IV. Kurzweil’s Esthetics and Theory of Criticism

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We are now ready to examine Kurzweil's understanding of art, for it flows directly from his understanding of language. Then we can turn to his notion of what literary criticism is and how it is to be performed. Here, too, we are dealing with a definite poetic and esthetic theory, but it is one that has not been clearly articulated; rather it has to be fleshed out from a number of statements and a few suggestive hints scattered throughout Kurzweil's writings.

The Nature of Literary Creativity

In both the Critique of Pure Reason and in the Handbook to his lectures on logic, Kant notes that the fundamental questions of philosophy in its widest sense are three: what can I know? what ought I to do? what may I hope? In the latter work he establishes a fourth question as basic to these three: what is man? This is the "anthropological" question. It is anthropological because Kant assigns metaphysics to answer the first one, ethics the second, religion the third and anthropology the fourth. "And Kant adds: 'Fundamentally all this could be reckoned as anthropology, since the first three questions are related to the last.'"

To answer Kant's fourth and most basic question, "What is Man?" requires for Kurzweil a completely different way of searching than what he saw in Buber, Heidegger and Scheler, one that employs no method and uses another medium—language. This way is the way of art, specifically literary art.

More than anything else it is language that defines man, and so when we are examining language we are examining man. I have noted in the preceding chapter the bases for this view. If language, in Heidegger's words, is truly "the home of Being," then Kurzweil believes that

Poetry and the literary work to the extent that it is a true work, returns man to his dwelling place, to language. And to the extent that we have a deep experience with it, language discloses the nature of our being.

Literature, therefore, is the locus classicus of the development of the anthropological question and that is the perspective in which it is to be read:
It is the language of the poets that knows how to determine man's dwelling place, that penetrates most deeply into the problem of man. . . Man and his perplexities—that is the historical trajectory of literature. Stylistic questions are certainly important, but they are secondary to the anthropological ones relating to the presentation of the image of man in all periods. That "the style is the man" is indeed true; but without man there is no style.3

We recover here a most important foundation for Kurzweil's esthetics from which a number of equally crucial corollaries follow. First is the notion that, because it is essentially a holding up and a showing forth of the human, literary language and literary art are by their very nature communicative. Art which is non-communicative is, in this sense, a contradiction in terms.

The creative act [itself] is always an act of relationship. Unlike the scientific process, artistic creativity involves demolishing the barrier between subject and object. It brings about and illuminates what did not exist beforehand. . . something beyond subject and object, a third entity which encircles the poet and the substance of his poetry. And so for this reason the creative act establishes the yearned-for unity which we have lost. It is that new third entity, beyond and above subject and object. It is "I", but at the same time it is both less and more than "I"; it is "Thou", but at the same time it is both less and more than "Thou".6

The context of these words, a discussion of those issues in relation to Tshernichovski's poetry, should not keep us from recognizing how closely they relate to Kurzweil's critique of Buber. Here we can see not only how much Kurzweil accepted the realm of "between" as "the real place and bearer of what happens between men",7 but also that for him art provides precisely that which "the philosophical science of man, which includes anthropology and sociology"8 cannot: a concrete, available "third entity" that can recover for man his lost sense of primal wholeness. To be sure, Kurzweil here talks about the creative "act", but the referent is really to the work of art itself that the act brings into being, for it is in the work where the artist and the reader meet, where communication takes place.

Second, such a poetics holds itself always in readiness for the instances when language is not related to Being; when words manipulate and do not disclose; and when what is created reflects not man in his relatedness ("man as man" in Buber's words) but presumptuous narcissism. In all these instances what passes for literature is not art.9 Better silence than such presumptuousness, as Bialik, Hofmannsthal and Kraus understood.
But that is not the half of it. The real question such a poetics asks is: considering what has happened to man in the twentieth century, is art even possible now? In the light of man's increasing detachedness, his continued withdrawal from the sphere of "between", be it between man and man or between man and God, into the sphere of "within"; as man has become increasingly problematic to himself, can language still serve as the vehicle for artistic communication? These doubts inform all of Kurzweil's criticism. I state them here in general terms and shall explore them further below when I shall consider the particulars of Kurzweil's literary theory.

All this would appear to imply that when Kurzweil talks about art he is really referring to literature. What about other aesthetic expressions as music, painting and sculpture? Kurzweil does not deal with these, though he is aware that they too are related to the human situation. It is certainly possible to incorporate them into the larger contours of the esthetic theory I have here described. "Without belief in man and in his uniqueness no art is possible." Nevertheless, since it is rooted in language, literature is clearly the focus of this theory.

Literature as art, then, by its very nature, involves relationship, or a striving for relationship, with the absolute, with the Divine, with that which transcends the self. In this sense is art ideally encompassed within the sacred and beauty an aspect of the holy. To put it in the terms of the Kantian trinity, the beautiful exists co-terminously with the good and the true, at least it did when the cosmos was perceived in its transcendental wholeness. When, however, man loses this perception, as he has over the last five centuries, then the process of differentiation occurs: the beautiful is dissociated from the true and the good, and a new realm, the esthetic, takes on its own autonomous existence as an absolute in and of itself. Kurzweil points to Benn, George, and Valéry as the leading exemplars of this process since Beaudelaire. Nevertheless Kurzweil is clear that, as Schwarcz aptly puts it, "all authentic art serves as a trustworthy record of the artist's striving to realize anew the unimpaired reality" of what he felicitously calls "the beauty of the pre-esthetic". This may take the form of an attempt to recover the primal vision of childhood or to re-constitute the collective consciousness of his nation or to recover the unassailable certainty of religious faith. In any case, all great art comes about after its creator has been carried "back to the depths of the deep, to the flux of the irrational, beyond the moral, to the mythological".
This means that all great literary creativity is for Kurzweil an inherently irrational process, resulting from the artist's encounter with the infinite as he stands before the depths of the abyss.

Any tendency toward unequivocal clarity, toward artistic expression which resists the seductions of unfathomable ambiguity, will circumscribe the limits of esthetic possibilities for developing the multivalent, the undefinable, the variegated, the irrational—the very mysteries of the work! . . . The irrational and the realm of the unspecified together constitute the womb of the great work of art.

