terceira Margem Do Rio” (The Third Bank of the River) is a parable which defies any psychological motivation or explanation for its plot. The first-person narrator reminisces about his childhood in a little village in the middle of the rainforest and ponders on his father’s life, who at one point had a canoe built for himself and spent the rest of his life anchored in the middle of the nearby river—a disconcerting embodiment of both displacement and transcendence: “Our father did not return. Nor has he gone anywhere since. He simply carried out the plan to stay within the river’s currents, right in the middle, always inside the canoe, never to return from there—never ever.”¹

The father’s leap into a liminal space marks a collapse of communicative codes which can be observed in many of Guimarães Rosa’s short stories and which reflects his position as an analyst of the effects of industrial and colonial modernity in pre-modern societies. The father’s retreat into a secluded existence leaves the whole village in a state of impotence, paralysed by the “strange nature of this reality”² which they quickly and apologetically dismiss as a tragic event, although it reflects their innermost fears as individuals and their fateful attitude as a community.

The father’s escape from human bondage and communal responsibility into an absurd hypostasis of individuality serves as an historical allegory of a foundational paradox of modernity—the compulsion to assert absolute

¹ Rosa, *Ficção Completa* II, 409: “Nosso pai não voltou. Ele não tinha ido a nenhuma parte. Só executava a invenção de se permanecer naqueles espaços do rio, de meio a meio, sempre dentro da canoa, para dela não saltar, nunca mais.” (translation B.M.)

² *Ibid.*: “estranheza dessa verdade” (translation B.M.).

self-reliance and simultaneously to define oneself within a given collective consciousness. Fredric Jameson's concept of "situational consciousness" captures the essence of this simultaneity: "the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the collectivity itself."³ Thus the third bank turns into the dimension of a *different* reality, archaic and modern at the same time. This allegory challenges the traditional mental topography of centre versus periphery and opens it up to a third category of space "in the face of the inexorability of [the people's] conditions as beings who are petrified in the here and now".⁴

In this perpetual suspension and reinstating of periphery and centre, "space can be neither measured nor mastered, because it may oscillate between infinite expansion and infinite contraction".⁵ For Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht this coalescence reflects a hermeneutic crisis in western self-awareness, leaving its mark in particular on post-war and postcolonial imagination, such as Guimarães Rosa's fiction. Modern literature in general is obsessed with this very moment of inversion and its spatial, temporal and figural implications. This prominence of third agents and third spaces in modern fiction is the subject matter of this book.

Gumbrecht also refers to the fact that the notion of historical time only emerged through the notion of a human subject linking past, present and future as a temporal sequence through action. This is also the only way humans can imagine themselves as creators, participating in the demiurgic power of world-making (*natura naturans*). It is in the context of the discovery of this creative potential *vis à vis* the presence of history in social praxis and interaction that the human emerges as the artist of him-/herself, as a subject marked by his or her "thirdness". Only through the ability to exteriorise oneself in self-reflection or play can one internalise social codes as "natural" and "individual".

This constitutive act of subjectivity is linked by Roland Barthes to what he calls "mythopoetics"—the genesis and dynamics of myth. By referring to the creation of the historical subject as participation in the demiurgic power of *natura naturans*, historical intention is given "a natural justification":

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or

³ Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", 85–6.

⁴ Albergaria, "O Sentido do Trágico em 'A Terceira Margem do Rio'", 524 (translation B.M.).

⁵ Gumbrecht, *In 1926*, 366.

used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality [...] myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made.⁶

Barthes's analyses combine mythopoetics and mimesis: myth shifts a given sign system—by both reduplicating and distorting it—into the realm of something natural, something which is the cause of mimesis rather than its product. History veiled by myth thus is no longer primarily an object of observation but rather a mode of perception. In Barthes the modern historiographer is a mystagogue who leads the reader back to the origin of a myth, i.e. the discursive origin where the sign in its internal complexity is reduced to a mere signifier. He creates a meta-language that reflects on the meta-language of myth itself, and thereby sets free “the myth as a story at once true and unreal”—the myth of the self, for example, which can recreate itself through a narrative.⁷ This prototype of someone who obstructs a certain code and thereby facilitates its systematic operations defines one of the central hidden agencies *behind* and characters *in* modern Western fiction: a third agent between the true and the unreal, between mimesis and myth.

