INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again – beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

Xerox University Microfilms

300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

75-20,537

KINSEY, Richard Barry, 1941-
HOW TO STUDY LITERARY TEXTS: AN ESSAY
ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE IN
LITERARY STUDIES.

The American University, Ph.D., 1975
Language and Literature, general

Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

HOW TO STUDY LITERARY TEXTS: AN ESSAY ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE IN LITERARY STUDIES

by

Richard Barry Kinsey

Submitted to the
Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
of The American University
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Literary Studies

Signatures of Committee:

Chairman: Rudolph von Abele

Charles Barry Chabot

Edward L. Kessler

Thomas F. Cannon, Jr.

Dean of the College

Date: 16 Apr 75

1975

The American University
Washington, D. C.

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY 5033

Preface

If what my friends and colleagues who have been through "traditional" doctoral programs tell me about their dissertation experiences is true, then preparing an interdisciplinary dissertation is quite unusual. For I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of my reading, thinking, and writing. In large part, this is because there is something undeniably exciting about learning new ways of saying and understanding, rather like learning to play a new game where the pieces and board *look* familiar but their use is nothing short of a mystery. Of course, eventually the rules of the game begin to take shape; they do so, however, only on their own terms and in their own time.

The English language gave me the pieces I move about in this essay; The American University gave me a large and varied board on which to play; and the Department of Literature supplied the continuing financial support that, as they say, bought me the time necessary for learning. But these are merely the material conditions for an education. Without the patient and firm guidance of my teachers they would have remained useless.

To Professors Edward Burkart, Grace Mancill, Hugo Mueller, and Kirk Rankin who taught me linguistics, I owe my love of the method of scientific inquiry. To Professor Barry Blose who struggled against my inability to grasp the subtleties of his thought while he introduced me to the philosophy of language, I owe my love of the richness and

power of conceptual analysis. And to the graduate faculty of the Department of Literature who first accepted me into and then encouraged my progress through a highly innovative program of interdisciplinary studies, I owe my love of literature and my belief in the implausibility of generalizing about works of art. To the members of my committee, Professors Thomas Cannon, C. Barry Chabot, and Edward Kessler I owe special thanks for their willingness to listen to ideas that I know to some, if not all, of them must seem heresy. None of these debts can be repaid; at best they can only be passed on to others who will, in their turn, face the difficulties of reconciling the uniqueness of each literary text with the regularities of language.

Great as these debts are, I owe two still greater. Throughout my candidacy Professor Rudolph von Abele has given me of his time, his keen insight into the fundamental issues of literary studies, and his friendship, so unselfishly that I can no longer distinguish between those ideas I set forth here which are mine and those which are his. What is best is certainly due to him; for the errors, omissions, and lapses in logic and sensitivity, I claim full responsibility.

Finally, to my friend James R. Coffee who daily listened while I located myself within my ignorance, I express my willingness to listen to him for a change.

Contents

Preface page i

Introduction page 1

1. Are science and humanistic study incompatible? page 2

2. What is a *literary* *text*? page 9

3. What is a *literary* text? page 16

4. What is a literary *text*? page 20

5. Do evaluative criteria make sense? page 24

6. Can a literary text be interpreted? page 26

7. Are literary texts intentional? page 35

8. Who tells stories? page 44

9. What statements are relevant to the study of literary texts? page 46

Bibliography page 55

Saying that literature is an instance of language use sounds trivial and uninteresting but it is neither. As language, literature becomes accessible to understanding and analysis where before it was hidden behind that impenetrable linguistic barrier that always separates the actual from the metaphysical. No wonder much of what passes for talk about literature reminds us of the Aesopian fable of the three blind men who, with predictable results, were asked to describe an elephant. Locked into the belief that they had all described the _same_ thing, each man was certain that he alone had penetrated the veil of tactile sensations and discovered the _arcanum arcanorum_.

We do not dispute the man who says, "I, and I alone, _know_ my own experience." On the contrary, we agree with him. But we also want to show him that a language is a system of signs which _cannot_ be used to describe his private experiences because the use of those signs is governed by _public_ rules. This, incidentally, is the reason literary studies _cannot_ be about the private experiences of either authors or readers.

This essay is about the meaning of the expression "literary studies." It is in the form of nine interdependent questions; the answers to the first eight establish the foundation necessary for asking and answering the ninth and final question:

1 Are science and humanistic study incompatible?

2 What is a _literary text_?

3 What is a literary text?

4 What is a literary text?

5 Do evaluative criteria make sense?

6 Can a literary text be interpreted?

7 Are literary texts intentional?

8 Who tells stories?

9 What statements are relevant to the study of literary texts?

I hope the difficulty of this last question is obvious enough to excuse my tackling it piecemeal.

1

The January 1975 issue of PMLA opens with a statement by its editor, William D. Schaefer, outlining and justifying the journal's new editorial policy. In the course of his remarks, Schaefer says, without the slightest trace of embarrassment, "[we] feel that critical diversity in PMLA is and always has been its chief virtue, that eclecticism is not only inevitable but desirable."[1] That such a policy is unimaginable in any serious scientific journal is hardly a matter for debate. That it is taken as a desideratum of healthy discussion in literary studies suggests that it ought to be instructive to consider briefly the differences between these two styles of

[1] William D. Schaefer, "Editor's Column," PMLA, 90 (1975), 3.

investigation.

Every theory has a subject matter; it is, in other words, "about" something. Mathematics, for example, is about numbers (or points). Although it is still fairly common to think of theories as "explaining" their subject matter, this is only partially correct. For a theory is not just the consequence of an investigation of some subject matter; on the contrary, as Thomas S. Kuhn makes clear in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, no investigation can proceed without at least a primitive notion of what will count as relevant to that investigation. But clearly, no matter how primitive they are, criteria of relevance imply a theory about the nature of what is under investigation; if this were not the case, then an investigator would have no idea of what to look for. Thus, theories structure their subject matter by construing it in a particular way before, during, and after the investigative process. As this process goes forward, the theory itself eventually becomes "an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions."[2]

One of the chief virtues of a theory is that it relieves every individual investigator working within the framework it provides from having to construct such a framework ad hoc each time he undertakes

[2] Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd ed., International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, 2, 2 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 23.

a new problem; it provides, in other words, a context of "first principles" which an investigator can and does accept as the basis for his research. In exchange for relinquishing his right to begin at the beginning, an option which is always available, the investigator is assured that the problems to which he devotes his energies are, with a high degree of probability, solvable. As Kuhn remarks, this is one of the reasons "normal science," i.e., "research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice" (p. 10), seems to progress so rapidly; for "its practitioners concentrate on problems that only their own lack of ingenuity should keep them from solving" (p. 37). This point is important because the classical critique of science is that it is an anti-humanistic discipline which denies to its practitioners a free choice of problems and methods. Not only does this critique rest on a misconception of the scientific enterprise--a scientist, as I have pointed out, is always _free_ to challenge the foundations of his discipline; if he does not, it is because he _freely_ accepts that foundation and the problems it suggests--but also on a faulty analysis of "freedom." This, of course, is an old problem; rather than rehearse it here in all its tedious detail, let me quote instead from Igor Stravinsky who, as an artist, the humanistic paradigm of a "free agent," may carry more weight with humanistic critics than an endless list of professional philosophers. Discussing

his compositional practice in the Poetics of Music, Stravinsky says:

> I experience a sort of terror when, at the moment of setting to work and finding myself before the infinitude of possibilities that present themselves, I have the feeling that everything is permissible to me. If everything is permissible to me, the best and the worst; if nothing offers me any resistance, than any effort is inconceivable, and I cannot use anything as a basis, and consequently every undertaking becomes futile.. . . What delivers me from the anguish into which an unrestricted freedom plunges me is the fact that I am always able to turn immediately to the concrete things that are here in question. I have no use for a theoretic freedom. Let me have something finite, definite--matter that can lend itself to my operation only insofar as it is commensurate with my possibilities. And such matter presents itself to me together with its limitations. I must in turn impose mine upon it. So here we are, whether we like it or not, in the realm of necessity.. . . My freedom thus consists in my moving about within the narrow frame that I have assigned myself for each one of my undertakings.
>
> I shall go even further: my freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles. Whatever diminishes constraint diminishes strength. The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit.[3]