Reality by its very infinity is ambiguous, dialectical, chaotic, confusing and threatening. It is the poet who perceives it thus as he stands in his solitary-ness before it. And here, precisely as a poet, he is spurred to create in the face of the void of the cosmos, a miniature world that, while evoking the larger boundlessness, still, because concrete, rational form is imposed by him on it, brings to its human creator a measure of wholeness, security, truth and beauty. This miniature world is the work of art, which represents at one and the same time both a yearning for and an illusion of the re-integration of diffuse and problematical reality. In his original formulation of this, the metaphysical basis of esthetic creativity, Kurzweil, following Schiller and Schopenhauer, points to the "idyllic" as its essential aspect. This is because the idyllic, in that it captures the world as a totality, does so in miniature, from a distance. Hence comes its charming, pleasurable and reassuring qualities. Were that same world reflected up close, in all its vastness, it would be terrifying. The idyllic, therefore, performs the same function as religious ritual.

Ritual teaches man how to meet the forces of the Divine, the transcendent and threatening numinous (Otto), the incomprehensible eternal "Ein sof". But the idyllic, as the heart of poetry, is also an attempt to root man in his little place in the face of the terrors of the formless void. The idyllic thus brings to light what in actuality is the implicit or explicit concern of all true art, namely the connection of the work to the hieratic-religious sphere.

Late in his life (1968) Kurzweil came to emphasize the wider perspective this passage only hints at.

More than twenty years ago, in my essay "The Existential and Metaphysical Roots of the Idyllic" I tried to illustrate, through the idyllic element, the consoling and tranquillizing function of the work of art. The idyllic appeared to me as "the important and even
Here we feel the full thrust of Kurzweil's esthetic theory. Art in its most sublime manifestations strives after the same primordial wholeness and certainty that religion once gave. It is both an intimation and yet an illusion of such certainty. The consciously applied, rational laws of form and proportion concretize and organize polysemous reality into a deceptive, pleasing coherence. As the vestiges of the Absolute of religion vanish,

artistic analysis, art itself can serve both as a refuge and as a revenge. All that is left is artistic form, and it is a kind of sad catharsis—without God, without gods, without grace.

The centrality of the artist's experience in this poetics is apparent. The work is an objectivation of an inner experience. As such the conventionally used term for poetic creativity—mimesis—becomes problematical. Mimesis is an Aristotelian concept predicated on the subject-object dichotomy, and the artistic act as Kurzweil construes it transcends this dichotomy. "The arts and literature do not 'imitate' reality. They evoke it in their language. Reality itself remains 'as it is'—ever shrouded by a veil of mystery." Such a poetics should be seen within the context of a German intellectual configuration, specifically the philosophy of life (Lebensphilosophie) as developed from German Romanticism into phenomenology.

Two figures in this tradition, although by no means the only or even the main figures, I have already mentioned: Schiller and Buber. To them we need add Buber's teacher, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). Schiller's understanding of artistic creativity is the foundation here, especially his notion of how "life" and "shape" inter-penetrate as the products of the two essential impulses of man, the "sensuous" and the "formal". "Life" for Schiller is "the object of the sense impulse . . . a concept which expresses all material being and all that is immediately present in the senses". "Shape", on the other hand, is "the object of the form impulse, expressed generally . . . both in the figurative and in the literal sense. . . ."

From the interaction of [these] two opposing impulses . . . we . . . see . . . the origin of the Beautiful, whose highest ideal is . . . to be sought in the most perfect possible union of reality and form.
That Kurzweil appropriates this should be clear from the foregoing, but between Schiller and Kurzweil comes also the decisive contribution in this area of Dilthey. The essential aspect of Schiller's theory was, for Dilthey, that it defined the creative act as a continuous process of transference from "lived experience" (Erlebnis) to artistic form (Gestalt) and from artistic form to "lived experience". This allowed Dilthey to develop his own concept of Erlebnis as the seed of the poetic process, a concept that has not fared well among American theorists but which is, beyond its importance for understanding Kurzweil, crucial to the development of any epistemology of literature. It is not that the Erlebnis idea is unknown or unrecognized. Wellek, for example, in his rather inadequate treatment of Dilthey, does note it as one of his principal terms and correctly describes it not just as unspecified experience—anything can become an Erlebnis to the poet—but as experience in its totality, an event or a thing that engages the total person. But Wellek seems to construe this experiential basis of literature primarily as Stoff, and he is led to regard Dilthey as having been interested almost exclusively in content and in literature as the expression of the "life-ideal of an age".

More recent studies of Dilthey have attempted to correct this erroneous perception. They emphasize that the totality of poetic Erlebnis, as Dilthey understood it, lies precisely in its immediacy, in its anteceding the Cartesian dualism and reflexive thought. "Experience does not and cannot directly perceive itself; ... it exists before the subject-object separation." Is it not the content of consciousness nor a psychological construct but the "total structural coherence of the psyche" which seeks "to comprehend the relationship between the historical and the existential, the universal and the particular, the biological and the ontological aspects of human life". It is the very opposite of the anatomized consciousness of I. A. Richards and the philosophical legacy of Locke, Hume and Kant which separated cognition from feeling and will and equated it alone with "knowing". Palmer assesses Dilthey's concept of Erlebnis in these insightful words:

Just this realm of prereflexive consciousness is that staked out by Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology. As Dilthey seeks to implement his methodological project in close coordination with his life philosophy, as he makes a clear separation between mere "thinking" and "life" (or experience) he is laying the foundations for 20th century phenomenology. . . . Yet it would be a grave mistake to think of experience as pointing to some
kind of merely subjective reality, for experience is precisely the reality of what is there-for-me before experience becomes objective (and therefore admits of a separation from the subjective). The prior unity is that out of which Dilthey tries to forge categories that will contain rather than separate the elements of feeling, knowing, and will, which are held together in experience--such categories perhaps as "value", "meaningfulness", "texture", and "relationship". 34

It is on this epistemological foundation that we must understand the ontological status Kurzweil grants to a literary work and his statement that such a work is at once subjective and objective. Similarly, it is on this foundation that we must see resting the mode of interpretation it necessitates--hermeneutics--35 and Kurzweil's relationship to that mode. As I have indicated, I shall explore this subject more fully below when I shall examine another feature of poetic experience as Dilthey conceives it that has a direct bearing on and unites both the creative and the interpretive aspects of literature: its temporality, the fact that such experience always exists within a specific historical context.