One of the recurrent leitmotifs of this study will be the isomorphism between third agents as narrated figures (*pícaro*, rogue, trickster, spy, parasite, avenger, etc.) and as narrating figures, many of whom can be described in terms of the double nature of Barthes's mythopoetics. The genealogy of third agents in modern literature is related to a particular mythopoetics which requires explanation in terms which interrelate literary scholarship and intellectual history. It is true that third agents have always been prominent literary protagonists, ranging from various embodiments of the fool or trickster archetypes in ancient and mediaeval literatures to the intriguer and schemer in eighteenth-century French drama. Some of these characters intervene in plots as agents of a moral cause and are associated with a divine (saviour) or an evil (tempter) power, others internalise precisely this structure of *psychomachia* and ridicule a society which bases its social cohesion on such a Manichean opposition of good versus evil. Third agents, i.e. literary characters who do not fit into an accepted framework of individual and social (or religious) identity, have always been favourite characters in literature. In the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, however, these figures became ever more prevalent. Nineteenth and twentieth-century western literatures teem with characters who can be classified as third agents,

⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 142.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

ranging from the adulterer/adulteress (in European and American realism) to the traveller (in postmodern fiction), by way of perhaps the most common third agent in twentieth-century fiction, the detective (going “down these mean streets”, in Raymond Chandler’s classic formulation, but as one “who is not himself mean”).⁸ These are characters who complicate binary models of social inclusion and exclusion. We can now pay attention to some key stages in this genealogy.

In 1807 Goethe published his novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (*Elective Affinities*), the story of two mismatched couples who project their un-lived passions onto the design of an English landscape garden. Every single one of the four protagonists displays a highly fragile psychological constitution, and the textual strategies sketch out to what degree modern subjectivity is perpetually jeopardised by both the mythological underpinnings of autonomous subjectivity and the ongoing presence of an interconnected social and religious episteme. The very discourse of modern subjectivity and its fragility places the human in a position between autonomy and heteronomy. The main characters in Goethe’s novel partake in this third agency and together form the metaphorical experiment of a double *ménage à trois*.

There is a minor character in *Elective Affinities* who functions as a parody of third agency in general. The so-called “Mittler” (mediator) is supposed to advise the main couple (Eduard and Charlotte) on their marital problems: he is a kind of legal arbiter and psychological counsellor at the same time. Yet he is always in the wrong place at the wrong time. He interferes without the necessary tact and lacks a deeper understanding of the situation. It is this form of interference, however, which also facilitates the exchange of roles through disturbance. This double quality of interference—simultaneous mediation and disruption—was to become the major feature of many third agents in modernity. It is the mediator’s ill-fated intervention which allows the suicidal protagonist Ottilie to move into the position of the secret mediator figure of the novel, whose entire appearance demonstrates that the fragile modern subject “exists only in the limitation, abbreviation, and even destruction of that to which it lays claim”.⁹

Goethe adds a further twist to this by featuring the “mediator” as a parody of the Romantic theorist and philosopher of language Friedrich

⁸ Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”, 991–2. See Hickman, “The Complex History of a ‘Simple Art’”, and more generally *The Art of Detective Fiction*, ed. Chernaik, Swales and Vilain.

⁹ Breithaupt, “Culture of Images”, 302.

Schlegel.¹⁰ In his collection of aphorisms *Ideen* (1800), Schlegel conflates the notion of the divine and the aesthetic in a “mediator” character in a Romantic configuration of self-reflexivity:

No person can be the direct mediator for himself, even for his own spirit, because this mediator must be purely objective, having his centre outside the perceiving subject. A person can select and appoint his mediator; but he can select and appoint only those who have selected themselves. A mediator is whoever perceives the divine in himself, and whoever sacrifices himself to preach, proclaim and present the divine [...] To mediate, and to be mediated, is the whole higher life of man, and every artist is a mediator for the others.¹¹

Schlegel’s conflation of the aesthetic and the sacred expressed itself powerfully in a Romantic conception of poetry that could come about because of post-Kantian philosophy’s relentless engagement with consciousness and its conditions—an intellectual context in which the constellations of thirddness presented in this volume decisively took shape.¹² Following on from Fichte’s radicalisation of Kant, Schlegel realised that “there is a kind of poetry whose essence lies in the relation between the ideal and the real, and which therefore, by analogy to philosophical jargon, should be called transcendental poetry”.¹³ In the wake of post-Kantian explorations of the consciousness of consciousness, a type of writing could emerge in which self-reflective thought became transmuted into a quasi-religious unifying principle, and at a stroke, for the early German Romantics, the distinctions between literature and philosophy, prose and poetry, were overcome (Nietzsche’s own determined erasure of those boundaries in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is but one aftershock of that move). Romantic (“transcendental”) poetry is therefore infinitely in between, a displaced locus of sacramental mediation, always transcending itself in the realisation of yet purer levels of self-reflection. It “hovers at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power,

¹⁰ Cf. Bersier, *Goethes Rätselparodie der Romantik*, 100–3.

¹¹ Schlegel, *Ideen*, 128–9. Original in Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, II, 226.

¹² A major contribution in this field is Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*. See also Wheeler, *Romanticism, Pragmatism and Deconstruction*.