I have quoted Stravinsky at length in order to show you that the notion of freedom advanced by humanists as a description of the artistic enterprise is not necessarily correct. And since this is the case, it will hardly do as a model for the practice of criticism. That it continues to enjoy a healthy and active existence in literary studies is one reason no one should be surprised to find that discipline so utterly confused and confusing. So, to claim, as does the editor of PMLA, that eclecticism can lead to genuine knowledge

[3] Igor Stravinsky, Poetics of Music: In the Form of Six Lessons, trans., Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (1947; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, Inc., 1956), pp. 66-68.

is about as credible as to claim that if you sit enough monkeys down in a room with typewriters, someday one of them is going to "write" *Beowulf*. Progress in understanding, one wants to say, does not come about so haphazardly or, to paraphrase Francis Bacon, it is better to be wrong than confused. Something like this is what I imagine Rilke had in mind when he advised his young correspondent of the *Letters to A Young Poet* against reading aesthetic criticism:

> such things are either partisan views, petrified and grown senseless in their lifeless induration, or they are clever quibblings in which today one view wins and tomorrow the opposite. Works of art are of an infinite loneliness and with nothing so little to be reached as with criticism. Only love can grasp and hold and be just toward them. Consider *yourself* and your feeling right with regard to every such argumentation, discussion or introduction; if you are wrong after all, the natural growth of your inner life will lead you slowly and with time to other insights.[4]

Gentle in their inward assurance of truth, yet forceful in their outward logic, these words express more truth and wisdom than it is comfortable to admit, either to ourselves or to one another. For it is undeniable that critics have too frequently used works of art, and here I am especially thinking about literature, as an occasion either for validating their own social, political, religious, or other views, or else for engaging in unproductive theoretical disputes, neither of which has anything whatsoever to do with the genuine study of art. The

[4] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to A Young Poet*, trans., M. D. Herter Norton, rev. ed. (1954; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1963), p. 29.

former seeks to force works of literature into too public an existence in which their timelessness is arrested while the latter trivializes them in the exempli gratia of disagreements serving only to enhance the professional reputations of a few scholars dwelling in a world detached from human experience. Thus we are offered our choice of literature-as-public-spectacle or literature-as-private-argument, a situation which leads me quite naturally to ask: Who benefits from the present deplorable state of literary studies?

Before offering a tentative answer to this question, let me first ask a somewhat different sort of question: Is the question being asked here appropriate to a serious investigation into the meaning of literary studies; more generally, is it "scholarly"? I ask this question now in order to forestall the argument that a scholarly question is of a particular type, sharing with all other scholarly questions certain essential properties which this question clearly does not possess and that, therefore, it is inappropriate in this context. My reply to this objection is that no question can be characterized as either scholarly or unscholarly because only answers are properly spoken of in these terms. Furthermore, just as subjectivity becomes objectivity not when an "I" is absent from the assertion of a proposition but when a sufficient number of other "I's" give their assent, so too, an answer moves toward becoming scholarly when it is asserted within a framework of criteria generally accepted

as scholarly. I want to add, however, that I do not intend to offer an answer to my original question which could be called scholarly; that is, I do not intend to conduct an exhaustive investigation into who in fact benefits from the perpetuation of a state of affairs in which genuine knowledge is consistently confused with that which is spurious. To do so would lead me into all sorts of difficulties I am not competent to resolve, difficulties connected, for example, with defining "benefiting from the existing situation" in terms compatible with an empirical investigation, something like, increases in wealth and/or prestige, and so on. Although I am convinced that answers to questions appropriate to such an investigation would be revealing about the community of literary scholars, in the absence of "hard" evidence I prefer to propose an answer that is not likely to increase the antagonisms already present in that community; I want, in other words, to suggest that no one benefits. Actually, it seems to me that everyone is hurt by a situation in which the only possible criterion against which individual research can be judged is internal consistency, In a discipline ruled by eclecticism, anything is valid so long as it is self-consistent; i.e., so long as the claims it makes cannot be used as evidence against any other claims. How could it be otherwise? Without a general theory of its subject matter, the practitioners of a discipline cannot judge the work of their fellow practitioners because each of them is conducting his research within an ad hoc framework that necessarily leads to ad hoc results. Not surprisingly,

when genuine criteria are absent, research gets judged in terms of such stop-gap pseudo-criteria as number of footnotes, stylistic felicity, and the like; but these are hardly a substitute for definitive criteria.

I have not larded this discussion of the present state of literary studies with a plethora of documentation for two reasons. First, because the job has recently been done very nicely by John M. Ellis in The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis;[5] and second, because all the footnotes in the world would fail to convince those who do not daily feel the need for a general framework in which to conduct their inquiries of the need for such a framework; those who feel this need, of course, do not need to be persuaded. Some of the flies in Wittgenstein's famous bottle will always be content to beat their wings against the walls of their invisible prison and it would be wrong to torment them with our perplexities. We, on the other hand, must conserve all our energy for the real task that confronts us: finding a way out of the bottle.

2

One of the major stumbling blocks to a general theory of literature

[5] John M. Ellis, The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis (Berkley: Univ. of California Press, 1974); see especially chs. 1 and 3.

is that critics have usually been unable or unwilling to agree on just how the subject matter of literary studies, i.e., literary texts or, less precisely, literature, is best isolated from that mass of of other kinds of written language to which it is so obviously related. Solutions to this problem have always and necessarily been asserted within the context of some theory of meaning; a moment's reflection will convince you why this must be the case, for, however and whatever it means, the expression "literary text" must mean in the way in which expressions are allowed to mean generally. To ask for the meaning of "x" is to ask for the meaning of the expression, x, in some language, L.

Although it has been subjected to endless refinement and elaboration, the theory of meaning which has dominated thinking about language from Plato down to the recent past--it still is the dominant popular conception of language[6]--claims that words or expressions mean by referring to (naming) entities-in-the-world. This, as Morris Weitz observes, has created all sorts of confusions in the study of literature. After examining Hamlet-criticism (as a paradigm case of criticism), Weitz concludes that much of what critics say about Hamlet "is said in a language whose assumptions and doctrines--about the

[6] See, for example, the discussion of definition in the popular "Freshman Composition" text, Hans P. Guth, Words and Ideas, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publ. Co., Inc., 1969), pp. 151-80.

nature of language, its relations to thought and the expression of thought, and its relation to *Hamlet*, the historical environment of *Hamlet*, and especially to tragedy, aesthetic response, poetic drama, and artistic greatness--they do not grasp, let alone question."[7] This conclusion, when conjoined with Weitz' subsequent rejection of the reference-theory of meaning and his adoption of Wittgenstein's use-theory--the only currently available alternative to the reference-theory, linguistic accounts of meaning being moribund[8]--ought to lead to a thorough reanalysis of the putative issues of *Hamlet*-criticism in which those pseudo-issues resulting from an erroneous theory of meaning are sorted out from the genuine issues. Such a reanalysis would, in effect, fulfill the requirements of Wittgenstein's claim in the *Blue Book* that "Philosophy . . . is a

[7] Morris Weitz, *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*, (1964; rpt. Cleveland: The World Publ. Co., 1966), p. 219.

