

Narratives of National Cultural Identity: The Canonization of Thomas Eakins

To Sonm

Thus we choose our past in the light of a certain end, but from then on it imposes itself upon us and devours us.

Jean-Paul Sartre¹

1

This paper examines one concrete case of how narrativity in art criticism produces national cultural identity. I view as verbal artifacts — i.e., not as signs referring to events but as signs referring to other signs, and, consequently, as narratives (see White, *The Content of the Form*; White, "Figuring the Nature") — seven articles published between 1917 and 1931 and one book canonizing Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) as a great national American painter. The authors of the articles are Alan Burroughs, John McLure Hamilton, Henry McBride,² Harrison S. Morris, Lewis Mumford, and Walter Pach. The book is Lloyd Goodrich's first biography of the painter, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (1933). My goal is theoretical rather than historical: I do not try to exhaust all critical writings on Eakins during this period³ but, on the basis of some of them, to outline a problem and to offer a solution.

Two frameworks — one theoretical and one historical — guide my project. The theoretical is provided by the notion of narrative identity, which I partially borrow from Paul Ricoeur (3: 186-89, 246-49). I operate under the following premises: (i)

Narrative identity pertains to events that a community holds to be important because it sees in them a beginning, a return to the community's origins. Pach, as if illustrating this peculiarity, writes: "One jealously defends the autochthonic character of his art because one feels that we must have a solid native basis such as Thomas Eakins offers us, upon which we may build when we have mastered the European traditions we are slowly assimilating" (114). Bregler says: "However, we can all share and feel proud of the fact that this American-born artist worked so diligently and accomplished so much without encouragement, and that he not only equals, but in some of his paintings surpasses many of the old masters of other countries." (ii) The epoch-making events establish or reinforce the consciousness a community maintains of its identity. McBride, for instance, referring to Homer, Ryder, Eakins, Fuller, and Blakelock, writes that "they were 'us'" (McBride 358). (iii) These events produce strong ethical feelings; they are the opposite of ethical neutrality. (iv) Narrative identity is not substantial; it does not come from a name denoting a subject identical with himself. It is a dynamic identity allowing mutability of a subject of action (individual or collective). To define an identity is to answer the question "who is the agent of this?" The answer to this question is the story of a life, which is narrative identity. (v) Narrative identity is based on a circular relation: the individual or the community builds his or its identity by receiving the stories which he or it invents. This circularity is not vicious but healthy (cf. Ricoeur 1: 53-54; see also 1: 3-4, 41, 54, 71-76, 3: 248). (vi) Narrative identity is an unstable one because it is possible to constitute several plots on the same events and, therefore, to compose different, even opposed plots about our lives. Thus, narrative identity is simultaneously a solution to the problem of identity and its new problematization.

The first five aspects of narrative identity as regards Eakins are demonstrated in parts 2 and 3 of this essay. The sixth is dealt with at the end of sections 2 and 3, and throughout section 4. Also with regard to the instability of narrative identity (aspect vi), I draw the attention to two things in the main text and the footnotes: first, some sources, which from a recent perspective shed light on the events mentioned in the 1917-1931 articles and Goodrich's book; and, second, different interpretations or narratives of Eakins that disagree with the ones in the eight earlier writings. My major sources are Goodrich's second, two-volume definitive biography of the artist, *Thomas Eakins*, and William Innes Homer's biography, which, using new material, tries to look beyond Eakins's idealized image.

The historical framework is the presupposition that, at a certain point in American cultural history, texts which functioned to create narrative identity were necessary, and so they were produced. This was during the period in which, broadly speaking, American culture was in a quest for self-identification. I take for granted that the first

1 Sartre 503. For the meaning of our past as strictly dependent on our present project see also 496-504.

2 For McBride's attitude to Eakins see Kirstein 5; and Rich 22.

3 For a bibliography on Eakins see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 301-17; and for selected bibliography McKinney 23-29; Nutty and Montagna; and Homer 265-68.

three decades or so of the twentieth century, the time when our book and articles appeared, were a part of this era.⁴

Theoretically, the second framework draws on Umberto Eco (*Semiotics and Philosophy of Language* 147-53, 161-62, 163; *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* 52-53). He thinks that there are two types of cultures or civilizations according to the ways in which interpretation is regulated: organized by a code or imposed by the power of an authority (*Semiotics and Philosophy of Language* 152-53). The code is a system of preestablished rules accepted by a community. For example, early Christianity invented an allegorical code by means of which it controlled the interpretation of the symbolic and uncoded Scriptures. On the other hand, a determinative authority is a central institution whose power ensues from an interpretive tradition, i.e., it holds the key to the "right" interpretation. For instance, the fourfold allegorical interpretation of the Bible was imposed by the Church thanks to its virtually unassailable political and cultural power. But power of this sort — be it of the Pope, the Big Brother or the Master — rests on hermeneutic circularity: the authority legitimizes the interpretation that legitimizes the authority.

If we apply Eco's idea to the periods of quest for national (or group) cultural identity, we may formulate the hypothesis that these epochs, in semiotic terms, are characterized by the creation and imposition of a code of producing and interpreting texts whose kernel is national (or group) cultural identity. More specifically, in the first three decades of the twentieth century, many of the critical texts on Eakins (and not only on him, of course) were written and understood in a way that constituted and assisted the cause of American national cultural identity.

One point indispensable to the understanding of our topic is that in America, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the quest for national cultural identity overlapped with the first stages of modernism, and thus more often than not, the narratives of cultural self-identification spoke a modernistic language. Yet the converse is also true: early modernistic discourse in America often fought in the name of national cultural identity.⁵ This reversible relationship is exemplified by Paul Rosenfeld, who explains the appearance of his collection of essays *Port of New York* as follows: "For the first time, among these modern [i.e., modernistic] men and women, I found

4 This period in American culture, compared with some "major" and "minor" European national cultures which went through a similar experience during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, comes later in time, but its essence is the same. With the breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the time of ethnic and national self-identification in Europe is back.

5 Such overlapping is by no means only an American phenomenon. In Polish literature, for example, nationalism speaks the language of romanticism (and vice versa) in Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* and of modernism (and vice versa) in Stanisław Wyspiański's *The Wedding*.

myself in an America where it was good to be.... during the last eight or seven years, the works of fourteen men and women at different times gave me the happy sense of a new spirit dawning in American life, and awakened a sense of wealth, of confidence, and of power which was not there before" (1-2).⁶

2

After Eakins's death, the Metropolitan Museum in New York opened on November 5, 1917 a comprehensive memorial exhibition including 60 of his works.⁷ This was one of the turning points in the posthumous fame of the painter, who from comparative obscurity during his lifetime (see Werbel) was turned into a pivotal figure in American art.⁸ In connection with the exhibition, the first articles dealing specially with Eakins appeared — something that did not happen during his lifetime.

In the seven articles and Goodrich's book that I discuss (as well as in some additional texts), Eakins is portrayed as a colossus of American national art by means of two entwined narratives:

6 However, the endeavors toward establishing national cultural identity in the beginning of the twentieth century spoke not only the language of modernism. An instance of this is the constitution of Edgar Allan Poe's status as a national American writer. During the second half of the nineteenth century, American criticism considered Poe a writer who did not belong to the American but, if to any, to the European — predominantly the French — literary tradition. However, the epoch of the search for national cultural identity subverted this critical line, and in the first decade of the twentieth century he was proclaimed an American writer of the highest rank, although no critical proof — in the form of thorough research — was offered (cf. Mabie; Wendell; and Smith). It was no earlier than the 1920s and the early 1930s when American scholarship substantiated its aspirations for Poe's Americanness (by that time, his fame as a world classic had been firmly implanted in France, Russia, the Scandinavian countries, and elsewhere) on the basis of his critical writings, which by then had been completely forgotten (with the exception of several famous articles such as "The Poetic Principle" and "The Philosophy of Composition") (cf. Alterton; Campbell 99-125, 147-86; and Jackson). It was mainly in his criticism where Poe's American roots were first discovered and thoroughly investigated. It took another two or three decades until Poe's place as a major American writer was irrevocably established. In the late 1920s, for instance, Parrington wrote: "The problem of Poe, fascinating as it is, lies outside the main current of American thought, and it may be left with the psychologist and the belletrist with whom it belongs" (2: 58). In the third volume of his work, he confirms his treatment of Poe (3: xxi). The shaky status of Poe as a great American writer is felt even in the late 1940s (see Spiller et al. 1: 321, 341). In the representative cases of Parrington and the *Literary History of the United States*, Poe's American identity is precarious not for the narrow specialists on this writer, but for the scholars, who in their broader summaries draw on the narrow specialists and who, due to their accessible and authoritative positions in literature, form public opinions.

7 For the relations between Eakins and the Metropolitan Museum see Weinberg; and Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 262-65, 270-71, 279-81; for the exhibition itself see 2: 274-78.

8 For the posthumous recognition of Eakins see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 272-84; Homer 250-53; and Hardin.

(i) Biographical narrative: here the painter is depicted as a prophet and patriarch. For my purposes, I reduce these concepts to their two fundamental characteristics: mediator and progenitor (see Achtemeier; Freedman; Myers). Eakins mediates between the American "self" and the Americans. This mediation is simultaneously a procreation: the painter artistically creates, or "fathers," the Americanness that he reveals to the Americans. The dynamic circular nexus between the two sides in Eakins's biography makes him a prophet/patriarch.⁹ On this basic connection, different secondary features are overlaid, and he, as we will see, is described with features reminding one of some aspects of well-known biblical figures.

(A hypothesis: the tension between mediation and procreation characterizes all tenets of national or group cultural identities. Every effort for such identification struggles on two fronts. On the one hand, the idea of mediation presupposes a preexistent, substantial communal identity [national, ethnic, gender, racial, religious, class, etc.] which is revealed. However, this presupposition debunks the professional basis of cultural studies turning them into divination, not into exploration of cultural constructs. On the other hand, the idea of procreation means that identities are constructed and nonsubstantial. But this subverts the ethical foundation of the cultural studies: if every identity is constructed, then communal interests operate behind the identity, and these interests clash with the interests of other communities, the result being, for instance, antiracist racism. The tension between mediation and procreation is resolved through dynamic circularity: to mediate is to procreate and vice versa.)

(ii) Critical narrative: here, Eakins is portrayed as a scientifically-minded artist who, through specific professional procedures, depicts not only the visual appearance of the material American world but its inmost essence as well.

The biographical and the critical narratives are intertwined because they tell one story in two different ways. Generally, this is the story of some deeply hidden Americanness that is revealed and constituted in the first case in a prophetic-patriarchal fashion, but in a professional painterly fashion in the second case. The constellation of these two narratives defines Eakins's status of a national American artist. Section 2 of this paper discusses the first narrative; section 3 the second.

