IRONY, HUMOR, AND ONTOLOGICAL RELATIONALITY IN LITERATURE

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The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate ontological relationality in literary theory and criticism by critically reflecting on modern theories of literature and by practically examining the literary texts of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and Oscar Wilde. Traditional studies of literary texts have been oriented toward interpretative or hermeneutic methodologies, focusing on an independent and individual subject in literature. Instead, I explore how relational ontology uncovers the interactive structures interposed between the author, the text, and the audience by examining the system of how the author’s creative positioning provokes the reader’s reaction through the text. In Chapter I, I critically inquire into modern literary theories of "irony" in Romanticism, New Criticism, and Deconstructionism to show how they tend to disregard the dynamic dimension of interactive relationships between different literary subjects. Chapter II scrutinizes Wilde’s humor in *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) in order to reveal the ontological relationships triggered by a creative positioning. In chapter III, I examine Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400) and the laughter in "The Miller’s Tale" in particular, to examine the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of its interactive relationships. In Chapter IV, I explore *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-99), *Othello* (1603-4), and *The Winter’s Tale* (1609-11) so as to show how artistic positioning creatively constructs a relational system of dynamic interactions to circulate social ideals and values. In so doing, this dissertation is aimed at revealing the aesthetic values of literature and the objective scope of literary discourse rather than providing yet another analytical paradigm dependent primarily on a single literary
subject. Thus, the ontological study is proposed as an alternative, yet primary, dimension of literary criticism and theoretical practice.
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INTRODUCTION: DISSEMINATION IS COMMUNICATION

This dissertation argues that the ontological study of relationality should be fundamental to contemporary literary criticism and the practice of critical theory created in and around literary texts. This alternative theoretical critique seeks to formulate and frame the philosophical premises necessary for defining and identifying the ontologically relational "event" enacted between authors and readers. In so doing, this study analyzes the interactive structures or communicative systems constructed between texts and readers. The creative act of writing and reading is one that depends on rhetorical positioning, which in turn generates existential communications among the different literary agents involved in a specific space, and the proliferating interactions are expected to bring forth a progressive outcome or to uncover aesthetic values of literature. Thus, I put forward relational ontology as an alternative, yet primary, dimension of literary criticism and theoretical practice.

Modern literary discourses have been more geared toward epistemological approaches to literature—especially since the advent of deconstruction and post-structuralism in the 1960s. Epistemological approaches to literature include any inductive investigation and interpretation of a literary text based on one particular literary subject, or any methodological approach to literature based on analytical understanding or conceptualization, whether close-reading or contextual study. This theoretical tendency has dominated the critical terrain for the last half-century. But the long-lasting theoretical inclination in our age has finally been confronted with a dilemma of making contemporary critical practices oriented toward epistemology capable of generating a seemingly infinite number of interpretations without orienting them towards the aesthetic
quality of the literary texts they study. Apart from the current epistemic ideology that promotes the incessant accumulation of various critical expositions, my theoretical inquiry is geared more toward unveiling and engaging universal structures or systems of literary positioning that provoke intellectual and relational tensions between the artist and the audience.

My theoretical examination should be differentiated from conventional connotations of ontological study in literary history, which has been mainly concerned with investigating an individual literary subject or one independent self as a natural, existential entity. As an alternative, I argue that literary relational ontology should be separated from subject-based inquiries with regard to the nature of the literary text (as a piece of artwork) or the subjectivity in it. Occasionally, the existential nature or ontic becoming of an individual subject has been a primary concern of the literary ontology as critics try to answer questions like "Who is the author?" (romanticism), "What is the text?" (new criticism) or "Who is the reader?" (i.e., reader-response criticism). But my critical lens is differentiated from such "identity politics" and more focused on the connectivity of those very entities. Thus, this study is more directed toward unpacking the relational modes of existence between literary agents like author, text, and audience, and toward the dynamic interactive systems constructed so as to effectuate outcomes resulting from progressive ontological engagements between authors, readers, and texts in a concrete socio-cultural space. Rising preoccupations with texts and readers throughout the last century is no more than a critical confirmation of the fact that they are interrelated entities, not only on an epistemological level but on an ontological plane as well. Ontologically, a text is interrelated to author, readers, and its
contextual space just like a living organism in nature is interconnected with its
surroundings to grow in its full capacity.

The epistemologies of literary subjects constantly infringe on the domain of
ontology. An independent and individual subject and its existential structure (or even
"growing" and "becoming" sometimes) are often believed to be a part of traditional
ontological studies of literature. Literary critics have tried to explain a literary subject in
terms of its existential features or substances like gender or sexuality, race, class,
consciousness or unconsciousness, religious or political orientation, or any other
individual identity by analytically splitting one particular cause of a subject's action from
all the other possibilities of interconnectivity. All of these efforts, in fact, should be
considered more as epistemological studies rather than ontological ones because they
try to explicate a literary subject in relation to one particular idea, regardless of whether
they are empirically-driven or hypothesis-driven studies. But just like a plant growing in
its relation with the sun and soil, every subject in literature ontologically exists as a part
of the whole relational system, not subsisting independently in a concrete space. As a
result of failures to draw a fine line between epistemology and ontology, the study of
ontology has thus been "epistemologized" and "substancized" in the history of literature
so far. For example, new criticism is often called the ontological study of literature, and it
involves the study of textual form and structure as with a living organism. But new critics
disregard the interrelationship between text and other components of literature, such as
the reader, author, and the cultural space that brings it forth, considering it an
independent substance in fact.
Through the 1980s, as critical inquiry widened to cultural and historical spheres, the examination of the contextual connectivities around texts has come to dominate literary scholarship. But the ontological system constituted through the study of these connections has been of little interest to critics. The system is constituted around the literary text in a specific cultural/social space, where the author and the readers formulate a literary community to share certain values of the culture. First of all, it is noteworthy how Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales* bring public resonance among his readers like Thomas Hoccleve, John Lydgate, John Shirely, Stephen Surigonus and so on throughout the fifteenth century of England, or how Joseph Addison and Richard Steels create the system around the daily journal *The Spectator* and its readers in the early eighteenth century in London. More recently, as an example, we can also take into consideration the *Tel Quel* group writers and critics conditioned around the French societal and political situation in the 1960s. Moreover, such ontological systems are often constituted around a piece of literature wherever and whenever a text interconnects its author and readers, and even more commonly now, a system is built around a writer’s blog and its online community of readers in a virtual space.

Instead of exploring the dynamic relationships between the text and its sociohistorical space along with those between the author and the readers, such critical transformations toward the subjective epistemology are simply taken as good excuses to comply with the critical obligation of continually expanding the scope and range of literary discourse. As a result, the possibilities of ontological critiques based on relationality have been overlooked, though I would argue that they are a more fundamental dimension of literary study because they are related to the construction
and acknowledgement of literary aesthetic value. To compensate for this marginalization of ontology as a necessary critical tool, I argue that uncovering the relational connectivity structured by different positionings of authors and readers to produce creative interactions between them should be the first step of any ontological project and hence every critical or interpretative one. Because literary texts create tensions between readers and authors in a particular societal space, such relational ontology comprises a fundamental condition of literariness.

The dynamic system of relationality propagated through literary positioning is the fulcrum of my investigation. While ontological study favors examining the relationality of different literary subjects rather than scrutinizing the ontic status of any individuated literary entity, it remains distinctive from epistemological inquiry. The philosophical premises of relational ontology are opposed to those of epistemology. Ontology is rooted in the considerations of creative positioning that can initiate relational interactions between different agents in a particular space. Thus, first of all, the study of relational ontology espouses deductive engagement while epistemology embraces inductive reasoning, just as scientific inquiry does in general. A subject's ontological act toward another subject or object determines or causes the ensuing interactive relationship. Relationality or communicative interaction is causally affected by the initiative action of a literary agent like a character in the text, the author, or the reader. The actions resulting or interactions can be characterized as creative and aesthetic so as to produce densely populated and progressive interactions, as well as various sorts of tension, whether aesthetic or interpretative. Second, space—as opposed to time—is privileged in the study of ontological interactions as they are existentially rendered between a text and its
readers in a given specific space. Just like a physical being located in a specific space, a text is projected toward the audience in a particular social/cultural system/situation. Third, ontological positioning itself is regarded as a complete and perfected aesthetic act that can trigger the readers’ full responsiveness and resonance, whereas epistemological investigations assume imperfect and partial understandings by and of the agents involved. Thus, while such a necessarily incomplete cognitive engagement constantly produces for the epistemologist Derridean “free play,” the aesthetic possibilities underpinning the ontological act imply concrete relational possibilities. Fourth, the ontological act, imbued with causality, causes an energetic flow from the author to the reader that is expected to progressively produce aesthetic value through various interactions; therefore, interpretative and hence critical engagements may be considered progressive and productive acts. Fifth, the relational positioning of ontology involves different subjects as a single group in a given space unbounded by time, whereas epistemological cognitive engagement is rendered by individual and identifiable subjects through the duration of time. Relational ontology accounts for intention and complicated causality from those within the spatial range, and the subsequent interactions seek a particular, collective outcome rather than an individual one.

Despite the prevailing critical propensity to marginalize ontological inquiry, it has intermittently found a place in different critical movements such as new criticism and romanticism. In the case of new critics like Cleanth Brooks and John Crowe Ransom, their primary project is to uncover the ontological structures of literary texts. And to understand them as organic entities, the whole of which depends upon the inter-
relationality of their parts, just as organisms in nature. This "organicism" thus prizes the study of the relational aspects of literary texts such as irony, paradox, and tension, which are necessarily related to the intrinsic quality of the work as a whole. Though new criticism evinces an aesthetic and formalistic regard for the text, and though its practitioners never extend the boundaries of inquiry outside of the text, their critical interest in the internal relationality of various literary devices calls attention to their reliance on ontological principles. Contemporaneous philosophical movements like structuralism and logical positivism also value holistic and cohesive systems of static inner-connectivity to arrive at an aesthetic appreciation of a given system or entity. Before the new critics, structuralists, and positivists, German and British romantics like Novalis, Schlegel, and Coleridge pursued the organic forms of texts. The English romantic in particular advocates the harmonious "multeity"² of a text's multiple parts, and through their connectivity, the text comes to be an organic form that generates its own ontological "becoming" as a living organism. Such strains of organic ontology ultimately are indebted of course to Plato and Aristotle.

Because the demise of ontological criticism in the wake of new criticism makes readers—rather than texts—ever more predominant in shaping the meaning of literary text, I employ ontological study to uncover a dynamic range of relationality between different literary substances or subjects, such as the text and textual characters, the writer, and the audience, in order to posit new readings of old texts that seek to engage their literary aesthetics. Such claims to ontological objectivity stand in stark contrast to the epistemological inclinations that patronize more relative and often subversive values. The rise of the reader as the dominant hermeneutic power in literary discourse
may ensure interpretive fertility and fecundity, but the sheer superfluity of interpretations threatens to overwhelm both their consumers and producers. Epistemological idealism, in fact, generates its own brand of skepticism because the notion is constructed upon arbitrary connections between the signified and signifier, or upon the indeterminacy of textual meaning. As Frank Lentricchia (1981) points out, it is after new criticism that modern literary criticism has moved away from ontological pursuits of aesthetic values in literature toward epistemological explorations of textual signification. The shift, which discards the possibilities of objective postulates in literary criticism, owes its genesis to the well-known theorists and critics on both sides of the Atlantic, the Continental thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes in particular, and American critics like Murray Krieger, E. D. Hirsch, Paul de Man, and Harold Bloom. At best, the overflow of interpretation simply leads critics to rest on the laurels of relative value as ideological critics like Raman Selden fret. At worst, any interpretive engagement would be stuck in its own solipsism or skepticism. In particular, the Johns Hopkins conference on structuralism in 1966 and the subsequent invasion of "French barbarism" (Lentricchia's term), including Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes, set off the outstanding theoretical trends of the late twentieth century in America, like deconstructionism, post-structuralism, and their intellectual epigones, which radically undermined the previously firm belief in the objectivity of the text or textual interpretation. This study of ontological relationality is thus proposed to gauge the possible objective dimensions of literary discourse.

The theoretical quests to resuscitate objectivity often resurface whenever epistemological principles fall into inevitable deadlock over incompatible perspectives.
assumed to have equal validity. The chase has constantly been after one prominent Enlightenment value, "disinterestedness," a concept aesthetically refined by the German critic, Immanuel Kant and extended by T.S. Eliot's notion of "impersonal" art, an idea beloved by new critics. However, in the age of dynamic literary responses, objectivity is rejected for its inability to achieve a "complete absence of subjectivity, the complete bracketing of anything our minds themselves contribute" (Nussbaum 884). Modern critics like F. R. Leavis, Raman Selden, and E. D. Hirsch, often put forward the epistemic ideal of detachment and neutrality—or, that is, objective validity in literary interpretation; however, critical consensus concedes that there is an indelible *différance* or *inframince* in various intellectual renditions of the text, provided that we dismiss the inductive nature of cognitive observation. More recently, critics like Satya Mohanty (2001) posit that "objectivity is attainable in the realm of values, in such areas as ethics and even aesthetics" (803). My own critical quest for such aesthetic objectivity has led me to the study of ontological relationality in literary texts.

I aim in this study to develop a theory of relational ontology as a viable mode of literary criticism. My dissertation comprises two main parts: one is a theoretical inquiry, and the other is its practical application to three different literary texts. In the first chapter, I analyze and critically reflect upon the theoretical traditions surrounding the ontology and epistemology of "irony" in Western literature. More specifically, I interrogate the concept of "irony" in literary study to highlight the relational tensions inherent in literary ontology. As a result, I hope to establish the philosophical premises of relational ontology and to uncover the ineluctable limitations of epistemological discourses, new criticism, romanticism, and deconstructionism in particular. In chapters
II-IV, I test the practicability and expediency of relational ontology as a mode of literary criticism, applying it to three different literary texts and their critical traditions. In chapter II, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) provides a vehicle for disclosing the aesthetics of ontological positioning as I concentrate on relationality constructed through humor and laughter. In chapter III, I show how Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400) reveals the ontological structure of relationality on the basis of its ethos, specifically focusing on "The Miller's Tale" and the adjacent tales in Fragment I. In the last chapter, I analyze *The Winter's Tale* (1610) and other of William Shakespeare's plays as sites of ontological interaction wherein both characters and audiences are engaged in the recognition of aesthetic ideals. In so doing, this project is particularly engaged with ideas of humor, as the study of humor and laughter features hubs of "relations" between different subjects both textual and extratextual. While the idea of humor eddies at the surface of my argument, its significance in literary relationships is embedded within the depths of the ontological dimensions of each text under consideration.

A Brief Glossary of Ontological Study

*Cognitive engagement*: I use this term to mean a reader's interpretative engagement with a text. I adopt "cognitive engagement" synonymously with "epistemological engagement." "Cognitive engagement" or "epistemological engagement" differs from ontological engagement in that the former is related to the analytic practice of literary interpretation in general, whereas the latter is related to the aesthetic value of text beyond the cognitive participation. Cognitive engagement is
rendered between a text and a reader when he or she reads, trying to uncover its meanings.

*Epistemological engagement:* I use "epistemological engagement" interchangeably with "cognitive engagement." It involves critics' and readers' general practice of interpreting a literary work. The engagement is concerned with the question of "how" a reader reads a text. Epistemological engagement with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example, involves the interpretive work of uncovering its meanings instead of focusing on the reasons why readers react and respond to the work.

*Substance-based thinking:* I use "substance" as a philosophical term of art to indicate the independent and individual quality of a literary subject. "Substance-based thinking" is based on the assumption that every subject consists of one primary essence or essential feature like gender, sexuality, class, religion, political ideology, unconsciousness, and so on.

*Ontological engagement:* I use "ontological engagement" to mean a writer or a reader's positioning act that enables the interchange of literary aesthetic values in a given culture and society. Ontological engagement differs from epistemological engagement in that the former is related to the question of "why" people read and respond to a piece of literature. I utilize the term indiscriminately with "ontological positioning." When Chaucer creates *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, the literary creation constitutes his literary action/reaction toward the audience in fourteenth-century England.

*Interactive positioning:* I use "interactive positioning" to mean a writer's act of
engagement with readers in his or her age. A writer's act of creation elicits readers' reaction, and/or a writer's positioning results from his or her reaction to the readers' demand for perfect or aesthetically pleasing literary creation in a given society. Thus, a writer's positioning as well as a reader's comprises interactive relationality between them. "Interactive positioning" is different from a subject's self-fashioning in that the former always engenders relationships with others. For example, Paulina's positioning as an artist in the final scene of The Winter's Tale motivates other characters' reactive positioning around her artwork.

Interactive space: I use "interactive space" to mean the specific locus of interaction regarding a piece of literary work. Oscar Wilde's comedies primarily interact with their audiences in the space of fin de siècle in England.

Relationality: I use "relationality" to mean the quality or system of relationships rendered by a subject’s positioning. A writer's creative positioning may give a sort of upper-hand position in his or her tensional relationship with readers just as assumed in romanticism, but readers and critics may be placed in superstructure as supposed in deconstructionism. But the system of relationality is eventually determined by the aesthetic creativity of a subject's positioning to embrace the others’ demand in a given cultural space.

Relational ontology: I use "relational ontology" to mean that every living organism is existentially interrelated in one way or another. I use "relational ontology" synonymously with "ontology" to explain relational features of literary subjects
like author, audience, text, and characters. One’s creative ontological positioning motivates others’ participation.
CHAPTER I
IRONY: FROM SUBSTANCE-BASED EPISTEMOLOGY TO THE ONTOLOGY OF
RELATIONALITY

Problems of the Epistemological Study of Irony

Irony betrays relation and relationality. Whether understood ontologically or 
hermeneutically, irony becomes a pronoun for the relationships produced or constructed 
between different (existential or cognitive) subjects. Romantic irony as authorial self-
reflexivity in literary creation comes between the author's creative imagination and the 
reader's crisscrossing wit. New critical irony, as a presence of opposites in a harmonious 
and aesthetic structure of a text, depends upon an ontological relationality between 
conflicting parts and their "qualifying" of one another to make a unified, aesthetically 
pleasing structure. By contrast, deconstructionists, imbued with modern skepticism, 
conceive of irony as a disruption between signified and signifier\(^3\) that constantly 
provokes subversive relationships in literary interpretations. Once Jacques Derrida and 
Paul de Man, among others, alienate irony from its ontological realm, our contemporary 
theoretical practices get stranded on the shores of solipsism and skepticism.

The relational nature of irony in contemporary literary discourses fundamentally 
epitomizes modern critics' epistemological engagement with literary interpretation and 
explication. Just as Richard Rorty (1989) acutely points out, modern irony comes from 
linguistic and subjective contingencies. The notion thus embodies infinite possibilities of 
textual signification with the infinite free play of signifier, as Jacques Derrida proclaims 
and thereby generates a freed semantic subject that constantly wafts around to satisfy 
its insatiable desire for dissemination without any definite directionality. The subject's
freedom is ironically interlocked with cognitive angst and anxiety within and without the
text about its meanings and only creates contingent relationships throughout the
interpretative process.

But when critics argue that some epistemological discourses contain ontological
features, including their existential concern with a cognitively deteriorating and
decomposing subject, they fail to recognize its extensive relatedness with other
subjects. The overall theoretical trend running through postmodern literary practice
invokes the disruptive tendencies of various modes of irony on an epistemological plane
between the reader/subject and the text/object, or between the different
readers/subjects. Given their epistemological predilections, they may even delimit
contemporary discourse of literature pertaining to substance-based thought or
epistemology by discarding relationality because most of them eventually boil down to
discourse of one particular substance of a subject or an individual entity—whether it is a
reader or even a character in the text. But we often notice that the substance-based
discourse of literature or epistemological argument is believed to entail an ontological
dimension. Knowingly or unknowingly, however, some critics, like Linda Hutcheon
(1994), confuse the ontological scope of irony with its epistemological dimension. When
she asserts that "ironic meaning comes into being as the consequence of a relationship,
a dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning-makers, but also of
different meanings, first, in order to create something new and, then … to endow it with
the critical edge of judgment" (58), she suggests that "different meaning-makers" of
irony result from dynamic relationships. It is indeed true that different meanings are
proliferated in the course of making different relationships between signifier and
signified, between the text and the readers, or between the subject and the object, but this inclusive nature\(^4\) of the semantic production of irony discloses its ontological dimension in that the concurrent presence of text and different readers should be assumed in the same space. Different meanings are produced in the process of constant interpretative confrontations between text and audience by the repulsive and disparate (not attractive) forces of irony. That is, irony unremittingly generates different meanings, excluding and dissociating on cognitive and semantic levels. Despite the exclusive nature of irony on a semantic level, it does not leave out the presence of author's and readers' dynamic positionings carried out in their "dialogic or intersubjective" space around the text (55, 91). However, I would argue that the critic's "dialogic" space is not necessarily physical and that the relational ontology of irony cannot be assumed without the specific space wherein different literary agents interact to exceed merely hermeneutic possibilities.

Postmodern critics Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994) also obscure the fine line between ontology and epistemology when they appropriate the romantic idea of "becoming" to illustrate the virtual structure of knowledge and thought whose manifold and multiple nature has to do with the multiplicity of irony. They point out that irony is designed to simply describe "the variety of multiplicity" of the "image of thought": "irony itself is a multiplicity – or rather, the art of multiplicities: the art of grasping the Ideas and problems they incarnate in things, and of grasping things as incarnations, as cases of solution for the problems of Ideas" (182). This sort of conceptual appropriation of irony discloses their assumptions about readers' cognitive engagement with the text and their rendering of textual meanings with contingency and continuance in the duration of time.
In so doing, Deleuze and Guattari assume a situation wherein the epistemological relationality of irony opens up liminal spaces for ontological relationships between the text and the reader or between the readers. That is, the multiple meanings of irony are thought to form a "becoming" or "growing" structure with the various readers’ engagements in a temporal sequence.

This speculation continues to emerge as Deleuze and Guattari collaboratively seize the idea of "becoming" as their theoretical lynchpin, while repudiating its origin or root. They argue that "becoming" happens to the virtual and indefinite subject called "Body without Organs" (or simply "BwO") in a virtual milieu, and "BwO" is "becoming" like complex "rhizome" (as a symbol of multiple connectivity) in contrast to a linearly connecting "tree" in a virtual time and space. The virtual "becoming" of cognitive subjectivity elicits relational dovetailing or interaction between subject and object as well as between different subjects, embracing modes of dissociating ruptures called "schizophrenia." Their affirmative theoretical orientation toward the idea of "becoming" seems to expose their ontological attention to a subject in that they assume the system of cognitive thought grows like an organic being. But at the same time, they eliminate the creative cause (authorship) and the resulting effect (readership), and the interactive dimension between them. Though they avoid using the term ontological for "becoming," their epistemological discourse is directed toward revealing this "image of thought" in continuous temporality, which makes it dwell in a virtual or ahistorical dimension, not in any specific space as they argue. Their conception seems to come out of a desperate effort to spatialize the temporal structure of subjective cognition by using the notion of "becoming." But I argue that such confusion between the ontological and
epistemological realms should be clarified, as the space of irony is prioritized for inclusive and ontological interactions beyond the text, whereas the exclusive nature of its semantic or cognitive relationality is revealed through the temporal duration of an epistemological act, in de Man’s words “a temporal sequence of acts of consciousness which is endless” (“The Rhetoric of Temporality” 220). Ontological relationality is extended beyond the realm of the "image of thought" into the specific space of culture and society where the author creatively positions him or herself toward the audience with the text. In that sense, it is notable that Wayne C. Booth (1974) mentions how irony builds "amiable communities" around the text by creating a room for participation of the interpreters (28).

Modern literary discourse concerning irony comprises the territory where we often witness the blurring between epistemological and ontological planes, and this confusion encapsulates the dilemma in which we have come to be stuck over the last half-century. The critical arguments around irony divulge the multiplicity of methodological models for approaching a literary text. The shift from formalistic/aesthetic ontology (new criticism) to formalistic epistemology (deconstruction), or the change from objective ontology to subjective ontology, is sure to reveal the dynamic dimension of interactions and communications between the text and the audience. These theoretical trends also raise the matter of subjective (or sometimes solipsistic) relativism resulting from an overflow of exclusive interpretations, not to mention the dilemma of striving to find an objective and common ground, if any, for literariness. To resolve this predicament, critics sometimes try to open a common _agora_ for literary discourse, for instance, by proposing the idea of an "interpretive community"
(Stanley Fish) just as David Bleich (1978) brings up the notion of the "interpreters’ community." By the same token, Richard Rorty proposes the concept of "solidarity" or social consensus to unravel the theoretical or philosophical predicament of irony. But the travail comes to be of no avail, eliciting nothing but skepticism, a situation that is often criticized by British ideological theorists like Raman Selden (1984) or socio-historical and scientific Marxist critics like F. R. Leavis, Raymond Williams, and Terry Eagleton.

Such a predicament or dilemma of irony, however, may not be resolved as long as a theoretical orientation is guided and regulated by an epistemological paradigm. The epistemological model or substance-based idea is fundamentally enthralled with analytical and inductive methodology, which cannot help but constantly confront the disruptive reasoning of others in constructing meanings of text since human cognitive experience is relative and contingent in itself. The autonomy of a cognitive subject is projected to deal with the anxiety of others' ironic infringement on its own territory, while the subject is in the process of becoming just like the existentialist subject (i.e., Heideggerian *Dasein)*⁶ that is thrown to the world, tirelessly enduring the abyssal gap between the world and the knowledge of it, while pursuing ontological fulfillment or totalization of being. As long as deconstructive postmodern theories solely rely on epistemological principles for uncovering the literary system of a text and its interpretative possibilities, or if the hegemony of epistemological discourse continues to dominate literary criticism, the ironic dilemma will be the inevitable consequence that arises from the incomplete nature of language and for our cognitive, subjective experience of the text. If the autonomous self/subject around the text, or the text itself
as an autonomous entity, is geared toward "becoming" without any systematic growth in itself, the whole process of becoming is developed through inductive reasoning engineered by epistemological involvement. And if epistemological experiences are simply to be quantified through the scope of temporality and yet remain open to infinite possibility, then epistemological "becoming" is no more than quantitative "growing" without producing any qualitative outcomes.

Such epistemological pursuits of modern literary critics and theorists have stagnated over the last few decades, and I aim to argue for the validity of a new mode of literary criticism. As J. Hillis Miller (1986) in his presidential address to the Modern Language Association proclaims, we start to notice that literary theory and criticism since the 1980s has shunned away from linguistic and semantic discourses toward "history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context, the material base" (283). Those political and institutional practices have been enacted in such models as post-colonialism, new historicism, environmentalism or eco-criticism, psychoanalytic study, queer and gender theory, racial or ethnic study, and Post-Marxist theory, to name several. The different philosophical paradigms have certainly extended the scope and sphere of modern literary discourse and literariness, as critics try to contextualize text and readers in their various superstructures. Still, rooted in inductive, epistemological modes of criticism, these various methodologies only result in yet a more quantitative increase in interpretations, while commonly accepted notions of literariness and aesthetics languish.

With this ongoing situation in mind, I suggest ontological study as an alternative to the "conventional" model of epistemological literary criticism. This ontology of irony,
the ontology of positioning or relational ontology, which has been often swept aside in the history of literary criticism, is quite different from traditional notions that have been discussed in Western literature in that most ontological discourse has been oriented more to the existential aspect of one particular literary subject—whether a character or work—than to its interactive relationality with others. But my argument is concerned with unveiling the more fundamental structures of literary engagements between the author and the readers toward the text. Rhetorical action or literary positioning can create diverse—and yet conflicting—interactions in and around the literary work in generating its different meanings, and moreover in unveiling literary values of the rhetorical action or the work. For this purpose, I specifically focus on the philosophical premises of the ontological relationality of irony as it impacts participants joined in a specific literary venue, whether ontological agents or subjects such as writer, text, character or reader. Thus, my investigation of the ontological system is to conceptualize the process of meaning-making as cross-functional and one of interplay beyond one independent subject or its substance-based engagement, and thereby to uncover the relational system of literary positionings and interactions through which we get to encounter aesthetic values of literature shared in a cultural community, and objective values not exposed in epistemological inquiry.

Ontology and the Relational Structure of Irony in the Text

The study of ontological relationality is geared to an analysis of the forces of consolidation around the text and its readers, regardless of the question of whether it should achieve a goal or produce any definite meaning. When a literary work of art is promulgated to create interactions with its readers and audiences, a specific
relationship or connectivity is assumed between the text and readers. Classical literati of Greece and Rome, European Enlightenment thinkers, or English critics like Sir Philip Sidney, commonly argue that readers are placed in receptive or passive positions to learn edifying lessons, thus their conception of relationality is not so reciprocal as readers are passively positioned subjects who are expected to appreciate the work’s *dulce et utile* (entertaining and enlightening) qualities. Ontologically, the author was thought to leverage the relationship over the readers, an initiative transferred to audiences and critics over the last half-century. In any case, the ontology of literary discourse starts with more deductive interactions between different agents/beings in that the text becomes an event between the author and the readers in a given society or space. That is, the audience is initially positioned in relation to the work in order to resolve tensions within and without the text. A writer’s creation of a textual artifact evokes deductive conditions wherein communicative interactions are initiated among specific audiences in a given specific society. Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, initially creates a public resonance and relatedness among its audience in fourteenth-century England, and then the interaction goes on through the centuries with other audiences and readers. But the text is primarily promulgated to form a field of interactions between the author and the readers in a cultural space of fourteenth-century England. Whenever the reader approaches the text, the ironic tension depends on the level of the text’s density of irony or its aesthetic quality.

The interactive tension between a work of literature and its readers is triggered by the irony of the work itself. In other words, the ironic tension produced in the aesthetic creation retains ontological principles because readers are to be responsive to
the tension of the text first and foremost. New critics like Cleanth Brooks, John Crow Ransom, and William Empson are some of the first who champion the inherent and intrinsic structural qualities of irony in literary texts, poetry in particular, interested as they are in the ontological structure of literary art. New criticism is often called "organic ontology" or "organicism" in as much as this school of thought prizes a work of art's wholeness or completeness of being. Archibald MacLeish condenses its ontological concern in his poem "Ars Poetica" (1926), stating simply "A poem should not mean / But be." Understood this way, a poem or text is a living thing, and the new critic's interest lies primarily in the artistic creation as a real entity, not in the expository explanation of it. Its value as an "objective correlative" is paramount, and, according to Brooks (1947), any kind of interpretive translation of the text is conceived heresy. The criticism thus disregards and discredits any subjective involvement in an artistic object as the text should be appreciated as a "simulacrum" of reality.