¹³ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 195. Original in Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften* II, 204. See Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, 138.

can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors”.¹⁴ Poetic writing thereby approximates ever more closely to the function of pure reflection, pure mediation, to a “uniting of difference into forms of identity”.¹⁵ But here precisely is the tension bequeathed by Romantic thought. For that movement towards reflection—towards unity—is only realised through what Schlegel famously came to define as Romantic irony and the aesthetics of the fragmentary, a practice of art caught between the universality of its claims and the self-subverting—ironic—awareness of its own disparateness, the juxtaposed collection of discrete elements that make it up. As the meeting point for those dual claims, poetic utterance constantly inscribes into its communicative act (its attempt at unity) the contingency of the combinations with which it speaks: the ironic third is a major legacy of Romantic theory to literary modernity.

The Romantic notion of the phatic and prophetic poet, the epitome of a third agent, was parodied by Goethe as an inefficient, obnoxious marriage mender, who has given up his former position as a priest after having won in the lottery. Like the *pícaro* or the fool, other mediator figures often partake in the realm of the underworld, in the world of gambling and in the sphere of the sacred. A major third figure in the English literary imagination is Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, whose crime—the killing of the albatross—places him in the liminal social space between legitimate and criminal (sacred and profane) violence.¹⁶ The Mariner, an eternal wanderer condemned for his transgression to “Life-in-Death”, is another modern secular mediator figure who traces his lineage back to a sacral context, and his fate is interwoven with the role of a specifically religious act—sacrifice—in post-Enlightenment societies.

René Girard’s study of the nineteenth-century French novel uncovers a deepening of the epistemological crisis the Romantics had sought to overcome.¹⁷ The sentimentalist attempt to root subjectivity in emotion, passion and intuition gave way to ironic self-reflection in Romantic writing and the parodic subversion of Romanticism in Goethe. Much of nineteenth-century French fiction, notably Balzac, Flaubert and later Maupassant, diagnoses the epistemological crisis of modern subjectivity as an anthropological one—the impossibility of forging connections with an unmediated “origin” through emotion, passion and intuition. As in Goethe’s marriage drama, here “self-consciousness is created [...] through

¹⁴ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 175. Original in Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften* II, 182–3.

¹⁵ Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 86.

¹⁶ See Modiano, “Historicist Readings of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*”, 284.

¹⁷ Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 23.

the replacement of something without definition or organisation by an image or placeholder".¹⁸ And the historical determinants of that crisis are never far to seek. One of Balzac's central characters, Vautrin, who moves with protean elusiveness and deceptive guile through *La comédie humaine*, is a trickster, an outlaw figure at once within and outside society, assuming many and varied disguises which admit of no stable, original identity. For Vautrin, destiny is worth nothing, or rather it bears whatever value one attaches to it: "une destinée vaut tout ce que l'homme l'estime".¹⁹ The ethical fluidity inherent in this endless circulation of roles—the well-nigh Zarathustrian self-dismemberment it entails—is ultimately Vautrin's undoing, but as Christopher Prendergast notes in his study of mimesis in the French novel, Vautrin's shape-shifting epitomises the ambivalence between the preservation of identity and its dispersal into a spectrum of constantly fluctuating value, an ambivalence that is one of nineteenth-century fiction's fundamental structural factors as it reflects (particularly the economic) tensions of modern selfhood: here the third agent "incarnates the spirit of anonymously mobile capital".²⁰

For Girard, the economy of mimesis is inseparable from the economy of desire. In both cases the third agent sets in motion the dynamics of exchange but remains in a covert position. Girard finds the crisis of both mimesis and desire epitomised in a figure on the threshold of literary modernism. In extensive analyses of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past/In Search of Lost Time*), he has shown how Marcel Proust—like Goethe before him—builds the structure of thirdness (or, to give the phenomenon its Girardian name, triangulation) into his writing of modern selfhood. In Proust we are presented with an entire phenomenology of anthropologically embedded mediation, crystallising around the various figures that populate his writing: the lover, the rival, the snob. For Girard, "it is not an exaggeration to say that, in all of the characters of *Remembrance of Things Past*, love is strictly subordinated to jealousy, to the presence of the rival. The privileged role of the mediator is therefore more obvious than ever".²¹ In the Proustian fictional universe, the object of desire undergoes "transfiguration": it is made both present and absent by being placed simultaneously inside and outside the desiring subject. And this ambiguity of the transfigured object—Proust's manipulation, according to Girard, of a central theological category—

¹⁸ Breithaupt, "Culture of Images", 306.

¹⁹ Balzac, *La comédie humaine* V, 709.

²⁰ Prendergast, *Order of Mimesis*, 97. On circulation and the novel see also Trotter, *Circulation*.

