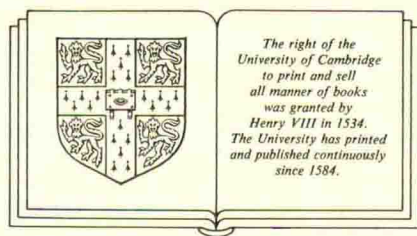


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*The example of Charles Mauron*

LINDA HUTCHEON



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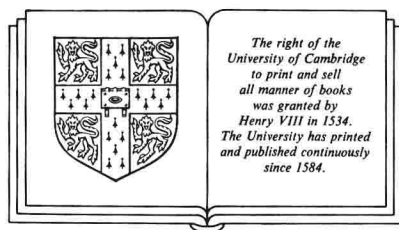
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Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA  
296 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park, Melbourne 3206, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1984

First published 1984

Printed in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Hutcheon, Linda, 1947–

Formalism and the Freudian aesthetic.

Includes bibliographies and index.

1. Mauron, Charles – Biography – Careers. 2. Formalism (Literary analysis). 3. Psychoanalysis and literature. 4. Criticism. 5. Aesthetics. 6. Critics – France – Biography. 7. Authors, French – 20th century – Biography. I. Title.

PN75.M33H87 1984 840'.9 [B] 83-23211

ISBN 0 521 26302 6

## Preface



THIS IS A study with a double focus: In the first place it seeks to chart the parallel revaluation of both formalism and psychology in twentieth-century literary criticism by using the work and career of the French critic Charles Mauron (1899–1966) as both a diachronic and a synchronic scaffolding. Using a structure of biography and literary history, it investigates Mauron's rather odd position both inside and outside two different critical contexts, the French and the English – a position that makes his work a particularly revealing kind of reflection of the diverse critical trends and tensions of our age. As a product of modernism, Mauron was aware of and open to the seeming contradictions of both formalist and psychoanalytic aesthetic theories, although for ultimately different reasons: He was both a literary critic, intent upon investigating the forms and structures, as well as the meaning, of literary objects, and an aesthete, concerned with the nature of the aesthetic experience, of the conditions of mind related to the production and comprehension of those objects. Mauron is best known as the formulator of a psychoanalytic approach to literature for which is reserved, in the French language and in this book, the name *psychocritique*. The full account of the genesis and development of this approach that will be provided in the Introduction has been deemed necessary, for it is only in the light of this final product that the stages in Mauron's development take on their particular

significance: They reveal his attempts to solve a personal dual allegiance, to “objective” science and to “subjective” art, and they also serve as one characteristic manifestation of what some would call a “paradigm,” in an extension of Kuhn’s sense, of a generally shared dichotomy that governs our literary critical thinking even today.

That paradigm forms the second focus of this study. With Mauron’s work still firmly in the center, the broader general context is that of the very contemporary – and yet enduring – theoretical issue of the designation of literary criticism as an objective or as a subjective activity. The English liberal humanist tradition has felt threatened recently by the attempts of continental semiotics and structuralism to put criticism on a more objective basis. Why the paranoia? Or, perhaps the question should be: Why the threat? There is a feeling today that criticism, in order to have validity as an institutionalized professional activity, must involve more than an innate appreciation of ineffable beauty or exquisitely fine moral vision on the part of the critic. But surely all so-called traditional criticism is not just an elitist, impressionistic exercise? And surely, too, structuralist and semiotic approaches go beyond sterile, pseudoscientific descriptions of form at the expense of all human content or meaning?

This battle – often fought, on both sides, with the double-edged weapons of rhetoric and reduction – represents more than just a modern clash of the cultural temperaments and tastes of England and France. The persistent resistance to some kinds of formalism in literary studies should be looked at in the context of the post-romantic aesthetic heritage. And the French infatuation with what the English reject must be seen as what it is: a very recent phenomenon, perhaps a reassertion of a version of Cartesian faith, but certainly a reaction against both a dominant metaphysical aesthetic and a predominantly historical and philological critical orientation. Charles Mauron’s work over a period of forty years belongs to neither the French nor the English tradition, but can cast interesting lights on both precisely because of this. The relative lack of success of his psychocritical method in France, a country that has since embraced the theories of Jacques Lacan with such fervor, points to the very foreign nature of Mauron’s Freudian formalism. Trained in France, but as a scientist, Mauron first began to think about art under the influence of the British formalist art critic Roger Fry.