The biographical narrative is comprised of six aspects (the sixth, Eakins's "poetics of greatness," consists of two levels: a structural and a historical one):

Moses's death and Eakins's death. Moses was not allowed the privilege of entering the promised land but could only glimpse it across the Jordan. In a similar way, Eakins

dies just before the recognition of his genius. McBride writes: "Fame held aloof from him until after his death" (132). Also: "The long continued neglect under which the artist struggled — he died without tasting the real public success — is puzzling" (131). Hamilton explains:

It is due to the initiative and generosity of the director and the trustees of the Metropolitan Museum that the collected works of Thomas Eakins are, for the first time, to be placed before the art lovers of New York and to obtain in the metropolis of America the recognition and admiration which the master was denied in his lifetime. Thomas Eakins died without receiving his just reward.... he passed away last year without receiving any assurance that he was entitled to a high position among artists (8).

For Morris, it is Eakins's art that is a Moses figure. The noble language matches the sublimity of the narrated myth: "It is inevitable that what is just and true and beautiful will find its ordered place in the substance of life. It may tragically outlast its creator and come to its own in a new generation, or it may have recognition in his day. But prevail it will, even in a world that must have authority for its liking; even in a world that has sacrificed many who bore it the richest gift" (12). Mumford explains that "his house, when he died in 1916, was filled with unsold canvases; and it needed his death, and a retrospective exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum to make our critics begin to realize the strength and integrity of Eakins" (367). Goodrich writes: "Hardly had he died before there began that wider recognition which he had lacked all his life" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 140). McKinney says: "In his declining years Eakins began to perceive the great honor that was to come to him only after death.... Only three museums acquired examples of Eakins' work during the artist's lifetime. Twenty-six years after his death he is represented by one or more canvases in twenty museums and in many private collections" (19; see also 19-21).

Eakins as a prophet. Eakins is described as a prophet in four ways: as Moses, as Jesus, as false prophet, and as unofficial prophet.

(a) Eakins, like Moses, is a leader of his people. Eakins — in painting — is one of the fathers of the nation. He acts as a spokesman for the American mind. Eakins represents American essence before both the Americans themselves and the world (that is, Western Europe, mainly France and Great Britain). Pach depicts the artist in this way and places him in the times of "the pioneers and builders" (112). Lincoln is "the supreme example" (112) of this glorious epoch, and Emerson, Mark Twain, and Whitman have evidenced in their work the character of the fathers. But "it is a painter who, by the quality of his art, with its excellences and limitations, has given us the

9 This double function pertains to some biblical characters as well: Abraham is not solely a patriarch but also a channel between God and men. It is through the patriarchs that God makes covenants with the rest of mankind.

truest record of the America of his time" (112). The rhetoric deserves a mention: starting from what seems to be an ultimate expression of American spirit (Lincoln, Whitman, Emerson, and Mark Twain), Pach ascends even higher: Eakins. Here the artist is presented as a prophet/patriarch *par excellence*.

(b) The painter, like Jesus, is a prophet who has persuaded only a small group of people that he is capable of delivering a (divine) message, that is to say to express American national character in his art. This group consists of his students, his family, some scientists who are Eakins's friends, some connoisseurs, and some perspicacious critics like the authors of some of the articles. Or, as Goodrich explains: "Most of this appreciation [of Eakins] was personal, coming not from official institutions, fashionable patrons, leading artists, critics, the public — in other words, the larger art world — but from people close to him" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 132; see also 132-33, 129). Eakins's death and the posthumous exhibition in 1917 cause him to be resurrected as a universally acknowledged spokesman for the American national mind. Morris portrays the prophetic importance of Eakins in a story that reminds one of Jesus and his disciples:

and he put into the minds and hands of his pupils a reverence for the principles of creative painting and sculpture that made them his devoted adorers and animated them with his own aims and often with his own technique. His dominating character overcame the weak, but into the strong it entered with a purpose so powerful as to leave its trace in much of American art as we know it.... and he saw his faithful pupils rise and go forth to fame, to positions at home and abroad of enviable rank. (11)¹⁰

While Eakins was still living, writes Hamilton, his picture *The Chess Player* hung for five decades "perhaps unnoticed, save by a few searching and discriminating eyes, in the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum in New York" (7). The painter's career was "limited" (7) to Philadelphia. Eakins guided his students at the Pennsylvania Academy "in those sound principles which must always be the foundations of great art" (8).

McBride, "a leading champion of international modernism" (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 277), contrives a narrative that is both biblical and modernistic: Eakins becomes a hero mainly through suffering reminiscent of that of Jesus or of a rejected

romantic-modernistic genius. The critic identifies who is to blame for the artist's ordeals: "the taste of our collectors, both public and private" (131); the undeveloped public, "the timid portion of the population" (130); "the academic exhibitions" (131), which constantly rejected Eakins's works although these works were finer than the accepted ones; the "money making artists of the present era" (this topic is hinted also by Burroughs [189]); and those who commissioned paintings and then rejected them (Mumford [367] holds the same). McBride concludes: "But nothing in the way of enthusiastic appreciation came to Eakins from the public during his lifetime" (132). For sympathy the "artist relied upon the members of his family and a small group of his pupils and scientific friends" (133). "The only honor" that Eakins received was a "little provincial reception" (133).¹¹

In the article "Eakins II," where he talks about the 1917 exhibition, McBride sticks to the narrative of suffering and rejects considering Eakins as a widely accepted, national painter. The critic stresses the romantic-modernistic features in the image of the artistic prophet: the appeal of the exhibition "must necessarily be to the few" (137) because it is doubtful whether "the public will ever rise en masse to the appreciation of pure style in painting" (137). McBride presents Eakins as a modernistic-Jesus figure, and himself as his apostle who passes through the test of his teacher: McBride advises a museum to buy one of Eakins's works, scolds the public for its silliness, and so on (135).

In a review of the 1917 exhibition and in her subsequent articles connected with Eakins, Helen Henderson reiterates that the artist was not recognized in his own city, Philadelphia, but rather in New York (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 277-78). On several occasions Goodrich tells the same narrative of the prophet, who is first appreciated outside of his city (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 126-29, 135, 141-42). The story echoes Jesus's lack of recognition in his native city of Nazareth. Goodrich renders this narrative in two versions: a biographical and a critical one. The latter explains why Eakins's deep and truthful portraiture was unvalued by the Philadelphia sitters and patrons who expected fashionable and superficial flattery (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 116-21).

McKinney emphasizes Eakins's noble suffering reminding one of Christ's humility: "Apart from the genius of his painting, Eakins had rare quality as a man. It is to be remembered that in the fifty-five years of his painting career, beset with lack

10 For Eakins's teaching career see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 167-89, 279-309; and Homer 155-71, 173-91. Both biographers agree that Eakins was a major influence in art education in America in his time. Yet they disagree on the particular issue touched upon in Morris's article, namely the status and number of Eakins's outstanding pupils. Goodrich holds that this number is fairly large (1: 309), while Homer, striving against Eakins's halo, thinks the opposite (191). Schendler writes: "He had no great students" (237).

11 Schendler also thinks that Eakins was not appreciated by the Philadelphia dull, unimaginative, and extremely conservative collectors and audience (159-64). In fact, the recognition of Eakins comes somewhat late and not without difficulty, but the picture is not as gloomy as McBride describes. For the recognition of the painter from the late 1890s on see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 199-224; and Homer 191-94. For the reception in the city of Lancaster see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 138; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 258-59; and Homer 248-49.

of appreciation and unjustifiable criticism, he was never vindictive toward those who opposed his art. His answers to his censors were framed with a restraint and dignity that bespoke his kind and gentlemanly character" (19).

An important issue, on which the early articles keep silent, is Eakins's scandalous resignation from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in February 1886, which embittered his life for decades (for the scandal see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 282-95; Homer 173-86). This fact, explained by the conflict between Eakins's ideas of the importance of the nude body in art and the restrictive morals of his time (for Eakins and the nude see Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 90-93; Schendler 90-95), has both a negative and a positive narrative potential in eulogizing the painter. The negative potential is that the discussion of the scandal would have dwarfed Eakins's status of a patriarch and prophet by underscoring the idiosyncracies of his sexuality (this, predictably, is the approach of Homer). The positive potential, used by some of Eakins's contemporaries and Goodrich, is the possibility to narrate the artist as an innocent victim, as a persecuted Jesus figure or a romantic-modernistic sufferer (cf. Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 84-90; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 291, 295).

(c) Eakins is unable to convince anybody that he is a prophet. He reminds one of a false prophet, a bizarre marginal figure. This narrative option is not fully developed, for it does not serve the national cultural cause. Burroughs, whose article consists mostly of criticism and contains very few biographical details, tends to present Eakins as a lonely modernist and, in the choice of the narrative pattern, as a false prophet, i.e., one without followers: "And so [Winslow] Homer established a long line of followers, while Eakins established nothing but his claim to a distant eminence" (189). Goodrich ends his book on the same note: "Eakins' influence, like that of Ryder, would be difficult to trace, aside from that which he exercised directly on his students" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 155).

(d) Finally, Eakins is depicted as an unofficial prophet, a narrative that like the previous one is unsuitable for the constitution of a national cultural identity. Mumford touches on something in Eakins that is characteristic of the prophets who are not a part of the official institutions: they advocate radical changes which could shatter society. "Along with Eakins' respect for science," writes Mumford, "went a hearty contempt for the hierarchies of caste and office" (367). This statement is supported by an anecdote, according to which the painter made a commissioned portrait of President Rutherford B. Hayes "working in his shirt-sleeves" for some committee that, horrified, "consigned the portrait to limbo" (367).¹² When McBride writes that Eakins

was not "a facile student," and was "always independent" (133), he follows the same narrative pattern as Mumford.¹³ Schendler says: "His thinking was essentially subversive of the moral order of his time...." (65).

The patriarchal appearance of Eakins.¹⁴ Pach portrays Eakins as a figure of mythical simplicity and power: "His head was massive, his eyes clear and determined; his bronzed skin was that of a man who had faced rough weather, and his strong jaw was only half hidden under the sparse, iron-gray beard" (112).¹⁵ Goodrich writes: "His general appearance was rough and a little formidable — 'like a bear,' it has been said" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 100).

The numerous details describing the painter as a man of archaic simplicity, even primitiveness (Morris 12; McBride 138; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 102, 110),¹⁶ and the episodes where he is shown as a virile and manly figure (Pach 113; Mumford 368; Burroughs 189; Morris 11; Hamilton 10) round off Eakins's patriarchal image. Mumford speaks of Eakins's masculinity in the following way: "his tough masculine interests.... his love of sailing, horseback-riding, duck-shooting" (368).¹⁷ Morris (12) connects the athletic themes of the painter with Eakins's strong masculine bent of mind. Goodrich provides numerous examples of Eakins's love for outdoor activities and sports (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 101-04, 121). The problem of Eakins's failing health after 1910-1911 (see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 258-62, 271-72), the time after which he practically did not paint (*Thomas Eakins* 2: 210), is not discussed in the 1917-1931 articles and is mentioned in passing by Goodrich (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 137-38) because a senile and artistically impotent figure cannot be the protagonist of a patriarchal narrative.

