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A Unified Field Theory of Literature

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Abstract

An understanding of the evolution of consciousness through seven states, as described by Maharishi's Vedic Science and corroborated by psychophysiological research and unified field theories of modern physics, provides a basis for the development of a unified field theory of literature. The cognitive and perceptual qualities that differentiate the seven states of consciousness provide a means by which experiences described in literature may be understood and appreciated. In addition, Maharishi's Vedic Science distinguishes various levels of the mind and their attributes, leading to a reappraisal of the nature of language and its relation to the speaker, to the world of experience, and to the essential components of the literary experience: a) the writer and the creative process, b) the mechanics of reading, and c) the reader's interpretation of meaning.

According to the unified field theory of literature presented here, the level of consciousness of the writer determines the quality of what is written, as well as its universality and range of influence. This theory also provides a way of understanding how the various literary techniques that are activated in the reading process affect the reader's consciousness and physiology. And finally, the degree to which the reader can discover meaning in a work is found to be directly related to the reader's state of consciousness. These considerations shed light on the major questions being discussed by literary theorists today—how the nature and function of literary study might be understood, how literature might be defined, and how the contents of standard anthologies and curricula might be determined—and provide new directions for the reading and teaching of literature.

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INTRODUCTION

This essay proposes a unified field theory of literature based on recent developments and interpretations of Vedic Science, psychophysiology, and unified field theories, one that will begin to establish a common foundation for the discussion of literary theory and criticism. Such a unification is very much needed today as a result of the recent erosion of a widely accepted purpose and methodology for literary study, teaching, and scholarship. Until recently there was a fairly common understanding in academic circles of what was meant by literature: literature was the collection of those “great books” read in high school and college, the Western tradition from Homer to T. S. Eliot, the subject matter studied by departments of English or literary studies. Even though the “literary canon,” the collection of texts comprising the standard works in a topic area such as English literature, has undergone periodic revisions, there was little discussion of why one would read these great books; they had, many believed, a humanizing effect on the reader and would develop compassionate, responsible individuals.

Nor was there much confusion about how one would read or teach these great books. The New Criticism of the 1930s, which directed attention toward a close reading of the work itself and away from its social context or author’s life, became a well-established practice, so well established, in fact, that even recent critical strategies that challenge its basic assumptions are being absorbed as new methods of close reading. Within this theoretical framework teachers of literature conscientiously guided their students through a sensitive and intelligent appreciation of the form, meaning, and mechanics of a work. Committed to teaching and perpetuating the institutions responsible for preserving knowledge of Western culture, professionals devoted their time to scholarly research, which was most often an elucidation of subtle aspects of how a work originated or evolved into its finished form, or how intricacies of meaning could be interpreted from the structure or figurative language of the work. This research was published as articles in literary journals or books, thus adding to the understanding of our literary and cultural heritage.
Challenging the Canon: What is Literature?

In recent years, however, many of these assumptions have come under very close scrutiny. The traditional collection of “great literature” has been widely challenged as being elitist and ethnocentric. For example, scholars have observed that standard anthologies covering American literature, itself a fairly late addition to the literary canon, have almost entirely omitted writings by members of ethnic minority groups. In addition, it has been charged that the very few women writers included in the canon were often devalued by being placed in supposedly minor schools (see, for example, Renza, 1984), or by being discussed in terms of their biography rather than their writings.

While addressing questions of what should be included in the canon, literary theorists have raised more fundamental issues of how we evaluate literature, whether a work might be valuable for all times or is read and taught mainly because it appears to promote certain social values (Jameson, 1981). Although literary reputations typically rise and fall from generation to generation, some works appear to last longer than others, finding enthusiastic readers in ages and cultures quite remote from their own. Is popularity merely a matter of taste or transitory historical relevance, or are there other factors at work in the longevity or ephemerality of literary works?

Similarly, theorists ask how literature might be distinguished from non-literature? We cannot say that literature is “creative” or imaginative writing only, since all effective writing is obviously creative and imaginative. “Does some essential literariness decree what shall be included in the literary canon—Virginia Woolf’s novels but not her letters? her letters but not Louis L’Amour’s westerns? L’Amour’s westerns but not Jordache’s TV advertisements?” (Staton, 1987, p. 3). Today we read as “literature” many works that originated as sermons, essays, science writing, history, and popular fiction, and passionate debate rages over the criteria by which works should be included in modern anthologies (Smith, 1984). When publishers poll the users of their anthologies, they find the widest disagreement on modern and contemporary authors (Lawall, 1986).

Some theorists ask what criteria can aid us in determining whether a given work is “literature” and therefore deserves to be included in anthologies and in courses on literary studies. Others suggest we abandon the whole idea of a special category called literature and subsume literary studies into a more general discipline called cultural studies and practices (Graff, 1986). A unified field theory of literature would provide a means by which literature can be defined and evaluated and its study as a separate discipline justified.

Teaching and Criticism

Along with questions of curricula and the identification of appropriate texts for these curricula, come the issues of what a literary studies department should teach. Shall we continue to organize courses along the lines of periods, genres, and other classifications of literary works or should we primarily be teaching our students to reflect on the discipline of literary studies itself, to discuss questions of how we read, what we choose to read, how the profession should constitute itself, and what “constraints, pressures, and assumptions—culture-specific, psychological, and ideological as well as (seemingly) text-generated—are operating” in reading (Waller, 1986, p. 32)?

We must ask what critics should do when approaching the work, what critical theories
and practices might be most useful to them and their readers. Does scholarly research add yet another interpretation of some work of literature to those already extant, or should it explore how a text comes to have meaning for its audience? Questions of meaning and interpretation have introduced other issues. For example, although structuralist critics insist that there are universal structures of the mind reflected in myth, folktale, and works of literature, as well as in other cultural artifacts (see Scholes, 1974), other theorists question whether there are any “eternal verities of the imagination” or any transcendental vantage point from which to unify either interpretation or theory (Nelson, 1986, p. 4). In fact, the new historicists seek to demystify supposed universals such as Reason, Truth, archetypal figures, and other “such structuralisms and consecrated stereotypes” and insist that a work must be read primarily within its historical or social context (Bruffee, 1986, p. 787).

Over the years there has also been a gradual erosion of the authority of the author, of any sense that the author’s intentions constitute a particularly privileged reading of a work. The extreme relativism in the area of literary interpretation has arisen partly as a result of the development of a large variety of critical approaches that examine works of literature in terms of linguistics, anthropology, sociology, or psychology, particularly neo-Freudian psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic critics, for example, explore an author’s unconscious meanings and, more broadly, many critics observe that interpretation, in general, involves complex issues of social and linguistic practices that undermine any determinate meaning in a work (Coward & Ellis, 1977). Some critical theorists, in fact, have persuasively argued that within the limited context of a work there might be an infinite set of readings possible for a given set of words. They have delighted in eroding the apparent meaning in a text by exploring its implicit contradictions, thereby showing that authors may have been unaware of their true intentions, or at best, unaware of their inconsistency. And do we not bring to any reading our own cultural and gender biases, to say nothing of the quality of our consciousness, variables that would preclude our arriving at any universal meaning that will not vary from individual to individual, from culture to culture, from century to century?

The study of literature was seen at one time as the discovery of universal truths about human nature and life, “the supremely civilizing pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 31). The study of literature may humanize the reader to some degree, but it has certainly not noticeably improved the quality of life on earth, removed social injustice, nor prevented war or other holocausts. A unified field theory of literature should be able to describe the effects that literature has on its audience and, if these effects are sometimes beneficial, suggest some way to enhance them and thereby advance the study of literature.

These questions challenge the longstanding consensus about the nature of literature and undermine the current activities of literature students and teachers to the extent that many established professionals see theory as threatening or find themselves baffled by the proliferation of critical approaches, each with its abstruse philosophical underpinnings and jargon. Consequently, many have been reluctant to plunge wholeheartedly into the current debate over theory and explore their own sense of what literature is and how it functions, even though every teacher and critic is committed to some sort of theoretical position and critical practice, regardless of how implicit or unexpressed it might be. In any case, judging from the recent proliferation of introductions to critical theory and special issues of journals dedicated to these questions, it is clear that there is a wide audience interested
in theoretical discussion related to the reading and teaching of literature.

To summarize, then, there is a great deal of current debate on what constitutes the subject matter of literary studies, how we read that subject matter, why we read it at all, how we interpret or write about it, and even how we can maintain a meaningful discussion when the discourses of the various critical theories have such widely divergent starting points and terminologies as to be almost unintelligible to each other.

Is a healthy pluralism the best we can hope for, or is it possible to challenge the "pervasive assumption that no theory can acquire permanent, ahistorical truth content" (Nelson, 1986, p. 1) and to develop a unified theory of literature? The greatest barrier to this endeavor would most certainly be the widespread belief that although any particular position may be argued, it is impossible to discover or prove any absolute Truth. Supposed universal truths of any sort are intellectually suspect and subject to the extreme relativism of our age. However, recent lucid and practical interpretations of ancient Vedic texts on consciousness, the latest advances in theoretical physics, and research on the psychophysiology of consciousness, taken together, suggest a new approach. With a new understanding available of both nature and human consciousness, it should be possible to evolve a new understanding of speech and of literary expression. From this, a theory of literature can be developed that will be capable of describing the origins of literary texts and providing a coherent and integrated basis for understanding their effects and evaluating their worth.

Towards a Unified Theory of Literature

This article proposes a unified theory of literature calling upon both the most ancient and traditional knowledge of human consciousness contained in Vedic literature, as it has been brought to light by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and the most recent corroboration of the principles of Maharishi's Vedic Science in psychophysiological research on consciousness and in the findings of modern physics. Maharishi connects the qualities and dynamical evolution of consciousness with the principles of physics, in both a theoretical and an experiential way (1986). He maintains that both consciousness and the natural world described by physics have their common origin in the unified field of all the laws of nature, as it has been expressed in the ancient Vedic tradition and as it has been recently glimpsed by contemporary unified field theories. Connections between consciousness and physics provide a basis upon which a unified field theory of literature can be formulated, and, in fact, recent critics are beginning to integrate quantum field theory with the study of literature (see, for example, Hayles, 1984; Overstreet, 1981). However, they have yet to incorporate knowledge of the profound connections between consciousness and the natural world that Maharishi has elucidated, which would provide a common basis for understanding literary techniques and their effects.

Maharishi describes individual human awareness as having its source and ground state in the unified field of natural law and as having the potential to evolve over time through a series of stable states of consciousness (1986). He points out that the individual perceives and describes the inner and outer worlds of experience differently from the vantage point of each particular state (1969). An understanding of these states and their cognitive differences is extremely relevant to the study of literature. Contrary to the current belief that language or literature determines what we think, a unified field theory of literature will argue that works of literature arise as expressions of individual consciousness and
experience, both of which are dependent upon an individual's state of consciousness. Similarly, Maharishi's delineation of levels of the individual psyche or mind, from the senses to the ego, brings a valuable perspective to discussions of creativity, the origins of language, thought, and literature, and the way literary techniques affect the reader's consciousness.

The development of a unified field theory of literature must begin, therefore, with a systematic description of Maharishi's delineation of the various states of consciousness that comprise the individual's range of experience. The perceptual and cognitive distinctions between each of these states will be illustrated by examples taken from Western literature which offer descriptions parallel to those given in Maharishi's Vedic Science. These literary examples show that Maharishi's distinctions between states of consciousness provide a universal, cross-cultural knowledge that can reliably elucidate the content and viewpoints of Western literature. In addition, they also often succeed in expressing what are regarded as ineffable experiences, occurring as they do beyond ordinary levels of awareness and thus beyond the language evolved to describe them.

In addition, a description of the distinctions Maharishi draws between the various levels of the mind will add a missing dimension to discussions of the nature of language and the findings of modern linguistics in particular. The tenets of modern linguistics have determined many of the basic assumptions upon which critical theories are based, and although they have added greatly to our knowledge, they have cut language off from its source in consciousness and set it adrift upon the seas of cultural relativity.

Based on a discussion of (a) states of consciousness, (b) levels of the mind, and (c) the nature of language, it will then be possible to examine how a unified field theory of literature can explain and integrate all the elements of the literary equation: the writer, the process of reading, and the reader. The first section of this discussion will concern writing and the creative process and the role the writer's consciousness plays in this process. The second will propose an explanation for the way in which the various mechanics of the reading process affect the reader's consciousness and physiology. The third will address how a unified field theory of literature looks at the means by which the reader creates meaning or interprets a text. All of these discussions will touch now and again upon modern critical theories, but will often diverge widely from recent concepts of the nature of literary studies. After this general discussion, it will be possible to reconsider issues in the definition and teaching of literature, the selection of texts for the literary canon, and the ultimate practicality of a unified field theory of literature for changing consciousness and affecting the way we live, both personally and as members of a larger society.

**CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE UNIFIED FIELD**

The development of a unified field theory of literature must begin with a discussion of those elements of Maharishi's Vedic Science that are most relevant to a theory of literature and that lead directly to a new appreciation and understanding of language and literature. Maharishi defines Vedic Science as knowledge of "the knower, the known, and the process of knowing which connects the knower with the known" (1986, p. 27). In the state of transcendental consciousness, reached when awareness settles down into its least excited
state through the Transcendental Meditation technique, for example, one is conscious only of consciousness itself, not of the usual objects of knowledge or thoughts, and, since the eyes are closed and the attention drawn completely within, there are also no objects of perception. One is awake within, yet in a state of profound physiological quiescence. This state is then comprised of the knower (the Self) in the process of knowing its Self. It is the state of pure consciousness, that is, consciousness purely aware of itself.

Maharishi describes the state of transcendental consciousness as one of self-referral or self-interaction since every other manifestation of consciousness is an excitation of this ground state. He explains how the Self or state of transcendental consciousness is reached through the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique and is therefore directly accessible to human awareness:

Human awareness can identify itself with this most basic, self-referral value of consciousness in the state of Samadhi, or transcendental consciousness. This is easily gained and most naturally enjoyed through Transcendental Meditation. The functioning of transcendental pure consciousness is the functioning of natural law in its most settled state. The conscious human mind, identifying itself with this level of nature's functioning, gains the ability to perform in the style with which nature performs its activity at its most fundamental level. Completely identified in transcendental consciousness with the full potential of natural law, the human mind is a field of all possibilities. (1986, pp. 30-31)

The subjective experience of the state of transcendental consciousness is one of unboundedness, bliss, and supreme fulfillment—qualities that clearly distinguish it from normal waking experience.