²¹ Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 23.

might be seen as a culmination, in the context of European modernism, to the spectrum of shifting currencies in which all of the writers discussed here participate: the post-sacral economy of constantly fluctuating signification and Barthesian mythopoetics.

What Girard identifies as mimetic desire in Proust's novel, typified by *snobisme* ("the snob does not dare trust his own judgement, he desires only objects desired by others"²²), is perhaps one late and powerful literary inflection of the self-doubt at the heart of emancipated subjectivity, of secular modernity's fraught quest to re-experience the satisfactions of vicariousness. Yet that redemption remains unattainable: "desire never actually acquires its true object: it leads to failure, oblivion, and death".²³ These mechanisms of Proustian desire, the constant inscription of and conflict with the mediator, are effectively precursors of Derrida's *auto-affection*, which "conjures up the presence of the other while working to keep it at bay".²⁴ For Girard, the economy inhabited by Proust's novel imposes "between subjective illusion and objective truth" an insuperable "supplementary moment" (*moment supplémentaire*) of "diversity and intermittence, of heterogeneity and chaos", in which even the permanence of nothingness is refused ontological purchase.²⁵ It is that in-between moment of simultaneous mediation and disturbance that makes *Remembrance of Things Past*, like *Elective Affinities*, an essential text in the modern genealogy of third agency.

A cultural theorist who has both practised and reflected upon a methodology of "thirdness", and whose insistence on the category of suspension may remind us of Girard's diagnosis of Proustian "intermittence", is Walter Benjamin. His mode of thinking and manner of writing go beyond the traditional dualism between content and form and constitute "ein Drittes" ("a third").²⁶ This he relates to the intrinsic nature of an image which does not resolve or sublimate the tension inherent in human self-reflection, but rather keeps it suspended between historical and sensual experience—as a "heteronomous and heterogeneous similitude".²⁷ Images for Benjamin are the medium of reflection and replace Schlegel's figure of the "mediator" by the configuration of the "body- and image-space" ("Leib- und Bildraum") in which our reality is engendered in

²² Ibid., 24.

²³ Ibid., 238.

²⁴ Howells, *Derrida*, 57.

²⁵ Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 238.

²⁶ Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* II.1, 314.

²⁷ Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space*, ix.

perpetual acts of translation of perceptual and physiognomic similarities.²⁸ The suggestiveness of this Benjaminian nexus (image, myth and history) has recently been traced out with reference to the writing of W. G. Sebald, where, as Eric L. Santner has shown, photographic images “capture the peculiarities of the memory of events that hover between personal memory and impersonal history, events one has not lived through oneself but that, in large measure through exposure to the stories of those who did experience them, have nonetheless entered into the fabric of the self”.²⁹ And it is memory that is central when, in his essay “On the Image of Proust”, Benjamin develops one of his central metaphors—childhood:

And just as children do not tire of quickly changing the bag and its contents into a third thing—namely, a stocking—Proust could not get his fill of emptying the dummy, his self, at one stroke in order to keep garnering that third thing, the image which satisfied his curiosity—indeed assuaged his homesickness.³⁰

The mediating power of images is their ability to entice acts of translation between perception, cognition and the human body without trying to demarcate one privileged territory or source of origin. “Childhood” itself as a precinct of “origin” is pre-empted by Benjamin in an image which captures the both/and, neither/nor position of two seemingly mutually exclusive entities: “container” and “content”. Benjamin relates his thinking in similarities to a mimetic and synaesthetic approach to reality in childhood.

Arguably *the child* is the hidden figure behind the secret agent of modernity whom we are trying to track down in these essays—implausible as that might seem if one thinks of the genealogy we sketched out above. In Goethe’s novel, Ottilie’s childlike thinking in similarities interferes with the other protagonists’ plans of self-advancement and emotional rationality (and it is the death of the child, the product of the ill-fated liaison between the couples, which forms the tragic climax of the story); the adulteress in nineteenth-century European novel-writing instils a dynamics of mimetic

²⁸ Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II.1, 309–10.

²⁹ Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, 158. Santner follows Marianne Hirsch in calling this dimension “post-memory”; see Hirsch, *Family Frames*.