[8] See, for example, Jerrold J. Katz and Jerry A. Fodor, "The Structure of A Semantic Theory," *Language*, 39 (1963), 170-210, rpt. in the same authors' *The Structure of Language* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 479-518; Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957); *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964); and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1965); and also the published symposia, Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language* (1960; rpt. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1966); and Seymour Chatman, ed., *Literary Style: A Symposium* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971). For an intelligent discussion of the failure of linguistic theories of meaning and linguistics in literary criticism generally, see William H. Youngren, *Semantics, Linguistics and Criticism* (New York: Random House, 1972).

fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert upon us."[9] But unfortunately, Weitz appears himself to have been bewitched by the verbal magic of "his" critics to such an extent that, after disallowing poetics as a logically legitimate pursuit, he is able to say that such attempts to "define the undefinable . . . are, nevertheless, invaluable because they incorporate debates over and recommendations of criteria that function as guides in the enrichment of our understanding of art" (p. 317). And his confusion on this point goes so far as to muddy his anlaysis of "criticism," the term he set out to clarify:

criticism itself, as this whole survey of Hamlet criticism reveals, has no , . . set of [defining] properties. The multiplicity of procedure, doctrine, and disagreement of this criticism incorporates a multiplicity of properties, none of which is necessary and sufficient. Criticism of Hamlet includes many things; any claim about what is primary or relevant or necessary or sufficient in criticism, consequently, is not a true (or false) statement about its nature, but an expression of a preference on the part of the particular critic that he converts into an honorific redefinition of "criticism." Criticism has no primary aim, task, or function, except the second-order or general goal of facilitating and enriching the understanding of a work of art. (p. 318)

But this is no conclusion, merely a restatement of the problem. Surely we have a right to expect something more concrete in the way of results from abandoning a false theory of meaning. And, as I will show shortly, such results are to be gained. First, however, I want

9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Books, 2nd ed. (1960; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 27.

to say something about the nature of Weitz' failure to reach a less amorphous conclusion because I believe it originates in a faulty understanding of what it means to ascribe use to a word. To begin with, Weitz completely ignores a fundamental distinction, first made explicit by Ferdinand de Saussure in the Cours de linguistique générale, between the synchronic description of a language and its diachronic description.[10] The former is a set of statements about a language with respect to its state in some particular and fairly narrow time-frame; a diachronic description, on the other hand, relates two or more synchronic descriptions (which is to say that a diachronic description makes "historical" statements). De Saussure insists that synchronic description is the primary goal of linguistic research on the fairly obvious principle that the accuracy of any statements relating two or more states of a language is a function of the accuracy with which those states are described. But there is another more important issue at stake here, for de Saussure also claims that any knowledge about the previous states of a language is irrelevant to the investigation of any one of its states. That this is true can be seen, to use de Saussure's own analogy, by comparing language to a chess game in which the state of the board at any given time, t_j, can be precisely described without recourse

[10] Ferdinand de Saussure, A Course in General Linguistics, trans., Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

to any knowledge about its state at any previous time, t_a. Now, nowhere does Weitz show the slightest awareness that this is a distinction with a difference; consequently he subsumes 350 years of _Hamlet_-criticism under a single rubric. But it seems unwise to assert that when we use the word "criticism" in contemporary discourse, we are using it to mean the history of criticism. I doubt there is a single critic alive who would want to vouch for the entire history of criticism; we may be wrong, but we do like to think that _some_ progress has been made since critics first began making statements about _Hamlet_. What has happened here is that Weitz has converted the definition of meaning from something which is referential with respect to the _essential_ properties of the entities-being-referenced, to a notion of use which appears to deny the possibility of any genuine definition at all; the effect of this is to make the old theory of meaning seem preferable to the new.

Fortunately, things only _seem_ this way because Weitz has misunderstood Wittgenstein's method. Whenever he is speaking about the use of a particular expression, Wittgenstein is speaking about its use at some specific time, usually its _current_ use, and not about how it _has been_ used throughout its history; in order to do that, as de Saussure makes clear and as I am sure Wittgenstein was aware, he would require a quite different method. And Wittgenstein is hardly content simply to make explicit the meanings implicit in apparently

contradictory forms of expression; on the contrary, he is at pains to show us how these contradictions are resolved, or made resolvable, by paying close attention to their meanings--meanings which have been obscured by our assimilating their forms of expression to superficially similar forms of expression with different grammars. The second half of the Blue Book, for example, is an analysis of personal experience, i.e., forms of expression involving the use of personal pronouns, which leads to a resolution of the apparent conflict between those who assert and those who deny the existence of "other minds." The error of the solipsist, Wittgenstein says, resides in his "objecting to a convention"; in his objecting, that is, to the common use of certain words without realizing that that is what he is doing. Put a little differently, he is looking "for a justification of his description [of the world] where there is none" (p. 73).

Seen in this way it becomes clear that Wittgenstein's whole effort is directed at showing us that sometimes we say things which are either tautologies or contradictions (statements having no sense) without realizing what we are saying. His purpose in showing us this is therapeutic, to cure us of the temptation to repeat our mistakes. This is a far cry from saying that sometimes we say things which are senseless and sometimes not, letting the matter rest there because there is no principle, other than personal preference, which allows us to decide which way of using language is correct and which

incorrect. To say that critics say things which are tautologous or contradictory is to say that they say things which are nonsense; but surely, it is only what critics say that makes sense which is of interest to us.

I have allowed myself the luxury of this little excursus because there is always the danger that someone following Weitz' method will claim that "literature" means anything and everything it has ever been said to mean. I prefer to think this unlikely, but one can never be certain. Besides, there is an even greater danger lurking here; for Weitz' failure to reach genuine conclusions demonstrates the logical priority of a definition of literature--actually *literary text*--over a definition of "criticism." Regardless of what the expression "literary text" means, however, "criticism" can only be useful insofar as it is *sensible* discourse *about* such texts.

3

This brings me back to my earlier question, What is a *literary text*? I think by now it is fairly obvious that if this question is being asked in the expectation of an answer couched in terms of a referential definition, then it is going to be unsatisfactory. So, let me rephrase the question in terms compatible with a use-theory definition, How is the expression "literary text" being used in sentences like, "*The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym is a literary* text"? Asking the

question this way shifts the focus of our attention from the thing-itself, in this case _Pym_, to the use which is being made of an item in the inventory of a conceptual system. (I put it this way in order to point out that I am no longer asking the more restricted kind of question, What is the actual usage of the expression "literary text" in the English language?, which calls for an empirical investigation; but rather a question requiring conceptual analysis.)

Recently Ellis has suggested that correctly answering this question hinges on our adoption of a special theory of evaluative expressions (a theory with a restricted range of applications within the framework of a use-theory of meaning). Specifically he asserts, "Literary texts are . . . those pieces of language used in a certain kind of way by the community. They are used as literature" (p. 42). This means they are _not_ used in the same ways in which ordinary language is used, namely to achieve some particular purpose, say to arrange a meeting or to communicate a piece of information, in which the immediate context of its origin is specifically relevant to the production and understanding of an utterance; but rather in a way which denies the specific relevance of _any_ immediate context. Our use of texts in this way is made possible by our radically restricting the referential dimension of their meaning. (Although Ellis never says _this_ explicitly, I think his analysis of what happens when we read a text _as_ literature can be reduced to the restriction of reference.) The effect of this

restriction, in Frege's terminology, is to ascribe sense but not reference (except that under certain conditions, what might be called "referential coloring" is allowed)[11] to literary texts. A simple example will make the meaning of this distinction clear. If someone were to say to me today, "The present King of France is bald," I could perfectly well understand the sense of what he said, something like, there is one and only one person called "The present King of France" and that person (i.e., the person to whom that description refers or applies) is bald. But if I wanted to determine whether or not the person called "The present King of France" is or is not bald, I could not because there is no such person who both exists and is called "The present King of France." So, you see, although literary texts can and do make perfectly good sense, the question of the truth or falsity of the "facts" they appear to describe is not a valid one; it is not, as it were, a valid move in the critical game because unless expressions "refer," there can be no question of their true-false status. But, then, this should come as no surprise

[11] The problem here is complex and deserves a full airing within the framework of Ellis' definition, something I am unable to undertake at this time. It boils down to questions like, What relations hold between the historical person, Napoleon, and the fictional character in Tolstoy's War and Peace having the identical proper name? For a discussion of some of the issues at stake, see Margaret Macdonald's contribution to the symposium, "The Language of Fiction," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, suppl. vol. 27 (1954), 165-84, rpt. in Philosophy Looks at the Arts, ed. Joseph Margolis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), pp. 181-95, which includes a short bibliography.

because it is quite customary to speak of a literary text, say _Madame Bovary_, as being truer than life, meaning, I suppose, that it is true to the spirit of life but not to the letter. And something similar is surely meant when we speak of the _fictiveness_ of a literary text.

Whenever we read a text--_any_ text--in this way, we are reading it _as_ literature. Once a text becomes widely read as literature within some community, it becomes _established_ as one of the literary texts of that community. This means that the characteristic response of the members of that community to such a text will be to read it _as_ literature; for they will have _learned_ to read it in that way. It also means that literary texts must be specified with respect to the one or more communities in which they are read characteristically as literature by the members of those communities for their own purposes. Thus, from the standpoint of some other community, the reading of any particular text as literature may appear wholly arbitrary or even unwarranted; but then this problem always exists when value judgments are involved. There are no metacriteria governing the settlement of disputes arising out of disagreements over criteria; thus the question whether or not some particular text is _really_ literary is empty.

