RENÉ WELLEK
AND AUSTIN WARREN

Theory of Literature

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

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THE naming of this book has been more than ordinarily difficult. Even a proper 'short title', 'Theory of Literature and Methodology of Literary Study', would be too cumbersome. Before the nineteenth century one might have managed, for then a full, analytic title could have covered the title-page while the spine bore the inscription 'Literature'.

We have written a book which, so far as we know, lacks any close parallel. It is not a textbook introducing the young to the elements of literary appreciation nor (like Morize's *Aims and Methods*) a survey of the techniques employed in scholarly research. Some continuity it may claim with Poetics and Rhetoric (from Aristotle down through Blair, Campbell, and Kames), systematic treatments of the genres of belles-lettres and stylistics, or with books called Principles of Literary Criticism. But we have sought to unite 'poetics' (or literary theory) and 'criticism' (evaluation of literature) with 'scholarship' ('research') and 'literary history' (the 'dynamics' of literature, in contrast to the 'statics' of theory and criticism). It comes nearer to certain German and Russian works, Walzel's *Gehalt und Gestalt*, or Julius Petersen's *Die Wissenschaft von der Dichtung*, or Tomashevsky's *Literary Theory*. In contrast to the Germans, however, we have avoided mere reproductions of the views of others and, though we take into account other perspectives and methods, have written from a consistent point of view; in contrast to Tomashevsky, we do not undertake to give elementary instruction on such topics as prosody. We are not eclectic like the Germans or doctrinaire like the Russian.

By the standards of older American scholarship, there is something grandiose and even 'unscholarly' about the very attempt to formulate the assumptions on which literary study is conducted (to do which one must go beyond 'facts') and something presumptuous in our effort to survey and evaluate highly specialized investigations. Every specialist will unavoidably be dissatisfied with our account of his speciality. But we have not aimed at minute completeness: the literary examples cited are always examples, not 'proof'; the bibliographies are 'selective'.

Nor have we undertaken to answer all the questions we raise. We have judged it of central use to ourselves and others to be international in our scholarship, to ask the right questions, to provide an *organon* of method.

The authors of this book, who first met at the University of Iowa in 1939, immediately felt their large agreement in literary theory and methodology.

Though of differing backgrounds and training, both had followed a similar pattern of development, passing through historical research and work in the 'history of ideas', to the position that literary study should be specifically literary. Both believed that 'scholarship' and 'criticism' were compatible; both refused to distinguish between 'contemporary' and past literature.

In 1941, they contributed chapters on 'History' and 'Criticism' to a collaborative volume, *Literary Scholarship*, instigated and edited by Norman Foerster, to whose thought and encouragement they are conscious of owing much. To him (were it not to give a misleading impression of his own doctrine) they would dedicate this book.

The chapters of the present book were undertaken on the basis of existing interests. Mr Wellek is primarily responsible for chapters 1–2, 4–7, 9–14, and 19, Mr Warren for chapters 3, 8, and 15–18. But the book is a real instance of a collaboration in which the author is the shared agreement between two writers. In terminology, tone, and emphasis there remain doubtless, some slight inconsistencies between the writers; but they venture to think that there may be compensation for these in the sense of two different minds reaching so substantial an agreement.

It remains to thank Dr Stevens and the Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, without whose aid the book would not have been possible, and the President, the Deans, and the department chairman of the University of Iowa, for their support and generous allotment of time; R. P. Blackmur and J. C. Ransom for their encouragement; Wallace Fowlie, Roman Jakobson, John McGalliard, John C. Pope, and Robert Penn Warren for their reading of certain chapters; Miss Alison White for close, devoted assistance throughout the composition of the book.

The authors wish to acknowledge also the kindness of certain editors and publishers in permitting the incorporation of some passages from their earlier writings into the present book: to the Louisiana University Press and Cleanth Brooks, former editor of the *Southern Review* (for 'Mode of Existence of the Literary Work'); to the University of North

Carolina Press (for a portion of 'Literary History', in *Literary Scholarship*, ed. Foerster, 1941); to the Columbia University Press (for passages from 'Periods and Movements in Literary History' and 'The Parallelism between Literature and the Arts' in the *English Institute Annuals, 1940* and *1941*); to the Philosophical Library (for passages from 'The Revolt against Positivism' and 'Literature and Society', in *Twentieth-Century English*, ed. Knickerbocker, 1946).

New Haven, 1 May 1948

RENÉ WELLEK
AUSTIN WARREN

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE AND LITERARY STUDY

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We must first make a distinction between literature and literary study. The two are distinct activities: one is creative, an art; the other, if not precisely a science, is a species of knowledge or of learning. There have been attempts, of course, to obliterate this distinction. For instance, it has been argued that one cannot understand literature unless one writes it, that one cannot and should not study Pope without trying his own hand at heroic couplets or an Elizabethan drama without himself writing a drama in blank verse.[1]* Yet useful as the experience of literary creation is to him, the task of the student is completely distinct. He must translate his experience of literature into intellectual terms, assimilate it to a coherent scheme which must be rational if it is to be knowledge. It may be true that the subject-matter of his study is irrational or at least contains strongly unrational elements; but he will not be therefore in any other position than the historian of painting or the musicologist, or, for that matter, the sociologist or the anatomist.

Clearly, some difficult problems are raised by this relationship. The solutions proposed have been various. Some theorists would simply deny that literary study is knowledge and advise a 'second creation', with results which to most of us seem futile today – Pater's description of Mona Lisa or the florid passages in Symonds or Symons. Such 'creative criticism' has usually meant a needless duplication or, at most, the translation of one work of art into another, usually inferior. Other theorists draw rather different sceptical conclusions from our contrast between literature and its study: literature, they argue, cannot be 'studied' at all. We can only read, enjoy, appreciate it. For the rest, we can only accumulate all kinds of information 'about' literature. Such scepticism is actually much more widespread than one might suppose. In practice, it shows itself in a stress on environmental 'facts' and in the disparagement of all attempts to go beyond them. Appreciation, taste, enthusiasm are left to the private indulgence as an inevitable, though deplorable, escape from the austerity of sound scholarship. But such a

* For the notes, see pp. 273–313.

dichotomy into 'scholarship' and 'appreciation' makes no provision at all for the true study of literature, at once 'literary' and 'systematic'.

The problem is one of how, intellectually, to deal with art, and with literary art specifically. Can it be done? And how can it be done? One answer has been: it can be done with the methods developed by the natural sciences, which need only be transferred to the study of literature. Several kinds of such transfer can be distinguished. One is the attempt to emulate the general scientific ideals of objectivity, impersonality, and certainty, an attempt which on the whole supports the collecting of neutral facts. Another is the effort to imitate the methods of natural science through the study of causal antecedents and origins; in practice, this 'genetic method' justifies the tracing of any kind of relationship as long as it is possible on chronological grounds. Applied more rigidly, scientific causality is used to explain literary phenomena by the assignment of determining causes to economic, social, and political conditions. Again, there is the introduction of the quantitative methods appropriately used in some sciences, i.e., statistics, charts, and graphs. And finally there is the attempt to use biological concepts in the tracing of the evolution of literature.[2]

Today there would be almost general recognition that this transfer has not fulfilled the expectations with which it was made originally. Sometimes scientific methods have proved their value within a strictly limited area, or with a limited technique such as the use of statistics in certain methods of textual criticism or in the study of metre. But most promoters of this scientific invasion into literary study have either confessed failure and ended with scepticism or have comforted themselves with delusions concerning the future successes of the scientific method. Thus, I. A. Richards used to refer to the future triumphs of neurology as insuring the solutions of all literary problems.[3]

We shall have to come back to some of the problems raised by this widespread application of natural science to literary study. They cannot be dismissed too facilely; and there is, no doubt, a large field in which the two methodologies contact or even overlap. Such fundamental methods as induction and deduction, analysis, synthesis, and comparison are common to all types of systematic knowledge. But, patently, the other solution commends itself: literary scholarship has its own valid methods which are not always those of the natural sciences but are nevertheless intellectual methods. Only a very narrow conception of truth can exclude the achievements of the humanities from the realm of knowledge. Long before modern scientific development, philosophy,

history, jurisprudence, theology, and even philology had worked out valid methods of knowing. Their achievements may have become obscured by the theoretical and practical triumphs of the modern physical sciences; but they are nevertheless real and permanent and can, sometimes with some modifications, easily be resuscitated or renovated. It should be simply recognized that there is this difference between the methods and aims of the natural sciences and the humanities.

How to define this difference is a complex problem. As early as 1883, Wilhelm Dilthey worked out the distinction between the methods of natural science and those of history in terms of a contrast between explanation and comprehension.[4] The scientist, Dilthey argued, accounts for an event in terms of its causal antecedents, while the historian tries to understand its meaning. This process of understanding is necessarily individual and even subjective. A year later, Wilhelm Windelband, the well-known historian of philosophy, also attacked the view that the historical sciences should imitate the methods of the natural sciences.[5] The natural scientists aim to establish general laws while the historians try to grasp the unique and non-recurring fact. This view was elaborated and somewhat modified by Heinrich Rickert, who drew a line not so much between generalizing and individualizing methods as between the sciences of nature and the sciences of culture.[6] The sciences of culture, he argued, are interested in the concrete and individual. Individuals, however, can be discovered and comprehended only in reference to some scheme of values, which is merely another name for culture. In France, A. D. Xénopol distinguished between the natural sciences as occupied with the 'facts of repetition' and history as occupied with the 'facts of succession'. In Italy, Benedetto Croce based his whole philosophy on a historical method which is totally different from that of the natural sciences.[7]

A full discussion of these problems would involve decision on such problems as the classification of the sciences, the philosophy of history, and the theory of knowledge.[8] Yet a few concrete examples may at least suggest that there is a very real problem which a student of literature has to face. Why do we study Shakespeare? It is clear we are not primarily interested in what he has in common with all men, for we could then as well study any other man, nor are we interested in what he has in common with all Englishmen, all men of the Renaissance, all Elizabethans, all poets, all dramatists, or even all Elizabethan dramatists, because in that case we might just as well study Dekker or Heywood. We want rather to discover what is peculiarly Shakespeare's, what

makes Shakespeare Shakespeare; and this is obviously a problem of individuality and value. Even in studying a period or movement or one specific national literature, the literary student will be interested in it as an individuality with characteristic features and qualities which set it off from other similar groupings.

The case for individuality can be supported also by another argument: attempts to find general laws in literature have always failed. Louis Cazamian's so-called law of English literature, the 'oscillation of the rhythm of the English national mind' between two poles, sentiment and intellect (accompanied by the further assertion that these oscillations become speedier the nearer we approach the present age), is either trivial or false. It breaks down completely in its application to the Victorian age.[9] Most of these 'laws' turn out to be only such psychological uniformities as action and reaction, or convention and revolt, which, even if they were beyond doubt, could not tell us anything really significant about the processes of literature. While physics may see its highest triumphs in some general theory reducing to a formula electricity and heat, gravitation and light, no general law can be assumed to achieve the purpose of literary study: the more general, the more abstract and hence empty it will seem; the more the concrete object of the work of art will elude our grasp.

There are thus two extreme solutions to our problem. One, made fashionable by the prestige of the natural sciences, identifies scientific and historical method and leads either to the mere collection of facts or to the establishment of highly generalized historical 'laws'. The other, denying that literary scholarship is a science, asserts the personal character of literary 'understanding' and the 'individuality', even 'uniqueness', of every work of literature. But in its extreme formulation the anti-scientific solution has its own obvious dangers. Personal 'intuition' may lead to a merely emotional 'appreciation', to complete subjectivity. To stress the 'individuality' and even 'uniqueness' of every work of art – though wholesome as a reaction against facile generalizations – is to forget that no work of art can be wholly 'unique' since it then would be completely incomprehensible. It is, of course, true that there is only one *Hamlet* or even one 'Trees' by Joyce Kilmer. But even a rubbish heap is unique in the sense that its precise proportions, position, and chemical combinations cannot be duplicated exactly. Moreover, all words in every literary work of art are, by their very nature, 'generals' and not particulars. The quarrel between the 'universal' and 'particular' in literature has been going on since Aristotle

proclaimed poetry to be more universal and hence more philosophical than history, which is concerned only with the particular, and since Dr Johnson asserted that the poet should not 'count the streaks of the tulip'. The Romantics and most modern critics never tire of stressing the particularity of poetry, its 'texture', its concreteness.[10] But one should recognize that each work of literature is both general and particular, or – better, possibly – is both individual and general. Individuality can be distinguished from complete particularity and uniqueness.[11] Like every human being, each work of literature has its individual characteristics; but it also shares common properties with other works of art, just as every man shares traits with humanity, with all members of his sex, nation, class, profession, etc. We can thus generalize concerning works of art, Elizabethan drama, all drama, all literature, all art. Literary criticism and literary history both attempt to characterize the individuality of a work, of an author, of a period, or of a national literature. But this characterization can be accomplished only in universal terms, on the basis of a literary theory. Literary theory, an *organon* of methods, is the great need of literary scholarship today.

This ideal does not, of course, minimize the importance of sympathetic understanding and enjoyment as preconditions of our knowledge and hence our reflections upon literature. But they are only preconditions. To say that literary study serves only the art of reading is to misconceive the ideal of organized knowledge, however indispensable this art may be to the student of literature. Even though 'reading' be used broadly enough to include critical understanding and sensibility, the art of reading is an ideal for a purely personal cultivation. As such it is highly desirable, and also serves as a basis of a widely spread literary culture. It cannot, however, replace the conception of 'literary scholarship', conceived of as super-personal tradition, as a growing body of knowledge, insights, and judgements.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE OF LITERATURE

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THE first problem to confront us is, obviously, the subject matter of literary scholarship. What is literature? What is not literature? What is the nature of literature? Simple as such questions sound, they are rarely answered clearly.

