



**Reading Strong Medicine:  
The Novel as Axe for the Frozen Sea Inside Us**

Corpus Christi College English 099  
Custom Courseware  
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# Reading Strong Medicine: The Novel as Axe for the Frozen Sea Inside Us

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*The Novel in Our Time*  
(abridged and paraphrased)

Human beings possess autonomous mind. This means not only that we possess the ability to think for ourselves, but also that our consciousness is characterized by the feeling of separation. We not only participate in the constant activity of the world, we also reflect upon that participation. As human beings, we reflect upon our own desires and needs, and we reflect on how best to use the things of the world in order to satisfy those needs and desires.

Because human beings possess autonomous mind, we see ourselves in a constant state of conflict with the external universe. The external universe not only offers us what we need, it also withholds it. We are forced to work, in one way or another, in order to get the good things that we want. But there is more. The external universe also threatens us. It threatens us with scarcity. It threatens us with stark and dangerous landscapes. It threatens us with storms and natural disasters. And it threatens each and every one of us with the eventual death that none of us can escape. This last threat, the threat of death, underlies all the others.

In our constant conflict with the external universe we are motivated by our instinct for survival. We all possess, in some degree, a sense of biological human responsibility towards other human beings—both to protect them and, as far as we are able, to help them thrive. This sense of biological human responsibility is linked to our instinctive life and moves us to stand not only against death but against oppression. Ultimately ours is a conflict with death, but it is also a conflict with those members of the human race who have lost their nerve and sided with death against humanity.

The greater human community is in a conflict with the “advocates of power”, those who have lost their nerve, lost their courage, and chosen to side with death against humanity. “Power,” here, refers to a combination of the ability to oppress others and the intention to oppress others. “Power,” in this sense, is the opposite of cooperation. In the simplest terms, the advocates of power do not cooperate with the greater community in order to get the good things they desire. Instead, the advocates of power find ways to force others to provide them with the good things they desire. Acting at the expense of others, pretending they are somehow different and therefore should be spared the suffering others face, the advocates of power destroy the communities in which they live, from the inside.

To feel “compassion” is, literally, to share suffering (*com*=together, *passio*=suffering). To the extent that all human beings die, we are all fellow sufferers—we all look ahead with the awareness of our own approaching and inevitable deaths and we suffer that awareness.<sup>1</sup> The advocates of power have lost their nerve; they are unwilling to struggle with others towards the good things of life. The advocates of power have traded their connection with others as fellow-strugglers and fellow-sufferers for a relation of power. They have chosen to make others suffer more so that they themselves suffer less. When we lose our nerve and side with death and power, we renounce and gradually lose our ability to hold others in our hearts and to feel as they do, either to suffer with them or to celebrate with them. The advocates of power have chosen to harden their hearts: they have renounced empathy for others and suppressed their sense of biological responsibility towards others..

The human conflict with death and power is not only a struggle for life but also for meaning and value in life. Comfort conceives humanity and the human community as being necessarily involved in a conflict... with death, and with those members of the human race

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<sup>1</sup> Looking back to the origin of the word, to draw “courage” is to draw motivation from those things we love, those things we hold in our hearts--courage has its etymological root in *coeur*, the French word for heart.

who have lost their nerve and sided with death against humanity as the advocates of power. In accordance with this view of human existence, Comfort draws two conclusions. His first conclusion has already been stated: the main ethical value that defines our humanity is a sense of biological human responsibility, against death and against power. His second conclusion is essentially an extension of the first: the human standards, such as beauty and justice, which are the essential supporting pillars of human community exist only so long as we assert them (12). It is through these standards that we build and measure meaning and value within the shared culture of the human community. It is furthermore in accordance with these standards that we limit activity destructive to our human community and culture.

Collectively asserted human standards are absolutely essential to the communal life of human beings. Nevertheless, no external standard, value, or idea should be given priority over an individual's natural biological sense of responsibility. *Irresponsible allegiances* lead to barbarity: artists, therefore, are forced, at an early stage to make up their minds whether they regards themselves as human beings or disguised quadrupeds (19). In this vein, it is the authorial artist's responsibility to refuse to abandon his or her basic conception of humanness for any extraneous object whatsoever, whether that object be victory, democracy, the nation, the party, the civil list, or even the libraries (19).

Authorial artists are presented with a vital choice when they recognize that their culture is in a state of crisis: When one is faced with the prospect of communal disintegration, and when one feels one has a duty, an impulse, or an inner compulsion to react to it by writing, there are four courses open.... One can make one's escape into the contemplation of true form. One can escape into lunacy. One can escape into a policy of making terms with barbarism. Or one can consciously assume responsibility for one's work and one's times, and interpret what one sees in the light of one's humanity (21). ... An artist who chooses the course of human responsibility knows that if you kill a man he dies, whatever your intentions were; that if your convictions are

leading you into officially-sponsored acts like Dachau and the atom bomb, you are, humanly speaking, insane; such an artist knows that it is to the person **under** your own feet that you owe responsibility (22).

The escape-routes that lead away from human responsibility may entail productivity but it is a barren productivity. The seekers of pure form produce work, often of great merit, but which ultimately imprisons them. Those who escape into lunacy, like the surrealists, are brave enough to confront the grimace of barbarism with a mirror grimace, but they purchase their satire at the cost of disintegrating themselves. As for the collaborators who make terms with barbarism and obey, they are the people who will desperately cling to belief in a lie, because it is unpopular or tiresome or unprofitable to stand when other people are running. Tell the collaborator that you are fighting for the Good, and they will cheer any beastliness, or tell them you are going to rescue the kitten on the roof and they will follow you *down* any number of flights (22).

There are two levels that may be distinguished when evaluating authorial achievement. Most basically, there is the quality of narration, style, humour, and a sense of magnitudes that qualify an author's work as a major achievement. Beyond this, however, a great novel or other work of literature is distinguished by its author's sanity. By sanity, I am referring to the author's responsible understanding of social and historical events. It is the author's sanity, in this sense, that lends him or her immunity from being bamboozled or being paid or flattered to bamboozle. It is this sanity that prevents a human being from being duped into becoming an S.S. man or an atom-bomb dropper on the one hand, or a government stooge on the other (22).