For new critics, irony expresses their ontological principle at an intrinsic level. They argue that poetry carries as high a density as an organic creature, since the contextual components of the organic whole are interrelated. The idea of organic unity brings up the question of the way parts are paradoxically associated within the poetic structure. According to the new critics, conflicting or ironically qualified parts are densely populated within the system of poetry for the sake of its intrinsic value. Critics then are to unpack the density of the literary object to reveal its aesthetic construction. According to their theory, the text consists of diverse and ambiguous figurative languages integrated into a concrete, organic structural system. While critics like Brooks favor "irony," other new critics prefer the concepts of "ambiguity" (Empson), "tension" (Allen
Tate), or "complexes of attitudes" (Brooks) in explaining the ontological system of the text. To the critics, the organic structure of poetry has conflicting but relational parts: this irony, ambiguity, tension, or complexes of attitudes underlies the "ontological principles" that emerge from the structural connectivity of the relational parts. Such parts are inclined toward a "positive unity, not a negative," or they represent "not a residue but an achieved harmony" (The Well Wrought Urn 195). And seeking this aesthetic, the new critics constantly pursue the ironical relationality within poems.

The term "irony" has the advantage of working as a shorthand for complicated and complex relatedness within a literary system. Brooks (1949) points out that irony is practically the only term available by which we can indicate the relational aspects of poetry, proposing it as a principle of ontological structure (1043-44). He also argues elsewhere (1947) that irony is "the most general term that we have for this kind of qualification which the various elements in a context receive from the context" (209). In making the meaning of the text, a poem's elements are "warped and twisted, qualified and revised" (197), and ultimately are balanced and harmonized to reach an ontological unity, in Brooks' words "equilibrium of forces" (207). Similarly, I. A. Richards (1924), who is considered the new critics' precursor, suggests that irony must be characteristic of poetry of the highest order, as it introduces opposite, complementary impulses in order to achieve a balanced poise (194-97). The presence of irony thus ensures that the poetry of synthesis becomes the primary precept to explain the organic attributes of an artistic representation. By means of irony, elements are qualified and qualifying, modified and modifying, as they generate conflicting and incongruous relationships
among themselves, the resolution of which produces harmonious, unified, or organic aesthetic.

New critics appropriate the conception of organicism to elaborate the complicated relationality between parts and whole, thereby revealing ontological traits of a textual being just as a living creature in nature. The seed of their organicism germinates in the soil of romanticism, especially from the poetics of S. T. Coleridge, who, according to M. H. Abrams (1953), is indebted to a particularly German strain of organology, the physical and philosophical study of plant and animal organs. First, Coleridge's organicism depends on the importance of "a whole": "the whole is primary and the parts secondary and derived…. ‘the whole is everything, and the parts are nothing’" (The Mirror and the Lamp 171). From this concept of organic holism grows the new critics' concept of "organic unity." Second, the whole grows as a plant grows, and Coleridge extends and applies the notion of the organic growing of the plant to a poet's mental process that evolves into the work of art. Thus, "growth" or "evolution" in his romantic ideology is related to the creative mind of a poet, not to a finished poem. A third integral component of Coleridge's organicism is "assimilation." Just as when "growing, the plant assimilates to its own substance the alien and diverse elements of earth, air, light, and water" (171), so images of sense for Coleridge become materials on which the mind feeds, or materials that quite lose their identity in being assimilated to a new whole (172). Fourth is "internality;" just as "the plant evolves spontaneously from an internal source of energy" (172), so the mental freedom and creative originality of the poets are the source of a great poem, whose balanced or reconciled "opposite or discordant qualities" point beyond the poem itself to the inner workings of the poet's
mind (Critical Theory Since Plato 471). The fifth and final feature of Coleridge’s organic structure is "interdependence": "the parts of a living whole are 'so far interdependent that each is reciprocally means and end,' while the 'dependence of the parts on the whole' is combined with the 'dependence of the whole on its parts'" (The Mirror and the Lamp 174). New critics appropriate the romantic's ideas of organicism in general while he puts too much emphasis on the whole structure and the harmonious assimilation of its conflicting parts.

When they inherit these ideas, new critics downplay one of the primary principles of the ontological system by eliminating the concept of "growth" as it privileges the mind of the poet. While romanticism emphasizes the poet's creativity, the new critics give more stress to the textual system itself. For the new critics, creativity is intrinsically inherent in the poem as a work of art, and so they rarely seek to know or understand the mind behind it—its origin. Whereas William Wordsworth defends poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," which "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility (Critical Theory Since Plato 441), T. S. Eliot, by contrast, asserts that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from personality" (787)—it is, for him, "impersonal." Following Eliot's lead, among others, the new critics eschew the privileging of personality for an impersonal, disinterested, or detached relationship with the text. In so doing, they underscore ontological structure as an aesthetic system of language by eliminating the possibility of the author's subjective involvement with the text, which is an ideal condition for the poetic aesthetics of new criticism.
The ontological system of irony or the text aesthetically takes up space for and in itself just as a "well-wrought urn" occupies a physical space. The poetic artifact autonomously stands as a "verbal icon." Following French symbolists like Charles Baudelaire and Paul Valéry, the new critics downplay the creativity of the person to assert that the poetic language itself has creative power, possessing its own autonomy. In their criticism, the poem itself is described as a living organic unity or a concrete organism. A. C. Bradley (1910), who brings out the notion of ontological autonomy with his classic phrase "poetry for poetry's sake," posits that "[poetry's] nature is to be not a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world, but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous" (737). To understand the poetry fully, we must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore the particular conditions which belong to us "in the other world of reality" (737). That "world" and its "laws" thus display a unity of form and content: "it is a unity in which you can no more separate a substance and form than you can separate living blood and the life in the blood" (741-42). Eliot also employs a biological metaphor to explain the process by which a poem becomes an organic unity:

There is first ... an inert embryo or 'creative germ' ... and, on the other hand, the language, the resources of the words at the poet's command. He has something germinating in him for which he must find words; but he cannot know what words he wants until he has found the words; he cannot identify this embryo until it has been transformed into an arrangement of the right words in the right order. When you have the words for it, the 'thing' for which the words had to be found has disappeared, replaced by a poem. (106)

From Eliot's view that the "progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (785) emerges the new critic's focus on form and content, not authorial intention or creative imagination. It is little wonder, then, that he prefers an impersonal self to a more emotional one, whose consciousness or deliberateness
infuses the poem. Wordsworth's creative "emotion recollected in tranquility" is for Eliot a disinterested "personality recollected in tranquility." And Eliot, along with Robert Penn Warren, seeks in a poem a "vision" of complicated human existence (1040) divorced from a romantic sense of the poetic self. It is, in short, their organic ontology that focuses their critical attention on the form and content of the poems rather than the poets' intentions and the circumstances in which they work. The new critics' organic and ontological understanding of poetic structure and system fuels formalistic investigations of the text directed at the existential status of the aesthetic object.

The organic system of the text reveals more complicated relationality than linear sequence or mere causality. Critics sometimes misunderstand the relational quality of an organic whole and its attendant irony as simple oneness, leading them to merely simplify the relational structure of the text or its complex connectivity. When Wimsatt (1957) points out that the new critics' conception of organic relationality grows from the classical theory of Aristotle, he misunderstands that the Greek philosopher's organic theory implies a similar quality of connectivity: "the kind of oneness implied not only in Aristotle's general theory of organic form but in his theory of verbal mimesis is the oneness of a thing which has heterogeneous, interacting parts" (32). But Aristotle's notion of the organic whole should be differentiated from the complex whole of ironic relationships. This appreciation of Aristotle's organic theory is fundamentally based on his *Poetics*. His idea of an aesthetic artwork suggests that "a whole" linked in relationship of cause and effect, just like a string of beads, is viewed as "unity of plot" in tragedy. Thus, according to the Greek philosopher, "causal necessity" or linear connectivity of the parts is the primary principle of "whole" in a literary artwork. In
chapter seven of *Poetics*, he succinctly says about the structure of a tragic play:

"Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole ... A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be" (31 italics mine). According to Aristotle, a work of art is considered an integrated whole composed of parts like the organic system of a living body. He carries on his argument about the plot and genre in the following chapter: "when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts of being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole" (35 italics mine). According to the Greek philosopher, the system of tragedy is composed of probable and necessary incidents connected by "causal necessity."

Elsewhere he confirms that "a beautiful object ... must ... have an orderly arrangement of parts" (31). In other words, Aristotle's concept of unity is simple unity based on scientific causal necessity rather than intricate organic unity because his unity is based on an "orderly" (not "interdependent") arrangement of parts "by causal necessity."8 However, the complicated relationality of ontological structure is not to be reduced to mere causal connectivity because the aesthetic quality of the text depends upon the level of density in its relational system.

The intricate organic parts of the aesthetic system are directed to formulating a harmonious entity of oneness. The relational or conflicting parts of the ontological system are oriented to reconciliation, harmony, or aesthetic perfection. The new critics
often argue that the ironically conflicting parts of an organic structure move toward reconciliation and concord, or are directed toward the ontological perfection of the art, which is essentially the new critics' most important aesthetic criterion. The modifying and qualifying interactions of the parts are oriented to their harmonious unity in a sense that the conflicting parts interact to induce the balanced whole. Despite the fact that the Aristotelian structure of art consists of the orderly parts instead of the opposite forces, it reveals the cause or motivation of (though linear) interactions. But the new critics eliminate the initial cause as well as the ensuing effect of ontological interactions by solely concentrating on the artistic structure itself. The critics formulate their critical theory without the notion of "growing" or "becoming." They disclaim the creative cause of literary work or authorial intention, criticizing it for "intentional fallacy," and also disavow the resulting effect of the text on readers for its "affective fallacy."9

However, the intrinsic and intricate relationality of a text cannot completely dispense with the author and reader. As a matter of fact, the new critical principle presupposes ontological completeness or perfection of both the text and the reader. Poetic art that is in ontologically perfect condition is to be uncovered by the ideal reader who keeps perfect disinterestedness toward the text. Whenever new critics argue that the relational structure aims at its own completeness or aesthetic status of perfection, they find themselves on the horns of a dilemma: they cannot deny the author's involvement in literary creation in the first place, nor can they entirely gainsay the relationship between text and reader. When it comes to the literary cause, on one hand, the new critics retain their critical craving for the romantic author. When Eliot advances the idea of relation between the text and the author, he appropriates the concepts of the
romantic ideals like creative imagination and the metaphysical conceit of the seventeenth-century poets. The early new critic or modernist (1921) proposes that witty intellection is a poet's impersonal mind that is, like Richards' irony, "constantly amalgamating disparate experience" and thereby "forming new wholes" (287). The "internal equilibrium" of the poet's mind is geared toward enabling ontological completions of poetry with effacement of the author, for which Eliot introduces the subjects of impersonality (which is to remove any of the author's personal, ideological, or biased involvement in creating a poetic being) and the objective correlative. Thus, his conception of poetic wit plays as an ontological cause in the relationship between the art and the artist: that is "a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible" (303). On the other hand, new critics do not exclusively eliminate the role of the reader. Though Richards is considered a forerunner of the new critical theory, he does not entirely disregard the connection between the text and the reader with his conception of irony. In fact, he emphasizes that irony comprises the state of the reader's distanced mind rather than the internal tensions of the text. The poetry of "the highest order" holds the reader's ironical contemplation, an aesthetic experience that Richards conceives of as responding to and reconciling with the text with "impersonality, disinterestedness and detachment." In other words, the ideal reader is disinterested, keeping an "all around" eye on the artistic object as a concrete universal, much like Immanuel Kant (1790) promotes a "disinterested interest" in aesthetic experience without reference to one's personal desire. Richards asserts that "[t]o respond, not through one narrow channel of interest, but simultaneously and coherently through many, is to be disinterested.... A state of
mind which is not disinterested is one which sees things only from one standpoint or under one aspect" (97). For the early new critic, irony is the quality in literary response to induce "the balance or reconciliation of opposition and discordant qualities" of the text (193). The creative dimension is negotiated and arranged somewhere between the art as "objective correlative" and the ideal readers who can eliminate their personal or biased involvement. Notwithstanding the fact that the most new critics pursue and embrace the poetic text as aesthetic substance or as organic entity, Richards does not completely dispense with the presence of the reader in a literary space. His irony is in fact sustained in the relationship between the text and the reader rather than constrained within the text; his ironic contemplation recognizes relationality between art and audience, which requires negotiation by the ideal reader. Thus, his irony requires ontological perfection from readers. That is, they are expected to keep an impersonal, detached and disinterested distance between themselves and the text by removing all of their existential and emotive involvement. However idealistic the notion, the readers' ontological integrity reassures a balanced relationship and ontological relationality between the text and the reader established by means of their aesthetic engagements and responses, which eventually secure "supremely valuable communications" between the text and the addressee.

The new critical relationality of literary subjects remains in the realm of formalism and idealism, not of actual interactions, because the aesthetic ontology of new criticism exclusively devolves upon the text. According to new critics, the author's profession is to disinterestedly constitute the aesthetic and organic system of the poetic artifact. The new critics also postulate the ideal reader who can perform one perfect reading. They
assume an ontological perfection in authorship and readership that achieves a literary
aesthetic rooted in the ontological completeness. In so doing, they try to provide a
standard of aesthetic totality on an ontological level. But their argument revolves around
merely an atemporal and utopian realm of literature. For them, the synchronic system of
the text constitutes self-sufficient interactions as the relational tension or irony resides
within its inherent and cohesive structure. The text, however, involves its author and
readers in a specific space as an ontological event, which can be explained only in
terms of relationships among them.

Ontology and the Relational Structure of Extratextual Irony

A Case of Romantic Irony: Author and Reader

Romantic irony illuminates the possibility of an interactive relationship between
author and reader. The romantic self that is thought to retain an infinite capability of
creative genius comes to realize its inescapable relationality with others or the world
that constantly delimitates the scope of imagination. Such tension between author and
audience generates irony in a creative work of art. However, critics analyze the
subjective selfhood of the romantic self in terms of its independent identity and
existential anxiety instead of its constructive relationality with others—readers and the
world. Thus we need to recuperate the notion of romantic irony to divulge the interactive
relationality between the author and the reader on an ontological level.

Romantic irony reveals the relationality between the author and the reader
beyond the formal connection of the text and the reader. Abrams (1957) concisely sums
up the relationality of romantic irony by defining it as a "mode of dramatic or narrative
writing in which the author builds up the illusion of representing reality, only to shatter it
by revealing that the author, as artist, is the arbitrary creator and manipulator of the characters and their actions" (100) by allowing the audience or the reader into the narrator's confidence to engage in the text as a creator. The idea of romantic irony is introduced by the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel around the turn of the nineteenth century, and it features "the other side of Romanticism," according to Gary Handwerk (2000), one "attuned to rationality rather than feeling, to calculation rather than sentiment, to self-reflection rather than self-expression" (203). While romantic fancy is involved with the writer's own creative capacity, romantic irony concerns discovering otherness in the artists' literary creations or their relations to potential "others," or readers. Romantic irony emerges when the author is reflexively aware of the presence of the readers in the course of literary creation. In other words, the concept reveals ontological tension or relationality between the audiences and a self-conscious artist who is to inevitably face them in presenting the aesthetic object or the text.

But most critics tend to ignore this ontological dimension in their analysis. When literary critics broach the subject of romantic irony, they are inclined to focus on the epistemological relationship between the author and the reader because they are more interested in the subjectivity of the romantic self. As we have seen earlier, Abram's critical insight regarding the notion is concerned with narrative, semantic, or cognitive aspects of the irony by placing it somewhere between the subjective world of the artist and the objective world of the artistic creation. It is true that romantic irony has been considered to be involved with the author's rhetorical and intellectual acknowledgement of infinite "otherness," a concept that precedes romantic "reflections upon subjectivity, epistemology and aesthetic representation" (Handwerk 208). This cognitive and
rhetorical concern with irony recurs even after the demise of romanticism in the critical history of literature. Handwerk mentions that modern day critics like Muecke (The Compass of Irony 1969), Paul de Man ("The Rhetoric of Temporality" 1969), and Wayne Booth (A Rhetoric of Irony 1974) share their theoretical interest in the rhetorical and linguistic level of irony when they engage in cognitive inquiry of the term (204-6). De Man in particular keeps his distance from the preceding literary discourse of the new critics who take the concept as the ontological principle of poetic and aesthetic system and structure. The Yale deconstructionist disregards the traditional discourse of irony as "ontological bad faith" because it brings up irreconcilable skepticism (194). The critic's claim is based upon his epistemological standpoint, so he fails to see the ontological interactions around the notion of irony, through which the author can more proactively create a relationship with the audience rather than taking its presence reflectively or self-consciously.

As a matter of fact, the tradition of appropriating the concept of irony as an epistemological and rhetorical apparatus in the history of literary discourse is rooted in the classical criticism of the Greek and Roman theorists. Socrates employs the rhetorical tactics of dissimulation as the eiron ("feigner" or "dissembler") in Greek comedy does, so as to reveal his rivals' (the sophists') ignorance of true knowledge. Socratic irony is thus related to his philosophical pursuit of true knowledge called epistēmē. But at the same time, the notion is designed as an engaging device for the philosopher to ontologically or relationally formulate intellectual interactions with the sophists. Later, Aristotle (Rhetoric Bk.3) comments on the ironical as "a mockery of oneself" as he credits Socrates with building its prototype: "the jests of the ironical man
are at his own expense: the buffoon excites laughter at others” (1419b7). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle regards irony as "the contrary to boastful exaggeration: it is a self-deprecating concealment of one's own powers and possessions; it shows better taste to deprecate than to exaggerate one's virtues" (1108.19-23). Aristotle's understanding of the term indicates that its rhetorical function entails ethical or ontological positioning "to spare others the feeling of inferiority" (1127b: 22-26). Marcus Cicero, a Roman rhetorician, also ascribes Socrates to the prototype of Greek irony and defines irony as the "form of dissimulation which the Greeks named *eironeia*" (*Academica Posteriors* 2.5.15), and Socratic irony is rendered as "witty and refined art of conversation" (*De officis* 1.30.108). Another Roman rhetorician, Quintilian, takes such irony as a part of rhetorical strategy to constitute a difference between what is said and what is intended (*Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.44). Since the classical employment of the term, irony receives diversified and decorated appropriations throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but its fundamental connotation has been constantly explored in terms more of incongruity or opposite significations rather than of ontological positioning and interaction between the literary agents, which is one of the overarching aims of this study.

Rather than following the tradition of regarding irony as semantic incongruity or romantic irony in particular as reflexive consciousness, I argue that irony is best understood to reflect the ontological tension between the author and the audience. Romantic irony brings forward the issue of "the other" or the reader in the history of literary discourse. Novalis (alias Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772-1801), who is a German romantic idealist, elucidates the scope of the irony set out by Schlegel by
equating it with "genuine consciousness – true presence of mind" (Schriften 428), and he calls more attention to the role of audience. For the German poet (1797), the ironic role of the readers seems to rather diminish the author's stature in the field of artistic creation: "The true reader must be the extended author. He is the higher instance, who receives his subject-matter after it has already been worked over by a lower instance" (470). The literary text is thus to be construed by epistemological engagement of the readers. It is true that the readers come to take a critical role in creating a work, but it does not indicate that the meaning of the text is excavated solely by the readers. His contemporary, Schlegel, differentiates the "synthetic writer" from the "analytic writer" to allocate a significant role for the ironic artist. The synthetic writer (or the ironist) invites the reader to engage in the text. The author's intervention as permanent parabasis is "for potentiation" of the text, that is, "to be seen not only as the breaking of the fictional illusion but also as an opening up of space for the response of the audience and its inclusion into the making of the work" (Clyde de Ryals 12). And the space constructed between the authorial subject and the readers is for intellectual interactions to produce the meaning of the text.

Because romantic irony engineers friendly communication with the reader, in which the communication is oriented toward the "becoming" not "being" of the artist's subjective consciousness, romantic irony can be called subjective ontology, or the ontology of the romantic self. Anne Mellor (1980) points out that a romantic ironist confronts two conflicting psychic drives in one individual: "one seeks order and coherence (to become being), while the other seeks chaos and freedom (to be becoming or to become nonbeing)" (8). But the limited self is "becoming" infinite though
never perfected. The disruptive mind is expected to undergo ontological becoming through the communication or "a reciprocal relationship with the other" as Ryals puts it (8), or through facing irony. Besides, Handwerk’s insightful analysis on the ethical level of romantic irony underlines the civility of the communicative relationship in this context, but the respectful communication between the author and the audience ultimately confirms the ontological becoming of the intersubjective consciousness of the author. That is why romantic irony may be called subjective ontology.

A Case of Deconstructionism: Text and Reader

New critics disregard the relational dimensions beyond the text on an ontological level, revealing their exclusive concern with the text itself. For the sole purpose of l’art pour l’art, they hold on to the ideal condition of literary creation where the author impersonally creates the aesthetic structure of the artifact, which is intended for the ideal reader's one right reading. On the other hand, the relationship between author and reader in romantic irony revolves around an extra-textual level. The notion does not provide complex relationality between the text and other literary subjects, drawing attention to the creative self of the author. Nonetheless, the idea of romantic irony reveals the possibility of extending literary relationships beyond the level of the intrinsic quality of the text to "others" or readers. But readers in these early critical traditions failed to take an active role in comprising relationships between the text and author—not only on the epistemological level, but on the ontological level as well. Since the demise of new criticism in the second half of the twentieth century, however, readers and critics proactively engage not with authors or even texts primarily, but with other critics.
The primary concern of deconstruction is to explicate the relationship between the text and the readers. Though the critics still pay most attention to unveiling the deconstructive structure of the text, they do not disregard the presence of readers in literary discourse. Toward the second half of the twentieth century, every emerging literary discourse took its shape primarily by disassembling and deconstructing the self-sufficient aesthetic unity pursued by critics in the early half of the century. The theoretical orientations of the discourse in this era revolve and devolve around the radical dismantling of any possible reconciliation between the dissimilar parts of textual signification or between different meanings. The philosophical critics like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault initiated the postmodern discussion of these impossibilities throughout the 1960s and 1970s, but the deconstructionist movements were triggered by the disbelief or mistrust of the existential subject and its language as a perfect and complete structure. On one hand, however, the matter of incertitude regarding a human subject and language had already been brought up by the European philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger before it was reinforced by their theoretical heirs. On the other hand, the modern paradigm for approaching human consciousness and language in our age is considered to have been originally introduced between 1770 and 1830, as Foucault argues in his discourse of modern *epistēmē* in his *Les Mots et les Choses* (*The Order of Things* 1966) that human consciousness and language alike are disruptive, indeterminate, and inconsistent. Despite the fact that the French theorist dislikes the tendency of romanticism, is concerned with German Philosophy (Kant in particular), instead, to consider a human subject as an empirical object, he does not deny the influence of the romantics, who inaugurated the idea of human "apperception,"
the perception of other's perception. Foucault argues that as the matter of a human subject and self begins to be dealt with on epistemological as well as ontological levels, the romantic recognition of "apperceptive" consciousness becomes further associated with the inconsistent or contingent nature of language and human self, an idea fundamental to postmodern irony, as Richard Rorty (1989) contends. American deconstructionists inherit the tradition of romantic irony in the sense that their "existentialized" version of deconstruction is steeped in romanticism's idea of the disruptive and dual nature of human experiences (Berman 229).

But the theoretical milieu since the 1960s takes a radically subversive turn since modern theorists orient their attention to the "theoretically infinite openness of language" (Berman 229) or the creative and disseminating nature of language and the interpretive self. While capsizing the notions of center, origin, truth, or even linguistic binarism of structuralism and the new critics' reconciliation of opposites, they do away with any chance of possible reconciliation or Hegelian synthesis between disruptive and dissimilar parts of a literary text. Derrida introduces the term *différance* to explicate the abyssal rupture between the textual language and its limitless interpretations, but leaves no possibility of mediating or reconciling the opposites. The infinite play of the signifier brings about boundless numbers of ironies signified in the text, and by the same token, indeterminacy as the theoretical basis of the interpretive mode promoted J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man. Geoffrey Hartman also adjusts his critical concerns to the creative quality and self-revelation of literary criticism. In so doing, the deconstructionists and other postmodern critics like Lacan and Foucault unfold "the space between the Saussurian signified and signifier," and "space, as Derrida's différance, becomes the
primary ontological category" (Berman 225). This space also comes to be "the location where self is generated, a space that remains a constituent of self (since self is language and language is difference)" (225). Art Berman (1988) also points out that the self in deconstruction cannot help but face its irony or otherness with infinitude, which he considers as "existential absurdity." That space of self is, however, constantly nullified and repealed by infinitely emerging engagement of the other(s) on a temporal level as the subjective self is solely caught up in epistemological involvement. In so doing, this contingent conceptualization of self in deconstructionism remains mostly in textual territory and limits the scope of its literary discourse to the formalistic and linguistic level just as new critics do. For that reason, critics like Frank Lentricchia (1980) and Edward W. Said (1982) often call deconstructionism (of Derrida and Barthes in particular) "new New Criticism" or "new aestheticism."

The deconstructive study of literary texts connotes disruptive relationships between the text and the reader because they are intertwined in the incessant epistemological or interpretive engagement of different readers who necessarily engage in the text from different perspectives. For that very reason, the latter half of the twentieth century may be called the age of "negative dialectics" if we are indebted to the philosophical concept of Theodor W. Adorno (1966) without its ideological implications. Infinite friction between dissimilars disseminated around the text recurs through this era without any definite closure, affirmative reconciliation, or a "third term." The author is simultaneously killed off and discarded in the modern literary discourse as modern critics like Barthes ("Death of the Author" 1967), Foucault ("What is an Author?" 1969), and Edward Said proclaim, and the text is dissected without any definitive meaning. In
other words, the existential absurdity or ontological irony of deconstructionism comes to be dealt with in terms of the infinitude of the critic's or the reader's interpretation. According to de Man in his *Blindness and Insight*, a modern irony arises as an interpretation brings insight to the text while the recognition blinds itself at the same time or an interpretive act comes with its denial in process of time. There is no correct or objective reading, nor is there a wrong reading, though the critic is absolved: De Man (1979) firmly points out that the inevitable "error is not within the reader" but with language itself because it is radically and unalterably figural and, therefore, "necessarily [leads to] misreading" (277). By a similar token, when introducing the concept of the "anxiety of influence," Harold Bloom also declares that "there is no interpretation but only misinterpretations" (95), arguing that poems are "acts of reading" and every reading is "misprision" or "creative misreading" (*Critical Theory Since 1960* 332, 342), and the misreading prompts complex anxiety as poets as readers and also writers relate themselves to their precursors.

As the author and authorial intention are removed from deconstructive discourse, and the connection between signifier and signified becomes arbitrary, readerly interpretation or addressee-oriented discourse comes to be one decisive factor in rendering the signification of the text. As a result, while the death of author and the subversive and destabilizing nature of language are the primary suspects in the rise of readers' and critics' status in modern literary inquiry, the ontological quality of the text has been exclusively disregarded. According to de Man, a text "riddled with ironies, paradoxes, and ambiguities" cannot be considered as principles of an organic natural entity any more (28). While the new critic's exclusive concern with the text is still
maintained at least within the circles of Derrida (as shown in his famous tenet "there is nothing outside text") and de Man, though more on an epistemological level than an ontological one, the distinction between a literary text and its criticism as a secondary is obscured. Derrida, following Nietzsche, regards "all the discourse modes" as "metaphorical; any absolute distinction between the language of literature and criticism becomes untenable" (Barzilai and Bloomfield 165). Likewise, J. Hillis Miller and de Man turn down any privilege of the literary text over critical as they see incurably figural nature in language, and de Man in particular argues that "[a]ll forms of literary endeavor, be they primarily 'creative' or 'critical,' engender crucial moments of blindness which are inseparable from their moments of insight. In this sense the distance which once seemed to separate author from reader is now eliminated" (165). Another Yale critic, Harold Bloom, denies the difference between creative text and criticism, or the distinction between literary creator and critic. Roland Barthes also agrees to conjoin "the functions of writer and reader, poet and critic" in his "Death of the Author" (1967), and Barthes removes the author from the text because he rejects all forms of textual closure. The French critic continues to argue that "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures … but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not … the author" (Image-Music-Text 147-48). The reader's epistemological or interpretive concern with the text regulates the relationship between the literary work itself and the reader.

While readers can take a proactive role rendering meanings of the text on an interpretive dimension, we cannot disregard the presence of authors and their relationship with readers and texts on an ontological phase. Ontologically, it is not
possible to hand over all the rights to control the relationships among different literary subjects as a text comprises a writer's creative rhetorical positioning toward his or her audience in a specific space of society and culture. The relational nature between them should be unraveled more through ontological investigation rather than epistemological or simple interpretative approach. For that reason, I propose to ontologically inquire into their complicated relationships.

**A Case of Reader-Oriented Criticism and Psychoanalytical Theory: Reader and Reader**

Reader or audience-related criticism emerges as a significantly notable trend after the 1970s, and the advent of the reader as a proactive participant in literary criticism reflects another irony surrounding the relationships constructed in modern literary discourse: those between reader and reader rather than between reader and text. For reader-oriented critics, the text comes to be a locus for numerous possible interpretations, but the readers take initiative in rendering the meaning of it. Barthes (1970) makes a distinction between the work and the text, or the readerly text and the writerly text: "the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore … to rewrite the writerly text would consist only disseminating it, in dispersing it within the field of infinite difference" (S/Z 5). His distinction between a "lisible" (readerly) text and a "scriptible" (writerly) one casts the reader as a positive subject who produces the meaning(s) of the text. By the same token, the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco's discussion of "open" and "closed" works is concerned with the multiplicity or plurality in textual signification. Derrida also differentiates between the text and the book in his *Writing and Difference* (1978) and *Dissemination* (1981). Apart from the book whose truth is fairly determinable, the text has no central subject, and it is no less than the world of the unconscious with infinite negativity: "The unconscious text is already a
weave of pure traces, differences” (Writing and Difference 211). So readers are summoned by means of epistemological postulation to participate in and decode the undefined text, and to take the initiative in disseminating its meanings. However, the reader’s involvement in the text may not be assumed without acknowledging others’ engagements as well. The interaction arises not only between the reader and the text, but among the readers as well as they analyze and interpret the text from their different perspectives. Thus, the relationships are to be subversive and disruptive.