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Like his mentor, Mauron sought a way to unite the two interests of his life: art and science. Both men thought that science would offer some objective means of approach to aesthetic objects. Just as the logical positivists were trying to move philosophy away from metaphysical speculation and toward analytical activity, so Mauron fought the metaphysical domination of one branch of philosophic inquiry, aesthetics. He wanted to introduce into aesthetics what the positivists were introducing into logic: the methodology and precision of science, the determination of meaning by tests of empirical observation. Such was the theory. In practice, Mauron's criticism, like Fry's, was scientific only in a very loose and metaphorical sense. There were no real experiments, despite the liberal use of the language of the experimental method. And so there was no quantitative measuring of results, and finally no universal scientific laws. What there was, at least in theory, was a scientific attitude of rational impartiality. After his first work, beauty was not Mauron's main aesthetic focus. For him, aesthetics was redefined as a science that treated of the conditions of sensuous perception; aesthetics became a form of psychology that examined empirically the nature of artistic creation and judgment. He sought to separate what in England had been united as the "mental and moral sciences." From there, with the help of the theories of Sigmund Freud, Mauron could finally formulate *psychocritique*. Psychoanalysis, or "scientific psychology," was for Mauron the validating authority needed to give meaning and significance to both his formalistic method and his theory of creation and response. The result, he argued, was objective literary criticism and an "empirical aesthetic."

Mauron's concept of the empirical was not really that of the English philosophical tradition. If anything, it was closer to that of American pragmatism: Mauron believed that the value of his analyses could be measured by their correspondence with so-called experimental results. His hypotheses, he felt, could be verified by empirical means. In this, he was perhaps most like the semiotician Peirce in his basic underlying assumptions. But the resemblance stops there. The method of literary analysis Mauron came to propose was in no way semiotic; nor, despite the claims of recent commentators, was it structuralist. It was also not Lacanian or deconstructivist, though related to both. It was, however, formalist, and from this and from the belief that psychoanalysis was an experimentally valid science came the sources of Mauron's claim

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that *psychocritique* was an objective methodology. But what exactly does this word "objective" mean in this context?

Today's theoretical debates have made it almost impossible not to be self-conscious about using the terms objective and subjective as applied to literary criticism. The mind's eye should see these words in quotation marks throughout this book, for the reader must continually remind himself or herself of the modern distrust of a distinction that Nietzsche (in *The Birth of Tragedy*) claimed to be of "no value whatever" in aesthetics. Yet, in *The Language of Criticism* (1966), John Casey has convincingly argued that the "objective-subjective dichotomy" has been the central dilemma of English criticism since Wordsworth. The last one hundred and fifty years, he believes, have produced only a series of failures to solve this dichotomy, mainly because of what he sees as an inadequate and even mistaken philosophy of the emotions that has demanded a choice be made between accepting literary response as subjective and seeking a scientific account of it. The habit of some literary critics – including Mauron – of using scientific language to describe aesthetic production and response is no guarantee of their theories' objectivity: Eliot's famous use of "catalyst," "medium," and "fusion" in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" does not really mask the subjective or romantic implications of his image.

Without disputing at all Casey's argument about English criticism, I still find myself uneasy about those terms that even he initially placed in quotation marks. We can no longer assume, even in science, the objectivity of the observing mind. And since Hegel, the terms "object" and "subject" have themselves become problematic. In literary criticism too, who is going to decide, for instance, which is more objective: the application of an external "scientific" frame of reference (linguistics, psychoanalysis) or the rigorous, internal, formal analysis of structures within a work of art? Both methods lay claim to objectivity. Usually, today, a critical method that pretends to this status will argue that it is scientific and descriptive. What is meant by science is, however, rarely defined. Certainly science does not merely describe; it interprets its findings. The problem becomes how to go from textual description to interpretation. Usually some grid is applied to the descriptive findings, often one with scientific pretensions itself – anthropology or linguistics or psychoanalysis. These social or, as the French say, "human" sciences are often called upon to lend what is sometimes,

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in effect, only a spurious air of scientificity and objectivity to the interpretation, as if to suggest that the text itself demanded that particular orientation of reading.