One way is to define 'literature' as everything in print. We then shall be able to study the 'medical profession in the fourteenth century' or 'planetary motion in the early Middle Ages' or 'witchcraft in Old and New England'. As Edwin Greenlaw has argued, 'Nothing related to the history of civilization is beyond our province'; we are 'not limited to belles-lettres or even to printed or manuscript records in our effort to understand a period or civilization', and we 'must see our work in the light of its possible contribution to the history of culture'.[1] According to Greenlaw's theory, and the practice of many scholars, literary study has thus become not merely closely related to the history of civilization but indeed identical with it. Such study is literary only in the sense that it is occupied with printed or written matter, necessarily the primary source of most history. It can, of course, be argued in defence of such a view that historians neglect these problems, that they are too much preoccupied with diplomatic, military, and economic history, and that thus the literary scholar is justified in invading and taking over a neighbouring terrain. Doubtless nobody should be forbidden to enter any area he likes, and doubtless there is much to be said in favour of cultivating the history of civilization in the broadest terms. But still the study ceases to be literary. The objection that this is only a quibble about terminology is not convincing. The study of everything connected with the history of civilization does, as a matter of fact, crowd out strictly literary studies. All distinctions fall; extraneous criteria are introduced into literature; and, by consequence, literature will be judged valuable only so far as it yields results for this or that adjacent discipline. The identification of literature with the history of civilization is a denial of the specific field and the specific methods of literary study.

Another way of defining literature is to limit it to 'great books', books which, whatever their subject, are 'notable for literary form or expression'. Here the criterion is either aesthetic worth alone or aesthetic worth in combination with general intellectual distinction. Within lyric poetry, drama, and fiction, the greatest works are selected on aesthetic grounds; other books are picked for their reputation or intellectual eminence together with aesthetic value of a rather narrow kind: style, composition, general force of presentation are the usual characteristics singled out. This is a common way of distinguishing or speaking of literature. By saying that 'this is not literature', we express such a value judgement; we make the same kind of judgement when we speak of a book on history, philosophy, or science as belonging to 'literature'.

Most literary histories do include treatment of philosophers, historians, theologians, moralists, politicians, and even some scientists. It would, for example, be difficult to imagine a literary history of eighteenth-century England without an extended treatment of Berkeley and Hume, Bishop Butler and Gibbon, Burke and even Adam Smith. The treatment of these authors, though usually much briefer than that of poets, playwrights, and novelists, is rarely limited to their strictly aesthetic merits. In practice, we get perfunctory and inexpert accounts of these authors in terms of their speciality. Quite rightly, Hume cannot be judged except as a philosopher, Gibbon except as a historian, Bishop Butler as a Christian apologist and moralist, and Adam Smith as a moralist and economist. But in most literary histories these thinkers are discussed in a fragmentary fashion without the proper context – the history of their subject of discourse – without a real grasp, that is, of the history of philosophy, of ethical theory, of historiography, of economic theory. The literary historian is not automatically transformed into a proper historian of these disciplines. He becomes simply a compiler, a self-conscious intruder.

The study of isolated 'great books' may be highly commendable for pedagogical purposes. We all must approve the idea that students – and particularly beginning students – should read great or at least good books rather than compilations or historical curiosities.[2] We may, however, doubt that the principle is worth preserving in its purity for the sciences, history, or any other accumulative and progressing subject. Within the history of imaginative literature, limitation to the great books makes incomprehensible the continuity of literary tradition, the development of literary genres, and indeed the very nature of the literary

process, besides obscuring the background of social, linguistic, ideological, and other conditioning circumstances. In history, philosophy, and similar subjects, it actually introduces an excessively 'aesthetic' point of view. There is obviously no other reason than stress on expository 'style' and organization for singling out Thomas Huxley from all English scientists as the one worth reading. This criterion must, with very few exceptions, favour popularizers over the great originators: it will, and must, prefer Huxley to Darwin, Bergson to Kant.

The term 'literature' seems best if we limit it to the art of literature, that is, to imaginative literature. There are certain difficulties with so employing the term; but, in English, the possible alternatives, such as 'fiction' or 'poetry', are either already pre-empted by narrow meanings or, like 'imaginative literature' or belles-lettres, are clumsy and misleading. One of the objections to 'literature' is its suggestion (in its etymology from *litera*) of limitation to written or printed literature; for, clearly, any coherent conception must include 'oral literature'. In this respect, the German term *Wortkunst* and the Russian *slovesnost* have the advantage over their English equivalent.

The simplest way of solving the question is by distinguishing the particular use made of language in literature. Language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of pictures, or sounds of music. But one should realize that language is not mere inert matter like stone but is itself a creation of man and is thus charged with the cultural heritage of a linguistic group.

The main distinctions to be drawn are between the literary, the everyday, and the scientific uses of language. A discussion of this point by Thomas Clark Pollock, *The Nature of Literature*,[3] though true as far as it goes, seems not entirely satisfactory, especially in defining the distinction between literary and everyday language. The problem is crucial and by no means simple in practice, since literature, in distinction from the other arts, has no medium of its own and since many mixed forms and subtle transitions undoubtedly exist. It is fairly easy to distinguish between the language of science and the language of literature. The mere contrast between 'thought' and 'emotion' or 'feeling' is, however, not sufficient. Literature does contain thought, while emotional language is by no means confined to literature: witness a lovers' conversation or an ordinary quarrel. Still, the ideal scientific language is purely 'denotative': it aims at a one-to-one correspondence between sign and referent. The sign is completely arbitrary, hence it

can be replaced by equivalent signs. The sign is also transparent; that is, without drawing attention to itself, it directs us unequivocally to its referent.

Thus scientific language tends towards such a system of signs as mathematics or symbolic logic. Its ideal is such a universal language as the *characteristica universalis* which Leibniz had begun to plan as early as the late seventeenth century. Compared to scientific language, literary language will appear in some ways deficient. It abounds in ambiguities; it is, like every other historical language, full of homonyms, arbitrary or irrational categories such as grammatical gender; it is permeated with historical accidents, memories, and associations. In a word, it is highly 'connotative'. Moreover, literary language is far from merely referential. It has its expressive side; it conveys the tone and attitude of the speaker or writer. And it does not merely state and express what it says; it also wants to influence the attitude of the reader, persuade him, and ultimately change him. There is a further important distinction between literary and scientific language: in the former, the sign itself, the sound symbolism of the word, is stressed. All kinds of techniques have been invented to draw attention to it, such as metre, alliteration, and patterns of sound.

These distinctions from scientific language may be made in different degrees by various works of literary art: for example, the sound pattern will be less important in a novel than in certain lyrical poems, impossible of adequate translation. The expressive element will be far less in an 'objective novel', which may disguise and almost conceal the attitude of the writer, than in a 'personal' lyric. The pragmatic element, slight in 'pure' poetry, may be large in a novel with a purpose or a satirical or didactic poem. Furthermore, the degree to which the language is intellectualized may vary considerably: there are philosophical and didactic poems and problem novels which approximate, at least occasionally, to the scientific use of language. Still, whatever the mixed modes apparent upon an examination of concrete literary works of art, the distinctions between the literary use and the scientific use seem clear: literary language is far more deeply involved in the historical structure of the language; it stresses the awareness of the sign itself; it has its expressive and pragmatic side which scientific language will always want so far as possible to minimize.

More difficult to establish is the distinction between everyday and literary language. Everyday language is not a uniform concept: it includes such wide variants as colloquial language, the language of

commerce, official language, the language of religion, the slang of students. But obviously much that has been said about literary language holds also for the other uses of language excepting the scientific. Everyday language also has its expressive function, though this varies from a colourless official announcement to the passionate plea roused by a moment of emotional crisis. Everyday language is full of the irrationalities and contextual changes of historical language, though there are moments when it aims at almost the precision of scientific description. Only occasionally is there awareness of the signs themselves in everyday speech. Yet such awareness does appear – in the sound symbolism of names and actions, or in puns. No doubt, everyday language wants most frequently to achieve results, to influence actions and attitudes. But it would be false to limit it merely to communication. A child's talking for hours without a listener and an adult's almost meaningless social chatter show that there are many uses of language which are not strictly, or at least primarily, communicative.

It is thus quantitatively that literary language is first of all to be differentiated from the varied uses of every day. The resources of language are exploited much more deliberately and systematically. In the work of a subjective poet, we have manifest a 'personality' far more coherent and all-pervasive than that of persons as we see them in everyday situations. Certain types of poetry will use paradox, ambiguity, the contextual change of meaning, even the irrational association of grammatical categories such as gender or tense, quite deliberately. Poetic language organizes, tightens, the resources of everyday language, and sometimes does even violence to them, in an effort to force us into awareness and attention. Many of these resources a writer will find formed, and preformed, by the silent and anonymous workings of many generations. In certain highly developed literatures, and especially in certain epochs, the poet merely uses an established convention: the language, so to speak, poeticizes for him. Still, every work of art imposes an order, an organization, a unity on its materials. This unity sometimes seems very loose, as in many sketches or adventure stories; but it increases to the complex, close-knit organization of certain poems, in which it may be almost impossible to change a word or the position of a word without impairing its total effect.

The pragmatic distinction between literary language and everyday language is much clearer. We reject as poetry or label as mere rhetoric everything which persuades us to a definite outward action. Genuine poetry affects us more subtly. Art imposes some kind of framework

which takes the statement of the work out of the world of reality. Into our semantic analysis we thus can reintroduce some of the common conceptions of aesthetics: 'disinterested contemplation', 'aesthetic distance', 'framing'. Again, however, we must realize that the distinction between art and non-art, between literature and the non-literary linguistic utterance, is fluid. The aesthetic function may extend to linguistic pronouncements of the most various sort. It would be a narrow conception of literature to exclude all propaganda art or didactic and satirical poetry. We have to recognize transitional forms like the essay, biography, and much rhetorical literature. In different periods of history the realm of the aesthetic function seems to expand or to contract: the personal letter, at times, was an art form, as was the sermon, while today, in agreement with the contemporary tendency against the confusion of genres, there appears a narrowing of the aesthetic function, a marked stress on purity of art, a reaction against pan-aestheticism and its claims as voiced by the aesthetics of the late nineteenth century. It seems, however, best to consider as literature only works in which the aesthetic function is dominant, while we can recognize that there are aesthetic elements, such as style and composition, in works which have a completely different, non-aesthetic purpose, such as scientific treatises, philosophical dissertations, political pamphlets, sermons.

But the nature of literature emerges most clearly under the referential aspects. The centre of literary art is obviously to be found in the traditional genres of the lyric, the epic, the drama. In all of them, the reference is to a world of fiction, of imagination. The statements in a novel, in a poem, or in a drama are not literally true; they are not logical propositions. There is a central and important difference between a statement, even in a historical novel or a novel by Balzac which seems to convey 'information' about actual happenings, and the same information appearing in a book of history or sociology. Even in the subjective lyric, the 'I' of the poet is a fictional, dramatic 'I'. A character in a novel differs from a historical figure or a figure in real life. He is made only of the sentences describing him or put into his mouth by the author. He has no past, no future, and sometimes no continuity of life. This elementary reflection disposes of much criticism devoted to Hamlet in Wittenberg, the influence of Hamlet's father on his son, the slim and young Falstaff, 'the girlhood of Shakespeare's heroines', the question of 'how many children had Lady Macbeth'.[4] Time and space in a novel are not those of real life. Even an apparently most realistic

novel, the very 'slice of life' of the naturalist, is constructed according to certain artistic conventions. Especially from a later historical perspective we see how similar are naturalistic novels in choice of theme, type of characterization, events selected or admitted, ways of conducting dialogue. We discern, likewise, the extreme conventionality of even the most naturalistic drama not only in its assumption of a scenic frame but in the way space and time are handled, the way even the supposedly realistic dialogue is selected and conducted, and the way characters enter and leave the stage.[5] Whatever the distinctions between *The Tempest* and *A Doll's House*, they share in this dramatic conventionality.

If we recognize 'fictionality', 'invention', or 'imagination' as the distinguishing trait of literature, we think thus of literature in terms of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Balzac, Keats rather than of Cicero or Montaigne, Bossuet, or Emerson. Admittedly, there will be 'boundary' cases, works like Plato's *Republic* to which it would be difficult to deny, at least in the great myths, passages of 'invention' and 'fictionality', while they are at the same time primarily works of philosophy. This conception of literature is descriptive, not evaluative. No wrong is done to a great and influential work by relegating it to rhetoric, to philosophy, to political pamphleteering, all of which may pose problems of aesthetic analysis, of stylistics and composition, similar or identical to those presented by literature, but where the central quality of fictionality will be absent. This conception will thus include in it all kinds of fiction, even the worst novel, the worst poem, the worst drama. Classification as art should be distinguished from evaluation.

One common misunderstanding must be removed. 'Imaginative' literature need not use images. Poetic language is permeated with imagery, beginning with the simplest figures and culminating in the total all-inclusive mythological systems of a Blake or Yeats. But imagery is not essential to fictional statement and hence to much literature. There are good completely imageless poems; there is even a 'poetry of statement'.[6] Imagery, besides, should not be confused with actual, sensuous, visual image-making. Under the influence of Hegel, nineteenth-century aestheticians such as Vischer and Eduard von Hartmann argued that all art is the 'sensuous shining forth of the idea', while another school (Fiedler, Hildebrand, Riehl) spoke of all art as 'pure visibility'.[7] But much great literature does not evoke sensuous images, or, if it does, it does so only incidentally, occasionally, and intermittently.[8] In the depiction even of a fictional character the writer may not suggest visual images at all. We scarcely can visualize any of

Dostoyevsky's or Henry James's characters, while we learn to know their states of mind, their motivations, evaluations, attitudes, and desires very completely.

At the most, a writer suggests some schematized outline or one single physical trait – the frequent practice of Tolstoy or Thomas Mann. The fact that we object to many illustrations, though by good artists and, in some cases (e.g. Thackeray's), even by the author himself, shows that the writer presents us only with such a schematized outline as is not meant to be filled out in detail.

If we had to visualize every metaphor in poetry we would become completely bewildered and confused. While there are readers given to visualizing and there are passages in literature where such imaginings seem required by the text, the psychological question should not be confused with analysis of the poet's metaphorical devices. These devices are largely the organization of mental processes which occur also outside of literature. Thus metaphor is latent in much of our everyday language and overt in slang and popular proverbs. The most abstract terms, by metaphorical transfer, derive from ultimately physical relationships (*comprehend, define, eliminate, substance, subject, hypothesis*). Poetry revives and makes us conscious of this metaphorical character of language, just as it uses the symbols and myths of our civilization: Classical, Teutonic, Celtic, and Christian.