But not every critic endows the reader with such a prominent and proactive position. The early reader-response critics like Walker Gibson (mock reader), Gerald Prince (narratee), and Michael Riffaterre (super reader) propose different concepts to define who the reader is and in pursuing so-called objective criticism, they follow the lead of the new critics. Those transcendental concepts of reader-response theory are rather similar to that of the "ideal reader" of new criticism in that they draw primary attention to the textual analysis as assuming its objectivity. But these reader-response critics share understandings of the text as the locus of indeterminate meaning with the contemporary theorists who focus on interpretive engagements with the text, trying to measure the "truth" of interpretation in that the position of such readers is arranged by the textual system so that they uncover the semiotic and/or semantic sense of the signs. But at the same time, the critics endow readers with a more proactive role than ever in interpretative analysis. Wolfgang Iser’s "implied reader" is the one who actively participates in producing the textual interpretations so as to fill in the unwritten portions of the text, its "gaps," "blanks," or areas of "indeterminacy," in his or her way while his reader is given a more progressive interpretative position than those of the early reader
critics like Gibson and Riffaterre. Iser would not admit that the text is a sole rendering of the readers' creative activity, nor would he endow them with full "autonomy or even a partial independence from textual constraints" (Thompkins xv). The readers' reading process is orchestrated and designed by textual "virtuality," employing satire, irony, or comic devices, though he never specifies how reading activity is limited by the structure of the text. This formalistic and hermeneutic dimension of the readers' reading is modified by his recent comment on "literary anthropology" regarding how the critic proposes a new terrain of literary discourse:

If a literary text does something to its readers, it also simultaneously reveals something about them. Thus literature turns into a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, inclinations, and eventually our overall makeup. In so doing, the reader-response critic draws out the interactive façade between the reader and the text. Now, the question arises as to why we need this particular medium of contacts. Questions of this kind point to a literary anthropology that is both an underpinning and an offshoot of reader-response criticism. (Prospecting 11)

More than anything, his progressive turn toward literary anthropology or interactive study indicates the fact that he would not disregard the ontological plane rendered in the readers' interpretive venture. Notwithstanding the emerging role of the reader, the reader-oriented critics still seem to have anxiety in handing over to the reader an active role in his or her interpretive engagement.

Stanley Fish's readers, however, take a more proactive drive for literary interpretation than Iser's. The American reader-response critic provocatively suggests that the physical text itself is not to be regarded as a hermeneutic center for objective meaning but instead introduces the text as a series of readers' interpretation of events or their cognitive activity. Unlike Iser's implied readers, who are expected to discover the hidden textual meanings, Fish's readers are not drawn into filling in textual gaps or
blanks limited by the text. Instead, his readers are the source of all possible
significations, "because the place where sense is made or not made is the reader's
mind rather than the printed page or the space between the covers of a book"
(Tompkins xvii). The American critic (1980) claims that "interpretation is not the art of
construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make
them" (327). The interpretive initiative is handed over to the readers in his literary
theory. This readerly invention as interpretation emerges as a primary source for literary
knowledge and discourse. His radical position, however, faces criticism because his
theoretical assumption would lead to excessive cases of subjective (or solipsistic,
sometimes) acts of reading and interpretation. To avoid swerving into radically
subjective criticism, the reader-response critic employs the concepts of "informed
reader" and "interpretive community," and they possesses what Jonathan Culler calls
"literary competence" in his essay (1975). The critics seem unwittingly and erratically to
find themselves in the middle of trying to confirm some possibility of objective
literariness in interpretation; however, as long as they pursue the question of readers in
the level of epistemology or cognitive interpretation, they cannot help but confront the
proliferation of countless equally valid readings, which is the eventuality of all subjective
criticism. The readers’ intelligent and cognitive approaches cannot but be inductive and
exclusive, as independent and individual readers will inevitably cast different interpretive
glances at the text. Regarding the differences in interpretation, Norman Holland,
another reader-oriented critic, faces the same dilemma in developing the idea of an
"identity theme," with which readers develop different eyes of interpretation from their
different life-world, or Lebenswelt. Holland thus includes the readers' ontological
situations, like their world of lived experiences, as decisive factors in interpretation, and in his approach, as in David Bleich's subjective criticism, the readers' psychological position weighs more heavily in reading. The upshot of reader-response criticism is that while invariably overwhelmed by the countless and boundless interpretations by the infinite number of readers, one interpretive eye is constantly qualified by another, and each is prevented from any commanding position. In so doing, the reader-centered criticism revolves around on a formalistic and textual plane, just as new criticism and deconstructionism focus on textual analysis or interpretation. Reader critics formulate the interactive relationship between the text and the readers so as to propagate its meanings, but the author still does not take any significant position in that critical practice. The divorce between signified and signifier in modern literary theory resolves into drawing the readers more to the core of literary discourse than ever before, while creating discursive and subversive relations among different interpretive positions. Despite these limitations of reader-centered criticism, it is notable that the reader-response critics try to provide a mode of interactive relationships in literature by establishing a community of more competent readers, which is a necessary condition for better ontological interactions.

Psychoanalytic study also reveals subversive relationality between readers as critics try to understand the relationships between different cognitive subjects or readers as well as between the cognitive subject and the text. Critics like Jacque Lacan and Slavoj Žižek illustrate this phenomenon in terms of psychoanalytical interactions rendered among the readers and the text. To describe the relationality, Lacan, in his essay *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1981), employs the notion
of the "gaze," through which one is observed while observing, as opposed to "seeing" or "looking," which is incorporated with an autonomous and unified action of a subject:

The gaze that I encounter …is not a seen gaze [that is, not an eye that I see looking at me] but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other…the sound of rustling leaves heard while out hunting…a footstep heard in a corridor…[the gaze exists] not at the level of [a particular visible] other whose gaze surprises the subject looking through the keyhole. It is that the other surprises him, the subject, as entirely hidden gaze. (84, 82)

The French psychoanalyst (1973) appropriates the existentialistic idea of ontological absurdity (Sartre's in particular) and defines the gaze as the uncontrollable presence of others, which constantly induces the fear of the subject being dissociated from others at an unconscious level. The subject in this relationship of seeing and being observed faces the constant angst of being eliminated by the others' gaze, or of being castrated in a figurative sense. The relation between the gaze and the eye has been applied to that of the reader and the text, or to that of the reader and other readers. Recently, Žižek furthers Lacan's psychoanalytical concepts of the eye and the gaze, and he recounts the relationship as "perversion" and "antinomy" in his work Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture (1991): "When I look at an object, the object is always already gazing at me, and from a point at which I cannot see it" (108-9). The term "gaze" is another name for "otherness" in their psychoanalytic investigation into literary relationships. Similarly, Michel Foucault brings out the idea of the incarcerating "gaze" in exploring the association between art and its spectator in The Order of Things (1970). The gaze, for Foucault, also implies political connotations in itself, just as the concept of "panopticon" suggests. He claims that the relationship between different subjects reveals infinite otherness and political power control geared
in-between. This notion of the "gaze" merely represents an interactive and yet subversive relationship between the observers of/and the textual object.

As Lacan’s gaze has a blind side of unconsciousness,¹² which is rendered in the realm of the "Real," so does Žižek's in the subject's perception of virtual or "psychic reality" (39-47), not of actual reality. For the Slovenian philosopher, the real is characterized as an absence of ontological substance, but the "Real is only detectable through its structural effects, one of which is the impossibility of ever achieving a stable identification between signifier and signified" (Grace Pollock 946). The Real is a cognitive positioning of subject toward object rather than a concrete ontological space due to the lack of physical reality, as he extensively elaborates in The Parallax View (2006). Epistemological positioning in the Real is also a contingent event to the intellectual subject. Moreover, on a cognitive level, intersubjective communication is rendered between a subject and an object (not the other subject) resulting in misprision or delimited misunderstanding (or "successful misunderstanding" in Lacan's terms: Žižek 1992: 30), which eventually introduces a "threatening dimension," or anxiety to the subject. The relationships between different cognitive or self-conscious subjects cannot but be disruptive and subversive as psychoanalytical study is related more to individual literary subjects than to their whole community. In that sense, Lacan and Žižek's theory is not much different from that of deconstructive critics who undertake literary analysis with regard to one individual subject and its epistemological relationality with others. But with ontological investigation, I pursue possibilities of resolving these subversive relationships.
Toward the Ontological Study of Relationality

It is my contention that the ontological study of literature can uncover the primary causes and aims of literary interactions among the author, the text, and the readers, and thus it can assist us in delineating and then disseminating the aesthetic values of a text placed in a specific cultural space. Such interactions are triggered by an irony or relational tension between the text and its contextual space and/or between the author and the audience, and the irony engages readers not only to produce meaning(s), but eventually to propagate literary values beyond the realm of mere interpretations. Thus, ontological relationality works ultimately to uncover the initial and decisive factors that establish the interactive (active and reactive) positionings between the author and the audience achieved in a specific society and culture. Literary critics and theorists have shut their eyes or have been blinded to this fundamental operation around the text and thus to the question of how literary interaction creates aesthetic qualities for the community of authors and readers in a concrete cultural space. With all of the recent theoretical trends built upon an epistemological ideology, critical tendencies have delimited the scope of contemporary critical discourse to subject- and substance-based thought, or to the epistemological paradigm because most of them eventually boil down to discourse of the individual and independent subject or its (either definable or indefinable) identity whether it means a reader, a text, or even a character in it.\(^\text{13}\)

Despite the fine but clear line between ontological and epistemological study, critics often confuse their differences, as we have seen earlier in the cases of Hutcheon, and Deleuze and Gauttari: one is concerned with relationality and aesthetic values in
literature, while the other is concerned with an independent subject and interpretative investigation.

The relational ontology of literature emerges when the author creates a work of art to foster public resonance among an audience placed in the given social/cultural space. Because the density of irony the text presents to the readers determines the level of interactions between the author and the readers, irony comprises the aesthetic quality that provokes the audience's engagement. But the relational nature of irony in contemporary literary discourse is directed toward concisely epitomizing an autonomous subject's epistemological engagement with literary texts, especially in recent theoretical trends since the 1960s. The theoretical tendency is mostly oriented toward the epistemologically indescribable nature of subject or its substance, whether it is concerned with texts, characters, or readers as individual and independent cognitive subjects. Irony creates an infinite possibility of textual meanings with the free play of the signifier. Such freedom eventually creates cognitive angst and anxiety within and without the text because by creating contingent relationships between different literary subjects, their individual identity is threatened by others or remains unidentified. In epistemology, irony provokes disruptive and dissociative relationships between the independent subject and the text, whereas in ontology, irony comprises complicated relational tensions between the author and the readers to communicate the ideals represented in the text.

To make an audience responsive and reactive, the author has to create tension through a text that is full of ironic qualities or contradictory dimensions. This way, irony in the text induces interactions between the author and the audience, constituting a
certain level of relationality among those literary entities. The author sometimes provokes tension through an ironic duel between two characters (like Othello and Iago in *Othello* or the Knight and the Miller in *The Canterbury Tales*). Sometimes the tension gets complicated by involving a third factor, and a tensional relationship is made between an ideal and the characters (like "being Earnest" and the two dandies, Jack and Algernon, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, or Godot and the two men, Estragon and Vladimir, in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, or between a woman and two suitors in Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale"). Or sometimes the system of tensional relationship is structured between a character and a particular space wherein he or she is placed (as Ishmael and Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*—in the sense that Captain Ahab represents the uncontrollable sea). Whatever the case is, the author intensifies the level of ironic or relational tension by creating a dynamic or multidimensional quality of the characters so that the author can induce the reader to interact with the text.

The relationship constructed through the tension reveals an ontological structure. The author's creative positioning through the text comprises a reaction to the reader's expectation. The romantics consider that the author holds the upper hand in his or her relationship with the audience, whereas deconstructionists assume that the readers and critics control the relationships resulting in meaning-making. But both theorists would agree that one who can draw out creative action – whether author, critic, or character – is placed in a position of control, whether the action takes place between texts and readers or characters within text. In the cases of Iago, Don John, and Leontes in Shakespeare's plays, their positionings resonate with tragic outcomes because the act
is engineered by their personal need. But as in the cases of Don Pedro and Paulina, their positionings are engineered by their communal desire to bring a certain level of aesthetic perfection to the community to which they belong. Their creative positionings put them in the upper or über structure of the relational system, so that they can control the others' positions.

In contrast, irony or tension constitutes relationships, and readers and audiences respond to the tension epistemologically and ontologically. Epistemology is concerned with one independent subject, while ontology is oriented toward its relationship with others, just as living organisms are related to one another in nature. Like a living plant that grows in its relationship with the sun and the earth, the author, the text, and the audience progress together toward the aesthetic perfection on an ontological level through a relationality constructed by means of irony.
CHAPTER II

FROM CIVILITY TO THE CREATIVITY OF HUMOR: AMIABLE HUMOR AND THE

CASE OF OSCAR WILDE

Wilde's Humor and Its Ancient Origin

When Oscar Wild employs not just verbal witticism and social satire, but also invokes the tradition of amiable humor, he uses the former to summon the audience's intellectual engagement to propagate interactive textual meanings, and the latter to open up a space of ethos and aesthetic positioning among those involved in and around the literary text. To judge from his critical essays, Wilde seems to understand how humor constructs interactive dimensions in which implications, and thus meanings, proliferate. At the same time, the dramatist also knows how to utilize comic factors to increase ontological interactions between himself and his audiences through the texts by creating ironic tension that arises from humor. He appropriates humor as the textual apparatus that has the audience responding and reacting. Thus, exploring the epistemological and ontological dimension of laughter in his play, I argue that Wilde's dramatic works encompass and surpass contemporary traditions of English humor, and in so doing, I show how he uses the creative dandy to foster the ontological relationality necessary to "grow" his aesthetic ideal.

When critics analyze Wilde's plays, they tend not to call attention to their humor as much as they do to their socio-cultural commentaries. Josephine M. Guy (1998) points out that Wilde's humor plays a significant role in garnering public and popular attention for his literary works, but "it is surprisingly unfashionable for modern critics (particularly those who wish to redefine his seriousness) to discuss the humour" (10).
But the critic does not deny the fact that Wilde’s humor is “intrinsic to his popularity” and "the most basic part of his craft" (10). This trend has led to uneven paths to understanding Wilde’s comedies in particular. I argue that we need to recognize the conversational or dialogic dimensions that emerge through laughter and humor as these interactions effectuate aesthetic and moral values among those involved.

To understand Wilde's humor, we need to draw attention to the tradition of humor in Western literature, which often places emphasis on its relationality and cognitive dimension. Thus, I first investigate how ancient and modern thinkers appreciate the notion of humor and laughter in constructing the relationship between the observer and the object, and then move on to Wilde’s humor and his appropriation of the concept to create an interactive ground for the comedy and the audience. It is undeniable that Wilde's idea is in the tradition of humor that runs from the classical period of Greece and Rome to nineteenth-century England. I also focus on how Wilde extends the classical notion of humor by creating an interactive space on an aesthetic level as well as on a cognitive and ethical level. The aesthetic quality of humor depends on a humorist’s creativity, as Arthur Koestler argues in his *Act of Creation* (1964), and to appreciate the dynamic dimensions of Wilde's humor, I first invite my readers to a specific scene of an Oscar Wilde comedy where he utilizes the dandy Lord Goring to creatively render amusement.

The once-favorable situation for Wilde's Mrs. Cheveley is suddenly reversed owing to a trivial prop in the third act of *An Ideal Husband* (1895):

> 14 "diamond snake-brooch with a ruby." As Mrs. Cheveley realizes that Lord Goring has retrieved her misplaced adornment at the dinner party, she insists that the brooch was a gift to her,
claiming her ownership of the jewel. But the clever dandy creates a comic scene by putting it on the charming and poised lady’s arm as a bracelet, not as a brooch. The displacement of the brooch triggers the displacement of Mrs. Cheveley from her seemingly graceful and noble ladyship to the comic centerpiece of this amusing scene. At this moment, the ornament transforms into a trap that reveals her deceptive and dissembling nature, and the audience comes to realize that the prop is not a present but instead a stolen swag from Lord Goring’s cousin. Upon this sudden awareness, the audience also recognizes incongruities within Mrs. Cheveley’s character. Her vain and desperate attempt to remove the bracelet from her arm is no longer consistent with her noble and gentle semblance, and the displaced prop now un_masks a vengeful and bestial nature hidden behind the veneer of her elegance and finesse. The indecorous clasping of the brooch qua bracelet on her arm as well as the wickedness of her theft does not befit the charming Mrs. Cheveley, and the jarring discrepancy arouses the audience’s humor at the moment of realization. Such humorous incongruity, or the humor of incongruity, which turns upon the audience’s epistemological involvement, has deep roots in Western literature.

Wilde’s humorous scene of displacement reminds us of the ancient account of laughter that the Roman critic, Horace, gives in Ars Poetica. In his epistle to the Piso family, Horace mentions that art has to do with its uniform and harmonious nature or decorum. A painter’s choosing to set a human head on the neck and shoulders of a horse is not decorous, but indecorous art, so the painting becomes merely an object of contemptuous and scornful laughter. The Roman poet illustrates: "If a painter chose to set a human head on the neck and shoulders of a horse, to gather limbs from every
animal and clothe them with feathers from every kind of bird, and make what at the top was a beautiful woman have ugly ending in a black fish’s tail – when you were admitted to view his picture, should you refrain from laughing, my good friends?” (68). Such an indecorous or strange rendering of the object elicits jocose and disdainful laughter. The improper or incongruous displacements depend upon the audience’s condescending and contemptuous attitudes toward the laughable object at the same time they are amused.

These two literary scenes illustrate two distinct dimensions of humor and laughter with regard to their connection to observers. First, this sort of humor creates existentially disdainful relationships between those laughing and those laughed at; it even elicits the intellectual recognition of incongruity at an epistemological level. This dual notion of humor runs through different ages of Western literary history, and understanding how the idea of humor has developed and grown through the ages enables us to discern the structures of the system constructed between humorists and their objects. The scornful, scoffing nature of laughter understood as the "superiority theory" of humor traces its origin back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle (Morreall 1983: 4-14). Plato mentions in one of his dialogues, Philebus, that "[w]hen we laugh at what is ridiculous in our friends, our pleasure, in mixing with malice, mixes with pain, for we have agreed that malice is a pain of the soul, and that laughter is pleasant, and on these occasions we both feel malice and laughter” (Morreall 13). In Plato’s view, we laugh at the stupidity, ignorance, or weaknesses of people who are in relatively inferior positions. In other words, we come to make fun of people when we notice that they do not know themselves with respect to wealth, physical fineness, or intellectual virtue. In this way, we delight in the
sufferings and misfortunes of others. According to the Greek philosopher, knowing oneself is the primary step to *dialetikē*, the true intellectual acknowledgement of a philosophical *idea*. Self-ignorance among those who are weak is considered a form of stupidity to be ridiculed, but Plato does not specify the origins of the weakness, whether it comes from any difference in social or political status between the ridiculer and the ridiculed. His philosophical concern with laughter is related to the epistemological intricacy of laughter, in that the person laughing must be cognizant of ignorance or stupidity, which then corresponds with the pleasure of laughter and the pain of malice, both of which constitute Plato's complicated response (50a-b). Plato's laughter thus keeps its ironical dimensions, in that comic pleasure is mixed with pain in the soul when we find amusement at what is ridiculous in our friends as they inevitably become the object of our laughter as well. The relational component of humor is hereby intertwined with the cognitive one. Thus, his laughter breaks out of such uncomfortable tension or intellectual stress constructed in an interactive space between an individual subject and its object.

Aristotle follows his mentor's notion that laughter is derisive in nature and derived from the misfortunes of an inferior, but unlike his mentor, Aristotle argues that the audience keeps its ontological distance from the object of laughter in comedy just as they maintain a degree of distance from the noble characters in tragedy. Comedy as an art form imitates and portrays ignoble or morally meaner actions, whereas tragedy represents noble or morally good characters. To clarify the distinction, he draws a fine line between the serious and the risible. In comedy, the ludicrous is to be found in "some defect, deformity, or ugliness that is neither painful nor destructive" (chapter 5
1449a 34). Unharmful error (*hamartēma*) or ugliness, unlike tragic mistakes and missteps (*hamartia*), which arouse destructive and painful *pathos* in audience, causes no pity or fear, but laughter and ridicule, even though both cases introduce interactions between the observer and the object engineered by the cognitive tension in the ancient theatrical space. So, his position differs from his mentor’s in that comic wit does not indicate any pain in itself since the spirit of comedy is free from pain and destruction. This speculation implies that the audience keeps a certain formal or disinterested distance from the actions of humorous representation, a distance distinct from the friendly or neighborly distance in Plato’s notion of ridicule. Aristotle thus assumes this presence of an ontological space between the ordinary audience and noble characters at which they do not laugh, or between the audience and common or low-born characters at which they do. In comedy, the audience thus breaks out in laughter that comes from their ontological superiority over the ignoble and humble characters.

Aristotle, furthermore, is among the first to categorize the various types and ethics of laughter in social relations. In *Nicomachean Ethics* (4.8), while dealing with proper and tactful wit in decent language, he insists that if one carries humor to the extreme, it becomes "vulgar buffoonery," which lacks propriety, whereas if one is incapable of producing anything funny, that is considered "boorish and unpolished." The moral ideal for laughter is to avoid either of these two extremes. Consequently, the ranges of humor between the excessive ends, either for a listener or a speaker, signify differences in ethical propriety between a well-bred and a vulgar man, or between an educated noble and an ignorant commoner. This notion simply implies the assumption that interactions generated through laughter operate around the wide scope of the
audiences involved in humor. Along with the ethical analysis of humor, the philosopher in Rhetoric (3.2) also advances a philosophical or epistemological discourse further with the archetypal discussion about incongruous humor, which is provoked as an audience recognizes the discrepancy between their anticipation and the unexpected outcome of the story. Laughter breaks out when the addressee's expectation incongruously meets the addresser's idea and language of wit and humor on a cognitive level. His philosophical attention is called to the cognitive dimension of laughter as well as to the measure of disinterested relatedness.

Following this Aristotelian conception of laughter, Cicero (106 – 43 B.C.E.), a Roman critic, reinforces the cognitive dimension of laughter and humor, though he does not deny the assumption that laughter implies the condescending and degrading inclinations of the audience (De Oratore Book II Ch. 236, 255, 266). The Roman critic polishes and refines the Greek philosopher's idea of incongruous laughter by specifying the cognitive process by which the audience breaks out in laughter: "The most common kind of joke is that in which we expect one thing and another is said; here our own disappointed expectation makes us laugh" (Ch. 63). According to the critic, cognitive interaction is furthered by the ambiguous nature of humor: "if something ambiguous is thrown in too, the effect of the joke is heightened" (Ch. 63). The quality of ambiguity is thought to make its audience responsive and reactive. Just like Horace, Cicero confirms that ontological distance is assumed in artistic or literary experience as he claims that the contemptuous nature of laughter arises as one observes an indecorous work of art. Though the Roman observation of laughter stays within the earlier discourse of the Greek philosophers, all those classical discourses of laughter show the primordial
understanding of how human interaction is triggered in response with laughter. These classical discussions of laughter and humor underline its cognitive and ethical scope.

But at the same time we notice that the ideas of laughter are related with the aesthetic assumption or decorum that the audience or observer has regarding the artistic object. The audience's presupposition of aesthetic decorum or perfect beauty leads him or her to be instinctively responsive to the indecorous art as an aesthetic ideal clashes into the imperfect quality of an object. Thus, laughter breaks out when the perceiver recognizes such a lack of fulfillment of aesthetic quality in the object presented by the artist, as seen in the Horatian painter's indecorous art. By the same token, the dandy's indecorous clasping of the brooch conflicts with the audience's ideal assumption of beauty. However, the aesthetic side of humor has long been disregarded, while critics and writers are more concerned with its cognitive and ethical dimensions.

British Traditions of Humor: Between Cognitivity and Civility

Classic conception of humor that depends upon cognition and ethical relationality becomes two major paradigms that govern the discourse of humor and laughter as time passes. Its cognitive and ethical qualities remain strong as fundamental principles of laughter until the rise of the "superiority theory" of humor as well as that of wit (and satire), both of which, like their classical counterparts, assume ontological and cognitive distance between the comedy and the audience. On one hand, the theory of wit and satire takes over the ancient epistemological understanding of philosophical humor, especially through the seventeenth century, which T. S. Eliot (1921) describes as the age of "dissociation of sensibility" or of the alienation of intellect from sensibility or emotion. On the other hand, the "superiority theory" of laughter replaces the classical
patronizing perceptions of laughing matters. The disdainful quality of laughter so central to the superiority theory and satirical or witty rationale dominates discussions of humor in English literary history well into the eighteenth century thanks in no less part to Thomas Hobbes, who incorporates the antique idea of derision into his philosophy of human relationships. The idea of superior humor postulates ontic distance and discrepancy between the subject and object of the ludicrous. An early modern philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), attributes this concept to the modern history of intelligence and laughter. In his *Human Nature* (1650) and *Leviathan* (1651), the English philosopher inherits the notion of the Greek philosophers that laughter is fundamentally a form of derision: "Sudden glory is the passion which makes all those grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that please them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another by comparison whereof they applaud themselves" (19). Hobbes considers that the source of comic laughter is deeply associated with the feeling of the cognitive subject’s superiority because we achieve "sudden glory" primarily by observing the infirmities of others and comparing them with our own eminency (247). In so doing, this patronizing position of a humorist keeps its intellectual—and yet existentially incompatible—distance from the object of laughter, but it does not create impressive interaction between the parties involved. The interactive intimation is not established yet, but the idea is suggested as a way of the intellectual subject’s not-so-reciprocal engagement.

It is not until the eighteenth century that English writers begin to react to and to revise Hobbes’ essentially classical ideas of humor to argue for an amiable sort that we encounter so frequently in Wilde’s comedy. Not all theorists who include the element of
superiority as part of humor believe that laughter is always contemptuous or scornful. Sympathy, congeniality, empathy, and geniality may be combined with the laughter of superiority (Morreall 1983:12). British humorists of the eighteenth century argue that humor implies an affectionate, benevolent attitude toward the person being laughed at. Humorists like Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, for example, point out that in amiable humor, laughter is tempered with love (Morreall 14). Another British humorist, Francis Hutcheson (1750), suggests in his response to Hobbes that superiority is not a necessary condition for comic amusement, as we rarely laugh at oysters. According to the critic, superiority is not a sufficient condition for comic amusement, because a comic scene does not necessarily summon such condescending attitudes (103-4). The amiable English humor of the eighteenth century thus comes from a positive view of the good nature of humans and constitutes a reaction to traditional derisive and disdainful laughter.

Jane Austen's Mrs. Elton concisely encapsulates the positivity of English humor in the eighteenth century when she comments on the character of Mr. Knightley in *Emma*: "Ah! You are an odd creature! [...] You are a humourist. [...] Under that peculiar sort of *dry, blunt manner*, I know you have the warmest heart. As I tell Mr. E., you are a thorough humourist" (242-43 italics mine). While Mrs. Elton's remark may seem a sort of flattery, her observation implies two distinctive features of eighteenth-century British humor. Just like Mr. Knightley in Austen's novel, an amiable humorist maintains a distanced attitude toward the humorous object or text with a blunt manner but simultaneously approaches the object of raillery with amiability. That amicable approach does not imply simply accepting the given situation with compassion; the friendly heart
of Emma’s brother-in-law is ironically qualified by his “dry, blunt” manner. Thus, this sort of humor bears ontological tension created by the discrepancy of the humorist's dual attitude toward the subject.

Alongside the amiable humor of the eighteenth century ascends satire, wit, mock-epic, and comic art, like caricature and comedy, in what can be called the English Age of Humor. Satire and wit especially flourish throughout the century, but the humor motivating it is a far cry from that of Mr. Knightley, considering the Earl of Rochester’s "A Satyr against Mankind" (1675), Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* (1682), Alexander Pope's "The Rape of The Lock" (1712), or Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729), wherein satire (whether Horatian or Juvenalian) as a literary form is employed to diminish or derogate a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. Motivated by Enlightenment ideals of intelligent rationality and moral decorum, the genre of satire is usually justified by and directed against "those who are ashamed of nothing else" as Swift puts it (648). In other words, the form is commonly directed against the upper-class aristocracy to chide and criticize its hypocrisy. Satire usually employs wit and irony, which denote a kind of verbal expression that is brief, deft, and intentionally contrived to produce a shock of comic surprise. By contrast, Mr. Knightley’s humor in *Emma* differs from this conventional type of comic quality. His humor is not so cynical as satirical laughter, and it does not depend on verbal wit or sneering sarcasm.