³⁰ Benjamin, *Selected Writings* II, 240. The original reads: “Und wie sie [children] selbst sich nicht ersättigen können, dies beides: Tasche und was drin liegt, mit *einem* Griff in etwas Drittes zu verwandeln, in den Strumpf, so war Proust unersättlich, die Attrappe, das Ich mit einem Griffe zu entleeren, um immer wieder jenes Dritte: das Bild, das seine Neugier, nein, sein Heimweh stillte, einzubringen” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, II.1, 314).

desire into the economy of passion and retains, in all its brutality and more often than not deadly consequentiality, an aura of naivety (*Madame Bovary* offers perhaps the most striking example); and, probably most famously, the picaresque tale of the twentieth century is populated by childlike protagonists, the most prominent doubtless being Oskar Matzerath in Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*)—the three-year-old dwarf who refuses to grow up since he does not want to be part of the adults' world, and yet collaborates with it in many different ways. This suggests a complex notion of childhood and certainly not a predominantly psychological one, and Benjamin's investigations of the nature of image and human memory give us reason to believe that part of the motivation behind the plethora of third agents and agencies (and their hidden "child") in the modern imagination has to do with the increasing rift between human memory on the one hand and the accelerated realms of human experience (*Erfahrungsraum*) and future expectations (*Erwartungshorizont*) on the other during the late eighteenth century.³¹

Subjectivity, then, can be described not only as the effect of an interpolation of social processes, produced in the duality of the imaginary, but as an active engagement with the omnipresent production of myth and metaphor around us. As Goethe demonstrates, the human attempt to channel the power of mythopoetics in the aesthetic rendering of human environments does not safeguard the project of subjective autonomy. The disconnection of myth from reality leads to mechanisms of fetishisation, as Barthes has shown. It is, however, likewise not a viable option to succumb to the petrifying power of the image, for example the racial stereotypes entrenched in the western mindset as symptoms of its own deeply embedded sense of fear.

V. S. Naipaul dramatises this conflict in *The Middle Passage* (1962), a semi-documentary and travelogue through the Caribbean islands which features the second ("middle") leg of the triangular slave trade, the journey from the West African coast to Brazil or the West Indies, as its unifying metaphor (the other two legs being the journey of the slave ships from European ports to west Africa and from the West Indies to North America or back to Europe respectively). He explores the dilemma of the Caribbean cultures which he regards as petrified by a racist bias governed by images of superiority or inferiority disenfranchising entire peoples and disavowing the colonised. Whereas Benjamin emphasises the productive quality of the image, Naipaul seeks to deconstruct its totemic potential. The third space of deprivation between lost cultural traditions and the promises of

³¹ Cf. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 211–18.

modernity and globalisation are envisaged even more drastically by Naipaul than by Guimarães Rosa. His radical questioning of modernity and its colonialist legacy also depicts third agency as an aggressive cultural mechanism through which the West has projected itself into new real spaces by turning them into imaginary ones. And it continues to do so in the iconicity which is bestowed upon the positions of “hybridity” and “interstitiality” in the rhetoric of cultural globalisation and the postmodern condition. The western project of modernity and its perpetual self-differentiation of social spheres and subjectivity also leave behind a legacy of marginalising other cultures in the “middle passage”, the purgatory between loss of tradition and lack of future (the exact opposite of what Koselleck defined as the decisive accelerator of Western modernity—an enlarged experiential scope and widening expectations):

A derelict man in a derelict land; a man discovering himself, with surprise and resignation, lost in a landscape which had never ceased to be unreal because the scene of an enforced and always temporary residence; the slaves kidnapped from one continent and abandoned on the unprofitable plantations of another, from which there could never more be escape. I was glad to leave Coronie, for [...] it held the full desolation that came to those who made the middle passage.³²

³² Naipaul, *Middle Passage*, 190.

2. AGENCIES, AGENTS, MEDIA

EKKEHARD KNÖRER

“The third”, any third, cannot be conceived without a relation to a first and a second that themselves relate to each other. This is, quite literally, as trivial an insight as they come. The triadic variations implied in this trivial insight, however, are manifold, to say the least. Where dualities and binaries meet a third, all manner of complexities arise. Figures of the third can constitute and sublimate and destroy and subvert and question, they can stabilise and destabilise, they can mediate or cross between and reflect upon dualities of all kinds. Figures of the third change dyads, binaries and oppositions by approaching, exiting and re-entering, by being present and by remaining (noticeably) absent.

There are logics, dynamics, economics, rhetorics, sociologies, aesthetics, psychologies and, of course, narratives of the third; the third—or thirds—figure in virtually any cultural phenomenon and artefact from pure logic—as in the law of the excluded third or the Hegelian logic of dialectics—to the realities of social interaction. In real life as in the products of our imagination we meet agents of the third in the shape of tricksters, spies and go-betweens. In this book we offer excerpts from and prolegomena to a yet (or, more probably, never) to be written exhaustive study of third figures. The topics treated here range from biblical origins to the indifference of post-history, from Robinson Crusoe to Jack the Ripper, from ethics to metaphysics and from mimesis to metaphor.

The structure of our book itself is tripartite. In the first part, “Agencies”, comprising three articles, the authors focus on the dynamics and structures of the third. The second part, on “Agents”, is less concerned with the grander scale of the history of ideas (with the notable exception of Martin Andree’s meditations on “The Triadic Structure of Presence”) than with the exemplary functions and workings of thirds in literary contexts. The book closes with another triad of contributions, with an emphasis on photography and film.