As far as the consideration of Erlebnis here goes, it remains only to note the distinctive way in which Dilthey advocated works of art were to be perceived: "as individual manifestations . . . belonging to an ordered or structured whole" and not in accordance with the canons of "the positivism of the natural sciences [which] tended to regard them as exemplifications of a general rule". 36

The goal is a holistic perception of reality.

This, I would suggest, is the "wholeness" that Kurzweil and Buber refer to. Dilthey's hopes for scientific rigor aside, it is a spiritual category and can be traced back to the monistic epistemology of the German tradition that runs back to Goethe. 37 The struggle is on behalf of a vision that would integrate all reality, Anschauung, 38 and against the increasing inroads not of science but of scientism, which sought to abolish the mystery of life and to dismiss "a priori as invalid all ontological assertions, i.e., assertions about the nature and meaning of Being" in favor of a strictly causal explanation of phenomena. 39 Essentially this is a struggle between analytical reason and creative imagination, the balance of power between which Goethe tried to maintain, 40 but ultimately it becomes an assertion of the priority of art over science. That, at least, is where Kurzweil enters the lists. It is a facet of his esthetics that pervades all his criticism.
Now if the basis for Kurzweil's esthetic and poetic theory is metaphysical, it is predicated upon an epistemology that I identify as phenomenological. Specifically, it is akin to the "transcendental subjectivity" that Husserl developed, whereby reality only exists to the extent that it is intentionally constituted by the Ego.

The upshot of the "transcendental subjective" mode of perception is that it does not admit of any truth that calls itself completely "objective". This is the driving force behind Kurzweil's sustained assault not only against the scientific method but against the manifestations of this method in the humanities. The assault is concentrated specifically against all claims of scientific objectivity in the fields of historical and literary scholarship, against all attempts to controvert the inscrutably human in the humanities.

The painful recognition of the inherent subjectivity of my discipline, which is one of the humanities, brings me to be sceptical about the humanities in general and history in particular. To put it simply: I can find no "truth" in the humanities. It is possible only to reach the maximum proximity to "the inner truth" of a text and no more.

All reality is thus a text to be interpreted and not analyzed. "If we extend this notion beyond literature, it merely confirms that the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or evolution." De Man is concerned with the problems of literary history but his observation holds, I think, for all history as Kurzweil perceives it.

More precisely, it is not history per se that is the target but historicism, the reduction of amorphous reality to definite laws. It is against historicism in a specific framework that Kurzweil fought—"mada'ei hayahadut," "Jewish sciences", the offspring of the nineteenth century Wissenschaft des Judentums, particularly as it is exemplified in the work of Gershom Scholem. Kurzweil's critique of Scholem--actually there are several separate critiques that coalesce into one extended repudiation of the work of perhaps the most celebrated Jewish scholar of our time--is voluminous and bitter. From the standpoint of literary criticism, which is our standpoint here, the critique is tangential. It is not, therefore, my intention to analyze it in any detail and, in any case, it can be readily understood in the light of the metaphysical postulates discussed in the preceding chapter.
Suffice it to say that Scholem is condemned for contravening the absoluteness of Jewish religious faith by relativizing it through the process of historicism.

Science cannot replace religion, and a scientific approach to Judaism has no authority as far as Judaism as a living substance goes. The Judaic sciences are concerned with the anatomy of a Judaism which has ceased to be "Torah"... It is possible to say that, paradoxically, a mathematician or a physicist is more authorized to appear as spokesman for Judaism than Messrs. Baer, Baron or G. Scholem, just as a gynecologist, qua gynecologist, is unable to evoke the mysteries of Eros, even though he is familiar with every aspect of the female body. The poet and the lover, without their ever having known woman, know a great deal more about it [Eros] and love than any gynecologist. And if the latter should become a lover, it will not be due to his professional expertise but in spite of it.

Here again we can sense Kurzweil's utter unwillingness—perhaps it is an inability—to concede any value to "realistic" epistemology. Kurzweil's critique of scientism in the humanities was launched not only against Scholem and Jewish historical scholarship but, with equal force, against all attempts to cast literary criticism into a scientific discipline. Kurzweil's attack on these attempts, specifically his lifelong polemic against formalism and structuralism, takes us to the heart of his view of what the critical enterprise is.

**Literary Criticism As Hermeneutics**

One of the central terms in Kurzweil's critical language is "values". There is, it is clear to him, a whole world of values outside of and around it that are reflected in and that impinge on the literary work itself. Considering the link he makes between philosophical anthropology (of which Scheler's in particular emphasizes man as a value-creating being) and art, it is hardly surprising that this is the aspect of literature on which Kurzweil focuses a good part of his attention.

Kurzweil never articulates exactly what he means by "values". In general, though, the term as he uses it points back to the realms of the "true" and the "good" of which the "beautiful" ideally partakes.

In all true art the ethical, even the religious, is the soul of the esthetic, for no matter how apostatizing and rebellious it is in form, its pulse can still be felt in the true esthetic.
Values, therefore, are moral, religious and social categories, and if they were once absolutes—"Divinity alone can be the guarantor of absolute truth"—in the secularized world of the last two hundred years we can only speak of relative values. Still, "it is absurd to assume the existence of a reality entirely devoid of values." This position agrees with that of Wellek who also stresses that

a work of art is a totality of values which do not adhere merely to the structure but constitute its very essence. All attempts to drain value from literature have failed and will fail because its very essence is value. Literary study cannot and must not be divorced from criticism, which is value judgment.

But whereas with Wellek we get the feeling that values, crucial as they are to literature, are an axiological construct, with Kurzweil, his own discursive treatment of the subject notwithstanding, they are a matter of deep personal concern, unashamedly espoused, in spite of the fact that by the late sixties he knew that he would be scorned as "old fashioned" by the younger Israeli critics who fiercely opposed any attempts to undermine the strict autonomy of the literary work.

