ROBERT SCHOLES: A PHILOSOPHICALLY-GROUNDED APPROACH TO ENGLISH PEDAGOGY AS POPULAR, POST-CRITICAL EDUCATION

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[**Editor's Note:** Robert Scholes passed away on December 9, 2016.]

ABSTRACT

Robert Scholes is a respected literary critic and semiotician who, motivated by dissatisfaction with the reigning epistemological assumptions in the field of literary theory, has advocated revamping the discipline of English in significant ways. Scholes's own epistemology and semiotic approach to pedagogy cohere quite well with Polanyi's epistemological work and are, in essence, post-critical. Given that far more students in the American educational system study English than philosophy, a wider embrace of Scholes's pedagogical approach could provide more opportunities than are currently available to give students access to a post-critical formation. Scholes's epistemology, semiotics, and pedagogy are discussed in some detail, and resonances with Polanyi's grand project are highlighted.

"We are condemned to inquiry by our status as humans" (*Structuralism in Literature* 169).

"What is inexplicit is not necessarily absent" (*Protocols of Reading* 78).

My epigraphs, which strike a distinctly Polanyian tone, are taken from the work of Robert Scholes, a literary theorist and semiotician who taught for many years as the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities at Brown University, and who served as president of both the Modern Language Association and the Semiotic Society of America.[1] Scholes, who began his career as a critic specializing in the work of James Joyce, went on to write a series of books that argue for a reworking of the subject matter of English in light of semiotic theory, advocating a move away from a nearly exclusive focus on imaginative literature and towards what he called, following Roland Barthes and others, textuality, envisioning the inclusion of a much broader range of textual types. Central to his program was his critique of the tendency for those working in the humanities to accept uncritically a consensus view of truth, leading to what he calls "hypocriticism."

While Scholes is certainly not influenced directly by Polanyi (he has stated that, while he has not studied Polanyi's epistemology, he "is dimly aware" of it), much of his critique harmonizes quite well with a Polanyian view, though the theory of personal knowledge is developed with more philosophical depth and rigor than Scholes's "love of truth" (e-mail correspondence). I have found the two thinkers' approaches dovetail extremely well, with Scholes's pedagogical and theoretical contributions providing valuable resources for the development of a concrete classroom practice that coheres with Polanyi's grand project of

> a humanistic revisionism [that] can be secured only by revising the claims of science itself…The task is difficult, for it calls into question an ideal of impersonal objectivity on which alone we feel it safe to rely. Yet this absurd ideal must be discarded. And if once we succeed in this, we shall find that science no longer threatens man's responsible existence and that we can restart the great work of the enlightenment without danger of the traps that have so disastrously ensnared its progress in the present century (*KB*, 46).

This "ideal of impersonal objectivity" is, of course, the critical philosophical and cultural perspective that Polanyi wishes to replace with a post-critical theory of personal knowledge. The magnitude of this project is enormous, perhaps even Quixotic.

Scholes's program, which aims to counteract hypocriticism within the discipline of English by making significant, strategic changes in both approach and subject matter, is, in my view, responding to those problems particular to the discipline of English that arose in response to the same modernist ideal that Polanyi targets. These problems, most notably hypocriticism, then develop further in response to the despair arising from the postmodern realization that such objectivity is unavailable to us. This leads

literary theorists explicitly to reject the belief in the enduring value of the texts they study, even as such a belief serves, tucked safely away from prying eyes, as the tacit impetus for the continuation of literary theorizing. Indeed, I believe that it will become clear that hypocriticism has a structure very similar to moral inversion, though its results are far less sinister than the totalitarianisms that Polanyi tracks and decries. The bohemians found in English department meetings are not—much to Bakunin's dismay and Polanyi's delight—armed.

Scholes's program thus runs parallel to Polanyi's, though it is much more modest. Calling it "modest" may, however, unfairly damn it with faint praise. As anyone who has attended an academic department meeting knows all too well, orchestrated shifts at the level of one school's department, let alone an entire discipline, do not tend to find themselves without plenty of obstacles and detractors. Nonetheless, tackling an academic discipline is a far more proscribed task than attempting to influence the entirety of Western culture.

This brings those of us sympathetic to Polanyi's epistemological aims round to a real conundrum: How to push forward his grand post-critical program?

Since the vast majority of people are not even aware that their worldview is influenced by the critical turn in Western thought, they must somehow become aware of the terminology that can help to express the outlook they currently hold unconsciously before they can be persuaded of its drawbacks and of the superiority of a post-critical perspective. This is a daunting task, indeed. A natural place to begin working on this is, of course, the classroom.

With some students, this process can unfold along the lines suggested by Dale Cannon, who gives us one possible approach to teaching introductory courses on philosophy in a post-critical mode (1999). Sadly, most students in the U.S. are unlikely to take an introductory class on philosophy. In contrast, nearly all American students take four years of English at the secondary level, and at least one or two courses at the university level. Given the post-critical resonances that I note throughout Scholes's project, I believe that adopting his approach to English education would allow us to cast the net much wider and therefore haul in a more bountiful post-critical catch. Am I chasing a white whale here? Perhaps. Disciplines are slow to change, and cultures evolve even more slowly—yet I prefer to believe that Polanyi's is a less tragic quest than Ahab's. At the very least, I believe that bringing together Scholes's and Polanyi's contributions for use in as many English classrooms as possible would open up new opportunities for the creation of pockets of post-critical resistance; the more such pockets, the merrier.