Maharishi identifies this inner field of consciousness—the field of all possibilities—with the unmanifest basis of the physical world, the unified field described by physics that gives rise through its own self-referral or self-interactive nature to all the forces and particles, to the very laws of nature themselves, and includes this knowledge in the purview of Vedic Science:

This state of pure knowledge, where knower, known, and knowledge are in the self-referral state, is that all-powerful, immortal, infinite dynamism at the unmanifest basis of creation. All about this is Vedic Science: all about the knower, the known, and the knowledge, all about consciousness, which means consciousness in its self-referral, self-interacting state and consciousness multiplied in the infinite variety of the whole creation, that performance of nature which goes on and on eternally in all spheres of time, past, present, and future. The knowledge of this most basic principle of life, this most basic reality of matter and intelligence both together, is the science of pure knowledge, the science of Veda. (1986, p. 27)

He says: “We speak of the unified field in connection with Vedic Science because of the similarity of what has been discovered by physics and what exists in the self-referral state of human consciousness” (p. 35). Recent discoveries have begun to corroborate the long search of physicists for a completely unified understanding of the fundamental particles and forces of nature. Sir Isaac Newton’s laws of motion achieved an extraordinary unification of terrestrial and celestial gravity in the seventeenth century, which was extended by Einstein’s general theory of relativity into a subtler understanding of space and time where, for example, space-time curvature is understood to be responsible for the gravitational force the sun exerts on the earth. In the nineteenth century, James Clerk Maxwell related the seemingly disparate forces of electricity and magnetism by means of a set
of differential equations that describes the electromagnetic field, including the behavior of light.

In the twentieth century, however, the scientific view of nature became increasingly complicated. With the advance of high energy physics came an understanding of two fundamental forces in nature in addition to those of gravity and electromagnetism: the weak force, which is responsible for the phenomena of radioactivity and is important in cosmology and astrophysics, and the strong force, which binds neutrons and protons together in atomic nuclei. Moreover, particles could no longer be thought of as immutable and point-like separate elements of matter, but rather in quantum theory are described by an abstract wave function, which is technically a field.

In 1967 the electromagnetic and weak forces were theoretically unified into an electroweak force (see Weinberg, 1974), and recent discoveries of particles predicted by this theory have lent great weight to its validity. Grand unified theories propose a unification of the electroweak force with the strong force, and over the last ten years physicists have gone on to propose various unified quantum field theories in which gravity could finally be united with the other force fields at a very fine time and distance scale, that is, at the Planck scale (10^{-33} cm and 10^{-44} sec.) (see Antoniadis, Ellis, Hagelin, & Nanopoulos, in press).

These theories of the physical world cannot easily be related to one’s daily experience. For example, this page, which appears to be a solid piece of matter, can be understood by classical physics to consist of minute particles separated by proportionately vast distances of empty space. Quantum field theory would describe the paper as consisting of discrete or quantized waves of energy, not particles at all. At the Planck scale all the various force fields and matter fields can be understood as fluctuations or waves of an underlying unified field. This would mean that all of the qualities of electromagnetism, gravity, and the nuclear forces, as well as electrons, neutrinos, and so on, would exist in latent or unmanifest form in the unified field and would then become expressed when these fields became differentiated at grosser time and distance scales.

The self-interactive or self-referral characteristic of the unified field accounts for how it spontaneously generates all the particles and forces of nature from within itself through a process that physicists describe as spontaneous symmetry breaking. That is, just as the DNA “refers back” to itself for information and intelligence on how to form the human organism, so the unified field “refers back” to itself to differentiate itself into other stages of manifest nature. At more manifest levels of nature the underlying unity ceases to predominate until, at the level of sensory experience, the world seems to be subject only to the laws of classical mechanics, with billiard-ball type theories of cause and effect that do not require the concept of self-referral to explain them.

Since all the manifest levels of nature emerge from the unified field, all the laws of nature must be present in the unified field in their seed form. As one theoretical physicist has said, “If, as particle theorists are inclined to believe, all the laws of nature have their ultimate origin in the dynamics of the unified field, then the unified field must itself embody the total intelligence of nature’s functioning” (Hagelin, 1987, p. 58). This description echoes Maharishi’s description of the nature of transcendental consciousness as a “state of perfect order, the matrix from which all the laws of nature emerge, the source of creative intelligence” (1977, p. 123).

Maharishi explains that just as the “unmanifest basis of creation” is capable of spontaneously producing through its self-referral activity “different characteristics or different
shades of its own nature” (1986, p. 86), so the state of pure knowledge or transcendental consciousness is at the source of the various states of consciousness that an individual can experience. Along with the varying states of consciousness that an individual experiences in the course of a day, such as sleeping, dreaming, and the range of waking consciousness (from very dull to crystal clear), are four “higher” states of consciousness. The range of experience possible in these seven states of consciousness invariably influences how the writer, the reader, or the critic (the knower) comes to know (through the process of writing or reading) the meaning of a work of literature (the known).

States of Consciousness

Maharishi writes that the seven states of consciousness are as different one from another as spectacles of different colours through which the same view looks different. When the same object is cognized in different states of consciousness, its values are differently appreciated. Life is appreciated differently at each different level of consciousness. (1969, p. 316)

He defines a state of consciousness as a stable mode of perception, cognition, and physiology that can be differentiated from other such states both subjectively and by its unique physiological parameters (1969, 1986). Reality is obviously different in dreaming than it is in waking, and is not perceived at all in sleep. Also, sleeping, dreaming, and waking states each have a unique EEG, respiratory, and biochemical signature that correlates with the subjective experiences of those states.

Maharishi describes how with the repeated experience of transcendental consciousness (Turiya), individual awareness progressively evolves into three higher states of consciousness: (a) cosmic consciousness (Turiyatita), (b) refined cosmic consciousness or God consciousness (Bhagavat Chetna), and ultimately, (c) unity consciousness (Brahmi Chetna) (1986, p. 115). Each of these higher states is characterized by the blissful experience of transcendental consciousness being maintained along with, at the first stage, individual thoughts and inner experience; at the second stage, along with a greatly enhanced perception of objects; and in the third, along with perception and experience of the unity of all of the natural world. These states of consciousness are explained more fully below.

Maharishi emphasizes that the physiology of the individual is in perfect balance only when unity consciousness is attained. In that state development is complete. “If the intellect is in a balanced state then everything is absolutely harmonious and consciousness is brilliant, clear, full of satisfaction, and blissful” (1986, p. 113). In that state, the human mind becomes the field of all possibilities and life is lived without limitations or restrictions.

The qualities of transcendental consciousness and the three “higher” states have only come under scientific scrutiny within the last twenty years, but research clearly distinguishes their experiential and psychophysiological parameters from those of sleeping, dreaming, and waking (Farrow & Hebert, 1982; Orme-Johnson, 1977; Badawi, Wallace, Orme-Johnson, & Rouzeré, 1984; Orme-Johnson & Haynes, 1981; see Alexander, Boyer, & Alexander, 1987, for a review of other relevant studies). This research indicates that the regular practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique “acts to unfreeze human development and promote the natural growth of higher states of consciousness beyond the endpoints of human development proposed in current Western psychology” (Alexander et al., 1987, p. 120).
The knowledge of states of consciousness is obviously fundamental to the study of literature, since the states of consciousness of the author and the reader determine much of what happens in the process of communication from one to the other. A unified field theory of literature can therefore describe the difference in experience and world view between an Emerson and a Hemingway, for example, as well as provide a matrix for discussing literature and the issues raised by literary theory.

Transitory experiences of what may be higher states of consciousness have often been recorded in Western literature, although they are called by various other names: epiphanies, timeless or visionary moments, privileged moments, peak experiences, and so forth. When each is defined, however, it is obvious that states of consciousness beyond the normal waking experience are being described. For example, E. F. N. Jephcott defines the privileged moment as one quite distinct from ordinary waking consciousness, in which an intensification of sensory perception is combined with a unity of awareness of the subject with nature, not under the auspices of time and individuality, but, as Spinoza would say, sub specie aeternitatis, under the aspect of eternity. These experiences, which are accompanied by an intense pleasure and happiness, he feels “are the source of the impulse to create a work of art” (1972, p. 11).

William James, the father of American psychology, called these unusual experiences states of “assurance.” We pass into these states, he wrote,

from out of ordinary consciousness as from a less into a more, as from a smallness into a vastness, and at the same time as from unrest to a rest. We feel them as reconciling, unifying states: ... In them the unlimited absorbs the limits and peacefully closes the account. (1902/1958, p. 326)

Besides “the loss of all worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony,” James noted that these states are also noetic—that is, there is “the sense of perceiving truths not known before. The mysteries of life become lucid” (p. 202). In James’s words, these are “states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect” (p. 300). In addition, they are ineffable, transient, and come spontaneously to the grateful recipient. Many of the instances that James cites occur in great writers and seem to be most familiar to exceptionally creative minds. He noted that these experiences cannot be willfully produced, but seem to arise by themselves. Unfortunately, James wrote, these experiences “come seldom, and they do not come to everyone; and the rest of life makes either no connection with them, or tends to contradict them more than it confirms them” (p. 31).

In the 1950s and 1960s the American humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow expanded James’s work and studied what he called self-actualized people, that is, people who had realized a great deal of their human potential and were functioning at a high level of values and behavior. He gathered instances of the high points of their lives, moments of intuition, “revelation, of illumination, insight, understanding, ecstasy” and called these moments peak experiences, thus enlarging James’s concept of the state of assurance to include states when thoughts, ideas, sense perceptions, emotions, and physical sensations could accompany the experience of the inner core of the individual, or Being, as Maslow called it (1972a, p. 178).

In these experiences, as individuals draw closer to their own essential inner Being, they can thereby more easily see the Being-values in the world around them. As Maslow
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describes them, in these experiences both the subject and the world seem whole, integrated, unified, perfect, fulfilled, lawful, alive, rich yet simple, beautiful, good, effortless, true, joyful, and self-sufficient. In addition, "there tends to be a loss, even though transient, of fear, anxiety, inhibition, of defense and control, of perplexity, confusion, conflict, ... The profound fear of disintegration, of insanity, of death, all tend to disappear for the moment" (1970, p. 66).

Maslow also observed the transiency, spontaneity, ineffability, and noetic nature of the peak experience. He writes, "There is universally reported a seeing of formerly hidden truth, a revelation in the strict sense, a stripping away of veils" (1972b, p. 62). In addition, "there is a very characteristic disorientation in time and space, or even the lack of consciousness of time and space. Phrased positively, this is like experiencing universality and eternity" (1970, p. 63). Contemporary developmental psychologists now view these experiences as precursors of higher states of consciousness which reflect "a developmental level of subtlety and comprehensiveness that goes beyond the level which can be readily appreciated within the boundaries of ordinary adult thought" (Alexander et al., 1987, p. 91; see also Alexander, Davies, Dillbeck, Dixon, Oetzel, Muehlman, & Orme-Johnson, in press).

These experiences can occur spontaneously, though rarely or imperfectly. They can be systematically developed, however, through the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique. In either case, they can best be understood in terms of the four higher states of consciousness that Maharishi's Vedic Science describes. This systematic framework provides a means to categorize these experiences and appreciate their relevance, and thus goes well beyond the schema of James, Maslow, and modern psychologists. Without this knowledge, these experiences might be questioned as being fanciful, imaginary, disconnected with the more familiar states of consciousness, or unrelated to a creative and productive life. Studied systematically, these experiences illustrate how much a writer or reader's perception of nature and the individual self depends upon their occurrence or non-occurrence. The best place to begin the development of a unified field theory of literature is with a discussion of the ground state of consciousness, the state of transcendental consciousness.

Transcendental Consciousness

Maharishi describes the fourth state of consciousness as transcendental consciousness, a state that is experienced when the mind settles into its least excited state. He also calls it pure consciousness because it is unmixed with the more active modes of the mind, such as thought, perception, feelings, memories, and so forth. The subjective experience of transcendental consciousness is one of unboundedness, bliss, inner silence, and complete fulfillment (1977; see discussion of Vedic Science above). In this state the individual experiences being at the home of all the laws of nature, the silent unmanifest basis of creation. Maharishi describes the state of transcendental consciousness as the ground state or least excited state of mind, which can be experienced through the TM technique:

The Transcendental Meditation technique is an effortless procedure for allowing the excitation of the mind to gradually settle down until the least excited state of mind is reached. This is a state of inner wakefulness with no object of thought or perception, just pure consciousness, aware of its own unbounded nature. It is wholeness, aware of itself, devoid of difference, beyond the division of subject and object—transcendental consciousness. It is a field of all possibilities where all creative potentialities exist together, infinitely correlated but
as yet unexpressed. It is a state of perfect order, the matrix from which all the laws of nature emerge, the source of creative intelligence. (p. 123)

The state Maharishi describes closely matches descriptions of the unified field proposed by modern physics. The experience of the most silent unbounded level of the inner Self as the “matrix from which all the laws of nature emerge” is expressed by Emerson in his essay “Nature.” On the basis of his own subjective experiences Emerson similarly posited one fundamental set of laws of nature both underlying and at the source of natural and therefore human phenomena. He writes: “A rule of one art, or a law of one organization, holds true throughout nature. So intimate is this Unity, that, it is easily seen, it lies under the undermost garment of Nature, and betrays its source in Universal Spirit” (1836/1987, p. 995). In his essay on “Self-Reliance” Emerson describes his own direct experience of the Universal Spirit as the “sense of being, which in calm hours rises, we know not how, in the soul.” This sense of being, Emerson writes, is “not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them, and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed. Here,” he says, “is the fountain of action and thought” (1841/1987, p. 1038).