The literary subjects of amicable humor are different from those of satire as the former are usually related to plebeians with superficial follies and foibles in real life, while the latter are related to the English aristocracy. Correspondingly, satirical wit
depends upon the intelligent recognition of comic elements in verbal metaphor, and such satirical laughter is close to the conceit of metaphysical poets like John Donne, as Samuel Johnson mentioned in his "Life of Cowley" (1779-81), in that witty remarks are conceived from the creative association of irrelevant ideas, or from metaphysical conceit: "a kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike" (20). Thus, the cognitive and intelligent understanding of the reader comprises a notable factor of wit and satire. By the same token, John Locke defines the concept of wit in his philosophical work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690): "For Wit lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant Pictures, and agreeable Visions in the Fancy" (156). For Locke, "the assemblage of ideas" appeals to patrician, intellectual minds of the upper class rather than the middle or low class, just as Joseph Addison (1711) criticizes wit as "false humour" of the aristocracy to be distinguished from the "true humour" of ordinary hearts: "For as True Humour generally looks serious, whilst every Body laughs about him; False Humour is always laughing, whilst every Body about him looks serious" (no. 35). "True Humour," for the critic, brings sympathy or common sentiment among the readers and the audience whereas "false humour," or verbal wit, often fails to. Thus, amiable humor does not imply patronizing attitudes as the satire of the aristocrat does. This agreeable feature of humor renders an embracing space, and what makes it distinctive from witty or satirical laughter is represented not simply by going beyond the intellectual dimension of witty remarks, but by creating civic and civil connections between the humorist and the humorous object as well.
Humor is thought to resonate with amiability when it first takes its contemporary meaning. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, the word "humor" establishes its meaning as "exciting amusement" in the late seventeenth through early eighteenth centuries, as compared to the notion of satirical wit. Prior to that time, humor mainly denoted "moisture, damp exhalation, or any fluid or juice of an animal or plant," ideas rooted in ancient and medieval physiology. It is notable that the word applies not only to the "quality of action, speech, or writing that excites amusement; oddity, jocularity, facetiousness, comicity, fun," but also to the observers' "faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing." The concept of humor over time then has been transformed from one related to physical attributes to that characterizing interactions between people. And the *OED* makes the notion more plain by distinguishing "humour" from "wit": 'Humour' is "less purely intellectual" than 'wit,' and signifies "a sympathetic quality in virtue of which it often becomes allied to pathos." The *OED* also elucidates the fact that the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) is one of the first among the English to take interest in this word of jocundity and jovialness. Shaftesbury broaches the subject of humor in his essay "*Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in a Letter to a Friend*" (1709), where he employs humor or raillery as his favorite tool for exposing absurdity within conventions, religious and otherwise, and discovering underlying truths. For Shaftesbury, pleasantry and raillery are qualities of the liberal heart of intelligence (44), and thereby he fashions humor as a literary tool to put pressure on the parties and persons involved in the issues he hopes to propagate and change. Finally, Addison, Shaftesbury's contemporary and an English humorist, proclaims the birth of the good natured "Humour" by putting forth an
interestingly allegorical genealogy in the daily journal *The Spectator* (no. 35): "Truth was the founder of the family, and the father of Good Sense. Good Sense was the father of Wit, who married a lady of a collateral line called Mirth, by whom he had issue Humour" (179). However, the youngest of this illustrious family is asked to have a complaisant and charitable frame of mind (no. 23 123), and thus this aboriginal consideration of English humor introduces the scions of Wit and Mirth as an uncommon way of engaging others in Enlightenment literary spaces as compared to the disdainful contempt of wit and satire.

When the idea of humor arises in early eighteenth-century England, English humorists and their emerging readers appreciate ethical values of humor. Addison, through the journal *The Spectator*, plays an initial role with Richard Steele in establishing a distinctive sort of humor in English literary history as an antidote to the poisonous ridicule of the Hobbesian sovereign smile. Addison assails the Hobbesian superior attitude in humor, enumerating the instances of barbarous and inhuman wit: "I am very much troubled when I see the talents of humour and ridicule in the possession of an ill-natured man" (no. 23). Such lampoons and satires, without amiable qualities of humor, are like "poisoned darts," which not only inflict a wound, but also make it incurable (no. 23). Addison continues to rail against traditional ideas of humor, asserting that "good natured men are not always men of the most wit," and that the greatest wits are "men eminent for their humanity" (no. 169). Humor with "a fit of mirth" and "strokes of raillery" is grounded in nature: "the metaphor of laughing, applied to fields and meadows when they are in flower, or to trees when they are in blossom, runs through all languages" (no. 249). Laughter is thus amiable and beautiful, resembling Mother Nature.
herself, and it flowers so as to bring delight and pleasure. Addison's colleague, Richard Steele, also supports the idea of the amiable humor in his July fourth issue of the journal in 1712 (no. 422): "To rally well, it is absolutely necessary that kindness must run through all you say, and you must ever preserve the character of a friend to support your pretensions to be free with a man." Addison and Steele agree to claim that the man of friendly humor has compassion for others' misfortunes or infirmities, pardoning and overlooking one's faults and foibles. Through the popular readership around the daily journal, humor plays a significant role for them to propagate such moral values as good nature, civility, equanimity, decorum, and virtue.

Amiable humor thus manifests a more inclusive nature than wit or satire. In his periodical (no. 112), Addison specifically illustrates how friendly humor reveals its inclusive and embracing features when he prints the story of Sir Roger, his friend, whose portrait captures the knight's oddities without ridiculing:

As Sir Roger is landlord to the whole congregation, he keeps them in very good order, and will suffer nobody to sleep in it besides himself; for if by chance he has been surprised into a short nap at sermon, upon recovering out of it he stands up and looks about him, and if he sees anybody else nodding, either wakes them himself, or send his servant to them. Several other of the old knight's particularities break out upon these occasions: sometimes he will be lengthening out a verse, in the singing Psalms, half a minute after the rest of the congregation have done with it; sometimes, when he is pleased with the matter of his devotion, he pronounces Amen! Three or four times to the same prayer; and sometimes stands up when everybody else is upon their knees, to count the congregation, or see if any of his tenants are missing.

Despite Roger's quaint carriage, the humorist does not see fit to despise his ridiculous behavior, and the reader is allowed to observe these little singularities and strangenesses as foibles that set off—rather than blemish—his good qualities. Thus, this amiable spirit of humor resonates around both the humorist and the reader.
Though their promulgation of amiable humor seems to merely stay in the rhetorical territory of ethos as a reaction to the Hobbesian laughter, its interactive dimensions show it to be the outcome of the civil and civic interaction of the age. Stuart M. Tave (1960) argues that the friendly nature of English humor is rooted in a cultural and political terrain indebted to the legacy of the Commonwealth and the Restoration (1649-1685) and the Glorious Revolution (1688-89). After the revolution, the Whigs began to claim the reins of government and thereafter came one of the most fundamental changes in the British Constitution: the reform of the parliamentary electoral system. As a result, the position of Parliament in the governance of the realm was enshrined so as to preserve political and social liberalism, and Whigs were advocates of the British middle class. Tave makes clear the connection between these socio-political transitions and the fashioning of sympathetic laughter:

What good-natured men wanted was a more equable way of life, in which the archetype was neither the saint nor the wit but the benevolent and good-humored gentleman, cheerful in his religion, sober in his wit: his theologians were the latitudinarian divines, his philosopher Shaftesbury, his journalists Addison and Steele; his political, economic, and social ideas tended to be Whiggish, commercial, and middle-class – rather closer to the Puritan (3). Amiable humor then is related to and arises from contemporary social situations wherein the incremental liberal interactions of the age promote the emergence of a civic and more civil form of humor and laughter.

The civil interaction around the laughter has to do with the emerging spirit of the time that appreciates democratic freedom and participation, regardless of their political implications. Tave goes on to argue that it is the Whig tradition of the Glorious Revolution that makes Englishmen proudly self-conscious of their liberties and wealth, and their liberal ideology begins to allow room for benevolence and sympathy toward
human foibles and frailties. Sir William Temple, a Whig who supports a libertarian ideology, writes a literary essay "Of Poetry" (1690) wherein he cherishes the humorous spirit rendered in English literature. Temple argues that "humour" is "a word peculiar to our language" and hard to be expressed in any other tongue. He claims that soils fertile for crops and ideas constitute ideal conditions for a harvest of generous humor: "This (a greater variety of humour) may proceed from the native plenty of our soil, the unequalness of our climate, as well as the ease of our government and the liberty of professing opinions and factions, … We have more humour because every man follows his own, and takes a pleasure, perhaps a pride, in showing it" (198-200). He seems to believe humor is a quality in humanity that is closer to the natural system than any other sources of it. The locality of humor is shaped by its distinctive terrestrial nature of the ontological space. Shaftesbury also supports a Whiggish ideology of liberalism, as laughter for him is the very sound of freedom, the voice of liberty resisting oppression during the particular time period.16 "If men are forbid to speak their minds seriously on certain subjects, they will do it ironically…. 'Tis the persecuting spirit has raised the bantering one" (50). Therefore, we cannot disregard how the amiable strain of modern British humor comprises the outcome of societal reciprocations among the liberal sprits of the century. The social energy of humor becomes more widely circulated to motivate interactions around the audience who wants to share liberal values. It is this spirit of humor that recurs and revives through the nineteenth century and also in Wilde’s witty and amiable humor.

Addison and Steele’s Spectator is an outstanding example of those literary pieces populated by the spirit of amiable humor. The journal maintains its unique status
as one of the first types of English literature to establish a libertarianism and humor within a middle-class milieu. Amid the early eighteenth century, the so-called Augustan era, when Enlightenment values had yet to reach the people at large, *The Spectator*, in Ian Watt's words (1957), is "the first and best representative of that special style of literature – the only really popular literature of our time – which consists in talking to the public about itself. Humanity is taken as reflected in the ordinary life of men" (56). Given that *The Spectator*, along with the *Tattler*, openly promoted amiable humor among the middle class, it played a shaping role in fashioning an ideology of laughter that was to be populated and shared among various readers in eighteenth-century England.

The scope of amiable humor is extended beyond its ethical dimension when Francis Hutcheson plays a crucial role in divulging a wider spectrum of humor and laughter in the English terrain of literature. When the British humorist Hutcheson takes his cue from Addison and Steel concerning the discourse of English humor, he encompasses and even surpasses their conception of it in his philosophical essay "Reflections upon Laughter" (1725) to argue that amiable attributes of humor are meant to elucidate relational and interactive planes of laughter rather than individual fashioning of civic mind. At first glance, Hutcheson's approach to (and appraisal of) a Hobbesian understanding of humor seem to be similar to Addison's, as both arguments are based on the appeal to good-natured humor in humanity while criticizing the seventeenth-century philosopher for a concept of humor as "sudden glory," which Hutcheson considers to be "some palpable absurdity" or "some ill-natured nonsense" (103). From Hutcheson's perspective, Hobbes' laughter comprises nothing more than a patronizing attitude. He agrees then with Addison that "[l]aughter often arises without any imagined
superiority of ourselves, may appear from one great fund of pleasantry, the Parody, and Burlesque Allusion, which move laughter in those who may have the highest veneration for the writing alluded to, and also admire the wit of the person who makes the allusion” (104). Like Addison, Hutcheson is concerned with the general subject of humor like Addison's "true wit," but his concern extends to even low, vulgar, or even base subjects as well. Although an object appears to us inferior, we are not in a position of scorning it; rather the inferiority would be a factor that increases joyful jest and amusement. For Hutcheson, some ingenuity in even dogs and monkeys, which comes near to some of our own (or human) arts, often makes us merry because we see some equality with ourselves or resemblance of our actions. Regarding "ridicule" or "burlesque," which Addison observes as "false wit," Hutcheson demands that a humorist not make slight of the ridicule, but laugh "with" the subject: "Ridicule applied to those qualities or circumstances in one of our companions, which neither he nor the ridiculer thinks dishonorable, is agreeable to everyone; the butt himself is as well pleased as any in company" (116). Whether laughter results from matters high or low, he reminds us that humor may be formulated through the interactional engagement of the subject with the laughing matter.

Moreover, Hutcheson's theory of humor extends and exceeds Addison's literary notion in that his philosophical approach also tackles the epistemological and aesthetical concerns of amiable humor. According to the Scotsman, a true humorist is to embrace the cognitive dimension of comic amusement as well, the cognitive basis of which is called "incongruity." He continues to argue, "We also find ourselves moved to laughter by an overstraining of wit, by bringing resemblances from subjects of a quite
different kind from the subject to which they are compared. When we see instead of the straining of a likeness, our laughter is apt to arise; as also, when the only resemblance is not in the idea, but in the sound of the words. And this is the matter of laughter in the pun" (109-10). Humor is here conceived as a sign of tension and interaction between disparate or contrasting ideas or concepts. Thus, his ideas of humor depend on the epistemological experience of incongruity. It should also be amiable, transforming the condescending attitude of traditional humor by the perceiver's courteous and complaisant heart toward the object, which he calls "a sublime sensation" (110). The critic seems to try to embrace various positions, even the most extreme ones, toward the comic object with his idea.

More than anything, what makes Hutcheson's argument distinctive is the fact he is one of the first English critics to combine the ideas of wit and humor within his incongruity theory of laughter, though his role is largely overlooked. For Hutcheson, as we have seen, humor is primarily derived from the cognitive perception of incongruity. Through his philosophical investigation of this premise, he clarifies that humor arises from "contrast, or opposition of ideas of dignity and meanness" (21), emphasizing the audience's pleasant and good-natured attitude toward the resulting irony. In fact, for this accomplishment, modern humor critics, like Noel Carroll (1999) and Elizabeth Telfer (1995), deem Hutcheson a pioneer in the field for initiating a discourse concerning the incongruous and ironical scope of humor (Carroll 153; Telfer 360). The critical tradition that he initiated is long and illustrious, and a brief overview suffices to illustrate its impact. Following Hutcheson's lead, James Beattie (1779) affirms that laughter is evoked from "the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage" (318;
326). Later, another English critic, William Hazlitt (1819), develops the idea of
disparateness and discordance, arguing that humor arises from realizing the
incongruous elements of the text. Outside England, incongruity theory influences
Immanuel Kant (1790) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1819). For Kant, humor is "an
affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing"
(223), and Schopenhauer, who admits Hutcheson’s influence on his chapter on the
ludicrous, also views the cause of laughter to be "simply the sudden perception of the
incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through in
some relation, and the laugh itself to be just the expression of this incongruity" (75).

Despite his influence on such thinkers, his observations about humor have been
often disregarded and overlooked. John Morreall (1983), for example, fails to mention
Hutcheson at all when he introduces incongruity theory in his historical compilation of
various views on laughter and humor, and Mark Weeks (2004) deems Kant "the father
of incongruity theory of laughing" assuming that the Enlightenment philosopher is the
first who "attributes laughter to a collision of incompatible conceptual frameworks" (3).
However, Hutcheson’s work should be conceived as the first to lay the foundation of
incongruity theory, not simply because he broaches the epistemological dimension of
humor but because he sets up the widest ground over which incongruity may operate
(from the mean and ignoble to the sublime and dignified).

Later in the century, the rise of the novel as a popular genre makes it possible to
propagate these dynamic dimensions of humor among the emerging middle-class
readers. We notice this rising phenomenon in eighteenth-century English literature,
which often illustrates the foibles and follies in such characters as Uncle Toby, Parson
Adams, or the vicar Primrose. With this humor, readers do not cast any hateful glance at these ludicrous characters of mock-epic novels. When Henry Fielding opens the preface to *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742), he leaves humorous observation up to his good-natured reader (xxxii). Humor and laughter in the emerging genre often create an interactive dimension between the author and the readers. With regard to the relational phase of humor, Wolfgang Iser (1974) points out that humor or ridicule in the text creates a "gap" that motivates the reader's participation on a cognitive level (34-36). But he undermines the ethical scope of humor when he argues that humor in Fielding's novels brings to the reader moral superiority because he or she experiences the "unmasking of absurd vices" (35). He certainly observes that humor delivers epistemological tension between those present in a reading space, but he fails to notice how the tension kindles amiable interactions between them beyond merely cognitive ones.

**A Taxonomy of Wilde's Humor**

Wilde's humor is intellectual and witty—resting on incongruity. Toward the end of his discourse on Victorian humor, Robert Martin (1974) claims that Wilde's comedies ultimately come out of this literary heritage of "heartless" wit of the century (100). The critic may be right when we consider the witty and humorous remarks that Wilde often scatters through his comic plays. The playwright has the characters constantly generate subversive epigrams throughout. Algernon, the idlest dandy from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, comments on marriage to his friend: "In married life, three is company, and two is none" (327). He also quips, for example, to Mr. Jack Worthing: "The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and
modern literature a complete impossibility!" (326). The dramatist similarly uses the other characters like Lady Bracknell to convey witty statements: "I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone" (332). Cecily's intuitive utterance has the audience break out in laughter upon the sudden realization of its meaning at the moment of temporary parting: "The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just been introduced is almost unbearable" (357). Thus, Martin considers these epigrams as part of the intelligent wit running through the Victorian age, and they are so paradoxical and ambiguous that their undefined implications demand the audience's cognitive involvement as they are induced to create novel meanings and significations.

However, Wilde does not completely overlook the notion of amiable humor along with its intellectual side, nor is his laughter discourteous and disdainful, as that of the superiority. In fact, critics like Harold Nicolson (1956) would set Wilde's humor in Irish tradition, in which laughter is disagreeably derisive and aggressive, much as in the superiority theory outlined above (11). But Wilde's absurd and nonsensical humor makes the audience laugh. The audience is simply amused by the sight of this displaced object—the diamond snake-brooch/bracelet. The laughter here is not at anyone, nor does it derive out of any feeling of superiority, granted that the scene and its humor divulge and debunk the disguised character of Mrs. Cheveley. Furthermore, we can confirm that Wilde inherits the tradition of amiable humor of the eighteenth century in his letter to the editor of the *St. James’s Gazette* (25 June 1890): "The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate; and it is to the
confusion between the two that we owe the appearance of Mrs. Grundy, that amusing old lady who represents the only original form of humour that the middle classes of this country have been able to produce" (336). In this remark, Wilde seems to have in mind the British tradition of amiable humor that emphasizes "charitable frame of mind" and appeals to "good nature," just as Henry Fielding asks his readers to have. Thus, Wilde's humor pertains to the tradition of amiable humor as well as comic incongruity.

But Wilde does not stay within the established boundaries of humor and laughter; instead he goes beyond them by opening up an aesthetic or creative dimension of humor at the same time. For Wilde, aesthetics are bound up with decorum, which prizes agreeableness even as it keeps its distance from the object. Though Wilde's humor creates an amiable and agreeable manner, his art surpasses the moral sphere. His humor is more than an ethical or moral commentary on his current society and culture, and it does not participate in the aristocratic tradition of employing witticisms based on abstract ideas. Roger B. Henkle (1980) notes that Wilde's comedies reflect a "transvaluation" of his contemporary culture rather than constitute literally satiric or morally enlightening commentaries: "Everything that the society puts forward as its sanctities is treated with delightful casualness" (306-07). He simply calls it "the art of transposing all values." The critic also suggests that such paradoxical humor of the plays like *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) in particular propagates its "amusing, liberating" consequences upon the audience by reversing the social norms of the age. By the same token, Gregory Mackie (2009) reads the reversal of the established social ideologies in the Wilde's systematic questioning and ironic subversion of the good manners of the age. Mackie also insists that Wilde's humor is designed to reflect
Victorian social "decorum" or "the assumed ethical basis of a code of decorous conduct" (146). For example, the comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* and its humor elaborate the rudimentary system of ridicule practiced throughout the Victorian time period: "decorum and etiquette are taken as the governing (really only) principles for all social life and are exaggerated to such an extent that their violation becomes hilarious" (160). The dramatist's idea of decorum belongs to the dimension of creative aesthetics rather than simply that of ethics or morality.

But critics often ignore or minimize the dynamic dimensions of Wilde's humor, or the aesthetic creativity that he achieves by combining wit and amiability. Earlier critics, like Eric Bentley (1947) and Epifanio San Juan, Jr. (1967), deny and exclude the social/cultural implications of the comic laughter, reducing the scope of Wilde's humor to a structural device; they consider humor as a key to disentangling the complex structure of the plays themselves. Bentley argues that Wilde's humor consists of ironic parallels between what is serious and what is absurd: "The counterpoint or irony of Wilde's play expresses itself theatrically in the contrast between the elegance and *savoir-faire* of the actors and the absurdity of what they actually do" (18). This understanding of Wilde's plays is drawn out of the idea of Art proposed in his essay "The Truth of Masks" (1891), where he claims that the truth in art is contradictory and congruous (1078). San Juan Jr. (1967) similarly develops another new critical or structuralist reading of Wilde's comic works: "With the comedies, Wilde modifies the 'thesis' element of the 'well-made' play by blending serious and trivial implications into a composite whole" (46). By the "inversions of standards" or by combining the serious subject with "gay verbal wit and paradox," Wilde achieves a complex whole of irony full of tensions and leads the
audience to break out in laughter (49-50). The observation certainly illuminates the structural values of Wildean humor, but in fact, it delimits the interactive dimension where the author and the audience meet.

Whether we consider Wilde's humor from the point of view of formal structuralism or of cultural/social politics, we cannot completely disregard his particular theoretical position on literature and art revealed through his critical writings, because it elucidates the creative and interactive dimensions of his humor. Considering Wilde's assertion that "All art is amoral" in his essay "The Critic as Artist" (1890), his comedies would also constitute pieces of art that audiences and critics are left to appreciate with their creative faculties rather than to judge with their ethical or cognitive ones. With this critical precept, Wilde seems to postulate the spectators' involvement in creating the meanings of comic laughter when he claims that the art of literature belongs to the sphere of aesthetics—not politics or ethics—a claim that emphasizes the role of a creative critic (1057-58). In so doing, he employs the notion of "growing" / "growth" in his theory of criticism, which is quite similar to romantic ideologies in terms of the creative mind and its act of creation, except his concept of growth refers to the critic's creative engagement while the other is related to the author's creative imagination. Wilde suggests that the critics creatively "multiply their personalities" as the criticism is geared toward aesthetic unity or incomplete completeness. Creative criticism thus starts with the text through unconventional intellectual lenses: "the primary goal of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not" (1030-31, 1048). The creative task is mainly concerned with the readers' creating a refreshing perspective. According to this theory, humor depends on the readers' creative faculty, which can inventively assemble
different meanings of a ludicrous object; so, for example, we should expect creative and productive meanings of the displaced "diamond snake-brooch with a ruby."

Consequently, when it comes to Wilde's comedy, humor breaks out by means of the audience's creative and cognitive action, via what Arthur Koestler (1964) terms "the sudden bisociation of an idea or event with two habitually incompatible matrices [that] will produce a comic effect" (51). Wilde's humor can thus be differentiated from mere incongruity, which asks an audience to uncover disparate elements or their meanings. The creative quality of humor is conceived as an aesthetic value in Wilde's theory, and laughter is a result of the creative relationship between the readers and the text. When Koestler calls attention to the creative value of laughter, he rightly points out that humor is something to be discovered through the observer's positive and proactive act of creation. And he also mentions that "(w)hen two independent matrices of perception or reasoning interact with each other the result is either a collision ending in laughter, or their fusion in a new intellectual synthesis, or their confrontation in an aesthetic experience" (45). The idea of "bisociation" or "intellectual synthesis" in Wilde's humor is not merely related to epistemological revelation but also to the creative recognition of relationality as one observes the text or understands its context and signification. Likewise, the modern critic claims Wilde's nonsense humor implicates this pattern of creative "bisociation"—"perceiving a situation or event in two habitually incompatible associative contexts" (95), the result of which is a line whose rhythm and syntax creates the impression of being a popular adage or golden rule of life: "in married life three is company and two none" (79). While Koestler underlines the creative dimension of
humor in general, his argument seems to confine the scope of Wilde’s humor to the intellectual or cognitive territory of witticism.

By contrast, I prefer to treat the comic situation in its broadest form so as to encompass an analysis of the amiable humor and its ethos, the cognition, and the role of the audience and humorist in the act of creating different meanings. On one hand, it is true that Wilde’s humor is often dependent upon such nonsense or the juxtaposition of oxymoronic verbal expressions like “beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics,” or “that dreadful Mrs. Cheveley, in a most lovely gown” in An Ideal Husband (484, 514). On the other, the playwright also employs this "displacement" to comic effect, not merely verbally, which requires the audience or the reader to recognize the difference between the familiar and the displaced meanings, but also physically by moving an object or a person from its usual/proper place or position. Thus, the creative displacement renders decisive momentum when the audience creates meanings of it, as he often admits the presence and proactive role of the critics and readers for artistic creations.

With regard to the way Wilde imagines and constructs interactive relationships built through laughter and humor, we need to understand his ideas concerning the anxiety in literary invention. In "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891), Wilde expresses some angst about writing a drama that can initiate such creative responses from audiences and critics under that particular social and political situation. Victorian socialism, he argues, asks a writer "to suppress individualism, forget his culture, annihilate his style, and surrender everything that is valuable in him" (1091). In order to placate the resistance of an audience fearful of controlling "novelty," Wilde counters that a novel artistic creation represents to the audience "a mode of Individualism, an
assertion on the part of the artist that he selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses…. Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value" (1091). Without the deconstructive power of a playwright, Wilde claims, a play cannot draw out any creative responses from its audience, and it is striking that he conceives of creative interaction mediated through the anxiety or tension inevitably sustained between audience and writer.

Creative Dimensions of Wilde's Humor

With this understanding of Wildean humor and laughter in mind, I turn to his plays to demonstrate how Wilde specifically constructs their creative and aesthetic spaces via humor through displacement and incongruity, along with other features of traditional English humor. As we notice in the scene of the displaced "diamond snake-brooch with a ruby" from An Ideal Husband, Wilde (through Lord Goring's creative placement of the artifact) triggers or motivates creative interactions with his audience. By placing the brooch on the arm as a bracelet, the dandy gains the upper-hand on the stolen clasp and Mrs. Cheveley's dreadful scheme, whereas she is placed in an unfavorable position for the moment. Now she is seen more on par with the insignificant diamond rather than with the dandy as her counterpart. Such incongruity induces the audience's creative involvement with creative meanings of the scene the moment when they break out in laughter. Likewise in An Ideal Husband, Lady Chiltern's pink notepaper intended for Lord Goring is another instance of displacement. The pink letter is originally intended for the lady in trouble to get urgent help from the bachelor, saying, "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude." First, the letter is displaced to Mrs. Cheveley's possession, the one who cherishes a tender passion for the romantic
celibate. In her jealous reading, the text becomes a love letter regardless of Lady Chiltern's original intention. Then later, the letter is (mis)placed to the hand of Sir Robert Chiltern, Lady Chiltern's husband, by the scheming of Mrs. Cheveley. The ambiguity of the recipient "you" leads the various readers in the play to come up with different significations of the letter, and the husband reads the epistle as a love letter to himself. The different readings in the displaced hands create humor because Wilde has his audience witness the discrepancy between the primary intention and the displaced interpretations of its readers.

While some critics claim that the incongruity of Wilde's humor piques only the audience's cognitive interest, I argue that it creates interconnected relationships between characters and audience members who simultaneously—and comically—attempt to assign meaning to "the diamond snake-brooch with a ruby." To Mrs. Cheveley, who claims ownership, the piece of jewelry is a mere artifact that embellishes her appearance. But Lord Goring creates comical relationality between the vicious woman and the jewelry by putting it on her as a bracelet. Clasping it on her arm, not on her dress, he evokes an image of a thief, and the item suddenly becomes a shackle rather than an adornment. By cleverly positioning the article, the man of idleness occupies the position of detective or policeman, indicating that he has apprehended a thief. This move creates opportunities for the audience to imagine new relationships between the lady of "horrid combinations" (531) and other characters, not only with Lord Goring, but also with the others, like Sir Robert Chiltern and Lady Chiltern. Mrs. Cheveley was the one who controlled the situation with her evil scheme against Sir Robert Chiltern a moment ago, but now the idlest man takes the control. Thus, the
dandified philosopher’s preemptive "positioning" propagates new relationships between the characters while producing an amusing scene and thereby engineering the creative critic's proactive involvement in creating meanings of the play. At the point where the text of comedy collides with the presence of audience, humor explodes.

A similar pattern may be found in the scenes revolving around the displaced letter on pink paper. With the dandy's help, the pink note becomes a love letter displaced from Lord Goring's hands into the hands of Mrs. Cheveley. Audiences witness Mrs. Cheveley's crafty design to tear apart Sir Robert Chiltern's life as the blackmailer secretly sends the unsigned letter to the promising politician. But the cruel sender crudely misses adding her name to it. The ideal husband and politician, however, seems to identify and understand what the metaphoric letter signifies (whatever it is), while Lord Goring also claims the letter back for amusement. Eventually, the letter reaches its destination as Lady Chiltern puts a final coda on this interesting circulation by adding her husband's name to it. This whole situation provokes laughter from the audience as they make meanings of it from different threads of relationships rendered around the signifier. And the process seems solely cognitive here, but we cannot disregard the fact of how the spectators qua critics work to uncover the implications of the unsigned letter in the play. The creative interaction between the audience and the play is processed via the tensions, intentionally or unintentionally, introduced by the dandy.

Wilde's Being Dandy and the Aesthetics of Humor

As described in the previous section, Wilde often utilizes comic dandies to provoke interactions between the text and the audience. Their creative positioning
motivates creative interactions. Understanding the scene’s relational ontology raises the possibility of discussing the universal system of relationality in the play rather than its particular characteristics. On an ontological or interactional level, the positioning comprises a creative move to generate tension or suspense, whether it is stressful or pleasant. The positioning game is provoked by the initial engagement of Mrs. Cheveley, who is described as "a work of art, on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools" (484). The description may specify the aesthetic features of the character, but it actually reveals the artificial or artful nature of her beauty adorned "in heliotrope, with diamonds" and with her "highly-coloured" lips, which is paralleled with Lady Chiltern, who happens to be posited on other side of this seesaw game. Mrs. Chiltern is directly depicted as "a woman of grave Greek beauty" (482), just as Marble Chiltern is presented with pure simplicity as "a perfect example of the English type of prettiness, the apple-blossom type" (483). The "orchid"-like lady, Mrs. Cheveley, strategically creates tension between Sir Robert Chiltern and herself, and the straining suspense is built up and extended to the end of the story. The tension engineered by Mrs. Cheveley's fraudulent scheme creates interactive energy among different characters, and it also affects the relationship between Lady Chiltern and Sir Robert. And the interactive space comes to be more densely populated with Lord Goring's positioning in the event. Lord Goring's positioning takes its vantage point paradoxically because he is "the idlest man in London." He does not belong to any part of the game between Mrs. Cheveley and Sir Robert, who sit on opposite ends. In other words, his positioning is engaged in from outside the circle of the given situation, just as creating another circle of contacts outside a balancing circle as in a gyroscope. While they push and shove one
another, Lord Goring, an outsider, takes the pivotal position in the center of the plank, controlling the space of the event.