Such a position would seem to necessitate examining the "what" of literature, its content only, leaving aside the formal aspects. Kurzweil regards this as an impossibility, as it negates the very nature of literature. Content only exists in the work to the extent that it is encased in form. Form and value are as inter-related as are content and value, and all three co-exist within a literary work. Hence not only is it impossible for criticism to concentrate on content alone but, Kurzweil concludes, all approaches that examine only form in its "purity" betray the very nature of form itself. Again we see his deep-seated aversion to all "purity" that is antiseptically isolated from the ultimate questions of human reality. We may also note that by "form" Kurzweil means all aspects of the "how" of literature comprised by style and technique.

Now, since "the primary basis in the act of creating a work of art is the tension between the artist and the world", and since the content and the form of the created work reflect values as artistic tension presents them, the subject and goal of literary criticism emerges: the world of values as communicated by the work of art or, to put it more accurately, by the form of the work of art. For, because of their inter-relationship, any changes in the perception of the world by the literary artist, that is, any shift in values, of necessity causes changes in his
rendering of that perception, in the "how" of literature. "The concept of form has to be functional because it changes in accordance with the progressive alterations in man's Weltanschauung." The larger task of the critic, then, is to examine the incessant shifts in the link between the work and the world.

All this is what Kurzweil means when he says that without values there can be neither literature nor criticism (i.e., literary evaluation), that "literary problems are much more than literary problems alone; otherwise they are not even literary problems". Kurzweil's militant indictment of formalism and all critical methodologies that purport to treat poetic questions scientifically is ineluctable and now stands clearly visible. Those who deal only with the formal and structural elements of the work of art are guilty of reducing the dimensions of literature, of asking small questions of it, questions that, of necessity, will yield answers of comparable size.

Isolating the literary work, removing it from its world and from its intellectual, linguistic and social tradition is a hopeless and wilful act, the fruit of a contumacious generation which parades its nakedness as the expensive finery of the very latest fashion. From time immemorial poetry has been linked to the life of man, and the problem of man is its very soul. The human spirit is no more nourished by structuralist formulas than the body by a printed menu. Professions that because of the spiritual crisis engulfing culture and the arts "literature desires nothing other than itself and has no reference to values of any sort" are nothing other than the suspicious modesty of a criticism that is satisfied "to detach every poem, every story fragment and certainly every work of fiction from its living link to the environment from which it sprang" and anatomize it methodically.

Moreover, the presumption that the dissection will be performed with scientific precision and will yield objectively valid results is totally repugnant to Kurzweil. All the remonstrations we have noted against historicism apply as well to the various attempts to establish an empirical, systematic method of arriving at the truth of literature. "Let it be noted, incidentally, that 'pure science' in the humanities is the kith and kin of 'pure poetry'; both dwell together at the threshold of nullity." Except that literature is, if possible, even more overtly antithetical to science than history.

The way of thought [of the sciences] is not the only way; there is another mode of thinking which is closer
to [that of] poetry, religion and certain kinds of philosophy, all of which are repulsive to [certain] types of scientists.

It is important to note, however, that this polemic against all formalist esthetics (not just Russian formalism or French structuralism, for example) was probably called forth by some specific developments within the field of criticism in Israel in the latter half of the sixties. The movement away from moral and ideological pre-occupations in criticism in favor of more "intrinsic" and inherently literary concerns, a movement which had occurred decades earlier in Europe and America, now began to stir in Israel. It is even possible to generalize, I think, that Kurzweil, having dominated Hebrew criticism for the previous quarter century, was a catalyst, or perhaps even the catalyst, for this shift. In a negative way we may gauge the strength of his influence precisely from the vigor with which the younger critics embraced the "new" methodologies of Benjamin Hrushovsky and his quarterly haSifrut. The positive result of this process, though, we may say, is that it forced Kurzweil to produce such late statements as "Literary Evaluation and the World of Values", "Between Anthropology and Literature", and "The Principles of Literary Interpretation", which are all prerequisites for digging out the roots of his critical theory, as this entire discussion testifies.

Nevertheless we ought not to lose sight of the fact that in its larger perspective Kurzweil's attack on the scientific aspirations of criticism (and, if I may so say it, the resultant antagonism, now more tacit than verbal, between the Kurzweil "school" at Bar-Ilan and the Hrushovsky disciples at Tel Aviv and the Hebrew Universities) is simply modern Hebrew criticism's version of a long-standing and still ongoing debate among all critical theorists over the nature of literary study.

In one of the most revealing statements of his critical position, Kurzweil says:

I have no doubt that hermeneutics, that is the art of literary interpretation, which is always essentially understanding and not recognition, is the heart of literary scholarship. Recognition is characteristic of the exact sciences. Understanding is the foundation of the humanities.

How does the critic "understand", "interpret", and "evaluate"? How does he go about, as Kurzweil mandates him to, encountering the world out of which the work springs and to which it, however tenuously, has reference?
Not, says Kurzweil, by imposing the facts or the methods of that world which lies beyond the work itself. Kurzweil repudiates what the practitioners of Geistesgeschichte do no less than he repudiates Marxist, Freudian or Jungian criticism.

Literary evaluation betrays itself when it overlooks the uniqueness of the artistic-esthetic phenomenon; it strays from its task completely when it reduces the literary text to a kind of laboratory for the testing of social, national, psychological, ideational, historic or biographical truths. Such elements are doubtless present in the literary work, but in and of themselves they do not comprise its distinctive essence and total value. [In the same way] the biased application of the historic-biographical approach, for example, or the method of reconstructing the experiential basis of poetry and literature precipitated an exaggeration of the opposite kind which separated, in an unnatural way, the literary work as a concrete esthetic phenomenon and its totality as a second [i.e., miniature] reality which always reflects the primary, external reality . . . .