Emerson says that if the student studies nature, what he will find is that

Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind... So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, “Know thyself,” and the modern precept, “Study nature,” become at last one maxim. (1837/1987, p. 1010)

Emerson’s subjective experience of a “sense of being” suggests the state of transpersonal consciousness or the unified field of all the laws of nature. It is not unreasonable that all of nature, including human consciousness, has a common source and can be described by one set of laws; the fact that the mind of the scientist or writer can experience and describe the workings of nature speaks for this connection.

Connections or possible relationships between consciousness and the physical world have been discussed by leading physicists. Nobel Laureate Eugene Wigner writes, “The simple fact is that it becomes increasingly evident that the primitive idea of separating body and soul is not a valid one...” (1967/1970, p. 217). Wigner observes that when physics began to deal with microscopic phenomena, it became necessary to entertain a concept of consciousness: “...it was not possible to formulate the laws of quantum mechanics in a fully consistent way without reference to the consciousness” (p. 172). Wigner is referring here to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, which implies that the observer invariably influences the system under observation with his or her consciousness. As theoretical physicist John Hagelin comments, “the clear separation between the observer and the observed, which is the cornerstone of modern empiricist thinking, is ultimately a conception whose utility may be limited to the classical domain” (1987, p. 59).

The consciousness of the observer is not the only issue here; the whole definition of consciousness itself and its relationship to matter must be reconsidered. Hagelin argues that “most particle theorists would agree that the unified field is the source of both subjective and objective existence” and that it may not be necessary to introduce anything external to the laws of physics to explain the phenomena of consciousness (p. 60). He submits that the unified field is the dynamical origin of all phenomena, including those of consciousness, and that there is an “identity between the ‘objective’ unified field of modern theoretical physics and a ‘subjective’ unified field of consciousness” (p. 59).
A UNIFIED FIELD BASED THEORY OF LITERATURE

There are numerous reports in literature of spontaneous experiences that suggest both the unified field and the state of transcendental consciousness that Maharishi describes, consciousness at its most silent, unbounded level where it loses the boundaries of localized thought or perception to become a unified field of all possibilities. For example, as Eugene Ionesco relates:

Once, long ago, I was sometimes overcome by a sort of grace, a euphoria. It was as if, first of all, every notion, every reality was emptied of its content. After this emptiness... it was as if I found myself suddenly at the center of pure ineffable existence; it was as if things had freed themselves of all arbitrary labels, of a framework that didn’t suit them, that limited them; social and logical constraint or the need to define them, to organize them, disappeared. It did not seem to me that I was the victim of a nominalist crisis; on the contrary, I think that I became one with the one essential reality, when, along with an immense, serene joy, I was overcome by what I might call the stupefaction of being, the certainty of being. . . . I say that with words that can only disfigure, that cannot describe the light of this profound, total organic intuition which, surging up as it did from my deepest self; might well have inundated everything, covered everything, both my other self and others. (1968/1971, pp. 150-151, emphasis added)

Ionesco had no name for this experience and could not understand what it was and why he experienced it only sporadically in his youth, and after a time, not at all. An appreciation of Ionesco’s youthful experiences of what is most likely transcendental consciousness illuminates his later plays. Having had experiences such as these, Ionesco no doubt found ridiculous the superficiality of daily life that he so dramatically exposes in The Bald Soprano.

Ionesco’s experience of transcending—the gradual emptying of consciousness of its contents until only “pure ineffable existence” remains along with “an immense serene joy” and the “certainty of being”—is similar to that reported by British essayist J. A. Symonds:

It consisted in a gradual but swiftly progressive obliteration of space, time, sensation, and the multitudinous factors of experience which seem to qualify what we are pleased to call our Self. In proportion as these conditions of ordinary consciousness were subtracted, the sense of an underlying or essential consciousness acquired intensity. At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute, abstract Self. The universe became without form and void of content. But Self persisted, formidable in its vivid keenness... (quoted in James, 1902/1958, p. 296, emphasis added)

The qualities of this state, its abstract, unbounded, self-sufficient, holistic nature, evoke the qualities of the unified field. Symonds calls his own nature, when identified with this state, the “Self” to distinguish it from the ordinary “self” of daily experience, just as Ionesco distinguishes his “deepest self” from his “other self.”

Experiences of transcendental consciousness occur under natural circumstances to a human nervous system that is in a temporary state of unusual purity and silence. As James observed, these experiences may be uncommon, but they are very real. “Our normal waking consciousness,” he wrote,

rational consciousness, as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality. (1902/1958, p. 305)
Since these “types of mentality” reminiscent of transcendental consciousness are uncommon and occur unpredictably in ordinary life, the best way to examine them is to study those practicing the TM technique during which they reliably appear.

Experiences of transcendental consciousness occurring during the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique have been observed to be correlated with a marked slowing of the respiration rate and heart rate (Farrow & Hebert, 1982; Badawi et al., 1984), and a global increase in EEG coherence in all frequencies and among all cortical areas (Badawi et al., 1984; D. W. Orme-Johnson, 1977). Self-reported experiences of transcendental consciousness are correlated with alpha coherence among front and central areas of the brain (D. W. Orme-Johnson & Haynes, 1981). This is important to note because experiences suggesting transcendental consciousness that occur in literature are generally framed by a description of the subject’s psychophysiological quiescence and this identifies them as having their basis in concrete experience rather than as being purely imaginative.

Cosmic Consciousness

When an individual has repeatedly experienced transcendental consciousness for some time in alternation with waking, dreaming and sleeping states, through the regular practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique, for example, the nervous system becomes habituated to maintaining transcendental consciousness along with these states, and the state of cosmic consciousness begins to develop:

In the state of cosmic consciousness, two different levels of organization in the nervous system function simultaneously while maintaining their separate identities. By virtue of this anatomical separation of function, it becomes possible for transcendental consciousness to co-exist with the waking state of consciousness and with the dreaming and sleeping states of consciousness.

In the early stage of the practice of Transcendental Meditation these two levels of function in the nervous system [waking and transcendental consciousness] are unable to occur at the same time; the function of the one inhibits the function of the other. . . . The practice of the mind in passing from one to another gradually overcomes this physiological inhibition, and the two levels begin to function perfectly at the same time, without inhibiting each other and still maintaining their separate identities. The function of each is independent of the other, and that is why this state of the nervous system corresponds to cosmic consciousness, in which Self-awareness exists as separate from activity. Silence is experienced with activity and yet as separate from it. (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1969, p. 314)

Maharishi defines cosmic consciousness as the ability to maintain the unbounded, blissful nature of pure consciousness along with thoughts, activity, and even deep sleep, so that the experiencer operates on a background of inner fullness and bliss, of “eternal happiness” (p. 365). The state of cosmic consciousness is not a mood nor the result of understanding some concept; it is a physiological state that is experientially based.

Since the essential nature of the Self is transcendental or beyond activity, it is “the silent witness of everything” (pp. 98-99). The individual who is established in cosmic consciousness is simply a silent and innocent witness of what is happening through him; he is a means through which nature fulfills its purpose of evolution. His actions are a response to the needs of the time. Quite naturally he performs actions which result in every kind of good. (p. 291)

The state of cosmic consciousness, Maharishi explains, is accompanied by behavior that
is spontaneously right, effective, and in tune with natural law (1969, 1986). It is a state of perfect inner fulfillment and successful outer activity.

Temporary experiences of this state may occur sporadically to an individual who is accustomed to experiencing transcendental consciousness, until it is finally established as that individual's stable state of consciousness. Experiences resembling Maharishi's definition of cosmic consciousness are much less common in literature than are experiences of transcendental consciousness, yet they do occur. For example, May Sinclair describes a character's development of consciousness in her novel *Mary Olivier* (1919). In Sinclair's novel, her heroine tells of repeated experiences throughout her life that are extremely similar, if not identical, to the state of pure consciousness that Maharishi describes. She calls it "reality breaking through" and experiences it vividly from time to time until it begins to be a continuous state. She muses:

> It had come to her when she was a child in brilliant, clear flashes; it had come again and again in her adolescence, with more brilliant and clearer flashes; then, after leaving her for twenty-three years, it had come like this—streaming in and out of her till its ebb and flow were the rhythm of her life.
>
> ...why had you to wait so long before you could remember it and be aware of it as *one continuous, shining background*? She had never been *aware* of it before; she had only thought about and about it, about Substance, the Thing-in-itself, Reality, God. *Thinking* was not being *aware*. (pp. 377-378, emphasis added)

The experience of pure consciousness as, in Sinclair's words, "one continuous, shining background," is symptomatic of the beginning of the establishment of cosmic consciousness. Observe that Sinclair's character clearly distinguishes between contemplation or *thinking* about Reality and "being *aware*" of it, that is, experiencing it directly. Maharishi emphasizes that "this state of life is not maintained on the basis of thinking or feeling: it is lived naturally on the level of Being" (1969, p. 434). An understanding of the nature of Mary's experiences clarifies and justifies the novel's ending, which may be puzzling for the reader without this dimension. Knowledge of states of consciousness can often provide important insights into character analysis and other aspects of literary interpretation, as will be seen in this section and those that follow.

The experience of pure consciousness being maintained along with activity is also suggested by Thoreau's description in *Walden* of occasionally "witnessing" his own thoughts and feelings:

> I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you. When the play ... of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, as far as he was concerned. (1854/1960, pp. 94-95)

The doubleness Thoreau relates is not an uncomfortable dissociation for him and suggests an experience of transcendental consciousness being maintained, however briefly, along with activity, as it would be in the stable state of cosmic consciousness. This is clearly felt in the following lines of the modern Hispanic poet Juan Ramon Jimenez in which he recognizes the "witnessing" Self to be his essential nature:
plant or plant from mineral, but rather a quality possessed by all these in their different
degrees. (1975, p. 119, emphasis added)

Raine says she dared scarcely to breathe, but was held “in a kind of fine attention.”
These words suggest that she was aware that her respiration rate had become very re­duced as she settled into this state of consciousness of “fine attention” where she could
observe its special characteristics. This experience apparently lasted for some time and
when it ended, Raine says, “I returned to dull common consciousness with a sense of
 diminution.” The experience was not of a strange state but rather of something “infinite­ly familiar, as if I were experiencing at last things as they are, was where I belonged,
where in some sense, I had always been and would always be.” Since the experience oc­curs naturally, Raine is comfortable with it and recognizes it to be natural, more natural, in fact, than “dull common consciousness.” Raine’s experience appears to comprise the
development of unity consciousness, the end result of the development begun in refined
cosmic consciousness, as described above, and suggests the bridging of both realities.

Unity Consciousness

When refined cosmic consciousness is lived for some time, awareness evolves into the
seventh state, unity consciousness, where the individual experiences an identity with
everything without losing consciousness of the Self, since both inner and outer realities
are perceived as unbounded, pure consciousness. Maharishi describes this highest stage
of human evolution as follows:

This seventh state of consciousness could very well be called the unified state of consciousness
because in that state, the ultimate value of the object, infinite and unmanifest, is made lively
when the conscious mind, being lively in the unbounded value of awareness, falls on the
object. The object is cognized in terms of the pure subjective value of unbound, unmanifest
awareness . . . . In this unified state of consciousness, the experiencer and the object of ex­perience have both been brought to the same level of infinite value and this encompasses
the entire phenomenon of perception and action as well. The gulf between the knower and
the object of his knowing has been bridged. When the unbounded perceive is able to cognize
the object in its total reality, cognizing the infinite value of the object, which was hitherto
unseen, then the perception can be called total or of supreme value. In this state, the full
value of knowledge has been gained, and we can finally speak of complete knowledge. (1972a,
Lesson 23)

The state of unity consciousness described by Maharishi is the supreme state of human
evolution. Until this state is reached all knowledge and experience are inadequately per­ceived and understood. Individuals living this state of consciousness are rare, and thus
experiences of this state, however transient, are appreciated for their singular nature. Even
when one has never experienced such a state personally, one is attracted to and moved
by the experience of one who has.

Gustave Flaubert describes a transient experience that suggests this state in the 1849-1858
version of his novel The Temptation of St. Anthony, and gives the reader a taste of the
bliss that accompanies such an experience:

It is true, often I have felt that something bigger than myself was fusing with my being: bit
by bit I went off into the greenery of the pastures and into the current of the rivers that I
watched go by; and I no longer knew where my soul was, it was so diffuse, universal, spread
out .... Your mind itself finally lost the notion of particularity which kept it on the alert.
It was like an immense harmony engulfing your soul with marvellous palpitations, and
you felt in its plenitude an inexpressible comprehension of the unrevealed wholeness of things; the interval between you and the object, like an abyss closing, grew narrower and narrower, until the difference vanished, because you both were bathed in infinity; you penetrated each other equally, and a subtle current passed from you into matter while the life of the elements slowly pervaded you, rising like a sap; one degree more, and you would have become nature, or nature become you...immortality, boundlessness, infinity, I have all that, I am that! I feel myself to be Substance, I am Thought!... I understand, I see, I breathe, in the midst of plenitude...how calm I am! (Jephcott, Trans., 1972, p. 31)

The description of St. Anthony's experience suggests the transition from the state of refined cosmic consciousness to that of unity consciousness. The character describes experiencing himself as boundless, infinite, and full and perceives nature as being bathed in the same infinity, boundlessness, and plenitude. This echoes what Maharishi describes above as the "experiencer and the object of experience [being] brought to the same level of infinite value" when the "unified state of consciousness" has been reached. "One degree more," the character relates, "and you would have become nature, or nature become you." This suggests what Maharishi describes as the "gulf between the knower and the object of his knowing [being] bridged."

Maharishi's descriptions of states of consciousness and the examples related to them taken from literature show that human consciousness is capable of experiencing a wide range of consciousness from waking state to cosmic consciousness and onward. Each state is perceptually and cognitively distinct from the others and the sequence of them indicates a natural progression toward the most holistic, most comprehensive state of awareness possible. The Transcendental Meditation technique systematically cultivates this development and hastens the natural evolutionary process (Maharishi, 1969, 1972a; see Alexander et al., 1987, and Alexander et al., in press, for research substantiating this statement).

