

BAKHTIN, BOURDIEU AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE CARNIVALESQUE

Introduction

The word ‘carnival’ pivots at a point of lexical association between the old and the new. Often used synonymously with such words as festival, fiesta, feast, gathering, celebration, fair, procession and party, it nevertheless retains an archaic sense of a bygone era when the social function of such events were more ritualised and community based. That world is clearly the source of Mikhail Bakhtin’s understanding of the word when he puts forward the notion of the carnivalesque in literature as a form, which subverts the predominant literary mode with its chaotic and humoristic asides, undermining the natural authority of the text. In former times, carnivals were often held at key points in the year’s cycle—both Christian and pagan (Christmas, Easter)—and included aspects of the ritualistic and syncretic pageantry. At such times, issues of life and death, fertility, and social cleansing held the past, present and future in balance; no wonder ‘laughter’ is central to carnival involvement—what Bakhtin saw as the assertion of ‘truth over power’—for one point in time and space at least.

If aspects of the *sacred* and the *profane* are central to ‘carnival’, it follows that so are the *social* and the *spiritual* and, with these, the *individual* and *society* at large; part of the appeal of literature of course, being that it puts a structural mirror to the mind so that both can be viewed, together and separate, depending on what ‘perspective’ one takes. Bakhtin holds a consecrated and legitimated position within the intellectual field as a literary theorist. His ideas have been adopted by researchers looking for a more social interpretation of literature. Normally, we might say that the social and the aesthetic are antithetical. Bourdieu begins his account of the ‘rules of art’ (1996) by anticipating the screams of protest that will be heard when we put the ‘love of art’ under a sociologist’s ‘scalpel’ (xvi) that might thus lead to denial of the singularity of the reader, the place to which art leads them, and thus the autonomy of the text.

In this article, I consider aesthetic experience based around literary texts in the light of the deployment of ideas derived from Bakhtin and Bourdieu. In so doing, Carnival will act as an ‘illuminatory’ context in which I can plant a discussion which teases out the relationship between individual aesthetic experience and the social world in which it is instantiated. In so doing, I hope to draw attention to the significance of the ‘margins’ of creative texts (*ibid.*) (what Schopenhauer called the *parerga et paralipmena*) in their production and consumption. I commence by considering a particular strong version of the literary experience, before sketching an account of aesthetics themselves. I then consider language and a theory of language, both in terms of literary text and conceptual terms which may be brought to bear on them. I return to carnival as a preliminary exploration of it in these terms and contrasting Bourdieu and Bakhtin. Towards the end of his career, Bourdieu spoke about the potential of his tools of analysis for artists and writers (2016/01). Finally, therefore, I end with a few preliminary remarks about what this might mean for those producing literary works of art.

A *Charismatic Vision*[i]?

The basic question about artistic experience is what is it that occurs when we stand in front of any work of art, or listen to a piece of music or, indeed, engage with a literary text? We can place the response to this question on some sort of continuum between pure sensationalism and a kind of 'out-of-body' experience that takes us to another world; and one we are sometimes reluctant to leave. In it we might discover some transcendent meaning of life, to lose ourselves and to be torn away from the realities of life. Clearly, there are millions of works of art, and indeed literary texts, sharing diversity of content and form to which they subscribe. Nevertheless, there is universality in the way they suggest an otherness that opens a door away from the mundane.

One of the most intense expressions of this duality of the sublime and the routine is the *Song of Wandering Aengus* by W B Yeats (1967: 27f). Here, the voice of the author describes going 'out to the hazel wood, because a fire was in my head', where he makes a fishing rod from a 'hazel wand' and 'hooks a berry to a thread'. He then casts the berry in a stream and catches a trout. Pantheism rules and moths are like stars and stars are like moths. Laying the trout on the ground, he goes to 'blow the fire aflame', but something wriggles on the floor and someone calls him by his name. Notice the 'thing' becomes personified, and the vision of a 'glimmering girl' appears before him, with 'apple-blossom' in her hair. The encounter, though, is brief: she calls him by his name and vanishes. In the last stanza, the author is now old, but only in body, as he commits to continue the search for her, 'through hilly land and hollow land' and, finally, 'kiss her lips and hold her hand' in eternity to pluck 'the silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun'.