The escape from easy binaries is the focus of Lawrence Steven’s meditations on I.A. Richards’s, F.R. Leavis’s, C.S. Peirce’s and D.H. Lawrence’s concepts of a “third realm”. The poem, for F.R. Leavis, is the

place where “minds meet”—and the poem is thus destined to be a model of human world making understood as a collaborative endeavour of making and finding sense and meaning. I.A. Richards had the same idea when he developed his communication triangle. When looking for what might connect the linguistic “symbol” and the real world “referent” he uses, says Steven, Peirce’s idea of thirdness. “The person who means”—the interpretant in Peirce’s terms—then came to be in the mediating position between “referent” and “symbol”. This mediator, however, is depersonalised in Peirce (as “mind”), and in Richards tends to be dissolved into something like an (ideal) context. What gets lost in these attempts, Steven argues, is the ethical dimension that is embodied in the “person who judges”. This moral dimension Leavis saw masterfully developed in D.H. Lawrence’s writing. Steven goes on to demonstrate how, in scenes from *Women in Love* and different versions of the tale “Daughters of the Vicar”, Lawrence undoes chronological time in order to describe “kairotic” moments of a “full flowing of life” that amounts to an “Ultimate Whole”.

The “ultimate whole” of absolute knowledge in the Hegelian scheme of things, however, is what modernity’s greatest thinkers have kept on striving to prevent from happening, says Pieter Vermeulen in his article “Mimesis and the Perpetuation of Modernity”. The argument goes like this: we must never reach the third stage of the synthesis implied in Hegel’s grand récit of the Spirit, because as absolute knowledge it is a synthesis that leaves behind everything human. Redemption, after Auschwitz, is no longer an option for humankind; all that is left is a kind of perpetual postponement. Vermeulen traces this thinking of postponement in thinkers from Erich Auerbach (and his concept of “mimesis”) to Geoffrey Hartman (who seeks a human middle ground of “unified multiplicity”) and Theodor W. Adorno, whose idea of “mimesis” runs counter to Hegel in its insistence on the “unsublatable particularity” found—and found only—in the best works of art. These positions, however, Vermeulen concludes, did not succeed; they were, more or less, given up by postmodern posterity. Postmodernity got us stuck in what it erroneously believes to be a final state of “cool Redemption” and indifference. Contradicting this ideology, Vermeulen insists that we have to continue in our search for an antidote to present forgetfulness, an antidote that acknowledges the “persistence of the past”.

Zachary Sng in his essay “Figure³” argues that metaphor works like dirt. Sng refers to Mary Douglas’s groundbreaking description of the cultural function of dirt, which, Douglas famously argued, emerges within a system as something that initially stands out and irritates, but is then

categorised as dirt, i.e. something formless. This process of happily overcoming the irritation can become the blueprint and symbol for all ordering processes of this kind. Metaphor, Sng argues, works in a structurally similar, and similarly paradoxical way. Sng demonstrates this by turning to Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. The binary of "order/error" or "system/outside the system" turns out to be a dynamic system. In metaphor and dirt the system flirts with its negative pole (error, disorder), but emerges triumphant. And what threatened to be a subversion of the system can then, on the contrary, "emerge on the other side as a powerful sign that stands in for this whole process", for the tripartite economy that will have produced it. In a post-Freudian reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" Sng then goes on to demonstrate how the inability to follow the logic of overcoming presented by Douglas produces a kind of fatal metaphoric arrest.

In the second, and largest, part of the book the authors take a look at different kinds of "third agents", their functions and their workings. Judith Ryan starts with observations on the question of literary techniques of getting inside a character's head. Narrative literature has, in the course of its history from the Middle Ages to modernity, developed one device especially that turns out to be as inconspicuous as it is pervasive: free indirect discourse. What began as a uniquely complex form of representing consciousness in language, has slowly trickled down to the most prosaic forms of popular fiction. Free indirect discourse has, Ryan concludes, in the course of the 20th century become "the 'third' that mediates between reader and character, keeping us suspended in the silent world of reading".

The four essays following Martin Andree's reconstruction of the triadic temporal and metaphysical structure of "Origin, Alienation, Restitution", and its inherent paradoxes, from the Bible to Novalis, focus on specific third agents. Santanu Das traces the position of thirdness in the Jewish English poet Isaac Rosenberg. Rosenberg is, next to Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, regarded as the most eminent soldier poet writing about the experience of the trenches in the First World War. His position as a Jew and a private resulted in poems rather different from those of Owen and Sassoon. Not only do vermin like lice and rats play a crucial thematic role, but there is also, Das argues, a heightened awareness in Rosenberg's writing of the liminal nature of his experience. This finds its expression in the presence of vermin as well as in the important role Rosenberg's poems accord to "touch" as "the most intimate and the most elusive of the human senses".