In medicine, one talks of insight, meaning the ability to recognize a delusion for a delusion, to distinguish a product of one's mind from a manifestation of an outer reality. For someone to possess insight implies that they are self-possessed commanding a wholeness of personality and absence of division in the mind. In terms of evaluating an author's achievement, a critic lacking insight can repeat sociological or historical criticism parrot-fashion and be as

much taken in by it as a lunatic by his claims to the throne. There is, however, a simple yet vital test by which a work may be initially approached and measured: the reader might attend not primarily to what authors say but to how far they show themselves able to see a man for a man, and a woman for a woman, with nothing interposed. The sane and responsible writer sees everyone naked, himself or herself included. Such authors are not devoid of political and moral judgements, but they make them equally. In reading, therefore, we might ask: Is this writer capable of recognizing a human being? Is this writer able to reject the art of diverse weights, for which an act identical in every respect is a heroic but regrettable necessity when done by Our Side and a contemptible atrocity when done by Their Side? Is this writer's judgement of human decisions level or weighted?; does this writer know filth from food, whatever the wrapper? If the writer is capable of recognizing a human being and of recognizing human actions stripped bare, then he or she is capable of being a great artist under barbarism. If the writer is incapable of such recognition, he or she is another part of barbarism made manifest (24).

The novel is the readiest and most acceptable way of embodying ideas and artistic statements in the context of our time. The novel is dependent on technical facilities and conditions which have never existed before. Novels are printed—indeed they must be printed for they cannot be memorized. Keeping step with the times, the novel is radically individual in its approach. This is the first time in history we have had a totally fragmented society (13,14). The novel addresses itself to one reader at a time, and the modern novel—unlike the early nineteenth century novel which addressed itself to a section of society—can make little assumptions about that reader's beliefs or activities. It is a global vehicle for serious literary communication and yet it can be based on no public myth which can be taken for granted—an entire world has to be created and peopled separately in each novel that is written (15).





## *The Panzaic Theory of the Novel*

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we are reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? So that it will make us happy, as you write? Good Lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from anyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.

Franz Kafka

In all this wild welter, we need some sort of guide. It's no good inventing Thou Shalt Nots!

What then? Turn truly, honorably to the novel, and see wherein you are ... alive, and wherein you are dead... in life. To be alive, to be man [and woman] alive, to be whole man [and woman] alive: that is the point. And at its best, the novel, and the novel supremely, can help you. ...

Only in the novel are all things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play, when we realize that life itself and not inert safety, is the reason for living. For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is anything, the wholeness of a man, the wholeness of a woman, man alive, and live woman.

D.H. Lawrence

[In *The Panzaic Theory of the Novel*, Wayne] Burns has created a theory of the novel that distances the reading of novels from the reading of other forms of writing. [His theory addresses the way novels] create more closeness, more intimacy with the inner world of the[ir] readers....

... The novel... “through ‘vision’ ... [c]uts through readers’ ideas and ideals to show them who they are and what they are up against in the real world. In Kafka’s words, it is ‘the axe for the frozen sea inside us.’” [Kafka exemplifies this idea, of being wounded or cut into by the novel, with a dream-like account of his own reading. Imagining himself as a kind of land-surveyor striving to take in the immensity of the inner-world conjured by what he is reading] Kafka’s “field glasses” begin to focus on the reality of the details and the inner project... [T]his effort, this project [in which Kafka’s “conscience cannot settle down [in which his conscience] receives big wounds... that makes it more sensitive to every twinge,” [is itself the internal, participatory] building of [the] novel [as a revolutionary aesthetic experience] (xxxiv).” [It is the cooperative nature of this internal building project shared by author and reader that] ... allows the novel to illuminate... the idealistic underbelly of [readers’] attachment to culture. The participatory effort required to “build” the novel, involves readers internalizing the author’s vision, and it is the active integration of this vision which then] cuts through readers’ ideas and ideals thereby revealing their worlds and themselves in a new light. [In this conception, the novel is finished or “brought to performance” as a “revolutionary aesthetic act” in the relationship between author, work, and reader. Kafka imagines the novel as] the axe for the frozen sea inside us.” For Kafka these words were a primer for an unfinished work, even for an unfinished life” (xxxiv). [Kafka’s image is one of living, suffering process. The work requires the readers’ participation in order to acquire lived meaning. The readers, in turn, require the illumination offered by genuine novels to fully see “who they are and what they are up against in the real world [and in themselves, to the extent that they have unwittingly internalized the self-destructing cultural ideals of this world]” (xxxiv).

In *A Panzaic Theory of the Novel*... [Wayne] Burns sees the novel as a microcosm of the whole of contemporary culture. Releasing the individual from that whole by undercutting it through what he defines as the Panzaic Principle, the novel becomes a revolutionary form of art. The reader will find that the Panzaic Principle is not a system, a symbol, a method, but a way of reading, a way of discovering the self in the making.(x)

In this Introduction I hope to show how much Burns' thinking about the novel and his unique Panzaic theory have meant to me in my own teaching and writing, to place his work in a context that has affected me over the years. In this way I suppose I am "contextualizing" his work for myself. But this "context," which he himself may not agree with, is what I will call a "mindful" context—one which I have mindfully arranged around the figures and movements that have continued to bring his work to performance for me since I first encountered him in 1960. [By "mindfulness" I mean] not only care and attention to details but also attention to the person (the reader) being addressed by the novel. Mindfulness is sensitive to remembering what has been lost, what has been forgotten, what has vanished into an extraterritorial place. It is about memory and traces of memory and how, in reading novels, one must excavate memory. It is a way of being scrupulous. ... But what, outside of one's own character and person, might enable one to develop the mindfulness necessary for survival in our mass culture? For Burns it is the novel which alone can do this for us; and this it is which distinguishes *A Panzaic Theory of the Novel* from other theories of the novel. (x, xi)

