

I hope Berry does not think the article denies the possibility that deviational language may convey a sense of a referent “with exceptional force.” After what my essay says about defamiliarization, about the effort to “render physical facts articulate,” and after the passage about animating and enlarging perception, which she quotes herself, my sympathy with this point of view must surely be clear. The article says, of the two poems it analyzes, “The original scene is not forgotten . . . in each poem it has become the central image, the major rhetorical resource,” and the concluding paragraph observes that “The deviations . . . articulate an extended consciousness of experience, transcending the familiar and recognizable.”

I think some confusion has arisen about such terms as “reference,” “representation,” and “mimesis,” which I have used, more or less interchangeably, to characterize language that alludes to some signified separate from the poem that preexists within the linguistic consensus. Language that evokes the referent “with exceptional force,” heightens attention to it, or transforms it is not, in my use of the term, mere reference. Berry seems to concur when she observes that “envisioning” is a separate function.

The “model” of language consisting of two mutually exclusive referential and self-reflexive functions Berry infers from the article is illusory. No such model exists. The article first pairs representational and *expressive* functions, then mentions self-reflexiveness, then, as Berry notes, a function connected with envisioning, which, for some reason, she excludes from the model of language she perceives operating in the discussion.

Inscapes is a subject that can be counted on to generate disagreement. But I do not understand why Berry should object to the distinction between poetic inscapes and inscapes of nature, since she herself explains that a poem may have inscapes that are a matter of formal design on the one hand and imitations of the inscapes of external objects on the other. If I have understood her explanation of this, there is no close relation between them; one does not *represent* the other; they are separate attributes of the poem. The situation I had in mind is one in which representation does occur, one in which the external inscape is embodied in a verbal design that has its own individuality. In such a case, I would maintain, metalanguage would dominate reference, as it does in verbal deviation in general.

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Text as Meaning in *The Trial*

To the Editor:

Henry Sussman’s article “The Court as Text: Inversion, Supplanting, and Derangement in Kafka’s *Der Prozeß*” (*PMLA*, 92 [1977], 41–55) was extremely stimulating. As I reread *The Trial*, the novel opened up for me in ways it never had before. I could take Kafka’s allegory to an extreme of self-reflexiveness that I fear might arouse Sussman’s suspicion.

Sussman suggests that in *The Trial* writing is the defendant’s only means of delaying imposition of sentence as indefinitely as possible, and I would like to suggest that the sentence Kafka fears is publication. One of the strangest moments in this novel of strange moments is K’s arrest (pp. 280–81, Modern Library edition). Three men lock in an absurd embrace, mimicking a “lifeless” text between its covers. The reason why Kafka seeks to extend his metaphors indefinitely is that he fears completion, for then he must face the goal of so much activity—publication—suffer being read, have a knife thrust deep into his heart, be treated like a dog, submit to a shame that “must outlive him” (p. 286). The shame must outlive K, for the works an author produces outlive him and must be submitted to the inscrutable, implacable, arbitrary judgments of the court of literary tradition, the process of time that never completely dismisses or accepts. No wonder most of Kafka’s work was published posthumously.

Titorelli’s three possibilities for termination of the court process are interpreted by Sussman as three generic types—definite acquittal as myth, ostensible acquittal as the short story, and indefinite postponement as the purgatory of the novel, with its burden of metaphoric extension. I would like to suggest that these three possibilities could be interpreted as categories of critical judgment—those works or authors that achieve definite acquittal are those rare exceptions of literary merit—*Beowulf*, Homer, Shakespeare, perhaps Milton—that all scholars agree are great; these works and authors do often achieve the status of myths or legends because of their invulnerability. Those works or authors who suffer ostensible acquittal are those that are gone but never quite forgotten, the lesser lights who at any moment may be brought into prominence by an interested critic seeking to prove or disprove their right to be part of the accepted canon, the great tradition. Those that achieve indefinite postponement are those books and authors that are constantly being batted back and forth among the critics, whose reputations are constantly being attacked and defended.

The accused is the text. It is presumed guilty. Kafka’s response to all those who would doubt whether

art is responsible is a flat, irrefutable “Guilty!” The only question remaining is “Of what?” The lawyer for the defense is the author. The authorities “wanted to eliminate defending counsel as much as possible; the whole onus of the Defense must be laid on the accused himself” (p. 145). Sounds like new criticism! K’s lawyer Huld wants K to accept his autonomy, not to seek any other aid—the author seeks to retain control over his work, to assume its whole defense, but this is a hopeless task. The trial, the process of interpretation, will take place with or without the author, with or without the text. After K left his first interrogation, the audience came to life and “were analyzing the situation like expert students” (p. 60). Once you have published a book you have laid yourself open, allowed all who will bother to come to penetrate to your most secret places. You cannot even know who your accusers are. The accretion of critics and critical material is endless, limitless, both extending backward into the past and reaching forward into the future. The work of art is at the disposal of the court. As the priest explains to K, “The Court wants nothing from you. It receives you when you come and it dismisses you when you go” (p. 278).

The interrogations, which are described as short but frequent, are like the reading process itself, especially of a novel, which rarely can be read through at one sitting. K insists that “it is only a trial if I recognize it as such” (p. 51), but this is a puerile assertion. K recognizes this fact when he finally decides to seek for the customary select audience but few—“he would be quite pleased if he could make the audience start thinking about the question and win a man here and there through conviction” (p. 53).

Late in the book K meets another accused, a man named Block. Block has seen one of Huld’s petitions in his defense—“crammed with Latin,” full of flattery, and “ending up with an analysis of vari-

ous cases from ancient times that were supposed to resemble mine” (p. 221). This petition resembles remarkably the prefaces of many books. No wonder Max Brod, Kafka’s literary executor, wrote postscripts. Block, like K, is a text and must submit to the process.

Block lives in a room that closely resembles the room into which Isabel Archer has been locked by her marriage with Osmond—“the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation.” Block lives in “a low-roofed chamber with no window which had room only for a narrow bed” (p. 227). Block, K, Isabel are all residents of the house of fiction; life has been turned into art and in the process has lost its vitality. Huld, at one point, asserts that “it’s often better to be in chains than to be free” (p. 236). Life must submit to art, formlessness become form, but art becomes guilty in the process, for, in imposing order, it must destroy, discard, distort.

The scene of the whipping in the lumber room is an externalization of the ceaseless internal process of selection, elimination, and perfection, which is the most essential part of writing. The discipline of art is a kind of self-flagellation. The lumber room is filled with “bundles of useless old papers and empty earthenware ink bottles” (p. 104), the debris of the writing process.

Significantly K’s life only begins, takes on shape, when he is recognized by the court, when he is placed under arrest. The beginning of the book coincides with the metaphorical genesis of K. His previous history is cloudy, and this is how it should be. The text is itself, and it must yield to several successive contradictory interpretations, as in the Parable of the Doorkeeper “the simple story had lost its clear outline” (p. 277).

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