Clearly, there are different ways of reading and appreciating such a poem. Of course, there is the immediacy of the sensuality of the things described, and everywhere it is magical: the hazel wood, the moths, the wand, the transfiguration of fish to girl, the mythical landscape and its poetic assumption at the end. Such an 'internalist' reading might extend to the literary form it takes and its formal consistency. But what are we to make of it? An 'externalist' might draw a connection between the illusive quality of the girl portrayed and the unrequited love Yeats experienced for Maud Gonne. But, if the poem was quite so personal, it would not hold universal appeal, and there seems to be something eternal in its story of escape from the particular to another world and the effects it has on the viewer. It is everywhere in literature and, indeed, poetry and song.

Of course, such is not without its dangers. For example, Celia, in T S Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*, states: 'You see, I think I have really had a vision of something, Though I don't know what it is. I don't want to forget it. I want to live with it'. (Eliot 1969: 418). Her reward for keeping faith with her vision is to be 'crucified on an anthill' in Africa. Whilst in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1971/1912), the personification of his aesthetic vision in the form of Tadzio literally leads the writer Aschenbach to his death. This kind of aesthetic beckoning can also be found in the popular vernacular. For example, the very carnivalesque 'Fairground' by the English folk singer Ralph McTell begins with him alone at the fair in a world of 'light and fantasy' as it sleeps (2005: 78f). Lighting a cigarette seems to activate the entire fairground, though, and soon the protagonist is on the big wheel with its intoxicating movement: 'And around and around, the wheel went spinning, Round and round' and he notices that 'although the fairground was moving, the rest of the world had stopped still'. Somewhat drunk by the experience, he then realises he has to get off and, in so doing, the music fades and the lights dim. A message is spelled out for him by candy-floss sticks and, as the fairground

grinds to a halt, the world outside is moving again. Although the message is 'plain', we are not told what it is and, clearly, it relates to what is real—the world or the fairground? In Peter Gabriel's 'Solsbury Hill' the message offered by the eagle which flies out of the night is plain enough: 'trust imagination'—even if your friends will think you are 'a nut'—to find 'home'.

Indeed, encounters of these sublime realms can have a positive therapeutic effect, as the alienated Harry Heller finds in Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* when he enters the carnival of the 'Magic Theatre', with the entrance price being *his mind* (1970/27: 192)! As Hesse makes clear in the 1961 Note to its reprinting, he intends the story to be one of healing, in this case of bringing the mind-bound ascetic Heller back into the world of sensuality and light. Disenchantment is always a danger though. William Blake is caught by a fairy maiden when he is 'dancing merrily' and he finds himself in a 'crystal cabinet': 'formed of gold and pearl and shining bright' (1980: 583f). However, once he seeks to grasp the 'inmost form', the entire vision is shattered and he is left a 'weeping babe'. 'Lost domain' is one of the translations given to Alain-Fournier's novel *Le Grands Meaulnes* (2007/ 1913), which describes the encounter of the hero of the story Augustin Meaulnes as he searches, in a very Aengus type way, for the woman he falls in love with at a magical costume party at a mysterious chateau. Back at school, he can think of nothing else but finding the chateau and the girl again. However, when he obtains what he wishes for, the mundane reality of living is a far cry from the enchanted world he remembers. Better, perhaps, as in the final parts of Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast Trilogy*, to turn away from what one seeks when it is at last in sight. Incidentally, John Fowles cites *Le Grands Meaulnes* as a previously unacknowledged primary source for his Jungian story of transformation, *The Magus* (1977), which ends with the enigmatic aphorism, *cras amet qui numquam amavit, quiqu amavit cras amet*. Following on from *Le Grands Meaulnes*, which Fowles refers to as 'adolescent', he describes *The Magus* also as 'a novel of adolescence written by a retarded adolescent' (9); sentiments quoted approvingly by Julian Barnes in his review of a new edition of the Alain-Fournier classic

(<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/13/grand-meaulnes-wanderer-julian-barnes>)

[ii]. With these literary examples in mind, I now want to explore some of the fundamentals of aesthetics; firstly, from a philosophical point of view, and then from the kind of socio-cultural insights that Bakhtin and Bourdieu offer.