The theory of the "Panzaic" is from beginning to end a dialogue—not only with the novel, but with readers as well: with those who can, as well as with those who cannot or will not understand the novel's importance to the critical individual able to read what it is saying... Burns has been writing about this principle since he began to think about the nature of literature, not as a profession or a career, but as a life project, a life's work. In Max Weber's words, intellectual life consists of "callings," and in Burns' life there has always been an instinctive calling to find holes in what he calls the System. (xi)

It is necessary for the future reader to realize that we live in an age of powerful "criticism"

that has suppressed voices like this voice of the Panzaic. In a larger sense... the culture, which has moved from a historical market economy to a market society, has endowed itself with the power to remove or silence those voices of critical intelligence which are different because such voices are not marketable in the domains of Literature departments, themselves now become adjuncts to the market society. The suppression has not been deliberate: the death of the novel, a perennial claim during the age of criticism has always sounded the alarm... But readers—who might not be aware of when and how the death of the novel itself became a reality in the name of the New Criticism and its aftermath—must understand that Burns addresses the death of readers. (xiv)

The search for an aesthetic or ethic which would illuminate the individual's responses to the novel has always been shadowed by the ideal of the canon on the one hand and that of the possibility of a universal method of reading on the other. But Burns says he is not searching for an ethic [in the sense of a universalizable code of reading conduct] and his use of Ortega and Lawrence makes that clear. [Instead, Burns views the novel] as a personal project of the intimate and sovereign individual [which] if read properly... resist[s] incorporation into the "Orb of the Institutions" (xvi). ... Burns knows that we have tacit knowledge based on Panzaic qualities that seem to wait [latent and unthought within us] for new novels which show how one might resist the grain of the culture and the management of symbols of myth or form [by which we are continually bombarded and conditioned]... Burns aligns himself in life and teaching with those who defend the self and the individual. (xviii)

In *A Panzaic Theory of the Novel* Burns ...clears the air and opens windows to experiencing the novels he discusses... in a discourse ["socratically questioning what is Panzaic both in the work and... within the reader"] and...[in] thinking through the experiences and feelings of [individual selves'] self-understanding. (xix)

[According to Burns, we suffer unknowingly from an] enchantment with the "crystalline orb" of our ideals. [But Burns does not want to turn reading into an exercise in institutional loyalties:

the greatest value of the novel lies in its potential to “disturb the surfaces of assent” (xxxv). Consequently, Burns does NOT claim]—as many [well intentioned] contemporary critics have done, from Hillis Miller to Edward Said—that literature ought to have been, and indeed must now be advanced in the name of the Just Cause. [He does NOT claim that] if the literature doesn’t conform to the Just Cause [if it doesn’t] give us hope for the species, or the underclass, or the subaltern—then literature must be interpreted in such a way that it will give us the ideological commitments and pieties by which we can live. [ON THE CONTRARY, for Burns it is absolutely essential that a reader follow the novel where it is going—even if this means provisionally suspending the reader’s own cherished beliefs, ideals and causes in the process.] (xxi)

Burns ... write[s] about experience that is situational in terms of the novel itself and the reader, and about the reader’s own search... for autonomy, in conflict with the cultural ideals that dominate our lives.... (xxiii). [In a similar vein, Georg] Simmel writes in “The Metropolis and Mental Life” that “[t]he deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt by the individual to maintain independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life” (xxviii citing p.324). [In Burns’ panzaic perspective] ... [t]he novel is for individuals reading as individuals who can relate to others as individuals. (xxv)

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza were *Copernican forerunners*. After Cervantes’ Sancho Panza the world was not the same. With Cervantes comes the beginnings of modern consciousness in contact with common situations, the birth of scientific thinking, naturalism, and the unrealized emotion in characters, and the feeling and life of language ([D.H.] Lawrence is a good example) that cannot be corseted into such socio-historical containers as allegory, the pastoral or epic genres. (xxv)

[Burns’ Panzaic Principle can be seen within the broader context of] the emancipatory project of modernism, whose historical task was to save the individual self from the

appearances against which that self struggles to maintain a connection to the real. (xxix)

# *A Panzaic Theory of the Novel*

## Chapter I

### THE PANZAIC: AN INTRODUCTION

*In all ages, the base Sancho Panza triumphs, you will find, in the long run, over the sublime Don Quixote.* (Stendhal)

I am aware of what has been happening in criticism and critical theory for the past thirty years. And because the theory that I am presenting differs so radically from present-day theories of the novel, I am presenting, in outline form, the basic critical premises which underlie it:

1. The novel is a unique art form. Novels cannot be conflated with poems or plays.
2. Novels are written by individuals for other individuals to read.
3. A novel consists of the words chosen and arranged by the novelist.
4. A good reader is someone capable of responding to the words of a novel as they have been chosen and arranged by the novelist.
5. Freudian awareness greatly enhances the ability of the reader to understand the words in a novel as they have been chosen by the novelist.
6. A good critic is a capable reader who represents his or her reading of a novel in a criticism that acknowledges his or her critical premises.
7. Novels may be genuine or counterfeit novels. Only novelists who question or rebel against the ideals of their culture can write genuine novels.
8. Readers must go wherever a genuine novel takes them, and in going there they will have no choice but to be as much at odds with their own and society's ideals as are the novels that they are reading--at least while they are reading the novels.
9. Vivision is what makes a novel genuine. Vision is what cuts through readers' ideas and

ideals to show them who they are and what they are up against in the real world. In Kafka's words, it is "the axe for the frozen sea inside us."

