Zeitschrift: SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature

Herausgeber: Swiss Association of University Teachers of English

Band: 6 (1992)

Artikel: Litterytoor 'n' anthropolygee : a twainian talk about cultures, vernaculars, and humor, plus the magical essays of Marcel Mauss

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-99895

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Litterytoor 'n' Anthropolygee: A Twainian Talk About Cultures, Vernaculars, and Humor, plus the Magical Essays of Marcel Mauss[1]

James A. Boon

Languages customarily designated "vernacular" are a basic concern of anthropologists and literary scholars alike. The topic of resistance to official standards pervades ethnographic writing, humorous discourse, and novelistic representations of "dialects," among other conformity-questioning styles. Ambiguities that animate colloquial usage and comedic forms resonate in "magical words" as well, among other ritual techniques. The second half of this paper address both "magic" and "comic" aspects of classic comparative essays by Marcel Mauss, France's premier ethnologist between the World Wars.

The paper begins otherwise: amidst the rhetorical devices of Mark Twain's variegated idiom of humor-talked; from there it modulates to the rhetorical devices of Mauss's variegated idiom of ethnology-writ. I thus propose an eccentric "marriage" between Twain's "voice" *and* Mauss's essays-*écrits* (with emphasis on the copulative word). My pages become a counter-*propre* "scene" of international, multilingual collisions between the would-be high and the ludic low, the lettered and the less so. Such a scene

[1] I wish to thank many participants in the SAUTE symposium for generous responses to a manifestly "experimental" paper, and J. Blair, R. Waswo, and B. Engler for their support. I also received helpful suggestions on related work about Mauss and Lévi-Strauss – accentuating magic, matter, music, and "mind" (*esprit*) – from organizers of a conference on gift-giving – N. Davis, R. Sharpe, and R. Lederman.

suits the unlikely couple Twain and Mauss, or the "disciplines" they respectively, and figuratively, represent. My entire essay-talk takes as its inspiration an extract, with emendations, from "the Author, Explanatory," prefacing *Huckleberry Finn*:

> In this book [rather, essay] a number of dialects [and disciplines] are used . . . pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech [and discourse].
>
> I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters [and texts] were trying to talk [and write] alike and not succeeding. (2)

Twain-Talking

Folks, this speech is about literature and anthropology – or perhaps literariness (*ostrenanie*) and culturality (*Kulturellheit*) – plus some smidgens of linguistics, a science more up my alley than I aim to advertize. I pinched the bit just cited from *Huckleberry Finn* to conjure up contexts of tricky verbiage, intertextuality, and vernacular life. You know the kinds of places I mean: where all sorts of blokes speak and listen, and sometimes write and read. I'm talkin' multilingual, composite-coded circumstances of folks interpreting and getting interpreted back. Hereabouts writers may even try writing like speech, and speakers may try speaking like writing. Yessir, in this crazy locus – this heteroglossic *topos* – even print may mimic talk. And *vice versa* (v-eye-see-verse-uh) – i.e., talk may try to pass for a text that is preinscribed, bookish, palimpsestic from a long time back.

Now such strange goings-on happen just where us anthropologists, *littérateurs*, and linguists hang around (Indonesian, *bergaul*). I don't have to tell you folks in Fribourg that one sucha place is quatrilingual *Suisse*, fairly "federalized" in official language policies (polyglossia), yet simultaneously riddled with many-cantoned diversity of idiom (heteroglossia?). Another sucha place I know 'bout is Hindu-Bali. Since beginning fieldwork there in 1971, I have written copious pages about its polyglot ritual and performance contexts, festooned with hierarchy, exchange, and inequality. For example, in a book called *Affinities and Extremes*:

> Balinese rituals in practice are as hybrid as the historical evidence "entexting" their past. They are intermedia, multilingual and polyscriptive: high/low Balinese, Kawi, Sanskrit mantras, Indonesian, pastiches and

> parodies of foreign tongues, including touristspeak, Arabic, etc. Ritual cyclically accelerates the circulation of production in every sensory realm and material medium [including spoken and written and literary production]. *Pedanda*-backed Siwaic ceremonies are in the business of cremating corpses [not circumcising sons, as ceremonies are in the business of doing next door in Islamic Lombok and Java]. . . . Local rites adjust attributes of social life to presumably ancestor-pleasing dimensions and malady-preventing ones. An on-going process across time and languages, rituals assert, sometimes obliquely, contrastive identities in a field of meanings always political, of course, but not only that.
>
> I call these properties "ritual-cum-rhetoric," a kind of pastiche mantra to evoke a history (provided it be multiplied) of "complex polyglossia" underscored in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin. . . . Bakhtin, however, credits a deliberate hybridized resistance only to that genre he calls the "novel." (1981:358–66) Yet, it is to this reflexive, "intentional double-voiced and internally dialogized" discourse that I [have compared] Balinese ritual with its rhetorics, plus any "history" that manages to leave traces thereof. (66–67)

Just how effectively so-called carnivalization can resist oppressive regimes is a matter today in considerable dispute, even in "Bakhtin studies."[2] Nevertheless, without "dialogized discourse," it is difficult to imagine how any subversiveness, whether efficacious or not, could happen at all.

Places replete with interlingual activity are legion. Here folks may write and/or speak such different tongues as Hoch Deutsch and low, or suave French and less, or High Balinese and unSanskritized Austronesian *Sprache*, among innumerable refined standards and counterofficial usages. All these utterances and inscriptions are multiply "entexted" and oddly situated between *langue* (so to speak) and *parole* (so to write). Theories alert to polyglossia and heteroglossia can help us rethink any static oral/literate dichotomy, along with phenomena of "drift" (in Edward Sapir's sense), pidginizing, creolizing, standardizing, "speechifying," national language "building" (*Bildung*), "literary language" efflorescence, ethnic language resurgences, and, of course, the ongoing politics of

[2] For example, Caryl Emerson's recent lecture at Princeton, "The Russians Reclaim Bakhtin;" see also Morson (1991).

canonicity and counter-canonicity. These pulses and thrusts mark the contradictory dynamics of edification and subversion "figured" in and as actual languages over time, during an imagined Babel's literary and spoken sequitors.[3]

In alluding to Babel, nearabouts Geneva, it seems *a propos* to acknowledge George Steiner. I'm talkin' his panoramic celebration *cum* lamentation of everything Steiner's dramatically polylingual European essence can grasp of the world's hermeneutic destiny: neverending translation. As Steiner's philosophy and fiction commiseratingly reveal, humanity's history of and as interpretation yields not just the hideousness of the Holocaust but the arch-hilarity of *Private Lives*, among abundant other *altérités* (which Steiner translates as "alternities"). Part-way along his *Lebenswerk*'s intensifying path of corpus-building – which recently resulted in *Real Presences* (a more anti-deconstructive title would be hard to imagine) – Steiner concluded *After Babel*'s last full chapter, "Topologies of Culture," with an unanswerably apposite question, one of the rare short sentences in that magisterial tome: "It would be ironic if the answer to Babel were pidgin and not Pentecost." (470)

Having just saluted (and slightly parodied) Steiner's *After Babel* and its aftermath, I can't resist mentioning Derrida's "Des Tours de Babel," another reading of and from Walter Benjamin's calling (*Beruf*) to that task called translation (*Uebersetzung*). Derrida's effervescence affords a counterbalance to Steiner's weightiness. (I find the thrill of Benjamin's writing to be that it is neither, or both). My anthropological objection to vintage (or stock) Derrida is one which many interdisciplinary colleagues may find pedestrian: his phrase-making seems more interested in itself-as-text than in *others*. That objection stipulated, I nevertheless cite Derrida-on-translation, translated, hoping to sound a quasi-comic tone:

> The "Tower of Babel" does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics.