In making this suggestion, I have no starry-eyed hopes of post-critical domination of English studies. My idea is much more circumspect: All of our students currently spend a fair amount of time studying English. Given that Scholes's approach to teaching English is based on what is an essentially post-critical epistemology and creates

the opportunity to incorporate more self-consciously philosophical content (such as, perhaps, Polanyi's) into the English curriculum, its adoption and use—even by relatively small numbers of teachers and departments—would result in the exposure of a larger number of students than has heretofore been possible to a post-critical intellectual formation. This course of action is reminiscent of Polanyi's call for a "popular education in economics" that would "elaborate the new economic ideas and…simplify their outlines so as to make them comprehensible to the intelligent layman" in order to create the conditions for an "enlightened public [that] would have full power to direct its economic life" (2016, 19). The emphasis here, of course, would be on epistemology and language rather than political economy.

In light of this, and since, so far as I have been able to tell, no work on Scholes has previously appeared in these pages, my purpose will be to lay out a brief retrospective of those works of Scholes's that develop the post-critical stream in his thought in the hope that it might be of help to those who are interested both in Polanyi and in the humanities, but who may be unfamiliar with Scholes's contributions. In particular, I believe that those of us who teach the humanities can find in Scholes a sophisticated ally who holds a respected place within a critical milieu often hostile to any sort of epistemological or ontological realism, and whose work can provide a rich pedagogical resource for teaching in a post-critical mode. To that end, I shall begin with an exploration of Scholes's mature epistemological positions, as crystallized in *The Rise and Fall of English* before tracing the trajectory and evolution of these currents of thought as arising naturally from his earlier work in semiotics. Finally, I will sketch out the pedagogical approach advocated by Scholes for the discipline of English, explaining in a bit more detail the move away from imaginative literature and towards textuality. My method will be, so far as is possible, to allow Scholes to speak for himself. Throughout, I will attempt to explain as clearly as I may how Scholes's semiotic work and pedagogy can serve as concrete ways of moving forward the "humanistic revisionism" that Polanyi advocated.

Epistemology and the Humanities

Scholes lays out his most developed and in-depth critique of the state of the humanities in *The Rise and Fall of English* in which he discusses the problem of morale among teachers of English, invoking observations on the same topic made by Derrida in "Mochlos; or the Conflict of the Faculties": "We feel bad about ourselves. Who would dare to say otherwise? And those who feel good about themselves are perhaps hiding something, from others or themselves" (quoted in *RFE*, 39).[2] Scholes believes this feeling of insecurity has arisen "because we have allowed ourselves to be persuaded that we cannot make truth claims [about our discipline] but must go on 'professing' just the same." Putting it another way, he says he "believe[s] that if the humanities

cannot claim what [Nietzsche] called 'the love of truth' as a part of our enterprise, then that enterprise is in serious trouble" (*RFE*, 39).

In Scholes's analysis, influential schools of thought—Yale deconstructionists like Paul De Man and J. Hillis Miller, as well as neopragmatists such as Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish, for example—"have taught us to be embarrassed by the word *truth*, and thus either to avoid it or condemn it" (*RFE*, 39). This in turn leads to the "skeptical gloom" noted by Nietzsche as arising in some followers of Kant who saw Kantianism as leading to the conclusion that we are cut off from truth by the mediated nature of perception (quoted in *RFE*, 42). Within the discipline of English, such gloom leads us to doubt, among other things, "the significance of the research that is required of us for the Ph.D. itself and for professional progress afterward" and to be "confused about what we should be teaching, and how, and why" (*RFE*, 44).

For Scholes, the questions of what to teach, and how, and why, are absolutely central, and in his mature work, he sees the answers to such questions as largely determined by the epistemology in which they are grounded. For teachers of English, the answer that he proposes is that ours is the task of helping students to become better readers and writers by focusing on a canon of methods rather than a canon of texts, a program he calls textuality (about which, more anon). In Scholes's view, such a program is a way of pursuing the love of truth and fostering it in others insofar as in training ourselves in the most effective ways of approaching the production and consumption of texts, we are providing them with valuable tools for the pursuit of meaning, both as it applies to particular texts in question at any given moment and in the broader scope of life.

This is because, as Polanyi points out, "man's intellectual superiority is almost entirely due to the use of language," and "so far as we know, the tiny fragments of the universe embodied in man are the only centres of thought and responsibility in the visible world [...granted] a short-lived, limited, hazardous opportunity for making some progress of their own towards an unthinkable consummation" (*PK*, 70; 405). If Polanyi is correct here, then our tools for making this hazardous progress are, to a very great extent, linguistic, and therefore textual. This linguistic emphasis, along with the broad base of participation in English studies within our current educational arrangements, underscores the potential of the discipline to help create a current of thought and culture that counteracts the undermining of meaning endemic to modern critical thought, and moves towards the restoration of meaning by "stabiliz[ing] knowledge against skepticism, by including its hazardous character in the conditions of knowledge" (*PK*, 245).