When individuals have a taste of higher states of consciousness, however briefly they are experienced, they are influenced for life. After sustaining the experience cited above, Eugene Ionesco wrote that, "I was saved now. It was impossible for me to become the prey of the mud of shadows again, because I knew now, in a luminous sort of way, I knew and could no longer forget that I am, I myself am, everything is. The miracle of being..." (p. 156). Ionesco bemoans the fact that although these experiences of "supernormal wakefulness" have come in the "simplest, most natural way," it is not easy to find the necessary button to press to turn them on; "we fumble about for it in the shadows on one of the walls of an enormous strange house" (p. 157). Similarly, Bernard Berenson reports that a childhood experience of "lness," as he called it, furnished him with a touchstone that remained with him for seven decades as:

the goal of my yearning, my longing, my desire. Not always, alas! But often enough in moments when passion, or ambition, or self-righteousness would have had their way with me, the feeling of that moment at the dawn of my conscious life would present itself and like a guardian angel remind me that IT was my goal and that IT was my only real happiness. (1958, p. 19)

Each author lives or experiences particular states of consciousness that determine and structure his or her perception of reality. Writers with spontaneous access to the unified field of consciousness would describe their lives in a way that would be foreign to those who had never had such experiences. They would appreciate the connectedness between consciousness and nature, which others might want to believe in but could find no rational cause to do so. Those at one stage of moral or cognitive development typically cannot fully understand the reasoning of those in higher stages (Alexander et al., 1987).
In other words, literary works, like personal points of view, are generated from different levels of consciousness. There is obviously a wide range of experience possible in waking state consciousness, from dull and narrow to broadly comprehensive and crystal clear, which can also include transitory glimpses of higher states of consciousness, such as the experiences cited above describe. As an individual evolves toward the state of cosmic consciousness, he or she would experience and express broader comprehension of the connectedness between individual consciousness and the natural world and would experience a more joyful appreciation of the wholeness of life. Readers who hope to understand the full range of human experience, whether in life or literature, must include the direct knowledge of the development of consciousness in their personal and professional agenda.

Levels of the Mind and the Nature of Language

In previous sections of this essay, nature has been described as a multi-leveled reality, with the level of its utmost simplicity and power hidden from view yet at once underlying and engendering the manifest material world. It has also been shown how this view gives rise to a dependable context in which experiences that occur in works of literature can be elucidated. Since language, the very stuff of literature, must change to express the reality of different states of consciousness, a unified field theory of literature can suggest ways to illuminate this area. Fundamental to such a discussion is the layered nature of the mind.

Maharishi’s Vedic Science describes the various levels of existence as “the environmental level, the level of the body, the senses, mind, intellect, emotions, and ego.” Finally there is “universal ego,” or Being, or the Self, the core of pure consciousness at the center of human existence (1972a, Lesson 6; 1969; see Figure 1). Maharishi explains:

Certainly the quality of life at these different levels is different. Life has particular characteristics and a particular meaning on the level of the environment; it has a different meaning and value on the level of the body, and again on the level of the senses, the mind, the intellect, and the emotions. On the level of the self, when the self is a small individual ego, life has a different value from the level of Being. (1972a, Lesson 6)

Although an individual operates within a more or less stable state of consciousness, at any given time an individual’s awareness may be primarily employing a particular facet of awareness, such as the intellect or discriminative ability. Maharishi usually refers to the various levels of existence from the senses to the Self as levels of the mind (Manas). One of the levels is also called mind, by which Maharishi means the memory and associational qualities of awareness. An understanding of levels of the mind is important for a discussion both of how literature affects the reader and how language arises in human awareness. Maharishi’s understanding of the process of language and its effects is broader and based on a deeper level of experience than that of current structural linguistics, as can be seen in a brief review of this area.

The founder of modern structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, distinguished three levels of linguistic activity, the broadest of which he called langage, by which he meant the whole human potential for speech, including its mental and physical aspects. He called ordinary individual utterance parole. Saussure and his successors focus on the third area,
Figure 1. Maharishi describes the mind as being structured from gross to subtle, from the senses to the Self. Awareness may transcend the grosser levels of the mind to ultimately experience the Self, the three-in-one nature of the unified field.

*langue*, the language systems that evolve and give rise to daily communication, such as the English language. He viewed *langue* as a system of signs, each of which is composed of a signifier (the sound-image or its graphic representation, the letters on a page, e.g., cat) and a signified (the meaning attached to the sound or letters, e.g., the concept of a small domestic animal). In his system one sees the relationship between signifier, signified, and referent (the actual thing to which the sign refers, e.g., the live animal) as completely arbitrary. We use language by discriminating the subtle differences between one signifier and another (e.g., the difference between cat and cab). Therefore, according to Saussure, meaning is not mysteriously contained within a sign, but is merely agreed upon within a given system.

Much of the current understanding of how language and literature function and relate to outside reality is based on the theories of structural linguistics. In deciding to focus only on language systems, these theories have chosen to ignore both the source of language in the consciousness of the writer and its effects on the consciousness of the reader. Building upon these theories, structuralist critics of literature analyze literary works as self-enclosed relational systems with their own rules, their own systems of discursive conventions func-
tioning independently of both "reality" and the author or reader (see Lentricchia, 1980).

Although the study of language systems and the necessity for understanding their codes has relevance for the study of literary works, it is also important to look at how the language of literature can transcend relative social codes to lead the awareness inward toward the levels of consciousness from which it originally arose. The contemporary American poet Denise Levertov, for example, writes that poetry is not the "dead level" of "common speech" but what Whitman called "the path / between reality and the soul," / a language / excelling itself to be itself" (1983, p. 15). Language as the path between reality and the soul is not accounted for by Saussure’s concept of langue, yet it is perhaps the most important dimension of literary language, and can be related to Saussure’s model.

Maharishi explains that the sign (the signifier "rose," for example, with its signified meaning) and its referent (the real flower) are both present in their unmanifest seed form within the unified field of consciousness. That is, a speaker in cosmic consciousness, whose awareness is established on that level, would give rise to language from that level. Speech arising from that level would therefore contain the power and precision characteristic of the unified field of all the laws of nature. Then, Maharishi comments,

The language will be in the spirit of the law of least action (least said with most effectiveness) with greatest response for whosoever hears it, and for all harmony and happiness in life, which is the purpose of language. . . Then expressions would be more lucid, easier to understand, appealing, not creating frustrations in the environment, but creating more harmony. (Maharishi, 1975a)

This understanding of how language arises and affects consciousness is quite different from the Saussurean model. It suggests new ways to understand the whole communication process, or at least puts the current understanding of langue into perspective, since it would apply only to waking consciousness and not to other states.

Similarly, when a hearer whose awareness is established in pure consciousness hears the sound "rose," for example, he or she would at once experience the relationship between the name and the form. That is, when consciousness, the basis of speech, has developed to cosmic consciousness, then the sight, sound, fragrance, and all cognitive and material aspects of the thing named would be simultaneously experienced, and communication would become complete and nourishing to both speaker and listener. Maharishi draws an analogy of the mutually nourishing and rewarding relationship between a mother and child to explain these ideas on speech:

Between the speaker and the speech is just that relationship that is between the mother and the child. The child is a source of nourishment to the mother, and on that is based the nourishment that the child receives from the mother. So language becomes lively, it has more life in it, it has more fulness in it if the awareness of the basis of language is there. That is why, along with the study of language, an uncovering procedure for consciousness is vital, and, with the use of language, awareness of the source of language is vital. (1975a)

To explain this more fully, Maharishi (1972b) describes how Vedic grammarians divide speech into four stages from unmanifest to most expressed. The subtlest level is para, the transcendental level where speech is not yet expressed but is contained in seed form. At the level of the Self or para (the Samhita or wholeness level of creation), the speaker, speech, and the process of giving rise to speech are one, even though the three aspects of speech can be conceptually differentiated. The next level of speech is pashyanti, the subtle level of speech in which speech is not yet expressed, but the level of transcendental
consciousness has been so enlivened that it is beginning to rise in impulses. This occurs close to the borderline between the Self and the very finest level of the ego.

The third level of speech is madhyama or the level of mental speech or verbal thought. The madhyama level of speech comprises the levels of mind and intellect where memory, thought, and discrimination function. Madhyama itself can be differentiated into numerous substages through which speech emerges from the impulse level all the way to the fourth and most manifest level, vaikhari, where it is spoken and can be heard (see Figure 2).

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**Ideal Communication**

Thus, according to Maharishi’s Vedic Science, speech or language ultimately arises from the basis of speech, which is pure consciousness or the Self. Practically speaking, ordinary language emerges directly from the level of awareness of the speaker, travels to the listener, sinks into the listener’s consciousness to whatever level it might, depending upon the listener’s level of awareness, and evokes as much of what originally gave rise to the words as the listener can receive. If both speaker and listener have the basis of speech fully developed in their consciousness, then communication will be most meaningful and effective (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1975a). In this instance, the full range of the object’s reality will be contained within the word chosen to express the speaker’s subjective experience of it. When this word falls upon a listener whose consciousness is also fully developed, it will evoke in that consciousness the full reality from which it sprang (see Figure 2).

Maharishi emphasizes that the full value of the connection of the sign to its referent will be communicated only if the consciousness of the listener has been expanded to the
level where it is unbounded or nearly unbounded (1974). If this has not taken place, some lesser value of the referent will be communicated. That part of the message that connects it to the unified field, or the Self, will fall on deaf ears, or rather, a deaf mind (see Figure 3). However, Maharishi mentions that more is included in the message than the words. The silence at the depth of the communication, whether in speech or art, is part of the message and also affects its audience (1970a; 1975a).

Incomplete Communication I

Figure 3. When the listener's level of awareness is not established at a subtle level of the mind, then the full value of the referent is not experienced.

When the listener's consciousness is more developed than the speaker's, then more may be communicated than the speaker is aware of. The listener may understand the message much more comprehensively than does the speaker, that is, he would understand what is being communicated as well as the nature of the consciousness of the speaker (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1970b; see Figure 4).

Therefore, when the speaker's awareness is established at the level of para, the basis of speech or communication, language can become a means for unfolding life; it can spread the variety of creation without losing the unity from which it arose (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1974; 1975a). Speech and communication are not usually understood in this way. Most individuals do not experience the full range of speech and are only aware of it at the most manifest end of the madhyama level and, of course, on the vaikhari level. At these levels, speech may seem to be entirely relative, arbitrary, and without an absolute basis. But this is a result of the limits of waking-state consciousness, not the nature of language. "How much a word would convey will depend on the comprehension of
the speaker. How much a word means will depend upon the comprehension of the reader" (Maharishi, 1976).

Literature, as well as other forms of communication, is also subject to analysis in terms of levels of speech and levels of the mind and need not be confined to the arbitrary relativism of the grossest levels of madhyama. Thus, the findings of structural linguistics may only be valid on certain levels of the mind and not relevant to the whole range of speech and consciousness.

Some linguists currently conceive of communication, including literary texts, in terms of the six elements of the speech act described by Roman Jakobson (1960). Jakobson identifies (a) an addresser; (b) an addressee; (c) a message that is passed between them; (d) a shared code that makes the message intelligible; (e) a contact or physical medium of communication (e.g., a book, a verbal utterance); and (f) a context to which the message refers. Depending upon which element dominates the communication, each communicative act is either (a) emotive or expressive of a state of mind; (b) conative, or trying for an effect; (c) poetic; (d) metalinguistic (e.g., “did you mean to say, . . .”); (e) phatic (e.g., “well, we’re finally talking together”; or (f) referential. According to Jakobson, communication is literary or poetic when the message or words themselves are emphasized or “foregrounded” in our attention (see Figure 5).

A unified field theory of literature adds three very important dimensions of communication to Jakobson’s diagram of the communication act: the level of consciousness of the speaker; the level of consciousness of the listener; and the quality of the environment.
A UNIFIED FIELD BASED THEORY OF LITERATURE

Jakobson's Communication Act

Context
Referential

Addressee
Emotive

Contact
Phatic

Message
Poetic

Contact
Phatic

Addressee
Conative

Shared Code
Metalinguistic

Figure 5. This schematic rendition of Jakobson's communication act shows the elements in plain type and the dominant function in italics.

in which communication takes place. In addition to creating an emotional contact or communicating a message, the quality of speech, it seems, is influenced by the consciousness of the speaker and can influence the consciousness of the listener, not just through imparting information or affecting the feelings, but through enlivening some degree of the unified field at the basis of the listener's consciousness. When this is possible, the communication is not only nourishing for the listener, but the nourishing effect rebounds to the speaker, and spreads out into the environment, creating an effect in the collective consciousness.

Collective consciousness has a particular meaning in Maharishi's Vedic Science. Maharishi defines collective consciousness as the sum of all the individual consciousnesses that make up a particular group such as a family, a city, or a nation (see D. W. Orme-Johnson & Dillbeck, 1987, for a thorough treatment of Maharishi's theory and a review of the research on its premises and predictions). The collective consciousness of a group is not a shared understanding of certain ideas or beliefs but rather an entity parallel to an individual's state of consciousness, one that affects how language is communicated. For example, if an environment is fraught with tension, anyone entering into it notices this tension and may interpret innocent remarks as being threatening. When the tension is dissolved, everyone in the situation feels more at ease and communication flows in a more positive and harmonious manner. The quality of feeling or consciousness surrounding a communication both influences and is influenced by the communication act. Hence the sketch of Jakobson's model must be redrawn to include the levels of speech operative for both the speaker and the listener and to account for the collective consciousness, which provides the environment in which the communication is taking place (see Figure 6).

The idea of literature or language as an expression of consciousness has been rejected by post-Saussurean linguistics, which insists that our language determines the nature of our experience and not the reverse. Recent theorists argue that "the fundamental agreement between the new rhetoric and post-structuralism that language is constitutive of reality is the basis for a unified field of study" and go on to suggest that this agreement can
Provide the basis for unifying the areas of writing and literary study (Shumway, 1985, p. 66). Whereas this notion clearly applies to waking state consciousness, it fails to generalize to higher states of consciousness where experience of the source of language, nature, and consciousness precedes and shapes expression. A unified field theory of literature must therefore reevaluate the role of consciousness in the processes of the writing and reading of literature.