All these distinctions between literature and non-literature which we have discussed – organization, personal expression, realization and exploitation of the medium, lack of practical purpose, and, of course, fictionality – are restatements, within a framework of semantic analysis, of age-old aesthetic terms such as 'unity in variety', 'disinterested contemplation', 'aesthetic distance', 'framing', and 'invention', 'imagination', 'creation'. Each of them describes one aspect of the literary work, one characteristic feature of its semantic directions. None is itself satisfactory. At least one result should emerge: a literary work of art is not a simple object but rather a highly complex organization of a stratified character with multiple meanings and relationships. The usual terminology, which speaks of an 'organism', is somewhat misleading, since it stresses only one aspect, that of 'unity in variety', and leads to biological parallels not always relevant. Furthermore, the 'identity of content and form' in literature, though the phrase draws attention to the close interrelationships within the work of art, is misleading in being overfacile. It encourages the illusion that the analysis of any element of an artefact, whether of content or of techique, must

be equally useful, and thus absolves us from the obligation to see the work in its totality. 'Content' and 'form' are terms used in too widely different senses for them to be, merely juxtaposed, helpful; indeed, even after careful definition, they too simply dichotomize the work of art. A modern analysis of the work of art has to begin with more complex questions: its mode of existence, its system of strata.[9]

CHAPTER THREE

THE FUNCTION OF LITERATURE

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THE nature and the function of literature must, in any coherent discourse, be correlative. The use of poetry follows from its nature: every object or class of objects is most efficiently and rationally used for what it is, or is centrally. It acquires a secondary use only when its prime function has lapsed: the old spinning-wheel becomes an ornament, or a specimen in a museum; the square piano, no longer capable of music, is made into a useful desk. Similarly, the nature of an object follows from its use: it is what it does. An artefact has the structure proper to the performance of its function, together with whatever accessories time and materials may make it possible, and taste may think it desirable, to add. There may be much in any literary work which is unnecessary to its literary function, though interesting or defensible on other grounds.

Have conceptions of the nature and the function of literature changed in the course of history? The question is not easy to answer. If one goes far enough back, one can say yes; one can reach a time when literature, philosophy, and religion exist undifferentiated: among the Greeks, Aeschylus and Hesiod would perhaps be instances. But Plato can already speak of the quarrel between the poets and the philosophers as an ancient quarrel and mean by it something intelligible to us. We must not, on the other hand, exaggerate the difference made by doctrines of 'art for art's sake' at the end of the nineteenth century or more recent doctrines of *poésie pure*. The 'didactic heresy', as Poe called the belief in poetry as an instrument of edification, is not to be equated with the traditional Renaissance doctrine that the poem pleases and teaches or teaches through pleasing.

On the whole, the reading of a history of aesthetics or poetics leaves one with the impression that the nature and the function of literature, so far as they can be put into large general conceptual terms, for comparison and contrast with other human activities and values, have not basically changed.

The history of aesthetics might almost be summarized as a dialectic

in which the thesis and counter-thesis are Horace's *dulce* and *utile:* poetry is sweet and useful. Either adjective separately represents a polar misconception with regard to the function of poetry – probably it is easier to correlate *dulce et utile* on the basis of function than on that of nature. The view that poetry is pleasure (analogous to any other pleasure) answers to the view that poetry is instruction (analogous to any textbook).[1] The view that all poetry is, or should be, propaganda is answered by the view that it is, or should be, pure sound and image – arabesque without reference to the world of human emotions. The opposing theses reach their subtlest versions, perhaps, in the views that art is 'play' and that it is 'work' (the 'craft' of fiction, the 'work' of art). Neither view, in isolation, can possibly seem acceptable. Told that poetry is 'play', spontaneous amusement, we feel that justice has been done neither to the care, skill, and planning of the artist nor to the seriousness and importance of the poem; but told that poetry is 'work' or 'craft', we feel the violence done to its joy and what Kant called its 'purposelessness'. We must describe the function of art in such a way as to do justice at once to the *dulce* and the *utile*.

The Horatian formula itself offers a helpful start if, remembering that precision in the use of critical terms is very recent, we give the Horatian terms an extension generous enough to encompass Roman and Renaissance creative practice. The usefulness of art need not be thought to lie in the enforcement of such a moral lesson as Le Bossu held to be Homer's reason for writing the *Iliad*, or even such as Hegel found in his favourite tragedy, *Antigone*. 'Useful' is equivalent to 'not a waste of time', not a form of 'passing the time', something deserving of serious attention. 'Sweet' is equivalent to 'not a bore', 'not a duty', 'its own reward'.

Can we use this double criterion as a basis of definition of literature, or is it rather a criterion of great literature? In older discussions, the distinctions between great, good, and 'sub-literary' literature rarely appear. There may be real doubt whether sub-literary literature (the pulp magazine) is 'useful' or 'instructive'. It is commonly thought of as sheer 'escape' and 'amusement'. But the question has to be answered in terms of sub-literary readers, not in those of readers of 'good literature'. Mortimer Adler, at least, would find some rudimentary desire for knowledge in the interest of the least intellectual novel reader. And as for 'escape', Kenneth Burke has reminded us how facile a charge that may become. The dream of escape may

assist a reader to clarify his dislike of the environment in which he is placed. The artist can . . . become 'subversive' by merely singing, in all innocence, of respite by the Mississippi.[2]

In answer to our question, it is probable that all art is 'sweet' *and* 'useful' to its appropriate users: that what it articulates is superior to their own self-induced reverie or reflection; that it gives them pleasure by the skill with which it articulates what they take to be something like their own reverie or reflection and by the release they experience through this articulation.

When a work of literature functions successfully, the two 'notes' of pleasure and utility should not merely coexist but coalesce. The pleasure of literature, we need to maintain, is not one preference among a long list of possible pleasures but is a 'higher pleasure' because pleasure in a higher kind of activity, i.e. non-acquisitive contemplation. And the utility – the seriousness, the instructiveness – of literature is a pleasurable seriousness, i.e. not the seriousness of a duty which must be done or of a lesson to be learned but an aesthetic seriousness, a seriousness of perception. The relativist who likes difficult modern poetry can always shrug off aesthetic judgement by making his taste a personal preference, on the level of crossword puzzles or chess. The educationist may falsely locate the seriousness of a great poem or novel, as in the historical information it purveys or the helpful moral lesson.

Another point of importance: Has literature a function, or functions? In his *Primer for Critics*, Boas gaily exposits a pluralism of interests and corresponding types of criticism; and, at the end of his *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot sadly, or at least wearily, insists on the 'variety of poetry' and the variety of things the kinds of poetry may do at various times. But these are exceptions. To take art or literature or poetry seriously is, ordinarily at least, to attribute to it some use proper to itself. Considering Arnold's view that poetry could supersede religion and philosophy, Eliot writes: '. . . nothing in this world or the next is a substitute for anything else. . . .'[3] That is, no real category of value has a real equivalent. There are no real substitutes. In practice, literature can obviously take the place of many things – of travel or sojourn in foreign lands, of direct experience, vicarious life; and it can be used by the historian as a social document. But has literature a work, a use, which nothing else does so well? Or is it an amalgam of philosophy, history, music, and imagery which, in a really modern economy, would be distributed? This is the basic question.

The defenders of literature will believe that it is not an archaic survival

but a permanence, and so will many who are neither poets nor teachers of poetry and who therefore lack the professional interest in survival. The experience of unique value in literature is basic to any theory concerning the nature of the value. Our shifting theories attempt to do progressively better justice to the experience.

One contemporary line asserts the use and seriousness of poetry by finding that poetry conveys knowledge – a kind of knowledge. Poetry is a form of knowledge. Aristotle had seemed to say something like that in his famous dictum that poetry is more philosophical than history, since history 'relates things which have happened, poetry such as might happen', the general and probable. Now however, when history, like literature, appears a loose, ill-defined discipline, and when science rather is the impressive rival, it is contended rather that literature gives a knowledge of those particularities with which science and philosophy are not concerned. While a Neo-Classical theorist like Dr Johnson could still think of poetry in terms of the 'grandeur of generality', modern theorists of many schools (e.g. Bergson, Gilby, Ransom, Stace) all stress the particularity of poetry. Says Stace, the play *Othello* is not about jealousy but about Othello's jealousy, the particular kind of jealousy a Moor married to a Venetian might feel.[4]

The typicality of literature or the particularity: literary theory and apologetics may stress one or the other; for literature, one may say, is more general than history and biography but more particularized than psychology or sociology. But not only are there shifts in the stress of literary theory. In literary practice, the specific degree of generality or particularity shifts from work to work and period to period. Pilgrim and Everyman undertake to be mankind. But Morose, the 'humorist' of Jonson's *Epicoene*, is a very special and idiosyncratic person. The principle of characterization in literature has always been defined as that of combining the 'type' with the 'individual' – showing the type in the individual or the individual in the type. The attempts at interpreting this principle, or specific dogmas derived from it, have not been very helpful. Literary typologies go back to the Horatian doctrine of decorum, and to the repertory of types in Roman comedy (e.g. the bragging soldier, the miser, the spendthrift and romantic son, the confidential servant). We recognize the typological again in the character books of the seventeenth century and in the comedies of Molière. But how to apply the concept more generally? Is the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* a type? If so, of what? Is Hamlet a type? Apparently, for an Elizabethan audience, a melancholiac, something as described

by Dr Timothy Bright. But he is many other things also, and his melancholy is given a particular genesis and context. In some sense, the character which is an individual as well as a type is so constituted by being shown to be many types: Hamlet is also a lover, or former lover, a scholar, a connoisseur of the drama, a fencer. Every man is a convergence or nexus of types – even the simplest man. So-called character types are seen 'flat', as all of us see people with whom we have relations of a single kind; 'round' characters combine views and relations, are shown in different contexts – public life, private, foreign lands.[5]

One cognitive value in the drama and novels would seem to be psychological. 'The novelists can teach you more about human nature than the psychologists' is a familiar kind of assertion. Horney recommends Dostoyevsky, Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Balzac as inexhaustible sources. E. M. Forster (*Aspects of the Novel*) speaks of the very limited number of persons whose inner life and motivations we know, and sees it as the great service of the novel that it does reveal the introspective life of the characters.[6] Presumably the inner lives he assigns his characters are drawn out of his own vigilant introspection. One might maintain that the great novels are source books for psychologists, or that they are case histories (i.e. illustrative, typical examples). But here we seem to come back to the fact that psychologists will use the novel only for its generalized typical value: they will draw off the character of Père Goriot from the total setting (the Maison Vauquer) and context of characters.

Max Eastman, himself a minor poet, would deny that the 'literary mind' can, in an age of science, lay claim to the discovery of truth. The 'literary mind' is simply the unspecialized, amateur mind of pre-scientific days attempting to persist and taking advantage of its verbal facility to create the impression that it is uttering the really important 'truths'. Truth in literature is the same as truth outside of literature, i.e. systematic and publicly verifiable knowledge. The novelist has no magic short cut to that present state of knowledge in the social sciences which constitutes the 'truth' against which his 'world', his fictional reality, is to be checked. But then, believes Eastman, the imaginative writer – and especially the poet – misunderstands himself if he thinks of his prime office as that of discovering and communicating knowledge. His real function is to make us perceive what we see, imagine what we already, conceptually or practically, know.[7]

It is difficult to draw the line between views of poetry as realization of the given and views of poetry as 'artistic insight'. Does the artist

remind us of what we have ceased to perceive or make us see what, though it was there all the time, we had not seen? One remembers the black-and-white drawings in which there are concealed figures or faces composed of dots and broken lines: they were there all the time, but one did not see them as wholes, as designs. In his *Intentions,* Wilde cites Whistler's discovery of aesthetic value in fog, of the Pre-Raphaelite discovery of beauty in types of women hitherto not seen as beautiful or as types. Are these instances of 'knowledge' or 'truth'? We hesitate. They are discoveries of new 'perceptual values', we say, of new 'aesthetic qualities'.

⟨One sees generally why aestheticians hesitate to deny 'truth' as a property and a criterion of art:[8] partly, it is an honorific term, and one registers one's serious respect for art, one's apprehension of it as one of the supreme values, by the attribution; and partly, one is illogically fearful that if art isn't 'true' it is a 'lie', as Plato, in violence, called it. Imaginative literature is a 'fiction', an artistic, verbal 'imitation of life'. The opposite of 'fiction' is not 'truth' but 'fact' or 'time-and-space existence'. 'Fact' is stranger than the probability with which literature must deal.[9]⟩

Among the arts, literature, specifically, seems also to claim 'truth' through the view of life (*Weltanschauung*) which every artistically coherent work possesses. The philosopher or critic must think some of these 'views' truer than others (as Eliot thinks Dante's truer than Shelley's or even than Shakespeare's); but any mature philosophy of life must have some measure of truth – at any event it lays claim to it. ⟨The truth *of* literature, as we are now considering it, seems to be the truth *in* literature – the philosophy which exists, in systematic conceptual form, outside of literature but may be applied to or illustrated by or embodied in literature.⟩ In this sense, the truth in Dante is Catholic theology and scholastic philosophy. Eliot's view of poetry in its relation to 'truth' seems essentially of this sort. Truth is the province of systematic thinkers; and artists are not such thinkers, though they may try to be if there are no philosophers whose work they can suitably assimilate.[10]

The whole controversy would appear, in large measure, semantic. What do we mean by 'knowledge', 'truth', 'cognition', 'wisdom'? If all truth is conceptual and propositional, then the arts – even the art of literature – can't be forms of truth. Again: if positivist reductive definitions are accepted, limiting truth to that which can be methodically verified by anyone, then art can't be a form of truth experimentally.