But critics often overlook the gravity of the dandy's positioning in Wilde's comedy. For instance, Ian Gregor (1966) misunderstands the significance of the creative approach rendered by Lord Goring and deems him merely "lucky": "Goring is lucky enough to be in a position to expose Mrs. Cheveley" (510). The critic points out that the character of a dandy in Wilde's comedy "exists fully only in a world of idyll, of pure play" (512). The reason we come to pay attention to the role of a dandy in Wilde's comedy is that the character generates a world "where, of necessity, everything was amoral, inconsequential, and superficial" (502). His claim indicates that the world is less concerned with the structure of the play where a dandy is placed than with the creative form of it—whether it is a farce, a parody, or a comedy of manners. The idlest dandy in Wilde's comedy, however, is presented as art itself. Unlike in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, it is interesting to notice the dramatist's meticulous description of a dandy in *An Ideal Husband*: "Enter Lord Goring in evening dress with a buttonhole. He is wearing a silk hat and Inverness cape. White-gloved, he carries a Louis Seize cane. His are all the delicate fopperies of Fashion. One sees that he stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it. He is the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought" (522). He is free from the social and political power game. The dandy always renders himself a free player like an undefined sheer signifier: "A flawless dandy…. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage" (488). His rather quixotic actions and words full of nonsense are full of contradictions and paradoxes, which constantly
propagate a delightful humor in relation with its audience. And with the creative positioning from the scene of "diamond snake-brooch with a ruby," the young viscount's presence opens up a more dynamic space of interactions in the play, which has remained to this point a simple balancing game between Mrs. Cheveley and the others. The decisive movement is eventually designed to create more progressive interplay and ontological collisions, resulting in a comic trajectory after all. It would be inconceivable to imagine one comic story with all the other characters except the dandy.

When Wilde employs the dandies in his comedies, he illustrates how their creative positioning renders relatedness and relationality with the audience through the humorous scenes. Waleska Sch wandt (2001) conceives the dandy's positioning simply as a part of Wilde's "aesthetic self-fashioning," but the ontological engagement should be considered more than autonomous fashioning as we notice the fact that this creative and delightful fashioning of a dandy is expanded in The Importance of Being Earnest. The audience witnesses another, and yet advanced, positioning game of the dandies. This play is equipped with ludicrous apparatuses around the two idle characters and their creative engagement throughout the play, along with verbal exchanges that seem full of nonsense. Trivial objects, like a cucumber sandwich or bread and butter in the first act, are used to set up comically creative associations between different characters. And a variety of relationships that the audience renders around the props constantly create humor and hilarity, as we examined above. Now our attention is drawn to the playful positioning game of "Bunburying" that Jack and Algernon produce. Both "Bunburying" and "being Ernest" are concerned with taking a position to get related to others in the play. The idlest dandy, Algernon, invents "an invaluable permanent invalid
called Bunbury” residing in the country (326). Likewise, Jack makes up his double or younger brother named Earnest for idling in the city. Just like Lord Goring in An Ideal Husband, the comic moments of the play come from the two young coxcombs’ positioning toward the other characters, seeking a fabulous fine art of life while clashing with one another throughout in this trifling war of manners. And the trivial war is stirred up by the constantly displaced self-fashioning performance of the unbridled two around the name of Earnest.

But unlike the case of An Ideal Husband, I argue that Wilde creates the humorous tension between the dandies and the ideal of being Ernest. Whether the play is a social satire with a moral lesson, a comedy of manners, or a farce with situational irony, humor in this positioning game is generated from the primary structure of tension between the pure artificiality of being Ernest and the playful characters. It is true that Jack is a little more serious about his Bunburying than Algernon, but he is the one who introduces the idea of creating an alter ego as a convenient form of life. His positioning as a profligate brother named Earnest in town provides a cause for all of the comic situations later on, starting off with his relationship with Gwendolen, who also has an ideal for someone with the same name. And his fictitious engagement gets complicated and comic with Algernon posing as a phantom brother Earnest to Jack’s ward Cecily. The two dandies’ appealing to Bunbury or Earnest originally yield only his absence, but their spontaneous double Bunburying reveals the presence of the secret (advertently or inadvertently), so Bunbury ceases to be “the secret subject of an open secret” just as Christopher Craft (1990) puts it (27). The audience experiences a certain incongruity or displacement between what the young bachelors actually are and what the two ladies
imagine them to be as their romantic counterparts, and conflict or contradiction engenders ironic and humorous relationships between them. One young couple in Algernon’s flat and the other in the Manor House of Woolton are quite similar in this respect, though they are different. The two couples’ engaging actions are like mirrors and echoes. Both Gwendolen and Cecily share the same artistic ideal of getting married to a man named Earnest, though they have different origins—one coming from the city and the other from the country. Algernon and Jack with "idle merriment and triviality" try to get engaged to these bachelorettes by projecting themselves as Earnest. The two young men also share common characteristics, such as leading an idle life or doing nothing and being under pressure of debt, though Jack has some property for himself. The men act like brothers even before they learn that they are real brothers, just as the ladies act like sisters even before they meet each other. These similarities are constantly recurring throughout the play, and the confused and comic situations are induced through the topsy-turvy relationships rendered among them until the mystery is resolved at the end of the play. But, when it comes to the ontological system of the play, the interaction depends on how different characters take their position toward the idea of "being Earnest," while the aesthetic ideal of "being Earnest" takes on the über-structure of the play. Under this structure, the characters posit themselves in opposing positions, which causes the tensions and interactions between themselves. The energy flows toward the direction in which they come to find an ideal solution out of the interplaying communication.

Thus, Wilde has the dandy invent a position out of his creative intuition to interact with the others, and the intuitive or creative positioning, though superficially and
frivolously rendered, provides the readers with the space to interact with the characters or the texts. Wilde projects this aesthetic positioning to be realized in a specific space where the play lives through various levels of interactions with the audience and readers. Just as Koestler argues about the creative dimension of humor, humor suddenly breaks out like an epiphany at this moment of clever creation, or when the creative frame of artistic reference and that of the audience are set up to clash and collide. For this reason, Wilde's comedy takes its genuine place not at the far end of Victorian literary tradition, but in the liminal space of an emerging modern one.
CHAPTER III

CHAUCERIAN HUMOR: “THE MILLER’S TALE,” RELATIONALITY AND THE ETHICAL DIMENSION OF LAUGHTER

Humor as Hermeneutic Experience and Beyond

Humor provokes an epistemological experience in *The Canterbury Tales*¹⁸ for pilgrim and reader alike. When the Miller makes his fellow pilgrims laugh with the churlish tale of rusticity, the merry amusement seems to be appreciated by different audiences with diverse responses: "Whan folk hadde laughen at this nyce cas / Of Absolon and hende Nicholas, / Diverse folk diversely they seyde, / But for the moore part they loughe and pleyde" (I 3855-58). Though sundry significations are generated around "this nyce cas," we are not informed of the individual pilgrims' diverse reflections on the teller and tale. Readers may notice that the general tenor of these multiple reactions parallel the communal mood or the seemingly monovalent reaction of the audience when the Knight ends his romance: "In al the route nas ther yong ne oold / That he ne seyde it was a noble storie / And worthy for to drawen to memorie" (I 3110-12). Every companion on the journey to Canterbury appears to be satisfied with the noble story of "gentlesse." While both tales receive an exhilarating and invigorating acknowledgement from the companions, the diversity of gleeful laughter from the Miller's audience raises questions about just which portions of the *fabliau* individual pilgrims find funny. The same questions apply to the readers who have been similarly cued by the pilgrims' enjoyment of the tale. A reader may smile at the blasphemous jokes about "Goddess pryvetee" and wives' private parts, while another might burst out laughing at the chaotic confusion caused by "water" flowing around Nicholas and John
the carpenter. Some may enjoy the satiric nature of John's duping with a promise of a second "Nowelis flood," or perhaps laughter would break out as Absolon kisses Alison's "nether ye" and Nicholas gets scalded in the rump. Or the comic hilarity might have to do with the Miller's initial announcement to tell "a legend and a lyf" to "quite with the Knyghtes tale," only to follow with an incongruous churlish fabliau rather than a saintly tale.

Whatever the cause of one's merriment at the tale, it is undeniable that the humor is associated with the audience's intellectual experience of (or response to) the text and that such reactions are as various as the individuals' interpretations and cognitive experiences. Timothy D. Arner (2005) convincingly argues that Chaucerian humor comprises the reader's hermeneutic experience. The critic regards laughter as "a sign of hermeneutic possibility" for the audience. By the same token, Peggy A. Knapp (2008) also agrees that "hermeneutic desire for meaning" accompanies humor and laughter (129). According to Arner, laughter and humor in the Tales reveal their transcendent nature by opening up infinite possibilities of interpretation for the readers "to participate in a process of creation and reception": humor "positively signals an affirmation of the perspective enjoyed by those privileged with an awareness of their own position outside of the narrative" (156-57). In other words, the audience (implied by laughter and humor) is expected to take a "transcendent" or hermeneutic position to produce the meanings of the text. With regard to the specific interpretation, however, humor corresponds to one particular perspective of the reader, eliminating other possible significations. And the critic observes that Chaucer's laughter consists in the realm of textual and contextual dimension without socio-historical connotations, and his
primary concern is with the readers, not with the author, to divulge the textual implications around merriment. Thus, his notion of the Chaucerian humor reveals a cognitive relationship between the text and the readers. Humor may endow the "outside" participants with freedom of interpretation by providing different perspectives, but this epistemological view of laughter does not illuminate the communicative and communal dimension of humor among those involved in this tale-telling game of the Tales.

The critics' cognitive observation about humor leads us to consider the idea of readership. The complicated structure of the Tales generates multifaceted levels of possible reception and readership. Toward the end of "The Miller's Tale," Chaucer the pilgrim describes how laughter breaks out among the immediate observers of the incident: "The folk gan laughen at his fantasies; / Into the roof they kiken and they cape, / And turned al his harm unto a jape" (I 3840-42). The guffaw of the fictional spectators who behold the machinery of the old man's deluded illusion is almost instantly and intellectually qualified by the laughing and playing of the pilgrims, who are, of course, presumably joined by the readers of whom Chaucer, both poet and pilgrim, is aware. In fact, the frame narrative of the Tales creates complicated layers of readership within and without the texts, while humor and laughter play a critical role in creating different associations and relationships among them. Around the scenes of amusement, various layers of readers react to one another to produce the meanings of the text. Initially, we notice that there is at least a three-fold audience for the tale: the fictional "folk" in the fabliau is one, the fellow audience of the Miller's tale or the host and sundry pilgrims are another, and the readers of the Tales the third, whether they are Chaucer's
contemporaries or a modern audience. Correspondingly, there are as many realized meanings of the text as there are different audiences who laugh at John the carpenter's silly fantasy. Paul Strohm (1983), however, proposes a slightly different concept of readership or audience that adds yet another layer: "Discussion of any author's audience must encompass the audience which is IMPLIED by the work, together with the work's ACTUAL audience in its own time and since. In addition, Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims constitute the most notable FICTIONAL audience in literature, and his habits of dedication tell us something about his INTENDED audience as well" (138). While Strohm's idea is indebted to that of reader-response critics like Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, it illustrates how different layers of audience are invited to probe and produce different meanings of the text. As the various types of audience are expected to participate in actualizing or realizing the potential implications of the medieval work, critical concerns regarding humor have focused on uncovering the connotations of the laughter of different characters and pilgrims as the immediate audiences of the Tales.

My critical concern, however, is more with the ontological or interactive value of laughter than with its epistemological features. Though critics like Helen Cooper (1989) and Derek Pearsall (1985) have considered the fact that "The Miller's Tale" is diametrically or ironically related to the "The Knight's Tale," and that the various levels of audiences indicate different hermeneutic possibilities, they have been more interested in uncovering the characteristics of individual subjects and the meanings of the text rather than in answering the question of how and why the different participants are set to dynamically interact with one another on various levels beyond the cognitive scope. While humor in the Tales can be seen as epistemological experiences of
different incongruities, a study of its ontological implications will lead us to a more thorough understanding of its interactive structure. Understanding its interactive structure, in turn, will more completely illuminate the ontological relationality between the text, the author, and different audiences. Uncovering the laughter and its communicative structure around "The Miller's Tale," "The Knight's Tale," and the whole system of the Tales, leads us to experience more dynamic dimensions of the ontological interactions, especially on an ethical and an aesthetic level, beyond the interpretative relationship between the text and the audience.

While the laughter following "The Miller's Tale" is a product of the tensional relationality between the romance and the fabliau, that irony triggers ontological factors that attract or incite the audience to be placed in a public sphere constituted around the Tales, not as an observer but as an active participant. In other words, the ironical relationship between the two tales creates tension that prompts the readers' interactive participation in the text. When it comes to the tension or stress that the audience experiences by reading the churlish tale after the noble one, we can recognize the different layers of the ontological structure constituted around the two parallel tales. At the most basic structural level there is tension between different characters, primarily between the two suitors, Nicholas and Absolon, and Alison. The love triangle ironically qualifies and modifies its counterpart in the Knight's epic romance between the two knights and Emilye, to which this relationality brings another level of tension. This apparent symmetrical structure of tension is sure to summon the audience's attention as they notice the juxtaposition of oppositions, a recognition that in turn prompts them to see parallels between the Knight and the Miller, as they compete in the tale-telling
competition. The tellers themselves take their position with their distinct tales in
response to the tale-telling game that the host proposes by setting its principle or rule
and reward: "And which of yow that bereth hym best of all – / That is to seyn, that telleth
in this caas / Tales of best sentence and moost solaas – / Shall have a soper atoure aller cost" (I 796-99). The tension between the Horatian dictum and the tellers' different
tales creates a space for the audience to get involved. Thus, the fictional space of the
pilgrimage from Southwark to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury comes
to be an overarching system of narrative tensions that implicate the external audience,
under which system there exists a sub-system of tension between the rule of game and
the competitors, and the audience joins this larger level of tensions between the
individual pilgrims. Within these hierarchical systems of tension, Chaucer the poet
creates a space of interaction to meet with his audience.

Moreover, the complicated layers of tension in the Tales interact around its
gyroscopic structure. The given space governs the tensional system constructed
between the different characters. The ironic conflict and collision between the two clerks
and Alison in "The Miller's Tale" operates within the realistic space of bawdry,
"Oxenford," while the romantic triangle in "The Knight's Tale" develops its tension under
the ideal or romantic space of "Atthenes." Likewise, the tension between the Knight and
the Miller, or one between "sentence" and "solaas," induces interaction on the road to
the saint's shrine. The two local spaces are projected to create responsive positioning
among the audience and the tellers within the larger space of the pilgrimage to
Canterbury. And the quality of ironic tension between the two generates interactional
energy to circulate around the author and the readers in the space of reading in this interactive space of laughter.

Interactive Space of Humor in *The Canterbury Tales*: Laughter as Bakhtinian Carnival

When the host invites the pilgrims to his tale-telling game for "best sentence and moost solaas," he immediately establishes himself as an audience and should be understood, in Cynthia Richardson's words, as "a representation of the forces external to the artist" (326). Read this way, the host occupies a liminal space between the audience and the artist Chaucer, and thus embodies the interpretative tension running through the *Tales*. It is a tension that arises from a need to judge between the edifying and the entertaining, and it is operative in the interactive spaces, thereby opened up between the host and all other pilgrims, between the pilgrims, Chaucer-the-pilgrim and poet, and the poet and his audiences, medieval and modern. On one hand, when L. M. Leitch (1982) claims that the *Tales* revolve around the tension between the "best sentence" and "moost solaas," he refers to a tension between the tales and time limitations that the host frequently and impatiently bestows upon the tellers. Hence, for the critic, the art of storytelling is concerned more with "the limited duration of the pilgrimage and the necessity to avoid boring the audience," (7) rather than with the spatiality or how the artist creates an interactive space for the audience. Though the critic calls our attention to the artist's responsibility to the readers, whom also must not be bored, the idea does not clarify the question of how the author provides an interactive space for them. On the other hand, critics like Laura Kendrick (1988) and John Ganim (1990), indebted to the notion of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival, have tried to explicate the space and the interaction among the tellers and the audience, showing
how a multitude of voices exists within the *Tales*’ fictional reality—even as Chaucer maintains an ambivalent attitude toward them. While this approach explains the nature of Chaucerian laughter within the *Tales* as tolerating and embracing the differences, Bakhtin’s idea of carnivalesque laughter leads us to probe its significance a little further in an effort to understand the interplay between the internal and external audiences.

Laughter and humor in the *Tales* create a communal space for everyone involved in a hermeneutic and/or ontological engagement with the text. While carnivalesque in character, the humor found in the Miller’s churlish tale relates to the social energy running through the story. For Bakhtin (1984), carnival laughter implies its "ambivalent" attributes—"it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival" (11-12)—and so it is in "The Miller’s Tale" to judge from responses, both fictional and critical. Such laughter creates an existential common ground where the speaker and audience interact, and Bakhtin suggests that carnival laughter engineers "the recreation of a spatially and temporally adequate world able to provide a new chronotope for a new, whole and harmonious man, and for new forms of human communication" (*Creation of a Prosaics* 437). Thus, that carnivalesque laughter is communal, "the laughter of all people" "not an individual reaction to some isolated 'comic'" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all people" (*Rabelais And His World* 11). This inclusive nature of humor is predicated upon a moment of "ontological deduction" in that laughter emerges amid the process of decoding the text as the speaker and the audience interact. The laughter starts with the creation of a virtual *chronotope* for the speaker and the audience to be interactively engaged in as a community in that the Bakhtinian notion signifies a particular temporal
space constructed by a fictional narrative. The readers' involvement with the medieval poet and his text creates a timely space for literary discourse through the centuries, and the idea of humor in the *Tales* is closely associated with the audience's ability to make intimately and intrinsically ontological connections with the text and their stories. The weft of textually associated threads crosses the warp of the readers' proactive engagement.

**Ontological Space, Genre, and the Participants' Proactive Positioning**

With the idea of humor, the text of the *Tales* becomes an interactive space as laughter becomes a sign of freedom that all of the participants enjoy without regulating or being regulated by the text. This freedom is certainly concerned with interpretive choice, on one hand. But at the same time, it is an existentially necessary condition for the people to take part in the festive arena. The festive mood frees its participants, which is another feature that Bakhtin uses to explain carnival laughter in medieval literature. According to the Russian critic, this laughter frees people "to a certain extent from censorship, oppression, and the stake" not by eliminating those realities, but by liberating people from "the great interior censor … from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power" (*CP* 453). The liberating attributes of the tale-telling game are initially recognized when the host invites the pilgrims to recount their "tales of best sentence and most solaas" (I 798) in the "General Prologue." Harry Bailly lays out the sanctioned arena for this tale-telling game: "And therfore wol I maken yow disport, / As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort. / And if yow liketh ale by oon assent / For to stonden at my juggement, / And for to werken as I shal yow seye, / Tomorwe, whan ye riden by the weye, / Now, by
my fader soule that is deed, But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow myn heed!" (I 775-81). The merry invitation creates a liberating venue or chronotope where and/or when the freedom of laughter "demolishes fear and piety before an object," and thus it is "a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically" (The Dialogic Imagination 23). The disengaging setup for these peregrinating festivities directs the people on this journey to proactively engage themselves in the game as they want to.

The gaiety of "The Miller's Tale" is enacted along the line of this unbinding invitation to play. And the pilgrim is not the only one who vigorously participates in the game to create the festive amusement. The Host asks the Nun's Priest (Sir John) to tell "something of huntying" (VII 2805), but he refuses the invitation, and instead brings out a blithe "mock-heroic" epic, a ridiculous and yet merry tale induce laughter among the audience. The Canon's Yeoman joins the company a little later and volunteers to disclose his lord's "pryvetee" (VIII 701) to the audience. Again the Host demands the Parson to tell a funny fable, but the priest would tell "a myrie tale in prose / to knytte up al this feeste and make an ende" (X 46-47) or a "meditacioun" (69) with "some virtuous sentence" (63) in it. Sometimes the teller's engagement is qualified by the audience's choice as the Host demands the Pardoner to tell them "som myrthe of japes right anon" (VI 319), but the gentle folk cry out since they are worried about what they would be told, as if they have some common assumption about what they would hear from the companion: "May, lat hym tells us of no ribaudye! / Telle us som moral thing, that we may leere / Som wit, and thane wol we gladly here" (VI 324-26). They would want to hear an edifying tale instead of an entertaining one. Sometimes, the discourteous
attitudes of the tellers toward the other pilgrims are gladly allowed in this festive mood, as the Reeve or Oswald tries to make a fool of the Miller and his not-so-favorable tale of him, provoking a minor level of tension: "Now, sires, ... / I pray yow alle that ye nat yow greve, / Thogh I answere, and somdeel sette his howve; / For leveful is with force force of-showvve" (I 3909-12). The audience eventually allows the Friar to make fun of the Summoner, even though the innkeeper asks him to leave the Summoner alone: "But if it lyke to this compaignye, / I wol yow of a somonour telle a game" (III 1278-79). All of these unrestrained and communal participations are temporarily sanctioned along with the congenial and convivial mood of carnival during the journey to and from Canterbury.

Regarding this festive literature, Bakhtin argues in his *Rabelais and His World* that the carnival atmosphere elicits a liberating engagement: "The gay aspect of the feast presented this happier future of a general material affluence, equality and freedom" (81). He also claims that "Laughter serves to externalize them [those who laugh], to liberate them from the constraints that might be dictated both by some internal essence and by outside conditions of class, status, profession, or environment" (*CP* 436). The theory may sound subversive, but the players in the fest are sanctioned an opportunity to create a proactive positioning toward the others regardless of their intrinsic social/cultural status.

Such sanctioned freedom and liberating engagement of the participants would not indicate that a participant completely denies the existential reality of "social self" as introduced in the "General Prologue." Critics like Kendrick (1988) argue that laughter eventually denies the reality and seriousness of the issue described in the medieval literature (1). The playful spirit of raillery and risibility would be authorized but under
control, according to the critic. The frolicsome fest may disperse the intensity and seriousness of the reality, but the laughter is rather concerned with creating an ideal or virtual self by taking a virtually equal position beyond the given identity to communicate with the others within the carnivalesque chronotope, or "realistic fantastic" world (CP 436). The chronotope of carnival laughter leads the players to create beyond their internal or given status. The creative action does not merely promote the idea of constructing a self in the game, but furthermore builds an ontological connection with the others and the world. The Miller's act of creating a ludicrous tale posits himself in interactive relationships with the noble romance of the Knight and also with the other partakers. The Miller's ludicrous tale implies a dynamic positioning toward the Knight's tale at first, and then the positioning is ironically qualified by the Reeve's participation with his repulsive attitude toward the fellow peasant, who creates another tale of raillery. And all of these interwoven creations are interrelated to one another in a space of pilgrimage, which is set up in between the reality and the ideal. In so doing, this participatory nature of humor is concerned with assuming a "responsible" or "responsive" attitude toward the laughing matter or the teller, whether it is condescending or congenial.

However, the pilgrims deductively adapt to this tale-telling fest, and their intuitive and creative positioning actualizes the literary style and form of the story to function as a diametrical or symmetrical parallel with the preceding tale. Bakhtin, in his Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1984), calls this kind of impetus to create a literature as "genre-shaping power": "Laughter is a specific aesthetic relationship to reality, but not one that can be translated into a logical language; that is, it is a specific means for artistically
visualizing and comprehending reality and, consequently, a specific means for structuring an artistic image, plot, or genre. Enormous creative, and therefore genre-shaping, power was possessed by ambivalent carnival laughter" (164). For Bakhtin, laughter constitutes and creates an ontological position toward a given reality, connoting "a new form-shaping ideology" in itself (CP 283). Laughter has to do not just with its responsive function to the event, but also with its creative form of communication or dialogue because of its "creative renewing changeability" (PDP 164). This aesthetic quality of laughter, therefore, brings out the question of genre as a creative and productive way of communication. And creating a new form of conversation makes it possible to engage in "dialogues of many philosophical positions" (CP 284). The Russian critic seems to be interested in the idea of genre more as a philosophical or epistemological ideology to see and conceptualize reality (CP 275-84). But at the same time, creating a new form may also be considered ontological and aesthetic action as it draws out "polyphonic" communication among different positions. The diverse voices are to interplay with one another, creating dialogic and different relationships of communication. By a similar token, Jon Cook (1986) incisively argues, by adducing Bakhtin's theory of carnival again, that the festive laughter in the Tales implies freedom and equal relationship among the participants, which is quite a different and challenging ideology from the conventional and current literature of the age. Medieval humor plays a significant part in redrawing the boundary between "the higher level of literature" and "the lower genres," creating a new form of literary communication or a novel genre (189-90). For Bakhtin, the subject of style and genre reflects existentially dialectical relations between the speaker and other participants in speech communication (87). He also
mentions that "[i]ntimate genres and styles are based on a maximum internal proximity of the speaker and addressee" (Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, 1986: 97). The close dialogic relationality, however, does not sanction to the participants unlimited freedom, as there always exists relational tension between the teller and the audience.

The variety of genres in the Tales reflects the various positionings of the participants of the tale-telling festival. According to Bakhtin, each genre represents how the individual characters position themselves to make a certain connection to others in the story. The Knight positions himself with an epic or courtly romance, the Nun's Priest with a beast fable or mock-heroic epic, and the Franklin with a Breton lay. Likewise, the participants of the festive carnival are engaged with different modes of tales, like fabliaux, saints' lives, or quasi-sermon, exemplums or mock sermons (sermon joyeux), moral didactic treatises, and so on in the Tales. As critics often indicate, Chaucer appropriates a variety of medieval genres, but still the genres employed in the Tales are "extensively and precisely different from the other collections" (9) that are current in the fourteenth century, as Cooper comments. According to the English critic, the medieval poet "exploits a generic and poetic range for the individual tales that is unparalleled in any other collection" (9). Derek Pearsall (1985) also argues that a fabliau like "The Miller's Tale" expands the conventionally typified nature of the genre "into a new dimension, through elaboration of characterization, plot and setting and through ironic play of style" (168). The level of distinctive aesthetic quality in each style of tale determines that of its relational or interactive quality with the others in and around the Tales.
Not So Funny: Chaucerian Comedy and Humanist Criticism

Chaucerian critics often, however, neglect the interactive dimension of humor and laughter between the author, the text, and the various levels of audiences. First, they attribute the literary quality of the work to the artist's poetic genius and humanism. Readers are thus placed in a receptive and appreciative position in the signifying process of the text when critics overlook the quality of humor in the Tales only to regard it as a reflex of Chaucer's own universal humanism, rather than the result of his creation of a space that calls for an audience to interact with one another—not only on a cognitive level—but also on an ontological level. For Richard Puttenham, in The Arte of English Poesie (1589), Chaucer possesses a "pleasant wit," but finds his humor to serve no other purpose than to ensure that "every man's part is played with much decency" (Heritage 127). Joseph Addison (1694) also discredits the value of Chaucerian jests by mentioning that the poet "tries to make his Reader laugh in vain," finding no interpretative value in their presence (Heritage 160). Later, though, John Dryden (1700) takes an assertive position in appreciating the merry poet and his humanism; the English critic values the individual characters' sublime gravity more than the boorish rusticity of comic characters like the Miller and the Reeve. For him, serious dramatic characterization is considered the one exquisite quality of modern literature. In his critical observation, however, the importance of the comic characters is significantly dwarfed, or even ignored, by the gravity of the serious figures like the Knight, and humor is something that comes from the serious characters. The whole interactive system between the tale of gravity and that of hilarity is not a major concern for the critic. Another English critic, William Blake (1809), also agrees with Dryden in that
Chaucer's pilgrims illustrate "physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life" 
(*Heritage* 1251). According to the romantic poet and artist, Chaucer positions himself as 
"the great poetical observer of men," or "as a master, as a father, and superior, who 
looks down on their little follies from the Emperor to the Miller; sometime with severity, 
oftener with joke and sport" (252). In other words, humor and hilarity in the *Tales* are a 
literary reflection of Chaucer's congenial and condescending genius to embrace the 
world as it is, representing "universal categories of human nature" (130), as C. David 
Benson (2003) puts it. The author's humor is thought to disclose his distanced (and yet 
patronizing) position, illustrating a critical understanding of the relationship between the 
author and the characters. In so doing, the critics disregard or exclude the possibility of 
the readers' interactive engagement with the text.

The dismissal of the comic tales was been prevalent among the Victorian 
readership and criticism, and the dominant social norms and ideologies prize the 
serious and elevated style of tales. The interactive position of the readers is thus 
devalued as grave Victorian social norms underestimate the value of the humorous 
tales of the medieval text. Victorian critics like Matthew Arnold downplay the value of 
humor and laughter in the *Tales* when the social or cultural norm or authority of the age 
breaks the balanced tension between the serious and the humorous by advocating 
"sentence" over "solaas." In other words, the societal tension brought up by the churlish 
laughter cannot be tolerated within the cultural system. Arnold (1880), one of those 
Victorians who belong to the Drydenian theoretical pedigree in a sense, casts doubt on 
Chaucer's seriousness in laughter, criticizing the poet for a lack of "high seriousness," 
despite the fact that he eloquently praises Chaucer and the work for a genuinely
humane perspective and skillful poetic style. Following an Aristotelian tradition and the Greek ideology of literature, Arnold appreciates the *Tales*' "high truth" or tragic moral vision, and "high and excellent seriousness" that he claims are found in the serious works of Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton. Since aesthetic perfection, in his view, attained through envisaging social ideals with ethical seriousness, the Victorian critic assumes that the edifying moral "sentence" that may be revealed through "game and play" or "solaas" could not attain any seriousness worthy of the age's social norm. Likewise, Thomas Raynesford Lounsbury, a post-Victorian American critic, also regards Chaucer's humor as unable to convey any serious moral or religious doctrine: rather "his business was the portrayal of men as they are, and not the effort to make them what they ought to be, or what he thought they ought to be. So far as Chaucer had any conscious aim at all, it was to mirror the life of his day, and not to reform its morals" (ii 472). In so doing, the gravitas of authorship and the serious tales is privileged, while the active participation of the audience is denied, and the humorous tales are often eliminated from the canon in this era.

