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Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics

Stanley Fish

Meaning as Event

I.

IF AT THIS moment someone were to ask, "what are you doing?", you might reply, "I am reading," and thereby acknowledge the fact that reading is an activity, something *you do*. No one would argue that the act of reading can take place in the absence of someone who reads—how can you tell the dance from the dancer?—but curiously enough when it comes time to make analytical statements about the end product of reading (meaning or understanding), the reader is usually forgotten or ignored. Indeed in recent literary history he has been excluded by legislation. I refer, of course, to the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of Wimsatt and Beardsley in their enormously influential article "The Affective Fallacy":

> The Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*). . . . It begins by trying to derive the standards of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome . . . is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear.[1]

In time, I shall return to these arguments, not so much to refute them as to affirm and embrace them; but I would first like to demonstrate the explanatory power of a method of analysis which takes the reader, as an actively mediating presence, fully into account, and which, therefore, has as its focus the "psychological effects" of the utterance. And I would like to begin with a sentence that does not open itself up to the questions we usually ask.

> That Judas perished by hanging himself, there is no certainty in Scripture: though in one place it seems to affirm it, and by a doubtful word

1 *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington, Ky., 1954), p. 21.

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hath given occasion to translate it; yet in another place, in a more punctual description, it maketh it improbable, and seems to overthrow it.

Ordinarily, one would begin by asking "what does this sentence mean?" or "what is it about?" or "what is it saying?", all of which preserve the objectivity of the utterance. For my purposes, however, this particular sentence has the advantage of not saying anything. That is, you can't get a fact out of it which could serve as an answer to any one of these questions. Of course, this difficulty is itself a fact—of response; and it suggests, to me at least, that what makes problematical sense as a statement makes perfect sense as a strategy, as an action made upon a reader rather than as a container from which a reader extracts a message. The strategy or action here is one of progressive decertainizing. Simply by taking in the first clause of the sentence, the reader commits himself to its assertion, "that Judas perished by hanging himself" (in constructions of this type "that" is understood to be shorthand for "the *fact* that"). This is not so much a conscious decision, as it is an anticipatory adjustment to his projection of the sentence's future contours. He knows (without giving cognitive form to his knowledge) that this first clause is preliminary to some larger assertion (it is a "ground") and he must be in control of it if he is to move easily and confidently through what follows; and in the context of this "knowledge," he is prepared, again less than consciously, for any one of several constructions:

That Judas perished by hanging himself, *is* (an example for us all).
That Judas perished by hanging himself, *shows* (how conscious he was of the enormity of his sin).
That Judas perished by hanging himself, *should* (give us pause).

The range of these possibilities (and there are, of course, more than I have listed) narrows considerably as the next three words are read, "there is no." At this point, the reader is expecting, and even predicting, a single word—"doubt"; but instead he finds "certainty"; and at that moment the status of the fact that had served as his point of reference becomes *un*certain. (It is nicely ironic that the appearance of "certainty" should be the occasion for doubt, whereas the word "doubt" would have contributed to the reader's certainty.) As a result, the terms of the reader's relationship to the sentence undergo a profound change. He is suddenly involved in a different kind of activity. Rather than following an argument along a well lighted path (a light, after all, has gone *out*), he is now looking for one. The natural impulse in a situation like this, either in life or in literature, is to go forward in the hope that what has been obscured will again become clear; but in this case

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going forward only intensifies the readers sense of disorientation. The prose is continually opening, but then closing, on the possibility of verification in one direction or another. There are two vocabularies in the sentence; one holds out the promise of a clarification—"place," "affirm," "place," "punctual," "overthrow"—while the other continually defaults on that promise—"Though," "doubtful," "yet," "improbable," "seems"; and the reader is passed back and forth between them and between the alternatives—that Judas did or did not perish by hanging himself—which are still suspended (actually it is the reader who is suspended) when the sentence ends (trails off? gives up?). The indeterminateness of this experience is compounded by a superfluity of pronouns. It becomes increasingly difficult to tell what "it" refers to, and if the reader takes the trouble to retrace his steps, he is simply led back to "that Judas perished by hanging himself"; in short, he exchanges an indefinite pronoun for an even less definite (that is, certain) assertion.