⟨The alternative to these seems some bi-modal or pluri-modal truth: there are various 'ways of knowing'. Or there are two basic types of knowledge, each of which uses a language system of signs: the sciences, which use the 'discursive' mode, and the arts, which use the 'presentational'.[11] Are these both truth? The former is what philosophers have ordinarily meant, while the latter takes care of religious 'myth' as well as poetry. We might call the latter 'true' rather than 'the truth'. The adjectival quality would express the distinction in centre of balance: art is substantively beautiful and adjectively true (i.e. it doesn't conflict with the truth). In his *Ars Poetica*, MacLeish attempts to adjust the claims of literary beauty and philosophy by the formula, a poem is 'equal to: not true': poetry is as serious and important as philosophy (science, knowledge, wisdom) and possesses the equivalence of truth, is truth-like.⟩

Mrs Langer stresses the plastic arts and, still more, music, rather than literature, in her plea for presentational symbolism as a form of knowledge. Apparently she thinks of literature as in some way a mixture of 'discursive' and 'presentational'. But the mythic element, or archetypal images, of literature would correspond to her presentational.[12]

⟨From views that art is discovery or insight into the truth we should distinguish the view that art – specifically literature – is propaganda, the view, that is, that the writer is not the discoverer but the persuasive purveyor of the truth.⟩ The term 'propaganda' is loose and needs scrutiny. In popular speech, it is applied only to doctrines viewed as pernicious and spread by men whom we distrust. The word implies calculation, intention, and is usually applied to specific, rather restricted doctrines or programmes.[13] So limiting the sense of the term, one might say that some art (the lowest kind) is propaganda, but that no great art, or good art, or Art, can possibly be. ⟨If, however, we stretch the term to mean 'effort, whether conscious or not, to influence readers to share one's attitude towards life', then there is plausibility in the contention that all artists are propagandists or should be, or (in complete reversal of the position outlined in the preceding sentence) that all sincere, responsible artists are morally obligated to be propagandists.⟩

According to Montgomery Belgion, the literary artist is an

> 'irresponsible propagandist'. That is to say, every writer adopts a view or theory of life. . . . The effect of the work is always to *persuade* the reader to accept that view or theory. This persuasion is always illicit. That is to say, the reader is always led to believe something, and that assent is hypnotic – the art of the presentation seduces the reader. . . .

Eliot, who quotes Belgion, replies by distinguishing 'poets whom it is a strain to think of as propagandists at all' from irresponsible propagandists, and a third group who, like Lucretius and Dante, are 'particularly conscious and responsible' propagandists; and Eliot makes the judgement of responsibility depend on both auctorial intention and historic effect.[14] 'Responsible propagandists' would seem to most people a contradiction in terms; but, interpreted as a tension of pulls, it makes a point. Serious art implies a view of life which can be stated in philosophical terms, even in terms of systems.[15] Between artistic coherence (what is sometimes called 'artistic logic') and philosophical coherence there is some kind of correlation. The responsible artist has no will to confuse emotion and thinking, sensibility and intellection, sincerity of feeling with adequacy of experience and reflection. The view of life which the responsible artist articulates perceptually is not, like most views which have popular success as 'propaganda', simple; and an adequately complex vision of life cannot, by hypnotic suggestion, move to premature or naïve action.

It remains to consider those conceptions of the function of literature clustered about the word 'catharsis'. The word – Aristotle's Greek, in the *Poetics* – has had a long history. The exegesis of Aristotle's use of the word remains in dispute; but what Aristotle may have meant, an exegetical problem of interest, need not be confounded with the problem to which the term has come to be applied. The function of literature, some say, is to relieve us – either writers or readers – from the pressure of emotions. To express emotions is to get free of them, as Goethe is said to have freed himself from *Weltschmerz* by composing *The Sorrows of Werther*. And the spectator of a tragedy or the reader of a novel is also said to experience release and relief. His emotions have been provided with focus, leaving him, at the end of his aesthetic experience, with 'calm of mind'.[16]

But does literature relieve us of emotions or, instead, incite them? Tragedy and comedy, Plato thought, 'nourish and water our emotions when we ought to dry them up'. Or, if literature relieves us of our emotions, are they not wrongly discharged when they are expended on poetic fictions? As a youth, St Augustine confesses, he lived in mortal sin; yet 'all this I wept not, I who wept for Dido slain. . . .' Is some literature incitory and some cathartic, or are we to distinguish between groups of readers and the nature of their response?[17] Again: should all art be cathartic? These are problems for treatment under 'Literature

and Psychology' and 'Literature and Society'; but they have, preliminarily, to be raised now.

To conclude: the question concerning the function of literature has a long history – in the Western world, from Plato down to the present. It is not a question instinctively raised by the poet or by those who like poetry; for such, 'Beauty is its own excuse for being', as Emerson was once drawn into saying. The question is put, rather, by utilitarians and moralists, or by statesmen and philosophers, that is, by the representatives of other special values or the speculative arbiters of all values. What, they ask, is the use of poetry anyhow – *cui bono*? And they ask the question at the full social or human dimension. Thus challenged, the poet and the instinctive reader of poetry are forced, as morally and intellectually responsible citizens, to make some reasoned reply to the community. They do so in a passage of an *Ars Poetica*. They write a *Defence* or *Apology* for poetry: the literary equivalent of what is called in theology 'apologetics'.[18] Writing to this end and for this prospective audience, they naturally stress the 'use' rather than the 'delight' of literature; and hence it would be semantically easy today to equate the 'function' of literature with its extrinsic relations. But from the Romantic movement on, the poet has often given, when challenged by the community, a different answer: the answer which A. C. Bradley calls 'poetry for poetry's sake';[19] and theorists do well to let the term 'function' serve the whole 'apologetic' range. So using the word, we say, poetry has many possible functions. Its prime and chief function is fidelity to its own nature.

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERARY THEORY, CRITICISM, AND HISTORY

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As we have envisaged a rationale for the study of literature, we must conclude the possibility of a systematic and integrated study of literature. English affords no very satisfactory name for this. The most common terms for it are 'literary scholarship' and 'philology'. The former term is objectionable only because it seems to exclude 'criticism' and to stress the academic nature of the study; it is acceptable, doubtless, if one interprets the term 'scholar' as inclusively as did Emerson. The latter term, 'philology', is open to many misunderstandings. Historically, it has been used to include not only all literary and linguistic studies but studies of all products of the human mind. Though its greatest vogue was in nineteenth-century Germany, it still survives in the titles of such reviews as *Modern Philology*, *Philological Quarterly*, and *Studies in Philology*. Boeckh, who wrote a fundamental *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften* (1877, but based on lectures partly dating back to 1809),[1] defined 'philology' as the 'knowledge of the known' and hence the study of language and literatures, arts and politics, religion and social customs. Practically identical with Greenlaw's 'literary history', Boeckh's philology is obviously motivated by the needs of classical studies, for which the help of history and archaeology seems particularly necessary. With Boeckh, literary study is only one branch of philology, understood as a total science of civilization, particularly a science of what he, with German Romanticism, called the 'National Spirit'. Today, because of its etymology and much of the actual work of specialists, philology is frequently understood to mean linguistics, especially historical grammar and the study of past forms of languages. Since the term has so many and such divergent meanings, it is best to abandon it.

Another alternative term for the work of the literary scholar is 'research'. But this seems particularly unfortunate, for it stresses the merely preliminary search for materials and draws, or seems to draw,

an untenable distinction between materials which have to be 'searched for' and those which are easily available. For example, it is 'research' when one visits the British Museum to read a rare book, while it apparently involves a different mental process to sit at home in an armchair and read a reprint of the same book. At most, the term 'research' suggests certain preliminary operations, the extent and nature of which will vary greatly with the nature of the problem. But it ill suggests those subtle concerns with interpretation, characterization, and evaluation which are peculiarly characteristic of literary studies.

Within our 'proper study', the distinctions between literary theory, criticism, and history are clearly the most important. There is, first, the distinction between a view of literature as a simultaneous order and a view of literature which sees it primarily as a series of works arranged in a chronological order and as integral parts of the historical process. There is, then, the further distinction between the study of the principles and criteria of literature and the study of the concrete literary works of art, whether we study them in isolation or in a chronological series. It seems best to draw attention to these distinctions by describing as 'literary theory' the study of the principles of literature, its categories, criteria, and the like, and by differentiating studies of concrete works of art as either 'literary criticism' (primarily static in approach) or 'literary history'. Of course, 'literary criticism' is frequently used in such a way as to include all literary theory; but such usage ignores a useful distinction. Aristotle was a theorist; Sainte-Beuve, primarily a critic. Kenneth Burke is largely a literary theorist, while R. P. Blackmur is a literary critic. The term 'theory of literature' might well include – as this book does – the necessary 'theory of literary criticism' and 'theory of literary history'.

These distinctions are fairly obvious and rather widely accepted. But less common is a realization that the methods so designated cannot be used in isolation, that they implicate each other so thoroughly as to make inconceivable literary theory without criticism or history, or criticism without theory and history, or history without theory and criticism. Obviously, literary theory is impossible except on the basis of a study of concrete literary works. Criteria, categories, and schemes cannot be arrived at *in vacuo*. But, conversely, no criticism or history is possible without some set of questions, some system of concepts, some points of reference, some generalizations. There is here, of course, no unsurmountable dilemma: we always read with some preconceptions, and we always change and modify these preconceptions upon further

experience of literary works. The process is dialectical: a mutual interpenetration of theory and practice.

There have been attempts to isolate literary history from theory and criticism. For example, F. W. Bateson[2] argued that literary history shows A to derive from B, while criticism pronounces A to be better than B. The first type, according to this view, deals with verifiable facts; the second, with matters of opinion and faith. But this distinction is quite untenable. There are simply no data in literary history which are completely neutral 'facts'. Value judgements are implied in the very choice of materials: in the simple preliminary distinction between books and literature, in the mere allocation of space to this or that author. Even the ascertaining of a date or a title presupposes some kind of judgement, one which selects this particular book or event from the millions of other books and events. Even if we grant that there are facts comparatively neutral, facts such as dates, titles, biographical events, we merely grant the possibility of compiling the annals of literature. But any question a little more advanced, even a question of textual criticism or of sources and influences, requires constant acts of judgement. Such a statement, for example, as 'Pope derives from Dryden' not only presupposes the act of selecting Dryden and Pope out of the innumerable versifiers of their times, but requires a knowledge of the characteristics of Dryden and Pope and then a constant activity of weighing, comparing, and selecting which is essentially critical. The question of the collaboration of Beaumont and Fletcher is insoluble unless we accept such an important principle as that certain stylistic traits (or devices) are related to one rather than to the other of the two writers; otherwise we have to accept the stylistic differences merely as matter of fact.

But usually the case for the isolation of literary history from literary criticism is put on different grounds. It is not denied that acts of judgement are necessary, but it is argued that literary history has its own peculiar standards and criteria, i.e. those of the other ages. We must, these literary reconstructionists argue, enter into the mind and attitudes of past periods and accept their standards, deliberately excluding the intrusions of our own preconceptions. This view, called 'historicism', was elaborated consistently in Germany during the nineteenth century, though even there it has been criticized by historical theorists of such eminence as Ernst Troeltsch.[3] It seems now to have penetrated directly or indirectly to England and the United States, and to it many of our 'literary historians' more or less clearly profess allegiance. Hardin

Craig, for instance, said that the newest and best phase of recent scholarship is the 'avoidance of anachronistic thinking'.[4] E. E. Stoll, studying the conventions of the Elizabethan stage and the expectations of its audience, works on the theory that the reconstruction of the author's intention is the central purpose of literary history.[5] Some such theory is implied in the many attempts to study Elizabethan psychological theories, such as the doctrine of humours, or of the scientific or pseudo-scientific conceptions of poets.[6] Rosemond Tuve has tried to explain the origin and meaning of metaphysical imagery by reference to the training in Ramist logic received by Donne and his contemporaries.[7]

As such studies cannot but convince us that different periods have entertained different critical conceptions and conventions, it has been concluded that each age is a self-contained unity expressed through its own type of poetry, incommensurate with any other. This view has been candidly and persuasively expounded by Frederick A. Pottle in his *Idiom of Poetry*.[8] He calls his position that of 'critical relativism', and speaks of profound 'shifts of sensibility', of a 'total discontinuity' in the history of poetry. His exposition is the more valuable as he combines it with an acceptance of absolute standards in ethics and religion.

At its finest, this conception of 'literary history' requires an effort of imagination, of 'empathy', of deep congeniality with a past age or a vanished taste. Successful efforts have been made to reconstruct the general outlook on life, the attitudes, conceptions, prejudices, and underlying assumptions of many civilizations. We know a great deal about the Greek attitude towards the gods, women, and slaves; we can describe the cosmology of the Middle Ages in great detail; and we have attempts to show the very different manner of seeing, or at least the very different artistic traditions and conventions, implied by Byzantine and Chinese art. Especially in Germany there is a plethora of studies, many of them influenced by Spengler, on the Gothic man, the Baroque man – all supposed to be sharply set off from our time, living in a world of their own.

In the study of literature, this attempt at historical reconstruction has led to great stress on the intention of the author, which, it is supposed, can be studied in the history of criticism and literary taste. It is usually assumed that if we can ascertain this intention and can see that the author has fulfilled it, we can also dispose of the problem of criticism. The author has served a contemporary purpose, and there is no need or even possibility of further criticizing his work. The method

thus leads to the recognition of a single critical standard, that of contemporary success. There are then not only one or two but literally hundreds of independent, diverse, and mutually exclusive conceptions of literature, each of which is in some way 'right'. The ideal of poetry is broken up in so many splinters that nothing remains of it: a general anarchy or, rather a levelling of all values must be the result. The history of literature is reduced to a series of discrete and hence finally incomprehensible fragments. A more moderate form is the view that there are polar poetical ideals which are so different that there is no common denominator between them: Classicism and Romanticism, the ideal of Pope and of Wordsworth, the poetry of statement and the poetry of implication.