[3] I discuss Saussure's *langue/parole* distinction in relational terms and marry it to other semiotic partners, including ethnological and literary approaches, in Boon (1982: ch. 4–7).

> . . . First: in what tongue was the tower of Babel constructed and deconstructed: In a tongue within which the proper name of Babel could also, by confusion, be translated by "confusion." The proper name Babel, as a proper name, should remain untranslatable, but. . . .
> . . . Let us start again [*Repartons*] from the "symbolic." Let us remember the metaphor, or the ammetaphor: a translation espouses the original when the two adjoined fragments, as different as they can be complete each other so as to form a larger tongue in the course of a sur-vival that changes them both. For the native tongue of the translator, as we have noted, is altered as well. Such at least is my interpretation — my translation, my "task of the translator." It is what I have called the translation contract: hymen or marriage contract with the promise to produce a child whose seed will give rise to history and growth. (165–66, 190–91)

I will later stress, as Derrida here does not, that marriage-exchange as an institutional genre is inherently *comique*. I also note, before continuing to cite Derrida, that his allusion to reproduction and growth might have invoked a *femme enceinte*, in the manner of Julia Kristeva, when proceeding:

> A marriage contract in the form of a seminar. Benjamin says as much, in the translation the original becomes larger; it grows rather than reproduces itself — and I will add: like a child, its own no doubt, but with the power to speak on its own which makes of a child something other than a product subjected to the law of reproduction. This promise signals a kingdom which is at once "promised and forbidden where the languages will be reconciled and fulfilled." This is the most Babelian note. . . . (190–91)

Well, that's about all the Derrida I have time for, folks.[4] Hoping only to

[4] Derrida's essay in both French and English forms the core of Graham (1984), a kind of writing-fest in translation-as-deconstruction. Coincidentally, when revising the present essay, there fell to me the task of reviewing for publication a new work by Derrida (translated) that revisits, among other texts, Mauss's *The Gift*. Derrida's take on Mauss would take this paper too far afield; but it is not without humor (sometimes ill).

catch a bit of his drift (a tad Twainian to my ear), my talk will linger on comedic incongruities in a long-term, worldwide "politics of translation" oscillating betwixt and between pidgins and Pentecosts.

One more thought. It may be that Derrida sounds a mite Twainian to me because, like Gertrude Stein (whose writing effects a humorous "there" that *is* there), "I am an American."[5] And in this regard, let me swipe a nifty theoretical point from a fellow I've never met named Paul Auster. His smart, bilingual edition of *Twentieth Century French Poetry* reviews some issues in French-versus-British-versus-American critique; and he points out the different textual "scenes" where each national style of subversiveness customarily transpires:

> It would be wrong . . . to set up a simple dichotomy between radicalism and conservatism, and to put all things French in the first category and all things English and American in the second. The most subversive and innovative elements of our [English language] literature have frequently surfaced in the unlikeliest places and have then been absorbed into the culture at large. Nursery rhymes . . . do not exist as such in France. Nor do the great works of Victorian children's literature (Lewis Carroll, George Macdonald) have any equivalent in French. As for America, it has always had its own, homegrown Dada spirit, which has continued to exist as a natural force, without any need of manifestoes or theoretical foundations. The films of Buster Keaton and W. C. Fields, the skits of Ring Lardner, the drawings of Rube Goldberg surely match the CORROSIVE EXUBERANCE of anything done in France during the same period. As Man Ray (a native American) wrote to Tristan Tzara from New York in 1921 about spreading the Dada movement to America: "Cher Tzara — Dada cannot live in New York. All New York is Dada, and will not tolerate a rival. . . ." (1984:xxxiii; capitals added)

As I was saying a while back, if you can again tolerate my national brand of "corrosive exuberance," so ludic are languages' multiplicities that some damn fool may even attempt to deliver orally (as I am now) from a typed

[5] "I am an American," opens "The Stranger's History" in Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* (1979:791).

page (as I have here) a written text studded with colloquialisms. (This brand of foolishness has been brilliantly smuggled into anthropological linguistics by Dennis Tedlock's nervy book, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*, on difficulties of representing Mayan narrative and Zuni storytelling in translation and print). Anyway, here I am, delivering a script in a composite ideolect of academese and U. S. Southern. (Or is my idiom emulating or simulating dialect-writers like William Faulkner?) Regardless, what I am *énoncé*-ing is not the home-language of most, or perhaps any, of my listeners.

Now I need to open apologetic parentheses, with an ulterior motive. I reason that a non-native speaker's expertise cannot realistically be expected to extend to colloquial usages. My listeners, for example, owe an American dialect nothing more than attempted fluency in such standards as have arisen in the history and politics of making English "proper" *for* translation. Nevertheless, this essay-talk must transgress conventional international proprieties, given its topic. For this I sincerely beg pardon; I truly wish my talk could deploy, say, Richter's speech-parodying German or Rabelais's effusively improper French, rather than Twain's equivalent American. But it can't; I only know proper French (pretty good), and proper German (alas, too little of it), and the Dutch inscribed in East-Indies colonialist ethnography (a highly restricted officialese!), among European tongues. We are all, then, deficient in each others' colloquialisms . . . and magics.

Here, now, is the motive for (and moral of) both my *apologia* and the possibly annoying devices of this talk's delivery. Because human languages exist dynamically as vernaculars – as deficiencies (and opportunities) vis-à-vis each other – anthropology and literature can happen. Our tasks pertain to ongoing "vernacularity" (rhymes with hilarity, which alliterates with hysteria). Both Litterytoor and Anthropolygee poke around the edges in any locale or metropole between shifting proprieties and a copiousness whose carnivalizing qualities keep outrunning strict controls. A passion for vernacular experience makes strange bedfellows out of paradoxical disciplinary pursuits. Litterytoor, cultural anthropolygee (and some sociolinguistics) gloss and inhabit texts and contexts of colloquialism that defy fixity of representation. Given such circumstances, acts of translation, while fundamental rather than merely secondary, are inherently provisional. No translation properly aspires to permanence; nothing can coincide with that "virtual translation" that, for Benjamin, could only

belong to the "original" "between its lines."[6] But translation's provisional nature does not preclude striving for *relative* adequacy. Accordingly, Litterytoor encompasses vernacular speakings precisely in its most elevated writing. And Anthropolygee inscribes each-*other*'s "magical words" in ways that counter official pressures to convert cultures into standardized descriptions or commoditized comparisons readily consumed. Equally resistant to conformist description, Litterytoor and Anthropolygee continually question sanitized conventions that routinely separate "literate" from "oral" or an "us" from a "them." No wonder we're plum tuckered.

