Céline and the aesthetics of hyperbole: Style, points, parataxis and other literary devices

Alexander Styhre

abstract

Organization theory is, like any other scientific program, also a form of literary project. Being able to express new ideas, images, or beliefs with the help of a concept, metaphor, or model is an accomplishment in its own right. Céline, the pen name of Louis-Ferdinand Destouches, was one of the greatest French writers of the twentieth century. Céline was part of a long-standing literary tradition that made the hyperbole a central literary technique, combining sophisticated French prose with a spoken form of language, the language of rage and mockery. Céline's famous 'three points of suspension' enabled him to present the social world as unfolding on a single plane wherein different events are connected horizontally rather than vertically. For organization theorists, the literary style of Céline is appealing because it denies any innate values and qualities but rather seeks to report what is being observed without explaining it. Appropriating some of his literary techniques and devices may thus help to free organization theory from representational epistemologies, making organization theory writing a more 'passionate' (i.e. an intense and expressive) pursuit.

Introduction

> I am not a man of messages, I am not a man of ideas, I am a man of style.
> Céline (2003:10)

> Peut-être Céline demeurera seul de nous tous.
> Jean-Paul Sartre, in 1946

> Hast du Verstand und ein Herz,
> so zeige nur eines von beiden,
> Beides verdammen Sie dir,
> zeigest Du beides zugleich
> Friedrich Hölderlin

'If you have brains and a heart, show only one or the other, for you will get credit for neither should you show both at once', the German poet Hölderlin advises (cited in Hirschman, 1998: 104). No one practiced such separation between emotionality and intellect more effectively than Louis-Ferdinand Destouches (1894-1961), better known under his *nom de plume* Céline (a name he took from his mother and grandmother), who

was the most important French writer besides Marcel Proust during the twentieth century. Céline is pure fury, pure emotionality. Throughout his life he was, in his own view, '*l'artiste contre tout*', the artist against everything. While the modern condition, shaped by colonialism, genocide, world wars, environmental destruction, and exploitation of humans, but also human accomplishment and advancement, have been accounted for by, for example, the Frankfurt School theorists (most prominently Theodor Adorno) in terms of disappointment and cynicism, Céline represents something different – a staunch rejection of mankind *tout court*. While Adorno tends to deplore a loss of bourgeois values and norms regarding, say, musical preferences and *savoir-faire,* there is absolutely no such elements of nostalgia in Céline's account. Céline's nihilism is complete, non-negotiable, hard and impenetrable. Being part of a long-standing tradition of literature that makes the *hyperbole* a key literary technique, beginning with the Menippean satire of the ancient period and continuing with the genre of romantic grotesque in the medieval period (Bakhtin, 1981; 1968), Céline needs to be understood as a modernizer. As opposed to conventional bourgeois literature, Celine seeks not to capture any higher values, morals, or purposes in life in his texts, but rather to portray life as he perceives it: as totally meaningless, as a farce, as a violation of all standards and norms, as a scandal. When reading Céline's work, it is easy to envisage a full-fledged cynic, a social outcast, frantically jotting down literary passages in his chamber late at night after a full day's work in his medical practice.

This paper attempts to position Céline's literary style in a specific tradition of literature and points to some of the merits of this style and how they can be translated into organization theory writing (see e.g. Beyes, 2009; Czarniawska, 2009; Kornberger, Rhodes and ten Bos, 2006; Land, 2005; De Cock, 2000; Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, 1994). More specifically, it points to the merits (or at least possibilities) of using hyperbole as a literary technique to advance alternative views of organization. Organization theory is here treated as a literary genre having its own literary traditions and literary tropes and styles. At the same time, organization theory remains open to external influences and, as the legitimate style of writing changes over time, new influences and resources are brought into the discourse. Therefore, organization theory needs to address literature as being an important source of influence when inscribing and writing organization.

This paper is organized as follows. First, some biographical notes on Céline are provided, followed by a discussion of his literary style. Thereafter, the uses of hyperbole in both popular management writing and more scholarly literature will be addressed. Finally, some concluding remarks regarding the significance of Céline's literary works and their importance for organization theory will be made.