Aesthetics

Two of the dominant strands in Western philosophy are contained in the somewhat false dichotomy between rationalism and empiricism: the former argues that the world, reality, can be revealed by rational thought/logic; the latter insists we need to comprehend the same firstly through sense experience. Allegorically, we might see the same opposition in the literary events alluded to above: should we simply *submit ourselves* to the heightened sensuality offered in the images, or, rather, analyse the word and sentence structure in order to *understand* the literary techniques used in constructing such an aesthetic. Fundamentally, it is an issue of *content* and *form*, and the relationship between the two.

These arguments came to a head from the eighteenth century, specifically in the work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), whose philosophy sought to reconcile the two and, in so doing, found modern aesthetics by bringing together processes of sensation, knowledge, understanding and imagination. For

Kant, aesthetics is not the preserve of art but actually relates to the Greek word meaning 'sensation' (the opposite being 'anaesthetic'—without sensation) (Kant 1956, 1961, 1987). One thinks of the sensationalism of those epiphanic moments of literary composition. Kant asks what is needed for such experiences to be so—*a priori*? By *a priori*, he means what exists prior to the actual experience itself; in other words, how we have a disposition to appreciate the literary event—prior to encountering it. This *a priori* is a determinate of direct immediate experience. Even objective, physical facts are perceived as sensation. However, this sensation is then interpreted, valued, and made sense of and, for this, we need knowledge and imagination.

It is 'sensation' which provides data to the mind, and is then taken up and *made something of* by the (structuring power of) *faculty of imagination*. It is the *form* which such data take that is most important, this being particularly evident in literary works. *A priori knowledge* involves some conceptual (structural) map to make sense of what is coming in. Such concepts are not only logical but include valued aspects of the nature of the world (for example, dimensions of *Space* and *Time*) and are important in perceiving *Form* implicit in sensation. They are seen as being *a priori* to experience itself as they exist prior to the experience. The *a priori* element in this account then points to what lies *beyond* (or before) immediate sensation (in the *imagination*); it gives rise to the essence of experience.

Kant subsequently contrasted the faculties of the *Imagination* and *Understanding* as a way of drawing a distinction between the *structuring power of imagination* and the actual *power to form concepts* itself. He ultimately investigated the process and constituents of how judgments of knowledge (*Understanding*) are made. It is again through *a priori* grounding concepts that *Understanding knows*: for example, concepts of *Substance, Quantity, Quality, Relation, Position, Possession, Action, Passivity*.

However, Kant also set out to locate a *higher form* of feeling, which is similarly *a priori* in determining experiences of pleasure and pain, likes and dislikes; these are valued responses that are driven by an emotional content, much as the charismatic literature referred to above. He reasoned that issues concerning the experience of taste (value) cannot be based simply on concepts of *Understanding* since they give rise to an experience that appears *transcendent* to existing knowledge per se—beyond knowing in a logical, conscious way. Therefore, such feelings lie *beyond* interpretational concepts; otherwise, they would not have the capacity to carry emotional content.

To exemplify this issue, Kant makes a distinction between what is considered *beautiful* and what is *pleasurable*. By contrasting these two, he intends the difference between what is straight sensational *Pleasure*, simple sensual enjoyment (like and dislike) and the *Beautiful*—a realm of aesthetic experience that seems to lie beyond immediacy. The beautiful, he argues, arises when *Imagination* presents sentient data (in time and space) to *Understanding*. There is then the possibility of converting the data via *a priori* concepts, but this cannot happen because of their emotional content. There are then two possibilities: either the data are simply accepted in their empirical form as sensational, and enjoyed as such or, since there are no *a priori* concepts to provide form, what is experienced is *the power to form concepts in itself*. Another way to see this is a consciousness without anything to be conscious of. As a result, what arises is termed *disinterestedness* (no identity between *subject* and *object*) since there are no concepts with which to interpret them. Kant describes this sublime state as one of *transcendent aesthetics*, or the *pure gaze*, which is essentially *disinterested* because it has no concepts with which to apply to it.