Begin Again

My talk is "entitled" (following Kenneth Burke) with misspellings; always tempting to spell "mispellings". This brand of joking coinage, too, I snitched from a literary-journalistic genius. Now, Mark Twain did some traveling across cultures; I like to imagine that, born later, he might have become an anthropologist-*auteur* as versed in cross-cultural as inter-temporal travel:

> When I came to again . . . there was a fellow on a horse looking down at me.
> "Fair sir will ye just?" said this fellow.
> "Will I which?"
> . . . I judged it best to humor him . . . to go with him . . . We did not come to any circus or sign of a circus. So I gave up the idea of a circus and concluded he was from an asylum. But we never came to any asylum – so I was up a stump, as you may say. I asked him how far we were from Hartford. He said he had never heard of the place. . . . At the end of an hour we saw a far-away town. . . .
> "Bridgeport?" said I, pointing. "Camelot," said he.[7]

Twain never stops playing between learned and studiously unlearned language; his "litterytoor" has become a canonical entry in the dictionary of Huckspeak, (I mean Huckspeech, not *Hochsprach*). Lacking time to tackle

[6] Benjamin's classic essay (1969:69–82) devises figures of the translator's task and the "original's" between-the-line-ness.

[7] Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, (1979:792–93).

Huckleberry Finn, per se, let me steal from a brilliant book on humorous writing in American literature by Neil Schmitz, *Of Huck and Alice*. (The title, which alludes to Ms. Toklas, is designed to enunciate colloquially – *'F 'uck 'n' Alice* – thus signifying the difference that speaking makes). I just don't know a finer reading of Twain or of Gertrude Stein's gaiety and genius. Schmitz's book, and my title, depend on literary theories of misspelling, a form of linguistic resistance, however docile:

> . . . the first misspelled word in *Huckleberry Finn*, and the last, is *sivilize*. [N.B. not *sivilise*]. . . . Misspelling releases the word from its imprisonment in the Dictionary. . . . and therein lies the metaphor. *Sivilize.* It is a written word that has gone over to the side of speech. . . . In this specific mode, humor necessarily alienates the "civilized" writer, who is bound to the Dictionary. . . . Humor has its theses, and the first is that writing wrongs speech. Civilize me, the style sez, and I cease to speak. . . . The humorist debases the privilege of writing. And readers who see it . . . are themselves abruptly liberated from the rectitude of writing, paroled. What thing in the nature of things can seriously withstand the confoundment of misspelling? The lesson Huck's line breaks, "sivilize me," is the lesson we all learn when we learn for better or worse, how to spell *civilize*. (33)[8]

Several perennial paradoxes cluster here, one of which I wish to emphasize. In order for humor to write (spell) wrong (rong), standardized conventions must prevail against which to misspell. An oft-noted, specific development in the politics of printing, lexicography and philological production has been earmarked by Hugh Kenner (saluting Walter Ong) "the uniformity of spelling which gave each separate word a stable identity

[8] I inserted "[N.B., Not *sivilise*]" into Schmitz's passage about Twain seriously, or rather, playfully. Mark Twain's humor was as international as it was colloquial, alert to Britishisms as much as to America's "Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary 'Pike-County' dialect; and four modified versions of this last." (1973:2). One wink from American to British may be the spelling of a name bestowed by Twain's "Burlesque Autobiography" of an eleventh century ancestor: Arth*our* Twain (1979:874). To this lowbrow (American) *authour*, spelling could hardly get funnier. For more on American "vernacular," see Marx (1988).

to the eye, whatever its equivocal status for the ear."[9] Moreover, to recognize any *mis*-spelling as such, the reader-writer cannot but be familiar with constructions of correctness; innocence of the invented standard would preclude writing or reading a given misspelling "right"! Misspelling as a rhetoric of humor must retain a smack of that propriety that it renders contingent.

It may be true, as Neil Schmitz argues, that humor "is skeptical of any discourse based on authority – misspeaks it, miswrites it, misrepresents it." (11) But that skepticism requires authorities-for-the-countering; it cannot imagine them altogether absent. Anarchistic, humor is not, whatever else it may be (e.g. anachronistic). Schmitz's terrific take on funny writing (despite lapses) almost "always already" (I'm winking) recognizes the fact that humor cannot do without policings to upend. Schmitz, moreover, adds salient insights about phoneticized printing:

> In effect, humorists must wrest their writing from proper writing, and this they do in a style that enhances speech values and sets these values against the prescriptive values of writing . . . this is at first a small stratagem for the humorist, an obvious device – phoneticized writing – but in this simple device lies the potent metaphor Speech, and here, in Huckspeech, the significant history of American humor begins. In *Huckleberry Finn* style is theme. How, then, does Huckspeech shape its beautiful wrong in the formality of the text, the text that demands the alienation of the letter-perfect? (2)

At risk of offending many linguists, I'd like to designate phoneticized writing of any kind a comic technique, much like misspelling is a device for contrarying Dictionary-writ. Techniques of phoneticized printing have flourished both in researches into unfamiliar sound-systems (e.g.,

[9] Kenner, *Stoic Comedians* (37); Ong's indispensable corpus sometimes reinforces a too-crisp orality/literacy dichotomy (Ong 1982) but more often refers the distinction to historical and comparative complexities (Ong 1983).

In publications on the history of colonialist and post-colonialist ethnological accounts (Boon 1977, 1982, 1990), I occasionally preserve evidence of non-standardized spelling; this resistance to anachronistic enforcement of a conformist orthography has not endeared my studies to some philologists or even a few historians. (Imagine!)

ethnographies of speaking) and in writing "dialect" literally. Descriptive linguistics has relied on a generically humorous mode of comparative inscription in its efforts scientifically to delineate all human "speeches." This copious process and possibly impossible dream is a globe-girdling comic endeavor, one the late Northrop Frye might have deemed "apocalyptic" (see below). Pidgins or Pentecosts? And will we ever know?

Begin Again Again (Lexical Interlude)

> Some of the doubts that have thus arisen are removed if we consult Grimm's dictionary.
>
> We read: . . . .[pages ensue]
>
> Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*. Let us retain this discovery. . . . – Freud, "The 'Uncanny'"[10]

Having borrowed one old misspelling (Litterytoor) and "neologized" another (Anthropolygee), I wanted to mention two additional words that illustrate what Kenneth Burke calls "words about words" (a far nicer designation than "meta-words") – in this case, *words about* official language versus carnivalized usage. In other words, instead of beginning against the dictionary, let's begin in it. Let's let Ole Man Dictionary subvert itself, semantically, without lowbrow devices of misspelling. Ever comparative, I shall employ my abashed American *Webster's* instead of my unabashed (microscopic) OED. As I think I just said, at issue are two quasi-erudite words in English that harbor contradictory meanings, including meanings of unerudite. The words of which I speak are both polysyllabic, professorial verbiage that refer to a contrary kind of language than they themselves represent; but they allude to its opposite as well. These odd words, over which I have already spilled so many words, are

[10] Freud (130–31). This essay becomes even eerier in translation, as page after page of bilingual dictionary entries are "translated back," thus heightening the effect of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* coinciding or reconverging.

