Initially, Susan's sole appeal seems to be that she likes Charlie without knowing who he is. Then, when his political relationship to the public collapses, Kane uses her as a means to regain the affection and applause of an audience by becoming a Svengali impresario. The fact that Susan obviously has no talent and that the opera career is manifestly an emotional strain for her indicates that she is reduced rather quickly from a source for love to a device for gaining approval.

After such a relentless emphasis, for Carringer to see Rosebud and the globe Kane drops as symbols of such recondite complexity is to ride a thesis particularly hard. Harkening back to the brief, almost insignificantly presented, childhood situation does seem rather simplistically sentimental. But Bernstein's anecdote of the impression a glimpse of a young girl in a white dress made upon him has in effect provided an argument for the "real" nature of such sentiments. The link between the globe and the Colorado boyhood reveals the same sense of subjective significance. And when the boy is first presented, he does seem like a small figure in one of those snowstorms stirred by the tipping of such a liquid-filled globe. The grownups pathetically reassure him that he won't be lonely, but it turns out that he is.

Rather than presenting us with "a sense of his [Kane's] complexity," the film seems rather to show us how simple human impulses get complicated by the refusal to recognize the Otherness of the world. Carringer's other point—"in Kane's attachment to what he calls Rosebud, we ought not to think of how the past intrudes into the present" (pp. 191-92)—also seems quite unconvincing in terms of what we are shown in the film.

Walter Shear
Kansas State College of Pittsburg

Mr. Carringer replies:

I think there was a stage in the evolution of *Citizen Kane* when even Welles would have agreed he was doing the kind of story Walter Shear outlines. A sense that Kane ought to be provided with a definitive psychological motive persisted well into the film's production, though the burden seemed to fall more heavily on different motives at different stages. Only a week before the script was to go to the Hays Office, for instance, Kane's final break with Leland, his best friend, over the opera review was being placed early in the story, where it would emphasize the psychological compulsion associated with Kane's name. Only gradually (as I tried to show in my essay) did Welles come to realize where his narrative method was leading him—toward a "prismatic" view of his subject. Kane, as Welles said, is all the things said about him, or none—it "depends on who's talking about him." To ignore this warning and look for a *real* Kane in one of the stories told about him inevitably will be to do what Shear does, to distort and trivialize the story. In my essay I tried to provide an alternative to his view that the obvious, surface meaning represented by Rosebud is the only acceptable one. I think if Shear felt obliged to comment he ought to have tried to discredit my methods or refute my arguments, rather than just to repeat a familiar old interpretation of the film.

Robert L. Carringer
University of Illinois

UNITY IDENTITY TEXT SELF

To the Editor:

Heinrich Henel's comments on Norman Holland's "Unity Identity Text Self" raise several important issues that Holland's reply did not address (*PMLA*, 91, 1976, 293-95). Any theory, for example, that requires that we rule out of court all shared responses to literary works as mere accidents is itself ignoring a potentially fruitful avenue for inquiry. For all the popularity of the notion of "plurisignificance" (whether it be New Critical ambiguity or Holland's brand of idiosyncratic response), the experience of most teachers of literature is that there *are* important shared inferences when we read (say) *King Lear*. Good evidence for this assertion was provided by the audience's response to a paper Holland read at the 1975 MLA Convention in San Francisco. In trying to demonstrate that readers "match up" their own unique identities to texts, Holland argued that when he read *King Lear* he found himself glad at the end of the play when Lear and Cordelia die. Lear, it seems, has been guilty of causing all the trouble, and Cordelia has been irresponsible in allowing the old fool to get away with it. Holland reacted this way, he explained, because he had always resented weak father figures.

I venture to say—from my conversations with others who attended this session—that a uniform response was that this was the most original and idiosyncratic *interpretation* of *King Lear* they had ever heard. Something, in other words, required many of Holland's listeners intuitively to reject such an interpretation as somehow false to their own experience with the play. Although Holland rejects the notion of a "regulative force" that "limits" response, precisely such an immanent force had functioned for most of his listeners when they had read the play.