The whole idea that the 'intention' of the author is the proper subject of literary history seems, however, quite mistaken. The meaning of a work of art is not exhausted by, or even equivalent to, its intention. As a system of values, it leads an independent life. The total meaning of a work of art cannot be defined merely in terms of its meaning for the author and his contemporaries. It is rather the result of a process of accretion, i.e. the history of its criticism by its many readers in many ages. It seems unnecessary and actually impossible to declare, as the historical reconstructionists do, that this whole process is irrelevant and that we must return only to its beginning. It is simply not possible to stop being men of the twentieth century while we engage in a judgement of the past: we cannot forget the associations of our own language, the newly acquired attitudes, the impact and import of the last centuries. We cannot become contemporary readers of Homer or Chaucer or members of the audience of the theatre of Dionysus in Athens or of the Globe in London. There will always be a decisive difference between an act of imaginative reconstruction and actual participation in a past point of view. We cannot really believe in Dionysus and laugh at him at the same time, as the audience of Euripides' *Bacchae* may have done;[9] and few of us can accept Dante's circles of Hell and mountain of Purgatory as literal truth. If we should really be able to reconstruct the meaning which *Hamlet* held for its contemporary audience, we would merely impoverish it. We would suppress the legitimate meanings which later generations found in *Hamlet*. We would bar the possibility of a new interpretation. This is not a plea for arbitrary subjective misreadings: the problem of a distinction between 'correct' and wrong-headed readings will remain, and will need a solution in every specific case. The historical scholar will not be satisfied to judge a work of art merely

from the point of view of our own time – a privilege of the practising critic, who will re-evaluate the past in terms of the needs of a present-day style or movement. It may be even instructive for him to look at a work of art from the point of view of a third time, contemporaneous neither with him nor with the author, or to survey the whole history of the interpretation and criticism of a work which will serve as a guide to the total meaning.

In practice, such clear-cut choices between the historical and the present-day point of view are scarcely feasible. We must beware of both false relativism and false absolutism. Values grow out of the historical process of valuation, which they in turn help us to understand. The answer to historical relativism is not a doctrinaire absolutism which appeals to 'unchanging human nature' or the 'universality of art'. We must rather adopt a view for which the term 'Perspectivism' seems suitable. We must be able to refer a work of art to the values of its own time and of all the periods subsequent to its own. A work of art is both 'eternal' (i.e. preserves a certain identity) and 'historical' (i.e. passes through a process of traceable development). Relativism reduces the history of literature to a series of discrete and hence discontinuous fragments, while most absolutisms serve either only a passing present-day situation or are based (like the standards of the New Humanists, the Marxists, and the Neo-Thomists) on some abstract non-literary ideal unjust to the historical variety of literature. 'Perspectivism' means that we recognize that there is one poetry, one literature, comparable in all ages, developing, changing, full of possibilities. Literature is neither a series of unique works with nothing in common nor a series of works enclosed in time-cycles of Romanticism or Classicism, the age of Pope and the age of Wordsworth. Nor is it, of course, the 'block-universe' of sameness and immutability which an older Classicism conceived as ideal. Both absolutism and relativism are false; but the more insidious danger today, at least in England and the United States, is a relativism equivalent to an anarchy of values, a surrender of the task of criticism.

In practice, no literary history has ever been written without some principles of selection and some attempt at characterization and evaluation. Literary historians who deny the importance of criticism are themselves unconscious critics, usually derivative critics, who have merely taken over traditional standards and reputations. Usually, today, they are belated Romanticists who have closed their minds to all other types of art and especially to modern literature. But, as R. G. Collingwood has said very pertinently, a man 'who claims to know what makes

Shakespeare a poet is tacitly claiming to know whether Miss Stein is a poet, and if not, why not'.[10]

The exclusion of recent literature from serious study has been an especially bad consequence of this 'scholarly' attitude. The term 'modern' literature used to be interpreted so widely by academics that scarcely any work after Milton's was considered a quite respectable object of study. Since then, the eighteenth century has been accepted into good and regular standing as conventional literary history and has even become fashionable, since it appears to offer an escape into a more gracious, more stable, and more hierarchic world. The Romantic period and the later nineteenth century are also beginning to receive the attention of the scholars, and there are even a few hardy men in academic positions who defend and practise the scholarly study of contemporary literature.

The only possible argument against the study of living authors is the point that the student forgoes the perspective of the completed work, of the explication which later works may give to the implications of the earlier. But this disadvantage, valid only for developing authors, seems small compared to the advantages we have in knowing the setting and the time and in the opportunities for personal acquaintance and interrogation or at least correspondence. If many second-rate or even tenth-rate authors of the past are worth study, a first-rate or even second-rate author of our time is worth studying, too. It is usually lack of perception or timidity which makes academics reluctant to judge for themselves. They profess to await the 'verdict of the ages', not realizing that this is but the verdict of other critics and readers, including other professors. The whole supposed immunity of the literary historian to criticism and theory is thoroughly false, and that for a simple reason: every work of art is existing now, is directly accessible to observation, and is a solution of certain artistic problems whether it was composed yesterday or a thousand years ago. It cannot be analysed, characterized, or evaluated without a constant recourse to critical principles. 'The literary historian must be a critic even in order to be an historian.'[11]

Conversely, literary history is also highly important for literary criticism as soon as the latter goes beyond the most subjective pronouncement of likes and dislikes. A critic who is content to be ignorant of all historical relationships would constantly go astray in his judgements. He could not know which work is original and which derivative; and, through his ignorance of historical conditions, he would constantly blunder in his understanding of specific works of art. The critic

possessed of little or no history is inclined to make slipshod guesses, or to indulge in autobiographical 'adventures among masterpieces', and, on the whole, will avoid concern with the more remote past, content to hand that over to the antiquarian and the 'philologist'.

A case in point is medieval literature, especially English medieval literature, which – with the possible exception of Chaucer – has scarcely been approached from any aesthetic and critical point of view. The application of modern sensibility would give a different perspective to much Anglo-Saxon poetry or to the rich medieval lyric, just as, conversely, an introduction of historical points of view and a systematic examination of genetic problems could throw much light on contemporary literature. The common divorce between literary criticism and literary history has been detrimental to both.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL, COMPARATIVE, AND NATIONAL LITERATURE

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WITHIN literary studies, we have distinguished between theory, history, and criticism. Using another basis of division, we shall now attempt a systematic definition of comparative, general, and national literature. The term 'comparative' literature is troublesome and doubtless, indeed, one of the reasons why this important mode of literary study has had less than the expected academic success. Matthew Arnold, translating Ampère's use of '*histoire comparative*', was apparently the first to use the term in English (1848). The French have preferred the term used earlier by Villemain, who had spoken of '*littérature comparée*' (1829), after the analogy of Cuvier's *Anatomie comparée* (1800). The Germans speak of '*vergleichende Literaturgeschichte*'.[1] Yet neither of these differently formed adjectives is very illuminating, since comparison is a method used by all criticism and sciences, and does not, in any way, adequately describe the specific procedures of literary study. The formal comparison between literatures – or even movements, figures, and works – is rarely a central theme in literary history, though such a book as F. C. Green's *Minuet*,[2] comparing aspects of French and English eighteenth-century literature, may be illuminating in defining not only parallels and affinities but also divergences between the literary development of one nation and that of another.

In practice, the term 'comparative' literature has covered and still covers rather distinct fields of study and groups of problems. It may mean, first, the study of oral literature, especially of folk-tale themes and their migration; of how and when they have entered 'higher', 'artistic' literature. This type of problem can be relegated to folklore, an important branch of learning which is only in part occupied with aesthetic facts, since it studies the total civilization of a 'folk', its costumes and customs, superstitions and tools, as well as its arts. We must, however, endorse the view that the study of oral literature is an integral part of literary scholarship, for it cannot be divorced from the study of written

works, and there has been and still is a continuous interaction between oral and written literature. Without going to the extreme of folklorists such as Hans Naumann[3] who consider most later oral literature *gesunkenes Kulturgut*, we can recognize that written upper-class literature has profoundly affected oral literature. On the other hand, we must assume the folk origin of many basic literary genres and themes, and we have abundant evidence for the social rise of folk literature. Still, the incorporation into folklore of chivalric romance and troubadour lyric is an indubitable fact. Though this is a view which would have shocked the Romantic believers in the creativity of the folk and the remote antiquity of folk art, nevertheless popular ballads, fairy tales, and legends as we know them are frequently of late origin and upper-class derivation. Yet the study of oral literature must be an important concern of every literary scholar who wants to understand the processes of literary development, the origin and the rise of our literary genres and devices. It is unfortunate that the study of oral literature has thus far been so exclusively preoccupied with the study of themes and their migrations from country to country, i.e. with the raw materials of modern literatures.[4] Of late, however, folklorists have increasingly turned their attention to the study of patterns, forms, and devices, to a morphology of literary forms, to the problems of the teller and narrator and the audience of a tale, and have thus prepared the way for a close integration of their studies into a general conception of literary scholarship.[5] Though the study of oral literature has its own peculiar problems, those of transmission and social setting,[6] its fundamental problems, without doubt, are shared with written literature; and there is a continuity between oral and written literature which has never been interrupted. Scholars in the modern European literatures have neglected these questions to their own disadvantage, while literary historians in the Slavic and Scandinavian countries, where folklore is still – or was till recently – alive, have been in much closer touch with these studies. But 'comparative literature' is hardly the term by which to designate the study of oral literature.

Another sense of 'comparative' literature confines it to the study of relationships between two or more literatures. This is the use established by the flourishing school of French *comparatistes* headed by the late Fernand Baldensperger and gathered around the *Revue de littérature comparée*.[7] The school has especially given attention, sometimes mechanically but sometimes with considerable finesse, to such questions as the reputation and penetration, the influence and fame, of Goethe in

France and England, of Ossian and Carlyle and Schiller in France. It has developed a methodology which, going beyond the collection of information concerning reviews, translations, and influences, considers carefully the image, the concept of a particular author at a particular time, such diverse factors of transmission as periodicals, translators, salons, and travellers, and the 'receiving factor', the special atmosphere and literary situation into which the foreign author is imported. In total, much evidence for the close unity, especially of the Western European literatures, has been accumulated; and our knowledge of the 'foreign trade' of literatures has been immeasurably increased.

But this conception of 'comparative literature' has also, one recognizes, its peculiar difficulties.[8] No distinct system can, it seems, emerge from the accumulation of such studies. There is no methodological distinction between a study of 'Shakespeare in France' and a study of 'Shakespeare in eighteenth-century England', or between a study of Poe's influence on Baudelaire and one of Dryden's influence on Pope. Comparisons between literatures, if isolated from concern with the total national literatures, tend to restrict themselves to external problems of sources and influences, reputation and fame. Such studies do not permit us to analyse and judge an individual work of art, or even to consider the complicated whole of its genesis; instead, they are mainly devoted either to such echoes of a masterpiece as translations and imitations, frequently by second-rate authors, or to the prehistory of a masterpiece, the migrations and the spread of its themes and forms. The emphasis of 'comparative literature' thus conceived is on externals; and the decline of this type of 'comparative literature' in recent decades reflects the general turning away from stress on mere 'facts', on sources and influences.

A third conception obviates, however, all these criticisms, by identifying 'comparative literature' with the study of literature in its totality, with 'world literature', with 'general' or 'universal' literature. There are certain difficulties with these suggested equations. The term 'world literature', a translation of Goethe's *Weltliteratur*,[9] is perhaps needlessly grandiose, implying that literature should be studied on all five continents, from New Zealand to Iceland. Goethe, actually, had no such thing in mind. 'World literature' was used by him to indicate a time when all literatures would become one. It is the ideal of the unification of all literatures into one great synthesis, where each nation would play its part in a universal concert. But Goethe himself saw that this is a very distant ideal, that no single nation is willing to give up its individuality.

Today we are possibly even further removed from such a state of amalgamation, and we would argue that we cannot even seriously wish that the diversities of national literatures should be obliterated. 'World literature' is frequently used in a third sense. It may mean the great treasure-house of the classics, such as Homer, Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Goethe, whose reputation has spread all over the world and has lasted a considerable time. It thus has become a synonym for 'masterpieces', for a selection from literature which has its critical and pedagogic justification but can hardly satisfy the scholar who cannot confine himself to the great peaks if he is to understand the whole mountain ranges or, to drop the figure, all history and change.

The possibly preferable term 'general literature' has other disadvantages. Originally it was used to mean poetics or theory and principles of literature, and in recent decades Paul Van Tieghem[10] has tried to capture it for a special conception in contrast to 'comparative literature'. According to him, 'general literature' studies those movements and fashions of literature which transcend national lines, while 'comparative literature' studies the interrelationships between two or more literatures. But how can we determine whether, e.g. Ossianism is a topic of 'general' or 'comparative literature'? One cannot make a valid distinction between the influence of Walter Scott abroad and the international vogue of the historical novel. 'Comparative' and 'general' literature merge inevitably. Possibly, it would be best to speak simply of 'literature'.

Whatever the difficulties into which a conception of universal literary history may run, it is important to think of literature as a totality and to trace the growth and development of literature without regard to linguistic distinctions. The great argument for 'comparative' or 'general' literature or just 'literature' is the obvious falsity of the idea of a self-enclosed national literature. Western literature, at least, forms a unity, a whole. One cannot doubt the continuity between Greek and Roman literatures, the Western medieval world, and the main modern literatures; and, without minimizing the importance of Oriental influences, especially that of the Bible, one must recognize a close unity which includes all Europe, Russia, the United States, and the Latin-American literatures. This ideal was envisaged and, within their limited means, fulfilled, by the founders of literary history in the early nineteenth century: such men as the Schlegels, Bouterwek, Sismondi, and Hallam.[11] But then the further growth of nationalism combined with the effect

of increasing specialization led to an increasingly narrow provincial cultivation of the study of national literatures. During the second half of the nineteenth century the ideal of a universal literary history was, however, revived under the influence of evolutionism. The early practitioners of 'comparative literature' were folklorists, ethnographers who, largely under the influence of Herbert Spencer, studied the origins of literature, its diversification in oral literary forms, and its emergence into the early epic, drama, and lyric.[12] Evolutionism left, however, few traces on the history of modern literatures and apparently fell into discredit when it drew the parallel between literary change and biological evolution too closely. With it the ideal of universal literary history declined. Happily, in recent years there are many signs which augur a return to the ambition of general literary historiography. Ernst Robert Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948), which traces commonplaces through the totality of Western tradition with stupendous erudition, and Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946), a history of realism from Homer to Joyce based on sensitive stylistic analyses of individual passages,[13] are achievements of scholarship which ignore the established nationalisms and convincingly demonstrate the unity of Western civilization, the vitality of the heritage of classical antiquity and medieval Christianity.