Today the subjective and objective extremes are often discussed in terms of impressionism and formalism. As modern critical concepts, both of these could be said to have their roots in the theories of "art for art's sake" and Kant's "purposiveness without purpose." As its name suggests, formalism presumes the precedence of form over content, at least in critical discussion. It does not deny that content exists, but chooses to limit its focus to the *ordering* of the content. In other words, form is the system of relations of parts within the work of art itself. In literary criticism, this may suggest an argument for the autonomy of art, in the sense of its liberation from the need to represent "reality," be it moral or phenomenological. But to place the locus of aesthetic value on form is not to deny content, or its significance, as the detractors of formalism insist. It is true, however, that the intent of the artist regarding the meaning or function of his work is considered irrelevant to most formalist critics.

Modern critical impressionism also flourished in the last century among the same art for art's sake purists. Their interest in the "sensibility" of the critic, in his openness to beauty, could be seen as the precursor of Eliot's special trust in the poet as critic and even of F. R. Leavis's faith in the critic's intuitive response to art, free from formulated criteria of judgment. However, psychologists, scientists, mathematicians, and others have all argued that intuition is in fact the basic intellectual act at the origin of all more complex and objective rational structures. Even if this is so, the trusting of intuition alone remains the source of that definition of critical impressionism as interpretation that lacks public reference. Criteria of judgment and selection do exist, but in the form of personal, intuitively perceived norms. This is what critics like Leavis are often accused of today, usually by formalists who fail to see that the exercise of value judgments is perhaps an implicit part of the entire critical enterprise – even if only in the selection of the text to be examined or described.

The terms formalist and impressionist are often used as pejorative labels for critics who "limit" themselves to form or to personal response. In this study, they are intended to be merely descriptive of two general critical approaches. Formalism calls for, first of all,



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the ordered description of the internal relations of a work of art. Unlike structuralism, it does not depend on a linguistic orthodoxy; in this sense, it is intrinsic, not extrinsic. Insofar as it describes the patterns of a work of art, formalism could be called an empirical approach. If we can speak of criteria of judgment here, they would be the coherence and unity of the work itself. Although critical impressionism often pretends to be purely inductive, there are actually unspoken (perhaps because intuitive) norms, which are in this way extrinsic to the work of art. The result is less descriptive than evaluative. In both cases, however, the hermeneutic activity is similar. Interpretation is carried out according to some chosen orthodoxy, some set of rules that provides an authority, tacit or acknowledged. In this sense, all criticism is deductive, or "judicial," to use Wellek's and Warren's terminology.

If the chosen orthodoxy is an organized body of knowledge, a science, or a philosophical system, we are more likely to accuse the criticism of being deterministic or a priori, especially if its hermeneutic grid feels as if it has been "imposed upon" the text. The choice of orthodoxy and its appropriateness to the text examined would seem important considerations. Charles Mauron came to adopt and adapt what he accepted as a scientifically validated orthodoxy – psychoanalysis. The reasons for this choice are to be found in a conflict in his early work between, on the one hand, his formalism and his trust in the scientific method, and on the other hand, an impressionistic, almost mystic trust in his intuitions as a reader of literature. The particular appropriateness of his choice lies in the fact that psychoanalysis itself can be seen as that most paradoxical of sciences, one that claims to offer an objective account, by means of inductive, empirical investigation, of the most subjective of human faculties, the unconscious. It is not surprising that Mauron should, therefore, be drawn to Freud as an authority to validate both his formalistic method of *psychocritique* (the empirical description of textual structures or networks of associated images) and his interpretation of those formal relations in terms of their unconscious origins in the psyche of the artist.

In addition to this, his early formalist concern for discovering scientifically the "Unity and Diversity in Art" (the title of his first published work in aesthetics) came to be tempered by an increasing respect for that which could be perceived only by what he called the critic's "antennae" – in other words, for details that often defy

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historical or textual “proof.” As he wrote in “Mallarmé et le Tao”: “Mais l’expérience humaine dépasse largement et sans cesse le domaine étroit des certitudes ou mêmes des hypothèses scientifiques. Le simple et déjà si mystérieux sens esthétique tressaille en nous à des messages sans justification historique.” With the discovery of Freud, Mauron could then argue that these messages were definitely not to be ignored, for their formal patterns worked upon the critic’s unconscious and, in fact, derived from, and therefore revealed, the artist’s unconscious. *Psychocritique*’s concern for this level of message was what psychoanalysis served to validate but what actually existed, from the start, in all of Mauron’s inquiries into the formal structures of art intuitively perceived by the critic’s antennae. And this was to be the basis of what Mauron called his empirical aesthetic, his Freudian formalism.