**A UNIFIED FIELD THEORY OF LITERATURE**

Maharishi’s understanding of how consciousness determines the quality of the message as it originates with the speaker, as well as the listener’s comprehension of it, justifies an emphasis on the importance of the levels of consciousness of the writer and the reader. Literature communicates not only the words in the text, but the quality of consciousness and emotions of the writer. Similarly, the quality of consciousness of the reader determines how much of the message including its subtle emotional layers can be appreciated. It also determines to what extent the literary techniques employed by the writer can operate
effectively within the reader's consciousness and enliven the unified field at the basis of that consciousness.

A unified field theory of literature, then, is based upon knowledge and experience of the full range of consciousness available to writers and readers, from the unified field at the basis of consciousness to the grosser levels of the mind. A consideration of both the levels of the mind operative at any moment in the creative or the reading process and the means by which the reader's awareness is led to transcend grosser levels of the mind and move inward toward the Self explains many of the mechanics and effects of literature. It provides a holistic means for understanding how literature affects the reader's consciousness as well as evaluating how well it does so.

The first area of concern is the consciousness of the writer and the writing process. The second area pertains to the issues of reading, including the self-referral nature of the techniques and conventions the writer employs, and the third will discuss how reading affects the consciousness and physiology of the reader, including how meaning is accorded to a work. On this basis it will then be possible to consider issues in the teaching of literature: the canon, the definition and evaluation of literature, and the various critical strategies.

The Writer and the Creative Process

Just as physicists describe the universe unfolding from the self-referral state of the unified field, many writers have experienced language and insights emerging from their consciousness when it is in its most silent state. For example, in the quiet of his room in London, Wordsworth could invoke a remembered scene from nature that would then spontaneously lead his awareness inward, he relates,

> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.
>
> ("Tintern Abbey")

Wordsworth's experience of his breath and heart rate slowing down until he appears to be "asleep in body" while his consciousness remains lively accords well with scientific research on the Transcendental Meditation technique. This research describes a state of "restful alertness" in which breath, heart, and metabolic rates decrease in the direction of deep sleep while the brain appears to be awake and alert, showing a predominance of alpha waves and little indication of the slow theta waves that characterize sleep (Wallace, 1970). Wordsworth's description of himself as "a living soul" with his inner eye enjoying a powerfully harmonious, joyful, and noetic state suggests that he was experiencing transcendental consciousness along with thoughts. He credits this state with allowing him "to see into the life of things" and certainly his best poetry dates from the years when he could frequently elicit this experience.

Maharishi discusses how the state of transcendental or pure consciousness gives rise to poetry in a lecture on the Vedic seer Madhuchchandhas, "who saw an impulse of his
awareness falling into that unbounded ocean of infinity, the unbounded ocean of Being within himself, and immediately his heart flowed into poetry and he spontaneously sang the verses of the Rig Veda (1972c). Maharishi then generalizes to the "flow of consciousness" of the individual writer: "All successful poets," he says, "have tracked the path of transcending. They start from what the eyes see, or the hands feel, or the ears hear, and they travel into space and time and direct their focus on to the beyond." He says elsewhere that the expressions of poetry spring out of the ecstasy of mutual union of a lively heart and vigilant mind (1971). Whether the writer is lying or sitting, he says, eyes open or closed, when the mind is deep in silence within and the impulse of speech is lively, then that writer's expressions will display great comprehension. That is, there will be a profound value of connectedness between the surface values of life and the more profound ones at their depth. When poetry arises from the depths of awareness it will inspire life (1972c). That is, its flow will stimulate a similar flow of life in the listener and enliven various levels of the listener's consciousness, a point that will be elaborated more fully in the next section.

It is interesting to consider how modern poets perceive the mechanics of the creative process. In a poem entitled "Poetics," the American poet A. R. Ammons looks at a birch tree and observes how a poem emerges from his intention to make that tree come alive to the reader (1972). He says:

I look for the way
things will turn
out spiralling from a center,
the shape
things will take to come forth in

With a form that imitates the process of ideas "spiralling from a center," Ammons moves around this idea, taking it up again and again as his poem considers from what "wells of possibility / how a thing will / unfold." The "wells of possibility" may mean more than the mere imaginative resources of the poet. This is finally suggested by the last stanza in which the poet finds himself

not so much looking for the shape
as being available
to any shape that may be
summoning itself
through me
from the self not mine but ours.

(p. 199)

When Ammons indicates that the self from which the poem arises is not only his self but a self held in common by all, he is suggesting that his inner self is tapping a larger Self at his source. Ammons' ideas place him in that tradition we call Emersonian, not because Ammons is imitating Emerson or has derived his poetics from him, but because Ammons understands his own experience of the creative process in a way that is similar to Emerson's. Emerson wrote in "The Poet," for example, that "poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings, and attempt to write them down . . ." (1844/1987, p. 1070).
The poet arrives at the perfect combination of sound and sense, truth and music, whenever, Emerson says, he is “so finely organized” that he can hear them with his inner ear. The phrase “so finely organized” suggests the refinement of the nervous system that results from repeated experiences of pure consciousness that allow an individual to “see into the life of things” or appreciate reality from that level. Robert Browning expresses a similar recognition of the deepest structures of consciousness, an “inmost centre” hemmed in by the gross flesh, as the source of truth:

Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe:
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness; and around
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception—which is truth;
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Blinds it, and makes all error; and, “to know”
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendor may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without. Watch narrowly
The demonstration of a truth, its birth,
And you trace back the effluence to its spring
And source within us, where broods radiance vast,
To be elicited ray by ray, as chance
Shall favour...

(Paracelsus, 1835/1906, p. 54)

Browning observes that his language and insights, “the effluence,” can be traced back to its radiant “spring and source within us.” Without a technique for systematically eliciting such experiences, Browning recognizes that they come only “as chance shall favour.”

These ideas raise several issues. In order for a writer spontaneously to experience pure consciousness, that writer’s consciousness must be, if even temporarily, “finely organized,” that is, in a state of balance and subtlety. This means that the writer is functioning at a level of the mind that is deeper and more integrated than usual, a level closer to the intelligence and organizing power of the unified field of natural law. At this level, the writer’s consciousness would necessarily be broader, more comprehensive, and holistic. The writing emerging from this level would reflect these qualities, as well as being better crafted, since the skills the writer had developed would be functioning optimally at subtler, more holistic levels of awareness. It follows from this that writers with ready access to the unified field of consciousness within would produce works exhibiting these qualities. Writers without spontaneous access to their Self would do well to cultivate the ability to have it, since it is the experience of the source of order and intelligence that brings these qualities into the mind and body of the experiencer, purifying, refining, and balancing the nervous system.

Maharishi frequently notes that the essential force of a work of literature lies in the purity of the writer’s consciousness (1975b). If one’s awareness is finely attuned to the unified field, he says, one is able to express broad comprehension in very compact expressions; one can suggest the “ocean in a drop.” The greatness of poetry depends partly upon the writer’s skill and partly upon the depth of consciousness from which it springs, upon how deep and lively the writer’s level of consciousness is (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1970a; 1971).
When you talk of simplicity of expressions, of great comprehension contained in literature, then we know it must come out of consciousness. . . . What makes a beautiful literary piece is spontaneity of rhyme, orderliness, greater comprehension, compactness. When all these beautiful qualities are found together, they inspire every phase of speech, every phase of thinking, every phase of intellect, every phase of perception, every phase of activity. (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1976)

Maharishi explains that one radiates the quality of one's consciousness or inner silence (1970a, 1972d). The bliss experienced at subtle levels of the mind, a bliss that is non-verbal or non-graphic, is readily perceptible in an artist or writer's work. In fact, Maharishi observes, artists' or writers' states of consciousness can be deduced from their work by a viewer whose consciousness is sufficiently highly evolved to be functioning on subtle levels of the mind.

When the writer's consciousness is functioning on subtle levels, it follows that writing will flow spontaneously, as Emerson and others have observed. Maharishi often comments that great literature is not belabored, but is the spontaneous outburst of awareness of the connectedness of all the different forms and phenomena of creation with that level of consciousness from which they arise. The poet, he says, writes as he feels, as spontaneously as he breathes, even without his knowing it (1971, 1975b, 1976). This is not to denigrate the importance of learning the skill or craft of writing. In fact, Maharishi emphasizes the necessity of learning the particular skills of one's art so that the maximum amount of creativity can be expressed through them. He also adds that even though one might devote one's time to developing a skill to perfection, there is not enough time in life also to develop all the other skills necessary to a fulfilled and successful life. If one develops one's consciousness at the same time that one is specializing in a skill, one will simultaneously culture success and fulfillment on many levels of life (1970a).

The school of phenomenological criticism also emphasizes the importance of the author's consciousness and discusses its effect on the reader's consciousness. Its methodology is based on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. When Husserl begins his phenomenological method by turning away from the external world to examine the contents of consciousness alone and thereby arrive at an absolute notion of essences, he is attempting to begin from the inner certainties of consciousness (see Lentricchia, 1980). The phenomenological method is therefore attempting to be a science of consciousness, one that would reveal the "deep structures" of the mind—if it were practiced with similar results by everyone.

Husserl's method, however, can be shown to consist in a description of his experiences of subtle states of consciousness, not instructions on how to evoke those experiences. Therefore, his method has not been practiced with success by his followers and his approach lies open to charges of being merely intuitional and arbitrary, rather than universal and transcendent as he hoped. Similarly, the phenomenological criticism of literature attempts to open itself to the full range of the work, primarily by understanding the author's consciousness, and thus it is obviously less interested in the social questions that are so important to today's new historicists. Even without a method for refining their own consciousness, some phenomenological critics have contributed valuable insights into the writing and reading of literature, because their consciousness may have been operating naturally on subtle, intuitional levels. With a reliable technique for refining their consciousness and therefore intuition, such as the TM technique, critics could employ phenomenological criticism to better advantage and enter more fully into the consciousness of the writer.
The principle of the emergence of great art or literature from the consciousness of its author clearly places a great degree of importance upon the writer. However, in order to fully grasp and appreciate an author’s state of consciousness and its functioning in a work of literature, the reader must develop his or her own consciousness. A unified field theory of literature proposes that the development of consciousness of each reader, from high school student to critic, be a high priority in the study of literature. Before taking up this question in some detail, it would first be useful to discuss how a unified field theory of literature would describe and explain the way in which literary techniques can affect the reader’s consciousness.

The Self-Referral Mechanics of Reading

When a unified field theory of literature examines the reading process from the aspect of consciousness, it becomes evident that the essential mechanics of reading are those of self-referral. That is, the language and structure of a work will ideally direct the reader’s awareness inward to some degree, if not to the Self, at least toward the Self, toward the level of pure consciousness underlying the more active levels of the mind. This process can also be called “transcending” because in reading literature the reader’s consciousness will transcend the grosser states of awareness and settle into quieter, subtler levels of the mind. Since reading occurs with the eyes open and the intellect and emotions lively, the reader would very seldom, if ever, transcend all the way to the level of infinite silence and bliss of transcendental consciousness, as happens in the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique. However, the same term for taking the mind from gross to subtler levels is used to describe the mechanics of literature since it would seem that the same law of nature is at work.

The mechanics of literature will take the reader’s awareness inward, however, only if the text being read is of sufficient excellence and connectedness and the reader’s consciousness is trained or accustomed to turn inward. The role played by the reader’s consciousness will be discussed more fully in a later section. This section will describe some of the mechanics of transcending operative in reading literature and suggest how a unified field theory of literature can elucidate and provide a framework for understanding how these techniques affect the consciousness of the reader.

The process of self-referral can be triggered through a number of dimensions of a work. First, its meaning or themes, the truths about nature and consciousness that it describes or enacts, take readers inward as they absorb or synthesize these ideas. Second, descriptions of experiences of higher states of consciousness or insights into the source of thought reverberate in the consciousness of those who have had such experiences, reminding readers of their existence and inspiring them to take their attention toward the Self. Thirdly, the process of self-referral can function independently of meaning or inspiration, and can be produced by literary techniques that induce the reader’s awareness to transcend to finer levels of the mind or intellect in the direction of the inner silence of the Self. Such techniques include, for example, the use of gaps between elements of the text, figurative language, rhythm, harmony, and point of view, to name a few. An examination of several of these areas will illustrate the usefulness of a unified field theory of literature in understanding how literature works.
Gaps

The area of reader-response criticism explores how readers participate in creating the meaning of a work by interacting with the text (see Tompkins, 1980). “Literary texts are full of unexpected twists and turns, and frustration of expectations,” Wolfgang Iser observes. By continually positing missing connections, reviewing what has already happened in the text in the light of what has just unfolded, and dynamically reformulating the meaning, the reader brings into the play the “faculty for establishing connections—for filling in the gaps left by the text itself” (p. 55). Iser notes, “The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror,” thus recognizing the role the reader’s consciousness plays in the process. Still, Iser believes that the “oscillation between the building and the breaking of illusions” is very much like “the way in which we gather experience in life. And thus the ‘reality’ of the reading experience can illuminate basic patterns of real experience” (pp. 62, 56). This process, he claims, “does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated ... it also entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness” (1974/1980, p. 68).

Iser’s recognition of the influence the dynamical process of reading has on the reader’s consciousness, as well as the limitations of that consciousness, is very valuable. However, the gaps that Iser discusses not only provoke the mind and intellect to discover the meaning of the text, but they can act on other levels of the mind as well. With each gap or hiatus in the flow of the text, the reader is allowed or even required to turn inward for a fraction of a second in order to posit the missing connection, or simply to rest between the activity that precedes and follows the gap. That is, in the silence of gaps in the meaning of the text, or even between the lines on the page or between the words, the reader will “refer back” to the self and momentarily sink into a deeper level of consciousness. Consequently, the reading process processes the reader, adding an experiential dimension to the intellectual meaning of the work, as will be evident in the consideration of a few stanzas of a poem.