Céline's style

Life and influences

Most biographers emphasize Céline's anti-Semitism and his general anti-social behaviour (Hewitt, 2003; Hindus, 1997;), and some commentators see a writer with few literary qualities and whose jokes demand 'a pretty weird sense of humor' (Winegarten,

2001: 290). As Komins (2004: 85) rightly remarks, 'Céline's biography haunts his literary production'. In contrast to this view, Céline served most of his life as a general practitioner in the working class suburbs of Paris where he cared for the sick and the penniless. Not accepting any payment from patients with little or no money and paying for the medicine for paupers from his own pocket, *docteur* Destouches was especially renowned for his gentle care with children and the elderly. The literary figure Céline may have been portrayed as a nihilist and a monstrous being, but *docteur* Destouches served his community. Living a remarkably eventful life, ending in the early 1960s in the suburb of Meudon just outside of Paris, Céline's biography is a history book of the European twentieth century including many countries, events, occurrences and personalities (for instance Mussolini, who Céline met when working for the League of Nations in Geneva in the 1920s, and Mata Hari, whose visa application Céline handled when working for the French authorities in London during World War I). Still, it is not being part of the European twentieth century experience that makes Céline a remarkable figure but rather his ability to capture the *Zeitgeist* of the most dramatic and blood-stained century to date, the century in which the potentiality of human evil for the first time was accompanied by unprecedented technological possibilities, leading to the first industrialized genocides in history. Prior to Stalin's great terror in the 1930s and the Nazi Holocaust in the 1940s, Céline, a decorated World War I veteran, expressed his great contempt for the state of mankind. More specifically, Céline manages to bring a new element into the tradition he belongs to: force.

Céline wrote and spoke like a cynic. He wrote to 'protest against the horror and meaninglessness of modern life – actually, indeed of life', as George Orwell (1962: 15) said. With other noted contemporaries, such as Henry Ford, Céline shared anti-Semite beliefs, although the term 'Jew' in his texts (for example, in the notorious three pamphlets published in the late 1930s) denotes all non-French influences, as Ekerwald (2004) suggests. Céline embodied great many paradoxes: as a man of the world who travelled to Africa and North America and worked for international organizations, he still maintained deeply provincial attitudes and spoke proudly of his Breton family background; he was a cynic who dedicated his career to curing the poor and the sick; as a literary celebrity, he despised the intellectual and academic elites – Céline speaks in condescending terms about the 'Goncourtiers', the literati who aspired to win the prestigious Goncourt Prize – and maintained an aggressive attitude towards virtually everyone. Céline is by any standard an enigma and therefore he is also an immensely fascinating figure. If we judged people on basis of their acts and accomplishments rather than their statements and declarations, such an analysis would be beneficial for Céline. Still, one must judge the literature produced and not the character of the writer. Céline was apparently not exactly a charming character, dressed like a *clochard* and with dirty nails, always ready to share a poisonous remark – his reply to Sartre's accusation of anti-Semitism is reputed as a masterpiece in public flogging – but his two first novels *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932, English translation 1934) and *Death on the Installment Plan* (1936, English translation 1938) are important modernist literary works.

The post-war period is filled with literature that is strongly indebted to Céline's work. All the beatniks and Ken Kesey owe Céline a lot and Charles Bukowski's *The Post Office* (1971) and Michel Houellebecq's *Whatever* (1999) may be seen as following in

Céline's tradition of cynical observations of everyday life and work. If we make Menippean satire the common thread in this stream of literature, then Thomas Pynchon also needs to be brought into the group of followers of Céline (Best and Kellner, 2001: 25; Herman, 1999; Ames, 1990). Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), one of the most complex and innovative literary works in the post-World War II period, clearly shares many themes with Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. While Céline's novel is located at the first of the 'Great Wars' and Pynchon's in the second, the war is envisaged as a zone of totally unexpected and curious events and occurrences; perhaps the war is the modern carnival, the world turned upside down. Just as Céline's prose is overwhelming in its ability to flow across the pages, so is Pynchon capable of orchestrating stories that are 'unbelievable', yet make sense in all their absurdity.