## Acknowledgments



A STUDY of a modern writer cannot be undertaken without the cooperation and assistance of the people who knew him and who are, in effect, the executors of his intellectual legacy. I must express my gratitude on this count above all to Alice Mauron for her hospitality and help with Mauron's papers, and also to her son, Claude Mauron, to Quentin Bell, Pamela (Fry) Diamand, Marie Mauron, and P. N. Furbank. In addition sincere thanks are due to the Bloomsbury scholar whose expertise has proved invaluable and whose patience has seemed unlimited: S. P. Rosenbaum. It was he who inspired this project. A special debt is owed to the Toronto Freud Group (Gabriel Moyal, Mary O'Connor, Paul St-Pierre, Anne Boyman). Reading Freud with these friends was an exciting and stimulating experience that was in some ways also responsible for this study. I am also greatly indebted to those friends and colleagues who read the manuscript in its various stages: Sharon Adams-Butler, Michael Ross, Alwyn Berland, Janet M. Paterson, Robert A. Greene. My gratitude also goes to Liz Maguire of Cambridge University Press for her faith and encouragement, and to Michael Black, Tom Conley, and the other (anonymous) reviewer, whose constructive comments and acute insights helped make this a better book. Its errors and inadequacies, of course, are mine only. For her care and skill in copyediting the manuscript, I would like to express my debt to Anne Richards.

## Acknowledgments

Particular and final thanks must go, as always, to my husband, Michael, for his patience as well as for his provocative, informed responses to all stages of this work.

I should also like to acknowledge the assistance of the Killam Foundation for its support during the researching and writing of this study. The financial generosity of its Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship allowed me to travel to St. Rémy-de-Provence, Paris, London, and Cambridge. But it is the moral support that such fellowships as this provide during these times of increasing professional underemployment of recent graduates that has been appreciated above all.

Part of Chapter 4 was presented to the E. M. Forster Centenary Conference (Montréal, May 1979) and a considerably more extended version was published both in a special issue of *Modernist Studies: Literature and Culture: 1920-1940*, 3, No. 3 (1979), pp. 141-50, and in *E. M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations*, ed. J. S. Herz and R. K. Martin (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 84-98, as " 'Sublime Noise' for Three Friends: The Role of Music in the Critical Writings of E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, and Charles Mauron." Versions of the Introduction were delivered to the English Society, McMaster University (October 1982), and to a meeting of the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English (Montréal, May 1980) as "Roger Fry, Sigmund Freud, Charles Mauron: Aesthetics and Psychology."

Toronto, 1984

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## INTRODUCTION



AS A LITERARY CRITIC, Charles Mauron is a figure whose value as an index to the major literary theoretical issues debated in our century equals, and indeed exceeds, his value as the inventor of *psychocritique*. His literary critical career began in the 1920s in England under the auspices of E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, and the Hogarth Press of Virginia and Leonard Woolf – a fact that the French have generally ignored, concentrating instead on his post-1950 formalization of the psychocritical method. However, in the mid-1960s, Mauron became embroiled in the now-famous Picard–Doubrovsky battle over the “nouvelle critique,” that is, over the importation of the frameworks from the social sciences into French literary criticism. For a brief time Mauron was alternately admired and condemned for the so-called rigor of his particular literary methodology derived from psychoanalysis. Today his work tends to be either ignored as out of fashion in France or rewritten – not without considerable distortion – in Lacanian terms.

