

FROM RHETORIC TO DECONSTRUCTION

Lecture Nine: (Inter)mediality

LITERATURE AND THE OTHER ARTS

Boundary-lines between forms of art and within forms of art (genres). The importance of the **medium** concerning the former. Aristotle: the arts “differ ... from one another in three respects—the medium, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation being in each case distinct.”

Medium: the material vehicle of art (word, colour/pigment, marble, sound, movement—literature, painting, sculpture, dancing). Limitations & possibilities inherent in the medium. Written (literature, music) and visual/plastic (painting, sculpture) arts. The (relative?) importance of the **temporal** and the **spatial** dimensions.

Can the artist cross the boundary line separating the arts? Consider Gotthold Ephraim Lessing on the statue of Laocoön and his children in the lethal grip of two snakes: why L.’s mouth is not open to express his agony. Representing the cry would have meant representing pain at its greatest intensity, which would have placed L., a noble character, in humiliating circumstances; moreover, the spectator would have been deprived of the use of his imagination. > The visual arts should grasp the moment preceding—thus anticipating—the moment of greatest intensity. Virgil in *The Aeneid* (Canto 2) does describe L.’s agony in detail, but he can do so without undermining the heroic stature of his character as his background has been fully established for the reader. Underlying Lessing’s argument: “**Objects which coexist, or the parts of which coexist, are termed bodies. It follows that bodies, with their visible properties, are the proper objects of painting. Objects which succeed, or the parts of which succeed to each other, are called generally actions. It follows that actions are the proper object of poetry.**” Yet there are “pictures” in Homer (description of the shield of Achilles made by Hephaestus/Vulcanus, in Canto 18; Hera/Juno’s chariot; Agamemnon’s clothing, etc. in *The Iliad*), and they are effective, nonetheless. The reason: when Homer “only desires to show us the picture, he will disperse, as it were, the picture in a kind of history of the object” (*Laocoön* [1766]).

THE CROSSING OF BOUNDARIES SPONTANEOUSLY

There has always been some inherent hybridization—cf.

- Obvious examples of **visualization/spatialization**: drama is literature, yet on the stage it becomes spectacle, that is, we cross from the written to the visual (the theatre is “primarily a visual representation of literature” [Frye, *Myth and Metaphor*, 1990]); poetic imagery: image defined as “vestigial representation of sensation,” most of the sensations “vestigially” represented being visual; verbal descriptions (depictions!) of places, of appearances of characters inevitably become visual when we internalize the verbally supplied data. Or consider the relationship between a film-script and the finished film.
- Obvious examples of **musicalization** (the cross-over less radical as both literature and music are temporal): rhythm in poetry (duple/triple verse; use of musical notes to indicate metric pattern); the reason for this: the musical ancestry of lyrical poetry (note also the term: lyre→lyrical): cf. song, the name of one type of poem indicative of its inception.
 - ▣ Such crossings happen in reverse direction, too: paintings telling stories—Hogarth’s *The Rake’s Progress*, a series of engravings, itself metamorphosed into another form by Stravinsky’s opera on the topic. Or consider early Italian Renaissance painters on the lives of the saints (Giotto’s pictures portraying the life of St Francis of Assisi in a *capella* of Santa Croce in Florence, etc.).

THE CROSSING OF BOUNDARIES BY DESIGN

Lessing’s idea that the boundaries between the various forms of art should be respected often deliberately ignored in the history of European art. Cf. Horace’s view that poetry should be like painting (*ut pictura poesis*, taken from Simonides, Greek poet of the 5th c. BC), verbal meaning of poem reinforced by stanza-form (metaphysical poet George Herbert, “Easter-wings”; Dylan Thomas, “Vision and Prayer”), “picture” of London by Wordsworth in “Upon Westminster Bridge.” *Ekphrasis*: the deliberate endeavour to achieve

pictorial effects by means of words—extreme instances of it in Rossetti’s verbal descriptions of visual works of art in his “Sonnets for Pictures.” “Gothic” construction of Hardy’s stanzas, Joyce seeking musical effects in “Sirens” episode of *Ulysses* (structure of *fuga per canonem*--overture, themes developed in a contrapuntal manner by interweaving of voice parts, words distorted to suggest singing or music as in “endlessnessness” [*fermata*]) or “Gone. They sing. Forgotten. I too; And one day she with. Leave her: get tired. Suffer then. Snivel. Big Spanishy eyes goggling at nothing. Her wavyavyeavyheavyeavyevyevy hair un comb:d.”

Spatial form: the most difficult of the experiments to reinforce the appeal of literature with the appeal of another art. The aim: creating the illusion of space by means of words (Joyce in “Wandering Rocks” episode of *U.*, V. Woolf in parts of *Mrs Dalloway*; Eliot’s *The Waste Land* lends itself to such an approach, E. himself calling for the use of the logic of imagination instead of the logic of concepts, for “new wholes out of disparate experiences,” parts to be perceived as juxtaposed in space, as if capable of striking the reader’s sensibility with an instantaneous impact). What affinities are there between this view of the poem and the Romantic idea of the perfect poem as image?

Intermediality and narratology: narrativity in need of a cross-medial definition; it must make use of quasi-material properties of narrating texts (broadly conceived) and exclude medium-specific concepts. A definition that covers all media that contain representation and can be intuitively classed as narrating media must be medium-neutral. If valid for music as well as literature, for instance, it must exclude character in the essentialist, mimetic sense

LITERARY GENRES: THE RHETORICAL (FORMALIST) CLASSIFICATION

Aristotle: when medium (and object) the same, differentiation according to **manner/mode** of imitation: “**the poet may imitate by narration—in which case he can either take another personality as Homer does, or speak in his own person, unchanged—or he may present all his characters as living and moving before us**” (*Poetics*, III) > the tripartite division of literature into **epic** (narrative), **lyric**, and **dramatic** forms.

Northrop Frye: Aristotle is fundamentally right (generic distinctions are to be based on manner of presentation). But where the Greek philosopher considered the manner of presentation from the point of view of the artist (see the definition), Frye establishes roughly the same classes from the point of view of the recipient. Range of forms: from presupposing an audience to supposed absence of audience: **drama** (acted before spectators); **epos** (spoken in front of listeners) **and fiction** (written for readers); **lyric** (the poet “overheard”). The instability of these divisions (epos into fiction, epos in fiction—the case of *Heart of Darkness*, the inset stories in Fielding, in Cervantes, etc.).

GENRE AS USE-VALUE

Underlying hypothesis: discourse operates through two grand systems: **denotative** (raw information) and **connotative** (associative meanings in the information). Fredric Jameson: “Genres are *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact.” A vast range of genres to be created out of discourse depending on the connotative element in it, that is, its use-value. Tragedy (use-value: *katharsis*), comedy, fiction, as separate genres; genre goes beyond literature (which itself is regarded as a supergenre): dinner table conversation, letter writing, law (a special use of discourse) etc. as genres; instability and impurity of genres. Henri Fresse-Montval’s letter-writing manual, *Nouveau Manuel*, creates a fictional reality for the *ars dictaminis* of the letters (letter into fiction).

■ In Ch. IV of Huysmans’s *Against the Grain*, Des Esseintes, the hero, blends the auditory and the gustatory in composing whole orchestras out of the various liquors he keeps in his house—arranged, the little casks, like the keys of an organ—he calls it his mouth organ.