10. Ersatz or imitation vision (which I do not call vision) counterfeits genuine vision and produces counterfeit novels.
11. The vision of a genuine novel challenges or undercuts many or all of the reader's values, ideas and beliefs, or, in a word, his or her ideals. Consequently, the vision of a genuine novel always "hurts" in the sense that Lawrence and Kafka describe the "hurt".
12. Some capable readers, usually sophisticated critics, will acknowledge that a novel conflicts with their ideals but will then proceed to downplay the significance of the conflict--usually by altering or modifying the words as arranged by the author in ways that will either erase the conflict altogether or treat it like an aberrant element that has to be disposed of before moral idealism can prevail.
13. Illumination is a subjective response that readers may sometimes have when they read certain genuine novels.
14. If capable readers experience the illumination of a genuine novel and then decide to reject it, for whatever reason, they have the right to do so.
15. Readers or critics with absolute religious or social or moral convictions will not ordinarily be capable readers of genuine novels. If, like T.S.Eliot, they nevertheless manage to read genuine novels, they will have no choice but to condemn them--as Eliot condemns Hardy and Lawrence. Either that or they have to deny their own absolute convictions--the way Graham Greene does in *Why Do I Write?*
16. The theory of fiction that I am presenting has no moral imperatives. It merely intends to show how capable readers can read genuine novels and experience the illumination that genuine novels may provide.



The theory itself is based primarily on passages from D.H.Lawrence and Jose Ortega y Gasset.

The following quotations are from Lawrence:

You can fool pretty nearly every other medium. You can make a poem pietistic, and still it will be a poem. You can write Hamlet in drama: if you wrote him in a novel, he'd be half comic, or a trifle suspicious: a suspicious character, like Dostoevsky's Idiot. Somehow, you sweep the ground a bit too clear in the poem or the drama, and you let the human Word fly a bit too freely. Now in a novel there's always a tom-cat, a black tom-cat that pounces on the white dove of the Word, if the dove doesn't watch it; and there is a banana-skin to trip on; and you know there is a water-closet on the premises. (Study of Thomas Hardy 18)

A new relation, a new relatedness hurts somewhat in the attaining; and will always hurt. So life will always hurt. Because real voluptuousness lies in re-acting [sic] old relationships, and at the best, getting an alcoholic sort of pleasure out of it, slightly depraving. ... Obviously, to read a really new novel will always hurt, to some extent. There will always be resistance ... You may judge of their reality by the fact that they do arouse a certain resistance, and compel, at length, a certain acquiescence. (Study of Thomas hardy 174-175)

The following quotations are from Ortega:

The force of the concrete in the things stops the movement of our images. The inert and harsh object rejects whatever "meanings" we may give it: it is just there, confronting us, affirming its mute, terrible materiality in the face of all phantoms. This is what we call realism: to bring things to a distance, place them under a light, incline them in such a way that the stress falls upon the side which slopes down towards pure materiality... Therefore, it does not actually matter what objects the realist chooses to describe. Any one at all will do, since they all have an imaginary halo around them, and the point is to show the pure materiality under it. We see in this materiality a conclusive argument, a critical power which defeats the claim to self-sufficiency of all idealizations, wishes and fancies of man. The insufficiency, in a word, of culture, of all that is noble, clear, lofty, ... Cervantes recognizes that culture is all that, but that alas, it is a fiction. Surrounding culture—as the puppet show of fancy was surrounded by the inn—lies the barbarous, brutal, mute, insignificant reality of things. It is sad that it is shown to us thus, but what can we do about it! It is real, it is there: it is terribly self-sufficient. Its force and its single meaning are rooted in its presence. Culture is memories and promises, an irreversible past, a dreamed future. But reality is a simple and frightening "being there." It is a presence, a deposit, an inertia. It is materiality (30-31)

In [Don Quixote] the epic comes to an end forever along with its aspiration to support a mythical orb bordering on that of material phenomena but different from it. It is true that the

reality of the adventure is saved, but such a salvation involves the sharpest irony. The reality of the adventure is reduced to the psychological, to a bodily humor perhaps. It is real as far as it is vapor from a brain, so that its reality is rather that of its opposite, the material. ... So that it is not only Don Quixote which is written against the books of chivalry, and as a result bears the latter within it, but the novel as a literary genre consists essentially of that absorption. (27,28)

This offers an explanation of ... how reality, the actual, can be changed into poetic substance. By itself, seen in a direct way, it would never be poetic: this is the privilege of the mythical. But we can consider it obliquely as destruction of the myth, as criticism of the myth. In this form reality, which is of an inert and insignificant nature, quiet and mute, acquires movement, is changed into an active power of aggression against the crystalline orb of the ideal. The enchantment of the latter broken, it falls into fine, iridescent dust which gradually loses its colours until it becomes an earthy brown. We are present at this scene in every novel. There is need of a book showing in detail that every novel bears Don Quixote within it like an inner filigree in the same way that every epic poem contains the Iliad within it like the fruit its core. (40)

Ortega's "every novel" cannot possibly include the thousands of best-selling novels (ranging from Uncle Tom's Cabin to Love Story) that exclude Panzaic reality altogether. Nor does there seem to be anything like complete destruction of the myth or of the crystalline orb of the ideal in the novels that E.M. Forster has defined as 'prophetic.' Yet these exceptions, further analysis will show, do not invalidate Ortega's argument; they merely qualify it.

"Every novel" may not bear the Don Quixote within it, but with very few exceptions, all the genuine ones do. Moreover they bear it, as I shall try to demonstrate, in a way and to a degree and with effects that fulfill Ortega's idealistic fears and Lawrence's realistic hopes.

In declaring that reality, in itself, "is of an inert and insignificant nature, quiet and mute," Ortega is of course expressing his own idealistic bias. And the same bias is apparent in his statement that "It does not actually matter what objects the realist chooses to describe. Any one at all will do, since they all have an imaginary halo around them. And the point is to show the pure materiality under it." Yet, however biased these statements may be, philosophically, they point towards a crucial aspect of the Panzaic that cannot be too much stressed: the fact that no thing

or being in fiction can be Panzaic in itself or in herself or himself. Not even a belly! Not even a phallus! A phallus, presented clinically, may be just a spout to urinate through; or presented pornographically, it may be an object to thrill to. It is only Panzaic when it functions in such a way as to cut through what Ortega has described as the “crystalline orb of the ideal”—the way the pig’s pizzle in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, for example, cuts directly through the crystalline orb of Jude’s daydreams to show the phallic reality that underlies them—the reality that is to make a shambles of his ideals.