Scholes's resuscitation of the phrase "love of truth" is the flag under which he sails towards such a stabilization of knowledge. While it will not be likely to bother many Polanyian thinkers, it was and is a controversial formulation in the world of literary

theory, where most of Scholes's work has been done. Scholes, having read perhaps more widely and seriously across the philosophical spectrum than many literary critics, knows that discussions of realist/anti-realist or correspondence/consensus theories of truth and related debates are open questions in the world of philosophy, but notes with disappointment that "many literary critics seem to believe that [such debates] ha[ve] been settled" in favor of a strong anti-realist, consensus position (*RFE*, 51).

Thus while Scholes argues that the love of truth is a necessary part of the humanistic enterprise, he does not see that view as being the consensus among his colleagues. At the same time, however, he wishes to avoid falling back into "naive empiricisms of all sorts." A good summation of his position can be found in an earlier work, *Textual Power*, where he remonstrates with fellow humanists and semioticians thus:

> Language is *not* transparent upon reality. Agreed. Perception is not unmediated, either. Agreed. But one cannot say even these things without claiming knowledge...Personally, I would insist that language consists of insensible structures that are inferred from the sensible phenomena of writing and speech...Texts are just as much a part of the world as kangaroos or atomic submarines. If we are totally cut off from things, language must be one of things from which we are cut off. If, on the other hand, we can think about texts with any degree of effectiveness, we can think about other things effectively, too. I am trying to undo, or at least cast doubt upon, the fundamental structuralist and post-structuralist view of language as a system of pure differences (104-105, italics in original).

Scholes argues that most of his colleagues "have largely given up on [literary] research as a progress toward truth" due to a range of structuralist, post-structuralist, and postmodern critiques (*RFE*, 47). This loss of faith is a momentous shift, given that imaginative literature achieved its imminence within the field of English largely due to the romantic philosophies of scholars like Matthew Arnold, who sought to elevate it to the status of a secular scripture. The professor of literature, therefore, plays the role of the priestly exegete who unpacks the hidden meaning of a literary text for her students—a true believer, as it were. In support of this view of professor-as-priest, Scholes traces in some detail the history of English as a discipline and finds that many early professors, such as William Lyon Phelps, who taught English at Yale from 1892 to 1933, were, in fact, active Christian ministers in addition to teachers of literature. The teaching and criticism produced by such professors/preachers was, to a great extent, of a piece with their work in the pulpit insofar as all of these modes were attempts to get at the truth in and about the texts and deliver that truth (and the methods necessary to get at it) to a wider public.

The criticism produced by most poststructuralist critics, however, calls into question the very bases of literature's elevation to the status of scripture, which leads Scholes to argue that

> *Hypocriticism* is a word whose time has come. It acknowledges more fully than is usual the roots of *hypocrite* in the ancient Greek verb *hypokrino*, which had a set of meanings sliding from simple speech, to orating, to acting on stage, to feigning or speaking falsely. We are constantly in danger of following the same trajectory. I propose this word, then, to refer to a weak and deficient kind of criticism—and also, of course, as in the normal usage of the word *hypocrisy*, to refer to what *Webster's Collegiate* calls the "act or practice of feigning to be what one is not or to feel what one does not feel; esp. the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion." Hypocriticism is simply the critical practice of people who must go through motions developed by evangelical teachers like...Phelps without the faith that animated Phelps himself, who know less literature than Phelps did because they must know more critical theory and can't, after all, know everything, and who have lost faith in the possibility of either themselves or the books they "profess" telling the truth about anything important in the lives of those they are teaching. We hypocritics have lost faith in what we do, which means we must either recover that faith or change what we are doing...I believe that the only way to recover faith in ourselves and in our project is indeed to change what we are doing, for our present enterprise is a leaky vessel, and the vessel is adrift in a culture almost as indifferent to its fate as the ocean itself (*RFE*, 81; italics in original).

In Scholes's view, the effects of the loss of truth as the goal of literary studies extend beyond the professoriate. He claims that the authorities to whom professors report "seem either not to know or not to care just what we are doing" in our classrooms since they are not motivated by a love of truth either, but rather by "devotion to the morality of the marketplace and the aesthetics of fashion," forces which also influence individuals within the discipline itself. If, then, humanists do not believe we are engaged in a search for truth, and we are primarily assessed on the basis of the quantity and attention-grabbing capability of our published material, then "we have… a conversation in which the rewards go to the best conversationalists" (*RFE*, 48).

Scholes admits that his defense of the concept of love of truth is "inadequate" (*RFE*, 39). His focus, however, is not on making a full-scale realist philosophical argument, but rather on examining the more constricted arena of the possibility of comparing

descriptions of texts with the texts themselves in order to ascertain the accuracy, fairness, and comprehensiveness – the truthfulness of such descriptions. This is, after all, his primary concern as a teacher of English and a literary critic. It is precisely here, however, where Polanyian epistemology can play an important role, providing a more rigorous foundation for Scholes's project. Indeed, Polanyi's description of the "typical device of modern intellectual prevarication" that his epistemological project attempts to counter sounds nearly identical to Scholes's descriptions of hypocriticism:

> Knowledge that we hold to be true and also vital to us, is made light of, because we cannot account for its acceptance in terms of a critical philosophy. We then feel entitled to continue using that knowledge, even while flattering our sense of intellectual superiority by disparaging it. And we actually go on, firmly relying on this despised knowledge to guide and lend meaning to our more exact enquiries, while pretending that these alone come up to our standards of scientific stringency (*PK*, 354).