"vernacular" and "colloquial."[11]

Here goes; dictionary definitions not for "slang" (is "slang" vernacular for vernacular?) but for "vernacular," or first for "colloquial," because it's a bit easier.

> COLLOQUIAL:
> Pertaining to common and familiar conversation; unstudied, informal . . . as in intimate speech among cultivated people, in familiar letters, speeches or writing, but not in formal written discourse (*flabbergast*; *go slow*; *harum-scarum*)
> Colloquial speech may be as correct as formal speech
> See Colloquy —. . . .
> COLLOQUY:
> Mutual discourse, esp. a somewhat formal conference; as a *colloquy* about religion. *Webster's*

Let's see if I've got this straight. A colloquy's mutual discourse is formal — uncolloquial — although colloquial speech may be as correct as formal speech, only correct otherwise. I'm beginning to feel flabbergasted, however *slow* I *go* in reading this dictionary-definition, as harum-scarum as Freud's *unheimlich* (canny?). ("Harum-scarum," by the way, means reckless, wild, rash, according to my microscopic OED.) Now for highbrow "slang."

> VERNACULAR:
> Belonging to, developed in, and spoken or used by, the people of a particular place, region, or country; native, indigenous — now almost solely used of language. . . .

I wonder if I oughta translate "native, indigenous" as *heimlich* — homelike?

[11] Some nights I dream that anthropological and literary disciplines have always been pursuing translations of every people's words (and practices) for "vernacular" and "colloquial." What if Malinowski had searched out Trobriand usages glossable as "colloquial," rather than, say, "magic." What if Mauss had read through Oceanic evidence for equivalents of "vernacular," rather than "*mana*." Or did they, effectively? (On some paradoxical aspects of world-wide "word lists" in the history of translation and circumnavigation, see Boon [1990:ch. 1; 1982:ch. 2]).

> VERNACULAR (continued):
> Pertaining to the native or indigenous speech of a place, written in the native, as opposed to the literary language. Characteristic of a locality; local, as a house of *vernacular* construction. "A *vernacular* disease" (Harvey).

I wonder if I oughta translate "local" as *heimlich*, or *unheimlich*: homelike-but-not.

> VERNACULAR (continued again):
> Of persons, that use the native, as contrasted with the literary, language of a place; as *vernacular* poets, *vernacular* interpreters. *Webster's*

Hmmmmmmm. "Vernacular construction; vernacular disease, vernacular poets, vernacular interpreters."

"*Vernacular* interpreters!" What are European *literateurs* — ever since *chansons de geste*, at least — if not "vernacular interpreters," or rather vernacular interpreters of vernacular interpreters? I cite R. Howard Bloch's superb study called *Etymologies and Genealogies* on Medieval French literature, or what he astutely calls "literary anthropology":

> This is not to suggest that the improper use of linguistic signs is not an important characteristic of the Old French *chanson de geste*. On the contrary, verbal impropriety abounds and seems often to spark dramatic interest. Sacrilegious oaths. . ., exaggeration. . ., blasphemy. . ., and broken promises, impossible situations. . ., lies. . ., and jokes . . . all serve as catalysts to thematic development. The "straight" narratives generated by such dislocations of the proper constitute, in fact, potent dramas of language. (102)

Now, Bloch adds one assertion that troubles me; he tends to credit a "true" epistemological shift exclusively to our own moment in the history of critical discourse:

> "Yet despite the detachment of words from meaning through blasphemy, boasts, lies, and jokes, the inherent contradiction of representing such linguistic transgression is never really explored [in *chansons de geste*]." (102)

Whether or not different literary historians credit such *doubt* (versus credulity) to Old French *écriture*, I would doubt Bloch's tendency to congratulate the present Derridean moment as the coming of age of a "crisis of representation." Bloch vaguely evokes a *passé* "then," a time "where language seems to break down [and] we find instead a strong desire for recuperation. . .," (102), as if that strong desire can *now* be escaped or at least evaded, thanks to the advent of deconstructive reading. To congratulate a *now* over a *then* is as suspect (anthropologically) as congratulating a *here* over a *there*, or an *us* over a *them*. And that latter gesture no genuINE anthropolygeest can afford. Back to the dictionary.

"Vernacular interpreters." I ask you: What are cultural anthropologists if not "vernacular interpreters" dependent on those "vernacular poets" (themselves "vernacular interpreters") called shamans and curers and indigenous exegetes – those "natives" (*heimlich*?) willing or obliged to speak/write in and as scenes of translation.

And what was Mark Twain if not a "vernacular interpreter," indeed a vernacularizing vernacular interpreter," anticipating folks like Faulkner: I don't see how a city no bigger than New York can hold enough people to take the money away from us country suckers."[12]

And what was ethnologist-Sanskritist Marcel Mauss, if not a "vernacular interpreter" of rituals and words, and words about words – including magical words, and exchange-words, and sacrificial-cycles of words. Mauss translated world-wide "colloquial" words so far as to insist, in 1902–03:

> There is no such thing as a wordless ritual; an apparent silence does not mean that inaudible incantations expressing the magician's will are not being made. From this point of view, the mechanical rite is but a translation of the unspoken incantation: a gesture is a sign, and also a language. Words and action become absolutely equivalent and that is why we find descriptions of the non-verbal rites presented to us as spells. Without any formal physical movement a magician can create, annihilate, direct, hunt, do anything he wishes with the aid of his voice, his breath, or merely through his will. . . . (1972:57)

[12] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, (1946:252). On Faulkner's continuation of nineteenth-century humorous modes and "stylistic approaches to the raft and the Mississippi." see Schmitz (129)

Momentarily this paper will modulate from Twain's *ear* for the vernacular over to Mauss's *pen* for the comparative-colloquy. Marcel Mauss authored Masterpieces of formal eloquence attuned to magic's "terrific confusion of images, without which, to our way of thinking, the rite itself would be inconceivable." (1972:62) But before turning to Mauss's writing, I must enter one last note about "VERNACULAR," a subversive dictionary-note not less contradictory than *unheimlich* becoming *heimlich*, that so caught Freud's fancy. "Vernacular," it seems, stems etymologically from Latin *vernaculus*, meaning "born in one's house, native."

"Vernaculus" stems in turn from *verna*, meaning "a slave born in his master's house, a native, of uncertain origin." Now if that ain't a hoot, history's tragic and true hoot. The very root of vernacular's "native" is a slave born in his master's house . . . of uncertain origin.

Mauss's Essays: Magical Gifts

> There are magical systems which are perfectly conscious of their diversity and refer to it with special words and metaphors. (1972: 60)

Marcel Mauss's career spanned the *fin de siècle* through World War II; he was France's leading ethnologist between the death of Emile Durkheim, his uncle, and the ascendancy of Lévi-Strauss. Like other Jewish scholars associated with *L'année sociologique* (and their colleagues in other academic outfits), Marcel Mauss found himself turned by History back into a *verna*, into a slave born in his master's house . . . into an embodiment of "uncertain origin" purged by totalitarian nations. During his final, tragic years in the aftermath of the Vichy regime, he lapsed into morose incapacity. We may never know whether his condition should be characterized as a vacated depression in the clinical sense or a more baroque madness, endowed with both fullness and emptiness – the malady of prophets.