The question of which texts are in fact counted as literary,by some community, on the other hand, is an empirical matter. Having

determined that <u>some</u> texts are regarded as literary by a community, one is in a position to determine whether or not any given text is considered literary, and from those that are counted as such (as paradigm cases) it is possible to elicit the criteria governing their discrimination within that community. This is best accomplished, as Ellis observes, by careful analysis of those cases where the decision whether or not to call a text literary is not clear-cut, where, that is, individuals hesitate over or disagree about how best to classify it; criteria, like national borders, are most strongly defended at their edges. Once such criteria have been made explicit, it is no longer correct to ask whether or not criteria exist for making the decisions in question or whether or not they are valid; instead we can only ask, Are there good reasons for <u>our</u> employing these criteria?

4

At this point in the discussion it would be helpful to have a definition of "text." Since Ellis himself offers no definition of this key term and since I am fully in agreement with his definition of "literary," I will try to offer one which I believe is not only correct but also consistent with my decision to adopt his use of "literary." The classic treatment of this question is presented by René Wellek and Austin Warren in chapter 12, "The Mode of Existence of A Literary Work of Art," of their <u>Theory of Literature</u>. Their

views are widely known, so I see no need to summarize them here; instead I want to offer an alternative to their thesis that a literary work of art "appears as an object of knowledge sui generis which has a special ontological status. It is neither real (like a statue) nor mental (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."[12]

I want to begin by reminding you that a literary text exists qua literary text only insofar as it is used in a characteristic way within some community. Its mode of existence as a text is the same as that of any other piece of written language; for it is only our radically restricting its referential dimension that makes it literary, and this does nothing whatsoever to alter its mode of existence as a text.

In order to be read widely, a text must be widely available. Of course, we might make texts available in any number of ways; we might, for example, put them in museums and wait for people to come there to read them (like the U. S. Constitution), or we might put them in

[12] René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1956), p. 144.

a traveling exhibit (like some of the historical documents being sent around the country as part of the Bicentennial celebration); we could do either or both of these things as well as many others you and I might imagine. But the point is we do not. What we normally do is mass produce texts in editions satisfying some sort of cost/benefit ratio that makes good economic sense. Accordingly, we say that for ordinary purposes differences between editions of the standard reference text, if any, will count as insignificant so long as they meet some minimum criteria of acceptability, e.g., no missing or obliterated pages. In this sense, selecting a text for ordinary purposes is rather like buying a twelve-inch ruler for ordinary purposes in that in neither case do I expect it to conform absolutely to the "standard" on which it is modeled.

Now I admit that this is a simple-minded solution to a problem that is made to appear incredibly complex--mostly, of course, because we are dealing with a muddle expressed in the form of a scientific question, the hallmark of metaphysics--but it does satisfy the minimum requirement that might be imposed on a definition of "text"; it distinguishes the text (an abstraction) of "The Fall of the House of Usher" not only from the text of *Endgame* but from every other text which is "Not-'The Fall of the House of Usher.'" Seen in this way it becomes apparent that texts are conventions for making written forms of language public.

Two additional points before I leave this problem; first, it is possible to make this definition more precise. Texts, for example, could be defined as sets of related linguistic inscriptions. The nature of the relationship itself could be specified by reference to (a) _graphemes_, abstract characters that stand for but do not necessarily resemble the letters and spaces in a normal text much as _phonemes_ cover a range of possible realizations--an example of such a representation-indifferent character set that comes easily to mind is hexadecimal notation, a system used widely in the storage systems of computers, and (b) the projection rules which transform these abstract characters into particular representations, e.g., Palatino or Lydian Cursive. However, on no account ought this way of defining the interrelationships among a family of related linguistic inscriptions (texts) be thought of as implying anything at all about the mode of existence, either real, mental, or ideal, of such a standard of reference; it is merely a formal convenience for speaking about certain kinds of relationships.

My second point is that nothing I have said should be construed as detracting from what textual critics do; theirs is a vital and valid activity. But it is also one that needs to be put into perspective. Critical editions have their uses and these uses are quite different from the ordinary use of texts. It is a mistake to conflate these different uses, as is often done in literary studies, because doing

so is like confusing the request for a measurement having a rough degree of precision (say, to the nearest inch) with a request for one having scientific precision (say, in angstrom units). Certainly both have their uses; but only a fool or someone who did not understand the language in which the original request was made would respond by giving the latter when the former is what was asked for.

5

I think the meaning of "literary text" is now sufficiently clear for me to move on to a consideration of some of the problems it raises; for the decision whether or not to use a text as literature is a complicated one. Ellis argues that this is a question of performance, that it is an evaluation of their success or failure when read as literature to perform as literature that is the criterion governing which texts become established as literature within a given community. And it is also this criterion that allows us to speak of "good" and "bad" literary texts. However, as Ellis points out, performance is never a single unanalysed criterion, it is always performance in some context or performance for some purpose(s).

No doubt, the fact that the classification of a text as literature depends upon how successfully it satisfies an inherently evaluative criterion will horrify some critics. I do not pretend to know why it is we often feel the need to justify our value judgments; but the

fact is that we do--in any case, this is properly a question for the psycho-sociologists to answer. What I do know, however, is that we make value judgments every day of our lives without feeling that great difficulties are waiting to ensnare us. And it is nothing less than scandalous that literary critics have been able to convince otherwise intelligent and sensitive people that the evaluation of texts is something best left to _them_. But, then, it is almost always easy to intimidate others from a position of "professional competence." It certainly is embarrassing when someone in whom we place our trust rebuts us with "That's just your opinion," or "That's merely a value judgment"; and our silence in the face of their criticism seems to convict us of ignorance when it should not. Anyone who has ever gone out to buy an amplifier for his stereo system knows that the best way to reach a decision is to _listen_ to the way in which each of the various alternatives performs and then to choose the one that sounds best _to him_ in the price range he can afford. Only a charlatan would try to convince you that he knows better than you which amplifier will best serve _your_ listening requirements. Ears are notoriously subjective receptors; that is why the question of which amplifier to buy can only be answered by each individual for himself. Why should the situation be any different when it comes to choosing literature? Who knows better than you what _you_ want in a literary text? The answer, of course, is no one. So, you see, nothing is going to get you off the hook when it comes to choosing literary

texts for your own purposes.[13]

The question naturally arises, What is it, on this interpretation, that constitutes the subject matter of literary studies? Surely it cannot be a matter of individual preferences? I will answer this question more fully later; for the present I simply want to remark that although I have just argued that the decision to use a given text as literature is an individual one (except insofar as it is not really a "decision" at all but a _learned_ response--Chaucer, Dante, and Shakespeare readily suggest themselves as paradigm cases of such learned behavior), these individual decisions can no more serve as definitive for literary studies than idiolects serve to define the domain of linguistics. Accordingly, the subject matter of literary studies will be the empirically determined set of texts _established_ as literary texts within some community at some particular time (as in linguistics, in literary studies synchronics is logically prior to diachronics).

6

Recently it has again become fashionable for critics to argue that the function of criticism is to interpret literary texts. In large

[13] My discussion of the problem of evaluation throughout is indebted to J. O. Urmson, "Some Questions Concerning Validity," rev. ed., in _Essays in Conceptual Analysis_, ed. Anthony Flew (New York: St Martin's Press, 1966), pp. 120-33.

measure this revival of interest can be attributed to Northrop Frye's _Anatomy of Criticism_ where the claim is made, "It is not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery. The instant that any critic permits himself to make a genuine comment about a poem (e.g., 'In _Hamlet_ Shakespeare appears to be portraying the tragedy of irresolution') he has begun to allegorize."[14] I like to think that if what Frye says _were_ more widely realized, fewer critics would be allegorizing, for interpretations are paradoxical.

In the _Blue Book_ Wittgenstein points out:

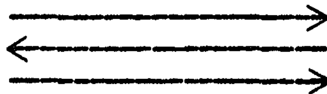
(1) The interpretation of any symbol is itself "a new symbol added to the old one" (p. 33).

(2) If language is to be at all useful, there must be some interpretation (final symbol) which is itself not subject to further interpretation.