Whatever is persuasive and illuminating about this analysis (and it is by no means exhaustive) is the result of my substituting for one question—what does this sentence mean?—another, more operational question—what does this sentence do? And what the sentence does is give the reader something and then take it away, drawing him on with the unredeemed promise of its return. An observation about the sentence as an utterance—its refusal to yield a declarative statement—has been transformed into an account of its experience (not being able to get a fact out of it). It is no longer an object, a thing-in-itself, but an *event*, something that *happens* to, and with the participation of, the reader. And it is this event, this happening—all of it and not anything that could be said about it or any information one might take away from it—that is, I would argue, the *meaning* of the sentence. (Of course, in this case there is no information to take away.)

This is a provocative thesis whose elaboration and defense will be the concern of the following pages, but before proceeding to it, I would like to examine another utterance which also (conveniently) says nothing:

Nor did they not perceive the evil plight.

The first word of this line from *Paradise Lost* (I, 335) generates a rather precise (if abstract) expectation of what will follow: a negative assertion which will require for its completion a subject and a verb. There are then two "dummy" slots in the reader's mind waiting to be filled. This expectation is strengthened (if only because it is not challenged) by the auxiliary "did" and the pronoun "they." Presumably, the verb is not far behind. But in its place the reader is presented

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with a second negative, one that can not be accommodated within his projection of the utterance's form. His progress through the line is halted and he is forced to come to terms with the intrusive (because unexpected) "not." In effect what the reader *does,* or is forced to do, at this point, is ask a question—did they or didn't they?—and in search of an answer he either rereads—in which case he simply repeats the sequence of mental operations—or goes forward—in which case he finds the anticipated verb, but in either case the syntactical uncertainty remains unresolved.

It could be objected that the solution to the difficulty is simply to invoke the rule of the double negative; one cancels the other and the "correct" reading is therefore "they did perceive the evil plight." But however satisfactory this may be in terms of the internal logic of grammatical utterances (and even in those terms there are problems,[2] it has nothing to do with the logic of the reading experience or, I would insist, with its meaning. That experience is a temporal one, and in the course of it the two negatives combine not to produce an affirmative, but to prevent the reader from making the simple (declarative) sense which would be the goal of a logical analysis. To clean the line up is to take from it its most prominent and important effect—the suspension of the reader between the alternatives its syntax momentarily offers. What is a problem if the line is considered as an object, a thing-in-itself, becomes a *fact* when it is regarded as an occurrence. The reader's inability to tell whether or not "they" do perceive and his involuntary question (or its psychological equivalent) are events in his encounter with the line, and as events they are part of the line's *meaning*, even though they take place in the mind, not on the page. Subsequently, we discover that the answer to the question "did they or didn't they," is, "they did and they didn't." Milton is exploiting (and calling our attention to) the two senses of "perceive": they (the fallen angels) do perceive the fire, the pain, the gloom; physically they see it; however they are blind to the moral significance of their situation; and in that sense they do not perceive the evil plight in which they are. But that is another story.

Underlying these two analyses is a method, rather simple in concept, but complex (or at least complicated) in execution. The concept is simply the rigorous and disinterested asking of the question, what does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play poem, *do*?; and the execution involves *an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one*

2 Thus the line could read: "They did not perceive," which is not the same as saying they did perceive. (The question is still open.) One could also argue that "not" is not really a negative.