Clearly, subsequent rational statements of classification and interpretation can be made, but the experience itself is literally *out of this world* because it is beyond any conceptual form with which to interpret it. This is the heart of Kantian transcendental aesthetics—the pure gaze—which is also the very experience of ‘high’ art and culture—the beautiful.

For Kant, much also hangs on achieving universal assent, on reaching shared aesthetic agreements; in other words, mutually valued appreciation by dint of common processes of *rejection of sensation* and the embracing of the *beautiful*. Such is a kind universal affirmation of what constitutes the *beautiful* or *high art*. It reflects a transcendental, ‘pure’ gaze in literature, music and classical taste, as it is opposed to the merely sensational.

If this sounds like a version of universal aesthetic response, it is—and there are problems with that. In *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences* (1993a), for example, Bakhtin attempts to rescue aesthetic content per se over the text itself in arguing against the Russian formalists and structuralists who have so influenced traditional literary criticism. Their perspective leads to a form of ‘philologism’ for him, where language is a dead form waiting to be aesthetically ‘decoded’. Indeed, traditional literary critique acts at the level of a kind of revelation of the underlying code, that which reveals the structural form of Kantian transcendent experience. Literature is thus translated by the interpreter using their heightened sense of aesthetic appreciation, which they claim for themselves.

In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993b), Bakhtin further sets out to decentre Kantian universalism by arguing for the ‘uniqueness of being’ and the responsibility of realising such uniqueness as an active and passive Being. Indeed, he consequently universalises ‘the world as experienced’ beyond what is thought about it. It is hence a curious critique of Kantian transcendence, where he seems to replace it with another transcendence, this time of the particular. The consequence for aesthetic appreciation is that classical literary criticism techniques are downgraded in favour of such concepts as *chronotope* (Bakhtin 1981)—literally Time-Space (one thinks of Einstein’s Space-Time)—which draws attention to the temporal unfolding of the novel within the real world and its organising categories. Once this is recognised, Bakhtin argues, each word and phrase can only be understood *within the context* of its deployment. He even further insists that to appreciate this, one needs to stand ‘outside the object of creativity’—in time, in space and in culture.

For a social theorist such as Pierre Bourdieu, this distinction between the ‘sensational’ and the ‘pure’ is also fundamental (see Grenfell 2004; Grenfell and Hardy 2007). However, he emphasises the possible range of environmental socio-cultural relations to the world itself in a way that Bakhtin would surely approve. So, for him, the transcendental aesthetic is not simply an emotional response but actually characteristic of an entire attitude to the world, one that is removed from practical exigencies—thus transcendent; in fact, in essence, the bourgeois personified. The *pure gaze* is effortless, unencumbered by a search for social standing; indeed, to explicitly express such a search is itself evidence of its non-possession. Moreover, it is an attitude whose provenance can be located at a particular point in time—a time that saw the move from feudal to bourgeois society, creating a class of men (and women) where the transcendental aesthetic was both needed and expressed. This would be exactly when Kant was writing, and there was consequently the rise of a different type of ‘writer-artist’, one who both liberated themselves from being shackled to traditional patrons—the Church and Monarchy—and assumed the voice (and markets!) of the new middle classes. Exemplars would be Flaubert (1821-1880) in literature and the Impressionist painters in the fine arts. The defining

principle here was *art for art's sake*, which was another form of transcendence that mirrored their bourgeois customers—claiming, implicitly, a transcendent autonomy within the social hierarchy.

Much of what I have written so far can be seen to highlight the dichotomy, or tension, between individual *subjectivities* and the *objective* environment within which they operate; for example, the interactions from which the literary eye arises. Bourdieu refers to such as the ‘opposition’ between the academic traditions of *subjectivism* and *objectivism*, and argues that as such they are ‘the most fundamental, and the most ruinous’ (1990: 25). For him, they need to be seen both as just different *modes of knowledge* and mutually constituting. It is, therefore, necessary to go beyond them both whilst preserving what has been learnt from each. This synthesis of oppositions is achieved for Bourdieu through a consideration of *structure* as a base generating principle.