(3) This last interpretation (final symbol) _is the meaning_.

This is important, so let me give Wittgenstein's example in full:

> Suppose we write down the scheme of saying and meaning by a column of arrows one below the other



[14] Northrop Frye, _Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays_ (1957; rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 89.

Then if this scheme is to serve our purpose at all, it must show us which of the three levels is the level of meaning. I can, e.g., make a scheme with three levels, the bottom level always being the level of meaning. But adopt whatever model or scheme you may, it will have a bottom level, and there will be no such thing as an interpretation of that. To say in this case that every arrow can still be interpreted would only mean that I could always make a different model of saying and meaning which had one more level than the one I am using.

Let us put it this way:--What one wishes to say is "Every sign is capable of interpretation; but the meaning mustn't be capable of interpretation. It is the last interpretation." (p. 34)

Language is a system of saying and meaning in which understanding the language means having learned to give meanings (final interpretations) to symbolic expressions belonging to that language in accordance with the rules of that language. Knowing a language, in other words, is knowing how to recognize and give meaning to a particular set of symbolic expressions. Thus, such expressions--which in principle can be interpreted any which way--have a meaning (final interpretation) only as part of a language; this meaning is what the speakers of a language know that nonspeakers do not.

A literary text is a piece of language used in a characteristic way. Although this use radically restricts any referential dimension that might be imputed to it as ordinary language, it in no way alters the sense, i.e., the non-referential aspect of meaning, of the symbolic expressions constituting such a text. If this were not the case, we would have no way of knowing its meaning because this is a matter of conforming to certain rules. Insofar as the interpretation

of a text is an interpretation of the meaning of the symbolic expressions constituting that text, it will be a _further_ interpretation. If this is so, then it must be _the_ meaning of those symbols (presumably the _real_ meaning). But allegories are metaphors _for_ the meaning; therefore they cannot be _the_ meaning. They are not, that is to say, identical to the meaning of those symbols _in the language_ in which the text is written. Yet this is paradoxical because though no further interpretation _in the language_ is either necessary or possible (the meaning being the _final_ interpretation), interpretations claim to be _interpretations of something_. Therefore, it must be that they are interpretations not governed by the rules which determine _the_ meaning in the language of symbolic expressions in that language.

Against this argument it might be claimed that there is some language, L_2, such that it is identical in its outward appearance, i.e., orthography, morphology, grammar, and syntax, to some other language, L_1, but that the meaning, M, associated with some symbolic expression, E_j, derivable in L_2 is not always identical to the identical expression derivable in L_1. Since the association of any given meaning with any given symbolic expression is arbitrary (until it is established in the language), this is certainly a possible state of affairs. In fact, an argument similar to this is advanced to justify the practice of Biblical hermeneutics; more precisely, as I understand it, the claim is that the _Bible_ was written in a

language, L_2, that was a kind of linguistic "code" parasitic on the ordinary language, L_1, and that accordingly it requires decoding (translation into L_1) in order to be understood by anyone who knows L_1 but not L_2.

If empirical investigation can establish that for some E_j in L_1 and L_2 it is the case that:

$$M(E_j)/L_1 \neq M(E_j)/L_2$$

then either L_2 is a dialect of L_1 or else it is an entirely different language. Since this distinction is never clear-cut, whichever is the actual case here is of no importance for my argument.

What we require in order for L_1 and L_2 to be mutually translatable is the final interpretations (meanings) for every expression in L_1 and L_2 for which a semantic inequality holds. And these meanings cannot be a matter of speculation since it was on the basis of their assertion that L_1 and L_2 were differentiated in the first place. But here we are not speaking about different levels of interpretation but rather different final interpretations.

Up to this point there will be little, if any, disagreement with what I have said because interpreters are willing to admit as much. Morton Bloomfield, for example, says, "The only stable element in a literary work is its words, which, if we know the language in which it is written, have a meaning. The significance of that meaning is

what may be called allegory. The problem of interpretation is the problem of allegory--whether historical or ahistorical" (emphasis added).[15] Now allegory, as Bloomfield goes on to remark, is a very old and highly respected way of doing what he calls "mak[ing] literary documents relevant" (p. 301). Unfortunately, he uses "relevant" intransitively when it surely will not sustain such a use. In order to understand his claim, then, we need to know _to what_ interpretations make literary texts relevant.

Within the context of literary studies, answers to this question are usually of two kinds. The first is that interpretation makes a text relevant to its author's intentions. E. D. Hirsch, Jr. puts it this way in _Validity in Interpretation_, "despite its practical concreteness and variability, the root problem of interpretation is always the same--to guess what the author meant. Even though we can never be certain that our guesses are correct, we know that they _can_ be correct and that the goal of interpretation as a discipline is constantly to increase the probability that they are correct."[16] The difficulty with this kind of answer is that insofar as "intention" is used to mean "what the author meant," this sort of interpretation

[15] Morton W. Bloomfield, "Allegory as Interpretation," _New Literary History_, 3 (1972), 301.

[16] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., _Validity in Interpretation_ (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), p. 207.

is an exercise in futility because, although it is certain that people can and do sometimes say things they did not mean, it is equally certain that the meaning of what they in fact say is a matter of linguistic rules and not of their intending. For example, the English sentence, "The book is open" means that the book is open for all Y's intending when he said it to mean that the persimmon has ripened.[17] I will have more to say about the problem of "intention" in the next section.

The second kind of answer is more difficult to state precisely because it covers such a wide range of possibilities, anything from highly subjective and immediate concerns to large and undeniably important issues like the social, political, or moral condition of the human race. In view of this, I will state this kind of answer as generally as possible in the form of a problem, What is the meaning of the expression "making a literary text relevant to x"? This question shows, I think, that the problem of interpretation (on this view) is actually a complex of problems that arise within the context of interpreting a literary text for the purpose(s) of making it relevant to something particular. For this reason we must be careful to distinguish what we do when we are making a text relevant for one purpose (to one thing) from what we do when we are making it relevant

[17] I am indebted to Professor Barry Blose for both this point and the delightful example with which it is so convincingly made.

for other purposes (to other things). This shows, incidentally, that a single text _can_ serve a number of different purposes, i.e., be interpreted to be relevant to different things.

Of all interpreters, Marxist critics seem to me the most honest, for they are always (and loudly) proclaiming _their_ purposes; other critics are either not so honest or else they genuinely believe that non-purposive interpretations are possible. Whenever I am confronted by an interpretation that does not make its purpose explicit, I begin to feel that I have encountered a diviner of significances, someone--like the water diviner in the _Blue Book_ (pp. 9-11)--whose interpretations just pop into his head while he is reading. But there are fewer and fewer of these critical diviners each year; as interpretive traditions are developed and made self-conscious by their practitioners, critics are able to teach their students the rules governing the transition from _the_ meaning of the symbolic expressions in a literary text to statements of their significance _for some purpose(s)_. And accordingly, interpreters are able to tell us that they _learned_ how to give the kinds of interpretations that they give.

Of course, this only begs the question, Are interpretations possible or necessary? If by "interpretation" one means something beyond the _final_ interpretation (meaning) of the symbolic expressions constituting a literary text which is still _in the language_ in which

the text is written, then the answer has to be, No, on both counts. If, on the other hand, one means by "interpretation" that activity which makes literary texts relevant to something, then the answer, again on both counts, has to be, Yes. Relevance is a relation and not a substantive; therefore, if one wants to make a text relevant to something, it is _necessary_ to interpret it to be relevant to that something. And interpretation is certainly possible because symbolic expressions only have the meanings we _give_ them.

This argument applies with equal force to all forms of interpretation, mythic, Freudian, and so on, which construe literary texts as symbolic structures requiring extra-linguistic knowledge as a necessary condition for their understanding. But literary texts are also _exoteric_ structures of symbolic expressions for anyone who knows the language in which they are written. Thus, all anyone needs in order to understand the _meaning_ of a literary text is (1) the text itself, and (2) a knowledge of the language in which it is written (which I take to include a knowledge of how, in principle, ambiguities that exist in any symbolic expression _in_ that language are to be resolved). How this meaning is interpreted to be relevant to something extrinsic to itself is not, I will argue more fully in the final section of this essay, a concern of literary studies. For now, I just want to point out that the reason this is so is that, from our point of view, it leads to paradox. Here, I

think, Frye was close to the truth when he observed, "Mathematics, like literature, proceeds hypothetically and by internal consistency, not descriptively and by outward fidelity to nature. When it is applied to external facts, it is not its truth but its applicability that is being verified" (emphasis added, p. 93).