In order to attempt to overcome the tendency toward hypocriticism in English studies, Scholes advocates a move away from a focus on imaginative literature and towards the teaching of texts partly in order to desacralize the subject matter, and partly in order to make greater use of the resources of philosophy and semiotics. I will attempt to make clear what Scholes thinks such a move might entail in due course. First, however, we will explore the ways in which Scholes's epistemological concerns and his pedagogical methods arise from his involvement in semiotics. I have already quoted at some length from *Textual Power*, one of a number of texts in which Scholes applies a semiotic approach to teaching practice. In so doing, he works to incorporate the insights generated by structuralist and post-structuralist thought without succumbing to their excesses. The result is a valuable pedagogical resource based on a set of linguistic and philosophical positions which harmonize quite well with a post-critical perspective. I believe such a resource can be used to give a greater number of students access to the tools afforded by such an approach for the hazardous striving toward that which both Scholes and Polanyi advocate.

Semiotics

As a semiotician, Scholes aligns himself more closely with Peirce than with Saussure, seeing the latter's emphasis on arbitrary signification as leading ultimately to the excesses of deconstruction, which movement's privileging of Saussure and suppression of Peirce he critiques in *Textual Power*. He argues that "we may in fact 'know' more than we can systematize about human behavior, so that our intuitions may indeed be

superior to our more reasoned positions," and he departs from French structuralist orthodoxy by "advocating...acceptance of the view that an act of communication may indeed point to the phenomenal world and even have the temerity to aim at what may lie behind the wall of phenomena—as Moby Dick seeks to tell us something about a real whaling industry and the behavior of real whales and whalers, while also probing deeper into the mysteries of the universe" (*SI*, 17; 24). A theme in much of his semiotic work is the necessity of "rescu[ing] the much-maligned referent" which is impossible to do while "remaining liberated from the empirical object"(*TP*, 85). This requires us "to rehabilitate reference itself…without falling back into naïve assumptions about the empirical object" (*TP*, 85).

There are obvious echoes here of the tacit dimension of knowledge as well as of certain affinities between the thought of Polanyi and Peirce in semiotic and epistemological contexts brought to our attention by Mullins, Colapietro, Agler, and Innis. This connection to Peirce's work for both Polanyi and Scholes is important, because both are concerned about preserving the possibility of meaning over and against the corrosive nature of the critical turn in Western thought. Perhaps the critical turn made the later linguistic turn inevitable, and if our vocabulary for pursuing meaning-creation after this linguistic turn is deeply shaped by Saussure's dyadic conception of a sign, then meaning is likely to be doomed for any hardy soul who, like Derrida, follows it through to its logical conclusion that language is itself primordial and autonomous, but also a completely arbitrary system of pure differences, hanging in metaphysical thin air. As John K. Sheriff points out:

> The nemesis of human understanding...based on the Saussurean sign...is the gap between the signifier and the signified, the word and what it represents, the statement and its meaning. If one has nothing but systems of dyadic signs whose parts have no logical, natural, or motivated relation, one is left with mystification and blindness when one tries to define the meaning of a sign. The definition or meaning of the signified is not determined by its signifier but by something else. Structuralists call this "something else" differences with other signs in the system. None of the signs *have* meaning in themselves; rather, the differences between (and within) signs *allow* meaning. Consequently, as Derrida has shown so thoroughly, all meaning is supplementarity, an ideality exterior to the process of language (Sheriff 1989, 53).

This theory of the sign is a prime example of the intellectual prevarication that both Scholes and Polanyi wish to overcome. It effectively undercuts the possibility of meaning even as it depends upon this "despised knowledge" to make its dialectical

attack (*PK*, 354). As we have already seen, widespread acceptance of this view leads to hypocriticism in the humanities. Both Scholes and Polanyi would agree with Sheriff that "we need a theory of signs that can relate phenomenology and ontology, modes of consciousness and modes of being" (Sheriff 1989, 54).

In contrast to the corrosive nature of the dyadic approach, which essentially leaves the person grasping the meaning of a sign a helpless bystander who must take what she gets, Peirce's triadic notion of the sign, which posits, in addition to the object (i.e. the *signified* in Saussure's terms) and the sign (or, the signifier), the *interpretant*. Peirce sums up the components of a sign thus:

> A sign or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object (2.228).

This third category provides a place for the personal agency required for the fiduciary nature of linguistically-codified knowledge. We might put this another way by saying that it provides a conception of language that allows for "human value" to be "the source of all valuation" (Blond).