Morris provides an illustration of Eakins's raw simplicity: "His studio whether at home or elsewhere, was no show-room of elegance and allurements. It was rough and coarse and dusty. He wore no velvet and fine linen, his habitual working dress was

13 For Eakins's uncompromising character see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 7-8, 45; Homer 182; and Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 156.

14 For Eakins's character, behavior, and personal life see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 1-13, 15; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 96-107.

15 For Eakins's appearance when young and older see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 7, 220, 222, 247, 250, 2: 7-8, 175, 223-24; and Homer 20, 51-52, 61, 71, 183-84, 200-02.

16 Homer (220-21) relates Eakins's simplicity of speech and dress, and his stubbornness and hatred of hypocrisy to Quaker values. See also Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 8-9.

17 For Eakins's outdoor activities and interest in sports see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 5, 7, 81, 87, 89-90, 94, 105, 145; 2: 4, 7, 15, 16-22, 101, 144-59, 168, 220, 223-24; Homer 182, 236-39; Wilmerding 19-20, 30; and Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 88-89, 134-38.

12 The "shirt-sleeves" is a "persistent legend," which is untrue (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 144; for the portrait see 1: 141-44; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 55-57; and Homer 89-91).

often uncouth..." (12).¹⁸ Goodrich describes the studio, which the artist called a "workshop," not an "atelier" as did some of his fashionable colleagues, like this: "A large bare room on the top floor of a business building, up four flights, it was in a state of chronic disorder, littered with canvases, painting materials, and clay" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 101). The picture of Eakins's studio and Eakins himself, given by the art critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, who visited him in 1881, uses the same objects as Morris and Goodrich, but the evaluation is degrading; the patriarchal narrative is absent, and the painter is belittled as a human and social being. Eakins is

not only not a gentleman in the popular acceptance of a "swell," but not even a man of tolerably good appearance or breeding. His home & surroundings & family were decidedly of the *lower* middle class. I should say, & he himself a big ungainly young man, very untidy to say the least, in his dress — a man whom one would not be likely to ask to dinner, in spite of the respect one has for his work! I used to wonder why he did not put better clothes and furniture in his pictures, but now I wonder how he even managed to see anything so good! His want of a sense of beauty apparent in his pictures is still more so in his surroundings. His studio was a garret room without one single object upon which the eye might rest with pleasure — the sole ornaments some skeletons & some models of the frame & muscles which looked, of course, like the contents of a butchers shop! (qtd. in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 197)

The patriarchal character of Eakins. Speaking of Eakins's patriarchal character, several interrelated narrative motifs must be considered: (a) the distinction between the mythical and the historical past, (b) the projection of Eakins's personal patriarchal characteristics onto his art, (c) the equation between Eakins's artistic and sexual potency, and (d) the placement of Eakins in a milieu suggesting the noble cultural roots of America.

(a) Pach, describing a conversation between Eakins and a friend of his, alludes to the distinction between the mythical past (inhabited by legendary figures) and the historical past (populated by ordinary people succeeding the legendary heroes): Eakins is "older only a few years [than his friend], yet seeming of another generation" (113).

McBride also implies the mythical difference between the past and the present, and loads the two temporal dimensions with opposite aesthetic and moral values. Explaining Eakins's obscurity during his lifetime, the critic writes that the artist "was a modest man, without guile, and quite ignorant of modern methods of self-

exploitation" (131). Thinking of "the successful, money making artists of the present era," the painter acknowledges to himself that "ninety-nine-and-one-hundredths of the character of these men is made of the quality known as 'push.' Thomas Eakins, on the contrary, was ninety-nine-one-hundredths artist, so Fame held aloof from him until after his death" (131-32; my emphasis). This modernistic opposition between high and commercial art (McBride's articles are the most modernistic ones among the writings on Eakins which I discuss), viewed through the narrative of Eakins as a prophet/patriarch, acquires new meanings. It suggests a mythical notion of history: the present is measured by the past, the contemporaries are dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants (see Calinescu 13-92), and time causes only deterioration: after the golden race or age, epitomized by Eakins, the silver, bronze, and iron ones come, embodied by Eakins's contemporary pushing artists (for the five — later four — races or ages see Hesiod 31-43; Ovid 1: 9-13). The true and great art belongs to the time of the ancestors, that is, Eakins, whereas the present art is petty and mercenary. The evocation of this mythical interpretation casts an ideal light on Eakins, personifying absolute perfection because, historically and culturally speaking, the amalgamation of myths telling of the golden race and age provide powerful subterranean currents in Western utopian thought from Hesiod to Marx (see Manuel and Manuel 66-75). This passage by McBride, besides its mythical connotations, also provides an example of how modernism and narrative national cultural identity in the garb of a patriarchal myth partially share their discourses.

How does McBride's narrative relate to some facts as we know them today? In the post-Civil War era, the rich American collectors were interested in European, not American art, for the latter was considered inferior and provincial. The successful American artists were usually those who imitated a fashionable European style. Eakins's realism did not attract such collectors (Homer 73-74). Goodrich traces Eakins's exhibiting and selling his works as well as working on commissions (*Thomas Eakins* 1: 164-66, 279-80; 2: 110-26, 159-67, 199, 201-02, 211, 225-36, 255-57, 260, 262-71, etc.). Homer, with his verve to dispel previous critical images of Eakins, stresses that the artist, in his painting, was trying to please not only himself (as the older critics believed) but also his potential buyers (86, 89-91, 106-17).

(b) Pach, by association, shifts the personal prophetic and patriarchal characteristics of Eakins onto his art: "In person, the painter was of the type which he represented" (112); in Eakins's "slow, impassive gestures there was something of the depth and dignity of his art" (113).

Morris — the critic who besides Pach most eloquently turns Eakins into a Moses figure — reiterates Pach. He describes Eakins as a Moses and, again by association, projects this image onto his art: "He spoke slowly but firmly on deep founded

18 For Eakins's clothes see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 7; 2: 8; Homer 219; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 100-01; and Schendler 218-20.

principles of life.... He was as frank in speech as he is in his art.... He was strong and fearless in his life, in his convictions, and in his art...." (12).

(c) Morris writes: "he poured out a rich abundance of canvases and often of sculptures" (11). Here, in the context of the big patriarchal narrative, the artistic potency is represented also as a physical one (a lavish ejaculation) and vice versa. Creation is both literal and symbolic. Eakins is portrayed as an archetypal father-artist. Through a narrative apotheosis, Eakins transforms from a human being into a divine creator.

However, the facts point in a different direction. Eakins's works number fewer than 600¹⁹ which means that he is not an exceptionally productive painter. During Eakins's teaching career, his time for creative work was limited. His sculptural output is also restricted, and many of these works had didactic, not purely aesthetic purposes (for Eakins's sculptures, see Siegl 67-69, 73-77, 82-87, 98-101, 106-08, 134-36). Moreover, Eakins had no children (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 97).

(d) Some biographical details add to the patriarchal grandeur of Eakins. He was born and lived in Philadelphia, "the city which has produced more great men in art, medicine, and law than any other in America" (Hamilton 7).²⁰ "His father was a calligrapher of prominence, writing diplomas and important governmental documents upon parchment" (McBride 133; see also Mumford 368).²¹ Particulars of this sort connote Eakins's proximity to the springs of American culture.

The source of knowledge or the legitimacy of the prophet. What is Eakins's knowledge of the American mind and reality? How does he communicate with the (divine) source of his knowledge? Why is his art both great and American? In Exodus 24:15, one finds the archetypal answer to such questions: "And Moses went up the mount [Sinai], and a cloud covered the mount." How and when God gives to Moses the tablets of the Ten Commandments are questions never to be answered. The springs of prophetic/patriarchal knowledge — and power through this knowledge — are hidden in the cloud of the deepest secrecy. The answers of the art critics to the question of Eakins's competence, ensuring his legitimacy as a prophet of the American self, are of the same kind. For Hamilton, the artist guides his students "in those

principles which must always be the foundations of great art. To a nature like that of Thomas Eakins, these principles were *inborn*" (8; my emphasis). Burroughs comments on the painting *The Thinker* as follows: "Eakins painted not only a thinker, but an American type, and the epoch made by many such men. *This statement will have to suffice.* Indeed it ought to, since *the picture is self-explanatory*" (188; my emphasis). Pach thinks that the painting *The Swimming Hole* embodies "the character of his country and generation" in a form which cannot be called realism, for it is "universal and absolute, like the truths of mathematics"; there is "nobility of scale" and "large and harmonious proportions" in this painting. "This quality is basic and it is evidence of Eakins's intuitive understanding of the character of that America of the builders which finds so strong an expression in his art" (113; my emphasis). Also: "every picture by Thomas Eakins is *instinct with the forces that were sweeping the America of his day*" (113; my emphasis). In these examples, the argument is circular: Eakins is a great artist because he expresses American essence, whereas because Eakins expresses American essence, he is a great artist.

Only Mumford offers causal, noncircular explanations of Eakins's artistic greatness: the painter was able to express American spirit because he "was open to all the new forces at work in his century" (366).²² In another case, the legitimacy of Eakins as a prophet comes through Whitman: the painter and the poet had dinners together; the artist graphically expressed in his work the principles put forward in the preface to *Leaves of Grass*; Whitman had praised Eakins (367-68).

Goodrich, following the same line, writes: "Both [Whitman and Eakins] were realists, dealing directly with the life around them, alive to the significance of the ordinary and familiar" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 121).²³

The "poetics of greatness" — structure. This last facet of the biographical narrative is the link between this narrative and the critical narrative of Eakins. We have seen, first, that the personal and biographical qualities of Eakins, shaped into a prophetic/patriarchal narrative, are projected onto his work by association; second, the circularity of the thesis that Eakins's art is great because it conveys the spirit of America, and that it expresses the spirit of America because it is great art. In these two cases, the prophetic/patriarchal story, the American self, and Eakins's great art are

22 Homer answers this question referring to Hippolyte Taine, whose ideas Eakins knew from his study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris: "Ideas, styles, and images in art were shaped by the period and place in which the artist functioned" (38).

23 For the connection between Eakins and Whitman see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 121-24, 155; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 230; 2: 16, 28-38; Homer 73, 116, 146, 210-21, 249; Schendler 96-105; and Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 108-11.

19 Goodrich initially catalogues 515 works (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 161-209): some 320 of them are paintings and watercolors, 10 are sculptures, and the rest are preparatory (145, 159).

20 Goodrich thinks the same of Philadelphia from the 1860s as does Hamilton (*Thomas Eakins* 1: 80); Schendler writes of the city in the 1870s as "the cradle of art in America" (60; see also 58-60); but Homer disagrees: in Eakins's time Philadelphia was only a center of the sciences but not of art (133-34).