Style, points, parataxis

Céline's scandalous success *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, his debut novel, was nominated for the 1932 Goncourt Prize but for some highly debated reason lost to what today is a totally forgotten work. Open up *Voyage au bout de la nuit* – for Komins (2004) a highly innovative mix of parody, *Bildungsroman*, and picaresque novel – and the reader notices from the first line that this is something entirely new: it is a statement, a declaration of independence, a window to the future (see Sturrock [1990] for an overview). 'The novel's [*Voyage au bout de la nuit*] innovative syntax, eclectic vocabulary, and, especially, its frenzied pace present difficulties to readers who are accustomed to cohesive modes of writing', Komins (2004: 75-76) remarks. The novel's very opening testifies to a new form of writing, breaking with conventions in affirming a spoken form of prose:

> Here's how it started. I'd never said a word. Not a word. It was Arthur Ganate that made me speak up. Arthur was a friend from med school. So we meet on the Place Clichy. It was after breakfast. He wants to talk to me. I listen. 'Not out here', he says, 'Let's go!' We go in. And there we were. (Céline, 1952: 3)

> Ça a débuté comme ça. Moi, j'avais jamais rien dit. Rien. C'est Arthur Ganate qui m'a fait parler. Arthur, un étudiant, un carabin, lui aussi, un camarade. On se recontre donc place Clichy. C'était après le dejeuner. Il vaut me parler. Je l'ecoute. «Restons pas dehors! qu'il me dit. Rentrons» Je rentre avec lui. Voilà. (Céline, 1932: 12)

Luce (2006) emphasizes that Céline's style of writing, from the outset, divided the readership into admirers and adversaries:

> His [Céline's] was described alternately as a breath of fresh air, a rancid effluvium, a fresco of satire. It was once mean and gross with flashes of dignity, cynically sincere a net in which human emotions were caught, an appropriate form with which to discuss the stench of human wretchedness. Impoverished in syntax, it was a reaction of formalism. (Luce, 2006: xiv)

The publication of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* was a major literary event.

Thinking of Céline as being not an entirely isolated figure but as being part of a long tradition of writing that makes the hyperbole its key literary mechanism (Ekerwald, 2004), then this literary technique should be examined in greater detail. In Julia Kristeva's (1982) study of the 'abject', the embarrassing or shameful element that is part of any subject and that cannot be dispensed with even though there is a strong sense

of shame on part of the subject, Céline's notorious anti-Semitic pamphlets published in the late 1930s and early 1940s are examined. In Céline, Kristeva (1982) sees something 'nocturnal', the fall of man, the end of things – a recognition of the abject. One of the mechanisms in Céline's style of writing is what Kristeva refers to as 'points of suspension' or 'exclamation points', points that connect sentences into a serial narrative where one sentence continues without being interrupted…Céline here manages to uphold a restless and continuous flow, almost exhausting the reader…there are no proper periods, only points of suspensions… one sentence leads to another…the text become frantic…it twists and turns…sentences become shorter…like some distorted version of James Joyce or Virginia Wolff's works, capturing a 'stream of consciousness', what William James (1890/1950) referred to as 'the stream of thought'. The suspension points serve to produce an image of continual change and lack of places sheltered from the frenzy of life; it is a most effective literary innovation. '*Mes trois points sont indispensables*', Céline declares (2006: 107) – 'my three points are indispensable'. Komins (2004: 67-68) notes:

> One can almost imagine the nod of a head, a grimace, a sigh, or a wiggling finger where the *trois points* appear. When caught in the written clamor and furious pace of his texts, the *trois points* bind us to the page. We might even conceive of them as a type of emotional glue that sutures us to the madness that constitute Céline's written world. (Komins, 2004: 67-68)

We may here compare to how Marcel Proust conceives of the colons in St. Luke's Gospel, serving as marks where the writer still lingers on in the text, similar to Céline's three dots:

> Often, in St. Luke's Gospel, when I come upon the 'colons' which punctuate it before each of the almost canticle-like passages with which it is strewn, I have heard the silence of the worshipper who has just stopped from reading out loud so as to intone the verses following, like a psalm reminding him of the older psalms in the Bible. (Proust, 2008: 88)