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another in time. Every word in this statement bears a special emphasis. The analysis must be of the developing responses to distinguish it from the atomism of much stylistic criticism. A reader's response to the fifth word in a line or sentence is to a large extent the product of his responses to words one, two, three, and four. And by response, I intend more than the range of feelings (what Wimsatt and Beardsley call "the purely affective reports"). The category of response includes any and all of the activities provoked by a string of words: the projection of syntactical and/or lexical probabilities; their subsequent occurrence or non-occurrence; attitudes towards persons, or things, or ideas referred to; the reversal or questioning of those attitudes; and much more. Obviously, this imposes a great burden on the analyst who in his observations on any one moment in the reading experience must take into account all that has happened (in the reader's mind) at previous moments, each of which was in its turn subject to the accumulating pressures of its predecessors. (He must also take into account influences and pressures pre-dating the actual reading experience—questions of genre, history, etc.—questions we shall consider later.) All of this is included in the phrase "in time." The basis of the method is a consideration of the *temporal* flow of the reading experience, and it is assumed that the reader responds in terms of that flow and not to the whole utterance. That is, in an utterance of any length, there is a point at which the reader has taken in only the first word, and then the second, and then the third, and so on, and the report of what happens to the reader is always a report of what has happened *to that point*. (The report includes the reader's set toward future experiences, but not those experiences.)

The importance of this principle is illustrated when we reverse the first two clauses of the Judas sentence: "There is no certainty that Judas perished by hanging himself." Here the status of the assertion is never in doubt because the reader knows from the beginning that it is doubtful; he is given a perspective from which to view the statement and that perspective is confirmed rather than challenged by what follows; even the confusion of pronouns in the second part of the sentence will not be disturbing to him, because it can easily be placed in the context of his initial response. There is no difference in these two sentences in the information conveyed (or not conveyed), or in the lexical and syntactical components,[3] only in the way these are received. But that one difference makes *all* the difference—between an uncomfortable, unsettling experience in which the gradual dimming of a fact is attended by a failure in perception, and a wholly self-satisfying one in which an

3 Of course, "That" is no longer read as "the fact that," but this is because the order of the clauses has resulted in the ruling out of that possibility.

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uncertainty is comfortably certain, and the reader's confidence in his own powers remains unshaken, because he is always in control. It is, I insist, a difference in meaning.

The results (I will later call them advantages) of this method are fairly, though not exhaustively, represented in my two examples. Essentially what the method does is *slow down* the reading experience so that "events" one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur, are brought before our analytical attentions. It is as if a slow motion camera with an automatic stop action effect were recording our linguistic experiences and presenting them to us for viewing. Of course the value of such a procedure is predicated on the idea of *meaning as an event,* something that is happening between the words and in the reader's mind, something not visible to the naked eye, but which can be made visible (or at least palpable) by the regular introduction of a "searching" question (what does this do?). It is more usual to assume that meaning is a function of the utterance, and to equate it with the information given (the message) or the attitude expressed. That is, the components of an utterance are considered either in relation to each other or to a state of affairs in the outside world, or to the state of mind of the speaker-author. In any and all of these variations, meaning is located (presumed to be imbedded) *in* the utterance, and the apprehension of meaning is an act of extraction.[4] In short, there is little sense of process and even less of the reader's actualizing participation in that process.

This concentration on the verbal object as a thing in itself, and as a repository of meaning has many consequences, theoretical and practical. First of all, it creates a whole class of utterances, which because of their alleged transparency, are declared to be uninteresting as objects of analysis. Sentences or fragments of sentences that immediately "make sense" (a deeply revealing phrase if one thinks about it) are examples of ordinary language; they are neutral and styleless statements, "simply" referring, or "simply" reporting. But the application to such utterances of the question "what does it do?" (which assumes that something is *always* happening) reveals that a great deal is going on in their production and comprehension (*every linguistic experience is affecting and pressuring*) although most of it is going on so close up, at such a basic, "preconscious" level of experience, that we tend to overlook it. Thus the utterance (written or spoken) "there is a chair" is at once understood as the report either of an existing state of affairs or of an act of perception (I see a chair). In either frame of reference, it

4 This is not true of the Oxford school of ordinary language philosophers (Austin, Grice, Searle) who discuss meaning in terms of hearer-speaker relationships and intention-response conventions, i.e., "situational meaning."