Arne Höcker's article on "Figurations of the Expert" reconstructs a transformation in historical discourse and practice. At the turn of the nineteenth century the prison chaplain has to cede his central position in criminological practice concerned with the "Lustmörder" (i.e. the sex murderer) to the figure of the "professional expert, the forensic consultant, the doctor or the psychiatrist". The sex murderer is no longer to be treated by a therapeutic combination of imprisonment and soul searching, but becomes the subject of "case histories" in which he features as an "object of knowledge". Höcker delineates this development in readings of autobiographies and case histories. Eva Blome's contribution is also inspired by discourse analysis. She describes the double emergence of interracial figures in "German politics and literature around 1920". Neither racist discourse denigrating the figures of interracial hybridity nor the literary texts valorising them can, as Blome demonstrates, escape the binary of "mixture and purity" which regulates this two-sided incapability of thinking a true third. The second part closes with Peter Schnyder's examination of one of the most important third agents—the adventurer. The adventure is, in Georg Simmel's words, "a modern form of experiencing" in so far as it combines the crucial modern experiences of individual self-assertion and emancipation and, at the same time, individual powerlessness *vis à vis* an accelerated bureaucracy. The adventurer highlights many features of our third agents, ranging from the flâneur and social outsider to the trickster and high risk venturer.

The articles in the final chapter concentrate on figures of the third in (theories of) photography and film. In his essay "Touching Sense", Hubertus von Amelunxen traces Roland Barthes's movement from structuralism to poststructuralism. This new mode of thinking comes to the fore, Amelunxen shows, in Barthes's theories of "obtuse meaning" and the "punctum", both examples of a search for "third meanings" beyond symbolical or iconic signification. This leads Amelunxen—in a flight of thought from Laplanche to Derrida, via Lacan and back to Barthes—to psychoanalysis and its uncanny revenants as well as photography's potential to tangentially insinuate an "inexhaustible alterity". The final chapters comprise two examinations of triadic structures in film. Naomi Segal analyses three movies dominated by triangular constellations of desire: whereas Adrian Lyne's *Fatal Attraction* proves to be a "mixed masculine fantasy", Jane Campion's *The Piano* can be read as "a film of and about female desire". Anthony Minghella's film version of Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Talented Mr Ripley* complicates these triangulations by the introduction of mediations and indirections, ultimately implying that "the only way to desire is through death". The book ends on a more

life-affirming note and a more positive outlook on configurations of the third in Karen Leeder's essay on "Message, Myth, and Metaphor". Angels, Leeder claims, are "the ultimate third thing" in religion, in myth, and the arts. She draws her examples from contemporary German and Austrian art, following the metaphorical wing-beat of heavenly creatures in Wim Wenders's movie *Wings of Desire* and the work of Austrian writer Raoul Schrott. As messengers and go-betweens angels are perfect embodiments of the third created in metaphor: embodiments, she concludes, of nothing less than our "desire to see".

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PART I:
AGENCIES

THE THIRD REALM:
KAIROS, REVISION AND THE ETHICS
OF LITERARY STUDY

LAWRENCE STEVEN

Two significant tendencies have emerged in the so-called ‘ethical turn’ in literary studies: one having an Aristotelian orientation (Booth, MacIntyre, Nussbaum, Schwarz, Parker, Goldberg among others, and characterised briefly by Aristotelian *phronesis* or practical wisdom, or what Nussbaum in *Love’s Knowledge* calls “perceptive equilibrium”); the other having a deconstructive orientation (Derrida, Levinas, Harpham, Miller, Attridge, Crichtley among others, and characterised briefly by what Levinas called an “irruption” of the “saying” into the “said,” or the “other” into the “same”).¹ Rather than review these generally familiar orientations, I will map a territory out of which a third tendency emerges, one offering a mediating alternative to the more familiar and largely non-communicating directions. Like F. R. Leavis I call this territory and tendency the Third Realm; unlike Leavis I wish to trace the historical and theoretical integuments of this Realm, unearthing its triadic, pragmatic, iterative and kairotic provenance, and following its filiations into contemporary literary-critical practice. Without some such tracing I believe we risk missing a current of thought that forms a continuous creative and critical response to the Enlightenment/postmodern dyad that has dominated theoretical/philosophical thought through most of the twentieth century.