Thus it may or may not be the case that interpreted in some way a text can be shown to be relevant (applicable) to something outside itself; but if it is interpreted for this purpose, then its interpretation constitutes a use different from the use of that text as literature. And although a given text can serve many different uses, it cannot serve mutually-exclusive uses simultaneously. For the purpose of literary studies, it is only the use of a text as literature that concerns us.

7

In addition of the use of "intention" to mean what the author meant, it can also be used to mean something like a plan or design in an author's mind. This is the chief use considered by William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe Beardsley in their celebrated "The Intentional Fallacy"; consequently, it has been the major focus of attempts to bolster or refute the anti-intentionalist position within literary studies (it is, for example, the use Ellis singles out for attention in the course of his discussion of the problem, pp. 107-13). It seems

rather ironic that an anti-intentionalist argument should grow out of this use because it makes such a strong _prima facie_ case _for_ intentionalism, since it certainly is the case that whenever we say something, we usually have a purpose in doing so. In other words, our saying whatever it is that we say on some occasion will normally be either (1) a necessary part of achieving some end, say holding a meeting which, in order to bring off we must first announce to others, or (2) an end in itself, like the conclusion of a logical proof (of course, this too _may_ have the additional and final end of convincing someone).

The intentionalist position is given added plausibility by John L. Austin's theory of speech acts, especially as amended and elaborated by John Searle.[18] I want to sketch this theory here because it bears heavily on the resolution of the "intentional fallacy" debate in literary studies.[19] Let us begin by supposing, with Wilfred Owen,

[18] John L. Austin, _How to Do Things with Words_, ed. J. O. Urmson (1962; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965); and _Philosophical Papers_, eds., J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970); John R. Searle, _Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language_ (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969).

[19] See, for example, Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions, and the Interpretation of Texts," _New Literary History_, 3 (1972), 393-408, which covers the most important recent thinking on intentionality as it pertains to literary studies; and Max Black, "Meaning and Intention: An Examination of Grice's Views," _New Literary History_, 4 (1973), 257-79. The fullest recent discussions of the general problem are G. E. M. Anscombe, _Intention_, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1963); and Jack W. Meiland, _The Nature of Intention_ (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1970).

that "All a poet can do is to warn"; but surely there are many ways in which a poet might warn us against something. He might, for example, undertake a lecture tour presenting his warning in person, or he might write letters to the editors of influential newspapers and journals. In either of these cases his claim upon our attention would be his _past_ achievements as a poet and, perhaps, his present polemical, as opposed to artistic, skill. But suppose he wants to warn us _as an artist_. If this were his decision he could write his warning in the form of a poem, his customary way of addressing us as an artist. Let us assume that he in fact writes such a poem. We will then be able to say it has two aspects; first, the meanings in the language, m, of the words constituting the poem--we will call this its _locutionary aspect_ and its production we will call a _locutionary act_--and his intention (design, plan, or purpose) that it be taken in a certain way, i.e., as a warning--this we will call its _illocutionary aspect_ or force, f, and its production we will call an _illocutionary act_. Using this scheme we can represent his poem, P, in terms of its two aspects:

$$P = f(m)$$

Let me clarify this distinction with a slightly modified version of one of Austin's examples:

Locutionary Act: He said to me, "Shoot her."

Illocutionary Act: He said to me, "I order you to shoot her."

From this example it may appear that the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts is a matter of the forms of the words; that the latter possesses its force _explicitly_ (the presence of "order") whereas the force of the former is ambiguous (it might be an order, request, threat, and so on). This is not Austin's meaning because his distinction is based on the kinds of things that can go wrong in their performance. Thus, an illocutionary act is _both_ an act _of_ saying something (saying what is said with meaning) and an act _in_ saying something (saying what is said with meaning _and_ a certain force), while a locutionary act is _only_ an act _of_ saying something, i.e., its force is either absent or ambiguous. As Searle remarks, this distinction does not hold up under scrutiny,[20] but for my purpose his objection can be ignored.

Although in the previous example, the force of the illocutionary act is specified by the verb "order," there are other ways in which the same force might have been specified. It might be the case, for example, that the _il_locutionary act, "Shoot her" is performed by the commander of a firing squad in the presence of troops properly designated as being under his command who are assembled at the time of its performance for the purpose of carrying out any such orders

[20] John R. Searle, "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts," _Philosophical Review_, 77 (1968), 405-24, rpt. in _Essays on J. L. Austin_, ed. Sir Isaiah Berlin (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 141-59.

issued by him, i.e., shooting O, the "her" in question who now stands before them against a wall with her eyes blindfolded.

Here it is necessary to introduce a third kind of act which contrasts with both locutionary and illocutionary acts. Saying something with a certain force will usually produce certain consequences, certain responses on the part of the person(s) being addressed (shooting her, or some thought or feeling and the like) and bringing about these consequences may have been the speaker's intention (in our present usage) in saying what he in fact said with the force with which he in fact said it. When something is said in order to bring about certain consequences, we will call its saying a _perlocutionary act_. A simple example of such an act would be _proving_ (more loosely, _arguing_) _p_ with the intention of persuading someone _that_ _p_.

The characteristic difficulty with perlocutionary acts is that they may fail to produce the intended consequences or they may bring about consequences that were not intended. So, although it is quite correct to speak of the force of an illocutionary act as being conventional (i.e., specified by explicit illocutionary verbs, some sort of performative formula, or by the context), it is wrong to think of perlocutionary acts in this way. Thus, to return to the example of the firing squad and its commander, even though he is duly authorized to order O shot and says, "Shoot her" intending to bring it about that the troops under his command recognize his

intention to issue an order bringing about the shooting of O, and even though the firing squad hears him say "Shoot her" and recognizes his intention, they may not shoot her or they may even turn around and shoot him. Their reason for doing the former might be that even though they recognize that their commander is legally authorized to issue such orders under similar circumstances, he is not in this case morally justified in doing so (something similar to this was the issue in the court martial of Lt. Calley). Their reason for doing the latter might be that there is a band of revolutionary soldiers outside the gates of the prison, in the courtyard of which they have just been ordered to shoot O; and they believe that if they shoot her, they will themselves be executed once the revolutionaries have got inside the prison, which is imminent; and that if they do not shoot her, their commanding officer will shoot them before surrendering the prison.

Now what has this got to do with our poet and his poem? From what has just been said it will be clear that in the immediate context of its origin, the poet's poem either will or will not be taken as a warning and it either will or will not succeed in actually warning those to whom it is addressed. But it must not be forgotten that we are dealing with no ordinary warning but an artistic warning. In other words, it either will or will not succeed in being taken as artistic (i.e., as an art work) by those in the immediate context

of its origin to whom it is addressed. But for an audience to recognize this poem as both a warning and as a work of art involves a paradox, for, in the light of our earlier definition of "literary text," the poet's intentions are mutually-exclusive. And in fact, I think some of the more perceptive artists have recognized this; Poe for example, says in his "Preface" to Eureka:

> What I here propound is true:--therefore it cannot die:--or, if by any means it be now trodden down so that it die, it will "rise again to the Life Everlasting."
>
> Nevertheless it is as a Poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead.[21]

In any case, as it turns out, both intentions are irrelevant to literary studies because the decision whether or not to use a given text as literature is not one made by the artist--who, as we have just seem, is in no position to enforce certain consequences as a result of his perlocutionary act (producing a poem)--but one made by his audience. So, even though an artist's intentions may, under certain circumstances, be available, i.e., be knowable in the ways in which anyone's intentions are allowed to be knowable, they are of no help whatsoever to literary critics. Nevertheless, I think the theory of speech acts goes a long way toward explaining why there often are heated debates over whether some work of art is

21 Edgar Allan Poe, Eureka, in The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (1902; rpt. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1965), XVI, 185.

to be understood as, for example, a warning or as an aesthetic object. The fact is, a text can be intended and recognized as either or as both (though the latter is paradoxical). But let me ask, What is the use of, say, a warning against something which is past or which was issued in a context dissimilar from our own? The only possible force it could have would be general, i.e., a general warning against "x"; but this is to change its meaning which, in the immediate context of its origin was specific and therein to trivialize it by assimilating it to all other warnings against "x." One simply does not say things like, "I warn you against x in general" or, if one does, he can hardly expect to be taken seriously. Thus, it is only as a work of art that something relevant to the immediate context of its origin can survive that context; if it was a warning in that context, it will, as a work of art, no longer be counted as such. Insofar as it was also originally intended as a work of art, our use of it as a work of art coincides with the author's intention; but, that this happens in any particular case is, from the point of view of intentionalism, merely a happy coincidence. Far more works are intended as art then ever actually become established as such.