I have been attempting to make clear some of the ways in which Scholes's semiotic position is inextricably tangled up with those issues of epistemology and ontology of interest to Polanyi *vis a vis* a brief exploration of the theoretical affinities both Scholes and Polanyi have with Peircean semiotics. My own view, again, is that Scholes, like Peirce, has important contributions to make to a pedagogically-based, post-critical movement in the humanities that seeks to move more thinkers from "a profession of nihilism" (or, for Scholes, hypocriticism) towards the ability "to profess now knowingly and openly those beliefs which could be tacitly taken for granted in the days before modern philosophic criticism reached its present incisiveness" (*PK*, 268).

While there is much more that could be said about Peirce's under-utilized theory, we must continue to move towards the ways in which Scholes's semiotic and philosophical views inform his pedagogy. Along the way we will see that much of what he sees as important in the humanities is the development of students' awareness of themselves as textual beings, that is, as beings who are distinctive primarily due to their use of language. This concern, as it is dealt with in the classroom by Scholes, might be rendered in Polanyian terms as helping students to better understand their calling and its location within the various orders of reality—cultural, linguistic, physical, etc. The emphases, of course, in textual studies will be on cultural and linguistic phenomena.

Thus Scholes notes that "when we become aware of ourselves, we are already thoroughly developed as textual creatures" (*PR*, 27). The role of a teacher, then, is to help

"to bring the assumptions that are in place out in the open for scrutiny" in order to give students access to a "usable cultural past" (*TP, x; RFE,* 126). The "humble subject 'English' is so important [because…] texts are places where power and weakness become visible and discussable, where learning and ignorance manifest themselves, where the structures that enable and constrain our thoughts and actions become palpable" (*TP*, xi). For Scholes, a focus on these traits, rather than on literariness *per se*, provides a foundation for a study of texts that is less susceptible to hypocritism than the mainstream of current practice, since its aims are not so heavily laden with what amounts to theological content that is not accepted by the rank and file of practicing teachers, but which still functions (out of sight, like the Turk in Walter Benjamin's description of the role of theology in Marxism) as the rationale for the teaching in the first place. The call is for teachers of English to stop "teaching literature" and to start "studying texts" (*TP*, 16). The subject matter is thus broadened (to include texts which are not imaginative literature nor literary criticism) as the discipline refocuses upon a "love of truth…existing at a lower order of abstraction[, in] words like *fair, accurate,* and *comprehensive,*" even as it maintains its right to point to "what may lie behind the wall of phenomena" (*RFE*, 57; SI, 24).

In so doing, the disciplinary apparatus also reserves its right to make ethical claims, implicit in terms like "power and weakness…learning and ignorance…enable and constrain," (*TP*, xi). Scholes sees the teaching of textuality as an act with a significant ethical component, and these ethics, inextricably bound up in the creation and decoding of texts, make claims on us that go beyond the linguistic realm since, as he puts it, "'the world is a text, but it is not only a text" (*PR*, 91). Hence also his agreement with Hilary Putnam, who argues that "we don't have an Archimedean point; we always speak the language of a time and place; but the rightness and wrongness of what we say is not just for a time and place" (*RFE*, 57; quoted in *PR*, 86, italics original). Here Scholes shares the Polanyian concern for universal epistemic and ethical intent in knowledge which is indwelled within the finite constraints of a particular knower's calling, and which is in turn partly determined by the constraints of the technical vocabulary of a particular discipline.

The particulars of Scholes's more practical pedagogical suggestions arise from this view, constituting for him "an act of faith: faith that teaching can be improved or adjusted to new circumstances, that critical dialogue can refine thought, and, more specifically, that literary theory and classroom practice really do have something to say to one another" (*TP*, x-xi). Again, this position is very close to the post-critical view of the fiduciary nature of personal knowledge held within the constraints of one's calling in which, because of the admixture of tacit and explicit dimensions, the epistemological content both is and is not available for critique and scrutiny.

The contrast between Saussurean and Peircean semiotics serves here as a case-in-point. Within the realm of literary theory, Saussure's dyadic approach has, to a very large degree, dictated the terms of the discussion regarding meaning in literary texts for about a half century. A young scholar entering the discipline, then, will have her calling shaped and molded by the disciplinary constraints dictated by this dominant view. This may happen explicitly, if she focuses on semiotics in her work, or tacitly, if her interests lie elsewhere, as the post-structuralist assumptions about meaning will be in the air, so to speak. Either way, these constraints will have ramifications—some of which will be ethical—both within the discipline in question and outside it.

One such ramification is that, for one with this formation, there can be no explicitly-acknowledged, seaworthy connection between semiotics, phenomenology, and ontology. This young literary scholar will continue to behave as if texts have meanings (even Derrida himself, as many have pointed out, cannot avoid doing so), but any talk of meaning will be officially thought to be so much embarrassingly naïve folk psychology. Such engagement with meaning will be therefore be driven out of sight.