Yet, before his rather late conversion (at the age of fifty or so) to Freudian psychology, Mauron was an aesthete and one of a particularly British sort. His two English books, both translated by his friend Roger Fry, and the series of articles that appeared in *The Burlington Magazine* (1925a – see Appendix A) and *The Criterion* (1927c, 1930, 1933a, 1935), translated by T. S. Eliot, bear the im-

print of English as much as French aesthetic issues, as do the lectures that Maumon gave during his English university tours in the twenties, thirties, and forties. But even the relatively recent rediscovery of Maumon's work in North America has not resulted in any revaluation of his method or its results. Nor has it brought about a reconsideration of the broader perspective that would place Maumon where he belongs: in the midst of that larger historical context of more than fifty years of diversity and tension in critical experimentation. What must be taken into account is the critical heritage of Maumon's British coevals, a heritage he absorbed almost by default, as his French formation was scientific and not philosophical. Those Kantian remains of art for art's sake led not only to Roger Fry's (and Maumon's) formalism, but also to that previously mentioned concern for the "sensibility" of the critic that T. S. Eliot as well as Maumon would manifest. The French symbolist inheritance of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound is also Maumon's. Those interests in aesthetic purity, in the unity of the arts, in music, in that bizarre union of intellectualism and an almost mystic suggestiveness are actually the materials for the experimental hypotheses of Maumon's first work, *The Nature of Beauty in Art and Literature*.

Together Fry and Maumon translated and published Mallarmé's poems, and in fact, Mallarmé was in some ways the unwitting spur to Maumon's moving beyond his early formalist and symbolist aesthetic formulations. Mallarmé's stress on craft and intellectual control acted as a challenge to Maumon, who had just been reading Freud and suspected the omnipotent control of the *unconscious*. Unlike Fry, his mentor, Maumon was seduced by Freud, as his *Aesthetics and Psychology* (1970a [1935]) bears witness. The attempt in this work, as its title suggests, is to separate and then reconcile the contemplative and the active impulses, or what Maumon saw alternatively as art and science, or aesthetics and psychology.

From 1935 on, Maumon clearly reflects the consequences of the modernist-inspired resurgence of both aesthetic formalism (in the visual and literary arts especially) and critical psychologism – both affectivist and expressive. The inherited (Kantian) nineteenth-century tension between criticism as description and as evaluation is transmitted here, in critical terms, in Maumon's constantly split allegiance: an allegiance, on the one hand, to the describing of the structures of the work of art itself and, on the other, to their elucidation in terms of the psyches of both the creator and the reader.



The first half of this study investigates Mauron's formation, both in its particulars and in the general implications of each stage of his intellectual development, as he cast about for satisfactory answers to the various aesthetic questions posed by his contemporaries. His early training in science and his immense respect for the experimental method of Claude Bernard left their mark on all of his methodological structures. His increasing blindness sharpened his already remarkable memory to such an extent that the first step of his later psychocritical method (a mental superimposition of memorized texts) became almost easier for a blind man than for a sighted one. And it was his 1919 meeting with Roger Fry that inaugurated an early period of quite strict formalism, soon tempered by the discovery of Freud.

At first, however, Freud was problematic for Mauron, who wanted to posit a higher reality, a spiritual sensibility, to explain the existence of art and also to act as a counter to both the instinctive, libidinal unconscious and the "social" self of the artist. Despite his anti-Bergsonianism, Mauron was in effect willing to posit a superrational as well as a subrational force in the human psyche. For support in this endeavor, he turned to Jung and to the Eastern mystics. In his two series of essays, *Sagesse de l'eau* (1945) and *L'Homme triple* (1947), the attempt to reconcile the animal and the spiritual became a reworking of the old struggle to unite psychology and aesthetics, for by the early 1950s Mauron had begun to perceive the true value that Freud was to have for him.

The second part of this study begins by investigating psychoanalysis as the objective science that studies the most subjective of realities – the human psyche. Or so it appeared to Mauron. Abandoning his (in some ways) quite traditionally philosophical, tripartite (spiritual, social, animal) concept of the mind, Mauron turned to Freud, and then to Ernst Kris, Leopold Bellak, and finally Melanie Klein and the Anglo-Saxon school of object-relation theorists, in his attempt to reconcile those haunting polar opposites that he could no longer ignore, whether he formulated them in terms of aesthetics and psychology, or of the work and the man, or of the contemplative impulse of art and the active impulse of science. His eclectic borrowings from various psychoanalytic theories were melded into what he named *psychocritique*, a four-step objective method for studying the unconscious structures of a work of art and, thereby, of the author's psyche. Even Mauron's early work,