In other words, Geistesgeschichte, psychologism and the other approaches that Wellek calls "extrinsic" are, in themselves, as inadequate to the critical task as are the "intrinsic" ones in themselves. What is wanted is an approach where the reader-critic puts everything else out of mind and encounters the text in its fullness as a "unique esthetic phenomenon". Kurzweil's terminology here is instructive. His description of the work as a "phenomenon" confirms the essentially Husserlian manner in which he relates to the literary text. The basis of Husserl's phenomenology is that it sought to gain an absolutely valid knowledge of things by suspending all pre-conceptions about them and putting all reality into brackets, as it were, so that the only manifestation of things that is given--their manifestation as phenomena--is confronted. Kurzweil's emphasis on the distinctive nature of the literary work presupposes a radical taking into account of its genesis and ontological status. We are, then, led back to some of the concerns raised above, and here again Dilthey is a key figure. Dilthey's point that the methods of science are not appropriate to the humanities is to Kurzweil in dire need of reiteration, and so is the path Dilthey laid open to literary critics--hermeneutics.

We may put the matter thus: if Erlebnis is the source of a literary work, then hermeneutics is the method of receiving, reading, interpreting and evaluating that work. Just as the former is an ontological and not a psychological experience, so the latter is not an intellectual or an analytical operation but a response out of one's whole being. The terms which contain Dilthey's conceptualization of the hermeneutic process are
Nacherleben and Verstehen. Palmer describes Verstehen as "the operation in which the mind grasps the 'mind' (Geist) of the other person". There can be little question that Dilthey's Verstehen is what Kurzweil is referring to and openly advocating in the important passage I cited above. (p. 54, bottom).

Poetic Erlebnis, for Dilthey, does not take place in a vacuum but in history, and the same is true of Verstehen. "Meaning always stands in a horizontal context that stretches into the past and into the future"; therefore meaning is created and understood from under a specific horizon. The consequent Geschichtlichkeit of literature allowed Dilthey to hope that through the hermeneutic process the critic would be able to arrive at "an objective relation between data (e.g. works of art) and the history of the human spirit". The literary work would thus be able to be seen as an individual manifestation of the socio-historical reality it reflected. A larger "hermeneutical circle" could thus be drawn between the work as the part and the age as a whole.

This idea was very quickly taken up by humanistic scholars in German universities in the decades following Dilthey's death—but in a way that Müller-Vollmer believes was completely untrue to what Dilthey himself intended. Of course, part of the reason for this is that Dilthey never wrote a complete treatment of any of the many subjects on which he wrote, and so his writings on literary theory, like everything else, exist only as "a grandiose collection of . . . fragments". The piecemeal manner in which his Gesammelte Schriften were put out (1913-1967) did not help either.

Muller-Vollmer suggests a deeper reason why Dilthey was misappropriated that is of interest here. In their attention to the parts, the nature of the whole—the philosophical basis underlying all Dilthey's work—was neglected by those who considered themselves his followers. I have already identified this basis as an adumbration of Husserl's phenomenology whereby Erlebnis and Verstehen must be seen to take place within the totality of a Gestalt that is formed by the artist, or the critic, before and beyond the traditional Cartesian dualism of the external world into subject and object. The literary work is seen as a total artistic structure composed of distinguishable elements of different strata, a view which Müller-Vollmer correctly says anticipates the phenomenological configuration later worked out by Husserl's pupil, Roman Ingarden. That is why in this view the dichotomy of literary study into "intrinsic" and "extrinsic"
approaches "without a prior investigation of its position in and relationship to the world of human experience" is fallacious. Moreover, Dilthey held no concept at all of "an all-powerful and ubiquitous spirit of the age" but instead was clear that "literary works do not derive their 'historical content' from the spirit of the age; it is rather through them and their creators that this spirit comes first into being". And "his [Dilthey's] own explicit warnings to apply the concept of 'world-view' with caution, if at all, to literature remained unheeded."

I dwell on these clarifications of Dilthey because they are, in a sense, a clarification of Kurzweil. Whatever else it is, hermeneutics is not Geistesgeschichte or the history of ideas but interpretation grounded in the concreteness of the literary text. This entire discussion, then, should shed light not only on Kurzweil's statement cited above but also on the following rejoinder he delivered to the ha-Sifrut coterie:

It is worth reminding these "innovators" of the work done from Dilthey and Schleiermacher through 19th century scholarship until Wolfgang Kayser, Staiger, Heidegger, Auerbach, Ingarden, Gadamer and others. And here in Israel also things have been done, especially in the most difficult domain of all, the domain of hermeneutic interpretation.

Kurzweil here leaves no doubt not only about whom he is talking but also about where he sees himself, correctly we are beginning to see, belonging as a critic.

Criticism is a creative act and, therefore, true criticism can only flow from a deep love of the created work. It is a giving of one's total self to art. This means that art and its interests transcend even human relationships. As Kurzweil answered Ernst Simon:

Neither you nor I is of importance . . . important only is the work of art; we simply do not count. Only the [artistic] undertaking itself is of interest, and if it is [judged to be] superfluous, its sentence should be summarily pronounced with every legitimate weapon.

Should rational argument prove inadequate in serving art by exposing presumption, hollowness and falsehood, then the critic is certainly mandated to unsheath irony and satire and do the job with them.

In this way Kurzweil comes around, in spite of the very different philosophical base on which his criticism rests, to the same view of the critic as a custodian and shaper of society's values that animates the work of such Anglo-American figures as
F. R. Leavis, Ivor Winters, Robert Penn Warren and Lionel Trilling.

Criticism, therefore, is at the same time both a static, conservative enterprise and a dynamic, revolutionary one. The critic "must preserve the eternal possessions of humankind, the moral values of the nation, from the din of political clamor", but he must also be resilient enough to be able to hear and identify new modes of artistic expression. It is just this dialectical nature of life that he must promulgate: that revolution and a conservative traditionalism are not in contradiction...[but] appear as two vital sides of a larger, unified event—the human spirit—in its faltering movement toward the wholeness of life.

But in doing all this the critic must have no illusion that he will succeed or that his influence will be very great. In the current crisis of culture he should not hold to a false optimism that parasitically lives off the future to pacify the furies of the present; let him rather be committed to the true optimism—a pessimism that hopes only for the least possible evil.