Neither of the uses of "intention" I have discussed thus far seems to me adequate; both depend too heavily on a logic inextricably bound up with reference-theories of meaning. Thus "intentions" are

said to refer to particular mental states either directly, or, by means of certain conventional formulae, indirectly. But it is not at all clear that a theory of intentionality ought to commit us to the existence of such mental states. On the contrary, it seems to me a distinct advantage of the use-theory of meaning that it commits us neither to mentalism nor anti-mentalism. A use-theory avoids the difficulties generated by the reference-theory by rephrasing a question like, What are intentions?, to something like, Under what conditions do we say that an act performed by someone is intentional? Put this way we are no longer tempted to invent "intentions" for people to have when they are doing something (say, performing a speech act) intentionally. Of course, this does not mean that it is improper for someone to say, "I intend (to do something)" because here it is _possible_ that there are no "intentions" independent of Y's saying, "I intend . . . ." In other words, we see that saying this is _similar_ to saying, "I promise (to do something)" in that it is used to _publicly_ commit the person who says it to doing (at some future time) whatever it is he said he would do. And almost all of us are familiar with the past tense versions of "I intend . . ." used by someone as an excuse for or as an explanation of his failure to do something he ought to have done.

I realize that all of this is pretty murky and needs much more careful analysis to bring out the actual similarities and differences

between intending, promising, and so on; but the point I want to make is that there are two "intend" paradigms, one for the first person singular pronoun and a different one for all the others. Of these it is the second that is relevant to the question of "intentions" in literary studies. Our problem is, What criteria are relevant to saying that a literary text is an intentional (as opposed to an unintentional) object? Asked in this manner, I am convinced that any reasonable criteria would lead us to call almost every literary text intentional, much as we would call almost every use of language intentional. But this does not commit us to the existence of any particular intention _in the author's mind_, either directly or indirectly ascertained. And it follows that if an author's "intentions" are irrelevant to understanding a literary text, then any other information about him or his environment (whether social, political, economic, or what have you) is irrelevant _a fortiori_.

8

If any information about an author is irrelevant to the use we make of his text(s), then there is no longer any compelling reason for us to invent "narrators" to explain how _his_ stories get told. To the extent that a narrator speaks in the first person, he is a "character" _in_ the story similar to any other "I" in the story who speaks. Third person narratives, on the other hand, have "narrators" who themselves speak in the first person _outside_ the story-proper,

but whose "I's" are present _in_ the story implicitly--the _name_ of this narrator is usually given on the title page of the text, right under the word "by." He can be thought of as saying, "I say: '(story).'"

No doubt it was necessary, as long as an author's intentions were thought to be relevant to understanding his story, to invent narrators to stand for the author so that whatever the narrator did (including saying) would not be attributed directly to the author; for it certainly is the case that narrators sometimes do things which the author, if the story were true, could not or would not do. But this is to forget that stories are just that; they are stories, hence not true (or false). Inventing narrators is to resolve a paradox with a muddle. It is as if we found some writing on a wall and said that walls properly can be said to have "I's" (in addition, I suppose, to ears). I might as well say that you do not exist when you are speaking to me _as_ a friend, teacher, student, or whatever, and invent a narrator for you! But you do exist; it is narrators who are fictitious (which does not mean that they have a special ontological status _sui generis_--it means they do _not_ exist). When narrators are not actually characters _in_ a story, they are superfluous; for while it makes perfectly good sense to speak of Gide's Lafcadio Wluiki (the _character_ in _Les Caves du Vatican_) or Twain's Huckleberry Finn (the _character-narrator_ in and of _Adventures of Huckleberry Finn_), it makes none at all to speak of Huysmans'

Huysmans (the <u>narrator</u> of <u>Là-Bas</u>).

9

Earlier I spoke of the similarities between choosing an amplifier and choosing a literary text. So I want to begin answering the question, What statements are relevant to the study of literary texts?, by asking an analogous question, What statements are relevant to the study of amplifiers? Getting clear about this analogous question ought to help us get clear about the primary question.

An amplifier is a configuration of electrical components used characteristically to receive, amplify, and transmit electrical signals within a stereo system. Although I can imagine that dropped into a bathtub under the proper conditions, an amplifier could be used as a splendid murder weapon, this use is of no interest to us because it is hardly characteristic. And although I can equally well imagine that someone who did not understand the characteristic uses of amplifiers and tuners might connect his turntable and speakers through a tuner in the belief that it would achieve the same results as an amplifier, this uncharacteristic use of a tuner <u>as an amplifier</u> also does not interest us. Yet even with these restrictions, there are many possible questions we might ask about the use of an amplifier as an amplifier. What is wanted is a conceptual framework that admits of certain kinds of questions

and excludes others.

Let us look at the whole situation a little more closely so that the framework will not be entirely arbitrary. There are many different amplifiers on the market at any one time which, when they are being used as amplifiers, will perform as amplifiers with varying degrees of success. In any individual case, the evaluation of an amplifier's performance will be conditioned by numerous idiosyncratic subjective factors; for this reason individual evaluations are of only marginal interest. What we want is a larger sample of idiosyncratic subjective evaluations in order to factor out those evaluative criteria which are purely idiosyncratic. Our interest, then, is in a fairly narrow range of normative evaluations. As manufacturers or as consumers of amplifiers, we may have many practical reasons for being interested in such evaluations; however, as amplifier scholars, our reasons must be more disinterested. We are not, in other words, in the business of providing market analyses to manufacturers nor product reports to consumers. I do not mean to imply that there is something suspect about providing such information; in fact, it appears that doing so is quite necessary and useful. My point is that neither of these activities is a legitimate basis for _scholarly_ research. What, then, is a legitimate basis for amplifier scholarship?

Keeping in mind that amplifiers are only one of the possible uses for the electrical components of which they consist, two activities

suggest themselves. First, making explicit the relationships that hold among the specific electrical components (capacitors, resistors, etc.) in each amplifier (an abstraction, like text) in terms of their functions (in the driver, phono pre-amp, etc.) and in accordance with the accepted notational conventions for representing such components, functions, and relationships in electrical engineering, the discipline of which amplifier research is a branch. This activity leads to the production of what, in the case of electrical devices, is called a *schematic diagram*. Second, developing amplifier-indifferent *specifications* for measuring the performance of amplifiers when they are being used as amplifiers. This activity leads to the rating of specific amplifier functions like power output, frequency response, distortion, signal-to-noise-ratio, and so on.

Since we have required that both the schematic diagram and the set of specifications for any given amplifier be independent of that amplifier, it will be possible to (1) make objective comparisons between amplifiers, and (2) make "state-of-the-art" generalizations, e.g., the currently available range of damping factors (under specified conditions) is *i-j*. The making of these comparisons and generalizations is the goal of synchronic amplifier scholarship. They are, however, subordinate to what must be the final goal of such scholarship, namely, correlating these descriptive statements with the equally descriptive normative evaluations in such a way that the

latter are explained in terms of the former. The reason for this is that the justification of our descriptions finally rests, as it does in any science, on their explanatory power.

Like an amplifier, a literary text is a object defined in terms of its characteristic use by human beings. Accordingly, it can be studied in ways analogous to the ways in which other objects used by human beings are studied. Whether or not these ways are further analogous in some sense to the ways in which we study objects not used by people, say sub-atomic particles or the planets of our solar system, is a question I do not propose to consider.

If you think about the reasons for restricting the kinds of statements relevant to amplifier scholarship, you will see the reasons for imposing similar restrictions on the kinds of statements relevant to literary studies. Not only do we want our statements about a literary text to be coherent and intersubjectively verifiable, we also want them to be comparable with our statements about other texts. For this reason we require that they be consistent with the notational conventions of linguistics, the discipline of which literary studies, inasmuch as it concerns <u>one</u> of the <u>possible</u> uses of language, is a branch. Since we <u>are</u> describing one use of language, there is every reason to believe that the results of our research will make a contribution to a general theory of language use.