Discussing Mauss's classic "Essai sur le don," James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* reminds readers:

> *The Gift* is an allegory of reconciliation and reciprocity in the wake of the First World War. As is well known, the war had a devastating impact on Mauss; its sequel in 1940 would deprive him of the will to work and think. With the breakdown of evolutionist master narratives. . . (65).

Earlier in *Writing Culture* Clifford recommended rescuing "history" back into *The Gift*, which he deemed "an admirable example of science deploying itself in history":

> The book was written in response to the breakdown of European reciprocity in World War I. The troubling proximity it shows between exchange and warfare, the image of the round table evoked at the end, these and other urgent resonances mark the work as a socialist-humanist allegory addressed to the political world of the twenties. This is not the work's only "content." (160)

Scholars should indeed situate Mauss's unsettling essay – which I find as politically *engagé* as anthropology can be – in the historical circumstances that occasioned it. Yet we must also beware not to reduce the work to a "window on," or reflex of, its immediate context. "Essai sur le don" (1925) deserves being read both contextually, as it "deployed itself *in* history," and textually as it countered the very history it was (and is) in. The same point applies to rites and institutions Mauss explored: they are not simply ingredients *in* a container called history (even when carefully distinguished from universal History).

The Gift's possibly paradoxical suggestions about a general development from rituals of exchange to monetized markets – what Clifford calls an "evolutionist master narrative" – has been repeatedly debated. Before proceeding to "comic" components of Mauss's earlier and later essays, I will illustrate two schools of response to *The Gift* with works by Marshall Sahlins and Michele Richman.[13]

In *Stoneage Economics* (an artfully pseudo-historical title) Sahlins lodges *The Gift*'s "historic merit" precisely in correcting "just this simplified progression from chaos to commonwealth, savagery to civilization" associated with Hobbes (179). Rightly, I think, Sahlins absolves Mauss of

[13] For contexts of *L'Année sociologique*, see Lukes, and Richman (1990). A wave of responses to Mauss's *Sociologie et anthropologie* was stimulated by Lévi-Strauss's controversial "*Introduction*." Derrida's new work in press (*Given Time*) will doubtless re-aggravate many vexed issues. Pocock (1972) is one scholar, along with Louis Dumont, attentive to the key place of Sanskritic evidence in *The Gift* (see Boon, 1990:167).

having idealized consensual societies; rather Mauss "transposes the classic alternatives of war and trade [taken for granted in formalist-economic assumptions] from the periphery to the very center of social life, and from the occasional episode to the continuous presence." (179, 182) Mauss's interpretation, I would add, helps him foreground the emotive charge of social and counter-social rituals, including magic, sacrifice, symbolic classifications, economy and exchange, marriage and trade, "techniques of bodies," and concepts of the person. Mauss's intertwined topics included "money," an institutionalized delay of return-in-kind that he compared to magic. Money bridges, as magic cancels, the gap between a wish and its fulfillment.

A more dissenting response to Mauss's *don* is outlined in Michele Richman's important *Reading Bataille* that attempts to move beyond "the weak point in Mauss's reading of archaic exchange" toward Bataille's notion of *dépense* (i.e. profuse expenditure, exhibitionism, effusive output, radical profanity, irrespective of anticipated return). Richman sets Bataille, engrossingly, in conversation with Nietzsche, Derrida, and others – all in contrast to Mauss. But to do so, she effectively detaches Mauss's "gift" from "sacrifice," and then accuses him of "optimistically" pursuing a past "irretrievably lost," given modern society's "sharp distinction between the economic and the social." (15) But, Mauss could not really be guilty of dreaming up a restored "meeting of morality and economics" or even a hoped-for "symbolic reconstruction," as Richman charges. In the sketch on *Sacrifice*, he had written (with Hubert):

> The victim takes place. It alone penetrates into the perilous domain of sacrifice, it dies there, and indeed it is there in order to die. The *sacrifier* [my italics] remains protected; the gods take the victim instead of him. *The victim redeems him*. Moses had not circumcised his son, and Yahweh came to "wrestle" with him in a hostelry. Moses was on the point of death when his wife savagely cut off the child's foreskin and, casting it at Yahweh's feet, said to him: "Thou art for me a husband of blood." The destruction of the foreskin satisfied the god; he did not destroy Moses, who was redeemed. There is no sacrifice into which some idea of redemption does not enter. (1964:98–99)

Such remarks suggest less dream of final redemption than resignation to on-going dearth, whether in Vedic or Pentateuchal constructions, both of

which Mauss intensively investigated.[14] Sacrifice for Mauss, like money, implies constitutive debt or dearth. And dearth – a culturally-construed, not natural, "scarcity" – coestablishes "economy" and "society," two aspects of the desire to give and be given debt (*Schuld*).

Mauss's writings continually interrelate principles of social exchange, economic conversion, sacrifice, and magic. And magic, for Mauss, takes into account techniques of subverting regular controls that critics now equate with Bataille's *dépense*:

> Taking everything into consideration, we find the same idea in magic which we found in sacrifice. Magic involves a terrific confusion of images, without which, to our way of thinking, the rite itself would be inconceivable. . . . Between a wish and its fulfillment there is, in magic, no gap. (Mauss 1972:62)

Mauss interpreted pre-monetized, pre-modern and infra-modern dimensions enacting indebtedness, and referred modern economy to magic's aneconomic "plenty," abundance, and copiousness. Magic is something like the counter-*propre* inherently figured within and against social and economic orthodoxy.

Mindful of Mauss's unhappy person, his work's historical contexts, and critical readings of his readings of various rites, I nevertheless (or therefore) accentuate themes of resilience in his essays. I remain skeptical of charges that Mauss naively lamented the loss of archaic usages; I suspect instead that his expositions were meant to be *mimetic* of rituals upon which they reflected. Mauss's writings inscribe the very rhythms of delay,

[14] On sacrifice, see especially Herrenschmidt (1979). Richman neglects Mauss's sense of "loss" as unending. Figuratively, loss pertains to what can be neither repaired nor redeemed by receiving-from-elsewhere. "Loss" in this sense implies "desire" (and the erotic), much as Georg Simmel envisioned it: "The necessity of proceeding in a roundabout way in order to acquire certain things is often the occasion, and often also the reason, for considering them valuable. In human relations, and most frequently and clearly in erotic relations, it is apparent that reserve, indifference or rejection incite the most passionate desire to overcome these barriers, and are the cause of efforts and sacrifices that, in many cases, the goal would not have seemed to deserve were it not for such opposition." (1900:87)

exchange, and return evident in comparative cultural practices resonant with magical resistance, ascetic dearth, and cyclic "redemption," a metaphor that is neither nostalgic, optimistic, nor *religiosus*.