The reader's position remained resigned or submissive as long as Victorian and the early twentieth-century critics would welcome and relate only to edifying and enlightening features of literature. The critics from the eighteenth and nineteenth century tended to acknowledge the congenial energy of the *Tales*, as a force that originated from the author's amiable humanism, but they disregard the humorous for propriety, churlish tales out of their concern, as Dryden (1700) comments on the jocose and jocular tales: "Such tales should be left untold by me." Braswell (2008) recently points out that it is not until the end of the nineteenth century that critics began to take
laughing matters seriously in reading the Tales, and she singles out Mary Eliza Haweis (1887) as one of the first to suggest including the tales of "obscenity" in serious critical considerations in order to define the distinctive qualities of Chaucerian humor in the text. The English critic argues that the critics and readers of the nineteenth century in particular, from Lord Byron to Walter Scott, deliberately shun the ludicrous tales, considering them as "obscene," "gross," or "smooch": "No nineteenth-century version of the Tales could be depended upon to include the story as Chaucer had written it—or to include it at all" (245-46). And the critic does not specify any detailed reasons behind this phenomenon, but the cultural ideology and norm of the Victorian era might be seen as one factor that leads them to treat the tales with contempt. For the critics, the comic stories would be seen as so crude and crass that they could not be fit to represent any refined spirit of the current times.

Critics have put more emphasis on the individual quality of the different tales in the Tales than on their interactive dimensions, while they appreciate the author's creating a drama of humanism. George Lyman Kittredge (1915) argues that Chaucer as a dramatist demonstrates his literary talent by identifying universal and unchanging human nature in portraying "English life and English character" in the Tales as the author "knew life and loved it, and his speciality was mankind as it was, and is" (1-2, 27). And the critic reckons that Englishness is uncovered through the courteous and amiable characterization of the pilgrims, which reflects Chaucer's firm belief in good-natured humans regardless of his particular religious, political, or moral position in the text. In so doing, the influential medievalist defines the Canterbury pilgrimage as a "human comedy" with an elaborately dramatic structure: "the Pilgrims do not exist for
the sake of the stories, but *vice versa* … the stories are merely long speeches expressing, directly or indirectly, the characters of the several persons” (154-56). For the critic, the *Tales* is conceived as a drama of different and distinctive human characters. He appreciates the humanistic value of characters as individual substances or entities, but disregards the dimension of interactions between them. By the same token, John Livingston Lowes (1934) agrees by mentioning that Chaucer brings forth "timeless creations upon a time determined state" (6), examining Chaucer and his work from the perspective of a realistic dramatist. Chaucer’s universal characterization of human values and inherent faith in good sense are also underlined by modern English critics like C. S. Lewis (1936), who follows Dryden’s congenial insight on Chaucer: "a profound and cheerful sobriety is the foundation alike of Chaucer’s humor and his pathos. There is nothing of the renaissance frivolity in him" (176). But this idea is designed to highlight more serious and elevated tales of courtly love like "The Knight’s Tale" over the indecent tales or comic fabliaux like "The Miller’s Tale," while thereby eliminating the space of interactions between the different tales and the tellers.

He’s Got Style: Chaucerian Comedy, Formalism, and Modern Criticism

Even well into the twentieth century, critics undermined the interactive values of the different genres in the *Tales*. When new criticism, with its central tenet of irony, starts to encroach on the realm of Chaucerian criticism, the stylistic value of the text and its intrinsic qualities of relationality rise to be a primary concern among critics toward the second half of the twentieth century. This critical inclination leads us to see the intrinsic structural tensions of the text, though the extrinsic tension between the author and the audience is still neglected. Unlike the tendency of earlier critics, who adhere more to
individual characters and tales rather than to the work as a whole or the interactive connections among tales, Chaucerian readers come finally to acknowledge the values of the collection's "unrefined" parts and their interrelations. Thus, the internal ontological qualities come to be appreciated more than ever as scholars call more attention to how the two radically different types of tales are conjoined to form a whole system of the Tales. New critical scholars like E. Talbot Donaldson and his student Charles Muscatine, are more attentive to the textual form and style than to the author and his "realistic" sketches of characters. Muscatine (1957) closely scrutinizes the content and form of the text, seeking "to determine Chaucer's 'meaning' as a complex whole; by giving form and style their due attention as essential, inseparable concomitants of meaning, it will try to balance the traditional preoccupation with 'content' alone" (1). For him, the humor in the Tales is dealt with as a matter of poetic style and form rather than of the writer's affect or of the readers' interplaying with the text. Thus, he categorizes the comic fabliaux as realistic bourgeois style imbued with the tastes of an emergent middle class full of "naïve realism … commerce … and common sense," as compared with the romances that are courtly, formal, and rhetorically stylized (58-59). Donaldson's textual analysis of the Tales (1970), similar to that of his colleague, calls for close attention to the poet's style and the formal complexities of the text, excluding historical or political context, while his contemporary D. W. Robertson (1962) is uncompromisingly committed to exegetical criticism in which he concentrates more on the philosophical, historical, and religious perspectives of medieval society, so as to establish a contextual guideline to understand their shaping influences on the text. Donaldson and Robertson occupy antipodal positions to each other in modern Chaucerian discourse; the former
argues that the latter's expository study of cultural modules sometimes leads to misunderstandings of a text whose meaning is, in his firm view, to be uncovered by grasping the complex humanism of, and thus the frequent humor in it. Though they maintain these different perspectives in appreciating the Tales, Robertson does not deny the observation of new critics that its humorous factor could serve as a fundamental literary apparatus to uncover the meaning of the whole text. In so doing, modern critics begin to appropriate the ontological discourse of new criticism as a means for analyzing the structure of the Tales, but unsurprisingly for those working in a new critical vein, the interactive space constructed through a relational tension between the author and the readers is eliminated or neglected. For them, tension or irony comprises part of the internal system of the text not a means for exploring the possibility of interaction between the artist and the audience.

Though modern criticism of the Tales and medieval humor coalesce around contemporary theoretical and philosophical paradigms that at once consider the structure of the Tales alongside of, and by means of, individual tales, critics use different critical tactics to unveil the meaning of Chaucer's comedy and humor. On one hand, laughter has been considered a matter of a particular genre, reflecting some coherent stylistic features of fabliau or parody. Muscatine and Donaldson argue that humor is simply part of the comic genre of the fabliaux, such as in the Reeve's, Shipman's, Merchant's, Friar's, and Summoner's tales. Derek Pearsall (1985) likewise asserts that the comedy is inherent in a genre that features the realistic "fantasy of the subhuman" as compared to the "fantasy of the superhuman" in romance (168). Elaborate practical jokes are played amid typically comic situations in which, for
example, an old man weds a younger wife only to be cuckolded by a young suitor. With this built-in hinge, comic peculiarities are to be uncovered by analyzing its genre’s distinctive literary form, language, allusion, imagery, and style. Pearsall also contends that the comic elements of genre are best revealed by juxtaposing it with another story. According to the critic (2003), the meaning of fabliau and its humor is revealed through its relation to romance: "two literary forms [that] seem to exist in a complementary relationship" (164), despite the fact, or perhaps because, the two distinct genres seem to work in "diametric opposition" (95) according to Cooper. By placing "The Knight's Tale" and "The Miller's Tale" in succession, Pearsall concludes that Chaucer throws "different slanting lights" on reality and gives "beneficial shock, enrichment, invigoration" to his reader's perception of the world (164). Chaucerian scholars like C. David Benson (1986) also comprehensively emphasize and clearly enunciate the distinctive characteristics of the individual genres or tales in the Tales. They commonly argue that tension, or ironic complexity, emerges from juxtaposing two different types of stories, which may yield humor and versatility of textual meanings. But they are not inclined to explain how the tension motivates the audience’s active involvement.

Humor Beyond the Text

Investigating and explicating the matter of humor as a specific feature thus demarcates the border and boundary of comedic discourse. It is hard to deny the assumption that hilarity and humor in the Tales creates relationships between different narratives, and the sudden association of distinctive genres accommodates and facilitates the contextual significance of comic insights. What such analysis risks, however, in analyzing humor as the result of the interactions of internal, generic devices
is overlooking the interactive spaces opened up by the author and the act of reading wherein humor is produced. When the Miller's fabliau draws the audience's attention, inducing laughter and intellectual response, the audience joins the space of interaction with the text. As we have considered earlier, various layers of readers are conjoined within and without. They could be the immediate audience of the tales or the pilgrims, the implied oral audience whom Chaucer addresses in his age, or distant readers from a different era. And the tension between the text and the audience implied in humor encompasses not only the textual dimension, but also the socio-cultural.

In fact, since the mid-1980s, critics like Laura Kendrick and Lee Patterson have extensively contextualized and historicized the Tales to explain connections between the tales and tellers, or between the tellers. In so doing, their theoretical concerns are oriented not only toward the text, but also toward its current audience and historical context. Consequently, the humor in the Tales is also dealt with in terms of its historical and cultural implications rather than its textual indications. Kendrick, for example, investigates the socio-historical function of the comic elements in her Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in The Canterbury Tales (1988). Appropriating Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque laughter, she argues that the medieval laughter is a "man's way of asserting his superiority or mastery in difficult situations, his way of dealing with the Fall, that is, with his knowledge of his own imperfection, his ignorance and weakness" (1). Consequently for her, self-assertion through laughter involves questions of social class, and thus audience expectations. While "gentils" would read the tales for the "sentence," churls like the Miller, Shipman, Cook, and Reeve would go for the "solaas" by making game out of earnest (16). By announcing his intention to tell "a legend and a lyf," the
Miller may have aroused the expectations of his noble audience, but his fabliau eventually overturns them. This way, the *Tales* create a locus of a carnival where the churlish class are allowed to "mock and dethrone" the patriarchal authority that represses and restrains them, and thereby to triumph. Therefore, for Kendrick, the blasphemous joy of the churls is granted under this "sanctioned" festive or carnivalesque circumstance just as in play and game, and eventually such mirth brings catharsis to the players, allowing them, within the bounds of fiction, to assert some control over their life. The Miller's humor is sanctioned within the boundary where the society or the company can control the deliberate blasphemy. Her study of the comedy is a hermeneutic tool to understand the contextual connection between the text and the culture, and yet she does not deny the cultural value of laughter, which she claims is sanctioned to "promote social stability." However, her New Historical study of humor simplifies and magnifies the tensional structure constructed between a peasant's subversive positioning act and the controlling authority of the society. Humor and laughter play a tendentious role to open up the space for the participant's "sanctioned" engagement, but at the same time, the structure of tension and thereby interactions in the *Tales* are much more dynamic than the simple interaction between one independent subject and its cultural authority (129). Her critical concern seems to be more oriented toward the hierarchical or vertical relationality constructed through humor, but we can disregard the vertical dimension of interactions among the different tellers and also the audiences.

While Kendrick is attentive to the subversive and seditious power of laughter in medieval society in terms of game and fest, Lee Patterson historicizes the text by
means of a political analysis indebted to Marxist theory as mediated through Fredrick Jameson (1982) in particular. In his *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (1991), Patterson regards the comedy of the Miller as being related to the insurgent power game in medieval society. In so doing, the critic grounds his reading in an historical context rather than an ideological one. The historicist renounces "absolutizing, totalizing schemes" in favor of "the specific, the particular, the local, and the contingent" with regard to the tale-tellers and their narratives because he firmly holds that "the relationship between the individual and social, in all its irreducible complexity, become visible" throughout the text (425). In his chapter, "The Miller's Tale and Politics of Laughter," Patterson argues that the tale reflects the class consciousness and "anticlerical" tendencies of the peasantry and constitutes both a protest against the unnecessary exploitation of the peasantry and the threat of class conflict (254). Thus, the laughter around the Miller's tale reveals, according to the critic, the social and political tension or "disunity" of late medieval society, not only between hierarchical social relationships, but also between individuals of the same social status; just as the Miller's comic fantasy counters the Knight's romance, so the former's fabliau is challenged by the Reeve's tale of spiteful animosity at the same time.23 This New Historic approach of Patterson's provides both ontological and epistemological insights with regard to the humorous attributes of the *Tales*: he perceptively demonstrates how the text is historically situated to represent its contemporary social subjects and the tension around them, while elucidating how Chaucer embraces different voices of the historical subjects and how they interact with one another in his text. His historicizing study of the *Tales* reveals his critical interest in the textual subjects and their
relationships uncovered through the social laughter, but just like the case of Kendrick, he also overlooks the interactive dimension of humor with the audience. The interactive space of communication includes the readers' proactive positioning with their tales of different genres beyond the text, just like the early medieval readers of the *Tales* like Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate are induced to create their responsive works.

Humor and the Ethical/Aesthetic Dimension of Positioning

The question of understanding different genres and tales in *Tales* is directed toward that of the relationships between the tellers and the audience, or that of their positionings and the communicative interactions between them in a public sphere. The laughter of the Miller's fabliau provides an ontological space for the other tellers and audience to join together as creative participants. The churlish tale and its humor motivate not merely the audience's participation in the intellectual interpretation of the story. His comment also connotes the question of readers' liberating, and yet proactive, positioning toward the tellers and tales in his prologue: "And therefore every gentil wight I preye, / For Goddess love, demeth nat that I seye / Of yvel entente, but for I moot reheerse / Hir tales alle, be they better or wrse, / Or ells falsen som of my mateere. / And therefore, whoso list it nat yheere, / Thurne over the leaf and chese another tale" (I 3171-77). And the drunken peasant entreats his audience to show civility and politeness for the story he is about to deliver, though he leaves it up to them to decide how to read it: "Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame; / And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game" (3185-86). The comment here prompts and provokes the audience's attitude toward the speaker and the tale, and the demeanor is implied in humorous and laughing responses. Therefore, the attitude is interpersonal, intersubjective, and social. This
position of laughter is related to the interpretive attitude of the observers as I have discussed earlier. But when Bakhtin points out that carnival laughter assumes an ambivalent attitude toward the others involved around the text, the idea implies more than cognitive engagement to disentangle the intricate meanings of the text: "The laughing word becomes a general attitude toward the world instead of a specific utterance engendering a specific response. Laughter tends not to combine with the word, but to replace it. When this happens, the word's openness typically becomes dehistoricizing and depersonalizing" (CP 441). The "dehistoricizing and depersonalizing" quality of laughter surpasses and encompasses its interpretative and intellectual dimension. The ambivalent attitude in laughter implicates the embracing quality of humor, which is geared toward a universal value among those involved around it. It is the openness for a participant to willingly take an active position toward others in his or her communicative action, and the positioning is ready to embrace tension and stress with humor and laughter, or tension between "sentence" and "solaas." Without laughter, it is hard to take a superior position in competition of the positioning game, as in the case of the Reeve, who is the only one who does not laugh with the others after the Miller's tale. Whatever positioning a participant is engaged in, the aesthetic and universal value of laughter illuminates the ontological relationships invoked around humor, strained with tension or interaction between the different parties. Thus, my question is now diverted to the universal value or principle in ontological positioning around laughter, or to how the different interactive relationships are structured between the speaker and its addressees on an aesthetic level.
The aesthetic value of laughter in the *Tales* revolves around the idea of civility or politeness. Amid the liberal interactions of the carnivalesque fest, the communicative acts draw us to consider the ethical dimension of communications among the participants. Humor facilitates a festive and free positioning game for them to engage in virtually equal interactions under the invitation of the Host. The aesthetic relationship includes a civil attitude among the participants, or the reciprocal or friendly interplay between the speaker and the audience as well. Through the *Tales*, the issue of courteousness is constantly brought up by the different tellers as they take a position in the tale-telling game. The Wife of Bath, for example, asks her audience not to be annoyed by her romance or amusing story: "If that I speke after my fantasye, / As taketh not agrief of that I sey, / For myn entente nys but for to pleye" (III 190-92). The matter of freedom does not tamper with that of politeness among the pilgrims. The language used by the tellers and audience persistently resists infringing upon the realm of civility throughout the *Tales*. And the precise principle of positioning manner is emphatically advanced by the Host when he mediates the storytelling progress in between the enthusiastic tellers, like the Friar and the Summoner: "A, sire, ye sholde be hende / And curteys, as a man of your estaat. In compaignye we wol have no debaat" (III 1286-88). The engaging attitude of being polite and courteous is communally appreciated in the social interplay necessitated by the game.

This courteous language used in the *Tales* indicates the civil relationship expected among the participants. Sociolinguists like Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1978, 1987), indebted to Erving Goffman and his article "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor" (1956), broach the subject of an ontological connection
between language and politeness in social interaction and communication. The relationship between the speaker and the addressee is often determined by two factors, according to H. Paul Brown (2006): They are "1) the perceived degree of intimacy or familiarity felt to exist or desired to exist by speakers between themselves and their addressee, and 2) the perceived relative social position of those speakers to their addressee within some social hierarchy" (10). In other words, regardless of the social intimacy or proximity between different classes, the status or social position itself is shown to play a significant factor in interacting with one another and in how one is addressed. Brown and Levinson (1987) first advance the theory, arguing that the idea of politeness in such relationships is defined as "The (linguistic) manifestation of the social hierarchy which exists between speaker and addressee at some time in terms of: 1) the social distance between the speaker and the addressee (distance or solidarity); 2) the power differential between the speaker and the addressee (power); and 3) The degree of imposition on the addressee involved in making the speech act" (5-6). This particular strategy of politeness as the "expression of social relationship" (2) is enacted to alleviate the possible threat or "the interpersonal tension" caused by any verbal act, showing a certain level of regard and respect to the speaker or the audience's "negative face" (freedom or the "perceived ability to engage freely in one's activities") or "positive face" (personality or "approval of one's public-self") (Brown 12). The language used by the participants often reflects a polite and civil relationship between them. When the Miller as a teller calls his audience "Now, sire, and eft, sire" (I 3271), the language implies his courteous attitude toward them. By the same token, other tellers, like the Nun's Priest, show respect to their listeners when he calls them "ye lorde" (VII 3331),
the Wife of Bath uses the term "Lordynges" (III 379), the Merchant politely refers to his audience "Ladyes" (IV 2350), and the Pardoner honors them as "good men" (VI 904).

If we agree that Chaucer's *Tales* is rendered in the vernacular of the late medieval ages, we would not disregard his collection of decasyllabic couplets as different from the language socially and culturally practiced in English society at that time. Whether we consider the text as a poem or a drama, the *Tales* constitutes different communicative interactions or dialogic relationships among the characters in its secular form of language. And the interactions are established upon this energetic flow of civility running throughout the *Tales*. The characters' choice of language in this positioning game is engineered "but for honeste / No vileyns word as yet to hym spak he" (III 1267-68), and the ontological energy of the congruous attitude overflows onto its audience as they orient themselves toward the text. And the apt manner is intended to draw an amiable or congenial response from the audience inside and outside the text.

The language of politeness and civility is a constant throughout the *Tales*. As we noticed earlier, the Reeve starts to tell his fabliau to mock the Miller when he makes a modest request, employing expressions like "I pray you alle that ye nat yow greve" (I 3910) "leveful" (3912) and "by youre leve" (3916), though he creates a strained tension with the other churl. Later, the Friar also chooses to use the similar pattern of verbal expression (III 1282) as he duels with the Summoner to settle a matter of honor in the tale-telling game. Or the characters sometimes reveal their conscious and deliberate efforts to establish an amiable relationship with their audience. On one hand, when the Franklin is about to tell his *Breton lay* to the other companions, he unpretentiously humbles himself, though his choice of words implies more than simply what he speaks
about with his rhetoric: "by cause I am a burel man, / At my bigynnning first I yow biseche, / Have me excused of my rude speche. / I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn; / Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn./…. / Colours of rethoryk been to me queynte; / My spirit feeleth noght of swich mateere. / But if yow list, my tale shule ye heere" (V 716-20, 726-28). On the other hand, the audience may notice that the Pardoner’s language often has moral value, though the speaker himself is immoral: "By God, I hope I shal yow telle a thyng / That shal by reson been at youre likyng. / For though myself be a ful vicious man, / A moral tale yet I yow telle kan" (VI 457-60). When it comes to considering the somewhat delirious speech of the Pardoner, his strategic choice of language is quite humorous and ironical, though its implications are left up to its audience. But hostile tension breaks out between Harry Bailey and the speaker once the Pardoner finishes his tale of moral exemplum and opens up his reliquary to the Host. The utterly vicious man is placed in jeopardy of being eliminated from the group at the moment, but the Knight—along with all the other people who have laughed about the scene—welcomes him back to the community. The reconciliation is promoted and pronounced with words of polite and earnest supplication for the Knight: "But right anon the worthy Knyght bigan, Whan that he saugh that al the peple lough, 'Namoore of this, for it is right ynough! / Sire Pardoner, be glad and myrie of cheere; / And ye, sire Hoost, that been to me so deere, / I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner. / And Pardoner, I prey thee, drawe thee neer, And, as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye’" (VI 960-67). The embracing quality of humor is included with words of civility when a similar case of politeness is practiced regarding how the noisy Monk is tolerated by his fellows.
Not only do they seek rapprochement with one another at the moment of conflict and clash on their journey, but the speakers embrace the others courteously as they choose the words for the tales. The Man of Law once comments on his principle of engagement in the game, illustrating how he learns to establish a writer's ethos by employing a flattering reference to Chaucer, the poet: "But certainly no word ne writeth he / Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee, / That loved hir owene brother sinfully – / of swiche cursed stories I sey fy!— / … / And therfore he, of ful avysement, / Nolde nevere write in none of his sermons / Of swiche unkynde abohomynacions, / Ne I wol noon reherce, if that I may" (II 77-80, 86-89). The Man of Law would not use horrible and graphic description when he told his story to his audience. His rhetorical choice is engineered by another storyteller and his choice of words rather than by his technical use of style. And furthermore, the pilgrim Chaucer is graciously allowed to change his position and tell another story when he is interrupted by the Host as he is narrating a terrible romance. In the Tales, politeness is asked for the speaker to avoid interpersonal clashes and also to interact with his audience in a reverent manner—despite the intellectual implications behind it.

With regard to Robin or the drunken "leeve" brother, he takes his position among all the other possible engagements from the other tellers to follow or "quite" the Knight's tale. The ontological deduction of the Miller is drawn out to denote or determine his relationship with the Knight and the others. The fabliau cannot be resonant without its preceding tale. And the arrangement or directionality of the teller's positioning enhances the quality of laughter and humor at the same time as it points toward a target to create, and even maximize, the diametrical tension between the comic tale and the following
position of the Knight’s. Upon considering the connection made between the teller and his audience, we may need to evaluate how the positioning of the Miller intensifies the tension or the density of the clashing relationship. We also notice that the positioning is invariably modified by another teller in the first part of the Tales in particular. As the Miller’s amusing tale is qualified and challenged by another churl, so is the Reeve’s Tale by Roger of Ware, or the Cook. Moreover, the directionality is also geared toward the audience to break out in laughter with various significations because we know that "Whereas a man may have noon audience, / Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence" and that the audience has the appreciating "substance" in themselves (VII 2801-03). The Knight’s tale provokes laughter for the Host among others (I 3114), the Cook enjoys the amusing tale of the Reeve (I 4326) more than anybody in the audience, and everyone bursts out in laughter as the Miller tells the tale to his audience. The Miller comes forward to compete with his "legend and a lyf," and the pugnacious character arouses an anxious tension around himself. But the ill-mannered churl does not forget to show his respect to "every gentil wight" in his communicative act, and the audience responds with amiable humor at the end of his farcical fabliau. Though the audience reveals their unique cognitive reactions for the tales, there is the civic and civil energy of homogeneous and humorous congeniality flowing throughout the festive tale-telling game. A humorous energy and courteous rapport between the tellers and the audiences are represented in this carnivalesque festival.

More than anything, positioning determines one’s subjectivity, and the positing form regulates its functioning or contents. The subject of "subjectivity" and "agency" has gained its privileged position in literary criticism of the Tales since the 1970s, when Jill
Man’s idea of "estates satire" argues that the characteristic descriptions of the pilgrims in the *Tales* depicts traditional stereotypes of the estates. The various approaches are made through the elaborate studies of the recent Chaucerian scholars, like H. Marshall Leicester,26 Carolyn Dinshaw, Patterson, and Mark Miller among many others, concerning the self-conscious subject or individual entity of the text. And the discourses have been oriented to grasping how the subjectivity can be explicated, and most of them are rendered more on the level of epistemology rather than ontology. From an epistemological perspective, those studies may still be valid to elaborate the nature of the subject; however, if we look into the ontological or interactive dimension of the *Tales*, we recognize that the relationships in positioning are geared more toward communicative interactions between the text and the audiences rather than fashioning the identity and integrity of the subject with a specific narrative voice and style.27

The similar structure of tensional interactions repeats itself as the tellers employ their distinctive communicative positioning in response to the game of "best sentence and moost solaas." And the relational density and consistency of the Miller's ludicrous story and the degree of intensity created by the subsequent tales determines the depth and width of the relationships between the participants in the tale-telling game. Rather than the quality of the tellers' and tale’ substance and style, their positioning regulates the content, and thereby the form or genre of the tales. The tellers try to create relationships with different forms of stories, and the degree of solidity or the quality of internal tension within the tale determines how the writer formulates an interactive space—or Bakhtinian *chronotope*—where existential or ontological energy permeates. In so doing, the interactive and communicative value of civility is communally or
aesthetically appreciated as the public resonance in humor is revealed by different layers of the audience in and around the Tales.
CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEAREAN COGITO: PERSPECTIVE AND POSITIONING

Early Modern Society and the Epistemological Impulse

Stephen Greenblatt (1980) broached the notion of "self-fashioning" in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, and it has continued to resonate among the Shakespearean scholars and the New Historicists who explore the interrelationships between the self and socio-cultural constraints. The phenomenon of self-fashioning revolves around modern concerns with human identity and the subversive, shaping power of culture. For Greenblatt, Renaissance "self-fashioning" reflects how the self constructs its identity and individuality in a public arena even as powers of one's culture impact the seemingly autonomous improvisation of the self. The tension between the shaping forces of the individual and his culture is conceived of as a creative power that constructs cultural artifacts. Still, the freedom of the individual subject diminishes as overarching systems of cultural authority like family, religion, and the state delimit (literary) acts of self-fashioning (4; 256). His study certainly exposes some traits of the relational structures divulged between the autonomous engagement of the early modern subject and cultural authority, as Greenblatt calls attention to the spatial system of Renaissance England. Engaging in his "cultural or anthropological criticism," Greenblatt appropriates the notion of "self-fashioning" to illustrate the ontological power structure of how the literary self is constructed. In other words, the creative self-fashioning of the Renaissance artist is constantly qualified by the larger system or the Other/Otherness.
However, his argument about the construction of the individual self and subversive gazes of "cultural institutions," on one hand, is solely based upon his epistemological impulse to make connections between literary actions and their cultural implications. The concept of the "circulation of social energy," uncovered through individual fashioning, simply confirms Greenblatt's cognitive inclination because he wants us to see Shakespeare's literary engagement fueled primarily by cultural identification. On the other hand, the critic's exploration is focused more on the individual subject or the independent self's social engagement than on interactive communications between the different subjects or between the subject and its social space created by "self-fashioning." We can still witness this tendency of subject-based observation in his recent study of Shakespeare's seeking freedom from or staging resistance to absolute authority (2010). By contrast, I discuss how Shakespeare and his plays create a space for ontological interactions that propagate the emerging value or idealism of humanity in early modern society—not just on a cognitive level—but also on a level of interactive relationality. In so doing, I opt to use the concept of interactive "positioning" to call more attention to how a creative (literary) act of engaging others in a given space initiates relational tension and thereby interactions between one subject and others to resolve it. This study is thus oriented toward uncovering the systematic patterns of positioning and interaction, and their significance for communal resolution in the given theatrical or societal space. The structure of relational ontology reveals its universal and inclusive nature, unlike the cognitive relationship between the text and the audience, which is contingent and subversive.
The limitations of critics like Greenblatt reside with their focus on an individual subject and its substance-based (like freedom or autonomy) inquiry. Certainly the ideas of individuation and freedom are emerging values of the age, and the significance of human perspective and perception rises at the same time as the empirical observation in art and science just starts to be widely appreciated in this early modern era. The matter of experiential cognition, moreover, discloses the way an observer acquires knowledge of the world, and this epistemological urge motivates an awareness of different possibilities for relationality between one subject and the other. Thus, I argue that relational interactions between different literary agents (including the text, the author, and the audience) rendered through Shakespeare’s different ontological positionings of characters can provide a critical lens through which the depth of a Shakespearean ideal of humanism is constructed in the space of Renaissance drama. For this purpose, I mainly focus on plays like *The Winter’s Tale*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Othello*, where Shakespeare deliberately creates cognitive and ontological tensions between his literary creation and the audience in order to provoke interactive communications in the theatrical space, propagating the ideal of human dignity or humanism in the early modern era.

*The Winter’s Tale* (16109-11) provides an ideal opportunity to study a moment that Shakespeare constructs to create tension between the art and the audiences and to demand them to interact with the text. These interactions in turn raise questions for which the answers require the readers to engage proactively with the writer’s positioning through the play. The early modern dramatist utilizes the positioning of Paulina as an artist to provoke such interactive tension and communication when she presents a work
of art to the audience to reinstate what has been lost since the beginning of the play. He has that theatrical presentation draw the audience’s attention, not just to cognitively generate its meanings, but for them to be involved ontologically in the process of creating art by reacting to Paulina’s artistic positioning. In investigating this process, I show how the relational system between different literary subjects is structured in and around the text on an extratextual level of relationship between the author and the audience as well as on a textual level.