The three points of suspension thus keep the reader from derailment, bringing the narrative forward. Céline wants to fuse force and emotionality into language. In one of his letters to Milton Hindus, his 'pseudo-biographer', Céline makes this announcement:

> '*Re-sensitize the language so that it pulses more than it reasons* – that was my goal. I'm a stylist, a colorist with words; but not like Mallarmé, searching out words with extremely rare meanings, I want ordinary words, everyday words. Vulgarity and sexuality have no part in all this – they are just accessories'. (Céline, cited in Hindus, 1997: 93)

Céline is thus capable of making language a medium of *life*, not of reason. In accomplishing this, language is no longer neatly separated into discourses, but rather these discourses are brought together, being folded into one another, replicating, overdubbing, becoming multiple: 'In many ways the uniqueness (and perhaps the genius) of Céline's work revolves around this extraordinary linguistic mélange – the ways in which each text rather seamlessly incorporates widely divergent levels of discourse', Komins (2004: 67) suggests. Céline is, in his own mind, not a man of ideas but of *style*, seeking to make language a matter of life, of flesh and blood, rather than stale reason.

Lanham (2003) distinguishes between *hypotaxis* and *parataxis*, wherein the former style of writing makes causal connections between two statements: 'X in terms of Y'. For

instance, the sentence, 'her face was wet because she had been crying' is hypotactic. Parataxis, on the other hand, '[l]eaves connections – causal, temporal, whatever – up to the reader', Lanham (2003: 43) says. Julius Caesar's statement '*Vini, Vidi, Vici*' is paratactic. Caesar does not say 'When I arrived at the scene of the battle, I made a thorough analysis of the situation, ultimately helping us defeat the enemy'. Instead, the reader is given an account of three discrete events (arrival, perception, victory) from which the reader/listener must create his or her own storyline. Hypotaxis is the style of more elaborate literature while parataxis is, Lanham (2003) suggests, more closely associated with the cognition of small children, who see discrete events but do not necessarily make causal connections between them (see e.g. Vygotsky, 1978). Céline's uses of the three points of suspension rest on a paratactic style: a series or flow of events that are not ever fully causally connected or understood as interrelated events. It is a style that *points to* events but does not seek to make sense out of them or anchor them in any meaningful analytical framework (such as what Jean-François Lyotard calls the *grands récits*, social progress, the scientific domination of nature, liberation of man, in brief the grand narrative of the Enlightenment tradition). Céline is a skeptic; events unfold in time and space but thinking of them as having some inner meaning or being interrelated is a frivolity, a self-deception. From this perspective, Céline's skepticism is paratactic.

This flow of impressions in combination with the aesthetic of hyperbole is Céline's contribution. While hyperbole is of Greek origin, the points of suspensions are his own innovation, surprisingly little attended to in the literature. Perhaps this is what Céline will be credited for in the future, namely his ability to innovate a new literary device of the same importance as, for example, the semi-colon or the hyphen.

Organization theory literature and the hyperbole

Lanham (2003: 1) points to the Platonist tradition of thinking, reinvigorated by Newtonian science, as the principal reason for us believing that '[o]nly ideas matter, not the words that convey them'. Says Marcel Proust (2008: 119): 'Style is not an embellishment as certain people think, it is not even a master of technique, it is – like the colours with painters – a quality of vision, the revelation of the private universe that each one of us can see and which others cannot see'. Elkins (1996) is also critical of the common sense view regarding any reasonably complex discourse as being filled with unnecessary 'jargon':

> Stephen Hawking's history of time and James Glieck chaos theory…are not just simpler versions of the original sciences but entirely different enterprises that make different claims and lead to different questions. The same may be said of omitting the jargon that makes some texts in humanities opaque: when that is done, the subject itself changes, and a readable version of Martin Heidegger or Jacques Lacan. (Elkins, 1996: 14)

Style matters: it makes a difference in terms of collapsing the iron curtain between ideas and 'the words that convey them'. Style is instead the 'quality of vision' of the artist. 'Writing, embedded within an entire economy of signs, is...constitutive of meaning rather than a passive medium for restoring the presence of language to thought', Lenoir (1998: 5) says, discussing Jacques Derrida's philosophy, questioning the idea of a

value-neutral and transparent language. Without style, in other words, there is no proper thinking.