In Louis Simpson’s poem “Physical Universe,” the reader follows a wakeful husband and father around the house at dawn as he makes himself a cup of coffee and idly takes up his son’s textbook on astronomy. As the father reads, he becomes caught up in the textbook’s description of the vastness of the primordial galaxy:

“Pulled one way by its own gravity,
the other way by the sun,
it broke, forming smaller clouds,
the protoplanets. Earth
was 2000 times as wide as it is now.”

The earth was without form, and void,
and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

“Then the sun began to shine,
....”


The idea that the earth was 2000 times as wide as it is now expands the reader’s concept of the earth. The break in the poem gives the father and the reader a moment to sink inward, and the ensuing lines from Genesis seem to come from deep within memory,
as if from the void from which creation itself arose.

The next gap, which is emphasized by an asterisk, again gives the reader an opportunity to transcend. The lines from Genesis in the context of a scientific textbook on astronomy bring two different versions of the creation into the reader's awareness. As Iser observes, "the reader will strive, even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern" (1974/1980, p. 58). This gap in the text of the poem allows readers a moment to dive into their consciousness and bring the two contrasting ideas into some sort of relationship. Simpson allows his readers to enjoy this moment of self-referral and lets the silence speak for itself. When the poem resumes, the story of creation is underway and the poet brings us back to the present moment.

The gaps between the stanzas are clearly part of the logic of the poem and allow its readers to transcend the surface value of the words to some extent, settle into, and more profoundly experience the poem's deeper questions on the nature of reality. Simpson says he chooses poetry rather than prose in which to develop his narratives because he feels that the movement of the poetic line can express more feeling than prose. He wants to "increase understanding, by touching the springs of nature," by a "writing that penetrates beneath the surface to currents of feeling and thought" (1980/1982, p. 413). That, for Simpson, is realism—a realism that is perhaps at the opposite pole of contemporary poetry from A. R. Ammons—yet his work achieves the same goal: at its best it leads the reader's awareness inward.

Through form and meaning, Louis Simpson's poem swings the reader's awareness from abstract to concrete, from the vastness of the galaxies to the father sitting at his kitchen table early Tuesday morning on the seventh of July; it moves the reader's awareness from outer to inner, from inner to outer, from activity to rest and back again. Maharishi explains that as literature swings the awareness from abstract to concrete, it sharpens the intellect and cultures the emotions:

The whole personality gets refined because there is first a very concrete appreciation of something. Then there is a very abstract appreciation immediately after that. And this expands emotions and intellect, expands awareness. . . . And the more these opposite values are put together in an expression, the more literary it becomes and the more cultural value there is in it. Literature cultures emotions, cultures speech, cultures intellect, cultures the whole personality. This is its value.

This is precisely what happens with greater speed in Transcendental Meditation. Awareness expands, immediately expands to unboundedness, becomes abstract. Then immediately it becomes concrete on a thought. Immediately it expands, immediately it contracts. This contraction and abstraction, contraction and expansion, contraction and expansion, at quick intervals, develops a universal value in individual existence.

Literature, remaining on the gross [level of awareness], shakes awareness from contractions to expansions, from expansions to contractions, from contractions to expansions. This is the fruit of the study of literature. All display of creative intelligence, all the value that we have in transcending, emerging from the transcendent into the relative, getting to the transcendent from the relative, emerging from the transcendent to the relative, awareness going back and forth—the same phenomenon is available to quite a great extent in the study of literature. (1974)

As Maharishi explains, the study of literature can enhance the evolution of consciousness. In addition, the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique can greatly enhance the reader's response to literature, since it improves readers' ability to transcend when the text encourages them to do so. The principle of awareness swinging from concrete to
abstract provides insights into how other literary techniques, such as figurative language, affect the reader's consciousness and thereby complement the intellectual experience of a work.

Figurative language

Symbols too swing the reader's awareness from the concrete object to the deeper ideas they evoke. Similarly, the terms of a metaphor encourage the reader to transcend to a subtler, more intuitive, holistic level of consciousness in order to connect the disparate objects involved in the metaphor. The reader attempts to make sense of figurative speech, to look for the wholeness in it, and in so doing must move to a subtler, and therefore more unifying level of consciousness. For example, when we read Kabir's description of what lies inside a clay jug, we encounter the unexpected.

Inside this clay jug there are canyons and pine mountains,
and the maker of canyons and pine mountains!
All seven oceans are inside, and hundreds of millions of stars.
The acid that tests gold is there, and the one who judges jewels.
And the music from the strings that no one touches, and the
source of all water.
(Bly, Trans., 1980, p. 272)

What does one experience in reading these lines? The awareness moves from the surface idea of a clay jug to a more profound one. The mind naturally transcends to subtler levels of consciousness in order to make sense of the juxtaposition of a simple clay jug and the contents of the universe, both manifest ("hundreds of millions of stars") and unmanifest ("the source of all water"). The mind asks, what kind of clay jug is this? Kabir obviously isn't talking merely about looking into the mouth of a piece of pottery; he might mean another kind of clay jug. Might it be the fleshly body and nervous system inside of which is consciousness, consciousness identified with the unified field, the source of all creation? In attempting to synthesize the terms of the metaphor—and we cannot help trying to do so—awareness must transcend to more silent and holistic levels of consciousness.

The movement of awareness in the consideration of the clay jug from pottery to flesh is effortless and pleasurable, and can stir up waves of delight. The experience of new insights and the expansion of consciousness that follow such moments of self-referral or transcending are often blissful. The level of transcendental consciousness is extremely blissful, and any inward movement of the awareness toward its source is often accompanied by some degree of bliss or pleasure, which no doubt accounts for a great deal of the charm of reading.

Maharishi points out that when contrasting values are put together in one comprehensive expression then "the entire mechanics of evolution would be available there." This can only occur when the writer's "awareness is very natural . . . And when this comes on the level of meaning, it's a joy to the intellect, it results in expansion of the intellect. It is the enlivenment of the full potential of the intellect, which is a joy to one's ego" (1976).

Meaning aside, the flow of "orderly rhythmic patterns of speech" found in literature expresses the rhythms of nature. "The flow of the [reader's] consciousness moves with [this flow] and is evolved by it" (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1976). Thus the flow of rhythm in literature is of utmost importance.
Rhythm

There is, of course, a rhythmical component to all speech and writing. We recall those famous lines from *Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw’s play about the nature and uses of language, where Mr. Doolittle tries to extract some money from Professor Higgins. When Higgins asks Doolittle to explain what he wants, the ensuing conversation emphasizes the nature of rhythm and its effects:

Doolittle ["most musical, most melancholy"] I’ll tell you, Governor, if you’ll only let me get a word in. I’m willing to tell you. I’m wanting to tell you. I’m waiting to tell you.

Higgins. Pickering, this chap has a certain natural gift of rhetoric. Observe the rhythm of his native woodnotes wild. "I’m willing to tell you: I’m wanting to tell you: I’m waiting to tell you." Sentimental rhetoric! thats the Welsh strain in him (II).

This illustration of the natural rhythms that can be found in prose contains something of the more musical and flowing rhythms of poetry.

When discussing rhythm and harmony in poetry, English teachers frequently cite Alexander Pope’s lines to the poet that illustrate their meaning by their own variation, first of sounds and then of rhythms:

The sound must seem an Echo to the sense:
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when the loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
When Ajax strives some rock’s vast weight to throw,
The line too labours, and the words move slow;
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o’er th’ unbending corn, and skims along the main.


Pope’s lines illustrate how different sounds and rhythmic stresses in the line can cause the lines to echo or recreate the action being described.

Poetry is written for the ear, even the silent ear, and the accent of the words in the line adds a dimension of meaning to the poetry that is subtle yet very real. A. R. Ammons compares a poem to a walk because, he says, a poem is not just a mental activity, it has body, rhythm, feeling, sound, and mind, conscious and subconscious. The pace at which a poet walks (and thinks), his natural breath-length, the line he pursues, whether forthright and straight or weaving and meditative, his whole “air,” whether of aimlessness or purpose—all these things and many more figure into the “physiology” of the poem he writes. . . . [The poem] may be lumbering, clipped, wavering, tripping. . . . It can’t be extracted and contemplated. It is non-reproducible and non-logical . . . . There is only one way to know it and that is to enter into it (1967/1982, pp. 5, 6).

All types of rhythms, whether of prose or poetry, affect the consciousness of the listener, who is “walked” by the rhythm of the language.

In a consideration of the differences in rhythm between the Rig Veda and the Sama Veda, Maharishi shows that the chanting of a verse, first in the style of Rig and then in the style of Sama Veda, illustrates the ways rhythm and sound are used in poetry not
only to enhance the meaning of the words, but to give the listener a direct experience of waves of consciousness as they spread into creation (1972b). Maharishi explains that the mechanics of the evolutionary process go through phases of rest and activity. Great literature is “the spontaneous flow of life in letters” and in its flow, it “brings the Self, the unmanifest Self, pure consciousness, unbounded awareness, in flow” with it. Specifically, when the rhythm of activity and rest is found on the levels of rhythm, meaning, and sound in a piece of literature, while at the same time the writer is bringing two very contrasting values together, then the reader’s consciousness can really flow with the flow of the literature:

All three things [rhythm, meaning, and sound] come together when consciousness is trained to flow in all these three values, and then that flow is the flow of evolution. Literature is a very, very beautiful field and the teachers of literature have only to lead their students to increase their ability to have this comprehension of great contrasting values close together, and this naturally develops through the practice of Transcendental Meditation. (1976)

William Butler Yeats also writes of how rhythm deeply affects consciousness, but not only those “energetic rhythms, as of a man running,” he says, but those “wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of the imagination, that neither desires nor hates, because it has done with time, and only wishes to gaze upon some reality, some beauty…. He describes how rhythm affects consciousness and therefore can prolong the poet’s creative moments:

The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state … in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols. (1900/1961, p. 159)

Yeats describes being poised in a state that resembles both waking and sleeping, where the awareness apparently lies close to the state of pure consciousness and can readily perceive symbols emerging into the more conscious mind. He writes in his autobiography:

I know now that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind. (1924/1965, pp. 182-183)

Here Yeats recognizes that poetry comes from the “buried self” and through the use of rhythm, among its other techniques, allows the consciousness of the reader to linger in that state and experience the “crisis” that joins that age-long memoried self to the trivial daily mind.

Not all the rhythms of nature or poetry are always accessible to all listeners. For there to be a perfect transmission of meaning, the consciousness of the listener must be at least as refined as that of the writer who created the verses.

Narrative techniques

Narrative techniques, such as authorial intrusion, can also lead the consciousness of the reader to deeper levels of the mind. For example, when the voice of the author breaks into a story and interrupts the illusion, the reader turns inward, remembering self, place,
and feeling. The modern British novelist John Fowles shows us his character in a moment of contemplation, and then speaks in his own voice: "Charles did not know it, but in those brief poised seconds above the waiting sea, in that luminous evening silence broken only by the waves' quiet wash, the whole Victorian Age was lost. And I do not mean he had taken the wrong path" (1969/1970, p. 63, emphasis added). In breaking in on the illusion of the fictional world, Fowles gives his readers pause and creates a moment of self-referral as they step outside the flow of the narrative and are reminded of their own existence.

One of the most important techniques in fiction is that of point of view. A novel is often told from the point of view of one of the characters, and the reader knows little that the character doesn't know. This gives the reader an opportunity to share the character's world-view and then, as the character's boundaries are expanded, so are the reader's. Jane Austen's novel Emma is brilliantly constructed to lead the reader to identify with Emma and see relationships as she does. Although Austen gives plenty of evidence that Emma is interpreting events as she chooses, evidence that is pointedly obvious on a later reading, the first-time reader innocently shares Emma's illusions that the match she is making between her friend Harriet and Mr. Elton is proceeding well.

When Mr. Elton unexpectedly proposes to Emma, her illusions are shattered. She is mortified to realize that she had misconstrued his past actions because she wished to see them as attentions to Harriet and that he had mistaken her friendliness for interest. Self-knowledge finally dawns and Austen's Emma is too intelligent and open-hearted to blame anyone but herself: "If she had so misinterpreted his feelings, she had little right to wonder that he, with self-interest to blind him, should have mistaken her's [sic]" (1816/1972, p. 93). Austen constructs her novel so that the reader shares Emma's growth of self-knowledge. Since Emma is intelligent and charming, the reader is drawn into an easy identification with her and begins to see the world as she does. When Emma learns from her mistakes, so does the reader. Each wave of self-knowledge that Austen creates for her character acts to turn her reader inward.

Readers must realize that along with Emma they have been mistaken and must judge for themselves. By the end of the novel, Emma is wiser and the reader is more vigilant, taking note of Austen's clues and turning reflectively back onto the self to consider them in the light of personal judgment, past events, and the like. Austen's novel gives her readers a powerful experience of self-referral as they frequently refer back to themselves to realize that each event is just a fictional possibility and that the reading process itself is the only reality. She shakes her readers out of a controlled illusion and gradually teases them inward toward self-knowledge, toward the authentic Self.

Self-referral appears to be the most basic experience in the reading process. It takes the reader beyond the surface levels of a work, from concrete imagery to more holistic levels of inner awareness. Many other evolutionary processes are also at work in literature. In fiction, for example, the reader may identify with one or more of the characters, going from sympathy to empathy as one sees oneself in the character. This process engages readers on the level of the ego and the emotions, and their consciousness expands along with the character's as the character goes through stages of learning, maturation, and the evolution of consciousness. If the writer brings out the transcendental aspects of a character's consciousness, then readers can also perceive the Self in that character, and thus grow in the qualities of refined cosmic consciousness. Or if the writer evokes the deepest levels of the natural world, the reader can appreciate a unity between the Self.
within and the Self in nature, and thus grow toward unity consciousness. Maharishi explains:

This is because no matter what state of existence, it breathes in the process of evolution. . . . beautiful existence, static existence, flowing existence—it breathes in the process of evolution. And because, as we have already seen, every literary impulse is in tune with the evolutionary process, so when a cultured mind looks at a thing, what he sees is the quantum mechanical level of the object, what he sees is that unmanifest level of the object where all the laws of nature are functioning, and he sees that all the laws of nature are taking existence to a higher level.