Such a stance clearly predicates the autonomy of criticism and, what is more, the strict independence of the critic from all "isms" be they political or philosophical.

Those who examine intellectual matters from under the secure shade of the political tree can be sure that whatever they discover will be affected by the kind of shade put forth by that particular tree. They forget that the tree is not the forest and that beyond its cover is a rich and variegated world, full of both light and shade. Sometimes the sheer fragrance of the tree is so intoxicating to those who sit under it that any new, strong scent different from the official, parochial one is considered putrid.

This statement has specific Israeli overtones, for until recently Israeli criticism was politicized to a much greater extent than in the United States. But the statement is valid as a general principle for Kurzweil: the subjectivity of criticism should not be dictated by mass or institutional criteria but by those determined by the free, responsible and sensitive individual.

This individualistic basis for criticism leads us to a final implication of the Kurzweilian view of criticism: it is inherently a lonely vocation. The true critic shares the fate of the true poet or novelist; as Thomas Mann puts it, "having pledged his allegiance to the word, the artist cannot dissociate himself from a certain opposition to reality, to society, to life". Even his bitterest enemies would not deny that Kurzweil attained to this. His utter isolation within the context of Israeli literary life,
particularly in his last years, is manifest even now to anyone who
studies the press and periodicals of the time.

Kurzweil himself probably viewed this with more equanimity.
He might have regarded his marginal position as the fulfillment of
the ideal Nietzsche set up for the critic. To Nietzsche, the
critic

is not a skeptic but has "a certainty of standards, a
conscious unity of method, sophisticated courage,
loneliness, and the ability to account for himself". . . . He teaches us to take time, to become quiet--to
become slow--as a goldsmith's art and connoisseurship of
the word.

Kurzweil as a Phenomenological Critic

In the preface to his second book of collected essays,
Sifrutenu ha hadashah; hemshekh o mahapekha?, as in all the
illuminating prefaces to all the volumes, Kurzweil tries to
establish that which unifies the various essays:

This book comprises a summary of my ideas regarding
the history of the problematics of modern Hebrew litera-
ture. For as long as I have been involved in literary
research I have regarded historical-biographical dis-
cussions strictly as preparation for the main and
decisive task of the scholar: the attempt to reveal the
intrinsic coherence of the work of art, that is, to
penetrate into its esthetic and intellectual experience.
Since every true work of art is a phenomenal vision of a
certain reality, it is perforce imbued, either knowingly
or unwittingly, with problems characteristic of that
reality which is disclosed. And since reality is not a
stable construct but one that changes from period to
period as each generation perceives it differently, so
similarly do artistic presentation and depiction of it
change in time.

The foregoing should sensitize us to the existence of a sub-stra-
tum of literary theory that lies beneath these compact sentences.
They ought to help prevent us from overlooking a fundamental
principle of Kurzweil's criticism that is here only tacitly
assumed: that the "intrinsic coherence of the work of art" is
yielded only by the text of that work. If the "unique phenome-
nological essence" that is the literary work is to be "uncovered"
or "penetrated into", the point of departure for these operations
is the text itself.

What is of interest here is the sense of the term "intrinsic
coherence" or "immanent coherence". It, too, is one of
Kurzweil's most frequently used critical terms, and no under-
standing of him can be complete without penetrating to its 

essence. Its implication is, if taken at face value, liable to 

mislead. Consider, for example, the following observation from 

Kurzweil's discussion of Bialik:

The preceding chapters of my treatment of Bialik have 

already posited a fundamentally new approach. . . . Our 

discussion of the personal poetry renders in an analy­

tic-intuitive way all the traditional methods of 

explaining his poetry completely antiquated. Our 

analysis obeys but one command: to be faithful to the 

intrinsic coherence of the poetry, which appears to us 

as a living and whole organon.

Such a statement of critical principle has overtones that seem 

very similar, if not identical, to New Criticism as Tate or Ransom 

formulated it. Indeed, setting aside for now the suspicious 
juxtaposition of the terms "analytic-intuitive", it is hard to 

escape the conclusion, both from this passage and from much of the 

Kurzweil corpus, that in his asseveration of the organic nature of 

the literary work and of the primacy of the text itself Kurzweil 

is the "new critic" of modern Hebrew literature.

Nevertheless, I believe we err if we perceive Kurzweil in 

these terms and leave it at that. While it is more than likely 

that he was completely conversant with the methods of New Criti­
cism, particularly with I. A. Richards, and while we cannot rule 

out its close attention to the text as one of the many influences 
on him, it is clear to me that ultimately Kurzweil takes his stand 
in an approach that has some serious disagreements with Richards, 
namely that of phenomenological hermeneutics. For one thing, 

though hermeneutics agrees with New Criticism that the individual 

work must be the starting point of any literary analysis, it 

emphasizes the contextual relation of the parts to the whole, and 
it seeks to read the work in relation to the rest of the author's 
corpus. Second, there is a difference between the two approaches 
over the autonomy of the individual work in relation to everything 
around and outside it, i.e., the reader, the artist, the external 
world and values.

This dissimilarity relates to an underlying perceptual 
difference over the very "mode of existence" of the literary work. 
And this in turn flows from a fundamental difference in episte­
mology.

Oxenhandler has documented this in an excellent brief study 
of the varying philosophical foundations that underly American New 

Criticism and French phenomenological criticism. He notes that 

New Criticism, to the extent that it has worked out a clear
philosophical basis in response to Ransom's call for ontological criticism, has done so largely in Aristotelian and Thomistic terms. Oxenhandler calls this basis "realism" because it construes reality, i.e., the real world, as composed of nothing other than real objects. What energizes the work of such critics as Ransom, Tate, Wimsatt and Brooks is the perception of the literary work primarily as an object. That it is an object sui generis and how it attained this status are relatively unimportant considerations; what is important is precisely its existence as object with, like all objects, its own properties. In this case the properties are such concrete things as structure, images and symbols. The task of criticism is to see how the work is put together and held together, and that is why, to perform its task, New Criticism dissects the "verbal icon" with close, astute textual analysis that has no recourse to anything other than "the work itself". This is the only method that is adequate and faithful to the work as an autonomous object.