21 For Eakins's father see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 2-3, 5, 7-8, 14-15, 34-36, 121; 2: 168-69; Siegl 21-22; and Homer 13, 40.

constructed as synonyms, as narrative substitutes for each other. Since the articles and Goodrich's book deal with art, they have to describe Eakins's work as great art, which means to formulate a "poetics of greatness." This "poetics," through a dynamics of circular alternations, not through a noncontradictory logic, forms a tripartite constellation of mutually supportive constituents:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{EAKINS} \\ \text{(prophet and patriarch)} \\ = \\ \text{AMERICAN SELF} = \text{GREAT ART} \end{array}$$

(We will see how the top of the triangle is reiterated in a modified form in the discussions of Eakins's art.)

The triangle of the "poetics" is not only a theoretical abstraction but can be perceived in some of the articles as well. Pach writes: "his work, with its almost naive self-reliance [indigenous naivete, patriarchal connotations] and its deep, homely truth [the American self expressed in art], will take on a profounder beauty even than that which we see in it to-day [great art]" (114). Also: "The virtues of his works [great art] ... are those of the life typified in his art [the American self], and the defects of the unsuccessful pictures are American defects" (114). Mumford suggests nearly the same: "Eakins was in fact the mirror of his period [prophet], the object mirrored [the American self], and the esthetic expression that resolves these terms [great art]" (367). In 1970, Goodrich writes: "By the clarity of his vision [prophet], the strength and depth of his artistry [great art], and the intensity of his attachment to his subject [the prophet and the American self], he gave the enduring life of art [great art] to the world in which he lived [the American self]" (*Thomas Eakins: Retrospective Exhibition* 7).

The "poetics of greatness" — history. The "poetics of greatness" is interesting not only for its theoretical but for its historical parameters as well. The constitution of the "poetics" dates from before the era of the quest for American cultural identity; it comes in full swing during this era; and, finally, one discovers it in a new garb in the 1980s, after that quest era is gone. A look at (a) the beginning and (b) the present of the "poetics" will augment its cultural characteristics.

(a) Perhaps the earliest formulation of the "poetics" belongs to Mrs. Van Rensselaer who, in 1881, published the following apropos of Eakins's painting *The Pathetic Song*:

Of all American artists he is the most typically national, the most devoted to the actual life about him, the most given to recording it without gloss or alteration. That life is often ugly in its manifestations, no doubt; but this ugliness does not daunt Mr. Eakins, and his artistic skill is such that he can bring good results from the most unpromising materials. In spite of deficient power of coloring, his brush-work is so clever, his insight into character so deep and his rendering of it so clear, his drawing is so firm, and his management of light so noteworthy that he makes delightful pictures out of whatsoever he will — even, as in this case, out of three homely figures with ugly clothes in an "undecorative" interior. This *Lady Singing a Pathetic Song* was so impressive because it was admirably painted, and because it was at the same time absolutely true to nature — a perfect record of the life amid which the artist lives. The day will come, I believe, when Mr. Eakins will be rated, as he deserves, far above the painters of mere pretty effects, and a good way above even men of similar artistic skill who devote themselves to less characteristic and less vital themes. All possible renderings of Italian peasants and colonial damsels and pretty models cannot equal in importance to our growing art one such strong and real and artistic work as this one I have noted (qtd. in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 198).

The whole "poetics of greatness," in embryo, is here. First, we have Eakins's superb technical skills (later critics expand this point with Eakins's blessed indigenous naivete for aesthetic and cultural matters in art, thus producing the rounded-off image of the self-reliant patriarch). Second, Eakins's skills render perfectly the life amid which the artist lives, that is to say, the American self. Third, Eakins's art, due to its second quality, is great art, and will live, while the art of many of his contemporaries will be forgotten. Mrs. Van Rensselaer sketches the "poetics," but she is also aware that it operates *solely* within a certain context: the era of the quest for national cultural identity which is yet to come. This awareness, as we will see at the end of this paper, is often missing from the later criticism, and this has important cultural consequences.

(b) The contemporary version of the "poetics of greatness" is spelled out by Goodrich whose status in the study of Eakins is unique: as a young man he authored the first biography of the painter, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work*, and half a century later he produced Eakins's definitive biography, *Thomas Eakins*. Despite their differences, the two books share key similarities pertaining to the two versions of the narrative of national cultural identity: in the first, biographical, version, Goodrich maintains that Eakins's art is based on his indigenous naivete, which means that in painterly and critical terms it should be interpreted as iconic/mimetic, not intertextual; and in the second, critical, version, he thinks that in Eakins's painting depth/structure dominate over surface/color. Thus, Goodrich transmits the two pivotal narrative ideas

of Eakins from one cultural epoch (the American quest for cultural self-identification) to another (the era when America, since the late 1940s, has set the pace in visual art [see Guilbaut]). Goodrich spells out the "poetics" in the last chapter of his two books (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 143-55; *Thomas Eakins* 2: 285-89). He believes the "poetics" to be true, whereas I ask: in what sense the "poetics" is a narrative historic-cultural construct. Goodrich's formulation of the "poetics" in his later book can be summarized as follows:

Eakins as a prophet/patriarch and his indigenous naivete: In Goodrich (as in Pach above), one perceives how the biographical prophetic/patriarchal narrative (the top of the triangle) is modified into a critical one emphasizing the blissful indigenous naivete of the painter. Both as a creative artist and educator in the visual arts, holds Goodrich, Eakins is interested exclusively in the technical aspects of art (perspective, anatomy, motion, use of photography for the purposes of painting: see notes 27, 29, and 30) but not in its aesthetic and cultural dimensions or in the dynamics of the trends and the fashions in his contemporary America or France. His artistic mind and practice are profound in the technical sense but narrow in the cultural sense.

Here are some illustrations of the "poetics" dealing with indigenous naivete: "His basic naturalistic philosophy never changed; his preferences in other art (except Greek sculpture) were for naturalistic art, past and present" (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 13). "Eakins had a powerful and penetrating intellect, but not of the kind that could be called cultured.... Eakins' cultural horizons were limited, and the artistic world he inhabited was narrow and relatively provincial. *It was not from knowledge of other art that his own drew its strength*" (2: 15; my emphasis; McKinney writes the same: "He saw and felt too much of the naturalness of American life and too much of its sultry vigor to force it into the smooth phrases of 'classical' art" [10]; see also Siegl 17). "With all his intellectual powers, in certain respects Eakins remained naive throughout his life" (2: 15). "Eakins' style from the very first revealed little influence from other art.... Eakins' tastes in art were never very wide or sophisticated.... His primary interest in the art of others was in their technical rather than their aesthetic qualities.... His art had an exceptionally close relation to reality, and was the product of deep, thorough study of natural forms, more than of other art" (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: Retrospective Exhibition* 16-19). And finally:

From first to last Eakins' teaching was strictly naturalistic: anticlassical and antiromantic, concerned with the realities of the physical world.... This naturalistic discipline was the most thorough teaching in America of the period, and in many ways more basic and vital than that of the École des Beaux-Arts [in Paris where Eakins studied from 1866 to 1869].... The strengths of Eakins' teaching were bounded by its limitations. It was deep but not broad. Its concentration on naturalistic truths excluded many other elements of the work

of art.... There was little study of great art, past or present.... He showed little awareness of current European trends... and his observations on the art were confined to mostly technical matters (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 308-09).

(For a summary of the strengths and the limitations of Eakins as an artist and a teacher see 2: 13-15 and 1: 308-09.) All these thoughts reiterate ideas from Goodrich's earlier book (cf. *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 39-40, 83, 104, 106-07, 143, 154).

Let us make some theoretical conclusions. The opposition between artistic practical knowledge and artistic aesthetic knowledge, suggested by Goodrich, points to a paradox in the "poetics of greatness": it is a poetics whose pivot is Eakins's blessed indigenous cultural naivete. The less the artist knows about the cultural contexts of art, the better. The explanation of the paradox is circular: the aesthetic and cultural knowledge is not indigenous, that is, not American, but it instead pertains to a cultural Other, in this case Europe. Cultural simplicity is an asset because it defines the Self in opposition to the sophisticated Other. My ignorance is valuable because it is mine, it is me, whereas your erudition is not valuable, because it is yours, it is you. Or, as Eakins himself puts it eloquently in 1914:

If America is to produce great painters and if young art students wish to assume a place in the history of the art of their country, their first desire should be to remain in America, to peer deeper into the heart of American life, rather than to spend their time abroad obtaining a superficial view of the art of the Old World.... It would be far better for American art students and painters to study their own country and portray its life and types. To do that they must remain free from any foreign superficialities (qtd. in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 139).

And as Goodrich, no less eloquently, echoes Eakins in 1933:

His [Eakins's] art was essentially original. Most artists of any sensitiveness see reality partly through their memories of other art, but he had the rare ability to face it without the need of anything to soften its hard outlines or make it more acceptable. His eye was as innocent as that of a primitive, observing things as if they had never been painted before — as indeed many of his subjects had not been. Few artists have been so little influenced by others, or have shown so few signs of a borrowed style (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 143).

The major characteristic of the prophet/patriarch of the national cultural Self is also the main feature of the Self in opposition to the Other, namely, the Self constructed

as the personification of primal indigenous simplicity. (In part 4, we will see that the glorification of Georgia O'Keeffe as a prophet/matriarch follows the same pattern.)

Eakins and the American Self: Eakins's technical knowledge and skills, Goodrich thinks, serve him to depict deeply, objectively, and without idealization the immediate reality around him, American reality. His art is directly related to American life, not to other art.

Some illustrations of Eakins's mimetic iconicity (realism): the painter has a "direct relation to the real" (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 156); he "was dealing directly with actualities" (1: 83) and "solid realities" (1: 96); he works from "direct observation of the real world" (1: 97); the artist shows an "interest in contemporary life" (1: 97) and "seldom attempts fantasy" (1: 145); he is "creating ... art out of actualities" (2: 28); this is why his realism is a "contemporary realism" (1: 190); "Eakins was as pure realist as could be found in American art of the period.... He painted what he saw in the real world..." (2: 90); Eakins is "the most drastic of American realists" (1: 158), "the strongest purely realistic artist of late nineteenth- and early twentieth century" (1: vii). His artistic credo is "naturalistic philosophy" (1: 98) and "unsparing realism" (1: 191) or "uncompromising realism" (1: 193; cf. Wilmerding who calls Eakins "a consummate realist" [16] and writes of the "brutality of [Eakins's] realism" [22] and his "uncompromising intensity of observation" [28]; Kathleen A. Foster also writes of Eakins as "the most radical realist of his period" [Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 70]); his art is characterized with a "lack of idealization in portraying people" (1: 193); "Eakins' mastery of character went much deeper; for him, character resided in the underlying structure of bones and muscles" (2: 57); "His dominating purpose was to recreate, truthfully and fully, the physical reality of the individual man or woman. But his realism went deeper than the physical externals; *whether consciously or unconsciously, he captured the essential element that can only be described as life*" (2: 78; my emphasis — again the legitimacy of the prophet cannot be explained, it just is; see also 2: 289. Homer reiterates these ideas about Eakins's portraits: cf. 223-24. Wilmerding writes the same: Eakins's painting *The Crucifixion* is "as much a depiction of organic human form as an expression of emotional content" [26]. For Eakins's realism see also Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 67-71, 82-83, 96; 2: 57-59, 127, 161, 257, 259-60, etc.; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: Retrospective Exhibition*; and Homer 83, 85-86, 102, 104-06, 122, 131, etc.).²⁴ All this has already been said in Goodrich's earlier book, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art*.