One might say that Mauss's essays display history itself, so to speak, deployed exchangingly, sacrificially, and magically. *The Gift* emphasizes both trade and marriage (*commercium et connubium*) in systems of reproduction (Boon 1982:175). And ritual sacrifice entails death and victims in the full-circle cycles – what Lewis Hyde, in his Maussian book also called *The Gift*, designates evergreen compost: birth from rot, repeatedly:

> [Osiris's dismembered body] is not just reassembled, it comes back green. With him we return to . . . the Tsimshian coppers cut apart at a chief's funeral, the Kwakiutl coppers dismembered and riveted back together with increased value. . . . And the gift. . . : a property that both perishes and increases. Osiris is the mystery of compost: "It grows such sweet things out of such corruptions." (182–83)

* * * * *

This brings us back to comedy. Institutions of marriage, remarriage, or ongoing reproducibility (including a sacrificial attitude toward renewal) are generically "comic" – one of the shapes that history takes. Among hosts of literary historians who affirm that the comic and tragic conspire, I might cite Harry Levin's recent *Playboys and Killjoys*:

> Comedy and tragedy both sprang from parallel, if not identical, origins – insofar as classicists have been able to explore them, from sacrificial feasts and other religious ceremonies. . . . Comedy has been traced back to the revel, or *komos*, which in turn looks ahead to the Aristophanic finale, the wedding or *gamos*. Phallephoric processions, orgiastic dances featuring satyrs rather than heroes, were a comic counterpart to the stately tragic dithyrambs, which had fostered panegyric rather than invective. (16)

It is *The Gift*'s reference to "the comic" that I wish now to consider.

A principal concern of Mauss was Brahminic rites of sublimated sacrifice. Sanskritic theories of "the gift" are pivotal to "Essai sur le don"; and Mauss punctuates his commentary with a striking suggestion: "*Toute*

cette théorie est même assez comique" (249; these words are misconveyed in Cunnison's translation, "This is a quaint theory.") Following Brahminic ideology, priests officiate at ritual sacrifice; like cows, priests are for giving (or being given to), not for spending (*dépense*) or consuming. To savor the "comic" of this Indological topic, I cite *the Gift* at length, restoring key words deleted in an influential translation insensitive to crucial tonalities:

> Other principles of Brahminic law awaken reminiscences [*étrangement*] of certain Polynesian, Melanesian and American customs we have described. The manner of receiving the gift is curiously similar. The Brahmin has invincible pride (*orgueil*). He refuses to have anything to do with markets (*le marché*) [*même il ne doit accepter rien qui en vienne*]. In a national economy with towns, markets and money, the Brahmin remains faithful to the economy and morality of the old Indo-Iranian shepherds (*pasteurs*) and other aboriginal peasants of the great plains. He maintains the dignity of a nobleman in taking offence at favours towards him. (57)
>
> *Toute cette théorie est même assez comique*. A whole caste which lives by gifts pretends to refuse them, then compromises and accepts only those which are offered spontaneously . . . on condition, to be sure, of some slight purification (*expiations*). The bond that the gift creates between the donor and the recipient is too strong for them (*les deux*). The recipient is in a state of dependence upon the donor. It is for this reason that the Brahmin may not accept and still less solicit from the king. . . .
>
> The gift is thus something that must be given, that must be received and that is, at the same time, dangerous to accept [*prendre*]. The gift itself constitutes an irrevocable link especially when it is a gift of food. The recipient depends upon the temper of the donor, in fact each depends upon the other. Thus a man does not eat with his enemy. All kinds of precautions are taken . . . [*expatiate*] . . . as only Hindu authors can . . . gifts, donors and things given are to be considered in their context [*relativement*], precisely and scrupulously. . . . There is etiquette at every step. It is not the same as a market where a man takes a thing objectively for a price. Nothing is casual [*indifférent*] here. (58)

No, nothing is "indifferent" in this comedy of "contracts, alliances, transmission of goods, bonds created by these transfers." Everything palpitates in this classical Hindu case that opposes purified Brahmins and sublimated sacrifice to market transactions. A Sanskritic "theory of the

gift" is "comic" in its techniques and etiquette of pretended refusal and its mélange of charged values linking donor and recipient (Brahmin) and ideas of dependence obverse to those of a marketplace. This example serves Mauss as a touchstone example from history's long-term "transitional phase" of what he calls:

> the spirit (*ce principe*) of gift-exchange . . . characteristic of societies which have passed the phase of "total prestation" (between clan and clan, family and family) but have not yet reached the stage of pure individual contract, the money market (*marché ou roule l'argent*), sale proper, fixed price, and weighed and coined money. (45)[15]

Ethnological evidence in *The Gift* stems largely from this so-called "transitional phase," which may include everything we know of cultures and histories. Careful reading of Mauss suggests something inevitably "transitional" in any exchange system, including extreme "total prestation" (reciprocation between two parties whose contrast is constituted by that mutual indebtedness), and extreme monetized markets, hypermediated. Neither a total prestation nor a market can be perfectly "at home" to its pure principles; to quote again Lewis Hyde:

> Put generally, within certain limits what has been given us as a gift may be sold in the marketplace and what has been earned in the marketplace may be given as a gift. Within certain limits, gift wealth may be rationalized and market wealth may be eroticized. (274)

That "*assez comique*" Sanskritic theory of gifts necessarily offered (*rendre*), but dangerously taken (*prendre*), could be said to form the heart of the *comédie humaine* overall.

The passage cited above demonstrates paradoxes and deceptive

[15] I am quoting *The Gift*'s *conclusion première*, not its tripartite concluding conclusions. Mauss's anthropological readers neglect his multiple endings, so suited to the essay form's customary ironies. (For echoes of Mauss's devices, see Boon 1982, ch. 5; 1990, ch. 5). For an overview of theories of magic, see O'Keefe; on magic in India, see Siegel; see also Malinowski's classic (1935) and Kenneth Burke's "Rhetoric and Primitive Magic." (1962:564–67)

valences of Brahminic ritual hierarchies carefully given "voice" in Mauss's "Essai sur le don."[16] His nuances of tone were appreciated by Michel de Certeau, who noted Mauss's pertinence to practices of resistance as well as domination. De Certeau detects in *The Gift*'s arguments, and between their lines, aspects of tactical "gifting" at society's margins, countering the thrusts of economic or political powers; in *Arts de faire* (*The Practice of Everyday Life*), he observes:

> The actual order of things is precisely what "popular" tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon. Though elsewhere it is exploited by a dominant power or simply denied by an ideological discourse, here order is *tricked* by an art. Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistence, that is, an economy of the "*gift*" (generosities for which one expects a return), an esthetics of "*tricks*" (artists operations) and an ethics of *tenacity* (countless ways of refusing to accord the established order the status of a law, a meaning, or a fatality). "Popular" culture is precisely that. . . .
>
> This practice of economic *diversion* is in reality the return of a sociopolitical ethics into an economic system. It is no doubt related to the *potlatch* described by Mauss, an interplay of voluntary allowances that counts on reciprocity and organizes a social network articulated by the "obligation to give." (26)

Like Mauss, de Certeau opposes *potlatch* to monetized market transactions; he realizes that diversionary counterprestations from the disempowered are aimed not only against dominant institutions of alienation but also against rivalrous counterprestations. De Certeau,

[16] Mauss's theories *of* a Sanskritic "theory of the gift" have affected my tactics of interpreting a place named Hindu-Bali: a counter-Muslim locale both "encrypted" and "displayed" within the world's most populous Islamic nation; a scene of and for translation, where meanings collide among Austronesian variations (High/Middle/Low Balinese, modern Indonesian and Sanskritized Old Javanese or Kawi), plus so-called Archipelago Sanskrit; an intersection of Malayo-Polynesian cultures, European colonialisms, and Indo-European ideology (Boon 1990:1977).