In phenomenological criticism the emphasis is on the work as an intentional work. It is a human creation to be interpreted and heard, not an object to be dissected and analyzed. Art is not so much craft as disclosure. This is because

For the phenomenological critics, the poem does not have an independent existence. It is simply part of consciousness; and in the measure that it appears to us, within consciousness, it has being—it is.

The critic's relationship to the text, then, is not as an "I" to an "It" but very much as an "I" to a "Thou", to put it in Buberian terms. The work does not speak by being cut to pieces in order for the analytical reader to see how and why it is made as it is; one must enable a work to speak by knowing how to listen, both to what is spoken in the words and what is left unsaid but still present behind the words.

This means that what obtains between the critic and the text is no less important than that between the artist and the text. The distinctions between author, critic and text, so important to Anglo-American criticism are, to the phenomenological critic, "artificial and untenable", and "unverifiable within [t]his frame of reference". In fact, criticism itself in this perspective is an unverifiable act. It strives not for a demonstrable, empirically arrived at explication, "the correct reading", but for a creative experience no less profound and engaged than that of the poet or novelist. Such criticism eschews "the heresy of
paraphrase" no less strongly than New Criticism, but at the same time it unabashedly scorns the latter's pretensions at "objectivity".91

I cannot maintain that Kurzweil carried out all his criticism with full consciousness of this epistemological differential. On the whole, though, it is within the cognitive structure of phenomenology that Kurzweil implicitly relates to the works he discusses. The emphasis on the "analytic-intuitive way" noted above82 now comes to the fore. If the experience of the poet, while not identical with the poem, is nonetheless related to the poem, it can only be recovered by a subjective act of intuition. This is what Kurzweil means when he says that the real challenge of criticism is "to grapple with the demands of literary interpretation in the true sense of hermeneutics".92

Intuition means subjectivity but, for Kurzweil, it is the subjectivity borne of an attempt to penetrate to an objective knowledge of things. That is the whole point of the phenomenology that Husserl developed. Believing that Kant's hope of attaining to a knowledge of "the thing in itself" was still unrealized, and convinced that all we really have to go on are phenomena, Husserl tried to institute a method that would enable the Kantian dream to be fulfilled. All reality would be doubted, just as Descartes had begun; all metaphysical and other prior definitions and qualifications of the nature of things would be suspended; existence, in short, would be "put into parentheses"—until only the aspects of things that are perceived by consciousness, constituted "by consciousness, are true and immediately valid". In other words, reality is reduced to its most undeniable nucleus: the knower to pure consciousness ("transcendental subjectivity") and the known to its purified essence as intuited by the knower.93 Husserl speaks specifically of "the intuition of essences" (Wesenserschauung),94 and it is highly likely that Kurzweil's use of the term "intuition" in his declarations of critical position connotes and implies the process of phenomenological reduction (Epoche).

The interesting feature of this method is its claim that such intuitive knowledge, subjective as it is, is at the same time objective, as objectively valid, in fact, as any cognition of the natural sciences. This claim is made not only by Husserl, who put forth phenomenology as a discipline of scientific rigor, but even by his pupil Heidegger and other followers who abandoned all scientific pretensions.95 The knowledge is objective because things can only be known to the extent that they are intentionally constituted by consciousness.
If an object is genuinely given as object, it is given as object for a subject; and thus the subject, too, is given; it is a datum of consciousness. Just as there is no consciousness (act of consciousness) without its objective reference, so there can be no object without its subjective reference.

Kurzweil knows this, which is why he both never denied the inherent subjectivity of his readings and at the same time resolutely proclaims them as a "penetration to the essence of the work". This is what he means when he says that it is possible to find no absolute "truth" in a text but rather "it is only possible to reach the maximum proximity to the inner truth of a text and no more". Friedlander observes that in Kurzweilian criticism one "draws near to the work", one does not "master it", and on this basis he suggests that we must understand and appreciate the intellectual responsibility of Kurzweil's life-long practice of titling so many of his critical essays "Notes on . . . .".

Friedlander documents what Kurzweil was wont to say to his students: "The literary interpreter must enclose himself in parentheses and listen with maximum acuteness and alertness to the sounds that well up from the work." The indispensibility of this basic methodological step--it is better described as a mental act--is repeated frequently throughout Kurzweil's writings. In reading Bialik's crucial poem "Metei midbar", for example, after all biographism and psychologism have been purged

There is no way left to us other than the rapt attentiveness to the enchantment of its sounds that results from utter reverence for the mysteries of the work. These are the faithful teachers that will never disappoint us and will show us how to see this great poem as an important part of that larger artistic unity that is the poetry of Bialik.

In this way the work is penetrated--not by brusquely pushing into it but by allowing it to disclose itself. Such "penetration" should be seen as Kurzweil's appropriation, in however inchoate a way, of the phenomenological reduction in which the irreducible essence of the work is intuited. It is in this framework, after the essence has been apprehended, that the "analysis" Kurzweil speaks of takes place. This involves the whole panoply of critical concerns: for theme and motif, style, image and symbol. Kurzweil examines them all. But in any case analysis is not done to carve up the work but to relate the elements investigated to the intuited essence. In this way is the "intrinsic coherence" of the work illuminated.
The hermeneutic nature of this operation now becomes apparent. The mysterious process that is understanding comes about in the dialectical, circular way that Schleiermacher described. The intuitive "grasp of the whole" throws light on the parts, yet we never really know the whole before we know the parts. An early aphorism of Schleiermacher states that understanding replicates precisely the way a child grasps the meaning of a new word: the sentence structure and the total context of meaning are the guides for the child and are the systems of interpretation for a general hermeneutics.101

But for Kurzweil the boundaries of the "hermeneutical circle" are never circumscribed by the individual work under examination. The very end of the two sentences cited above about "Metei midbar" hints at this.99 Kurzweil, I have determined, is not a New Critic.