Scholes is post-critical in that he openly proclaims our ability as linguistic creatures to penetrate the wall of phenomena with our signs, sometimes reaching the ontological on the far side (if indeed it be on the far side). This approach, if followed with rigor, allows the moral and ethical dimensions of our enterprises to remain out in the open, rather than being stashed out of sight below decks due to embarrassment over the impossibility of impersonal, objectivististic moral and ethical justification. For, as Polanyi reminds us, "modern man's immorality is unstable. Presently his moral passions reassert themselves in objectivist disguise and the scientistic Minotaur [i.e. moral inversion] is born" (*PK*, 268). Hence the importance and usefulness of challenging those destructive elements of the modern critical project within our disciplinary apparatus and replacing them with something better, to be handed on to our students so that, perhaps, their callings will include the resources necessary to avoid the pitfalls leading to hypocriticism and, ultimately for Polanyi, moral inversion.

Pedagogy

In the following section I shall sketch out Scholes's suggestions for the wholesale restructuring of English as a discipline (those interested in several concrete examples of how Scholes's and Polanyi's work might be combined in the classroom, along with further examples of the sorts of critical and pedagogical resources found in many of Scholes's works are advised to consult the endnotes).[3] My purpose here is to attempt to smooth the path toward a more wide-spread use of Scholes's post-critical pedagogy in the teaching of the humanities in general and of English in particular by tracing those trajectories in Scholes's work that are concerned with establishing fundamental, lasting change at the disciplinary level.

Scholes's treatment of these themes is primarily concerned with what goes on in departments of English, yet I think it fair to say resonances will be felt, to varying degrees, across the humanities. This trend toward a significant reimagining of English begins to take shape in *Textual Power*, in which Scholes deconstructs certain aspects of the English apparatus, outlining the division between the consumption and production of texts. Under the heading of consumption, he contrasts classes based on the interpretation of imaginative literature with remedial courses on "reading," which attempt to improve the students' skills at reading "non-literature," a textual type which presumably needs no interpretation. On the production side of the discipline he includes classes on creative writing, which produce what he calls "pseudo-literature," and those on composition, which produce "pseudo-non-literature" (*TP*, 7). He points out that consumption is valued over production, with the interpretation of literature at the top of the heap (such courses, of course, being given to the more prestigious staff) and composition at the bottom (often given to younger faculty and graduate students). He further notes that work done in composition is considered remedial, while that done in creative writing is thought to be a joke—the proof of this, he notes, lies in the fact that classes on reading and interpretation do not tend to take as their raw materials texts produced by the teachers or students of composition and creative writing classes.

In Scholes's view, this disciplinary separation is artificial, and so his call to move away from the teaching of literature and towards teaching textuality aims to reunite the production and consumption of texts and to stop giving short shrift, as we have seen, to genres other than imaginative literature. In other words, he seeks to make relevant the connection between seeing and doing that was, for a while, achieved in the classes of rhetoric and oratory in days of yore. Scholes develops this line of thought in great detail in *The Rise and Fall of English*, in which he makes what perhaps amounts to his most audacious claim: the discipline of English ought to be restructured wholesale along the lines of the medieval trivium.

In turning for inspiration to the *trivium*, which consisted of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, Scholes does not advocate a simple transplantation of the ancient method into our educational context, but rather finds a spirit and a system for approaching learning that can be modified to suit our current purposes. One thinks here of Polanyi's call to renew the enterprise of the Scholastics:

> Such is, in bold outline, my program for reconsidering the conception of knowledge and restoring thereby the harmony between faith and reason. Few of the clues which are guiding me today were available to the Scholastics. The modes of reasoning which they relied on were inadequate; their knowledge of nature was tenuous and often spurious. Moreover, the faith they wanted to prove rational was cast

into excessively rigid and detailed formulas, presenting intractable and sometimes even absurd problems to the reasoning mind.

Even so, though their enterprise collapsed, it left great monuments behind it, and I believe that we are today in an infinitely better position to renew their basic endeavor. The present need for it could not be more pressing (Polanyi 1961, 247).

Scholes, like Polanyi, "acknowledg[es] the cultural past of our institutions," even as he refashions them into a coherent approach to training students in semiotically-grounded approaches to textuality in light (and in spite) of post-structuralist theory (*RFE*, 126).

In the area of grammar, he is interested in focusing on themes of subjectivity and objectivity in language, leading students in the study of "the way that their mother tongue presents human beings with a set of words and grammatical rules in which they attain subjectivity at the cost of being subjected" as well as "how…'objective' discourses…work and what their strengths, costs, and limitations may be" (*RFE*, 120-121). In courses on logic (or system-and-dialectic), he would strive "to make available to students the tradition of clear and systematic thinking [in philosophy]…so that students may learn to employ the resources of logic and dialectic in their own thinking and writing" (*RFE*, 122). His revamped take on rhetoric would include the rhetorical traditions going back to Aristotle and beyond, but would also extend to new forms of media, "especially those that mix verbal and visual textuality to generate effects of unprecedented power" (*RFE*, 125).