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makes immediate sense. To my mind, however, what is interesting about the utterance is the *sub rosa* message it puts out *by virtue of* its easy comprehensibility. Because it gives information directly and simply, it asserts (silently, but effectively) the "givability", directly and simply, of information; and it is thus as extension of the ordering operation we perform on experience when ever it is filtered through our temporal-spatial consciousness. In short it *makes* sense, in exactly the way we make (i.e., manufacture) sense of whatever, if anything, exists outside us; and by making easy sense it tells us that sense can be easily made and that we are capable of easily making it. A whole document consisting of such utterances—a chemistry text or a telephone book—will be telling us that all the time; and *that*, rather than any reportable "content," will be its *meaning*. Such language can be called "ordinary" only because it confirms and reflects our ordinary understanding of the world and our position in it; but for precisely that reason it is *extra*-ordinary (unless we accept a naive epistemology which grants us unmediated access to reality) and to leave it unanalyzed is to risk missing much of what happens—to us and through us—when we read and (or so we think) understand.

In short, the problem is simply that most methods of analysis operate at so high a level of abstraction that the basic data of the *meaning experience* is slighted and/or obscured. In the area of specifically literary studies, the effects of a naive theory of utterance meaning and of its attendant assumption of ordinary language can be seen in what is acknowledged to be the sorry state of the criticism of the novel and of prose in general. This is usually explained with reference to a distinction between prose and poetry, which is actually a distinction between ordinary language and poetic language. Poetry, it is asserted, is characterized by a high incidence of deviance from normal syntactical and lexical habits. It therefore offers the analyst-critic a great many points of departure. Prose, on the other hand (except for Baroque eccentrics like Thomas Browne and James Joyce) is, well, just prose, and just there. It is this helplessness before all but the most spectacular effects that I would remedy; although in one way the two examples with which this essay began were badly chosen, since they were analyses of utterances that are obviously and problematically deviant. This, of course, was a ploy to gain your attention. Assuming that I now have it, let me insist that the method shows to best advantage when it is applied to unpromising material. Consider for example this sentence (actually part of a sentence) from Pater's "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, which, while it is hardly the stuff of everyday conversation, does not, at first sight, afford much scope for the critic's analytical skill:

That clear perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours.

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What can one say about a sentence like this? The analyst of style would, I fear, find it distressingly straightforward and non-deviant, a simple declarative of the form X is Y. And if he were by chance drawn to it, he would not be likely to pay very much attention to the first word—"That." It is simply there. But of course it is not simply there; it is *actively* there, doing something, and what that something is can be discovered by asking the question "what does it do?" The answer is obvious, right there in front of our noses, although we may not see it until we ask the question. "That" is a demonstrative, a word that points *out,* and as one takes it *in,* a sense of its referent (yet unidentified) is established. Whatever "that" is, it is outside, at a distance from the observer-reader; it is "pointable to" (pointing is what the word "that" does), something of substance and solidity. In terms of the reader's response, "that" generates an expectation that impels him forward, the expectation of finding out *what* "that" is. The word and its effect are the basic data of the meaning experience and they will direct our description of that experience because they direct the reader.

The adjective "clear" works in two ways; it promises the reader that when "that" appears, he will be able to see it easily, and, conversely, that it can be easily seen. "Perpetual" stabilizes the visibility of "that" even *before* it is seen and "outline" gives it potential form, while at the same time raising a question. That question—outline of what?—is obligingly answered by the phrase "of face and limb," which, in effect, fills the outline in. By the time the reader reaches the declarative verb "is"—which sets the seal on the objective reality of what has preceded it—he is fully and securely oriented in a world of perfectly discerned objects and perfectly discerning observers, of whom he is one. But then the sentence turns on the reader, and takes away the world it has itself created. With "but" the easy progress through the sentence is impeded (it is a split second before one realizes that "but" has the force of "only"); the declarative force of "is" is weakened and the status of the firmly drawn outline the reader has been pressured to accept is suddenly uncertain; "image" resolves that uncertainty, but in the direction of insubstantiality; and the now blurred form disappears altogether when the phrase "of ours" collapses the distinction between the reader and that which is (or was) "without" (Pater's own word). Now you see it (that), now you don't. Pater giveth and Pater taketh away. (Again this description of the reader's experience is an analysis of the sentence's meaning and if you were to ask, "but, what does it mean?" I would simply repeat the description.)