Whether or not something is Panzaic in a novel therefore depends not on what it is like (it may, in itself, be “inert and insignificant”) but on what it does. More specifically, what it does to the abstract, the ideal, the “crystalline orb,” the “imaginary halo.” The two fine ladies’ handkerchiefs that Kafka’s officer wears under the collar of his uniform (in the Penal Colony) may, for instance, be more Panzaic than “the seven bronze verges ... to which the dancing women offered flowers and furious caresses ... [until] shouting and howling, seven women suddenly hurled themselves upon the seven bronzes” in Octave Mirabeau’s *The Torture Garden* (49). The handkerchiefs may be more Panzaic because, “inert and insignificant” as they may be in themselves, they nevertheless function in such a way, in context, as to bring out the discrepancy between the officer’s impulses and his professed ideals; whereas Mirabeau’s seven verges bear little if any relationship to the ideal: they merely express his notion of female lust.

Yet if the Panzaic ultimately depends on what something does, there is no denying that what something is like may to a large extent determine what it does. In most instances handkerchiefs will not be Panzaic; verges and phalluses will. There is no getting around the fact that, in our culture, we associate phalluses with the real and the crude, handkerchiefs with the genteel and the refined. Nor is there any denying that these associations necessarily affect what phalluses

and handkerchiefs can do in any fictional context.

But these are theoretical considerations that can best be clarified later on, in the discussion of individual novels. The point here is that nothing is Panzaic in itself, that nothing can be Panzaic until it is brought into conflict with the ideal and serves to cut through or destroy “the crystalline orb of the ideal.”

The necessary corollary to this point, as Ortega explains, is that the ideal is every bit as essential to the working of the Panzaic principle as the real. In Ortega’s words:

[The realistic novel] needs something of the mirage to make us see it as such. So that it is not only Don Quixote which was written against the books of chivalry, and as a result bears the latter within it, but the novel as a literary genre consists essentially of that absorption.

According to this formulation, then, a Panzaic character would be one who is like Sancho Panza in both character and function, which of course raises the primary question of what Sancho Panza is like; and this question—if it can be answered at all satisfactorily—raises the further and perhaps even more difficult question of what the likenesses are. Is Sam Weller, for example, like Sancho Panza because Dickens has, to some extent, modeled him after Sancho Panza, and has clearly indicated that he intends him to play Sancho Panza to Pickwick’s Don Quixote? My own answer would be “No,” on the ground that Sam Weller is not really like Sancho, that the seeming similarities in character and function are merely outward and superficial, that Sam, regardless of how Dickens consciously intended him, corresponds to a distinct Victorian type that is in most respects antithetical to Sancho Panza, a pseudo-Panzaic type sometimes defined as “The Resourceful Hero” who invariably ends up defending the mythical orb of the ideal.<sup>3</sup> Whereupon another critic might reply that I have misunderstood

Sancho (and perhaps Sam Weller too); that the similarities I have dismissed as superficial are really fundamental; that my whole conception of the Panzaic is based on misunderstanding of Sancho and his role in *Don Quixote*; that in point of fact I have fashioned out of my Lawrentian reading a Sancho who resembles Lawrence's Mellors far more than he does the Sancho of Cervantes' text.

To such charges I might reply that my reading of *Don Quixote* is not at all extreme or idiosyncratic; that, on the contrary, it is in all essentials much like Ortega's reading. And from these beginnings I might then go on to a full-scale defense of my own reading, and more especially my interpretation of Sancho and his role in the novel. Indeed, if my concept of the Panzaic were dependent on my interpretation of Sancho, I would be obliged to undertake some such defence. But it is not. I am not trying to define or establish points of literary indebtedness; rather I am trying to identify a type of character common to innumerable novels, a type that I have labeled Panzaic because, in my opinion, Sancho Panza is the first and perhaps the most successful embodiment of the type. But if I am wrong about Sancho it does not follow that I am wrong about the type, which exists apart from Sancho and my application of his name. Indeed the type could just as well be identified through one or another of its 20th century exemplifications, e.g., through Schweik in *The Good Soldier Schweik*, or Zorba in *Zorba the Greek*, or the mother in Vittorini's *Conversation in Sicily*, or Kitten in Robert Gover's *One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding*.

Each of these characters beautifully embodies the type. The mother in Vittorini's novel, described by the narrator, who is her son, as a "Blessed Old Sow" is in her own way every bit as earthy, every bit as simple-minded, as Sancho; and it is she, in the context of the novel, who shows the nullity of the social and political ideals that her son and others would have people live by. Zorba, too, for all his physical and sexual prowess, is naive if not simple minded in

his responses, and it is primarily through his responses that the novel exposes the inadequacy of the Quixotic hero's liberal ideals. Schweik, unlike Zorba and Vittorini's mother, who are for their years quite striking, and even handsome, is a man after Sancho's own belly—a man who resembles Sancho in everything from physical features to his simple-mindedness, and while there may be some questions as to whether Schweik is actually simple-minded, or is, like Hamlet, feigning madness, the question is not, in the present context, a crucial one. What really matters is that Schweik's simple-minded attitudes and responses, whether real or assumed, serve to devastate the pretensions and posturings of the Don Quixotes who are, in the name of God and country, trying either to kill him or to get him killed.

Kitten, the fourteen-year-old black prostitute in Robert Gover's *One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding*, provides still another beautiful example of a Panzaic character—even though the novel she appears in is rather slight. What Kitten, “lil ol black Pickaninny me,” does to the college boy, J.C., is not just hilariously funny; it provides a contrast between her responses and his that shows how unfeeling and cruel and stupid a well-intentioned and liberal young American can be. And this contrast could have been even more telling if Gover had created in his college boy a Don Quixote of more sensitivity and sophistication and intelligence. As it is, Kitten has it all her own way so easily so much of the time, that she never gets a chance to exercise her Panzaic powers to the full. She who might have devastated the highest and most precious mythical orbs of our culture ends up by devastating only a college boy version of white, middle-class, protestant Americanism. But this is of course a criticism of the novel, not of Kitten.