In the modern trivium, as in the ancient, the organizing principle would be "a canon of concepts, precepts, and practices rather than a canon of texts," whose aim would be to "put students in touch with a usable cultural past […in order to] help [them] attain an active relationship with their cultural present" (*RFE* 120, 126). Scholes is in no way dogmatic with regard to the trivium as an organizational structure for English. The point, rather, is to refocus the discipline onto a canon of methods that will foster in students the love of truth, while helping them to better understand and navigate their own cultural situation by means of a sharpened knowledge of its historical development and the use of language itself. It is important to note that, as Scholes frequently points out, this shift would not mean that the literary canon present in English departments at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty first centuries would be summarily thrown out the window. Those texts would, by and large, remain in the classroom, studied (along with others that have often been traditionally associated with philosophy, linguistics, sociology, economics, etc.) in the ways enumerated above. They would no longer serve, however, as ends in themselves, but would rather function as some (though not all) of the raw materials for the consumption side of textuality. Ultimately, Scholes's trivial proposal is aimed at finding a concrete, feasible way out of

the epistemologically rooted hypocriticism he sees as endemic to English in its current practice.

A Scholesian approach to teaching English is, at its very roots, a philosophical project, and its adoption would result in a discipline that is pedagogically more rigorously philosophical than it has been, at least as practiced by most critics and teachers working within its disciplinary bounds (there are important exceptions, of course). To reiterate a point made much earlier in this paper, I think it clear that if Scholes's call for an emphasis on the traditions of clear and systematic thinking (including the limitations and excesses of these traditions) were widely incorporated into English instruction, it would be an important step toward a growing awareness among a larger subset of intelligent laypersons of the often corrosive influence of the ideal of impersonal objectivity at the levels of worldview and culture. This would open a new space—small, but a new space nonetheless—in which explicitly post-critical approaches could be explored and applied pedagogically, a curricular environment in which Scholes's and Polanyi's insights would support and accentuate one another quite well.

I hope to have shown that while Scholes cannot be properly characterized as a Polanyian thinker, his methods and aims are to a very great extent parallel to and in harmony with Polanyi's. In addition, the fact that Scholes's work is oriented towards more humble goals than Polanyi's grand program, tending towards engagement with semiotics and critical theory in order to apply the best of these movements to classroom practice leads me to see in his work a valuable repository of arguments and practices which can be used to effectively teach the humanities in a post-critical fashion. This pedagogical movement, rooted in epistemological and semiotic positions that are common to Scholes and Polanyi (as well as Peirce) would constitute a small, but significant step toward the humanistic revisionism advocated by Polanyi that would place our personal, fiduciary epistemic commitments at the center of a conception of knowing that would allow us to rigorously and realistically connect our use of signs to the phenomenological and ontological realms in which we dwell.

I have jokingly referred to these lofty disciplinary, philosophical, and cultural pretensions as a white whale. A more widely-employed post-critical English pedagogy, combining the insights of Scholes and Polanyi, might be as serviceable a harpoon as we are likely to get our hands on, given the fact that under our current educational regime nearly all students have some exposure to the study of English while far fewer take courses on philosophy or semiotics, thus leaving precious few initiates in the sciences aware of even the barest rudiments of proper philosophy of science.

ENDNOTES

[1]All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the works of Robert Scholes. Due to the retrospective nature of this article I have chosen to use the following abbreviations for the titles of Scholes's major works:

CR   *The Crafty Reader*
EAF   *English After the Fall*
F   *The Fabulators*
SI   *Semiotics and Interpretation*
SL   *Structuralism in Literature*
PR   *Protocols of Reading*
RFE *The Rise and Fall of English*
TP   *Textual Power*

[2]In 2011 Scholes published *English After the Fall*, in which he restates and further develops the case he made in the earlier *The Rise and Fall of English*. While this later volume is very valuable, I find the arguments put forth in the earlier work to be more robust and foundational, and more likely to be of interest to those interested in Polanyi's work. In *English After the Fall*, he notes that he does not know of any English departments that have "followed [his] advice for making the fall of English a fortunate one…no doubt…because [he] failed to make the case persuasively enough" (xiv). In this later work he reiterates, focuses on, and expands his arguments for the move to textuality, while eschewing recommendations for more specific curricular categories (i.e. the trivium) that might be used to carry out such a shift. With regard to his failure to make the case sufficiently enough, we may wish to pardon him—it might well be a tall task for any individual scholar to completely alter the approach to the entire discipline of English in one fell swoop. But again, I have focused on the earlier *The Rise and Fall of English*, which I see as a more comprehensive and uncompromising statement of his project.

[3]A fascinating example of the application of Scholesian semiotic method at the level of culture is found in *Protocols of Reading*, where he approaches the life stories of James Joyce, Benito Mussolini, and Georg Lukács as texts in order to gain insight into modernist ideology. This is a rich undertaking, which provides ample opportunity to study not only how the calling of talented individuals can influence culture and ideology on a grand scale, but also particular aspects of moral inversion manifested at the level of the individual (Scholes notes that as all three figures grasped the "difficulty—perhaps the impossibility—of achieving the socialist program…[they] shifted their goals in various directions, all of which were marked by certain authoritarian and totalizing proclivities;" (*PR*, 29]). Such an approach could most certainly serve as the basis for classes on historicized ideology and a host of other issues. These passages might also be usefully incorporated into a class which takes as its point of departure the concept of moral inversion.

While the foregoing example provides thematic material that can be readily applied by any able-bodied humanist to a range of post-critically useful classroom scenarios, many of Scholes's works contain a wealth of material that is more explicitly designed for immediate pedagogical deployment. *Textual Power*, for instance, contains a series of chapters entitled "The Text in the Class I, II, & III" where Scholes outlines a practical way for educators to help students improve their skills as readers by breaking the reading process into three subsidiary steps: submission to the text, interpretation of the text, and, finally, criticism of the text.