What is true of this sentence is true, I believe, of much of what we hold ourselves responsible for as critics and teachers of literature. There is more to it, that is, to its experience, than meets the casual eye.

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What is required then is a method, a machine if you will, which in its operation makes observable, or at least accessible, what goes on below the level of self-conscious response. Everyone would admit that something "funny" happens in the "Judas" sentence from Browne's *Religio Medici* and that there is a difficulty built into the reading and understanding of the line from *Paradise Lost*; but there is a tendency to assume that the Pater sentence is a simple assertion (whatever that is). It is of course, nothing of the kind. In fact it is not an assertion at all, although (the promise of) an assertion is one of its components. It is an experience; it occurs; it does something; it makes us do something. Indeed, I would go so far as to say, in direct contradiction of Wimsatt-Beardsley, that what it does is what it means.

The Logic and Structure of Response

II.

What I am suggesting is that there is no direct relationship between the meaning of a sentence (paragraph, novel, poem) and what its words mean. Or, to put the matter less provocatively, the information an utterance gives, its message, is a constituent of, but certainly not to be identified with, its meaning. It is the experience of an utterance—*all* of it and not anything that could be said about it, including anything I could say—that *is* its meaning.

It follows, then, that it is impossible to mean the same thing in two (or more) different ways, although we tend to think that it happens all the time. We do this by substituting for our immediate linguistic experience an interpretation or abstraction of it, in which "it" is inevitably compromised. We contrive to forget what has happened to us in our life with language, removing ourselves as far as possible from the linguistic event before making a statement about it. Thus we say, for example, that "the book of the father" and "the father's book" mean the same thing, forgetting that "father" and "book" occupy different positions of emphasis in our different experiences; and as we progress in this forgetting, we become capable of believing that sentences as different as these are equivalent in meaning:

> This fact is concealed by the influence of language, moulded by science, which foists on us exact concepts as though they represented the immediate deliverances of experience.
>
> A. N. Whitehead

> And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable,

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flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further.

Walter Pater

It is (literally) tempting to say that these sentences make the same point: that language which pretends to precision operates to obscure the flux and disorder of actual experience. And of course they do, if one considers them at a high enough level of generality. But as individual experiences through which a reader lives, they are not alike at all, and neither, therefore, are their meanings.

To take the Whitehead sentence first, it simply doesn't mean what it says; for as the reader moves through it, he experiences the stability of the world whose existence it supposedly denies. The word "fact" itself makes an exact concept out of the idea of inexactness; and by referring backward to find its referent—"the radically untidy ill-adjusted character of . . . experience"—the reader performs the characteristic action required of him by this sentence, the fixing of things in their place.

There is nothing untidy either in the sentence or in our experience of it. Each clause is logically related to its predecessors and prepares the way for what follows; and since our active attention is required only at the points of relation, the sentence is divided *by us* into a succession of discrete areas, each of which is dominated by the language of certainty. Even the phrase "as though they represented" falls into this category, since its stress falls on "they represented" which then thrusts us forward to the waiting "deliverances of experience." In short, the sentence, in its action upon us, declares the tidy well-ordered character of actual experience, and that is its meaning.

At first the Pater sentence is self-subverting in the same way. The least forceful word in its first two clauses is "not," which is literally overwhelmed by the words that surround it—"world," "objects," solidity," "language"; and by the time the reader reaches the "but" in "but of impressions," he finds himself inhabiting (dwelling in) a "world" of fixed and "solid" objects. It is of course a world made up of words, constructed in large part by the reader himself as he performs grammatical actions which reinforce the stability of its phenomena. By referring backwards from "them" to "objects," the reader accords "objects" a place in the sentence (whatever can be referred back to must be somewhere) and in his mind. In the second half of the sentence, however, this same world is unbuilt. There is still a backward dependence to the reading experience, but the point of reference is the word "impressions"; and the series which follows it—"unstable," "flickering," 'inconsistent"—serves only to accentuate its *in*stability. Like Whitehead, Pater perpetrates the very deception he is warning against; but this is

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only one part of his strategy. The other is to break down (extinguish) the coherence of the illusion he has created. Each successive stage of the sentence is less exact (in Whitehead's terms) than its predecessors, because at each successive stage the reader is given less and less to hold on to; and when the corporeality of "this world" has wasted away to an "it" ("it contracts still further"), he is left with nothing at all.