In the next two sections, the uses of hyperbole in popular management texts and the potential of using hyperbole in scholarly accounts of organizations will be discussed, pointing to the significance of style in making an argument and pursuing specific images of organization.

Popular management writing: Hyperbole as rhetoric

One domain where the tradition of hyperbole has been carefully maintained and given a key role is that of popular management books, the so-called 'management guru genre' (see e.g. Collins, 2003; Clark and Greatbatch, 2002; Jackson, 2001; Case, 1999; Grint and Case, 1999). The genre of management guru literature has a long tradition (see e.g. Gilbreth, 1911; Gantt, 1913; Sloan, 1964) but it would be adequate to say that the period from the 1980s until the end of the 1990s is the golden age for popular management books. This is also the period in which neoliberal doctrines and the belief in the market as the principal economic mechanism take on their hegemonic role. Alan Liu (2004) makes the connection between management guru literature (and more specifically Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*) and new age (quasi)religious beliefs. The 1980s are generally perceived as conservative times but they were almost revolutionary in questioning the role of the welfare state. However, it was no 'revolt of the people' but of 'capital' (Duménil and Lévy, 2004). Enterprising behaviour and a firm belief in both oneself and underlying economic rationalities regulating the economy and, increasingly, society were of central importance. New Age teachings instructed that one should always turn inward to find the strength to move on; what works for me is right, and no clergy has the authority to sell me their version of God or other divinities. The particular management writing genre that was produced during this period of time, perhaps best represented by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1982), a book aimed at redeeming the American capitalism after falling short against the Japanese on a number of key performance indicators, did not spare any resources to boost self-confidence, strengthen beliefs, and create enthusiasm among the managerial cadres and stakeholders. Thomas Frank's *One Market Under God* (2000), a critique of what he refers to as 'market populism', points to the conspicuous hyperbole and exaggerations of the texts in the genre of popular management writing:

> Anybody who had any experience with the management theory industry can tell similar stories: of quotes and dates widely misplaced, of an alarming and misinformed credulity about science, of anecdotes that prove nothing, of patently absurd syllogisms, of meaningless diagrams and homemade master narratives. (Frank, 2000: 176)

Rather than pursuing a more integrated argument that seeks to make sense out of complex managerial challenges, much of the popular management literature offers, Frank (2000: 177) suggests, 'theories of art and learning so elementary they could have been lifted from the back of cereal boxes'. Hammer and Champy, the management guru writers who advance the concept of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) certainly use such alarmist hyperbole to state their point in their best-selling *Reengineering the Corporation* (1993):

> America's largest corporations – even the most successful and promising among them – *must* embrace and apply the principles of business reengineering, or they will be eclipsed by the greater success of those companies that do. (Hammer and Champy, 1993: 1-2)

In Michael Hammer's *The Agenda* (2001), a book seeking to further advance the idea of the process-based organization developed in *Reengineering the Corporation*, hyperbole is the predominant literary style. First, Hammer presents his view of the new customer-driven economy as something entirely new for American companies:

> Executives of the most powerful companies in the world now tremble before their independent and demanding customers. They know customers have the power and that they will use it. Welcome to the customer economy. (Hammer, 2001: 5)

In Hammer's view, virtually everything is wrong with American corporations and his ranting makes use of many horror stories from his work as a consultant. For Hammer, very little is competently conducted in American companies:

> Departmental managers are narrowly focused on their own turf, while top managers are too far away from the actions to comprehend the work being done on the front lines. (*ibid.*: 56)

> Errors proliferate in a processless environment. Sharing neither a common vision nor a common terminology, departments miscommunicate, leading to mistakes that require rework or that alienate customers or both. The absence of process also makes companies clumsy and sluggish. (*ibid.*: 56)