Literary history as a synthesis, literary history on a super-national scale, will have to be written again. The study of comparative literature in this sense will make high demands on the linguistic proficiencies of our scholars. It asks for a widening of perspectives, a suppression of local and provincial sentiments, not easy to achieve. Yet literature is one, as art and humanity are one; and in this conception lies the future of historical literary studies.

Within this enormous area – in practice, identical with all literary history – there are, no doubt, subdivisions sometimes running along linguistic lines. There are, first of all, the groups of the three main linguistic families in Europe – the Germanic, the Romance, and the Slavic literatures. The Romance literatures have particularly frequently been studied in close interconnexion, from the days of Bouterwek up to Leonardo Olschki's attempt to write a history of them all for the medieval period.[14] The Germanic literatures have been comparably studied, usually, only for the early Middle Ages, when the nearness of a general Teutonic civilization, can be still strongly felt.[15] Despite the customary opposition of Polish scholars, it would appear that the close linguistic affinities of the Slavic languages, in combination with shared popular

traditions extending even to metrical forms, make up a basis for a common Slavic literature.[16]

The history of themes and forms, devices and genres, is obviously an international history. While most of our genres descend from the literature of Greece and Rome, they were very considerably modified and augmented during the Middle Ages. Even the history of metrics, though closely bound up with the individual linguistic systems, is international. Furthermore, the great literary movements and styles of modern Europe (the Renaissance, the Baroque, Neo-Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism) far exceed the boundaries of one nation, even though there are significant national differences between the workings out of these styles.[17] Also their geographical spread may vary. The Renaissance, e.g. penetrated to Poland but not to Russia or Bohemia. The Baroque style flooded the whole of Eastern Europe including the Ukraine, but hardly touched Russia proper. There may be also considerable chronological divergencies: the Baroque style survived in the peasant civilizations of Eastern Europe well to the end of the eighteenth century when the West has passed through the Enlightenment, and so on. On the whole, the importance of linguistic barriers was quite unduly magnified during the nineteenth century.

This emphasis was due to the very close association between Romantic (mostly linguistic) nationalism and the rise of modern organized literary history. It continues today through such practical influences as the virtual identification, especially in the United States, of the teaching of literature and the teaching of a language. The result, in the United States, has been an extraordinary lack of contact between the students of English, German, and French literature. Each of these groups bears a completely different imprint and uses different methods. These disjunctions are in part, doubtless, unavoidable, simply because most men live in but a single linguistic medium; and yet they lead to grotesque consequences when literary problems are discussed only with regard to views expressed in the particular language and only with reference to texts and documents in that language. Though in certain problems of artistic style, metre, and even genre, the linguistic differences between the European literatures will be important, it is clear that for many problems of the history of ideas, including critical ideas, such distinctions are untenable; artificial cross-sections are drawn through homogeneous materials, and histories are written concerning ideological echoes by chance expressed in English or German or French. The excessive attention to one vernacular is especially detrimental to the study

of medieval literature, since in the Middle Ages Latin was the foremost literary language, and Europe formed a very close intellectual unity. A history of literature during the Middle Ages in England which neglects the vast amount of writings in Latin and Anglo-Norman gives a false picture of England's literary situation and general culture.

This recommendation of comparative literature does not, of course, imply neglecting the study of individual national literatures. Indeed, it is just the problem of 'nationality' and of the distinct contributions of the individual nations to this general literary process which should be realized as central. Instead of being studied with theoretical clarity, the problem has been blurred by nationalistic sentiment and racial theories. To isolate the exact contributions of English literature to general literature, a fascinating problem, might lead to a shift of perspective and an altered evaluation, even of the major figures. Within each national literature there arise similar problems of the exact shares of regions and cities. Such an exaggerated theory as that of Josef Nadler,[18] who professes to be able to discern the traits and characteristics of each German tribe and region and its reflections in literature, should not deter us from the consideration of these problems, rarely investigated with any command of facts and any coherent method. Much that has been written on the role of New England, the Middle West, and the South in the history of American literature, and most of the writings on regionalism, amounts to no more than the expression of pious hopes, local pride, and resentment of centralizing powers. Any objective analysis will have to distinguish questions concerning the racial descent of authors and sociological questions concerning provenance and setting from questions concerning the actual influence of the landscape and questions of literary tradition and fashion.

Problems of 'nationality' become especially complicated if we have to decide that literatures in the same language are distinct national literatures, as American and modern Irish assuredly are. Such a question as why Goldsmith, Sterne, and Sheridan do not belong to Irish literature, while Yeats and Joyce do, needs an answer. Are there independent Belgian, Swiss, and Austrian literatures? It is not very easy to determine the point at which literature written in America ceased to be 'colonial English' and became an independent national literature. Is it the mere fact of political independence? Is it the national consciousness of the authors themselves? Is it the use of national subject-matter and 'local colour'? Or is it the rise of a definite national literary style?

Only when we have reached decisions on these problems shall we

be able to write histories of national literature which are not simply geographical or linguistic categories, shall we be able to analyse the exact way in which each national literature enters into European tradition. Universal and national literatures implicate each other. A pervading European convention is modified in each country: there are also centres of radiation in the individual countries, and eccentric and individually great figures who set off one national tradition from the other. To be able to describe the exact share of the one and the other would amount to knowing much that is worth knowing in the whole of literary history.

Part Three

THE EXTRINSIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

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THE most widespread and flourishing methods of studying literature concern themselves with its setting, its environment, its external causes. These extrinsic methods are not limited to a study of the past but are equally applicable to present-day literature. Hence the term 'historical' should properly be reserved for that study of literature which concentrates on its change in time and is thus centrally preoccupied with the problem of history. Though the 'extrinsic' study may merely attempt to interpret literature in the light of its social context and its antecedents, in most cases it becomes a 'causal' explanation, professing to account for literature, to explain it, and finally to reduce it to its origins (the 'fallacy of origins'). Nobody can deny that much light has been thrown on literature by a proper knowledge of the conditions under which it has been produced; the exegetical value of such a study seems indubitable. Yet it is clear that causal study can never dispose of problems of description, analysis, and evaluation of an object such as a work of literary art. Cause and effect are incommensurate: the concrete result of these extrinsic causes – the work of art – is always unpredictable.

All history, all environmental factors, can be argued to shape a work of art. But the actual problems begin when we evaluate, compare, and isolate the individual factors which are supposed to determine the work of art. Most students try to isolate a specific series of human actions and creations and to ascribe to that alone a determining influence on the work of literature. Thus one group considers literature mainly the product of an individual creator and concludes hence that literature should be investigated mainly through biography and the psychology of the author. A second group looks for the main determining factors of literary creation in the institutional life of man – in economic, social, and political conditions; another related group seeks for the causal explanation of literature largely in such other collective creations of the human mind as the history of ideas, of theology, and the other arts. Finally, there is a group of students who seek to explain literature in terms of the *Zeitgeist*, some quintessential spirit of the time, some intellectual atmosphere or 'climate' of opinion, some unitary force abstracted largely from the characteristics of the other arts.

These advocates of the extrinsic approach vary in the rigidity with which they apply deterministic causal methods to their study and hence in the claims they make for the success of their method. Those who believe in social causation are usually the most deterministic. This radicalism can be explained by their philosophical affiliations with nineteenth-century positivism and science; but one must not forget that the idealistic adherents of *Geistesgeschichte*, philosophically affiliated with Hegelianism or other forms of Romantic thought, are also extreme determinists and even fatalists.

Many students who use these methods will make much more modest claims. They will seek to establish only some degree of relationship between the work of art and its settings and antecedents, and they will assume that some degree of illumination follows from such knowledge, though the precise relevance of these relationships may escape them altogether. These more modest proponents seem wiser, for surely causal explanation is a very overrated method in the study of literature, and as surely it never can dispose of the critical problems of analysis and evaluation. Among the different cause-governed methods, an explanation of the work of art in terms of the total setting seems preferable, since the reduction of literature to the effect of a single cause is manifestly impossible. Without endorsing the specific conceptions of German *Geistesgeschichte*, we recognize that such explanation by a synthesis of all the factors obviates a most important criticism against the other current methods. What follows is an attempt to weigh the importance of these different factors and to criticize the array of methods from the point of view of their relevance to a study which could be called centrally literary or 'ergocentric'.

Part Four

THE INTRINSIC STUDY OF LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

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THE natural and sensible starting-point for work in literary scholarship is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves. After all, only the works themselves justify all our interest in the life of an author, in his social environment and the whole process of literature. But, curiously enough, literary history has been so preoccupied with the setting of a work of literature that its attempts at an analysis of the works themselves have been slight in comparison with the enormous efforts expended on the study of environment. Some reasons for this over-emphasis on the conditioning circumstances rather than on the works themselves are not far to seek. Modern literary history arose in close connexion with the Romantic movement, which could subvert the critical system of Neo-Classicism only with the relativist argument that different times required different standards. Thus the emphasis shifted from the literature to its historical background, which was used to justify the new values ascribed to old literature. In the nineteenth century, explanation by causes became the great watchword, largely in an endeavour to emulate the methods of the natural sciences. Besides, the breakdown of the old poetics, which occurred with the shift of interest to the individual taste of the reader, strengthened the conviction that art, being fundamentally irrational, should be left to 'appreciation'. Sir Sidney Lee, in his inaugural lecture, merely summed up the theory of most academic literary scholarship when he said: 'In literary history we seek the external circumstances – political, social, economic – in which literature is produced.'[1] The result of a lack of clarity on questions of poetics has been the astonishing helplessness of most scholars when confronted with the task of actually analysing and evaluating a work of art.

In recent years a healthy reaction has taken place which recognizes that the study of literature should, first and foremost, concentrate on the actual works of art themselves. The old methods of classical rhetoric, poetics, or metrics are and must be reviewed and restated in modern terms. New methods based on a survey of the wider range of forms in modern literature are being introduced. In France the method of *explication de textes*,[2] in Germany the formal analyses based on parallels

with the history of fine arts, cultivated by Oskar Walzel,[3] and especially the brilliant movement of the Russian formalists and their Czech and Polish followers[4] have brought new stimuli to the study of the literary work, which we are only beginning to see properly and to analyse adequately. In England some of the followers of I. A. Richards have paid close attention to the text of poetry[5] and also in the United States a group of critics have made a study of the work of art the centre of their interest.[6] Several studies of the drama[7] which stress its difference from life and combat the confusion between dramatic and empirical reality point in the same direction. Similarly, many studies of the novel[8] are not content to consider it merely in terms of its relations to the social structure but try to analyse its artistic methods – its points of view, its narrative technique.

The Russian formalists most vigorously objected to the old dichotomy of 'content versus form', which cuts a work of art into two halves: a crude content and a superimposed, purely external form.[9] Clearly, the aesthetic effect of a work of art does not reside in what is commonly called its content. There are few works of art which are not ridiculous or meaningless in synopsis (which can be justified only as a pedagogical device.)[10] But a distinction between form as the factor aesthetically active and a content aesthetically indifferent meets with insuperable difficulties. At first sight the boundary line may seem fairly definite. If we understand by content the ideas and emotions conveyed in a work of literature, the form would include all linguistic elements by which contents are expressed. But if we examine this distinction more closely, we see that content implies some elements of form: e.g. the events told in a novel are parts of the content, while the way in which they are arranged into a 'plot' is part of the form. Dissociated from this way of arrangement they have no artistic effect whatsoever. The common remedy proposed and widely used by Germans, i.e. the introduction of the term 'inner form', which originally dates back to Plotinus and Shaftesbury, is merely complicating matters, as the boundary line between inner and outer form remains completely obscure. It must simply be admitted that the manner in which events are arranged in a plot is part of the form. Things become even more disastrous for the traditional concepts when we realize that even in the language, commonly considered part of the form, it is necessary to distinguish between words in themselves, aesthetically indifferent, and the manner in which individual words make up units of sound and meaning, aesthetically effective. It would be better to rechristen all the aesthetically indifferent elements

'materials', while the manner in which they acquire aesthetic efficacy may be called 'structure'. This distinction is by no means a simple renaming of the old pair, content and form. It cuts right across the old boundary lines. 'Materials' include elements formerly considered part of the content, and parts formerly considered formal. 'Structure' is a concept including both content and form so far as they are organized for aesthetic purposes. The work of art is, then, considered as a whole system of signs, or structure of signs, serving a specific aesthetic purpose.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MODE OF EXISTENCE OF A LITERARY WORK OF ART

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BEFORE we can analyse the different strata of a work of art we shall have to raise an extremely difficult epistemological question, that of the 'mode of existence' or the 'ontological situs' of a literary work of art (which, for brevity's sake, we shall call a 'poem' in what follows).[1] What is the 'real' poem; where should we look for it; how does it exist? A correct answer to these questions should solve several critical problems and open a way to the proper analysis of a work of literature.

To the question what and where is a poem, or rather a literary work of art in general, several traditional answers have been given which must be criticized and eliminated before we can attempt an answer of our own. One of the most common and oldest answers is the view that a poem is an 'artefact', an object of the same nature as a piece of sculpture or a painting. Thus the work of art is considered identical with the black lines of ink on white paper or parchment or, if we think of a Babylonian poem, with the grooves in the brick. Obviously this answer is quite unsatisfactory. There is, first of all, the huge oral 'literature'. There are poems or stories which have never been fixed in writing and still continue to exist. Thus the lines in black ink are merely a method of recording a poem which must be conceived as existing elsewhere. If we destroy the writing or even all copies of a printed book we still may not destroy the poem, as it might be preserved in oral tradition or in the memory of a man like Macaulay, who boasted of knowing *Paradise Lost* and *Pilgrim's Progress* by heart. On the other hand, if we destroy a painting or a piece of sculpture or a building, we destroy it completely, though we may preserve descriptions or records in another medium and might even try to reconstruct what has been lost. But we shall always create a different work of art (however similar), while the mere destruction of the copy of a book or even of all its copies may not touch the work of art at all.