24 Recent general histories of art echo this: "Eakins embraced an earnest and sober verisimilitude that endowed his portraits and narrative scenes with a haunting truthfulness, worlds away from the charmingly polished visions of [Jean-Léon] Gérôme [Eakins's professor in Paris]" (Wood, Cole, and Gealt 252).

(This aspect of the "poetics of greatness" has a drawback: it cannot explain the value of works that do not relate directly to contemporary American reality. In such cases, as with the so called idyllic or Arcadian paintings, sculptures, and photographs, Goodrich proclaims the works not typical for the artist, they are not Eakins's forte [*Thomas Eakins* 1: 230-37]. Lamb oscillates between an intertextual and a realistic approach with respect to the Arcadian works.)

Once we know Eakins's patriarchal/prophetic indigenous naïvete and his mimetic iconicity or realism, we can reformulate their synonymy by revealing their respective limits. On the one hand, the art of the Self as an art of indigenous naïvete is iconic in the terms of Charles Sanders Peirce: the artistic sign bears a formal resemblance with the object it stands for. Moreover, this likeness is unmediated by other signs; it is direct or mimetic (Eakins's technically superb paintings stand for American reality). On the other hand, the art of the Other is intertextual, and the artistic sign does not relate to a reality but to other sets of artistic signs (European art and its American followers and imitators are interested in trends, fashions, aesthetic and cultural contexts).

The limit of the prophetic/patriarchal narrative identity, which in art criticism is transformed into a blessed indigenous naïvete or mimetic iconicity, is that it eliminates the intertextual dimension of art. In the narratives of national cultural identity, mimetic iconicity supersedes intertextuality. After Mikhail Bakhtin (see Bakhtin's works discussed by Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin* 41-74), Julia Kristeva ("Word, Dialogue, and Novel" and *Revolution in Poetic Language*), Peirce (5: 284), Roman Jakobson ("On Linguistic Aspects" 2: 261-62), Eco (*Theory of Semiotics*; *Role of the Reader* 24, 74, 175-99), and Michael Riffaterre who have demonstrated that language and culture exist as dialogicity, intertextuality, translatability of signs into other signs, and unlimited semiosis, it is difficult to accept at face value the doctrine of indigenous naïvete excluding cultural contexts. However, if narrative identity is efficient, it is because it is not logical but, as Ricoeur shows, it is a dynamic relation between human praxis and narrativity.

This dynamics explains why Goodrich, in the heyday of the American quest for national cultural identity (as well as fifty years later), is unable to solve the logical tension between the assumption that Eakins is an iconic artist and the fact that Eakins constantly studies, admires, and refers to the European masters. On the one hand, Goodrich thinks, Eakins champions mimetic art (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* 17-21) but, on the other, he goes to Spain to acquaint himself with its great painters (28-31); his iconic art grasps the deepest reality, but this grasp is perfected thanks to the example of the old masters (40-41); Eakins's painting *Crucifixion* is scientifically made, i.e., it is iconic, yet it is on a subject regularly done by the old masters (105); he is for iconic or realistic art of the type that has already been created by the eminent Spanish, Dutch, ancient Greek, and French artists (106, 150). Sometimes Goodrich contradicts

himself in two adjoining sentences or even in one and the same sentence: "His letters reveal an artistic nature too close to reality and too intensely concentrated on the problem of depicting it, to be much interested in appreciation. His artistic curiosity extended only to works which, by successfully solving the problems that troubled him, had something definite to teach him; and his comments on them were limited almost entirely to their technique" (19). Or: "he was interested chiefly in the technical qualities of other painters, in what they could teach him — an attitude typical rather of the creator than the appreciator" (106). Goodrich can overcome this logical incongruity in three ways. The first is to accept that Eakins creates iconic artistic signs like the masters of the Old World, the difference being only the reality which these signs denote: with Eakins, this is American reality, whereas with the European painters, it is European reality. Goodrich mentions this option (143), but its drawback is that it is detrimental to the patriarchal features of Eakins: the imitativeness of Eakins the patriarch is an oxymoron, because a patriarch, by definition, is primal and primary, not derivative and secondary. Moreover, this option eliminates the feature "great art" from the "poetics of greatness" leaving us not with difference of artistic signs (both Eakins and the old masters produce iconic signs) but of referents (American reality versus European reality). To evade these dangers, which subvert the narrative of national cultural identity, Goodrich tries a second answer: he supplants Eakins's creative consciousness with chance. Eakins's "admiration of the Spanish masters, was a matter of temperamental coincidence rather than imitation"; the parallels between Eakins and certain contemporary French painters "were those of coincidence rather than influence" (154). But this presents Eakins as an artistic schizophrenic: he knows why he recreates American reality but does not know why he is interested in the European masters. A deranged prophet is acceptable, but a mentally deficient scientific artist is a contradiction in terms, which threatens the narrative of national cultural identity from a new direction: a schizophrenic Eakins would be unable to represent the inmost depth of the American self through his intellect (for Eakins's scientific artistry, see section 3). Thus the "poetics of greatness" would lose the constituent "American self" and, consequently, would not serve the American cultural cause. The third option of Goodrich is one of faith, and it seems the only plausible explanation of Eakins's iconic art: the Americans of the 1930s (and later) should believe that Eakins is the greatest American realist, whose art is "essentially original" (143), be proud of that, and ask no more questions.

Today it is possible to interpret Eakins's works not only as signs of an ontological reality, that is to say as iconic, but also as relations between signs that do not refer to reality. Some contemporary studies (cf. Hayes) suggest that Eakins's realism can successfully be analyzed intertextually, i.e., in the context of European scientific positivism and painterly realism of the second half of the nineteenth century. Others

(cf. Michael Fried in Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 83) interpret Eakins's paintings as signs related to other signs, i.e., as more or less self-sufficient structures of artistic elements. Within these two frameworks of study — the intertextual and the structural — we can perceive more clearly the tenets of Eakins's indigenous naive and iconic realism not as absolute truths but as cultural constructs serving the needs of its time. However, the open question with such newer approaches is whether it is plausible not only methodologically but also historically to take Eakins out of the neo-classical/realistic paradigm where the artistic sign stands for an ontological reality, and shift him toward the romantic/modernistic one where the sign stands for other signs (for the semiotic model of neo-classical and realistic literature and art, on the one hand, and the romantic and modernistic, on the other, see Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*; Jakobson, "Two Aspects," esp. 2: 255-56).

3

Now I turn to the second, critical narrative — Eakins as a scientific artist. In the case of Eakins's art, the painter is represented as a man of unusual intellectual power and with a scientific attitude toward his work and the world which he depicts.²⁵

25

Goodrich and Homer occasionally challenge this aspect of Eakins's narrative. For them, Eakins's rational artistry is not always an asset. They think that some of the more spontaneous preparatory works are better than the rigorously calculated final versions (see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 265; 2: 147, 156-59; and Homer 63, 129, 141; see also 208, 227, 237, 239; for Eakins's rational approach to painting see Homer 129-53). These opinions of Goodrich and Homer testify to a partial rejection of Eakins's narrative identity created by his early critics. In my opinion, however, the comparisons of the artistic value of the finished and the preparatory works can be only relative rather than absolute because these opinions depend on their enunciate environment.

The narrative identity of Eakins as an artist-scientist, as a man of both action and intellect, persists in recent general histories of art: "In his determination to fuse art and science for the sake of an uncompromising Realism in painting, Thomas Eakins all but revived the Renaissance tenets of Leonardo da Vinci" (Arnason 362). Or: "Portraying a triumph of modern science [in *The Gross Clinic*] — surgery performed on an anesthetized patient — Eakins combined scientific precision with artistic license" (Wood, Cole, and Gealt 252). And no wonder, because this narrative identity is maintained even by today's Eakins experts: "Two of the major and most familiar paired elements in Eakins's career were his dual allegiances to art and science" (Wilmerding 16; see also 16-17, 22-25). This identity, by uniting two extreme features, echoes Van Wyck Brooks's holistic dream which preaches fusion of the "highbrow" (that is, pure intellect, idealism, that for which stands Jonathan Edwards) and the "lowbrow" (in other words, material activity, pragmatism, everything epitomized by Benjamin Franklin) of American mind into the future American, "the man whose prime end is the fulfilling of his own creative instincts" (Brooks 34).

Brooks's holistic dream, which is another narrative of national cultural identity, should have been a powerful narrative trap or a story whose truth is thought of to be universal, independent of the experience of the voice which enunciates it, if recent scholarship repeats it, while looking for "the unifying principle" (Singal 3) of American modernism. This principle, as Singal formulates it, consists

The scientific topics, as all the early critics previously mentioned point out, are most important in Eakins's work. His portraits, especially those of scientists, belong to this thematic group.²⁶ On the other hand, Eakins himself fits into the paradigm of a national artist when he writes a treatise on anatomy (McBride 134),²⁷ studies motion all night with the help of photography (Hamilton 8; Burroughs 188; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 46-47, 66-70, 108) or is on friendly terms with some scientists (Pach 112; McBride 133).²⁸

The basic opposition in Eakins's work epitomizing his scientific artistry²⁹ is, let me tell it so, that between depth and surface. All early critics describe Eakins as a painter who penetrates beyond the surface of the objects he depicts, and conceives their construction and core, the truth hidden in them. The critics agree that Eakins is a realist (Mumford 366; Hamilton 8; Morris 11; Burroughs 185, 188, 189; Pach 113; McBride 134, 135, 139; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work*). Most of them,

in the following: "Again and again, from art to social policy, Modernists have attempted to bring together that which the previous [Victorian] culture tried to keep separate" (9).

²⁶ For the portraits of scientists, thinkers, intellectuals belonging to the high clergy and the military, and people from the intelligentsia see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 73-75, 122-40, 2: 39-51, 53-55, 59, 79, 81-83, 131-35, 137-44, 179-98, 205-12, 221-23, 258, 260-62, 267; Homer 56, 74-83, 87, 91-93, 120, 221, 231-36; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 105-06, 112-13, 116, 124-26; *Thomas Eakins: Image of the Surgeon*, Schendler 197-215; Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 76-81, 114-16, 120-33, 139-45, 148-53, 166-67, 170-78; and Wilmerding 20-23, 28-29, 32.