Hammer knows that selling his arguments demands a kind of storytelling that portrays major corporations as being in free fall, only to be saved by savvy management consultants who know – in contrast to managers – what to do to turn around corporations on the verge of collapsing. This hatred of large corporations, at the heart of the shareholder value ideology (Ezzamel, Willmott and Worthington, 2008; Engelen, 2002) developed within the neoliberal political and economic doctrine (see Ho, 2009: 104-106) is what propels Hammer's (2001) argument. It is a text filled with sarcasm, emotionality, and hyperbole, all aimed at envisioning American industry as weak and degenerated. In this respect, Hammer's *The Agenda* is representative of the popular management guru literature genre. While Céline's authors are protesting against the meaninglessness of life, the popular management guru literature is protesting against something entirely different, namely that which is perceived as poor managerial practice and substandard financial performance. Céline's discourse is ethical in portraying the predicament of modernity, but popular management guru literature is overtly political, advancing the neoliberal agenda: market orientation, customer power, anti-bureaucratization, and shareholder value as the overarching corporate governance principle.

Hyperbole both regarding the challenges facing Western industry and the benefits of using prescribed managerial methods are central rhetorical elements in the popular management literature. In addition, when management practices fail to deliver expected results, it is management and not the practices per se that is too blame. Without paying homage to Céline or any other authors for that matter, popular management guru writing is a literary genre shaped by hyperbole and exaggeration.

Scholarly writings on organization: Hyperbole as style

Czarniawska (1997: 144) associates rhetoric filled with hyperbole and the abundance of *pathos* with political speech: 'Hyperbole is favored: threats are described as black or sinister, while promising developments are depicted in all the colors of the rainbow'. Scholarly writing is, on the contrary, commonly associated with the very absence of pathos, with de-emotionalized and distanced vocabularies accounting for what has been observed. The scholarly tradition of what Robert Boyle called 'modest witnessing', joint observations of experiments, prohibits any overtly emotional accounts of experimental findings (Shapin, 1994: 124). Hans-Jörg Rheinberger sees this gradual erasure of the actor from the domain of scientific authorship as a relatively recent phenomenon:

> All of them [scientific genres] avoid the 'I' as nominative case, and often even the pluralistic we. This was not generally yet the case before 1900. Today, we find no 'I' anymore in these texts. Their grammatical structure suggests that the facts of the objects speak to the initiated laboratory worker or to a wider circle of readers. All along the above-mentioned authority gradient is a strict commitment to the passive voice, from which there is no escape. The supposed commitment to objectivity is built right into the language in which the scientist is allowed to speak to his or her fellows and to a wider audience Therefore, and in a certain sense, authorship as a warranty to speak appears to be, in scientific writing, always already crossed out. (2003: 311)

The 'active voice' of the scholar is today, Rheinberger suggests, 'only permitted at the outer fringes of the spectrum of writing science', in historical reflections and anecdotes, in congressional openings and commemorations, and in scientific autobiographies. Under these conditions, Rheinberger says, 'the scientist may take the freedom to expose his or her personal view, something that has no place in the regular canon of scientific writing' (*ibid.*). The ideal of scientific writing is thus one of modesty, objectivity, and necessity: the scientist, when going public, as French molecular biologist and Nobel laureate François Jacob argues:

> 'describe[s] their own activity as a well-ordered series of ideas and experiments linked in a strict logical sequence. In scientific articles, reason proceeds along a high road that leads from darkness to light with not the slightest error, not a hint of bad decision, no confusion, nothing but perfect reasoning'. (cited in *ibid.*: 315)

The difficulties that have faced the scientist for years or even decades are eliminated from the narrative; what faces the reader are merely the inevitable facts produced by the scientific community: 'Scientific papers are not designed to promote an understanding of alternatives, but to foster the impression that what *has been done* is all that *could be done*' (Knorr Cetina, 1981: 42). Scientists as fact-makers are thus using a *pathos*-free rhetoric to impose the image of an unproblematic production of truth.