So it's the comprehensive vision of a poet or a literary writer that sees, not the surface structure of it, so much as he sees the mechanics involved in its evolution. And that is why, no matter what one sees . . . one sees evolution there, and because evolution is one's own nature, in everything one sees one's own nature, and this reference to the self makes everything enjoyable. So the study of literature would even go so far as to develop unity consciousness (1976).

By a "cultured mind" Maharishi means the developed or "cultured" consciousness of one who has been practicing the TM technique and evolving to the level where it is possible to see the Self and the mechanics of evolution in the world of experience. Such a mind would indeed deeply enjoy reading.

The Joy of Reading

Since works of literature employ description, characters, sound, rhythm, ideas, associations and, in fact, relate to all aspects of life, they necessarily engage all the levels of the mind. A work of literature evokes the experience of the sensory level of life through describing material objects and evoking their image on the inward eye. The reader is also affected by the sounds of the words, even the silent sounds that enter the mind on the madhyama level of speech. Similarly, the finest level of feeling is stirred by literature, and the ego or individual self of the reader is engaged in the work as the writer arouses love or sympathy with the characters presented. The writer allows readers to share in the experience or vision, to create and discover it for themselves, so that it becomes each reader's own experience.

The most important level of the mind that a work of literature can enliven is the level of the Self or unified field, and this it does by inducing the reader, through its various techniques—gaps, figurative language, narrative techniques, and so forth—to transcend in the direction of the Self. As a result of enlivening all the levels of the mind and directing the awareness inward, a great work of literature can integrate and refine the consciousness of a reader who is open to it. Since experiences of subtler levels of the mind are increasingly blissful, the joy of reading becomes more intense as the work stimulates more self-referral. According to Maharishi, the experience of happiness is an indication that one's life is on an evolutionary track; pain and suffering are indications of the opposite, that one's life is out of tune with evolution (1969; 1972a).

Eminent American critic J. Hillis Miller speaks movingly of the joy of reading. His understanding of the reading experience emphasizes both the value of literature in triggering that joy and the recognition that this joy comes from deep within the consciousness of the reader:

To speak of the joy of reading will remind some of Roland Barthes's "plaisir du texte."

But I have in mind more specifically the powerful uses of the word in the Romantic period,
not only in Schiller's "Ode to Joy" but Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," where the "shaping spirit of Imagination" gives that "Joy" which is "Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower," "the spirit and the power / Which wedding Nature gives to us in dower / A new Earth and new Heaven." And I have in mind Wordsworth's "Surprised by joy—impatient as the wind," where a sudden inrush of joy can make the poet forget even the sorrow of his daughter's death and turn instinctively to "share the transport" of his joy with her, forgetting that she is "deepburied in the silent tomb." For me, the joy of reading, when it comes, is something like Wordsworth's sudden joy: surprising, unpredictable both in its nature and in its possible effects, a break in time, in that sense anarchic, a dissolution of preexisting orders, the opening of a sense of freedom that is like a new earth and a new heaven, an influx of power. The joy of reading is in this sense apocalyptic. It has to do with transfiguration and the end but also has to do with a momentary lapse of the fear of death. (1986, p. 2)

Hillis Miller's beautiful description of his experience illustrates not only the joy of reading, but its ability to change consciousness. Wordsworth's "sudden joy" and Miller's "joy of reading" both have "to do with transfiguration and the end."

As the process of reading great literature swings the awareness from the concrete to the abstract, the reader's awareness transcends to subtler levels of the mind. Since the body responds to the activity of the mind, literature must affect the reader's physiology. There must therefore be a physiological explanation for the joy and transformation reading apparently produces. Psychologists have begun to examine the behavior of the autonomic nervous system corresponding to psychological processes, such as reading or listening to music. The autonomic nervous system has two aspects, the sympathetic system which governs arousal and activity, and the parasympathetic which governs rest and renewal. It might be expected that activities such as reading would decrease all sympathetic activity (e.g., heart rate, skin conductance, etc.) but this is not exactly the case.

Lacey and his colleagues observed that when subjects were closely attending to an engaging set of aural stimuli their heart rates slowed, whereas when subjects were performing arithmetic tasks, their heart rates increased (Lacey, Kagan, Lacey, & Moss, 1963). Lacey also found that the "empathic listening" produced a pattern of cardiac deceleration accompanied by increasing skin conductance, indications of physiological rest along with mental alertness.

Similarly, in a study of reading involvement, Angelotti, Behnke and Carlile (1975) measured the heart rates of teenagers as they rested and then silently read either three pages of history or three pages of fiction, both structured so that the first page contained the exposition or introductory material, the second the highlight or major issue, and the third the conclusion. They found a striking difference between the two experiences: the reading of fiction was associated with a significant drop in the students' heart rates, from 94 beats per minute to 89, t(19) = 6.18, p < .01, while the reading of history was associated with a drop in heart rate of only one beat per minute (n.s.). The authors conclude that since autonomic activity appears to reflect the degree to which reading involves the reader, the reading of fiction apparently generates more "involvement" than the reading of historical material.

These changes in autonomic activity suggest that "empathic listening" and "involved reading" effect changes in the reader's physiology in the direction of those produced by the Transcendental Meditation technique, though not nearly of the same magnitude. Physiological and psychological research on the TM technique has found that transcending is associated with a state of "restful alertness" (Wallace, 1970). This state is characterized by
reduced heart rate, oxygen consumption, metabolic rate, and respiration rate, together with increased EEG coherence (see Chalmers, Clements, Schenkluhn, & Weinless, in press; D. W. Orme-Johnson & Farrow, 1977; Badawi et al., 1984; D. W. Orme-Johnson, 1977). Thus, "involved reading" apparently creates a physiological state similar to, although not as profound as that created by the practice of TM. Since transcending is a blissful process, this could account for the joy experienced during reading. 

Similarly, the regular experience of transcending through the TM technique promotes individual growth or evolution of consciousness in the direction of greater intelligence (Aron, D. W. Orme-Johnson, & Brubaker, 1981; Tjoa, 1975), better mental and physiological health (D. W. Orme-Johnson, 1987; Wallace, Dillbeck, Jacobe, & Harrington, 1982), and increased creativity (Travis, 1979), and produces a wide spectrum of physiological and psychological benefits (see Wallace, 1986 for a comprehensive review). The experience of transcending regularly through the TM technique promotes not only cognitive and physiological evolution, but appears to enhance growth toward a higher level of principled moral reasoning as well (Nidich, Ryncarz, Abrams, Orme-Johnson, & Wallace, 1983). The process of transcending to deeper levels of consciousness while reading may also be the physiological basis for whatever cognitive or moral transformation readers might experience when reading great literature.

Shelley insists in the conclusion to his Defence of Poetry that poetry produces elevating and delightful "evanescent visitations" which are

experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imaginations; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire. The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship is essentially linked with these emotions. . . . (1840)

T. S. Eliot would agree. He writes that literature "affects us as entire human beings; it affects our moral and religious existence" (1935/1967, p. 350). However, since both Eliot and Shelley imply in their writing that only a well-developed consciousness can fully respond to literature and thus be humanized by it, it would appear that only those already virtuous would be made more so by their study of literature. Maharishi makes the same point: only those with "cultured minds," he says, can see the Self in the play of literature. What of the rest of the reading public with a less evolved moral consciousness, less delicate sensibility, or less enlarged imagination? This brings us to the role of readers and their consciousness in the response to the literary experience.

The Reader: Knowledge is Structured in Consciousness

The state of the reader's consciousness is clearly an essential component in the literary communication process. A great writer may create a work of literature that presents the dynamics of life and the mechanics of consciousness as they express themselves in nature and society, yet the reader may not understand or respond to them as fully as the writer might hope. Inasmuch as any work of literature is a microcosm, a recreation of the world or nature and experience, its meanings can be as varied and multiple, and even as incomprehensible or contradictory as life itself often appears to be.

The various modern critical approaches that analyze meaning or literary form and technique arise from divergent understandings of the mechanics of consciousness and conse-
quently seem fragmented and contradictory. No one critical theory has yet been able to satisfy all temperaments and points of view. However, a unified field based theory of literature can bring the various critical strategies into a harmonious rapprochement by connecting them to a theory of consciousness and nature derived from Maharishi's Vedic Science, one which is not only substantiated by psychological research but open to validation by direct experience.

For example, myth or archetypal criticism argues that certain recurring literary events represent universal patterns of consciousness. Yet to many this criticism seems speculative, unrelated to either experimental research or social realities, and unconcerned about the differences between literature and other cultural artifacts. However, we can think of the primary patterns that myth critics discover in a work as reflecting the principles of consciousness. In this light a consideration of how these primary patterns manifest into story and song would aid the myth critic in not only identifying but interpreting and relating them to the framework of modern science and human experience. An example of one such pattern will suggest how the archetypal method may be enriched by a unified field based approach to theory and criticism.

The literary pattern of travel to the land of the dead is found in Virgil, Apuleius, Dante, and numerous other classical and medieval authors. In their works, a character enters another world in a quest for knowledge that will transcend sense perception and then returns to the everyday world at a higher level of integration. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas descends through a cave guided by the Cumean sybil in order to reach the underworld and discover there the route to the site on which he is to found his city. There he learns...

"...a soul within sustains the heaven
and earth, the plains of water, and the gleaming
 globe of the moon, the Titan sun, the stars;
and mind, that pours through every member, mingles
with that great body."

(Mandelbaum, Trans., 1972, p. 156)

He learns what his destiny will be and sees the souls of future generations. With this knowledge he returns to the world of activity and finds what will become the Roman Empire. Similarly, Psyche, the heroine of the Cupid and Psyche story within Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, descends into the underworld on her quest to be reunited with her divine husband. Psyche gets the boon she seeks, Platonic Beauty or Being, and returns, Apuleius says, greatly enlivened (*longue vegetior, Met. XI.20*). As a result of her descent, Soul is then reunited with Cupid and raised to immortality and eternal bliss.

Modern novels exhibiting this pattern may show a character descending instead into a cave or canyon, or diving into a lake. These descents are typically effortless penetrations into a dark and mysterious realm, which suggests the depths of their consciousness since they yield self-knowledge of a profound intuitive kind and they usually result in a personal transformation that brings greater power and success to the character. The pattern of descent into another world followed by a life-enhancing return thus metaphorically depicts the transcending process, the natural dive of conscious awareness toward its source, the field of pure intelligence or the Self (see R. Orme-Johnson, 1982). The knowledge and experience of transcending to the unified field of consciousness adds an important dimension to the archetypal critic's interpretation of this pattern and brings...
the insights derived from the archetypal approach into a meaningful relationship with the reader's own life.

What may distinguish a "great" work of literature from a mediocre one, or one that is not literature at all, might be that it takes the reader through a beneficial transformation of awareness. The role of criticism, then, would be to satisfy the reader's intellect by discovering how the form, meaning, and techniques of the work affect consciousness. Yet, for any critical approach to yield results, the critic or reader must be at least as highly evolved as the writer, if not more so. If critics do not have broad comprehension, true objectivity, and a profound sense of the evolutionary nature of life, then their reading may be subject to the boundaries of their consciousness, time, culture, and gender. Maharishi notes that:

When we want to analyze an expression, we can do justice to the writer of the expression and to our method of analysis only if we are completely impartial to what we have in front of us, and we can only afford to be impartial when our level of consciousness is exactly the level of consciousness of the writer. If our level of consciousness is higher than the writer's then we'll have an analysis of his writing on a much brighter level, on a much grander level. If our level of consciousness is much lower, we'll try to understand his meaning and his expression, but we'll not be able to come up to the writer. Therefore the analyzers or the literary critics have to have at least the level of consciousness of the writer. Otherwise, they don't do justice to him. (1976)

Although one will not know what the writer's level of consciousness is, Maharishi goes on to say that it will always be beneficial for the reader to have a higher level than the writer, "because then he'll derive greater inspiration, he'll derive greater charm and greater meaning, and he'll derive inspired evolution through whatever he reads" (1976).

Hermeneutic critic E.D. Hirsch, Jr., touches on the issue of broad comprehension when he advises the critic to reconstruct the text in terms of the conventions and ways of seeing that must have governed the writer's "meanings" (1967). Whereas readers of a later time may assign various "significances" that were clearly not foreseen by the original text, there would nonetheless be a meaning that the author intended and that must be related to the various significances that later readers discover in it. Although Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance is a useful one, we can question whether it is possible really to know a contemporary author's meaning, let alone one from the past, if readers' comprehension is limited by the boundaries that their time and culture inevitably impose. It would seem that the obstacles of translating readers into another era are nearly insurmountable. When we look now, for example, at Michelet's Roman History or his History of France, we see that they are distinctly stamped by the Romantic world view, in spite of the fact that Michelet believed he was being objective and conveying to his readers the reality of the past.

The state of the reader's consciousness, how broad or how bounded it might be, is therefore crucial in the interpretation of literature. Readers who have never experienced pure consciousness, had glimpses of higher states of consciousness, or known of their existence would be unable to understand references to these states and might take them to be merely fanciful or primarily metaphysical speculation. Readers not accustomed to transcending inward might not be particularly moved by the opportunities for self-referral that a text provides and might be resistant to interpretations that are based on an unfamiliar dimension of experience—cognitive or emotional.
Lastly, and most importantly, critics or readers can not achieve true objectivity and go beyond the limits of their own cultural prejudices until they have developed the ability to take their awareness beyond the limits of the small self and learned to identify their conscious mind with “the self-referral unified field, the fountainhead of all the streams of activity in nature” (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1986, p. 97). Only when they have directly experienced the unified field and know themselves to be “one with the one essential reality” will they begin to understand the relationship of the parts of life with the wholeness of life.