²⁷ Eakins's only published treatise during his lifetime was on horse anatomy (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 128-30). He had a manuscript of lectures intended for publication on perspective (1: 183-84).

²⁸ For Eakins's relations with scientists see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 282, 2: 5; and Homer 133-34, 182-83, 197, 232.

²⁹ For Eakins's scientific artistry see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 7, 40-44, 104-05, 143-44, 149; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 98-105; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: Retrospective Exhibition* 13-14; Bregler. Eakins shared the scientific, empirical, and positivistic spirit of the second half of the nineteenth century, which shunned mysticism, transcendentalism, romanticism, and idealism (Homer 131). Homer touches on different sources of this scientism, especially during Eakins's study in Paris, 1866-1870: the painter's inborn analytical mind (17, 91; for Eakins's interest in mathematics see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 98-99; 2: 13) and objectivism (24), logic as the core of French academic training from the seventeenth well into the nineteenth century (27-28), the spread of positivistic ideas (Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Taine) (36-38), and the influence of some of Eakins's French teachers in Paris (130-31). Eakins's early critics, however, present this scientism as something unique for the painter. For Eakins's artistic and scientific interest in human and horse anatomy see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 57-60, 62-63, 66-71, 109-11, 153; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 12-14, 27, 50, 98, 123, 177-81, 188-89, 197-98, 263, 281, 303-08; 2: 128-30; and Homer 134-36. On Eakins's expertise in perspective see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 99-102, 105, 182-83, 308; Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 68-70; and Homer 136-41. For Eakins's theory of reflections in water see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 47; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 102-05.

however, go on to say that Eakins is a realist who presents the essence, the inner nature of the object, of the depicted world or the American mind.

Hamilton writes: "To him art was built upon a solid basis; construction was everything and surface little or nothing" (8). Morris maintains that Eakins's "mind was a radical one which went to the roots of beauty, to its noble structures and uncompromising justice, rather than to its superficial loveliness" (11). Burroughs says: "He caught the eternal value of no matter how plain a fact" (185). Also: "He thought deeper and eliminated more as he composed his later work" (188). Or: Eakins is "an austere observer and as unfeeling as a mathematician" (189). McKinney writes the following about Eakins's portraits: "With accurate detail and austere delineation he was able to draw out the very soul of his subject and lay it, unflattered but alive with character, before the spectator" (15). Mumford asserts: "Eakins had singular capacity of doing justice to the subject ... he could make them [the people on his pictures] all on their own ground, and have in each subject his particular strength" (368). Mumford quotes Eakins, who explains how he works: "You reduce the whole thing to simple factors...." (368; for the whole quote from Eakins see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 98). Pach strikes a universalist modernistic note: the artist does not copy, but rather embodies the character of his country and generation; the formal relations in his pictures "are not to be accounted for as realism. They are universal and absolute, like the truths of mathematics; they are abstractions that we know best in music and architecture, but which must underlie the representation of the painter or sculptor if it is to live" (113). Goodrich, in *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work*, raises this idea to an even higher degree, and thus makes it one of the axial points of his interpretation of Eakins, which is perpetuated in his later book on the painter. Goodrich's sophisticated analysis of Eakins's portraiture, for instance, boils down to the following formula: the artist does not paint idealized likenesses, i.e., surface, but depicts characters, i.e., depth (111-17).

The other oppositions, characteristic of Eakins's art as represented in the "poetics of greatness," are corollaries to the juxtaposition between depth and surface: (i) Eakins reduces color and stresses composition, construction, and anatomy (Hamilton 8; Mumford 366; Burroughs 188; see also Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 15-17). (ii) It is the artist's dissecting mind, not his vision, that probes the depth of the material world. Therefore, photography is of little help in Eakins's work, because it is superficial and misleading. According to some critics, the painter evades the temptations of fashionable photographic impressionism (Hamilton 8; McBride 138; Mumford 366, 368). Others, however, consider Eakins's use of photography as an important step toward deeper realism, or else think of photography and realism as synonyms (Burroughs 185; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 46-47, 66-70). Paradoxically, in both cases, photography contributes to Eakins's power to grasp the

elemental depth of things.³⁰ (iii) Eakins's art is true and great, while academism is imitative, perfunctory, and superficial (McBride 137; Pach 114). (iv) The art of Eakins is American, true, and great, whereas the art of France (the school of Boucher and Fragonard) is false (Hamilton 8).

But is the major opposition between depth and surface in Eakins's art an absolute one, or is it a relative narrative construct that serves the goal of national cultural identity? I discuss this issue by focussing on the juxtaposition of structure (depth) and color (surface).³¹ Eakins's early critics hold that in him, structure dominates over color.³² However, today we know that Eakins in his artistic and educational practice

30 Today, we know that Eakins widely used photography for painterly purposes. The fullest collection of Eakins's photography is Hendricks's book; see also Parry and Stubbs; Danly; and Danly and Leibold. The problem is discussed at length by Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 98, 230, 233-36, 240-42, 244-78; 2: 36-37, 156; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: Retrospective Exhibition* 21-22; Homer 75, 102-104, 111-13, 116, 129, 141-53, 197, 202, 205-08, 216, 239; and Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 102-04, 123, 155, 162-65.

31 The relation between structure and color can be analyzed from three angles: (i) the theory and artistic-educational practice of Eakins, where structure is color and vice versa; (ii) the formulation of this relation in Eakins's early critics (and Goodrich), where structure dominates over color; and (iii) the character of Eakins's works themselves, that is, the relation between the Model Author in the works, their artistic strategy, as opposed to the painter as an empirical author with his own views about what his works are (for the distinction between the Model Author and the empirical author see Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*; *Role of Reader, Limits of Interpretation, Interpretation and Overinterpretation*; and *Six Walks*). I deal only with (i) and (ii), and compare them as two opposed narratives based on the same events.

32 In both his books, similarly to his discussion of Eakins's indigenous naive and mimetic realism, Goodrich is unable to solve the logical tension between the equality of form and color, which he perceives as a critic, and the postulate of the priority of form over color, which is the cornerstone of the painterly aspect of the narrative of national cultural identity. In the former case, he repeats that in Eakins "color became form, form color," whereas in the latter he insists on "the form-building function of color" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 147). In general, the critic sides with the narrative of national cultural identity, i.e., with the subordinate role of color with respect to form. An example for such unresolved tension: Goodrich, in opposition to Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who in her description of *The Pathetic Song* writes of Eakins's "deficient power of coloring," thinks that Eakins is "one of the most genuine colorists of his time in this country" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 147), that he has "an inborn deeply physical color sense" and is "a profoundly sensuous colorist" (*Thomas Eakins* 1: 76; see also 1: 75-76). Yet further he gives priority to form over color in Eakins: the artist "was concerned less with the surface [color, light] than the core of forms [depth, structure]" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 146); "he was concerned with outdoor light and color for their function in revealing form.... for Eakins the solid substance of the real world, and its pictorial equivalent in form, remained paramount" (*Thomas Eakins* 1: 97). Goodrich also follows in the wake of the old critical narrative, which gives priority to form over color, when he compares Eakins with the French impressionists: the American stands for form, structure, three-dimensionality, substance, rationality, and permanence, whereas the French are characterized through color, two-dimensionality, visual effects, and mutability (*Thomas Eakins* 1: 97-98, 105; and *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 46).

time and again underscoring (and practiced) the equality and complementarity between the two: the form is not first built and then colored but is modeled in color; the structure is the color and the color is the structure.

How does Eakins the artist deal with structure and color? In Mrs. Van Rensselaer's report of her meeting with the painter in 1881, we read: Eakins "says he destroyed all his academic studies & since that time has never worked at all in black and white even for the purpose of making notes.... he was so unaccustomed to working in line that he did not know how he should succeed" (qtd. in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 197). Goodrich says the same about Eakins's few illustrations: "Like his paintings, they were constructed in tone, without any emphasis on line" (1: 199-200). Or: "With all his emphasis on form, Eakins produced little graphic art" (1: 199). According to Goodrich, Eakins shows a weak interest in drawing as a medium in itself, and his preparatory works are in oil rather than drawings (1: 107-08; see also Schendler 50). Eakins's drawings of nude models in charcoal and black crayon are treated more painterly, i.e., in shaded volumes, than linearly (Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 55). Goodrich also writes: "Eakins' handling of the two mediums [watercolor and oil] was not essentially different, and he often made oil studies for his watercolors.... His studies for pictures were usually in the form not of drawings but of small oil sketches" (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 159; see also Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 72-73). Similar observations are made in Goodrich's earlier book (*Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 44-45, 146-47).

What about Eakins the teacher? Traditionally in American art schools and at the Pennsylvania Academy, a student began with drawing from casts and the antique, and when the student showed progress, he or she was admitted to life classes. Eakins shortened the first stage, and encouraged his students to start painting from nature, from life models, as soon as possible, and "to start right in painting in full color" (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 174; see also Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* 76; for Eakins's own early drawings see Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins* 50-61). In the 1870s, this was a radical approach. In 1879, William C. Brownell reported some of the ideas of the relation between form and tone of Eakins the teacher. The artist thinks the following: "The main thing that the brush secures is the instant grasp of the grand construction of a figure. There are no lines in nature... there are only form and color.... I don't at all share the old fear that the beauties of color will intoxicate the pupil, and cause him to neglect the form" (qtd. in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 175; see also 1: 173-75). And then: "Paint an egg, as it teaches you to paint well. You know the form, and it is only painting." Also: "Take a lump of sugar, a piece of chalk, and get the texture. These things can be gained with paint" (qtd. in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 1: 182). Or: "Paint three eggs — one red, one black, one white. Paint the white and black ones first, then paint all three together. I turned myself some wooden ones, this shape

and I painted these in sunlight, in twilight, indoors, — working with the light, and the light just skimming across them. These simple studies make strong painters" (qtd. in Siegl 109; see also 109-10). William Merritt Chase, a painter who was Eakins's junior, and who was the chief teacher at the Pennsylvania Academy school (1896-1909), pointed at Eakins's principle to "model in paint" as something not to be emulated (Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* 2: 220).

To sum up: there are grounds to question the assertion that in Eakins structure and form (depth) prevail over tone and color (surface). This assertion is a central notion in the narrative of Eakins as a scientific artist, and in this part of the "poetics of greatness," which defines the painterly parameters of Eakins's great art and realism. The assertion has been formulated in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's notes on *The Pathetic Song* (the opposition between Eakins's "deficient power of color" and his "insight into character [which is] so deep"), if not earlier, and through a critical tradition in the first third of the twentieth century has become a badge of Eakins's art. However, the artistic and educational practice of the painter shows that another narrative of Eakins's work is also possible: structure and color are inseparable and complementary, neither dominating the other.