This essay has two parts. In the first I introduce Leavis’s formulation of the Third Realm, and then survey the influences upon his particular articulation of thirdness. I will mention the influences coming from literary theory and semiotics through I. A. Richards, from pragmatism through C. S. Peirce via, again, I. A. Richards, from philosophy of science through Michael Polanyi, and from literature through D. H. Lawrence. Leavis develops out of Peirce and Richards’ triadism notions of continuity and fallibilism, though he resists the evolutionary progressivism (or as he

¹ Levinas, *Revelation*, 202; *Totality*, 195 and *passim*.

would call it “technologico-Benthamite” scientism) that tempts both Richards and Peirce to downplay the personal knowledge and agency of the interpreter/judge. In Polanyi’s triadism he appreciates the seamless integration of the tacit dimension with the personal knower’s responsibility as the nexus of meaning, and his later articulation of what he calls the “living principle” is imbued with Lawrence’s sense of full flowing yet highly particularised life, of the human being in subtle interrelation with her or his circumambient universe, an interrelation which is “thought” most fully in the reading and writing of literature—and specifically the novel—rather than in discursive argument. In the second part of the paper we will turn to D. H. Lawrence’s conception of thirdness as a matter of the kairotic ethic of literature, a matter of submission to a world that is simultaneously a seizing of an opportunity. I will inquire into how Lawrence engages this triadic simultaneity in three ways: through his discursive prose in an essay from *Twilight in Italy*, through a dramatic embodiment in a scene from *Women in Love*, and through his practice as a reviser of early and final versions of a scene from the tale “Daughters of the Vicar”.

1

F. R. Leavis feels that “an account of how a poem exists is a pregnant hint of the way in which the Human World is created and, in constant renewal, maintained”. Here is his account:

Analysis [...] in so far as it aims at establishing a favourable judgment, is the process of justifying the assumption that a poem which we take to be a real poem stands between us in what is in some sense a public world. Minds can meet in it, and there is so essential a measure of concurrence as to its nature and constitution that there can be intelligent—that is, profitable—differing about what precisely it is. It is neither merely private, nor public in the sense that it can be brought into a laboratory, quantified, tripped over or even pointed to—the only way of pointing to particulars in it is to put one’s finger on given spots in the assemblage of black marks on the page—and that assemblage is not the poem. The poem is a product, and, in any actual existence, a phenomenon, of human creativity, the essentially collaborative nature of which it exemplifies in diverse distinguishable modes. And yet it is real. [...] it belongs to the ‘Third Realm’—the realm of that which is neither public in the ordinary sense nor merely private.²

How do minds come to a meeting in a poem? Through a process of

² Leavis, *Living Principle*, 36.

judgements that establishes the poem as a reality they can share. There is a gradual adjustment of one personal horizon to another: “The form of a judgement is ‘This is so, isn’t it?’, the question asking for confirmation that the thing *is* so, but prepared for the answer in the form, ‘Yes, but—’, the ‘but’ standing for corrections, refinements, precisions, amplifications” (35). For the collaborative encounter to be genuine, and so creative, the individual readers must be highly responsible for their judging: “I cannot take a judgement over; that is, I cannot have my judging done for me by someone else. Either I judge for myself, or there is no judging”.³ Some features of Leavis’s third realm need to be kept in mind as we move forward: the essentially collaborative, dialogic nature of human creativity, its establishment and continuous renewal of the immeasurably or unquantifiably *real*, and the ethical and personal character of its judging: its trust, its self-fallibility, its sincerity.

A significant influence on Leavis at Cambridge in the ’20s was I. A. Richards, conventionally understood to be one of the founders of the discipline of English Studies. Richards is pivotal because he represents the growing tip of two distinct traditions of thought: on the one hand the English moral tradition of Coleridge’s creative Imagination, Arnold’s disinterestedness and Eliot’s impersonality, combined with their moral prophetic fervour to save civilised standards. On the other hand, Richards’ thought consists of scientific evolutionary progressivism mixed with Benthamite utilitarian pragmatism. The two strands are juxtaposed most illustratively in Richards’ 1930s work in China promulgating Ogden’s “Basic English”. Only a generation or two on from Arnold and the reaction to universal education, Richards’ attempt to spread an instrumental, 850-word vocabulary version of English can be seen as the academic counterpart to Hudson Taylor’s China Inland Mission sending out the “Cambridge Seven” in the 1880s to take the good news to the unenlightened masses. Richards’ dual concerns—both to establish the principles of literary criticism on a scientific basis and to develop heightened critical and cognitive sensibility through practical criticism and close reading—are caught nicely in the opening sentences of his preface to *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924): “A book is a machine to think with, but it need not, therefore, usurp the functions either of the bellows or the locomotive. This book might better be compared to a loom on which it is proposed to re-weave some ravelled parts of our civilization” (1).

The thrust to disciplined missionary efficiency here, combined with the metaphoric ambiguity and the wit, are characteristic of the discipline of

³ Leavis, *Valuation*, 277.