The first stage is that of the preliminary reading, which is dependent upon our submission to an "assume[d] authority and intentionality," otherwise there will be "nothing sufficiently other for us to interpret…[and] criticize" (*TP*, 39). The next step is that of interpretation. The reader, "based on a feeling of incompleteness on [his or her] part," here fills in the gaps left in the text and looks for "a concealed or non-obvious meaning" which may or may not turn up (*TP*, 22). Significantly, the interpretive stage "question[s] that very unity of subjectivity and intention that we have postulated in order to read" in the first place (*TP*, 40). The third stage involves criticism of "the themes developed in…[the] text…or of the codes themselves, out of which…[the] text has been constructed" (*TP*, 23). This is often more effectively carried out from a practical, collective position, rather than one that is purely personal and individual, so that part of the teacher's role is to help students identify their own group or class interests – again, to help students to understand more fully their calling.

Scholes's account of this stage of reading is reminiscent of Polanyi's description of discovery as "a conscious and persistent striving for the solution of an articulate problem…" in "…an act in which satisfaction, submission, and universal legislation are indissolubly combined" (*PK*, 301). The implicitly post-critical nature of Scholes's approach here might be made more explicit by accentuating the ways in which a rigorously defensible criticism must rest upon a foundation of submission and interpretation that are ultimately fiduciary and personal in nature, due to the fact that the reader must pour herself into these preliminary stages in ways that will never be completely available for introspective critique. Again, I provide these brief sketches in order to illustrate how a teacher of English (or of the humanities more generally) might concretely combine contributions from both Scholes and Polanyi in order to teach the process of reading in a post-critical mode.

Unsurprisingly, given his deep involvement in semiotics, Scholes's approach to teaching texts is informed by a heightened awareness of genre: "Major literary works are all comments on their own form, on the generic tradition or traditions from which they take their being. The study of literature, then, must involve the study of communicative process in general—or semiotics—and in particular the codes that govern the production and interpretation of the major kinds of literature, and the subcodes that inform the various genres that have developed in the course of literary history" (*SI*, 34-35). Such a "semiotic approach...allows critic, teacher, student, and reader more scope for thought, more freedom and more responsibility, than a[n]…exegetical one" because texts are, in the final analysis, "communication[s] to be tested and weighed, not icon[s] to be worshiped" (*SI*, 126). The aim of such an approach is to "both socialize and desocialize…[since] students need to acquire the interpretive codes of their culture, but they also need see them as codes, so that they can appreciate those texts that reshape accepted ideas and at the same time defend themselves against the manipulative exploitation of received opinion" (SI, 14).

The Crafty Reader, published in 2001, is comprised of a series of studies offering concrete suggestions and examples for the teaching of a variety of text types through this lens of genre as informed by semiotic theory. A central concern in this book is to focus on whole genres as well as particular texts which aspire to the level of craft rather than art, or which, at any rate would not likely be considered high art by most canon-guardians. The topics covered thus range from poetry (with attention to poets and forms scorned by the New Critics), to the private-eye novel, to the science fantasy of J.K. Rowling. A particularly intriguing chapter, Reading the World, provides the contours of a course based on a reading of American culture informed by Baudrillard's work on hyperreality *vis a vis* the paintings of Norman Rockwell. This section, which manages to remain tethered to Scholes's realist ontology, also makes (in my own view, at least) a convincing argument that Rockwell is not a hack sentimentalist, but a skilled postmodern craftsman who is savvy to the complex, mediated nature of human existence. For those individuals new to the classroom and charged with teaching

literature, textuality, or semiotics, this book may prove a godsend, as almost every chapter can serve as the outline for a new course, perhaps easing a bit the curricular hand-to-mouth existence of green teachers.

Finally, Scholes has produced much valuable literary criticism in addition to his philosophical pedagogy. In the works that I have been drawing on most prominently, examples of his approach to literary criticism can be found in the chapter on *Ulysses* in *Structuralism in Literature*, as well as in chapters on film, drama, and fiction, and close readings of short stories by Joyce and Hemingway in *Semiotics and Interpretation*. In 1963's *The Fabulators* (updated in 1979 to include J.L. Borges and some Latin American magical realism under the title *Fabulation and Metafiction*) he resurrects the term "fabulator" to describe what he sees as a new sub-genre of allegorical fiction by writers such as Kurt Vonnegut, Iris Murdoch, and John Barth. This genre "emphasizes art and joy" by "tend[ing] away from the representation of reality but return[ing] toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy," simultaneously exhibiting "an extraordinary delight in design...for its own sake," thus producing texts whose formal qualities "assert...the authority of the fabulator" (F, 10-11). All of the above passages might be usefully employed as accessible examples of semiotically informed critical approaches in courses which include the primary texts or genres addressed.

It is important to note that, in addition to the foregoing examples, Scholes has been involved in the creation of a number of textbooks. One such is *Text Book: Writing Through Literature*, originally published in 1988 and updated several times since.

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