In Bourdieusian epistemology, the basis of human knowledge and experience is expressed through the simple fact of the *co-occurrence* (literally) between an individual’s structural connection with both the material and the social world. Everything lies in this connection: here are the structures of primary sense, feeling and thought—the intensional (sic.) links that are established between human beings and phenomena, both material and ideational—with which they come in contact. Everything we know about the world is both established and developed as a consequence of individual acts of (psychic) perception, which are, by their very nature, structural because they are *essentially* relational. However, these structures also have defining generating principles, which are both pre-constructed (coming from the past) and onward-evolving (futures-orientated—*protension*) according to the logics of differentiation found within the social universe. In other words, the generating principles do not exist in some value-free, Platonic realm (which Kant seems to point to); rather, they are the product and process of what already-has-been—values which serve the status quo and/or emerging social forms, and to which individuals converge and/or diverge. This phenomenological, structural relation is, therefore, also a product of environmentally structural conditions, which offer objective regularities to guide thought and action in ways of doing things.

The objective and subjective bases to Bourdieu’s *theory of practice* can also be expressed as ‘culture’, as being both *structured* (*opus operatum*, and hence open to objectification) and *structuring* (*modus operandi*, and thus generative of thought and action) (Bourdieu 1977). Ultimately, the task is to understand the content and form of the (structural) relationships between these different foci—the individuals involved and their personal (cognitive) profiles, surroundings (social and material) environment, and the body of work emerging from them. Such an approach is predicated on seeing that, at any particular time and place, changing structures and institutions can be analysed (an *externalist* objective reading) at the same time as the nature and extent of individuals’ participation in it (an *internalist* subjective reading). The two distinct social logics are then viewed as inter-penetrating and mutually constituting, giving rise to both *structured structures* and *structuring structures*, which can be objectified and discussed as such in demonstrable relations—between individuals and their literary pursuits.

The world is infinitely complex and it is impossible to represent the totality of its complexity. Yet, faced with this multi-dimensionality, there are various ways of tackling it. Two of Bourdieu’s key conceptual terms in doing so are *Habitus* and *Field*, each of which exists in a kind of ‘ontological complicity’ with the other (see Grenfell 2014). *Habitus* relates to the *subjective* side of the equation—‘Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures...Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ (Bourdieu 1992: 53), whilst *Fields* supply

the *objective*—‘as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions’ (ibid.: 97).

One further analytic tool is also needed—*Capital*—as the currency for *field* operations; what is symbolically valued and how it can be played out to determine advantageous positions within the social space. For Bourdieu, it comes in three essential forms: *Economic Capital*—Money wealth; *Cultural Capital*—Culturally valued acquisitions, objects, behaviours, educational qualifications, symbolically powerful associations; and *Social Capital*—social networks, who you know, and the extent to which they can be drawn upon for social advantage.

Language and the Literary Field

These concepts invite us to view literature as a *field*, and the *habitus* of those involved in it at the time. A three-stage approach is offered which parallels: the *field* and the *field of power*, the *field* itself; and the *habitus* of those in the *field* (see Grenfell 2014, chapter 13). Yet, it is still important to develop a theory of language in order to understand the way it is deployed in the literary forms.

Traditionally, language per se has been seen as a kind of synchronic (a-temporal) system in itself which, paradoxically, has allowed literary theorists to ignore its socio-cultural praxis. Bourdieu is very critical of this ‘formalist’ approach to language. For him language can never be simply a direct transfer of meaning—word for word—from one to another in a Lockean sense of transmission, but is always mediated by culture. In a very Wittgensteinian (and indeed Bakhtinian) sense, Bourdieu argues that language only has meaning in terms of the *situations* within which it is immersed at any one time and place—literally, a game! The schemes of aesthetic perception which individuals hold, and the language which carries them, are each homologously linked to social structures, which act as both their provenance and social destiny. Just as social agents exist in network relations, therefore, words also exist in networks of semantic relations (objectifiable) to each other—and partly acquire their meaning in terms of difference and similarity *with respect to each other*. *Sense* and *meaning* are always determined in the interplay between individual meaning and the social context in which language is being expressed. Such contexts are set within social space—often as *field*—that is *bounded areas of activity*: for example, education, culture, politics, and indeed the literary world. Words form a part of such *social space* and *fields* and are ultimately used to represent their particular way of thinking. By entering a *field* (implying a semantic network), a word thus takes on meaning *from that field*, which itself differs according to its position within the overall *field* and thus semantic *space*. The attribution of meaning is therefore also a kind of imposition (originating from the *field* context), a kind of transformation and transubstantiation where meaning is changed from one context to another: ‘the substance signified is the signifying form which is realized’ (1991: 143) *in practice*. In other words, what is signified and signifying is socially co-terminus for Bourdieu; the meaning necessary to a *field* context is realised in the particular lexical/semantic form. So, words can have one meaning in one context and another elsewhere. It is an imposition because any specific meaning can be projected onto a word—signifying—prior to it being signified as a sign (word). The result is that all language is socio-culturally relative.