The Panzaic is not synonymous with the sexual, or the Dionysian, or Rabelaisian, or, for that matter, any of the current forms of postmodern philosophizing. The Panzaic principle is not an attempt to elevate or idealize the Panzaic or the Panzaic character at the expense of the idealistic

or heroic. By their very nature Panzaic characters cannot be so elevated—and still remain Panzaic. Inevitably they become heroic. And when this happens they can no longer function like Sancho Panza or like Schweik. They cease being undercutters of the ideal and become embodiments of the ideal, i.e., they cease being Sancho Panzas and become spiritual Sancho Panzas or sensual Don Quixotes or, more positively Tristans or Don Juans.

One of the first and most notable examples of this kind is Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Even in the earliest version of this novel (reprinted by New Directions under the title of *The First Lady Chatterley*) Lawrence's gamekeeper, Parkin, is as much the embodiment of Lawrence's ideals as he is the undercutter of the conventional ideals of Lord Chatterley. And in the third and final version we know as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence makes Parkin even more heroic, giving him a new name, Mellors, and endowing him, as the occasion demands, with the speech, manners, and even the dress of a gentleman. Consequently, Mellors is not a Panzaic character: he is a hero—in a sense that none of Lawrence's other great novels have heroes. He is, in short, Lawrence's idealized self-image—a sensual Don Quixote with no Sancho Panza to challenge his sensual pretensions. He has all the right feelings, all the right ideas, and knows all the right answers. And, like Lawrence, he is constantly exercising his rightness and his knowingness, giving Connie, the other characters, and us, the readers, the final word on everything from sex to Bolshevism to painting.

With such a hero, the novel should be as bad as Lawrence's detractors have declared it to be. Why it is not, why it is, on the contrary, a masterful novel of a very special kind, I have explained in "Lady Chatterley's Lover: A Pilgrim's Progress for Our Time." And I shall not repeat my arguments here, except to point out that it is Connie's guts, not Mellors', that first give the lie to Clifford and his "insentient iron world":

“My dear, you speak as if you were ushering it all in! [ i.e. “the life of the human body”]. ... Believe me, whatever God there is is slowly eliminating the guts and alimentary system from the human being, to evolve a higher, more spiritual being.”

“Why should I believe you, Clifford, when I feel that whatever God there is has at last wakened up in my guts, as you call them, and is rippling so happily there, like dawn? Why should I believe you, when I feel so very much the contrary” (Lady Chatterley 298)

What makes her and the other characters Panzaic, then, is not their outward or even their inward characteristics; it is their function—which is, as I have explained, to show that the senses of even a fool can give the lie to the noblest ideals of even most profound thinker. But this, of course, does not mean that the Panzaic character must be a fool (although many if the greatest have been); nor does it mean that the Panzaic character by virtue of giving the lie to the hero or heroine, then usurps the position of the hero or heroine and becomes a hero or heroine on his or her own. In life the rightness of the guts (as against the mind) will depend on one’s point of view. In Lawrence’s as in all other novels, however, the guts are always right; it is an axiom or principle of the novel that they are always right, that the senses of even a fool can give the lie to even the most profound abstractions of the noblest thinker. And it is this principle that I have designated the Panzaic principle.

Falstaff is perhaps the ultimate embodiment of Panzaic individuality. That he appears in a play, not a novel, doesn’t really matter here. For he is expressing, in his speech on “honor,” exactly the same feelings that Connie Chatterley is expressing in her response to Clifford: “Why should I believe you when I feel so very much the contrary?” The difference is that Falstaff is expressing his feelings far more dramatically and powerfully—in words that can hardly be misunderstood. And they bear directly on the individual and society—as Franz Alexander pointed out long ago:

We have [in the termites] the example of a perfect social organization in which the individuals



have no private life and all their functions and energies belong to the state. Here is a community in which the state does not serve the welfare of the individual, but the individual lives for the state, which appears as a higher biological unit comparable with the human body, in which the individual cells have no private life but depend on each other and function for the benefit of the whole body.

Is this the future of the human race, which is seemingly drifting towards an increasingly mechanized social organization? The state of the termites appears to us as a horrible nightmare. From this nightmare we are relieved by Falstaff, the apotheosis of self-sufficient careless individuality. So long as we applaud him and want to see him again and again and expect our writers to create him anew in a thousand different guises, we are safe from the destiny of the termites. Our applause demonstrates that the portion of our personality which stands for individual sovereignty is still stronger than our collectivist urges. It is difficult to tell whether the dynamic structure of the human personality is in the process of changing in the direction of a more collective type of man, but we may comfort ourselves by the belief that if, and when, the collective forces finally gain the upper hand in us, we will not deplore the loss of individual sovereignty because we will have ceased to understand what it means. (606)

This is, I believe, a prophetic statement. I have quoted it again and again in teaching my classes because I believe it foretells our ultimate fate as individuals, and because I also believe that it foretells the ultimate fate of genuine novels (and, incidentally, Panzaic criticism). Conceivably, if people could understand what is happening to them, they might evade their termitic fate. But how can they when, at the same time their feelings are being denied or dulled, society is stuffing them with stock re-sponses designed to suppress and replace the individual feelings and impulses they still have? Bereft of individual feelings, and all individual feelings are by definition dissident feelings, and forbidden to entertain dissident thoughts, on pain of being dismissed from their jobs and their community, people lost a sense of who they are—if they are anyone. This sense of emptiness or lostness Lawrence dramatizes again and again in his novels, most directly perhaps in *The Rainbow* in his treatment of Skrebensky.