moreover, seconds Mauss's hints that *potlatch* cannot be totally absent, or abstract-individualized market absolute:

> In our societies, the market economy is no longer determined by such an "emulation": taking the abstract individual as a basic unit, it regulates all exchanges among these units according to the code of generalized equivalence constituted by money. . . . However that may be, the *potlatch* seems to persist within it as the mark of another type of economy. It survives in our economy, though on its margins or in its interstices. It is even developing, although held to be illegitimate, within modern market economy. Because of this, the politics of the "gift" *also* becomes a diversionary tactic. In the same way, the loss that was voluntary in a gift economy is transformed into a transgression in a profit economy: it appears as an excess (a waste), a challenge (a rejection of profit), or a crime (an attack on property). (27)

The "economic crime" of waste recalls the magic of copiousness, the excess of ludic expenditure, and the cancellation of desire's gap. De Certeau finds *dépense* implicit within *don*, and he grasps dimensions of gift-giving that evade economic propriety-*cum*-property – much as humor might.

De Certeau's own essays in *Arts de faire* seem more akin to Mauss's aphoristic writing about "magic," rather than *The Gift*'s measured interwoven exposition that possibly mimics the institutionalized exchange described. Shifting styles of commentary characterize Mauss's essays, including the co-authored ones; they possibly embody a range of figural devices, a self-conscious array of *techniques de l'essai*. For example, the study with Hubert of sacrifice echoes oscillating movements between sacred (set-apart) passage and exegesis – something rather Pentateuch-like or Upanashad-like (recall the quotation cited earlier from *Sacrifice* on circumcision).

Again, this stylistic self-consciousness is conspicuous in Mauss's "sketch" on magic (with Hubert), littered with pungeant formulations, chock-a-block with bursts of lexical energy, harum-scarum with fragmentary, definitional twists. Now, one might say that memorable epigraphs are rhetoric's equivalent to magic – separable, isolated, metonymic, condensed. Myth-like (in Lévi-Strauss's sense), aphorisms may hold up in translation or be identifiable *as translated*. With that hope in mind, I here cite seven bursts from Mauss's *esquisse*, translated, in

reverse order:

> 1) Magic is the domain of pure production, ex *nihilo*. With words and gestures it does what techniques achieve by labour. (1972:141)
> 2) Magic has a veritable predilection for forbidden things. (129)
> 3) Magic, like sacrifice, requires and produces an alteration, a modification in one's state of mind. This is expressed by the gravity of the actions, the changed nature of the voice and even by the use of a special language, the language of spirits and gods. (128)
> 4) Thanks to the idea of *mana*, magic – the domain of wish-fulfillment – is shown to have plenty of rationalism. (127)
> 5) It is even possible that inductive reasoning was first learnt in the school of magic. (126)
> 6) The idea of magical efficacy is ever present and plays far from an accessory part, since it enjoys the same role which the copula plays in a grammatical clause. It is this which presents the magical idea, gives it being, reality, truth, makes it so powerful. (122)
> 7) . . . magic, like religion, is a game, involving "value judgments," expressive aphorisms which attribute different qualities to different objects entering the system. (121)

In brief, the essay on magic, which likens magic to aphorisms, is itself replete with aphorisms. I doubt that Mauss's writing here is no less rhetorically self-aware than Twain's "talking." Apt aphorisms, moreover, often have a humorous ring because of their very aptness. In contrast, the prose of *The Gift* – no less mindful of its own devices, I'd wager – converts epigraphic insight into more systematic exposition – just as exchange rites relegate magical practices to the margins and interstices of the regularities of mutual obligation, marriage, trade partners, and so forth.

I might rephrase my analogy between institutional configuration and figural mode in this way: If magical utterances imply the aphoristic, gifting utterances imply the conversational (the latter insight actually belongs to Lévi-Strauss).[17] Different language modes in Mauss (including formats of prayer) are articulated relationally, with respect to both the communication style each mode implies and the locus of producing it.

[17] Lévi-Strauss *Elementary Structures* (1969:493–97).

Consider, for example, the typical "scene" – *topos*? – of aphorism Mauss evokes:

> Magical rites are commonly performed in woods, far away from dwelling places, at night or in shadowy corners, in the secret recesses of a house or at any rate in some out-of-the-way place. Where religious rites are performed openly, in full public view, magical rites are carried out in secret. Even when magic is licit, it is done in secret, as if performing some maleficent deed. . . . Thus, as far as society is concerned, the magician is a being set apart and he prefers even more to retire to the depths of the forest. Among colleagues too he nearly always tries to keep himself to himself . . . working in a private capacity; both the act and the actor are shrouded in mystery. (23)

Let me underscore the shifting vantages and thoroughness of Mauss's scheme, which I read as something like a genre-theory (or perhaps a theory of modes) of ritual practice. In his relational perspectives, everything that occasional magic is *not* routine debt-giving *is*: public, open, social, manifest, cyclic. Yet magic joins sacrifice at the opposite end of the same axis:

> Two extremes which form the differing poles of magic religion: the pole of sacrifice and the pole of evil spells. Religion has always created a kind of ideal towards which people direct their hymns, vows, sacrifices, an ideal which is bolstered by prescriptions. These are areas which are avoided by magic. . . . (1972:24)

Posed from the vantage of religion, public, social "gifting" constrasts on the one hand with personal, asocial, incidental magic; and on the other hand with the social pole of magical incantation: sacrifice. Phrasing these relationships more generally: *le don* is social, manifest, reciprocated desire; magic is personal desire: gapless wish at risk of unreciprocation; but this risky, asocial business is itself socially valued.

In matters of performative genres and their associated institutions, Mauss's own rhetoric covers the gamut: exchange (implies marriage, trade, and comedy), sacrifice (implies priestly liturgy, redemptive death, and commentary), and magic (implies prophecy, social-negation, and aphorism). Like history, Mauss's essays pulse to ritual rhythms of relay,

delay, and return. *Toute cette théorie est*, indeed, *assez comique*.

Pushed to its limits, Mauss's writing could almost be interpreted as a thoroughgoing "anatomy" of worldwide rites, just as famous "essays" by Northrop Frye would later offer an "anatomy" of worldwide texts. As Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* stipulated, the genre "anatomy" (from which Frye pinched his title) implies a parodic, possibly apocalyptic vision of historical cyclicity and tragicomic circularity: "The theme of encyclopaedic parody is endemic in satire [i.e., Menippean satire], and in prose fiction is chiefly to be found in the anatomy . . ." (322)

Finally, for the sake of circularity, folks, I might just mention that Frye too knew Mark Twain (but evidently, alas, not Marcel Mauss); and Frye went so far as to claim in his own encyclopedic parody:

> In *Huckleberry Finn* the main theme is one of the oldest in comedy, the freeing of a slave, and the *cognitio* tells us that Jim had already been set free before his escape was bungled by Tom Sawyer's pedantries. (180)

The End: Mark Twain and Mauss, Twins, Interdisciplinary Marriage

> This party was one of those persons whom they call Philosophers. He was twins, being born simultaneously in two different houses in the city of Boston.
>
> — Mark Twain, "The Late Benjamin Franklin." (1979:89)

Well folks, my essay's in a pickle; it's too long already but has a lot more to say. So I'd better wind up with a list of conclusions: "seven," a magic number.