At this point, it is possible to see the connections that Bourdieu draws between the levels of life and literature: we begin with the primary cognitive experience between subject and object that develops a

certain *ethos*; we then enter a *social space* which includes various *fields* mediated by *symbolic capital*, language—its form and content—is shaped within them; aesthetics is formed within particular *field* contexts and played out in social terms. The producer of literature, similarly, has social provenance and targets an audience, which shares affinities with them—in terms of dispositional *habitus*; an artist must, for Bourdieu, create their own market. In the case of Flaubert, Bourdieu sees a case exemplar of one who was both shaped by and wrote for a new class of bourgeois, which necessitated him shifting between ‘romanticism’ and ‘realism’. It is always important for the avant-garde to offer something seemingly ‘new’, so it endowed exclusivity to its audience, but in forms that were essentially ‘old’, necessarily so in order for there to be recognition. The battle at the artistic literary level is one of life and death because: ‘to impose a new producer (attract acknowledgement/recognized legitimacy), a new producer, a new product and a new system of taste on the market at a given moment means to relegate to the past a whole set of producers, products and systems of taste, all hierarchized in relation to each other to their degree of legitimacy’ (1996: 160 my bracketed comments).

Bourdieu has been accused of reducing ontology to epistemology. However, a more positive angle on the same would be to say he is elevating epistemology to ontology, and what that implies in terms of the outer regions of subjectivity, objectivity and consciousness. We can see that, beginning with a theory of practice of subject and object, he has developed an approach which allows for a polyvalent application. So, just as we can—indeed, should—study authors in terms of their social provenance (*habitus*) and literary *field*, we can bring the same method to the literary text itself—the *fields* depicted, the *habitus* of the characters, the structural relations and *capital* configuration involved; and the audience for the literary output—targeted audience, large-scale/restricted markets, dominant aesthetic forms and their morphology (content-form, symbolic constituents, etc.). In this sense, Bakhtin’s concept of *polyphony* (1984a)—that is the way literary texts include multiple voices—is useful but does not go far enough in identifying the social provenance of voices and the way they interact within *field* microcosms. All this can also be played out in terms of the nuances of language: *polyglossia* for Bakhtin—that is its hybrid nature—and *heteroglossia*, which prioritises context over text itself. Bourdieu himself was aware of the polysemic nature of words and, as I have argued, sought to establish language—all language including literary—in what Bakhtin would call its ‘base condition’. It is just that Bourdieu goes further in analysing such conditions in terms of an overarching socio-cultural epistemology. To do so is, for him, essential in order to avoid succumbing to the kind of dominant aesthetics occulted and so prevalent in literary *fields*, as well as the trap of psychologism (philosophy of consciousness) that an existentialist like Sartre falls into when he analyses Flaubert and ends up merely succeeding in imposing his own relationship to the world on the author.

Social Literary Aesthetics and the Carnival

Bourdieu, I would argue, is more systematic than Bakhtin in developing a coherent epistemology that is founded on a phenomenology of subject and object and the principles (*interest*) underlying the generating, relational structures between them. This implicates subjective dispositions (*habitus*) and what is valued symbolically within social space (including *fields*). Aesthetic, including literary, production and consumption are formed within such, and language is the medium of its instantiation. In this way, Bourdieu is able to read off issues of literary form and content (independently), the