A unified field theory of literature, then, describes how literature affects consciousness and assists in the development and refinement of the reader's awareness. Thus the interpretation and study of literature must begin with these considerations and conclude with their implications for the teaching of literature.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

The ideas and techniques operative in literature lie ready but dormant, awaiting a creative interaction with both the teacher's consciousness and the student's. The quality of any student's consciousness influences the quality of their response to literature and to the guidance of the teacher. The quality of the teacher's consciousness determines their response to literature, to criticism, and to the students in the classroom. Developing the self-referral state of consciousness of both student and teacher is therefore a necessary consideration in improving the learning experience.

Teaching and Learning

Students can be taught to recognize symbols, metaphors, or archetypes, but can they be taught to respond to them? If students have a well-developed capacity for self-referral, for transcending the gross surface levels of mental activity in the direction of their own unbounded inner silence, then the images and symbols in a work will strike deeply, and its literary techniques will lead their awareness to subtler levels. It is on these levels that words and ideas can gently expand the boundaries of their thought and feeling and lead them to new holistic perceptions and experiences of their inner selves.

If students fail to "get anything out of" the great works of literature, teachers try to lead them into a work through an understanding and appreciation of its historical or cultural milieu, introduce relevant aspects of the writer's personality or life experience, appeal to images and analogies from the sciences and from the other arts, or provoke the student to enter into the experience of the characters by acting them out—all valuable classroom techniques, but insufficient to take "insensitive" readers beyond the surface levels of their minds to the deeper regions within.

Maharishi says that teachers offer their students a river of knowledge, but if drops from a waterfall splash on hard rocks and evaporate, they fail to reach their goal; if a student's consciousness is not flexible and open, it will be impervious to the teacher's guidance and knowledge (1974). Maharishi emphasizes that it is the teacher's responsibility to not only give knowledge, but increase the students' receptivity to knowledge. "The best education," he says, "will cultivate a habit of working from that totality of natural law, that
field which is our own transcendental consciousness, our own unbounded awareness” (1986, p. 98). This is substantiated by research on the TM technique in educational settings showing improvements in concept learning (Dillbeck, D. W. Orme-Johnson, & Wallace, 1981), intelligence (Aron et al., 1981; Tjoa, 1975), creativity (Travis, 1979), basic academic skills (Nidich, Nidich, & Rainforth, in press), and academic performance (Kember, 1985).

When students learn the Transcendental Meditation technique, they learn to transcend on a daily basis. They would gain the ability to take their awareness from gross to subtle layers of consciousness more frequently when a text they were reading offered an opportunity to do so. Some students appear to be more sensitive to literature; they intuitively understand and are deeply affected by it. Others are not so fortunate. Perhaps the problem lies not in their “insensitivity” but in the quality of their consciousness, a situation that is easily remedied. Maharishi comments:

Literature, as we said, is the flow of consciousness. It’s a flow of life, and one could enjoy the flow of life if the awareness which actually flows is really crystal clear, fluid. On a frozen consciousness, on a frozen level of consciousness, the flow is not available. Stressed minds can hardly flow ... so to be a good student of literature so that what one studies becomes an inspiration for evolution, one should practice Transcendental Meditation, which releases stresses and strains from consciousness, leaves consciousness pure and crystalline and fluid and flowing. Since we know literature to be the flow of consciousness, the flow of life, the flow of nature, the flow of infinity, totality, then we have to study it on the ground of that infinite, unbounded, total value of consciousness. (1976)

Maharishi suggests that teachers begin by telling their students about the mechanics of studying literature, how to analyze, compare, and evaluate. Then they should tell them that:

all these different values in the structure of literature are all contained in a particular expression on the basis of the consciousness of the writer. And all these great writers ... had very natural, very simple, very all-comprehensive awareness. From that level they have spoken, and in order to do justice to their expressions, students should at least have the level of consciousness of those great writers. (1976)

Students should be aware that “literature is a path in which pure consciousness flows, and it flows on both levels, sound and meaning, comprehending the entirety of the value of consciousness, the value of life.” A. R. Ammons urges a similar point in the teaching of poetry:

... I would suggest you teach that poetry leads us to the unstructured sources of our beings, to the unknown, and returns us to our rational, structured selves refreshed. ... Poetry is a verbal means to a non-verbal source. It is a motion to no-motion, to the still point of contemplation and deep realization,... (1967/1982, p. 8)

Secondly, Maharishi points out that if students don’t have pure consciousness available during the reading process, then instead of flowing in and out with the literary work they will be trying instead to apply the principles the teacher gave them. They’ll be “laboring more than getting into that natural impulse of evolution, which is the potentiality of a literary piece” and will quickly become very tired. If the students’ consciousness is pure and flexible, it will be able to fathom deeper meanings and understand the mechanics operating in the literature in a very relaxed way. As the consciousness of the student flows
with "the flow of the words, with the orderly and rhythmic flow of the rhymes, of the
couplets," he says, "the student gets refreshed. . . . The study of literature is evolutionary.
It'll take away all the tiredness that the student may have" (1976).

In this context it is interesting to refer once more to J. Hillis Miller's remarks on the
joy of reading. Miller cites his own joy in reading the poetry of Francis Ponge and men­
tions in an aside that "No doubt this is partly because of my freedom from obligation
toward Ponge or to teach Ponge" (1986, p. 2). In other words, Miller's joy is due in part
to his being able to approach Ponge's poetry without laboring under specific motivations
(How will I teach this? What will I write about here? What does this have to do with
my other work?) that would interfere with his experience of the work.

Since great literature affects the consciousness of its readers and adds, to whatever degree,
to the improvement of human life and society, then questions of what to teach and how
to teach it are very relevant. Critical theorists have brought to teachers' awareness that
they have a point of view, implicit or explicit, and that this point of view governs not
only choices of critical and pedagogical approaches to literature, but what literature they
select for their students to read. A unified field theory of literature can contribute to these
issues and to a much needed revitalization of purpose and direction in the teaching of
the humanities.

**Revitalizing the Canon**

Editors and publishers of recent editions of the standard anthologies have begun to create
a more balanced canon, rescuing many previously ignored treasures from our cultural
heritage in the process. Questions of ethnic balance or balance in the area of gender,
however, are not the only ones. Each anthologist has a particular point of view on life
and preferences for particular styles of writing. For example, if an editor believes that
life is a difficult affair fraught with suffering and tragedy, which man can only heroically
endure until death brings some kind of dignified release, then that editor may select writers
who share this view or select similar works by other writers even though they may not
be wholly representative of those writers' work.

There has been a very noticeable prejudice over the last hundred years in favor of so­
called naturalistic fiction and poetry in anthologies. Editors have consistently selected
works that portray life as depressing, degraded, and hopeless, not necessarily a true pic­
ture of reality, but certainly life as they themselves see it, and they have favored those
genres most congenial to naturalistic writing and eschewed other genres, such as fantasy
or romance, in spite of their long and distinguished history.

George Sand pointed out over one hundred years ago that if our aim is to win sympathy
for the distressed, these naturalistic methods may be counterproductive:

Certain artists of our time, casting a serious look upon what surrounds them, devote themselves
to painting wretchedness, the abjectness of poverty, Lazarus's dung-heap. This may belong
to the domain of art and philosophy; but when they paint poverty so hideous and degraded,
sometimes so vicious and criminal, do they attain their end, and is the effect wholesome,
as they would have it? . . . The frightful Death, grinning and playing the fiddle in the pic­
tures of Holbein and his predecessors, did not succeed, under this aspect, in converting the
wicked and consoling the victims. Is not our literature proceeding in this somewhat like the
artists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance? (Potter, Trans., 1851/1976, pp. 3-4)
In fact, writers can only paint life as they see it, regardless of their intentions to improve it. As Emerson observes:

The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself. (1836/1987, p. 1006)

Therefore, merely adding cultural balance to anthologies will not be sufficient. As one anthologist notes:

New works must teach us how to read, or at least how not to misread, if they will truly renew cultural tradition. Only a discipline that makes a point of being aware of how it reads, and with what assumptions and intertextualities, is in a position to attempt either a broadening of literary understanding or an authentic expansion of canonical texts. (Lawall, 1986, p. 25)

In addition to broadening literary understanding through an awareness of linguistic and social contexts, the canon should expand our ability to read from the surface levels of the mind to the transcendent and to redefine both experientially and intellectually what is meant by the word “literature.”

Maharishi explains that what distinguishes a piece of literature from one that is not literature, or is inferior literature, is that in great literature the surface values being described are simultaneously unfolding the deeper truths which structure those surface values. The expressions that comprise a great work of literature will contain a wide range of meaning in a very compact way. With the element of intellectual fulfillment that accompanies such an experience go the elements of charm, beauty and harmony. Literature must evoke the total value of life, from the surface to the transcendent. The inclusion of the transcendent, Maharishi says, provides the necessary element of wholeness (1975b). Literature that has this range of meaning and beauty in its language has the ability to swing the awareness of the reader from concrete to abstract and thereby deepen the reader’s consciousness. Those pieces that have “gained the dignity of the name literature,” he says, “are those that are naturally helpful to the path of evolution” (1976).

One way that literature expresses the full range of life from its surface to its depth is by engaging all levels of existence, as we discussed earlier, and thus by “inspir[ing] every phase of speech, every phase of thinking, every phase of intellect, every phase of perception, every phase of activity” (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1976). Writings that address the intellect only, such as most philosophical or technical writing, would not be literature by this definition. If the writings of Plato or Einstein have entered into the domain of literature, it is because they speak not only to the intellect but to the emotions and the senses by their use of figurative language and other literary techniques, all of which direct the reader’s awareness inward and elicit self-referral; they do not just transfer information from mind to mind or discriminate one logical argument from another on the level of the intellect.

Forms of writing that do not address all levels of the mind from the senses to the Self may be well written but should not necessarily be called literature by this standard. Writings that primarily act upon the grosser emotions or senses, such as advertising or propaganda, promote some direction of activity but do not beneficially transform consciousness. Joyce argues a similar point in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Stephen Dedalus explains:
The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire or loathing. Desire urges us to possess, to go to something; loathing urges us to abandon, to go from something. These are kinetic emotions. The arts which excite them ... are therefore improper arts. The esthetic emotion (I use the general term) is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing. (1916/1968, p. 205)

By stasis Joyce means epiphanies, those quiescent states of consciousness, which appear to be similar to experiences produced by transcending, when the esthetic image is first conceived or perceived:

The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley’s, called the enchantment of the heart. (p. 213)

For Joyce, the aesthetic images of literature arise from epiphanies and, when read, would elicit experiences in the reader similar to those that produced them.

“Great” literature, then, as Maharishi would say, would be that which is most transformative of consciousness, which would act on the consciousness of the reader in a number of ways. It would lead the reader’s awareness inward and deliver the joy inherent in words or phrases that are beautiful, harmonious, and true, reflecting the depths and purpose of life while describing the experiences of the senses, intellect, and feelings. It would then refine the intellect and emotions of its readers and inspire them to evolve toward higher levels of consciousness. Maharishi emphasizes that literature is the highest form of speech; it is worthwhile speech. And what makes speech worthwhile is that it expresses the deeper significance of life, the purposefulness of life, the real value of life (1975b). It would, in Maharishi’s words, give expression to the unified field in every breath of daily life.

How do we know, then, if a work of literature is great? We can only judge by the effect it has upon us and upon others. As we change and as the collective consciousness changes, our perception of our own consciousness and the effects of literature will also change. Consequently, the canon will always change to reflect the collective consciousness of every age. The current debate over the canon is evidence of how rapidly collective consciousness has been changing recently, leaving curricula and anthologies lagging behind. It is important that we remain continually sensitive to our own response to what we read, and to our students’ responses, because, Maharishi points out, what we put our attention on becomes more influential in our lives; what we see, we become (1969).

The reading and teaching of great literature can complement our natural tendency to grow in consciousness. It can encourage our desire for self-knowledge, and can enliven our capacity to learn from the most highly evolved minds in our history, to enjoy and be affected by the masterpieces of our culture, those from the past and those not yet written. If we base our theory of literature on scientific research on consciousness, Maharishi’s Vedic Science, and unified field theories, we can expand our understanding of literature and deepen our experience of it. We will enlarge our critical approaches to great works of art and bring a new relevance and importance to the reading, study, and teaching of literature.

With Maharishi’s Vedic Science the study of literature can become

a process of unfolding the full potential of life, developing that pure consciousness, which
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is a field of all possibilities, the home of all the laws of nature, the home of all knowledge, the source of all expressions and all speech. Literature is a very great training for living the absolute. It's a training in every phase of living to give expression to the absolute in every phase of activity, in every impulse of speech, in every mode of mind. Literature is a very, very great field for comprehending evolutionary processes on the intellectual level and experiencing them on the level of consciousness. (1976)

A unified field based approach to literature then, in Maharishi's words, can provide "fulfillment to literature at the very basis of literature, and [make] literature a means to rise to enlightenment."

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A UNIFIED FIELD BASED THEORY OF LITERATURE


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A UNIFIED FIELD BASED THEORY OF LITERATURE

A Unified Field Theory of Literature

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Abstract

An understanding of the evolution of consciousness through seven states, as described by Maharishi's Vedic Science and corroborated by psychophysiological research and unified field theories of modern physics, provides a basis for the development of a unified field theory of literature. The cognitive and perceptual qualities that differentiate the seven states of consciousness provide a means by which experiences described in literature may be understood and appreciated. In addition, Maharishi's Vedic Science distinguishes various levels of the mind and their attributes, leading to a reappraisal of the nature of language and its relation to the speaker, to the world of experience, and to the essential components of the literary experience: a) the writer and the creative process, b) the mechanics of reading, and c) the reader's interpretation of meaning.

According to the unified field theory of literature presented here, the level of consciousness of the writer determines the quality of what is written, as well as its universality and range of influence. This theory also provides a way of understanding how the various literary techniques that are activated in the reading process affect the reader's consciousness and physiology. And finally, the degree to which the reader can discover meaning in a work is found to be directly related to the reader's state of consciousness. These considerations shed light on the major questions being discussed by literary theorists today—how the nature and function of literary study might be understood, how literature might be defined, and how the contents of standard anthologies and curricula might be determined—and provide new directions for the reading and teaching of literature.

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