This is not to say that even two members of the audience would have agreed on one interpretation of *King Lear*, evidence Holland alludes to when he

https://doi.org/10.2307/461569 Published online by Cambridge University Press

asserts that if there were a regulative force in works "we should see more unanimity than we do in, say, Shakespeare studies" (p. 295). But Holland is confusing two crucial intuitive aspects of literary experience and confusing both with the intellectual act of understanding that experience. When we read *King Lear*, we are constrained to make certain kinds of judgments, conditioned in part by the generic requirements of whatever form the work is a representative of, in part by the unique requirements of the work itself. In *Lear*, for example, if we fail to judge that, for all his error, Lear is more sinned against than sinning, and that his progression is one toward an inevitable doom, we can in some *objective* sense (the power of that work) be said to have misread. But we are always free to make another kind of judgment about any work: those *possible* inferences any of us *can* draw from an artistic construct made up of the incredibly complex, multifaceted, and allusive materials of human existence. Within this second kind of judgment, Holland's idiosyncratic associations with weak father figures fit in. But while both kinds of inferences (one kind in a sense "required," the other "optional") are perfectly permissible, we cause incredible critical confusion when we fail to make the distinction.

Finally, then, another explanation for the lack of critical agreement Holland uses to bolster his arguments for plurisignificance (or better said, lack of any determinate significance) is that critics, in trying to *explain* their experiences with literary works, invariably concentrate on one or the other of these two kinds of inferences. And if the critic chooses to examine the possible inferences he can make from any text, the number of "meanings" or analogies with human experience (including his own) he can find is virtually limitless. Nothing in this, as far as I can see, refutes the notion held by many critics from Aristotle on that literary works create in the midst of their allusive complexity determinate significance we can describe and—if we are asking the same question about the same literary "facts"—about which we can come to fruitful agreement.

MICHAEL M. BOARDMAN
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Mr. Holland replies:

Can I explain my experience of a text through the text alone, me alone, or the relation between the two of us? Is that relation lawlike and, if it is, in what direction? That is, do texts "cause" (or "control") responses or do literents? Is meaning "in" texts or is it something we create through texts? Do texts signify (or "plurisignify") or do we simply interpret them in varying ways? These are basic and perhaps divisive issues for our profession. Michael Boardman suggests a compromise: We are "conditioned," "constrained to make certain kinds of judgments," yet also "free" to make all kinds of "possible" and "idiosyncratic" inferences.

Alas, his examples don't demonstrate textual constraint. Is Lear's doom inevitable? This "catastrophe, unlike those of all the other mature tragedies, does not seem at all inevitable"—thus the great A. C. Bradley. "It is not even satisfactorily motived."[1] Have we "misread" the play "in some *objective* sense" if we do not conclude that Lear is more sinned against than sinning? Clifford Leech calls that line "self-pitying and self-righteous." Marvin Rosenberg and G. Wilson Knight hear in it Lear's equating justice with vengeance on "others." "This equivocal statement," writes William W. Main, "suggests . . . a rather self-pitying feeling that Lear's innocence outweighs his guilt. Lear's crime, however, of selling love is the greatest crime in this play."[2]

We always find this phenomenon: literents of taste, intelligence, and even genius (if we include Tolstoy on *Lear*) differing about interpretations. What then do these metaphors of "force" or "power" constraining significance mean? We can perhaps find out by looking, not at the text alone, but at the relation between text and literent, especially for analogies to what psycholinguists and psychologists of perception tell us about the way we perceive simpler things than *Lear*: shapes, colors, directions, sentences, or the familiar "optical illusions."[3]

We analyze by synthesis. That is, after a preliminary once-over, we can bring to bear on the object a schema which feels personally, biologically, and culturally appropriate. We perceive the object then by a differencing: it "is" the schema we ourselves have generated plus the difference between the schema and what our senses admit. We may then either minify that difference by further analysis-by-synthesis or tolerate it, depending on circumstances and our own style.

In this model, as in Piaget's assimilation-accommodation paradigm or my own hypothesis of DEFT perceptions as functions of identity, objects do not in any simple way "cause" or "control" our perceptions of them. Rather, we "transact" the object. We perceive actively, through ideas and feelings, not passively as waves impinge on eye or ear; and surely we must be very active indeed when we perceive something as complex as *King Lear*.

I begin with certain feelings toward the play, awe for the tragedy and its author, for example. I invest those feelings toward the play as a whole in the sequence of particular events ostensibly "in" the play—I transfer my awe to Lear. Then, when Lear

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