One could say, I suppose, that at the least these two sentences gesture toward the same insight; but even this minimal statement makes me uneasy, because "insight" is another word that implies "there it is, I've got it." And this is exactly the difference between the two sentences: Whitehead lets you get "it" ("the neat, trim, tidy, exact world"), while Pater gives you the experience of having "it" melt under your feet. It is only when one steps back from the sentences that they are in any way equivalent; and stepping back is what an analysis in terms of doing and happenings does not allow.

The analysis of the Pater sentence illustrates another feature of the method, its independence of linguistic logic. If a casual reader were asked to point out the most important word in the second clause— "not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them"—he would probably answer "not," because as a logical marker "not" controls everything that follows it. But as one component in an experience, it is hardly controlling at all; for as the clause unfolds, "not" has less and less a claim on our attention and memories; working against it, and finally overwhelming it, as we saw, is an unbroken succession of more forceful words. My point of course is that in an analysis of the sentence as a thing in itself, consisting of words arranged in syntacto-logical relationships, "not" would figure prominently, while in an experiential analysis it is noted chiefly for its weakness.

The case is even clearer and perhaps more interesting in this sentence from one of Donne's sermons:

> And therefore, as the mysteries of our religions are not the objects of our reason, but by faith we rest on God's decree and purpose (it is so, O God, because it is thy will it should be so) So God's decrees are ever to be considered in the manifestation thereof.

Here the "not"—again logically controlling—is subverted by the very construction in which it is imbedded; for that construction, unobtrusively, but nonethless effectively, pressures the reader to perform exactly those mental operations whose propriety the statement of the sentence —what it is saying—is challenging. That is, a paraphrase of the material before the parenthesis might read—"Matters of faith and religion are not the objects of our reason"; but the simple act of taking in the words "And therefore" involves us unavoidably in reasoning about mat-

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ters of faith and religion; in fact so strong is the pull of these words that our primary response to this part of the sentence is one of anticipation; we are waiting for a "so" clause to complete the logically based sequence begun by "And therefore as." But when that "so" appears, it is not at all what we had expected, for it is the "so" of divine fiat—it is so O God because it is thy will it should be so—of a causality more real than any that can be observed in nature or described in a natural (human) language. The speaker, however, completes his "explaining" and "organizing" statement as if its silent claim to be a window on reality were still unquestioned. As a result the reader is alerted to the inadequacy of the very process in which he is (through the syntax) involved, and at the same time he accepts the necessity, for limited human beings, of proceeding within the now discredited assumptions of that process.

Of course, a formalist analysis of this sentence would certainly have discovered the tension between the two "so's," one a synonym for therefore, the other shorthand for "so be it," and might even have gone on to suggest that the relationship between them is a mirror of the relationship between the mysteries of faith and the operations of reason. I doubt, however, that a formalist analysis would have brought us to the point where we could see the sentence, and the mode of discourse it represents, as a self-deflating joke ("thereof" mocks "therefore"), to which the reader responds and of which he is a victim. In short, and to repeat myself, to consider the utterances apart from the consciousness receiving it is to risk missing a great deal of what is going on. It is a risk which analysis in terms of "doings and happenings"[5] works to minimize.

Another advantage of the method is its ability to deal with sentences (and works) that don't mean anything, in the sense of not making sense. Literature, it is often remarked (either in praise or with contempt) is largely made up of such utterances. (It is an interesting comment both on Dylan Thomas and the proponents of a deviation theory of poetic language that their examples so often are taken from his work.) In an experiential analysis, the sharp distinction between sense and nonsense, with the attendant value judgments and the talk about truth content, is blurred, because the place where sense is made or not made is the reader's mind rather than the printed page or the space between the covers of a book. For an example, I turn once again, and for the last time, to Pater.