Toward the end of the play, the audience witnesses Paulina’s demand that Leontes arouse his faith regarding the resurrection of his dead queen: "It is required / You do awake your faith" (5.3.94-95). The King of Sicilia is thus placed in the position of publicly attesting his belief regarding the event as both the Sicilian king and the audience, witnessing the extraordinary and anomalous event, are forced to address a question of seeing and believing. Most of the time in Shakespearean plays, the audience is in an omniscient position, knowing more than the characters on the stage. But, every once in a while, we know as little as one of the characters does in the play, here being placed in the position of Leontes, not knowing precisely what we are seeing on the stage at the moment. The audience’s cognitive experience, as well as Leontes’, is here challenged by Paulina’s calling on the faith in what we see on the stage. Thus, the question comes at this pivotal point of the play when audiences are asked to withhold their intellectual judgment of Hermione or the artistic statue for a moment and to reflect on their existential positioning toward the aesthetic presentation, whether it is the statue or the play itself.
But, first of all, Shakespeare sets up the scene to pique the audience’s cognitive engagement with the statue regarding whether it is dead or alive by placing them in the position of Leontes:

O, thus she stood,
Even with such life of majesty – warm life,
As now it coldly stands – when first I wooed her.
I am ashamed. Does not the stone rebuke me
For being more stone than it? O royal piece!
There’s magic in thy majesty, which has
My evils conjured to remembrance, and
From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,
Standing like stone with thee. (5.3.34-42)

The question of human perception for both audiences and characters starts with the cognitive subject’s epistemological impulse to disclose the unknown truth. Regarding such epistemological engagement, Patricia Parker (1996) usefully employs the term "dilation" to describe the process of gradually growing intellectual recognition of the characters so as to uncover secret or hidden truths. While her discourse is focused on the sexual and historical implications of the idea, dilation via spying and intelligencing reveals how the characters like Othello and Hamlet come to understand ongoing situations around themselves. Their epistemological impulse to discover the truth "unfolds" (237) or "brings to light" (244) the secrecy of an event whose significance they are desperately engaged in unraveling, just as Othello seeks to know the "essence that's not seen" (4.1.16) through the eyes of Iago, whom the moor assumes "sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds" (3.3.243). This gnosiological desire of the characters creates an impetus that dominates or dictates their understanding of the world regardless of the truthfulness or authenticity of the evidence they eventually come
to recognize. And oftentimes, as Parker argues, the process of discovery (whatever its interpretive implications) that unfolds through various epistemological observations drives a play to its tragic ending, as in the case of Hamlet, who is fatally "fascinated with unseen events, the obsession everywhere in Hamlet with spying and being spied upon" (256). Intelligencing is useful for thinking about cognition and epistemology because it has to do with the question of how one as an autonomous subject perceives and knows reality in Renaissance plays. While the cognitive preoccupation of characters certainly manifests a subject's desire for knowledge, Shakespeare does not merely stay within the scope of individual perception or the individual's perception in exploring questions of knowledge and knowing the world.

While intelligencing exposes characters' epistemological impulses or their desires to know the truth, their (often limited) intellectual recognition constantly collides with that of the audience. Shakespeare often employs intelligencing as an interactive device to invite the audience to participate in unraveling the meaning of the cognitive experience being staged, for example, between Othello and Iago. For that reason, the plays' epistemological or cognitive concerns involve both characters and audience in the dilation of the intellectual engagement grounded in inductive reasoning because the process is typically fueled by getting glimpses of small sense-data that are presented as clues to anxious observers in the theatrical space—players and audiences alike. Of course, these interpretive engagements may generate different hermeneutic outcomes, but in situations wherein the audience does not know more than the characters themselves, the playwright utilizes these clues to provoke dynamic interactions among their various and distinctive cognitive experiences.
Shakespeare creates and breaks this type of interactive cognitive tension more often in his comic plays. In the last scene of *Much Ado About Nothing* (15980), for example, the audience witnesses Don Pedro's ironic "smile in sadness" as Benedick encourages and entreats the bachelor from Aragon to get married: "Prince, thou art sad, get thee a wife, get thee a wife. / There is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn" (5.4.117-18). The final ironic allusion to cuckoldry elicits laughter from the audience who, like Don Pedro, witnesses the resolution of the entangled situations, and yet remains aloof in observing the events from a liminal space. The audience's epistemological experiences at the moment clash with those of Benedick and other characters, and yet they generate a humorous dimension consonant with the comic mood of the play.

The clash or tension constructed from observers' different perspectives often prompts laughter as the audience witnesses a character's epistemological impulses being manipulated by another. While the Prince of Aragon plots to facilitate the different romantic relationships throughout the play, the audience notices that laughter accompanies numerous cases of (manipulatively) placed auditory recognition. In other words, Shakespeare often uses such cognitive misperceptions to shape a character's empirical judgment or knowledge in dramatic comedies. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, for example, Antonio's man happens to overhear the prince and Count Claudio contriving an intriguing plan for wooing Hero (1.2.7-13). Borachio also eavesdrops on the same scene (1.3.46-50) and delivers the intelligence to Don John, plotting a horrendous scheme to subvert the romantic plan. And we also come to know that Benedick catches the same moment (2.1.186-91). In so doing, Shakespeare sets up this process of
informing and disinforming to create interactions between the play and the audience, who increasingly know more collectively than the characters, who have a limited scope of perception. The dramatic irony provokes the audience’s participation in producing meanings of the play.

Shakespeare puts to work the limited perspective of the characters to provoke laughter from his audience. As the play *Much Ado About Nothing* develops, different characters are entangled in this business of intellectual peek-a-boo to comic effect. In so doing, the playwright magnifies the effect of humor by inventing a symmetrical tension between the good and the evil characters. Over the course of this intelligencing game of overhearing and mishearing, Don John tries to play a deceptive informant just like Iago in *Othello*, disrupting the festive flow of the play. As the ensign is resentfully desirous of the military position of Cassio favored by the African Moor in *Othello*, so does Don John here reveal his jealousy over the relationship between Don Pedro and the young Florentine. And this conflicting structure runs throughout the play to amplify its comic effect as the initial positioning of Don Pedro, unlike that of Iago, is constructive enough to effectuate a comic ending as his positioning harbors a positive energy rather than a negative one in itself.

Shakespeare utilizes the cognitive impulses of the characters to provoke the audience’s cognitive and ontological interactions with the play at the same time. While Shakespeare works to ratchet up the audience’s anxiety or stress by shaping tension between the Prince's romantic design and his bastard brother’s vengeful plot, the merry companionship between Beatrice and Benedick is deceptively constructed by the other characters through the purposeful setup of the scene of mishearing. By taking an upper-
hand position in the play, Don Pedro is placed to get the comic energy running through the play. The cognitive discrepancy between what a character knows and what the audience observes generates a comic tension that often leads to laughter. In Act 2, the audience observes Benedick inadvertently overhearing Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio, who try to convert the bachelor’s apparent indifference toward Beatrice. The scene ironically starts with Benedick’s prosaic soliloquy about falling in love in Leonato’s garden: "I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviours to love, will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love" (2.3.8-11). Don Pedro orchestrates the hearsay, driving Benedick to commit to getting into relationship despite his perverse position of anti-marriage: "Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive the love come from her" (2.3.199-201). The audience is inclined to break out in laughter when they notice how the lord from Padua reluctantly—yet willingly—admits his obligation to the relationship and how he comes to rationalize why he has to marry Beatrice after all. Beatrice is set up as a cognitive object worthy of attention: "They say the lady is fair" (2.3.204) and Benedick takes action by spying on her so as to confirm any affection toward himself: "she’s fair lady. I do spy some marks of love in her" (2.3.216). The ignorant bachelor is placed in the center of an amusing situation, which arises from the Prince's having the upper-hand, and creates a positive energy in the play.

By the same token, the early modern dramatist constantly fabricates the comic scene more effectively by bringing together the different theatrical experiences between the characters and the audience. In other words, he comically challenges the
epistemological impulses of the characters in a theatrical space by setting them up in cognitively defensive positions. Just like the case of Benedick's mishearing, "the same net" is spread for Beatrice as well by Hero and Ursula in the beginning of the Act 3. Her stark response interestingly resonates with that of Benedick, and her speech suddenly goes on verse, using alternately rhymed couplets: "And, Benedick, love on. I will requite thee, / Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand. / If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee / To bind our loves up in a holy band. / For others say thou dost deserve, and I / Believe it better than reportingly" (3.2.112-17). She has used witty and intelligent prose so far, but suddenly the audience notices that the cynical character tries to moderate her independent and free-agent-like behavior by regulating or formalizing her language. She recognizes at the moment the truthfulness of Benedick's affection toward her, but her recognition is ironically qualified by that of the Renaissance spectators who witness the disinformation on the stage.

When we try to elaborate the significance of cognitive impulses of characters like Benedick and Beatrice, critics tend to focus on explaining the motivation or cause of their epistemological engagement. Critics like René Girard (1991) argue that this cognitive impulse of the characters has to do with mimetic desire in a romantic relationship. The urge to know the love of a romantic counterpart is initiated by some ontological or existential desire to imitate their close friends' romantic or sexual cravings. Accordingly, Beatrice and Benedick get into a relationship as a result of "love by another's voice" (81), which is a desire to imitate someone's desire. Their epistemological impulses to know love are instigated by a third-party mediator like Don Pedro who arouses their jealous instincts to imitate, and the hunger for love consists
merely of "ironic references to mimetic desire" (82). The French critic’s anthropological approach to cognitive motivation is sure to clarify some universally imitative dimension of human relations in Shakespeare’s plays, but my critical interest lies in uncovering a more universal system of how different cognitive impulses interact in a theatrical space and in accounting for the relationality between the individual cognitive impulses represented and the collective level of interpretative tension generated by their differences. A character’s desire to know is not simply a part of mimesis or inductive reasoning through sensory or empirical observation, but rather a literary device that Shakespeare uses to construct the intelligencing experience as a part of an ontological system structured within theatrical space.

Cognitive Impulse in Much Ado About Nothing

My contention is that Shakespeare envisions the theater as an ontological system in which different cognitive impulses collide to create tension and to fuel interactions between the play and the audience that bring forth meanings of the play. A subject’s cognitive contemplation of the world is constantly qualified or modified by other characters’ and the audiences’ presence in the same space. He intensifies the tension by creating symmetrical structures within a play that involve the audience in making sense of it. For example, Don John, malcontent and malignant, tries to contrive a mischievous design that counteracts Don Pedro’s festive scheme. He challenges Hero’s loyalty to Claudio by fabricating the young bachelor’s cognitive experience, employing his men, Borachio and Conrad, for conspiracy and connivance. By having Claudio falsely witness Hero’s unfaithfulness, the reticent villain formulates and increases the cognitive tension as he proclaims that "the lady is disloyal" (3.2.85-86). The young
Florentine's firm belief in the only heir to Leonato is shaken and shattered as the illegitimate brother of Don Pedro declares Hero's infidelity: "If you dare not trust that you see, confess not that you know. If you will follow me I will show enough, and when you have seen more and heard more, proceed accordingly" (3.2.100-03). And, as in the case of Beatrice and Benedick, Claudio and Don Pedro's eagerness to witness and examine the situation is enacted to confirm the accusation of Hero's infidelity, though they began it with a certain suspicion. Don John, however, attempts to prune away the roots of doubt with his seemingly adamant assurance: "Let the issue show itself" (3.2.109-10). The bastard's deceptive confidence and conviction seems to invite his audience to the most judicious and unbiased epistemological experience of the lady's infidelity.

The playwright here must face a dilemma that he has created, or the audience's demand to resolve the muddled situation in favor either of Hero's faithfulness or reviving the comic mood. The illicit act of the villains seems to dominate the mood of the play as in a tragedy, but Shakespeare then has their trickery obstructed by the most unusual of suspects, the fools. The tension between the festive mood around Don Pedro's positioning and the deceitful design meant to dismantle it comes to be dissolved as the audience witnesses the appearance of Dogberry and his compadres, thereby demanding yet one more interactive ontological relationship. The scene is ironical in that the evil scheme is to be divulged by these clumsy and clownish characters, not by the others whom we may think are more capable of or more knowledgeable about disclosing the plot. Dogberry pedantically advises his watchmen of their duty in patrolling Leonato's house: "The most peaceable way for you if you do take a thief is to
let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company" (3.3.54-55). Apparently, they have no capability for making out the situation in which they are about to encounter the cunning connivers during the night watch, a fact made plain by the constant verbal malfunctioning of Dogberry and his fellows. As the watchmen and the audience witness Borachio and Conrad boastfully divulge how the Prince and Claudio are falsely "planted and placed and possessed" (3.3.147) by their master, the scene becomes an "amiable encounter" between the play and the audience, which raises the audience's expectation that the festive energy will be restored. The malfunctioning cognitive impulses of the naïve characters to recognize the strangers defuse the tension constructed between the play and the audience for the moment. In this way the spectators come to get a glimpse of how the intrinsic tension between the characters will be resolved.

Shakespeare again creates cognitive tension to be resolved in the ensuing public accusation scene in Act 4 wherein the audience must figure out how to recover the tainted romantic relationship and wonder what is to come of the matter of Hero's loyalty, which is yet to be unveiled and resolved. The audience witnesses Claudio and his companions' misunderstanding of her fidelity by means of the trial scene. After Claudio's public shaming of her, the audience confronts another scene of epistemological tension between Friar and Leonato regarding Hero's "blushing" (4.1.32-40). Claudio denounces the bewildered lady for being "this rotten orange" (4.1.30), based on his observation, which is falsely facilitated by the conspirators the night before. For the doubtful bachelor, the blushing is a mere sign of "guiltiness, not modesty" (4.1.40). Don Pedro also justifies the validity of a seemingly indisputable ocular roof: "this grieved Count / Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night / Talk with a ruffian at her chamber window"
(4.1.88-90). Meanwhile, Friar Francis, who has been silent during the whole scene of allegation, shows his resolute conviction regarding the truthfulness of her blushing: "I have marked / A thousand blushing apparitions / To start into her face, a thousand innocent shames / In angel whiteness beat away those blushes, / And in her eye there hath appeared a fire / To burn the errors that these princes hold / Against her maiden truth" (4.1.157-63). His interpretive perspective is different from the others, even from the maid's father, Leonato: "Friar, it cannot be. / … / She not denies it. / Why seek'st thou then to cover with excuse / That which appears in proper nakedness?" (4.1.169-74). The Friar's defense fuels a resurgence of the play's comic energy as Shakespeare stirs up and defuses tension between the characters’ cognition and the audience’s, who already know the truth about the "blushing," as they witnessed how the perception of the lady's loyalty was falsely manipulated. Still, we do not know whether the Friar's judgment comes from his experience as an old man or a divine, but we do know that his evaluation of the situation depends on sheer cognitive observation. Regardless of the question of whether the Friar's subjective discretion is to be trusted or not, Shakespeare here has the cognitive tension heightened even further between the Friar and other characters who are still suspicious of Hero's loyalty, and their epistemological experience collides with that of the audience.

All of the much-ado-about-nothing situations in the play have something to do with comic confusions in perspectives, while the hurly-burly is constantly meant to elicit humorous responses from the audience. Regarding their epistemological experiences, critics like Marjorie Garber (2004) explain that the term "nothing" is concerned with "noting," a linkage reinforced by the fact that the words are thought to be pronounced in
the same way on the early modern British stage: "Much ado about noting" is certainly an apt description of the play's events, and nonevents. To 'note' was to observe or mark carefully, to give heed or attention to ..., but also to set down as having a certain good or bad character, to point at or indicate by pointing, to mark or brand with some disgrace or defect, and to stigmatize" (380). The comic situations, therefore, are rendered through the displaced, disinformed, and confounded cognition of the characters, which simultaneously challenge the characters' cognitive impulses. Garber focuses more on the interpretation of the play than on its theatrical structure, but Shakespeare undoubtedly creates incongruous or discrepant cognitive experiences between the characters and the audience to advance the interactive relationality that, in turn, generates meanings of the play.

For the comic conclusion, the playwright adjusts such epistemological jarring to begin to relieve the interpretative tension not only between the different characters, but also between the play and its audience. Toward the final act, once Claudio finds that he is framed by Don John's treachery and villainy, he becomes able to see Hero's innocence: "Sweet Hero, now thy image doth appear / In the rare semblance that I loved it first" (5.1.235-36). This rather receptive and muted recognition of the truth emerges as the young count is cognitively detoxified of the lethal poison administered by the bastard brother of the gentle Prince. Claudio does not seem to take any proactive step to position himself to draw a truthful observation about love in his romantic experience. In so doing, Shakespeare stages Hero's final marvelous unmasking to redeem and reconcile the most eligible bachelor's genial follies of the past at last: "And when I lived I was your other wife; / And when you loved, you were my other husband" (5.4.60-61). At
the same time, the audience observes the incongruity of this scene of rapprochement: some of the characters (who think Hero was dead) recognize the resurrection and its truthfulness, while the audience already knows that the lady was not actually dead and that the unmasking is devised by Leonato and Antonio. Leonato and his brother Antonio orchestrate the final festive ceremony for the duped Florentine by bringing up the "copy" of his "deceased" child to rehabilitate and restore dismantled relationships in the romantic ritual. The spectators vividly witness all the procedures of the creative ceremony, and in so doing, stay apprised of the restoration of the tainted relationship between Hero and Claudio. Friar Francis’ restoration scene is never fully explicated, adding some disputable dim ground as to how the characters cognitively perceive the marvelous occurrence. Instead, Shakespeare leads his audience to follow the comic mood of the play: "All this amazement can I qualify / When after that the holy rites are ended / I'll tell you largely of fair Hero's death. / Meantime, let wonder seem familiar, / And to the chapel let us presently" (5.4.67-71). Concerning the story of "fair Hero's death," the Friar remains ambiguous to the other characters. The audience does not ever get to hear from the Friar any further concerning the familiarity of the ceremonial scene, but Claudio as an immediate audience of the scene unveiling Hero would not confirm the fact that there is any discrepancy between his confession of love and cognition. Though the cognitive tension or ambiguity still exists regarding the story of death and revival, the direction of the scene is more oriented toward reconciliation, while the audience remains uninformed regarding the characters' recognition of the story of resurrection. Shakespeare seems to leave the ambiguity up to his audience's recognition, whatever it is.
But the cognitive tension between the play and the audience is yet to be fully relieved or resolved when the audience's intelligencing eyes turn toward the bickering couple again. The audience's humorous response, or their amusement, comes from observing the jolly duo fencing with each other "against their hearts" (5.1.92) toward the end of the play. Benedick now recognizes the fact that Beatrice regards him with "an eye of favour" (5.4.22), though she is yet to unmask. During this final verbal squabbling, Benedick and Beatrice deny having written love sonnets, and yet they give in to the amiable request of their community to get married. Both of them recognize that the romantic notes ironically provide "miraculous" ocular proof to confirm their affection. Though they still act like they feel dubious about their "frivolous" loyalty, they become another couple who falls into matrimonial relationship. As Benedick concludes that "man is a giddy thing," the ironical remark may provoke different kinds of laughter from different audiences with different recognitions of the final scene because it contains ambiguous implications regarding the characters and their marital relationships. The audience recognizes that Benedick's marriage is now paralleled with what he has said against it for the possibility of his being a cuckold (5.4.103-4). For that reason, Claudio's calling Benedick "a double dealer" constitutes double-entendre and conveys humorous incongruity to the audience, who has been omnisciently watching the character on the stage. Hence Benedick's final suggestion for Don Pedro to get a wife certainly implies cognitive tension between the play and the audience, however they render its comic connotations: "First, of my word; therefore play, music. Prince, thou art sad; get thee a wife, get thee a wife: there is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn" (5.4.126-28). Benedick's quip connotes double meanings of marital life, and the tension
is more evident when the audience notices that the Prince smiles at Benedick’s invitation, but in a sad mood. This apparent lack of consistency in Don Pedro’s character rouses the audience’s cognitive attention toward the very one who has arranged the festive mood through the play but who remains aloof to the end. Here, the Prince’s ironic stance still confronts and collides with the cognitive responses of the intelligencing audience, who wants to know whether Don Pedro actually joins the festive mood that he originally planned to create in the beginning. Thus, the tension between the play and the audience persists throughout the ending scene, though the play resolves the symmetrical tension between Don Pedro and Don John in the end. The tension moreover continues to incite communicative or dialogic interactions between the theatrical text and the audiences—both early modern and modern in that they are left to consider its ambiguity.

Cognitive Impulse in *The Winter’s Tale*

In his play *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare encapsulates this cognitive impulse, tension, and thereby the interaction of the Renaissance societal space. A subject’s cognitive contemplation of the world is constantly qualified or modified by the others’ in the same space. The difference induces the cognitive tension with which Shakespeare creates the theatrical space of interactive relationality. The tension does not necessarily have to be resolved as it is rather devised to prompt interactive or sometimes interpretative actions. By the same token, the early modern dramatist often utilizes the cognitive experiences of different literary subjects to generate the relational interactions that result in aesthetic engagement for those involved in the play, or for characters and audiences in *The Winter’s Tale*, though the romance brings up the question of
interactive relationality more insistently than the comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*. Once we return to the last scene of the romance, we notice that it resembles the girl’s renaissance in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Or put another way, the animation of the dead girl recalls the last scene of *The Winter’s Tale*, where Paulina revives Hermione, the queen who has been dead for sixteen years. Just like the case in which the Friar sets up a scene of revival for Claudio and others in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the way miracles are staged in *The Winter’s Tale* helps bring people back to their epistemological senses while restoring their relationships. Paulina’s therapeutic role-playing brings the Sicilian king to a full sense of penitence and recovery from many distressed and remorseful years. As in the comedy, the gimmickry is sure to produce a salutary result—not only for Leontes—but for the other characters as well; these features of revival are also recurrent in Shakespeare’s late romance plays like *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*. Nonetheless, questions surrounding the king’s reinstatement still remain: How does he redeem himself through the ritual? How does the play rehabilitate itself? How does he restore what is lost? All the questions merge onto this final moment where Paulina requests faith from her audience.

Shakespeare constantly deals with questions of human faith and evidential fact in terms of cognitive impulse and acquiring knowledge. As we examined earlier, Othello persistently pursues any ocular proof to confirm Desdemona’s (dis)loyalty out of his misgivings or anxiety, which is engineered by the genius villain Iago when the devilish character invents the evidence, which leads to the moor’s tragic misjudgment. On an epistemological level, cognition and credibility are incompatible because faith (in a secular sense) should not require any proof, whereas cognition is geared toward
empirical evidence. The first three acts of *The Winter's Tale* unremittingly track close to an Othello model. Leontes' lunatic jealousy is, however, germinated from nothing but his own ungrounded suspicion. Leontes plays his own private Iago, basing his mistrust of the queen upon his own cognitively contaminated knowledge, a knowledge tainted by his perception as the analogy of a spider in Act 2 suggests:

> How blest am I  
> In my just censure, in my true opinion!  
> Alack, for lesser knowledge — how accursed  
> In being so blest! There may be in the cup  
> A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart,  
> And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge  
> Is not infected; but if one present  
> Th'abhorred ingredient to his eye, make known  
> How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides;  
> With violent hefts.  
> I have drunk, and seen the spider. (2.1.38-48)

This metaphor encapsulates Leontes' cognitive impulse, one in which a tainted or infected perception triggers a detrimental effect on the observer. Empirical knowledge can poison the perceiver who imbibes and learns of its presence, as poison affects Leontes when he sees and learns about its nature.

This analogy also describes the problems of knowability and knowledge in the play, rendering as it does its fantastic poetic vision of how knowledge can be poisonous or contaminated if known to the perceiver. The king's observation itself facilitates recognition of his tragic error of distrusting his wife. The figurative comparison parallels with Othello's desperate anxiety, as Garber (2004) suggests (834): "I had been happy if the general camp, / Pioneers and all, had tasted her sweet body, / So I had nothing
known” (Othello 3.3.350-52). In both cases, Shakespeare shows that the inductive procedures of empirical epistemology have to do with the ways a character forms and develops his or her knowledge. That process concerns how data, when perceived differently, affects and infects the trajectory of our knowledge.

Leontes' defiled cognition brings intellectual stress or tension to the audience at the same time. Spectators notice that his suspicion of the queen’s chastity sprouts from his watching the wife giving her hand to Polixenes. This subtle moment provides a visual motif for the Sicilian king to cast a doubt on the queen's fidelity:

Too hot, too hot:
To mingle friendship farreis mingling bloods.
I have tremor cordis on me. My heart dances,
But not for joy, not joy. This entertainment
May a free face put on, derive a liberty
From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom,
And well become the agent. 'T may, I grant.
But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,
As not they are, and making practiced smiles
As in a looking-glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere
The mort o'th' deer. (1.2.110-20)

While the king's doubtful eye guides the direction of his cognitive attention, the audience also observes the staging of the relationship performed by the actors and gauges the level of intimacy between the Queen and the King of Bohemia. With regard to Leontes' cognitive experience of the queen's infidelity, the theme of nothing—"noting"—emerges once again here in the troubled king's monologue:

Is whispering nothing
Is learning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career
Of laughter with a sigh – a note infallible
Of breaking honesty. Horsing foot on foot? Skulking in corners?
Wishing clocks more swift, Hours minutes, noon midnight? And all eyes
Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,
That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
Why, then, the world and all that's in't is nothing,
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
If this be nothing. (1.2.287-98)

For the king who has been observing this whole series of events, nothing is everything, indicating and confirming her unfaithfulness. But the spider he finds in the cup could be the one the king puts in for himself as Garber masterfully argues (835). In other words, he could be the very one who contaminates the contents of the cup. With his observations and assumptions, the king consolidates his own dubious judgment in weighing and probing "evidence." The audience, however, must appraise the scene by means of the very same rhetorical questions that the king uses to found his perceptions, and his cognitive impulses leave the audience intellectually uncomfortable.

The uncomfortable tension allows Shakespeare to play up the audience’s interactions with the king's epistemological construct, and the tension between the perspectives seems to be heightened when Leontes is adamant about his knowledge and discretion on this matter of the tainted relationship between the royal couple:
"Cease, no more! You smell this business with a sense as cold / As is a dead man’s nose. But I do see't and feel't / As you feel doing thus; and see withal / The instruments that feel" (2.1.152-56). At the same time, the audience also sees the other characters who witness the same event entreat the king to correct his willful misperceptions, to
recover his sanity, and to reinstate the queen's fallen faithfulness: "Please you t'accept it," appeals a lord, "that the Queen is spotless / I'th' eyes of heaven and to you" (2.1.134-35). With the king's refusal comes chaos in his marriage (Hermione's honor is "flawed"), in his court (he mistrusts his subjects), and his family (he renounces his legitimate issue). With these actions, he is alienated from everyone inside and outside the play. In so doing, Shakespeare maximizes the cognitive tension with Leontes' perspective and the audience's, thereby creating the tragic trajectory of the drama. Unlike the intermediary cognition in Much Ado About Nothing, or the manipulated and molded perception in Othello, Leontes' intelligencing and knowledge is exclusively unmediated. He alone engineers the incredulity of the others, and there is no intermediary Iago or Don John who would drive Leontes under a cloud of suspicion. The absurd extrapolations from his intelligencing are his alone, and the audience is left to uncover and construe the unknown source of his suspicion.

Shakespeare continues to promote these interactions by unveiling the dire consequences of Leontes' tainted cognition in this trial scene. Despite all his convictions regarding the relationship between the queen and Polixenes, the king cannot present any ocular proof to indict the queen in his "just and open trial" (2.3.205). For this very reason, Hermione cannot present any counterargument to defend herself but can only appeal to her king's "conscience," (the same that condemned her) in hopes that he may remember witnessing her integrity and loyalty before the Bohemian king's arrival at court. She finds no attorney except the oracle. The disbelieved queen asserts herself that the litigation against her honor is a sheer mis- and/or mock-trial based upon the king's tendentious tyranny, not upon the just law of a judicious mind: "if I shall be
condemned / Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else / But what your jealousies awake,
I tell you / "Tis rigour, and not law" (3.2.109-12). Her playing as a merely passive pawn
defects the cognition of the audience, who wants to recognize the truthfulness of the
king's allegation and the queen's protest because she cannot present to the king and
the audience any ocular proof for her loyalty.

Should the audience have shared the king's epistemological conclusions,
Shakespeare challenges that affinity by forcing them to confront those responses, by
having them watch the king's court confront his perceptions with their own. The
"dreaming" king's cognitive positioning toward Hermione derives him to be a tyrant
whom Camillo advises to "be cured / Of this diseased opinion, and betimes, / For 'tis
most dangerous" (1.2.298-300). Paulina also attests that the king's spoiled knowledge
alienates him from all the others that used to affirm his honorable position: "for he / The
sacred honour of himself, his queen's, / His hopeful son's, his babe's, betrays to slander
… The root of his opinion … is rotten / As ever oak or stone was sound" (2.3.84-86, 90-91). His connections with his dear good friend from childhood, Polixenes, and with the
faithful lords, like Camillo and Antigonus, are infected along with the distrusted alliance
with the audience, as Paulina ratifies: "I'll not remember you of my own lord, / Who is
lost too" (3.2.228-29). Though the news of Mamillius' death and the queen's swooning
along with Apollo's oracle snaps the jealous tyrant out of his own suspicion, it is too late
for him to recover everything lost. And in so doing, Shakespeare forces the audience to
question their faith in the character as well, and thus undermines any alliances that they
might have been inclined to form.
During the violent upheaval, Paulina assumes a significant position as "a most intelligencing bawd" (2.3.69) or a liaison between the disconcerted queen and the doubtful king, so that the playwright has her issue a challenge to Leontes' knowledge, a tension in which the audience is forced to reside until the moment of reconciliation. She positions herself more like a close friend and confidant to the queen rather than a subject or a lady-in-waiting. Her "free undertaking" (2.2.47) is set out to be the queen's "advocate to th' loud'st" (2.2.42), and despite the king's warning, she decides to voice her opinion in a dignified yet defiant way to reveal the lunatic jealousy of the king. But the audience observes Paulina also playing a proactive and peremptory role in an attempt to create reconciliation between the king and the queen. By contrast to the king's "noting" of "nothing," she is determined to present an ocular proof of the queen's loyalty, saying that the newborn offspring comes from Leontes' own procreation. In so doing, Paulina appeals to his sensory perception:

   It is yours.
   ...
   Behold, my lord,
   Although the print be little, the whole matter
   And copy of the father: eye, nose, lip,
   The trick of of's frown, his forehead, nay, the valley,
   The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles,
   The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger.
   And though good goddess Nature, which hast made it
   So like to him that got it, if thou hast
   The ordering of the mind too, 'mongst all colours
   No yellow in't, lest she suspect, as he does,
   Her children not her husband's. (2.3.96-108)
The intelligencing agent tries to draw a visual connection between the father and the baby daughter so as to invoke the king's awareness of the truth. But she seems to the obstinate king a mere woman to be ruled in his court, and when her vivid descriptions of the child are unable to gain any traction with a father consumed by his "weak-hinged fancy" (2.3.119), the audience is invited to join the tensioned interactions.