aesthetics they carry, and the individual and *field* articulations of these in terms of social cultural provenance and positioning. From this perspective, charisma is just another socio-cultural phenomenon: so, going back to the examples offered at the beginning of this article, we would need to understand Yeats in terms of social background and place within the Irish literary *field*, Mann and Fowles as the same, Blake with respect of the changes in the *field* of cultural production in the eighteenth century, etc. Such *re-historicises* what has been *de-historicised* by conventional literary criticism; indeed, through a sociological history of the (literary) past and a historical sociology of the (literary) present. The text itself, however, must also receive the same treatment in what he terms ‘the return of the repressed’; in other words, study it in terms of *habitus*, *field*, *capital*, etc. in order to highlight the homologies between various levels within literary works. There are many examples to follow. Besides Flaubert, one of Bourdieu’s favourite novels is *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. In this novel, he sees reproduced the whole social structure that the protagonists share; also how that structure is expressed in their very language and every gesture; the domination of the male patriarch—indeed, how he is dominated by his domination, by his unseeing relationship to the *illusio*—the interests of ‘the game’. At the same time, Bourdieu argues that Woolf allows us to see how a certain class of women of the day is able to avoid engaging with the *illusio*, and to avoid the central games of society, and thus to escape the *libido dominandi* that comes with such involvement. As a result, women develop a lucid view of what is going on—almost a sociological ‘knowing’ gaze (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 173). In the world, and thus represented in the novel, everything is symbolic for Bourdieu. So, when the heroine Mrs Ramsay tries on a stocking, a whole set of events are triggered that can only be understood in terms of her *social position* and *habitus* (ibid.: 124). In these ways, Woolf is using literary techniques—‘fade in/fade out’, for example—to express the ‘mystic boundaries’ between masculine and feminine worlds and the ‘enchantment of love’ (Bourdieu 2001/1998: 108f); the disillusioning in which she takes so much pleasure (something shared with the sociologist!).

The Carnival

As noted above, Carnival for Bakhtin is a literary form, which subverts other literary forms and has existed for millennia; for example, in satirical and comical dialogues in ancient Greece. Moreover, in a very Bourdeusian way, these literary forms themselves parallel what can already be witnessed in societies and communities at large: both pagan and Christian rituals and, indeed, annual community celebrations. Bakhtin (1984a, 1984b) identifies various carnivalesque characteristics such as bringing people together who would not normally meet, allowing eccentric behaviours, uniting opposites, and permitting the sacrilegious. ‘The Fool’ and grotesque creatures and behaviour also feature as the normal run of orthodoxy is challenged. Why are these so important from a sociological point of view?

Bourdieu was a keen photographer, and at the core of his work on his home region of the Béarn in South-west France is a single snapshot (reproduced on the cover of a French book reprint of three key papers from this study in 2002; see Bourdieu, 2008) of a single incident: a Christmas village ball, or carnival. Bourdieu describes the scene with the various village generations gathered and dancing. However, around the perimeter there are the middle-aged bachelors, watching but not dancing. Who are they and what is the nature of their evident unease? Bourdieu's analyses showed how local customs involved a calculation in terms of the number of children in a family and the size of the

inheritance. Custom then operated to ensure the trans-generational survival of family status within the community rather than individual needs. Such customs had been developed in order to accommodate the State Code on inheritance that all children in a family had a right to inheritance. Two principles operated: firstly, one which prioritised the rights of elder children; secondly, the distinction between socially ascending and descending marriages. Across these two principles, he observed sub-principles of gender, village and country, and age—applying in a range of possible permutations. The non-dancers are, therefore, the men who have not been accommodated by the marriage practices of the region. The classic ‘celibate’ of the dance floor was hence the younger children of both large and poor families, but for different reasons. In one case, marriage would entail undesirable dowry payments; in the other, fragmentation of inheritance. Moreover, this selection was mediated by grandmothers who gave, or withheld, consent to forming partnerships. The point was that both marriage and celibacy could be considered as a collective decision, albeit socially prescribed, rather than one of individual choice. The Carnival was one site for such social mechanics to operate in occult form. The locals spoke of ‘crisis in society’ because of the ways their customs no longer worked. Connected with this was a changing world, and he shows how the closed, traditional worlds were slowly being opened up to the influence of nearby large towns and cities. Women, as the most symbolically socio-sensitive, often acted as veritable Trojan Horses in importing the genome of the new world into the old one.