This at least of flame-like, our life has, that it is but the concurrence,

5 I borrow this phrase from P. W. Bridgman, *The Way Things Are.*

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renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways.

This sentence deliberately frustrates the reader's natural desire to organize the particulars it offers. One can see for instance how different its experience would be if "concurrences of forces" were substituted for "concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces." The one allows and encourages the formation of a physical image which has a spatial reality; the mind imagines (pictures) separate and distinct forces converging, in an orderly fashion, on a center where they form a new, but still recognizable and managable (in a mental sense), force; the other determinedly prevents that image from forming. Before the reader can respond fully to "concurrence," "renewed" stops him by making the temporal status of the motion unclear. Has the concurrence already taken place? Is it taking place now? Although "from moment to moment" answers these questions, it does so at the expense of the assumptions behind them; the phrase leaves no time for anything so formal and chartable as a "process." For "a moment," at "of forces," there is a coming together; but in the next moment, the moment when the reader takes in "parting," they separate. Or do they? "sooner or later" upsets this new attempt to find pattern and direction in "our life" and the reader is once more disoriented, spatially and temporally. The final deterrent to order is the plural "ways," which prevents the mind's eye from travelling down a single path and insists on the haphazardness and randomness of whatever it is that happens sooner or later.

Of course this reading of the sentence (that is, of its effects) ignores its status as a logical utterance. "Concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces" is meaningless as a statement corresponding to a state of affairs in the "real" world; but its refusal to mean in that discursive way creates the experience that is its meaning; and an analysis of that experience rather than of logical content is able to make sense of one kind—experiential sense—out of nonsense.

A similar (and saving) operation can be performed on units larger than the sentence. One of Plato's more problematical dialogues is the *Phaedrus*, in part because its final assertion—"no work . . . has ever been written or recited that is worthy of serious attention"—seems to be contradicted by its very existence. This "embarrasment" has been the cause of a great many articles, often entitled "The Unity of the *Phaedrus*," in which the offending section is somehow accounted for, usually by explaining it away. What these studies attempt to discover is the *internal* unity of the *Phaedrus*, its coherence as a self-contained artifact; but if we look for the coherence of the dialogue in the reader's

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experience of it rather than in its formal structure, the "inconsistency" is less a problem to be solved than something that happens, a fact of response; and as a fact of response it is the key to the way the work works. Rather than a single sustained argument, the *Phaedrus* is a series of discrete conversations or seminars, each with its own carefully posed question, ensuing discussion and firmly drawn conclusion; but so arranged that to enter into the spirit and assumptions of any one of these self-enclosed units is implicitly to reject the spirit and assumptions of the unit immediately preceding. This is a pattern which can be clearly illustrated by the relationship between the speech of Lysias and the first speech delivered by Socrates. Lysias' speech is criticized for not conforming to the definition of a good discourse: "every discourse, like a living creature, should be so put together that it has its own body and lacks neither head nor feet, middle nor extremities, all composed in such a way that they suit both each other and the whole."[6] Socrates, in fact, is quite careful to rule out any other standard of judgment: it is the "arrangement" rather than the "invention" or "relevance" that concerns him as a critic. Subsequently, Socrates own effort on the same theme is criticized for its impiety, an impiety, moreover, that is compounded by its effectiveness as a "piece of rhetoric." In other words, Lysias' speech is bad because it is not well put together and Socrates' speech is bad because it is well put together.

Although neither Socrates nor Phaedrus acknowledges the contradiction, the reader, who has fallen in (perhaps involuntarily) with the standards of judgment established by the philosopher himself, is certainly confronted with it, and asked implicitly to do something with it. What he does (or should do) is realize that in the condemnation of Socrates' speech a new standard (of impiety) has been introduced, one that invalidates the very basis on which the discussion (and his reading experience) had hitherto been preceding. At that moment, this early section of the dialogue will have achieved its true purpose, which is, paradoxically, to bring the reader to the point where he is no longer interested in the issues it treats; no longer interested because he has come to see that the real issues exist at a higher level of generality. Thus, in a way peculiar to dialectical form and experience, this space of prose and argument will have been the vehicle of its own abandonment.