By this time it should be clear that, read Panzaically, novels are not verbalized art objects structures, or unities, or patterns in the sense that sculptures, or paintings, or even dramas and poetry are. In some fashion or another every novel has structure and unity and pattern, of

course, but these rhetorical features cannot be abstracted from the stuff of the novel and made the test of its meaning and quality—as even Percy Lubbock, the father of organicist fictional criticism, acknowledged when, after pointing out the technical shortcomings of Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, he went on to explain that he was, after all, talking only about the craft of fictions, that nothing he had said would detract from *Vanity Fair* as a “store of life.” Lubbock’s was a grudging admission. He wasn’t interested in stores of life. He was interested in technique. That was why he could argue that *War and Peace*, which he recognized as the greatest novel ever written, nevertheless lacked unity (i.e., it broke in two) and would have been still greater if Henry James had written it. A silly statement, since James not only didn’t write *War and Peace* but couldn’t write anything comparable to it—in part because his concern for unity was greater than his concern for life. In short, what Lubbock and James and all their critical followers were trying to do was tame the novel, purify it, and render it amenable to their own critical concepts. [...]

Up to the present, at least, [...] efforts to tame the novel, whether for art (conceived as structure, texture, and unity) or for art and morality (conceived as what is good for us, as measured by Culture and Tradition) have come up against the fact that novels, as “stores of life,” are so closely and vitally connected with the reader’s own life that he has no choice but to make the same or similar connections with the characters in the novel that he makes with the characters he encounters in his everyday living. Inevitably this is true—whether he is reading Kafka or George Eliot. And while the reader knows, or has to learn, that the characters in fiction are not “real,” in the sense that his friends, for example, are real; he also knows that they are, as he experiences them through his reading, close to real, or life-like, perhaps more life-like than some of his friends, who may be at pains to hide their life-likeness. And he also knows that the fictional world in which these characters move and feel and think is also life-like—again whether it be the world of Kafka or George Eliot. What the reader is experiencing, then, unless

he has been taught to look for unity or structure or pattern or symbols, is other characters in another world. All fictional, it is true, yet like the characters he knows and the world he lives in. And he will experience, though the likenesses, connections between himself and other people, connections between his world and theirs—connections which will, if the novel goes beyond his own perceptions (as serious novels almost always do) give him a new awareness of himself and the world he lives in.

The connections that only fiction can make are therefore what counts—the connections and the awareness or illumination they give. And the connections and the awareness, though to some extent dependent on unity, structure, and pattern, do not derive primarily from these elements. The final test is the quality and amount of illumination that a novel gives the reader through the connections it obliges him [or her] to make. How it obliges [a reader] to make the connections is not finally crucial, since the “how,” in so far as it depends on unity, structure, and pattern, is only a means to the illuminative end. Hence the usual criteria for experiencing and judging an art object are secondary, or do not apply. A novel can break in the middle, like *War and Peace*, or be awkwardly written, like Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, or have the shape of a loose baggy monster, the way Henry James described the three-volume novels of the nineteenth century, and still induce the reader to make illuminative connections.

Why critics cannot accept this view of the novel requires more explanation than I can attempt here. I can however make a few suggestions, beginning with the fact that they believe art to be, if not an object, then an entity which has qualities which can somehow be measured or quantified in ways that will determine its permanent worth. The idea that an art form, in this case the novel, can be so loose and so dependent on what the reader brings to it and the connections he [or she] makes with it, in the ways I have suggested, strikes nearly all critics

as dismaying or even horrifying. For what happens to tradition, what happens to standards, what happens to culture, what happens to morality? Aren't we left with pure subjectivity—with nothing more than gut responses or kicks or prejudices? What is to prevent mixed-up readers from making perverse connections with a novel and then declaring these connections illuminating?

The answer, I concede, is that nothing will, in an absolute sense, prevent them. But then nothing prevents them now. Indeed I would maintain that it is easier for critics to express their sadism when they can hide behind unity or structure or morality than it is when they have to express themselves more directly, in terms of their response to characters or passages in the novel.

Which is, I believe, one primary reason why critics—and in a different sense, writers too—are so loath to give up “technique” as a measure of quality. Technique is their screen, not only from what they experience in novels, but from the connections their fictional experiences induce. Without their screens they would stand naked before us. And they not only fear nakedness in themselves, they fear the possibility that we as readers will stand naked before them and each other. So they have to try to hide from themselves and us—in the name of art and culture and morality.

With nearly all art forms they have, in large measure, succeeded—though not, as yet, with the novel. Even now, with all the emphasis on technical experimentation and technical refinement, an emphasis to which novelists as well as critics have to a frightening degree succumbed, novels must still be read, finally, in the same old way. They are still slices of life, no matter how refined or elaborate the techniques of slicing, and they still demand that the reader connect up the life that they present with [her] own. More than that, as I have demonstrated in *The Panzaic Principle*, the connections that they demand invariably give the lie to their own and the critics'

abstractions.

Yet as we all know, we live in a frightening time. Really good novels have become even more difficult to write, and perhaps equally difficult to read. What we [therefore] want are connections that will seem like connections but will not be genuine connections at all. Such novels are... counterfeit, in that they pretend to do what serious art does without actually doing it. The connections they induce are not with the passions and fears and hates and thoughts that make us what we are in our individual selves but with our rationalized versions of what we like to think we are—as we try to assume the roles which have been thrust upon us. At the lowest level; I'm O.K., You're O.K.—all the way up, or across, to the infinitude of roles that our self-help writers and publicists and sex mechanics are providing for us.

Genuine novels, on the other hand, can never function this way. The connections they compel must always cut through our posturings, our roles; and therefore, as D.H. Lawrence long ago explained, must always “hurt.” They must always “hurt” because they must always oblige us to see what underlies our own and our society's ideas and ideals.

The illumination that genuine novels give us cannot be equated with what other art forms give us. It is not beauty, in any ordinary sense of that word; nor is it morality in any accepted sense. They do not tell us how to live, except perhaps by implication. What they do give us, if we can make the connections they demand, is a deeper, fuller sense of who we are, and can perhaps become in the world we have to live in. Or, in a word, they give us ourselves. They cannot, except in their incidental attributes, make us happy or contented or fulfilled. They can only make us realize, paraphrasing D.H. Lawrence, what is alive and what is dead in ourselves and our world.