That the writing on the paper is not the 'real' poem can be demonstrated also by another argument. The printed page contains a great many elements which are extraneous to the poem: the size of the type, the sort of type used (roman, italic), the size of the page, and many other factors. If we should take seriously the view that a poem is an artefact, we would have to come to the conclusion that every single copy or, at least, every differently printed edition is a different work of art. There would be no *a priori* reason why copies in different editions should be copies of the same book. Besides, not every printing is considered by us, the readers, a correct printing of a poem. The very fact that we are able to correct printer's errors in a text which we might not have read before or, in some rare cases, restore the genuine meaning of the text shows that we do not consider the printed lines as the genuine poem. Thus we have shown that the poem (or any literary work of art) can exist outside its printed version and that the printed artefact contains many elements which we all must consider as not included in the genuine poem.

Still, this negative conclusion should not blind us to the enormous practical importance, since the invention of writing and printing, of our methods of recording poetry. There is no doubt that much literature has been lost and thus completely destroyed because its written records have disappeared and the theoretically possible means of oral tradition have failed or have been interrupted. Writing and especially printing have made possible the continuity of literary tradition and must have done much to increase the unity and integrity of works of art. Besides, at least in certain periods of the history of poetry, the graphic picture has become a part of some finished works of art.

In Chinese poetry, as Ernest Fenollosa has shown, the pictorial ideograms form a part of the total meaning of the poems. But also in the Western tradition there are the graphic poems of the *Greek Anthology*, the 'Altar' or the 'Churchfloor' of George Herbert, and similar poems of the Metaphysicals which can be paralleled on the Continent in Spanish Gongorism, Italian Marinism, in German Baroque poetry, and elsewhere. Also modern poetry in America (e. e. cummings), in Germany (Arno Holz), in France (Mallarmé, Apollinaire), and elsewhere has used graphic devices like unusual line arrangements or even beginnings at the bottom of the page, different colours of printing, etc.[2] In the novel *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne used, as far back as the eighteenth century, blank and marbled pages. All such devices are integral parts of these particular works of art. Though we know that a majority of poetry is

independent of them, they cannot and should not be ignored in those cases.

Besides, the role of print in poetry is by no means confined to such comparatively rare extravaganzas; the line-ends of verses, the grouping into stanzas, the paragraphs of prose passages, eye-rhymes or puns which are comprehensible only through spelling, and many similar devices must be considered integral factors of literary works of art. A purely oral theory tends to exclude all considerations of such devices, but they cannot be ignored in any complete analysis of many works of literary art. Their existence proves that print has become very important for the practice of poetry in modern times, that poetry is written for the eye as well as for the ear. Though the use of graphic devices is not indispensable, they are far more frequent in literature than in music, where the printed score is in a position similar to the printed page in poetry. In music such uses are rare, though by no means non-existent. There are many curious optical devices (colours, etc.) in Italian madrigal scores of the sixteenth century. The supposedly 'pure', 'absolute' composer Handel wrote a chorus speaking of the Red-Sea flood where the 'water stood like a wall', and the notes on the printed page of music form firm rows of evenly spaced dots suggesting a phalanx or wall.[3]

We have started with a theory which probably has not many serious adherents today. The second answer to our question puts the essence of a literary work of art into the sequence of sounds uttered by a speaker or reader of poetry. This is a widely accepted solution favoured especially by reciters. But the answer is equally unsatisfactory. Every reading aloud or reciting of a poem is merely a performance of a poem and not the poem itself. It is on exactly the same level as the performance of a piece of music by a musician. There is – to follow the line of our previous argument – a huge written literature which may never be sounded at all. To deny this, we have to subscribe to some such absurd theory as that of some behaviourists that all silent reading is accompanied by movements of the vocal cords. Actually, all experience shows that, unless we are almost illiterate or are struggling with the reading of a foreign language or want to articulate the sound whisperingly on purpose, we usually read 'globally', that is, we grasp printed words as wholes without breaking them up into sequences of phonemes and thus do not pronounce them even silently. In reading quickly we have no time even to articulate the sounds with our vocal cords. To assume besides that a poem exists in the reading aloud leads to the weird con-

clusion that a poem is non-existent when it is not sounded and that it is re-created afresh by every reading.

But most importantly, every reading of a poem is more than the genuine poem: each performance contains elements which are extraneous to the poem and individual idiosyncrasies of pronunciation, pitch, tempo, and distribution of stress – elements which are either determined by the personality of the speaker or are symptoms and means of his interpretation of the poem. Moreover, the reading of a poem not only adds individual elements but always represents only a selection of components implicit in the text of a poem: the pitch of the voice, the speed in which a passage is read, the distribution and intensity of the stresses, these may be either right or wrong, and even when right, may still represent only one version of reading a poem. We must acknowledge the possibility of several readings of a poem: readings which we either consider wrong readings, if we feel them to be distortions of the true meaning of the poem, or readings which we have to consider as correct and admissible, but still may not consider ideal.

The reading of the poem is not the poem itself, for we can correct the performance mentally. Even if we hear a recitation which we acknowledge to be excellent or perfect, we cannot preclude the possibility that somebody else, or even the same reciter at another time, may give a very different rendering which would bring out other elements of the poem equally well. The analogy to a musical performance is again helpful: the performance of a symphony even by a Toscanini is not the symphony itself, for it is inevitably coloured by the individuality of the performers and adds concrete details of tempo, rubato, timbre, etc., which may be changed in a next performance, though it would be impossible to deny that the same symphony has been performed for the second time. Thus we have shown that the poem can exist outside its sounded performance, and that the sounded performance contains many elements which we must consider as not included in the poem.

Still, in some literary works of art (especially in lyrical poetry) the vocal side of poetry may be an important factor of the general structure. Attention can be drawn to it by various means like metre, patterns of vowel or consonant sequences, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc. This fact explains – or rather helps to explain – the inadequacy of much translating of lyrical poetry, since these potential sound-patterns cannot be transferred into another linguistic system, though a skilful translator may approximate their general effect in his own language. There is, however, an enormous literature which is relatively independent of

sound-patterns, as can be shown by the historical effects of many works in even pedestrian translations. Sound may be an important factor in the structure of a poem, but the answer that a poem is a sequence of sounds is as unsatisfactory as the solution which puts faith in the print on the page.

The third, very common answer to our question says that a poem is the experience of the reader. A poem, it is argued, is nothing outside the mental processes of individual readers and is thus identical with the mental state or process which we experience in reading or listening to a poem. Again, this 'psychological' solution seems unsatisfactory. It is true, of course, that a poem can be known only through individual experiences, but it is not identical with such an individual experience. Every individual experience of a poem contains something idiosyncratic and purely individual. It is coloured by our mood and our individual preparation. The education, the personality of every reader, the general cultural climate of a time, the religious or philosophical or purely technical preconceptions of every reader will add something instantaneous and extraneous to every reading of a poem. Two readings at different times by the same individual may vary considerably either because he has matured mentally or because he is weakened by momentary circumstances such as fatigue, worry, or distraction. Every experience of a poem thus both leaves out something or adds something individual. The experience will never be commensurate with the poem: even a good reader will discover new details in poems which he had not experienced during previous readings, and it is needless to point out how distorted or shallow may be the reading of a less trained or untrained reader.

The view that the mental experience of a reader is the poem itself leads to the absurd conclusion that a poem is non-existent unless experienced and that it is re-created in every experience. There thus would not be one *Divine Comedy* but as many Divine Comedies as there are and were and will be readers. We end in complete scepticism and anarchy and arrive at the vicious maxim of *de gustibus non est disputandum*. If we should take this view seriously, it would be impossible to explain why one experience of a poem by one reader should be better than the experience of any other reader and why it is possible to correct the interpretation of another reader. It would mean the definite end of all teaching of literature which aims at enhancing the understanding and appreciation of a text. The writings of I. A. Richards, especially his book on *Practical Criticism*, have shown how much can be done in analysing the

individual idiosyncrasies of readers and how much a good teacher can achieve in rectifying false approaches. Curiously enough, Richards, who constantly criticizes the experiences of his pupils, holds to an extreme psychological theory which is in flat contradiction to his excellent critical practice. The idea that poetry is supposed to order our impulses and the conclusion that the value of poetry is in some sort of psychical therapy lead him finally to the admission that this goal may be accomplished by a bad as well as a good poem, by a carpet, a pot, a gesture as well as by a sonata.[4] Thus the supposed pattern in our mind is not definitely related to the poem which caused it.

The psychology of the reader, however interesting in itself or useful for pedagogical purposes, will always remain outside the object of literary study – the concrete work of art – and is unable to deal with the question of the structure and value of the work of art. Psychological theories must be theories of effect and may lead in extreme cases to such criteria of the value of poetry as that proposed by A. E. Housman in a lecture, *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (1933), where he tells us, one hopes with his tongue in his cheek, that good poetry can be recognized by the thrill down our spine. This is on the same level as eighteenth-century theories which measured the quality of a tragedy by the amount of tears shed by the audience or the movie scout's conception of the quality of a comedy on the basis of the number of laughs he has counted in the audience. Thus anarchy, scepticism, a complete confusion of values is the result of every psychological theory, as it must be unrelated either to the structure or the quality of a poem.

The psychological theory is only very slightly improved by I. A. Richards when he defines a poem as the 'experience of the right kind of reader'.[5] Obviously the whole problem is shifted to the conception of the *right* reader – and the meaning of that adjective. But even assuming an ideal condition of mood in a reader of the finest background and the best training, the definition remains unsatisfactory, as it is open to all the criticism we have made of the psychological method. It puts the essence of the poem into a momentary experience which even the right kind of reader could not repeat unchanged. It will always fall short of the full meaning of a poem at any given instance and will always add inevitable personal elements to the reading.

A fourth answer has been suggested to obviate this difficulty. The poem, we hear, is the experience of the author. Only in parenthesis, we may dismiss the view that the poem is the experience of the author at any time of his life after the creation of his work, when he re-reads it.

He then has obviously become simply a reader of his work and is liable to errors and misinterpretations of his own work almost as much as any other reader. Many instances of glaring misinterpretations by an author of his own work could be collected: the old anecdote about Browning professing not to understand his own poem has probably its element of truth. It happens to all of us that we misinterpret or do not fully understand what we have written some time ago. Thus the suggested answer must refer to the experience of the author during the time of creation. By 'experience of the author' we might mean, however, two different things: the conscious experience, the intentions which the author wanted to embody in his work, or the total conscious and unconscious experience during the prolonged time of creation. The view that the genuine poem is to be found in the intentions of an author is widespread even though it is not always explicitly stated.[6] It justifies much historical research and is at the bottom of many arguments in favour of specific interpretations. However, for most works of art we have no evidence to reconstruct the intentions of the author except the finished work itself. Even if we are in possession of contemporary evidence in the form of an explicit profession of intentions, such a profession need not be binding on a modern observer. 'Intentions' of the author are always 'rationalizations', commentaries which certainly must be taken into account but also must be criticized in the light of the finished work of art. The 'intentions' of an author may go far beyond the finished work of art: they may be merely pronouncements of plans and ideals. while the performance may be either far below or far aside the mark. If we could have interviewed Shakespeare he probably would have expressed his intentions in writing *Hamlet* in a way which we should find most unsatisfactory. We would still quite rightly insist on finding meanings in *Hamlet* (and not merely inventing them) which were probably far from clearly formulated in Shakespeare's conscious mind.

Artists may be strongly influenced by a contemporary critical situation and by contemporary critical formulae while giving expression to their intentions, but the critical formulae themselves might be quite inadequate to characterize their actual artistic achievement. The Baroque age is an obvious case in point, since a surprisingly new artistic practice found little expression either in the pronouncements of the artists or the comments of the critics. A sculptor such as Bernini could lecture to the Paris Academy expounding the view that his own practice was in strict conformity to that of the ancients, and Daniel Adam Pöppelmann, the architect of that highly rococo building in

Dresden called the Zwinger, wrote a whole pamphlet in order to demonstrate the strict agreement of his creation with the purest principles of Vitruvius.[7] The metaphysical poets had only a few quite inadequate critical formulae (like 'strong lines') which scarcely touch the actual novelty of their practice; and medieval artists frequently had purely religious or didactic 'intentions' which do not even begin to give expression to the artistic principles of their practice. Divergence between conscious intention and actual performance is a common phenomenon in the history of literature. Zola sincerely believed in his scientific theory of the experimental novel, but actually produced highly melodramatic and symbolic novels. Gogol thought of himself as a social reformer, as a 'geographer' of Russia, while, in practice, he produced novels and stories full of fantastic and grotesque creatures of his imagination. It is simply impossible to rely on the study of the intentions of an author, as they might not even represent an accurate commentary on his work, and at their best are not more than such a commentary. There can be no objections against the study of 'intention', if we mean by it merely a study of the integral work of art directed towards the total meaning.[8] But this use of the term 'intention' is different and somewhat misleading.

But also the alternative suggestion – that the genuine poem is in the total experience, conscious and unconscious, during the time of the creation – is very unsatisfactory. In practice, this conclusion has the serious disadvantage of putting the problem into a completely inaccessible and purely hypothetical x which we have no means of reconstructing or even of exploring. Beyond this insurmountable practical difficulty, the solution is also unsatisfactory because it puts the existence of the poem into a subjective experience which already is a thing of the past. The experiences of the author during creation ceased precisely when the poem had begun to exist. If this conception were right, we should never be able to come into direct contact with the work of art itself, but have constantly to make the assumption that our experiences in reading the poem are in some way identical with the long-past experiences of the author. E. M. Tillyard in his book on *Milton* has tried to use the idea that *Paradise Lost* is about the state of the author when he wrote it, and could not, in a long and frequently irrelevant exchange of arguments with C. S. Lewis, acknowledge that *Paradise Lost* is, first of all, about Satan and Adam and Eve and hundreds and thousands of different ideas, representations, and concepts, rather than about Milton's state of mind during creation.[9] That the whole content of

the poem was once in contact with the conscious and subconscious mind of Milton is perfectly true; but this state of mind is inaccessible and might have been filled, in those particular moments, with millions of experiences of which we cannot find a trace in the poem itself. Taken literally this whole solution must lead to pointless speculations about the exact duration of the state of mind of the creator and its exact content, which might include a toothache at the moment of creation.[10] The whole psychological approach through states of mind, whether of the reader or the listener, the speaker or the author, raises more problems than it can possibly solve.