At the present time linguistics is dominated by Noam Chomsky's theory of transformational generative grammar. As John Lyons puts it, "Right or wrong, Chomsky's theory of grammar is undoubtedly the most dynamic and influential; and no linguist who wishes to keep abreast of current developments in his subject can afford to ignore Chomsky's theoretical pronouncements. Every other 'school' of linguistics at the present time tends to define its position in relation to Chomsky's views on particular issues."[22] The importance of this situation for us is that Chomsky's theory, while providing a powerful method for describing syntactic structure, sweeps the whole problem of meaning under the mat on which our old friend, the cat (who) is on the mat, sleeps comfortably. In large measure, Chomsky's failure to provide an adequate account of meaning stems from the fact that he, like Leonard Ploomfield, Edward Sapir, and the other linguists who pioneered American structuralism, is interested in semantics only insofar as it accounts for syntactic regularities and anomalies that cannot be accounted for in any other way. Thus he has adopted a primitive reference-theory of meaning which, whether he is committed to it or not, is inconsistent with the view of meaning adopted here. If his descriptive notation commits us to his explanation of meaning, then our analyses will necessarily end in paradoxes.

[22] John Lyons, _Noam Chomsky_ (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), pp. 1-2.

Chomsky's theory explains the relations between sentences like, "James Joyce wrote _Ulysses_" and "_Ulysses_ was written by James Joyce" by asserting that they originate in a common _deep structure_ (abstract representation of the relations among sentence constituents) which, in this case, closely resembles the first of our two sentences, and that the differences in their _surface structures_ (the ways in which they appear in the example) are the result of changes brought about by the application of the _passive transformation_ to the second of the two. Roughly this transformation does three things, (1) it transposes the _deep subject_ (James Joyce) and _deep object_ (_Ulysses_), (2) inserts "by" before the post-transposition object, and (3) introduces a form of the verb "be" and makes appropriate adjustments to the _deep verb_ (i.e., wrote ⟶ written). What we have, then, in the theory of transformations is a way of representing and accounting for, among other relations, the active and passive "versions" of sentences like those in the example.

But Chomsky goes further than this, claiming that these two versions are synonymous; in other words, that transformations add nothing to the meaning of a sentence. Thus, for Chomsky, whatever meaning a sentence has, it has in virtue of its _deep structure_, its _surface structure_ being merely a matter of stylistic free variation, a claim equivalent to asserting that the "style/content" dichotomy is genuine.

Although it seems fair to me to say that the changes which result from steps 2 and 3 of the passive transformation are grammatically significant but semantically insignificant, it does not seem at all correct to say the same about step 1. That some linguistic constituent is in free variation with another constituent is an empirical hypothesis and not an analytic truth. In the present case, I am convinced that it is simply false to claim that "James Joyce wrote _Ulysses_" and "_Ulysses_ was written by James Joyce" are used interchangably by speakers of English. Quite the contrary appears to be the case, as the notion "subject of the sentence" makes clear; in the former case, we are speaking _about_ James Joyce (making a biographical statement, that is, about _him_) while in the latter, we are speaking _about_ _Ulysses_ (making an attributive statement about _it_).

If adopting Chomsky's descriptive notation commits us to adopting both his reference-theory of meaning and his theory of stylistic free variation, then we have a compelling reason for rejecting it. The question is, Does such an entailment actually apply in this case? I do not believe that it does because I cannot see how an explanation of the "facts" linguistic descriptions describe can be said to follow from their description. Actually, it seems to me that in addition to providing us with a powerful way of formally representing the relations that hold among the linguistic components of a sentence

(their syntactic structure), the notion of transformations suggests a way of formally accounting for the *differences* in meanings of sentences like those I have been discussing. Unlike Chomsky, I see no reason why we cannot say that under specified conditions transformations *add or change* meaning with respect to some standard reference sentence the meaning of which is fixed. Alternatively, we might confine ourselves exclusively to the surface structure of sentences.

I do not want to argue the pros and cons of Chomsky's theory any further because, as in the case of defining that set of specifications appropriate to the description of literary texts, such problems will be resolved only as a result of actually describing the structure of individual texts. And the same is true of how best to correlate these descriptions with the normative evaluations they must explain. Instead, having suggested a framework in which the problems *can* be resolved, I want to turn very briefly to some of the pedagogic implications of adopting the approach to literary texts I have just sketched.

The first thing to be remarked is that literary studies will have a genuine scientific basis. Accordingly, we will no longer be teaching our students *ad hoc* readings (interpretations) of texts, but rather a *method* for making explicit what is already known by anyone who knows the language in which a specific text is written.

What will distinguish these descriptions from ordinary language descriptions is their greater degree of precision. And these descriptions will have the real advantage of being intersubjectively verifiable, like the descriptions that result from any other form of scientific investigation. Thus, we will be finally in a position to reconstrue the history of our discipline in terms of the passage from speculative knowledge to actual knowledge.

Initially, a large part of our task will be to fight against the temptation--one we often share with our students--to say that only what I know is _really_ known. This will not be easy; but in fighting against this temptation we will earn for literary studies the right to be called a humanistic discipline--for any discipline that does not acknowledge the existence of others is not entitled to that name.

List of Works Cited

Anscombe, G. E. M. Intention. 2nd ed., Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1963.

Austin, J. L. How to Do Things with Words. Ed. J. O Urmson. 1962; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965.

Austin, J. L. Philosophical Papers. Eds. J. O Urmson and G. J. Warnock. 2nd ed., London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970.

Black, Max. "Meaning and Intention: An Examination of Grice's Views." New Literary History, 4 (1973), 257-79.

Bloomfield, Morton W. "Allegory as Interpretation." New Literary History, 3 (1972), 301-17.

Chatman, Seymour, ed. Literary Style: A Symposium. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971.

Chomsky, Noam. Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1965.

Chomsky, Noam. Current Issues in Linguistic Theory. The Hague: Mouton, 1964.

Chomsky, Noam. Syntactic Structures. The Hague: Mouton, 1957.

Ellis, John M. The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis. Berkley: Univ. of California Press, 1974.

Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays. 1957; rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971.

Guth, Hans P. Words and Ideas. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publ. Co., Inc., 1969.

Hirsch, E. D. Validity in Interpretation. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967.

Katz, Jerrold J. and Fodor, Jerry A. "The Structure of a Semantic Theory." Language, 39 (1963), 170-210.

Kuhn, Thomas S. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, 2, 2. 2nd ed. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970.

Lyons, John. Noam Chomsky. New York: The Viking Press, 1970.

Macdonald, Margaret. "The Language of Fiction." Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, suppl. vol. 27 (1954), 168-84.

Meiland, Jack W. The Nature of Intention. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1970.

Poe, Edgar Allan. Eureka. The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, XVI. Ed. James A. Harrison. 1902; rpt. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1965.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. Letters to a Young Poet. Trans. M. D. Herter Norton. Rev. ed., 1954; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1963.

de Saussure, Ferdinand. A Course in General Linguistics. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.

Searle, John R. "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts." Philosophical Review, 77 (1968), 405-24.

Searle, John R. Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969.

Sebeok, Thomas A. Style in Language. 1960; rpt. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1966.

Schaefer, William D. "Editor's Column." PMLA, 90 (1975), 3-4.

Skinner, Quentin. "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts." New Literary History, 3 (1972), 393-408.

Stravinsky, Igor. Poetics of Music: In the Form of Six Lessons. Trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl. 1947; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, Inc., 1956.

Urmson, J. O. "Some Questions Concerning Validity." Essays in Conceptual Analysis. Ed. Anthony Flew. Rev. ed., New York: St Martin's Press, 1966, pp. 120-33.

Weitz, Morris. Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism. 1964; rpt. Cleveland: The World Publ. Co., 1966.

Wellek, René and Warren, Austin. Theory of Literature. 2nd.ed., New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1956.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. The Blue and Brown Books. 2nd ed., 1960; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

Youngren, William H. Semantics, Linguistics and Criticism. New York: Random House, 1972.