Unfortunately, novels can only do all this—and here, I realize, I may seem to be introducing a huge *Catch-22*—if we, as readers, can make the connections the novels demand of us. Until it has a reader a novel is dead print. And if the reader brings only stock responses to a novel it can be little more than a story, as E.M. Forster defines “story.” Read that way *War and Peace* or *Death on the Installment Plan* will do very little for the reader—less, in fact, than the latest popular novel, which is almost certain to be a better “story” than either *War and Peace* or *Death on the Installment Plan*.

Still another and perhaps greater difficulty: the reader may get even less from these two great novels if he brings a formidable array of technical knowledge [...] Looking for [...] symbols in Celine or Tolstoy will give the reader about as much understanding of the novels as looking at the statues in Central Park will, in real life, give him [or her] an understanding of New York City. Nor are the really sophisticated forms of technical criticism, as practiced by professional critics, much more helpful. For such criticism, even when it is intelligent and well-developed, almost invariably concerns itself with “craft,” (i.e., how the novel achieves its effects) whereas the reader’s first concern is, or should be, to respond to what the novel expresses. If we were all trying to study the craft of fiction, in order to write our own novels, technical criticism might be essential. But we are not trying to write novels, we are trying to read them. One doesn’t have to be a mechanic in order to be a driver—even a Grand Prix driver; nor does one have to know how to build a house in order to live in one.

While certain novels may appear to be incomprehensible without benefit of technical analysis these appearances are usually deceptive. There are images and symbols in Lawrence’s novels, for example, but if one tries to read *Women in Love* in terms of imagery or symbolism [one] will have the tail wagging the dog, and in the process [one] will miss the vital connections the novel is asking [the reader] to make. And so it is with every aspect of technique—every aspect

of unity, structure, pattern, and even style. A reader's sensitivity to style can actually handicap him [or her] in [their] reading if, as so often happens, [they] permit... cultivated tastes to stand between [them] and the elemental qualities the novels may be trying to express. T.S. Eliot's strictures on Hardy's style provide an interesting example of this type of criticism—an example that Katherine Ann Porter, herself a premier stylist among novelists, countered beautifully when she pointed out that stylistic awkwardnesses are of no consequence in Hardy's novels, that Hardy's scenes come through to the reader "worldless."

Technical expertise, then, is not a requirement for reading novels: it may even be a liability. Some of the best readers I have had in my classes have been students with no technical knowledge whatsoever--students majoring in history, or political science, or sociology, or physics, or bio-genetics, who have taken only Freshman English and often haven't done very well in it. These students are better readers primarily because they are more open less afraid. They are not burdened with either cultivated tastes or technical knowledge; and consequently, on the positive side, they are ready and willing to see and feel and think what any given novel is trying to get them to see and feel and think. ONce they have done that, once they have gone where the novel wants them to go in its fictional world, they are ready and willing to make the connections with their own world that the novel is pointing towards. IN their readings they are consequently experiencing the novel, not counting symbols or images or worrying about unity or point of view.

But I don't want to overestimate the students. The very best readers are those who have the courage and openness of the students and, in addition, have the advantage that further experience and knowledge can bring. Years ago, with this in mind, Irving Howe and I worked out a plan for a collection of critical essays to be entitled *Under Distant Eyes*, which would include the work

of such well-known figures as Freud and Trotsky, along with that of lesser known but equally knowledgeable and gifted people who had at one time or another written about novels. It was a great idea, and should have been carried through. But Irving could not put up with my trying to insist that nearly all of our “distant eyes” were, like Trotsky’s, Panzaic eyes. For I am still convinced that Trotsky’s essay on Céline, for example, goes further in exploring the connections Céline was trying to express in *Journey to the End of the Night* than anything that has been written since. (191-203)

It goes further because Trotsky, disdaining the critical hue and cry that had been raised against Céline, had the courage and the perceptiveness to follow the novel to the very end of its night. And if, having done that, Trotsky finally had to invoke his own Communist beliefs as a stay against what the novel revealed, he at least did not do so until he had given the novel its due, in a criticism (which I see as Panzaic) that cuts deeper and goes further than more recent criticism of the novel has been able to go.

At this point it may seem as if I have worked things around to where only readers who consciously or unconsciously embrace the Panzaic principle can be adequate readers of novels. And with qualifications, more qualifications than I can even begin to touch upon here, I must acknowledge that I believe this to be true: once again, not because Panzaic readers are more intelligent or more perceptive or more sensitive than other readers but because they are more open to the kinds of demands that serious novels inevitably make--demands that no other art forms make.

Yet if I believe that I am right in maintaining that only Panzaic readers can meet the demands of novels, I must at the same time acknowledge that my view will be considered, by almost



everyone else, a partisan one, based on theoretical premises that critics of other persuasions will dismiss on the basis of their own theoretical premises. Of course they have every right to take this stance; indeed they must take it--or have their own conceptions of art and culture and morality called into serious question. They have to believe that novels are like other art forms, and that art finally has to be on the side of culture and morality, which they equate with life. And I, as a Panzaic Lawrentian, have to honor their beliefs as best I can; and then make the best case I can for my own. In other words I have to honor their sincerity, their good intentions, as I hope they will honor mine, without falling into the trap of thinking there is some common ground on which we can come to critical agreement. For there is no such ground. Put a bit melodramatically, their conception of "life" I see as, if not death, then the next thing to death. And when they invoke their conceptions of morality and culture, and try to impose them on the novel, I see them, whatever their avowed intentions, choking off the one art form best suited to give people a chance for life.

Speaking less melodramatically, I am happy to say that many critics are either flexible enough or inconsistent enough to meet the demands of novels without worrying too much about where these demands are leading them. From these critics, who are often extremely perceptive, Panzaic critics can learn a great deal, and I believe we should not only read them but honor their critical achievements. Yet the final differences are always going to be there, and a Panzaic critic must recognize that these ultimate differences cannot be overcome, that ultimately there is no common ground. It is life and the novel against culture and morality.