A better way is obviously in the direction of defining the work of art in terms of social and collective experience. There are two possibilities of solution, which, however, still fall short of solving our problem satisfactorily. We may say that the work of art is the sum of all past and possible experiences of the poem: a solution which leaves us with an infinity of irrelevant individual experiences, bad and false readings, and perversions. In short, it merely gives us the answer that the poem is in the state of mind of its reader, multiplied by infinity. Another answer solves the question by stating that the genuine poem is the experience common to all the experiences of the poem.[11] But this answer would obviously reduce the work of art to the common denominator of all these experiences. This denominator must be the *lowest* common denominator, the most shallow, most superficial and trivial experience. This solution, besides its practical difficulties, would completely impoverish the total meaning of a work of art.

An answer to our question in terms of individual or social psychology cannot be found. A poem, we have to conclude, is not an individual experience or a sum of experiences, but only a potential cause of experiences. Definition in terms of states of mind fails because it cannot account for the normative character of the genuine poem, for the simple fact that it might be experienced correctly or incorrectly. In every individual experience only a small part can be considered as adequate to the true poem. Thus, the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers. Every single experience (reading, reciting, and so forth) is only an attempt – more or less successful and complete – to grasp this set of norms or standards.

The term 'norms' as used here should not, of course, be confused with norms which are either classical or romantic, ethical or political. The norms we have in mind are implicit norms which have to be ex-

tracted from every individual experience of a work of art and together make up the genuine work of art as a whole. It is true that if we compare works of art among themselves, similarities or differences between these norms will be ascertained, and from the similarities themselves it ought to be possible to proceed to a classification of works of art according to the type of norms they embody. We may finally arrive at theories of genres and ultimately at theories of literature in general. To deny this, as it has been denied by those who with some justification stress the uniqueness of every work of art, seems to push the conception of individuality so far that every work of art would become completely isolated from tradition and thus finally both incommunicable and incomprehensible. Assuming that we have to start with the analysis of an individual work of art, we still can scarcely deny that there must be some links, some similarities, some common elements or factors which would approximate two or more given works of art and thus would open the door to a transition from the analysis of one individual work of art to a type such as Greek tragedy and hence to tragedy in general, to literature in general, and finally to some all-inclusive structure common to all arts.

But this is a further problem. We, however, have still to decide where and how these norms exist. A closer analysis of a work of art will show that it is best to think of it as not merely one system of norms but rather of a system which is made up of several strata, each implying its own subordinate group. The Polish philosopher, Roman Ingarden, in an ingenious, highly technical analysis of the literary work of art,[12] has employed the methods of Husserl's 'Phenomenology' to arrive at such distinctions of strata. We need not follow him in every detail to see that his general distinctions are sound and useful: there is, first, the sound-stratum which is not, of course, to be confused with the actual sounding of the words, as our preceding argument must have shown. Still, this pattern is indispensable, as only on the basis of sounds can the second stratum arise: the units of meaning. Every single word will have its meaning, will combine into units in the context, into syntagmas and sentence patterns. Out of this syntactic structure arises a third stratum, that of the objects represented, the 'world' of a novelist, the characters, the setting. Ingarden adds two other strata which may not have to be distinguished as separable. The stratum of the 'world' is seen from a particular viewpoint, which is not necessarily stated but is implied. An event presented in literature can be, for example, presented as 'seen' or as 'heard': even the same event, for example the banging of

a door; a character can be seen in its 'inner' or 'outer' characteristic traits. And finally, Ingarden speaks of a stratum of 'metaphysical qualities' (the sublime, the tragic, the terrible, the holy) of which art can give us contemplation. This stratum is not indispensable, and may be missing in some works of literature. Possibly the two last strata can be included in the 'world', in the realm of represented objects. But they also suggest very real problems in the analysis of literature. The 'point of view' has, at least in the novel, received considerable attention since Henry James and since Lubbock's more systematic exposition of the Jamesian theory and practice. The stratum of 'metaphysical qualities' allows Ingarden to reintroduce questions of the 'philosophical meaning' of works of art without the risk of the usual intellectualist errors.

It is useful to illustrate the conception by the parallel which can be drawn from linguistics. Linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and the Prague Linguistic Circle carefully distinguish between *langue* and *parole*,[13] the system of language and the individual speech-act; and this distinction corresponds to that between the poem as such and the individual experience of the poem. The system of language (*langue*) is a collection of conventions and norms whose workings and relations we can observe and describe as having a fundamental coherence and identity in spite of very different, imperfect, or incomplete pronouncements of individual speakers. In this respect at least, a literary work of art is in exactly the same position as a system of language. We as individuals shall never realize it completely, for we shall never use our own language completely and perfectly. The very same situation is actually exhibited in every single act of cognition. We shall never know an object in all its qualities, but still we can scarcely deny the identity of objects even though we may see them from different perspectives. We always grasp some 'structure of determination' in the object which makes the act of cognition not an act of arbitrary invention or subjective distinction but the recognition of some norms imposed on us by reality. Similarly, the structure of a work of art has the character of a 'duty which I have to realize'. I shall always realize it imperfectly, but in spite of some incompleteness a certain 'structure of determination' remains, just as in any other object of knowledge.[14]

Modern linguists have analysed the potential sounds as phonemes; they can also analyse morphemes and syntagmas. The sentence, for instance, can be described not merely as an *ad hoc* utterance but as a syntactic pattern. Outside of phonemics, modern functional linguistics is still comparatively undeveloped; but the problems, though difficult,

are not insoluble or completely new: they are rather restatements of the morphological and syntactical questions as they were discussed in older grammars. The analysis of a literary work of art encounters parallel problems in units of meaning and their specific organization for aesthetic purposes. Such problems as those of poetic semantics, diction, and imagery are reintroduced in a new and more careful statement. Units of meaning, sentences, and sentence structures refer to objects, construct imaginative realities such as landscapes, interiors, characters, actions, or ideas. These also can be analysed in a way which does not confuse them with empirical reality and does not ignore the fact that they inhere in linguistic structures. A character in a novel grows only out of the units of meaning, is made of the sentences either pronounced by the figure or pronounced about it. It has an indeterminate structure in comparison with a biological person who has his coherent past.[15] These distinctions of strata have the advantage of superseding the traditional, misleading distinction between content and form. The content will reappear in close contact with the linguistic substratum, in which it is implied and on which it is dependent.

But this conception of the literary work of art as a stratified system of norms still leaves undetermined the actual mode of existence of this system. To deal with this matter properly we should have to settle such controversies as those of nominalism versus realism, mentalism versus behaviourism – in short, all the chief problems of epistemology. For our purposes, however, it will be sufficient to avoid two opposites, extreme Platonism and extreme nominalism. There is no need to hypostatize or 'reify' this system of norms, to make it a sort of archetypal idea presiding over a timeless realm of essences. The literary work of art has not the same ontological status as the idea of a triangle, or of a number, or a quality like 'redness'. Unlike such 'subsistences', the literary work of art is, first of all, created at a certain point in time and, secondly, is subject to change and even to complete destruction. In this respect it rather resembles the system of language, though the exact moment of creation or death is probably much less clearly definable in the case of language than in that of the literary work of art, usually an individual creation. On the other hand, one should recognize that an extreme nominalism which rejects the concept of a 'system of language' and thus of a work of art in our sense, or admits it only as a useful fiction or a 'scientific description', misses the whole problem and the point at issue. The narrow assumptions of behaviourism define as 'mystical' or 'metaphysical' anything which does not conform to a very limited

conception of empirical reality. Yet to call the phoneme a 'fiction', or the system of language merely a 'scientific description of speech-acts', is to ignore the problem of truth.[16] We recognize norms and deviations from norms and do not merely devise some purely verbal descriptions. The whole behaviourist point of view is, in this respect, based on a bad theory of abstraction. Numbers or norms are what they are, whether we construct them or not. Certainly I perform the counting, I perform the reading; but number presentation or recognition of a norm is not the same as the number or norm itself. The utterance of the sound *b* is not the phoneme *b*. We recognize a structure of norms within reality and do not simply invent verbal constructs. The objection that we have access to these norms only through individual acts of cognition, and that we cannot get out of these acts or beyond them, is only apparently impressive. It is the objection which has been made to Kant's criticism of our cognition, and it can be refuted with the Kantian arguments.

It is true we are ourselves liable to misunderstandings and lack of comprehension of these norms, but this does not mean that the critic assumes a superhuman role of criticizing our comprehension from the outside or that he pretends to grasp the perfect whole of the system of norms in some act of intellectual intuition. Rather, we criticize a part of our knowledge in the light of the higher standard set by another part. We are not supposed to put ourselves into the position of a man who, in order to test his vision, tries to look at his own eyes, but into the position of a man who compares the objects he sees clearly with those he sees only dimly, makes then generalizations as to the kinds of objects which fall into the two classes, and explains the difference by some theory of vision which takes account of distance, light, and so forth.

Analogously, we can distinguish between right and wrong readings of a poem, or between a recognition or a distortion of the norms implicit in a work of art, by acts of comparison, by a study of different false or incomplete 'realizations' or interpretations. We can study the actual workings, relations, and combinations of these norms, just as the phoneme can be studied. The literary work of art is neither an empirical fact, in the sense of being a state of mind of any given individual or of any group of individuals, nor is it an ideal changeless object such as a triangle. The work of art may become an object of experience; it is, we admit, accessible only through individual experience, but it is not identical with any experience. It differs from ideal objects such as numbers precisely because it is only accessible through the empirical (physical or potentially physical) part of its structure, the sound-system, while

a triangle or a number can be intuited directly. It also differs from ideal objects in one important respect. It has something which can be called 'life'. It arises at a certain point of time, changes in the course of history, and may perish. A work of art is 'timeless' only in the sense that, if preserved, it has some fundamental structure of identity since its creation, but it is 'historical' too. It has a development which can be described. This development is nothing but the series of concretizations of a given work of art in the course of history which we may, to a certain extent, reconstruct from the reports of critics and readers about their experiences and judgements and the effect of a given work of art on other works. Our consciousness of earlier concretizations (readings, criticisms, misinterpretations) will affect our own experience: earlier readings may educate us to a deeper understanding or may cause a violent reaction against the prevalent interpretations of the past. All this shows the importance of the history of criticism and leads to difficult questions about the nature and limits of individuality. How can a work of art pass through a process of evolution and still preserve its basic structure unimpaired? One can speak of the 'life' of a work of art in history in exactly the same sense in which one can speak of an animal or a human being remaining the same individual while constantly changing in the course of a lifetime. The *Iliad* still 'exists'; that is, it can become again and again effective and is thus different from a historical phenomenon like the Battle of Waterloo which is definitely past, though its course may be reconstructed and its effects may be discernible even today. In what sense can we, however, speak of an identity between the *Iliad* as the contemporary Greeks heard or read it and the *Iliad* we now read? Even assuming that we know the identical text, our actual experience must be different. We cannot contrast its language with the everyday language of Greece, and cannot therefore feel the deviations from colloquial language on which much of the poetic effect must depend. We are unable to understand many verbal ambiguities which are an essential part of every poet's meaning. Obviously it requires in addition some imaginative effort, which can have only very partial success, to think ourselves back into the Greek belief in gods, or the Greek scale of moral values. Still, it could be scarcely denied that there is a substantial identity of 'structure' which has remained the same throughout the ages. This structure, however, is dynamic: it changes throughout the process of history while passing through the minds of its readers, critics, and fellow artists.[17] Thus the system of norms is growing and changing and will remain, in some sense, always incompletely and imperfectly

realized. But this dynamic conception does not mean mere subjectivism and relativism. All the different points of view are by no means equally right. It will always be possible to determine which point of view grasps the subject most thoroughly and deeply. A hierarchy of viewpoints, a criticism of the grasp of norms, is implied in the concept of the adequacy of interpretation. All relativism is ultimately defeated by the recognition that 'the Absolute is in the relative, though not finally and fully in it'.[18]

The work of art, then, appears as an object of knowledge *sui generis* which has a special ontological status. It is neither real (physical, like a statue) nor mental (psychological, like the experience of light or pain) nor ideal (like a triangle). It is a system of norms of ideal concepts which are intersubjective. They must be assumed to exist in collective ideology, changing with it, accessible only through individual mental experiences, based on the sound-structure of its sentences.

We have not discussed the question of artistic values. But the preceding examination should have shown that there is no structure outside norms and values. We cannot comprehend and analyse any work of art without reference to values. The very fact that I recognize a certain structure as a 'work of art' implies a judgement of value. The error of pure phenomenology is in the assumption that such a dissociation is possible, that values are superimposed on structure, 'inhere' on or in structures. This error of analysis vitiates the penetrating book of Roman Ingarden, who tries to analyse the work of art without reference to values. The root of the matter lies, of course, in the phenomenologist's assumption of an eternal, non-temporal order of 'essences' to which the empirical individualizations are added only later. By assuming an absolute scale of values we necessarily lose contact with the relativity of individual judgements. A frozen Absolute faces a valueless flux of individual judgements.

The unsound thesis of absolutism and the equally unsound antithesis of relativism must be superseded and harmonized in a new synthesis which makes the scale of values itself dynamic, but does not surrender it as such. 'Perspectivism', as we have termed such a conception,[19] does not mean an anarchy of values, a glorification of individual caprice, but a process of getting to know the object from different points of view which may be defined and criticized in their turn. Structure, sign, and value form three aspects of the very same problem and cannot be artificially isolated.

We must, however, first try to examine the methods used in describing and analysing the various strata of the work of art: (1) the sound-stratum, euphony, rhythm, and metre; (2) the units of meaning which determine the formal linguistic structure of a work of literature, its style and the discipline of stylistics investigating it systematically; (3) image and metaphor, the most centrally poetic of all stylistic devices which need special discussion also because they almost imperceptibly shade off into (4) the specific 'world' of poetry in symbol and systems of symbols which we call poetic 'myth'. The world projected by narrative fiction presents (5) special problems of modes and techniques to which we shall devote another chapter. Having surveyed the methods of analysis applicable to individual works of art, we shall raise the question (6) of the nature of literary genres and then discuss the central problem of all criticism – (7) evaluation. Finally we shall return to the idea of the evolution of literature and discuss (8) the nature of literary history and the possibility of an internal history of literature as a history of an art.