Shakespeare has Paulina challenge the audience's perception as well as Leontes'. When Paulina acts as an autonomous agent between Hermione and Leontes, it is striking to notice that she presents the newborn as an artistic reproduction of the father by employing the language of the early modern print culture. Her visual rendition of the original and its copy foreshadows the artistic animation of the final act in which Leontes and the audience confront artistic and visual presentation of the apparently dead queen while the theme of nature and imitative art recur throughout the play. The matter of art and nature, at the moment, seems to be rendered as a subject of epistemological concern with how the perceiver finds his or her perspective when oriented toward an object, here to Leontes' orientation toward the baby. Leontes seems unable to see any connectivity between the original and its replica, and a recognition of the relationship seems to require no less than epistemological distance between the observer and the object. That same distance is also required of the spectators who are asked to discern Paulina's rhetorical presentation of the copy and the original.

To the audience, as well as to the character Leontes, this question of cognition and relationship invariably revolves around that of faith in this early modern space of theater. When Paulina showcases the statue of Hermione in the final scene, the audience (who is placed in the position of Leontes again) confuses themselves about
whether it is a copy or an original. Despite the confusion, Leontes is required to have faith that the queen exists to him as the significant other. Likewise, the audience has to have faith in the theatrical presentation on the stage to recognize its relationship with them. The question of recognition is interrelated with how a cognitive subject renders his or her relationship with the other, as Stanley Cavell (1987) argues: "For her [Hermione] to return to him [Leontes] is for to recognize her; for him to recognize her is for him to recognize his relation to her; in particular to recognize what his denial of her has done to her, hence to him" (125). Once the king recognizes her, his perception is not poisoned any longer, and it is this relational faith that fuels the comic ending to the play. However, the connection between human recognition and relationship leads us to see more of its dynamic dimension than of simple relatedness between one subject and the other. It involves the other characters and the audiences on an ontological level as well.

Ontological Positioning: Beyond the Epistemological Impulse

It is probably true that one aspect of the distinctive nature of Shakespearean plays is their outworking of such social energies, as Greenblatt's New Historical studies indicate, but the plays are undeniably animated by the philosophical energies inaugurated by English empiricism and European or continental rationalism. The new cognitive science of the human understanding of art and literature arises throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and human perception and perspectives of the world emerge as the dominant and commanding forces of the age. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Shakespeare’s contemporary, is among the pioneers who try to uncover the capacity and limitation of cognitive human understanding, developing English
empirical epistemology well before modern philosophers like John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume. More than anything, as David Daiches (1970), a Scottish critic, observes, the British philosopher proposes an inductive scientific reasoning in his *Novum Organum* (1620) by "laying anew the foundations of human knowledge on which could be reared an ever-increasing understanding and control of nature" (485).

Empirical human experience is now believed to be an anchor of building unbiased scientific knowledge, and as a consequence, human perspective is fundamental to an appreciation of literature and art, as well as science.

But the idea of human perspective as advanced in the early modern period is not only related to the cognitive experience of the subject but to the relationality between the subject and its cognitive object. Or put another way, the rise of human perspective motivates a creative ontological relationship between subject and object as well as an epistemological one. But the interactional aspect of perspective has been disregarded because of an exclusive concern with the subject's epistemological experiences. With regard to the epistemological transformation of the early modern era in art and literature, Girard (1991) articulates how artistic representation goes beyond the capacity of its model or nature:

> Before the Renaissance, painting had tried to stick to reality out of genuine respect for it. The absolute superiority of divine over human creation was taken for granted. With the Renaissance, things began to change: The emphasis shifted away from the reproduced reality to the reproduction itself. Artists still imitated nature, but in a spirit of competition that make them bolder and bolder. Soon they began to hope that human creation would overtake and even surpass its model. (332)

The new spirit of early modern artists creates a new style of art by employing human perspective in painting, an albeit illusive impression of three-dimensional space, which
is drastically different from the flat space rendered on the medieval canvas. Furthermore, perspective in art is rendered by means of receding parallel lines called the "vanishing point," which is interposed between the artist's observing eye and the object. Perspective and vanishing point may distort the look of the object when it is perceived from a certain position, or it may unveil different facets of it as viewed from different or relative positions. On the plausible warping view of artistic perspective, Shakespeare makes an interesting comment in his tragedy Richard II: "For sorrow's eye … / Divides one thing entire to many objects – / Like perspectives, which, rightly gazed upon, / Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry, / Distinguish form" (2.2.16-20). Critics like Garber (2004) appropriate this line to demonstrate how early moderns begin to appreciate how we see and imitate the world more unconditionally than before.

Of course, such cognitive and creative engagement depends on constructing perspective by seeing objects in relation to other objects. Since the idea of perspective and vanishing point is first introduced in the fifteenth-century European artistic culture, perspective theory in early modern art has not simply been concerned with how we as the cognitive subject perceive the object, but with the different positions of the observer or the relative connections made between an observer and an object. The emerging artwork of the Renaissance illustrates how an epistemological subject necessitates taking a position relative to a solid object, even as the practice of perspectival construction points to a corresponding idealism, freedom, and autonomy of the artist in the early modern period. As we have noticed in Girard's remarks, the Renaissance artists embrace the ideal that "human creation would overtake and even surpass its model" (332), and when it comes to the artistic and creative constitution of reality and
knowledge, they believe that autonomous positioning would allow them to achieve an ideal representation of nature, even if they have to distort perspective to achieve it.

Hans Holbein the younger, a German artist, masterly wields the power of anamorphic or distorted perspective in the early Renaissance. One of his portraits has often been brought to Shakespearean scholars' attention for its oblique perspective, for such a perspective draws attention to the artist's construction of it. The celebrated painting titled "Double Portrait of Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve" or "Ambassadors" (1533) illustrates two prominent French noblemen who visit the court of the English King Henry VIII, and while the representation seems to be rendered in the normal vision of reality, the viewer comes to confront another distorted perspective, or "eyed awry" (Richard II 2.2.19), existing on the same plane of canvas, a silver smear-like skull. About the presence of this "unreadable blur" (18), Greenblatt (1980) argues that the skull is to be seen by effacing the first perspective: "To see the large death's-head requires a still more radical abandonment of what we take to be 'normal' vision; we must throw the entire painting out of perspective in order to bring into perspective what our usual mode of perception cannot comprehend" (19). The two different perspectives are executed from two "incommensurable" or incompatible positions, which coexist at the same time. In other words, the critic simply states that "we must distort, and in essence, efface the figures in order to see the skull" (20). The shifting perceptive, the "effacement" of one for the other, raises a question of differing ontological positions, as the Shakespearean scholar claims that "those representational techniques … celebrate man's relatedness to the objects of his making" (20). He also argues that Holbein's perspective denotes that "there is nothing in the painting that is not the product of
human fashioning" (20). In so doing, the critic appropriates Lacan’s psychoanalytical concept of "gaze" and Foucault’s term "subversion" to inquire into and illuminate the connectivity between the sixteenth-century writers and their literary creations and the socio-cultural conditions or systems in which they are situated. Thus, he attempts to uncover "the role of human autonomy in the construction of identity" in early modern society by investigating and analyzing the choices the Renaissance writers rendered "in representing themselves and in fashioning characters" (256). But the critic confesses he has found that "fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions—family, religion, state—were inseparably intertwined … there were no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity … the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society" (256). He thus seems to reach an irresolvable impasse as he finds the autonomous subject conditioned by the larger system of the culture. With the limited scope of "autonomous self-fashioning" in the Renaissance, Greenblatt brilliantly explains how anamorphic painting represents the early modern ideology of intellectual and artistic relatedness between the artist and the object. However, his observation seems to be solely based upon the philosophical premise that it would be impossible to assume two different perspectives or positions at the same space on an epistemological plane. That is, one perspective must efface the other.

Yet, if we take an ontological cue from the artistic perspective painting of the early modern age, we come to notice that positioning renders different relations to the portrait. Artistic representation is an event in which the artist takes a position toward the object. The event of this positioning act deductively arranges the objects according to
the receding lines of the vanishing point. The relative position of the object is thus determined by where the artist or perceiver stands or is situated. In terms of a connective understanding of different objects in the same work of art, one's creative positioning intensifies the relational density or tension between one position and another, whose symmetric or diametric structure would create various or infinite possibilities of epistemological association, just as we experience through the symmetry between two dynamic characters like Othello and Iago.

**Ontological Positioning in Othello**

Like Holbein, though on stage rather than canvas, Shakespeare creates such dynamic and interactive dimensions between different characters through positioning them in early modern theatrical space, thereby using a character’s positioning to establish the viewer’s perspective and to create various perspectives from which an audience views a character and/or a play. When Greenblatt tries to come up with some anthropological or universal model that can explain the advancement of early modern humanism, he suggests that the early modern fashioning of the individual self confronts subversive power or containment. In his analysis of the Shakespearean construction of the self in *Othello*, he uncovers interrelationships between the self and the culture surrounding it only to find that the autonomous self is restrained or sustained by established social codes like the "Christian doctrine of sexuality" (246). Shakespeare may be aware of such cultural relationality; however, his plays and characters are better seen as responses to the questions of positioning raised by early modern artists and scientists. For example, *Othello* starts with the positioning of Iago, who is not quite satisfied with the situation of Michael Cassio’s promotion to lieutenant, the second-in-
command. Iago then is positioned as the symmetrical other to engage the moor, but without divulging his real position as a tragic force: "Were I the Moor I would not be Iago. / In following him I follow but myself. /... / I am not what I am" (1.1.57-65). Iago’s ontological position as an antithetical force thus makes him a vanishing point relative to whose receding lines the ontological positions of the other characters are decided and stretched out. Iago’s ontological vanishing point thus formulates the whole structure of relationships among the characters in the play, whose dynamic interactions Shakespeare enhances by placing them in the space of Cyprus, a sort of neutral zone where no one in this play is native. From an ontological view of relational interactions, Iago’s positioning is designed more to promote tension among the characters and hence involve the viewer rather than to improvise Iago’s own identity through self-fashioning, un-fashioning, and re-fashioning.

The ontological action and reaction/counteraction are not concerned with the fact that Othello fails to counteract Iago’s positioning, or that he does proactively position himself relative to various other characters, but rather with the fact that Shakespeare makes the dynamic, multidimensional characters crash into one another throughout the play. Whereas Greenblatt argues that Othello’s pitiful projection of self is designed to establish his own identity out of his existentially liminal space (i.e., somewhere between being a civilized native and an outlandish stranger), ontologically speaking, there is no individual identity to be fashioned or un-fashioned, but only existential interactions to be observed on a collective level. The moor’s defensive position is designed to create structural tension between Othello and Iago with the result that the playwright sets up the diametrical system of the play to engineer the tragic ending of the play, precisely
because Iago’s preemptive positioning dominates the other characters’ position; ontologically, the cause already harbors the result.

**Ontological Positioning in *Much Ado About Nothing***

The ontological engagement of positioning is always expected to bring forth a certain outcome, and the product has to do with the directionality of the creative positioning that creates a dominant force in any given event. In the case of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Don Pedro’s positioning as a matchmaker engineers a romantic bridge between Claudio and Hero:

> And I will fit thee with the remedy
> ....
> I will assume thy part in some disguise,
> And tell fair Hero I am Claudio.
> And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart
> And take her hearing prisoner with the force
> And strong encounter of my amorous tale.
> Then after to her father will I break,
> And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
> In practice let us put it presently. (1.1.267-76)

The nobleman may already have had some homosocial bonding with the young Florentine (11.8-9), but his engagement creates an ontological space in which other characters are arranged relative to him, a line of perspective that allows him to orchestrate the romantic connection between Benedick and Beatrice as well as between the young bachelor and Hero. These proactive moves also lead other characters to take up certain positions as well. Don John approaches and decides to join this positioning game by counteracting his half-brother’s position: “I had rather be a canker in a hedge
than a rose in his grace, and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all than to fashion a carriage to rob love from any. In this, though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man, it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain” (1.3.21-24). His ontological engagement reminds us of Iago and his "I am not what I am," statement, and it creates a symmetrical and/or structural tension between the half-brothers throughout. Though the density of interactive connection is not magnified and maximized as much as the case of Iago and Othello because the characters in the comedy do not divulge such depth and versatility as those in the tragedy, there exists a tensional symmetry between the two brothers throughout the play.

Ontology and directionality of positioning that leads toward romantic reconciliation in comedy might be conceived as no more than a part of a generic trajectory. Concerning the flow and progression of comedy, Russ McDonald (2001) writes:

Comedy refers to a literary structure … that moves toward a happy ending and implied a positive understanding of human experience…. Comedy moves from confusion to order, from ignorance to understanding, from law to liberty, from happiness to satisfaction, from separation to union, from barrenness to fertility, from singleness to marriage, from two to one. (81)

The directionality of the Shakespearean comedy, and even tragedy, thus seems formulaic but the matter of the ontological focuses not so much on structure as with various positionings that affect the relational perspectives of those involved in any given space. What matters in ontological study is not just the internal structure of the play, but the interactive structures between the play or the writer and the audience in any given society, and the structures promoted by the intrinsic systems of tension in the play that result from the ontological positioning of the characters relative to the each other and
the audience. The ontological system of *Much Ado About Nothing* revolves around the interactive tension between Don Pedro and Don John, whereas the structure in *Othello* spins around the balancing line drawn between Iago and the Moor, as in a gyroscope. But questions of ontology are more interested in the external or outer torque of the literary gyroscope in which the audience is interactively spun around the play's text even as the parts within continue to move.

**Ontological Positioning in The Winter's Tale**

Shakespeare projects a character's ontological positioning to represent his own artistic or aesthetic engagement with the audience. A good example for analysis is *The Winter's Tale*, wherein Shakespeare sets up two different levels of ontological interactions in the theatrical space. On one hand, Leontes' ontological positioning as his own Iago seems to set a tragedy in motion as his action is geared toward creating tension with the queen. His adamant stance toward Hermione brings about the collapse of all his established relationships, and the action is led down the seemingly catastrophic and calamitous path of tragedy. On the other hand, Paulina's positioning relative to the king reveals not personal motives, but more public ones in that by effectuating a reconciliation between king and queen she reverses the disintegration of the court. Moreover, Shakespeare employs the character to draw the audience's engagement with the text through the artistic positioning in the final scene in particular.

The motivation of Leontes' initial engagement with Hermione, however, is not so explicit as in *Othello*, where Iago decides to play a villain because of his own anxiety of being a cuckold ("I hate the Moor, / And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets / He has done my office" [1.3.368-70]) and/or a sense of inferiority piqued by Cassio's
promotion. Leontes’ lack of motivation leads us to generate different assumptions to explain Leontes’ jealousy; but some critics, like Frank Kermode, G K. Knight, and J. H. P. Pafford, argue that Shakespeare may remove the psychological motives for his own reason, or the removal leads us to pay more attention to other aspects of the play, like the manners in which the disastrous consequences are emerging or hastening. Thus, positioning for the other characters often comes out of some existential deficiency or ontological incompleteness. Jealousy is no more than one instance of recognizing such an absence of ideal perfection or the lack of a consummate relationship between those involved. That insufficiency seems to be a necessary motivation for engaging in ontological action to reach its aesthetic fulfillment.

When it comes to Leontes’ motivation, we must ask why he is positioned in Act 1 to create tension with Hermione and not Polixenes. His positioning toward Hermione in the first act is engineered by his recognition of the incomplete relationship he has built. As the play opens, the audience gets a glimpse of a perfect or prime status of human kinship through the conversation between the two noble lords. Camillo the Sicilian lord states: "Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters—though not personal—hath been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies, that they have seemed to be together, though absent" (1.1.21-25). The international relationship has been perfectly tuned by a civil and cordial respect rooted in their royal positioning. Their friendship appears to have remained in its innocent prelapsarian state as we notice from Polixenes’s description of their childhood: "What we changed / Was innocence for innocence. We knew not / The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed / That any did" (1.2.70-73). But all of a
sudden, the audience starts to experience a chasm between the two good, old friends. The Bohemian king would not agree to postpone his departure despite Leontes' entreaty and earnest appeal. So Hermione, who has been "tongue-tied" (1.2.27) for a while, takes the cue from the king to persuade the royal visitor to stay a little longer. Soon after the queen wins him over and changes his mind, Leontes witnesses the queen giving her hand to Polixenes, Leontes' "tremor cordis" (1.2.112) starts to suspect that the perfect world of the king's aura has been "smutched" (1.2.123): "To mingle friendship farre is mingling bloods" (1.2.111). The king refuses to differentiate courtship from friendship at that moment. The Sicilian king takes the position of Iago for himself and starts to alienate everyone around him. His tyrannical positioning leads him to his own tragedy, eliminating or displacing the lords of his court and his family from their positions. And his decisive, despotic move is regulated by the knowledge he gets from his cognitive experience, though it turns out to be untrue in the end.

Now we return to the question of whether his knowledge is tainted by his perception or something else, as the king's analogy of a spider in a cup certainly illuminates the connection between knowledge and cognitive intelligencing. Considering his own cognitive experience of the doubtful connection between his queen and his Bohemian friend, the lunatic jealousy of the king seems even more plausible than that of Othello. However, our attention is directed toward why the king's positioning and knowledge causes the tragic consequences in the play. His positioning toward the queen is primarily engineered by his recognition of the ontological situation's incompleteness around his royal court. The audience observes that the dramatic path of the play is crossed through the destructive turmoil. The tragic error lies in the king's
positioning relative to the queen, which implies its own result. And his ontological
projection is enacted to solve the problem of unfaithfulness, which has to do with the
imperfect status quo that the king assuredly assumes. Now the question is why the king
creates tension against the queen instead of his Bohemian counterpart. Leontes throws
out a plausible excuse to his audience:

Fie, fie no thought of him.
The very thought of my revenges that way
Recoil upon me. In himself too mighty,
And in his parties, his alliance. Let him be
Until a time may serve. For present vengeance,
Take it on her. Camillo and Polixenes
Laugh at me, make their pastime at my sorrow,
They should not laugh if I could reach them, nor
Shall she, within my power. (2.3.18-26)

His vengeful positioning is directed toward Hermione and the children, and so doing, the
king keeps the issue within his domestic court. Just like the cases of Iago and Don
John, his act of positioning is projected to resolve his personal misgivings or suspicions
regarding the queen's possible disloyalty.

But when Paulina, by standing up for the queen, creates a diametrical force
relative to Leontes, her positioning is more oriented toward public motives or toward the
whole community in and around the play. Yet her initial engagement directly with the
king is not so successful as to generate any traction; she is rather disregarded by the
king as "a most intelligencing bawd" (2.3.68) and quelled even by her husband. Her
second attempt at positioning focuses on building a relationship between Leontes and
the newborn child. Despite her attempts to sway the king with skillful analogies of
literary and biological production, the king refuses to abandon his own perspective. He
believes Paulina to be a mere traitor analogous to his "unfaithful" wife. The overlap in their ontological positions relative to the king's does not carry creative force enough to counterbalance and resolve the situation. Rather, the force comes from the outside or "the great Apollo," who is believed to deliver the truth via oracle, and thus he shifts the king's perspective on his wife by means of divine intervention.

But Shakespeare does not allow the divine intervention to unravel the situation completely, thereby leaving the audience to answer whether the queen really dies, and more importantly, whether Leontes truly regains his ability to see the world as it is. The godly oracle may adjust Leontes' ill suspicion, but it does not normalize the disarranged situation. Instead, the playwright delays the ultimate resolution and has his audience undergo the radically different spaces of Sicily and Bohemia. We do not expect any immediate reconciliation as we experience at the end of Much Ado About Nothing, despite the king's publicized penitence: "My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle. I'll reconcile me to Polixenes, / New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo, / Whom I proclaim a man of truth, of mercy" (3.2.152-54). Just as Claudio must undergo public penance to clear Hero's name, the Sicilian king will have to demonstrate his own redemption by taking upon himself public shame. Leontes moreover expresses private remorse for an indefinite number of years, promising that: "Once a day I'll visit / The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there" (3.2.236-37).

But the audience is still left with a question of whether the relationship between the king and the others in the play is completely rehabilitated. Sixteen years then elapse in the space of Renaissance theater when the character Time proclaims that "I slide / O'er sixteen years and leave the growth untried / Of that wide gap" (4.1.5-7), before the
audience is transported to a mirthful Bohemia, where they witness yet another courtly positioning game. Perdita is dressed as Queen of the Feast (4.4.20; 4.4.110) and also as Libyan Princess (4.4). Autolycus puts on beggars clothes (4.3.57-58), deceptively playing a cutpurse, and then bundles up as a ballad peddler (4.4.215) who exploits the others’ trust and honesty (4.4.584-85). Later, he acts as a courtier (4.4.700), helping out Perdita’s shepherd father and clown brother. Polixenes and Camillo disguise themselves in order to go intelligencing and learn about the king's son, though they eventually unveil themselves (4.4.405). And Florizel also exchanges his clothes with Autolycus’ (4.4.630). The various positionings are ultimately geared toward comedic resolution, as Shakespeare uses the scene to create momentum for that ultimate solution. Paulina's theatrical spectacle of reviving the apparently dead queen is artistically staged to restore the disintegrated relationships. Toward the end of the play, after the noblewoman of Sicily has concealed the queen in her place for sixteen years, Paulina positions herself as a representative of the ameliorative artist who uses her skills to unite everyone around her. The "grave and good Paulina" represents a "royal piece" of art as lively as her audience: "Prepare / To see the life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death" (5.3.18-20). As she discloses the statue of Hermione not only to Leontes, but to Polixenes as well, the noble lords (including Camillo, Perdita, and Florizel) as well, the artist tells her audience, "It is required / You do awake your faith." In response, the statue is transformed into the ideal reality, and the transformation not only restores the king to himself but effects existential reconciliation between Leontes and Hermione, between father and daughter, between king and
people, between a man and his old friend, between the character of Leontes and his audience, and between the play and its spectators as well.

Unlike the positioning of Leontes or Iago, Paulina's ontological engagement targets the community and its aesthetic perfection, and with her positioning, Shakespeare asks the audience to participate in this ideal reinstatement and rehabilitation of various relationships. In so doing, he creates tension and interaction between the play and his spectators as he presents the idea of faith as a vanishing point that can construct relational communications on a line stretched out between the author and the audience. Paulina's ontological positioning is ideally directed to optimize the involvement of others in the community so as to undo the incomplete nature of the situation, where all of the relationships in the play are not fully recovered. But eventually, just as Paulina's creative engagement brings the audience together with her artistic presentation, so does Shakespeare's play. Thus, ontological positioning is a way of provoking those involved in the space of early modern theatre beyond their different cognitive impulses to ontological interactions of various kinds. All of the ontological interactions are eventually geared toward the aesthetic perfection or reconciliation in the end, just like the perfect artwork of Paulina.
1 as in French as well as in English

2 Coleridge coined this term to indicate "multiplicity" in aesthetic unity.

3 By the same token, Paul de Man (1969) explains, "the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous" (209).

4 Different meanings are present at the same time.

5 For further discussion on "BwO" and "rhizome," see their collaborative works, A Thousand Plateaus (1980) and What is Philosophy? (1991).

6 Heidegger's Dasein literally means the "being there" of human existence, but the philosopher considers that "Being itself is time" (Das Sein selber ist Zeit) or a being is to become totalized in the process of time (Robert Holub 267).

7 T.S. Eliot coins the phrase in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919): "the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (145). The term also indicates ontological concreteness or physicality of poetic creation just as the new critics often utilize those expressions like "verbal icon" (Wimsatt) or "well-wrought urn" (Brooks).

8 As a matter of fact, in the original Greek text, we cannot discover such a word corresponding to "organic" in the last part of the eighth chapter of Poetics: The Greek text "morion tou holou" should be simply translated as "a part of the whole." By the same token, Chicago critics like Salmon Crane, Elder Olson, and Wayne C. Booth, who are opposed to the complex logic of new criticism, are often called "Neo-Aristotelians" for their support of the Greek scholar's idea of literary work as a concrete artistic whole, or an organic unity of the textual components. The Chicago school appropriates Aristotelian scientific relationality as their structural principle of the text to criticize the new critical conception of a poetic system.

9 For further discussion on this, see Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's collaborative essays "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) and "The Affective Fallacy" (1949).

10 See also chapter fourteen of S. T. Coleridge's Bibliographia Literaria (1819) for similar arguments.

11 An ancient theatrical term often used in comedy, indicating a choral speech directly addressed to the audience regardless of the dramatic theme or subject.
The idea reminds us of de Man’s idea of insight and blindness.

The base linguistic structure of English consists of "a subject and a verb" (or "a subject + verb + an object"), which might be one of the systematic reasons we can say its syntactic structure is more oriented or directed toward the individual subject and its epistemological action.

All the citations of Oscar Wilde’s works in this chapter are from Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, ed. J. B. Foreman (London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1966).

The term is not yet transformed to imply the pejorative sense, as in modern usage; it simply means "amusing" in the eighteenth century.


All the Canterbury Tales citations in this chapter are from The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987).

William F. Woods investigates the relationships between the characters and their personal space wherein they are placed in his recent work Chaucerian Spaces: Spatial Poetics in Chaucer’s Opening Tales (Albany: SUNY P, 2008).

See also The Dialogic Imagination (Austin: University of Texas P, 1982: 168) for Bakhtin’s further elaboration on this point.


While exclusive conception of the ontological system brings more critical insight to the effort of uncovering the structure of the text, the tendency toward dramatic analysis comes to be another compelling paradigm that persists through the recent years, granted that we live in the age of absolutely rich versatility of interpretations with regard to Chaucer study. On one hand, Derek Pearsall, A. C. Spearing and C. David Benson are some names of those scholars who keep drawing our attention onto the distinctive poetic styles and system of the text just as new critics delve into its ontological deep structure. Derek Pearsall (1985) goes through each and every tale, arguing that the text of the Tales is more fittingly gauged by measure of genre in which the genuine entity of every tale is disclosed and uncovered, rather than by dramatic reading promoted by Kittredge and his theoretical advocates. The Harvard medievalist, calling Kittredge "the most convincing proponent of the 'dramatic principle'" (316), proposes the study of distinctive narratives themselves within the individual tales instead of probing the narrators as realistic characters. In so doing, he illuminates how different genres are
"counterpointed" one another and enriches the meaning of the text (x-xi). C. David Benson (1986) goes further and suggests that the tales are "a series of literary experiments rather than a drama of personalities," and the "conflicting artistries of the tales" generate various signification of the text (139). The critic (1989) also points out that "the Canterbury Tales is not a dramatic clash of different pilgrims but a literary contest among different poets" (20), trying to manifest the incommensurable poetic features of each and every tale. He claims that "the dramatic approach has hindered the detailed and wide-ranging literary comparisons between particular tales and among groups of tales" as it disregards unique stylistic individuality of the poem (140-41). The critic regards the analysis of individual substance as a stepping stone to inquire into the relational nature of the poem as a whole. For Benson, to recognize Chaucer's achievement in the Tales is to get the gist of distinguished style of each poem and its variety of collection, and even the tales of the same genre, whether romances or fabliaux, show significantly different narrative artistry from one another, using unique style of language, literary allusions, imagery, speech and dialogue, dialect, literary device, etc. Because of this sort of theoretical orientation, the Chaucerian critic is less attentive to uncovering how the variety of tales and tellers interact or inter-relate one another than to laying out the distinctive stylistic characteristics of the medieval poems.

23 This idea of superior political positioning via laughter is acknowledged by other historicist critics like Paul Strohm (1989). He also concedes that the laughter "implies a division similar to that within the pilgrimage between gentils who want moral content and cherils who want harlotry" (129) in examining Chaucer and his texts in terms of his particular social and historical situations. Hence according to the critic, humor breaks somewhere between the horizontal tension and the vertical. His theory is oriented more toward "conciliatory" connection between the polyvocal social beings rather than toward irreconcilable relationship or unresolvable tension.

24 Later, Paddy Austin (1990) appropriates this theory of politeness to analyze the social role of humor in social relationships. She argues about how humor serves to show respect and civility in constructing different social connections, ironically revealing different types of power relations at the same time. However, we have scarce scholarly work on the connection between those two subjects. On the other hand, there have been only a few or lack of major scholarly commitment that adopts and apply the theory to any literary texts, but on the linguistic level. Among those few are a germinal study of Roger Brown and Albert Gilman ("Politeness Theory and Shakespeare's Four Major Tragedies," 1989) and H. Paul Brown's article ("Addressing Agamemnon: A Pilot Study of Politeness and Pragmatics in the Iliad," 2006).

For instance of an epistemological study of the Tales, H. Marshall Leicester in The Disenchanted Self: Represent the Subject in The Canterbury Tales (1990) cast a doubt on the identity of the individual tellers, leaving it up to the reader's interpretive rendition. As his critical concern comes from contemporary theoretical discourses like deconstruction, psycho-analysis, linguistics and social theory, Leicester's "subject" is designed to replace the traditional humanist engagement with the literary "self," or the essentially invariable entity. According to the critic, the tellers are indeterminate and indefinite subjects as he argues that the Wife of Bath, for instance, is "a continuous and ongoing set of interpretations and reinterpretations whose indeterminacies she embodies and hands on to us" (138). He also appropriates the term "disenchantment" to explain Chaucerian subject as "disenchanted consciousness" which has no definite substance or entity. Also indebted to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory on metaphor of a rhizome that indicates a spreading-out system with no points of origin or center, Leicester claims the characters of the Tales represent a myriad of possibilities of "practical consciousness" (99-100). This character-oriented dramatic approach is sure to illuminate how the tales relate to the tellers or how the character of the teller is determined or embodied through the tale and multiple interpretations of it. But at the same time, his laborious task seems to be sheer practical exercise of applying the popular modern theories to Chaucer's portrayal of characters, leaving the unstable subjects up to multiple interpretations of the readers.

As we have seen in the cases of C. Benson and Leicester in particular.


Greenblatt (1988) suggests that Shakespearean romances stimulate circulation of "salutary anxiety through the experience of a threatening plenitude" (20). According to the critic, the salutary anxiety as social practice or social energy is circulated around the early modern society as we notice the anxiety created in the romances is ironically expected to be resolved toward the ending.
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