4

In sections 2 and 3, I stressed some concrete parameters of narrative national cultural identity understood predominantly (though not solely) as self-constancy. Now let us concentrate on the last quality of narrative identity, which shows its instability, a topic which I have already touched on in respect of indigenous naïveté, mimetic iconicity, and the opposition between depth and surface in Eakins. We have also seen that the biographical and the critical narratives of Eakins reiterate the cause of national cultural identity in two distinct yet similar ways: both the prophetic/patriarchal and the artistic-scientific stories tell about how Eakins discovers, mediates, and creates the American national self. The main consequence of this narrative duality is the possibility of supplanting the notion of the truthfulness of Eakins's status as a great national American painter with the assertion of the inconstancy of his narrative identity. In this section, the question of the instability of the narrative national cultural identity is taken over from another, broader historical perspective: Eakins's prophetic/patriarchal and artistic image is compared with similar images of Albert P. Ryder and O'Keeffe constructed by Rosenfeld, an early modernistic art critic (for Rosenfeld see Paul).

The reader will remember that one set of events or one life can be told by a variety of plots, even by opposed plots. In our case, we encounter this possibility in an enriched form. According to the early critics, the essential in Eakins's, Ryder's, and O'Keeffe's artistic lives is the same: they are patriarchal or matriarchal figures

prophetically voicing the American self. The differences among their plots ensue mainly from the way they perform their patriarchal or matriarchal and prophetic roles, in other words, from their artistic peculiarities. Put differently, in the narratives of his early critics, Eakins is a prophet/patriarch and scientific artist for a set of reasons which are quite different from the reasons bestowing patriarchal or matriarchal and prophetic status on Ryder and O'Keeffe in Rosenfeld's articles.

The fundamental feature in Ryder's narrative identity is that he prophetically spells out the American self. This narrative first differs from Eakins's in that, whereas the latter's connection with the depth of American character is never logically explained, Ryder's connection is clearly stated. According to Rosenfeld, American pioneers are perpetual wanderers, and so is Ryder, whose life is "unutterable solitude, lone wandering, unending homelessness" (10). Many of Ryder's paintings express the endless roaming by means of figures reminiscent of the Flying Dutchman (11). Rosenfeld, in other words, equates Ryder as a wanderer, the American spirit as wanderous, and Ryder's paintings as depicting wanderers. Here, narrative national cultural identity speaks modernistic language: "Generation transmitted the restlessness to generation till it became a national characteristic. It is always the distant that is musical for the American. Like the Melisande of Maeterlinck, his psyche looks always into the 'otherwheres'" (8). The fact that national cultural identity employs the discourse of modernism, accounts for Rosenfeld's inclusion in his article of Columbus's story, turned into a modernistic semireligious quest for "the universe" (6), where America is viewed as "a divine land" (7).

The auxiliary patriarchal feature of Ryder, which he shares with Eakins, is his physical portrait: "a man of the massive corporeal forms, the great bones and sinews of *the fathers of the races* which have learned to do titanic labor" (10; my emphasis). The juxtaposition of mythical and historical time is also alluded to: despite his powerful physique, Ryder is "helpless nevertheless in the world of men" (10).

The rest of Rosenfeld's article provides a plot opposed to that of Eakins: both painters are patriarchs and prophets, but their art springs from opposite sources. Eakins's art, as we know, is primarily construction, depth, and solid presence. Ryder's is surface — color or rather, lack of color, "tone, merely" (13), which the painter does not always master well (13-14). His canvases are "void, embryonic," their basic quality is "an evasion" (4). Eakins is a rational observer. Ryder is intuitive, "a blinded man in the noon," who delicately parodies "the world of the sun and the reason" (12). Eakins is an impassive scientist. Ryder is "a poet. He work[s] from feeling" (15), "from the image in his brain. He could see with closed eyes" (16). Eakins is preeminently a realist. Ryder's works are "mysteriously still" and "moony" (13), they convey "a mysterious life" (4), "fantastic" shapes, "a dream," "tender mysterious tones and sensitive forms" (5). Eakins is active and athletic, as are the figures on his canvases. Ryder's works are

marked by "secret passivity and stillness" (13). Eakins is masculine and virile both in his life and in his art. Ryder's art exudes "sexual fear" (14); he vaguely depicts only the "spiritual regions of the body" (15), and that is why his paintings are empty in the middle and their images are concentrated in the upper part of the canvas (14-15).

Two features constitute O'Keeffe's basic quality as an American matriarch and prophet. The first is cultural and historical, and juxtaposes Europe and America: O'Keeffe is not burdened by European cultural tradition, which, as Rosenfeld thinks, "is something belonging to men. In her, there are 'no traces of intellectualization'" (204-05), her mind is "born of profoundest feeling" (205).³³ The second characteristic is social and pertains to American life: "It is the woman who has been given the position of honor in American society," where men are "undeveloped and infantile" (209). The implicit equation of these two arguments suggests that the best in America is feminine, and this femininity is defined, first, as anti-intellectual, as O'Keeffe's "capacity of fiery passion" (208), and, second, as erotically of and about the body — O'Keeffe's art expresses "her body's subconscious knowledge of itself" (205).³⁴

Rosenfeld's argument is circular: the positive qualities of an unintellectual America and of American women dominating American men have no other ground but the author's desire to glorify O'Keeffe. Along similar lines, O'Keeffe is an expression of American spirit as unsophisticated and feminine, because Rosenfeld feels it his national and critical duty to praise this spirit.

The elemental matriarchal qualities of O'Keeffe and her art are entwined both with the subconscious and with the body as generative: her pictures suggest "the aromatic warmth of unknown submarine forests" (206), she outlines "a whole universe, a full course of life: mysterious cycles of birth and reproduction and death expressed through the terms of a woman's body" (204).

Once again, the discourses of modernism and narrative national cultural identity overlap: "There is nothing really experienced which does not become esthetics for him

[i.e., the artist, in this case O'Keeffe]" (208). The equation of art and life, as we know, is a basic romantic and modernistic topic.

The critical part of O'Keeffe's narrative is similar and dissimilar from both Eakins's and Ryder's narratives. As with Ryder, Rosenfeld deals with O'Keeffe's colors and surfaces, not with depth or composition. But, unlike Ryder, she applies the "greatest [color] extremes" (199), uses them for the purposes of "complementariness" (200), and handles them with exquisite "subtlety" (201).

Ricoeur explains that narrative identity becomes equivalent to true self-constancy only when the narratively identified subject is ready to act in a certain way, that is, through ethical responsibility as the highest moment of self-constancy. Thus, narrative identity trespasses verbal boundaries and becomes praxis. We can apply what Ricoeur says to the province of criticism, albeit in a paradoxical way. Let us presume that criticism practically acts by keeping a critical meta-distance, by being able to criticize its own postulates. Transposed in the realm of narrative national cultural identity, critical action means the ability to formulate the parameters of the constancy and the fluidity of this type of narrative identity. The paradox consists namely in the fact that as the acting criticism is self-critical criticism, so narrative identity, in the form of *narrative national cultural identity*, becomes *self-constant through critical, i.e., self-detached awareness of its inconstancy*.

Let us clarify the paradox by an example. We have seen that in some areas criticism reiterates aspects of the narrative national cultural identity as if it were stable, self-constant, and substantial: for instance, in Eakins's art, depth dominates over surface, or his art is one of indigenous naïveté and mimetic iconicity. Criticism, in making such assertions, forgets to explain that, in fact, they are facets of a narrative national cultural identity, which served certain purposes several decades ago, but which today have to be analyzed from a critical meta-distance. Thus, criticism gives up its critical role, that is to say its meta-distance, and turns into a non-acting subject.

The problem in such cases is that criticism neglects the pragmatic aspect of narratives of national cultural identity. This pragmatic aspect consists in the following: the utterance comprises two constituents — linguistic material or text, which is repeatable, and socio-historical and socio-cultural context of enunciation, which is unique. Only the coexistence of text and context, of linguistic material and enunciated environment constitutes the utterance (for utterance and enunciation see Todorov's interpretation of Bakhtin, *Mikhail Bakhtin* 41-59; and also *Symbolism and Interpretation* 9-11). Criticism becomes a non-acting subject when it views the utterance of narrative national cultural identity as repeatable, whereas, in reality, it is unique because it is embedded in a nonreiterative context.

What is this enunciative context? Recalling our hypothesis based on Eco, this context is a cultural code, which, in the beginning of the twentieth century, produced

33 This is another version of the blessed indigenous naïveté. Goodrich's book ends on the same note: "It may seem paradoxical that Eakins, Ryder, and Homer, who today appear the most creative painters of their period, and the closest to contemporary taste, were so little involved in the movements of their time. But this has been true of many of the most original Americans of the nineteenth century, who had been notable more for vigorous naturalism or romantic personal expression than for innovations in basic artistic concepts. Most such innovations had originated abroad and had been transmitted by individuals more impressionable and sophisticated but not generally as creative. *The most enduring American art has not always been in accord with the changing currents of its time; more often it has come from the deeper springs of individual and national character*" (Thomas Eakins 2: 289; my emphasis; see also Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: Retrospective Exhibition* 32-33).

34 For Rosenfeld, even nature is erotic: in O'Keeffe's article, he writes of "full-breasted clouds" (206).

and interpreted cultural statements as *national* cultural statements. This code does not operate in today's America, at least not in the domain of the visual arts. Therefore, what the recent criticism repeats, when saying that in Eakins depth dominates over surface, or that his art is mimetic and iconic, is not the whole utterance (text plus enunciative environment), but solely the utterance's text. The unawareness of the difference between text and utterance in this case marks the end of criticism as an acting subject. The paradoxical result of the confusion between text and utterance is the reduced possibility for perpetuating the self-constancy of a narrative national cultural identity as an utterance by trying to perpetuate it only as a text.