Literary criticism [needs to] attain to that approach necessary for a true understanding of a work of art [by seeing it] within the totality of every great writer's work . . . that is, to see the individual artistic phenomenon also synoptically in the context of the oeuvre in its wholeness.102

This is a great methodological principle of all of Kurzweil's criticism.103 It is here enunciated in regard to Agnon but it is valid for every novelist and poet Kurzweil chooses to discuss. Just as the Sefer hama'asim sheds light on the entire Agnon corpus, so the seemingly different "personal poems" of Bialik can and must be integrally related to the earlier "national" poems; and, in the same way, such disparate works of Tshernichovski as the sonnet cycle 'Al hadam and 'Ama dedahava can be shown to be parts of a larger whole.

Nor does the application of the principle stop here. "In grasping the artistic phenomenon, as in the apprehension of all the events of life, the Gestalt, holistic approach to things is apparent to me."104 All reality is thus construed as one large Gestalt. Therefore, what Kurzweil calls the individual figura, be it the image or symbol in a poem or a novel, be it the single poem, play or novel, or be it the entire corpus of the poet, playwright or the novelist--all cannot but be related to their context, to their cultural field, to the larger whole to which they belong,105 like the words of a sentence. Here we see, from another angle, why Kurzweil feels that modern literature presages the decline of culture. In its increasing tendency to turn in upon itself, modern literature breaks down the distinction between individual image and the holistic background.106 It offers, in
other words, no hermeneutic circle to the critic. Since it refers to nothing other than itself, culture and values have ceased to exist for it. Mallarmé has been corroborated: "The words are all there is", and a century later, art has actualized what Flaubert envisioned in his own Bouvard et Pecuchet: "Je prépare mon vomissement." 107

We have thus arrived at a determination of the rudiments of Kurzweil's attitude to the literary text and how he reads that text. Its hermeneutical as well as its phenomenological nature should be clear. The conjunction of the two in his criticism now enables me to state what I see lying at the heart of all of Kurzweil's work. The intuition that penetrates to the essence of a literary work, its transcendental reduction, is, because that work is part of a total culture, ipso facto identical with the intuition of the essence of the total culture, its transcendental reduction. Reality as a total Gestalt is in effect reduced phenomenologically, and its parts are all understood and interpreted in accordance with this reduction. The "intrinsic coherence" of a single work thus partakes of the "intrinsic coherence" of all culture. Here we may pull together virtually everything set forth in this chapter. Barukh Kurzweil intuited that the essence of man, as man, is to live as a created being in relation to the Absolute of a concerned God. Modernism in western culture, therefore, is essentially the crisis in belief and in values that the breakdown of this relationship has precipitated. A work of modern literature, for this reason, reduces itself to being or showing some aspect of this breakdown. These are the foundations of Kurzweil's critical monism.

To be sure, this approach to the literary text and the cultural theory that underlies it are not original with Kurzweil. They connect securely to the critical work of such European figures as Erich Auerbach, Nikolai Hartmann and the theoretical positions developed by Roman Ingarden and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Were I to pursue this matter in ever wider circles, I would be able to show broad resemblances between Kurzweil and a host of other kindred spirits in European criticism: Emil Staiger and Max Kommerell; Georges Poulet, Gaston Bachelard, Sartre and other "critics of consciousness". This would run the risk, however, of obscuring Kurzweil's own uniqueness. The influences of the Israeli milieu in which he flourished as well as the Hebrew literary tradition in which he was so deeply involved must be regarded as decisive in the shaping of this uniqueness.
Now, if this is the cognitive structure within which his work takes place, it should be read and evaluated in the same context. This implies that we must learn to know quite precisely what to expect from such work, what kind of questions to ask of it and, conversely, what not to look for in it. Not having looked yet at the practical criticism, I can here state what the expectations and questions are only in general terms.

For one thing, we must be prepared not to be put off by the grandiosity of the claims Kurzweil makes.

With the bracketing or doubting of reality, the critic's language acquires a new mission. There is less need for the critic to be humble, since he is, in a very real sense, co-creator of the literary work. Phenomenological criticism... manifests a kind of Hegelian pride, a belief in its own omnipotence.

For this reason such ingredients of realistic cognition as meticulous research, elaborate documentation, analytical footnotes are all outside the purview of such criticism. One looks in vain for them in Kurzweil. Rigor is an aspect of passion, not vice versa. This is something that very few of Kurzweil's critics understood.

More importantly, it is quite beside the point to accuse Kurzweil, as many do, of ignoring the text, of not getting "the correct reading", or of not analyzing the literary object. For Kurzweil there is no object to analyze, no distinct "correct reading" to get; there is only knowing how to "read correctly". Like Gadamer, he "is concerned not so much with understanding more correctly (and thus with providing norms for valid interpretation) as with understanding more deeply, more truly." I would add "more authentically". Criticism as hermeneutics is, for Kurzweil, not "the logic of validation" but a "theory of understanding". Its energy is directed at providing not the "truth to reality" but "truth about reality".

This being the case, the limitations of this approach, what it cannot do, are now properly seen. The basic problem is one not of validity—that is now construed in existential terms—but of verification. This is the fundamental weakness of all phenomenology. "Transcendental subjectivity" comes perilously close to "transcendental solipsism". What guarantee is there that the essence of a work as intuited by one critic, however supervised he may be by thorough training and wide reading in the humanities and social sciences, will be the same as that intuited by his equally responsible and experienced counterpart? It is as impossible to achieve an analysis "free from suppositions", as Husserl had hoped, as it is to put the world (including oneself as critic)
into parentheses as one confronts that world's other beings and things (including a literary text). When all is said and done, in literary criticism as well, the phenomenological method . . . is not one of "proof"; rather it is one of description, wherein it is hoped that others will see things the same way—knowing subjectively that they are wrong if they do not.113

The only possible basis for verification—and it is a dubious one for criticism—is a replication of the same reductive process within the framework of the phenomenological method. We can appreciate the claim of Eugen Fink, who Husserl himself regarded as among his best interpreters, that "it is impossible to understand what phenomenology is without being oneself a phenomenologist".114

This is hardly to suggest that the results of such criticism, Kurzweil's in particular, are to be dismissed out of hand. What they might mean and what this body of criticism "accomplishes" I shall be better able to speak of only at the end of these deliberations.