What carnival events offer, therefore, is a sanctioned mechanism for individuals in the group to be orientated towards their social destiny—in the same way that the elders in Omaha villages explain to (some of the) fasting young men how their visions are not ‘authentic’ in managing the entry rights into the dominant castes of the community (see Bourdieu 1979: 10). More than this, however, carnival reasserts the norm by denying it and, in this way, reveals that the underlying power structure persists only by consent, even of the dominated. As Bourdieu states it, echoing Durkheim (and possibly Kafka), ‘Society is God’ (2000: 245).

In a way, Bourdieu’s representation of society can seem very orthodox—indeed, a sociological orthodoxy of orthodoxy. However, he was enough of an anthropologist to understand that what occurred was never played out in a linear fashion. Misrecognition was central to the efficacy of social processes to bind people to their place in the social world. So, in Carnival, the ‘Lord of Misrule’ is allowed to rule—but only for a day; the Fool is wise; mischief making is sanctioned—when sanctioned. A little like the ‘flaw’ that is built into Asian rugs, there seems a social function in permitting non-orthodoxy, as the very way of re-asserting it through submission. ‘There is a crack in everything’ sang the Canadian poet, Leonard Cohen, ‘that is the way the light gets in’. There seems then a social function, allowing renewal of orthodoxies by challenging them or, indeed, re-embracing them—a time also to ‘let off steam’. Can the novel perform the same functional roles? It obviously can as it is able to offer a profane aesthetics of non-conformism and anti-convention. However, voyeurism is insufficient on its own, and Bakhtin himself argues that, in the real world, the carnival must embrace the individual for it to be effective—observing it is not enough. The literary carnivalesque, therefore, again implies a certain type of reader—detached gaze—constituted by a certain stage in the development of certain classes in the modern world. Bourdieu would also want to interpret the carnivalesque novel itself in terms of the cultural field of production that produced it, and the readers who read it, as a symbiotic relation between internal and externalists’ interpretations of the same.

Conclusion

This article began by drawing from various texts in order to explore what an aesthetic response within them might be made up of. I counterpoised an empirical, sensational response to one considered as ‘pure’. Ideas derived from both Bakhtin and Bourdieu were then used to look into the socio-cultural dimensions of literary content and form. Indeed, I contrasted some of Bakhtin’s principal notions with others derived, and built up, from a Bourdieusian phenomenology and eventual theory of practice. Finally, we have seen that the significance of carnival goes beyond merely setting operational literary features, disclosing the underlying, generating structure of form in shaping content. The key has been to set both the writer and the text within their socio-historic provenance as part of the cultural field of reproduction—*of their day*.

More could be said by way of further exemplification and also about reflexivity on the part of the analyst and reader, and this would be one way in which Bourdieu’s *metanoia* could help and support the process of writing by socio-culturally *picking away* at the underlying, generating principles of the creative event. A further philosophical diversion would be needed in order to arrive at Bourdieusian ‘objective art’, or what might be called ‘objective aesthetics’.

Why do it? Both for writers of literary texts and their critics, this perspective would seem to go beyond conventional approaches to cultural production and consumption, and do target analysis of the underlying nature of the expressive impulse in trans-historic *fields*. As with Bourdieu, we might see such as escaping a transcendent sense of the ineffable so present in the Hölderlinian vision of charismatic talent, and offering a view of literary aesthetics which is so much ‘more reassuring, more humane, than belief in the miraculous virtues of pure interest in pure form’ (Bourdieu 1993: 188) insisted upon by the creators of conventional and even avant-garde literatures.

[i] Charisma is often used to describe something beyond everyday experience: unaccountable, literally, a gift from god.

[ii] In a typical externalist aside, Barnes draws attention to the final carnival fireworks in *Le Grands Meaulnes* as announcing the end of romanticism just before the ‘reality’ of World War 1 broke out. That being said, it seems that the sublime world, just out of sight, occasionally encountered in the magical, and often personified in women and men (even boys), is not a disposition easily overturned; rather it seems endemic in the human psyche and its aesthetic. Most of subsequent Fowles’ novels, for example *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969), *The Ebony Tower* (1974), *Daniel Martin* (1977), *Mantissa* (1982) and *A Maggot* (1985), contain strong elements of this search for the unreachable.

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