Indiana University, Bloomington

Works Cited

- Achtemeier, Paul J., gen. ed. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. San Francisco: Harper, 1985.
- Alterton, Margaret. *Origins of Poe's Critical Theory*. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1965 [1st ed. 1925].
- Arnason, H[arvard] H. *History of Modern Art*. Third edition revised and updated by Daniel Wheeler. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.; New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1986.
- Bregler, Charles. "A Tribute." *A Loan Exhibition of the Works of Thomas Eakins, 1844-1944, Commemorating the Centennial of His Birth*. New York: M. Knoedler and Company, [1944]. 24.
- Brooks, Van Wyck. "America's Coming-of-Age" [1915]. *Three Essays on America*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1934. 15-34.
- Burroughs, Alan. "Thomas Eakins." *The Arts*, 3 (March 1923): 185-89.
- Calinescu, Matei. *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1987.
- Campbell, Killis. *The Mind of Poe and Other Studies*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1933. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.
- Danly, Susan. "Thomas Eakins and the Art of Photography." Wilmerding 180-91.
- Danly, Susan and Cheryl Leibold; with essays by Elizabeth Johns, Anne McCauley, Mary Panzer [Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts], *Eakins and the Photograph: Works by Thomas Eakins and His Circle in the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*. Washington: Published for the Academy by the Smithsonian Institution Press, c1994.
- Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (With Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, Christine Brooke-Rose). Ed. Stefan Collini. Cambridge UP, 1992.
- . *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990.
- . *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*. Trans. William Weaver. San Diego, New York, London: A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1984.
- . *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- . *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.
- . *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard UP, 1994.
- . *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976.
- Freedman, David Noel, Ed.-in-Chief. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1992.
- Goodrich, Lloyd. *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Published for the National Gallery of Art, Washington [by] Harvard UP, 1982.
- . *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933.
- . *Thomas Eakins: Retrospective Exhibition*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1970.
- Guilbaut, Serge. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.
- Hamilton, J. McLure. "Thomas Eakins: Two Appreciations. I." [1917]. *The International Studio* July 1918: 7-10.
- Hardin, Jennifer. "The Critical Reception of Thomas Eakins's Work. II: Posthumous." Wilmerding 195-98.
- Hayes, John. "Thomas Eakins and His European Contemporaries." Wilmerding 36-49.
- Hendricks, Gordon. *The Photographs of Thomas Eakins*. New York: Grossman Publ., 1972.
- Hesiod [The Works and Days, Theogony, The Shield of Herakles]. Trans. Richmond Latimore. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1959.
- Homer, William Innes. *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art*. New York, London, Paris: Abberville Press Publishers, 1992.
- Jackson, David. K. *Poe and "The Southern Literary Messenger"*. Richmond, Va.: Press of the Dietz Printing Co., 1934.
- Jakobson, Roman. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." *Selected Writings: Word and Language*. 8 vols. The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1971. 2: 260-66.
- . "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." *Selected Writings: Word and Language*. 2: 239-59.
- Kirstein, Lincoln. "A Quasi-Preface: Henry McBride." *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticism of Henry McBride*. By Henry McBride. New York: Atheneum, 1975. 3-16.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.
- . "Word, Dialogue, and Novel." *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980. 64-91.

- Lamb, John G., Jr. "Eakins and the Arcadian Themes." *Eakins at Avondale and Thomas Eakins: A Personal Collection*. Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania: Brandywine River Museum, 1980. 18-20.
- Mabie, Hamilton Wright. "Poe's Place in American Literature." *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. 17 vols. Ed. James A. Harrison. New York: AMS Press Inc., 1965 (1st ed. 1902). 2: vii-xxxiii.
- Manuel, Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel. *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1979.
- McBride, Henry. "Thomas Eakins I" and "Thomas Eakins II" [1917]. *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticism of Henry McBride*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1975. 130-36, 136-39.
- McKinney, Roland [Joseph]. *Thomas Eakins*. Photo Research and Bibliography by Aimée Crane. New York: Crown Publishers, 1942.
- Mickiewicz, Adam. *Pan Tadeusz*. Trans. Kenneth R. Mackenzie. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1992.
- Morris, Harrison S. "Thomas Eakins: Two Appreciations. II" [1917]. *The International Studio* July 1918: 11-12.
- Mumford, Lewis. "The Brown Decades: Art." *Scribner's Magazine* 90 (1931): 361-72.
- Myers, Allen C., revision ed. *The Eedmans Bible Dictionary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eedermans Publishing Company, 1987.
- Niury, Sue Himelick and Dennis R. Montagna. "Selected Bibliography," *Eakins at Avondale*. 77-78.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Frank Justus Miller. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1960.
- Pach, Walter. "A Grand Provincial." *The Freeman*, vol. 7, no. 161, 11 April, 1923: 112-14.
- Parrington, Vernon Louis. *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*. 3 vols. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927-1930.
- Parry, Ellwood C., III and Robert Stubbs. *Photographer Thomas Eakins*. Philadelphia, Atlanta: Olympia Galleries, Ltd., 1981.
- Paul, Sherman. "Paul Rosenfeld." Foreward. *Port of New York*. By Paul Rosenfeld. vii-lvi.
- Peirce, Charles S. *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*. 8 vols. Vols. 1-6, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss; vols. 7-8, edited by Arthur Burks. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980.
- Rich, Daniel Catton. "Introduction: The Art Criticism of Henry McBride." Introduction. *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticism of Henry McBride*. By Henry McBride. 17-28.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. 3 vols. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (vols. 1-2); Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (vol. 3). Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1984-1988.
- Riffaterre, Michael. "The Interpretant in Literary Semiotics." *Reading Eco: An Anthology*. Ed. Rocco Capozzi. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997. 173-84.
- Rosenfeld, Paul. *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1961 [1st ed. 1924].
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York. Avenel: Gramercy Books, 1994.
- Schendler, Sylvan. *Eakins*. Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1967.
- Siegl, Theodor. *The Thomas Eakins Collection*. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978.
- Singal, Daniel Joseph. "Towards a Definition of American Modernism." *Modernist Culture in America*. Ed. Daniel Joseph Singal. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991. 1-27.
- Smith, C. Alphonso. "The Americanism of Poe." *The Book of the Poe Centenary*. Eds. Charles W. Kent and John S. Patton. Charlottesville: U of Virginia, 1909. 159-79.
- Spiller, Robert E., Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, and Henry Seidel Canby, eds. *Literary History of the United States*. 3 vols. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948.
- Thomas Eakins: Image of the Surgeon*. Baltimore: The Walters Art Gallery; The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, 1989.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Trans. Wlad Godzich. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 13. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.
- . *Symbolism and Interpretation*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.
- . *Theories of the Symbol*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1982.
- Weinberg, H[elen] Barbara, with a contribution by Jeff L. Rosenheim. *Thomas Eakins and the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York, N. Y.: Metropolitan Museum of Art, c1994.
- Wendell, Barrett. "The Nationalism of Poe." *The Book of the Poe Centenary*. 117-58.
- Werbel, Amy B. "The Critical Reception of Thomas Eakins's Work. I: Lifetime." Wilmerding 192-94.
- White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.
- . "Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased": Literary Theory and Historical Writing." *The Future of Literary Theory*. Ed. Ralph Cohen. New York: Routledge, 1989. 19-43.
- Wilmerding, John. "The Tension of Biography and Art in Thomas Eakins." Wilmerding 16-35.
- , gen. ed. *Thomas Eakins*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.
- Wood, Michael, Bruce Cole, and Adelheid Gealt. *Art of the Western World: From Ancient Greece to Post-Modernism*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: A Touchstone Book, Published by Simon & Schuster, 1989.
- Wypianski, Stanislaw. *The Wedding*. Trans. Gerard T. Kapolka. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990.

Surrealists in Wonderland: Aspects of the Appropriation of Lewis Carroll

The surrealist movement, springing as it did from the Dadaists who gathered in Paris immediately after World War I, had one goal, fervently stated in many different media: to break through the accretions formed on the human mind by centuries of French Cartesian logic. For this reason, the surrealists, led by André Breton and a small group of his closest followers, scorned the history of literature as a source of inspiration, particularly the romantic and realist traditions: "...[L]'attitude réaliste, inspirée du positivisme, de saint Thomas à Anatole France, m'a bien l'air hostile à tout essor intellectuel et moral" (Breton, *Manifestes* 17-18). The surrealists believed wholeheartedly that genius would not — indeed, could not — come from the old alliances with European schools of thought and technique; instead, the raw material of inspiration must spring from the human unconscious mind, finally freed of its Cartesian shackles. The reader of surrealist texts may therefore be surprised by the repeated acclamations of the literary works of a British Victorian parson and Cambridge don, who wrote with equal facility children's books, logico-mathematical texts, and some of the oddest nonsense rhyme in English literature: Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll. The link between Carroll and the surrealists is not, however, as arbitrary as it may seem; Carroll aided the surrealists in the formation of their definition of absurdity, humor, and madness; they in return claimed him as their unknowing father. In this article, I will describe the process the surrealists used to choose Lewis Carroll, and explore some of the elements of his work that appealed to them.

Although the surrealists maintained a hostile position toward the long, bourgeois history of literature, they had a definite notion of the filiation of texts. Instead of the normal process — the surrealists' admitting an alliance with authors or literary movements in the past which had influenced them — they announced which artists in the past were worthy of being called surrealist. They did not see these artists as predecessors or forerunners; rather, they perceived that some men in other times and other places had a mental, spiritual, or theoretical kinship with the surrealist movement. Breton in particular had a very specific idea of who in literature's past

could be said to be surrealist and in what way; his list varied wildly, going from century to century and genre to genre. He adopted the *fatrasies*, for instance: French nonsense poems from the thirteenth century (Éluard and Breton 11). He included a list in the first surrealist manifesto of past authors who were "surrealist" and in what way they could be said to be so; surprisingly, even a few romantics made it into the list: "Victor Hugo est surréaliste quand il n'est pas bête" (Breton, *Manifestes* 36). These authors did not necessarily have anything to do with one another; their only bond was that André Breton found some reflection of his own surrealist philosophy in their writings. In this way, the surrealists could appropriate an author or a specific text in order to make it their own.

Some of these surrealist professions of kinship, though anachronistic, respond to a certain logic. Sade, Lautréamont, and Rimbaud, for example, three authors Breton consistently cited as surrealists before their time, were adjudged outrageous or even mad by their contemporaries, and their writings were not at all typical of the period in which they lived. However, in general, Breton did not place much emphasis on the logic of a practice that appropriated the literature of past centuries for the use of a twentieth-century artistic movement, nor did the anachronisms inherent to this type of appropriation concern him. Of still less importance were the intentions of the authors with whom he claimed kinship; it was irrelevant to him what they had been trying to accomplish in their particular artistic vision. This aspect of the way in which the surrealists chose their connections was part and parcel of their desire to obtain direct access to the unconscious in artistic creation; the critical or explicative function of an artist's creative process was to be avoided as much as possible in order to gain admittance to the subconscious layers of the mind. The author's conscious explanations could only cloud and hinder the free operation of the unconscious.

Once the theory is in place that the intentions of the author are irrelevant, adoption of any work of art for any purpose whatever becomes much easier. This explains how the surrealists were able, without any apparent irony, to choose two British Victorian authors as the "Fathers of Nonsense": Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. Carroll and Lear have several traits in common: they were both nineteenth-century British professors; they both wrote for children; and they both experimented with nonsense verse. However, "[t]heir aims are divergent, and the means of achieving them almost entirely distinct," and the two authors, however similar on the surface, were respected by the surrealists for very different reasons (Heath 5). Despite the fact that the anarchic Lear might have understood the surrealists better, and despite the fact that Carroll — both as a parson and as a logician — certainly would have disapproved of surrealist goals and practices, it is Carroll who maintains a consistent presence in surrealist references to those authors in the past who are related to their own literary efforts.