1. Marcel Mauss addressed history's cross-cultural gamut of ritual practices and exchange systems — from structures of nervous reciprocity between clans, to monetary markets of centralized states. He contrasted magical techniques to rites of "giving indebtedness" regularly; magic/gift overlaps with such distinctions as heterodox/orthodox or vernacular/official. "Magical" utterances and scripts are experienced as the equivalent of foreign-words-at-home. Magic implies alien speech or writ within the segmented community responsive to the words' power and allure. One might call magic something like "heteroglossia," isolable in its own right and peppering rituals of sacrifice, exchange, and "comic" hierarchy, among other topics visited in Mauss's *oeuvre*. "Magic," then, is

alien heteroglossia even at home; Mauss wrote about it (and wrote it) in an erudite style. "Dialect" is at-home heteroglossia even elsewhere; Twain wrote about it (and wrote it) in a colloquial style. Hence the affinity, across a difference, between the likes of Twain and the likes of Mauss.

2. Mauss's essays helped anthropologists read rites as rhetorical practice. Ritual activities (including words) partake of multilayeredness, inter(con)textuality, and evasiveness – the very properties associated by many literary theorists exclusively with "texts." What I call ritual-*cum*-rhetorical aspects of social life include a subversiveness akin to humorous writing and speaking, or a writing-speaking hybrid. One tried and true stylistic recourse in both fiction (e.g., the novel) and description (e.g., ethnography) is to coagulate the *hoity-toi* (overbaked?) and the *cru*. Equivalent resources exist in many, perhaps all, polities and eras, including non-literate ones. As so many disciplines and antidisciplines together have shown, different cultures and times deserve to be "read" according to their respective ways of displaying their devices of erudition and its debunking, their styles of transgressing proprieties. Litterytoor and Anthropolygee keep engaging and enacting parodic practices (texts and rites) – both gleeful and sad.

3. One current of contemporary critical opinion – too familiar to need references – considers parody (or any attitude tinged with it) a "post-modern" development. This assumption forgets venerable, shifting ironies of literary modernism, on back through early Romantics, Renaissance description and censorship, medieval semiotics, and Lucianic parody or Menippean satire – just on the "Western" front. "Parody," moreover, pertains to a vast array of non-European practices of heterodoxy and counter-propriety. Just to name two cases from a perfectly copious list: so-called Tantric textual and ritual tactics of Hindu and Buddhist domains; the gender-inflected travesties performed along the edges and in the interstices of New Guinea social cycles.[18]

I cite expansive parody not to imply that vernacularizing, self-conscious genres of ritual-cum-rhetoric are "always already," but to recall how un-new, culturally diverse, and recurrent they prove. Why, one multivocal, would-be polylingual classic called *Max Havelaar* (Multatuli 1860) – *the*

[18] For sources on relevant aspects of Tantrism and New Guinea's emphatically gendered rites, see Boon (1990:159–70; 179–80).

canonical novel in Dutch literature, as much ethnography as Menippean satire – even helped crumble Dutch colonialism. Maybe.

4. Humorous modes of practice counter language-orthodoxies necessary for them to resist. And "comic" forms, while attesting resilience, hardly neglect the violence, pain, inequalities, and suffering inflicted by powers whose mission is to render oppressed voices unheard. An "attitude" (in Kenneth Burke's sense) toward history's "comic" accentuates tears, death, repressions, and harm – along with laughs, life, assertions and hope. "Victimage," too, has been a major rubric of Burke's dramatism and rhetoric of human motives, as he tried to explore the fullest extent imaginable of humanity's forensic complexity.

5. Part of my work covers contexts of rhetorical intricacy in cultures like Bali, eras like "early-modern," and discourses like "Indology" and "Hinduization; another part revisits comparative writings – by such scholars as Robert Lowie, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, A. M. Hocart, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and, here, Marcel Mauss – searching subtler textual and political resonances than grudging readers notice. I also credit virtuosity (and agency) in techniques of persuasion not just to critical theorists, but to plain-folks and subjugated ones too. Obviously, deep duplicities and arcane multiplicities characterize high-flying deconstruction as well as the logocentrisms it contests. But similar qualities obtain in low-down jokes, earthy laments, everyday resistance, commodity consumption, and rituals of getting-by.

For me, Anthropolygee remains, as it was from the start, an art of reading diverse *folks* in their plights and enthusiasms. Now, "folks" include intelligentsia, with our (anti)metaphysics, theories, and manifestoes. And Anthropolygeests must read them too, like Litterytoorists. And v-eye-see-vers-uh. Really though, neither Anthropolygee nor Litterytoor should elevate fancy-folks-writing *over and against* plain-folks-talking (or vice versa). Nor siree, folks. Whatsmore, plain-folks ain't plain atall; they just know how to talk that way; tricky devils.

6. For all these reasons the transgressive marriage of anthropological and literary study strikes me as peculiarly suitable.[19] Inspired by Balinese Tantric tropes, I see us as unidentical-twin disciplines. This incestuous union (represented in this talking-essay talk by Twain *and* Mauss)

[19] My own work (1972, 1977, 1982, 1990) represents as disciplinary alliance a *ménage à trois* of anthropology, literature, and history, each partner inflected by a

embraces the most vernacular and colloquial tensions, contradictions, and conflicts that comparative evidence (as-written and misspelled, as-read and "misprisioned") illuminates or clouds. To engage in projects wedding anthropology and literature (of any gender) still risks ruffling the feathers of both of these strange birds in the aviary of *sciences des langues*.

7. My title's conjoined disciplines must, I aver, keep interpreting basic anthropological topics (e.g., kinship and marriage) along with basic literary topics (e.g., metaphors and narrative); both varieties of topics, after all, exist. I worry about recent litero-ethnographic trends, sometimes in the name of "cultural studies," that smoothe away difficulties on one side or the other — social structure or textual tropes — so to advance a pat disquisition on power. Ironically, a familiar "sameness" results when critical voices and choices become consolidated into a political correctitude whose pronouncements evoke a utopian bliss, conjugal or otherwise. In my book, creatively critical transgressions and discursive humor — e.g., Litterytoor *and* Anthropolygee — should keep questioning the would-be new, "antidisciplinary" standardization, along with all the other brands.

You know, folks, it ain't easy being twins, particularly when they're married.

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linguistic turn. I adapt rhetorics from different cultures and discourses — Hindu-Bali, Indo-European ideology, Jacobean masques, structuralism, comparative mythology, Margaret Mead's biography — attuned to marriage and diverse contraries (asceticism, licentiousness, divorce, celibacy, autoeroticism, etc.). I have proposed "Menippean satire" (Boon 1982:278–79; 1990:67–69, 86–91, 197) as a long-term "blurred genre" (Geertz 1983:ch. 1); and I recommend continual revisiting of past critics, such as Kenneth Burke and Roland Barthes, and past ethnologists, such as Victor Turner and Ruth Benedict — worthy readers of "comic" rites and texts, plus the doubts their rhetorics inspire.

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