However, the social sciences and organization studies are not only producing facts but are also seeking to tell stories that make sense to the reader. While the sciences are bound to their regimes of representations (theories, numerical representations, calculuses, etc.) and an epistemology that tightly couples facts and inscriptions, the social sciences are also literary genres (Czarniawska, 1997). Rhodes (2009) introduces the term 'post-representational theory' to denote literary genres that transcend what he calls 'realistic representations'. In this post-representational theory, the purpose of writing is to constitute the writing subject vis-à-vis the Other as much as it is a

'description' of the order of things. Says Rhodes: 'Writing is…a matter of writing the self…The object and addressivity of the text create the writing subject – create the *I* from the rendering of the Other' (2009: 659). In this regime of writing, a post-representational literary tradition that is potentially capable of breaking with inherited epistemological traditions and embracing pathos and expressionism, there are new possibilities for inscribing organizations. Hyperbole may be an effective literary trope that advances alternative images of organization. Céline developed a highly idiosyncratic style characterized by blatant cynicism and hyperbole, capable of emotionally affecting the reader. A post-representational theory of organizations, a genre of organization theory that affirms hyperbole and other literary tropes, may enable alternative views. In popular management guru writing, hyperbole has been part of the promotion of specific managerial programs and arrangements and there is ample evidence of the impact of proposed management packages such as BPR and TQM. Organization theorists may also benefit from using hyperbole and other literary tropes to broaden the scope of narratives about organizations. While the popular management guru writing resorts to hyperbole to justify or even sell management training programs and management concepts, a scholarly discourse that makes use of hyperbole would on the contrary seek to advance alternative perspectives on organization. The scholarly discourse is thus less preoccupied with political objectives than with developing a literary style that emphasizes certain elements of organizational realities at the expense of others; it represents a *perspectival epistemology* that emphasizes situated knowledge and local practices.

Discussion and concluding remarks

Céline does not seek to capture any underlying meanings or concealed ideals or other innate structures. For him, life is on the surface, what is seen, what is experienced, what is accomplished and evolving as a series of connections and associations. Literature is not 'good', as his adversary Jean-Paul Sartre suggested; nor is it 'evil', as Georges Bataille responded. Instead, literature is *human* – beyond good and evil, life resonates through literature, through language. It is, with Céline, an extension of life. Literature's role – if it has a role to play at all – is to capture life, life as *event* (Manning, 2010). Céline's literature is not 'figurative', in terms of portraying people in very detailed terms, nor is it abstract and impressionistic. It is a form of storytelling that unfolds along the 'rail' of the three points of suspension where the one event unfolds into the other, taking the reader to places and occurrences.

Organization theory is in many ways like any scientific program, a literary project. 'Literary' here is not used in the restricted sense of *belles-lettres*, but rather as the totality of norms and standards for how to legitimately express scientific knowledge-claims. A regime of statistical methods could also constitute a literary project. In the more sociological branch of organization theory, there is a continuous demand for new concepts, terms, and innovative forms of expressing theoretical propositions and empirical observations regarding the practice of organizing. New modes of expression are perhaps a rare thing but it is still demanded to maintain a viable scientific discipline. When Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* was first published in 1932, it was an immediate success, perhaps primarily because of its direct style of writing, a form of

sophisticated literary French in combination with a vernacular language imported from the streets and the cafés, the bars and the bazaars. Perhaps for the first time, spoken language and a literary style were combined and bought together into one unity. It is always complicated to learn from outstanding literary works, but what one may learn from Céline is that the frenzy of everyday life of modernity, its immediate and sometimes even brutal expressions, may be combined with literary prose; the two are necessarily part of the same plane of language. The one presupposes the other.

This paper has aimed at making a contribution to organization theory in terms of discussing the literary style of Céline, one of the most important modernist authors. When developing alternative literary genres in organization studies, the cynical and skeptic tradition of thinking represented by Céline may serve as a source of influence, opening up new modes of thinking and styles of writing. Operating in a post-representational theory of organization, the inherited prohibition against pathos – pathos is Céline's most significant mark – may be overcome and new ways of writing organization may be enacted.

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the author   Alexander Styhre, Ph.D, is professor and chair of organization theory and management, Dept. of Business Administration, School of Business, Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg. Alexander is interested in innovation, knowledge-intensive work, and professionalism and admires Alice Munro's short stories capturing the fleeting moments of human lives wherein light gleams an instant. His most recent books are *Visual culture in organizations* (2010, Routledge) and *Venturing into the bioeconomy* (co-authored with Mats Sundgren, 2011, Palgrave).
E-mail: Alexander.Styhre@handels.gu.se