Nor is that by any means the end of the matter. This pattern, in which the reader is first encouraged to entertain assumptions he probably already holds and then is later forced to re-examine and discredit those same assumptions, is repeated again and again. In the mid-

6 Ed. W. C. Helmbold and W. G. Rabinowitz (New York, 1956), p. 53.

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dle section of the dialogue, the two friends agree to explore the subject of "good" and "bad" writing; and Socrates argues against the sophist position that an orator "may neglect what is really good . . . for it is from what seems to be true that persuasion comes, not from the real truth" (p. 46). It is essential, counters Socrates, for a "competent speaker" to know the truth about all things and subjects, for unless he does, and here the reader anticipates some kind of equation between good writing and a concern for the truth—he will be unable to *deceive* ("When a man sets out to deceive someone else without being taken in himself, he must accurately grasp the similarity and dissimilarity of the facts"). While art and truth have been joined in one context—the ruthlessly practical context of manipulative rhetoric—a wedge has been driven between them in another—the moral context assumed at the beginning of the discussion. To the earlier insight that a well-made speech is not necessarily a "true" speech (in the moral sense), the reader must now add the further (and extending) insight that "well-madeness" is likely to be a weapon in the arsenal of Truth's enemies. So that what was at first standard of judgment to which Socrates, Phaedrus *and* the reader repaired, is now seen to be positively deleterious to the higher standard now only gradually emerging from the dialogue.

The important word in my last sentence is "seen"; for it suggests that what is being processed by the *Phaedrus* is not an argument or a proposition, but a vision. As an argument, in fact, the dialogue makes no sense, since Socrates is continually reaching conclusions which he subsequently, and without comment, abandons. But as an attempt to refine its reader's vision it makes a great deal of sense; for then the contradictions, the moments of "blurring," become invitations to examine closely premises too easily acquiesced in. The reader who accepts this invitation will find, on retracing his steps, that statements and phrases which had seemed unexceptionable are now suspect and dubious; and that lines of reasoning which had seemed proper and to the point are now disastrously narrow. Of course they—phrases, statements, premises and conclusions—haven't changed (as Socrates remarks later, "written words . . . go on telling you the same thing over and over"), the *reader* has, and with each change he is able to dispense with whatever section of the dialogue he has been reading, because he has passed beyond the level of perception it rerspresents.

To read the *Phaedrus*, then, is to use it up; for the value of any point in it is that it gets *you* (not any sustained argument) to the next point, which is not so much a point (in logical-demonstrative terms) as a level of insight. It is thus a *self-consuming artifact*, a mimetic enactment in the reader's experience of the Platonic ladder in which each

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rung, as it is negotiated, is kicked away. The final rung, the intuition which stands (or, more properly, on which the reader stands), because it is the last, is of course the rejection of written artifacts, a rejection that far from contradicting what has preceded, is an exact description of what the reader, in his repeated abandoning of successive stages in the argument, has been *doing*. What was problematical sense in the structure of a self-enclosed argument, makes perfect sense in the structure of the reader's experience.

The *Phaedrus* is a radical criticism of the idea of internal coherence from a moral point of view; by identifying the appeal of well-put-together artifacts with the sense of order in the perceiving (i.e., receiving) mind, it provides a strong argument for the banishing of the good poet who is potentially the good deceiver. We can put aside the moral issue and still profit from the dialogue; for if the laws of beginning, middle, and end are laws of psychology rather than form (or truth), a criticism which has as its focus the structural integrity of the artifact is obviously misdirected. (It is the experience of works, not works that have beginnings, middles, and ends.) A new look at the question may result in the rehabilitation of works like *The Faerie Queene* which have been criticized because their poetic worlds lack "unity" and consistency.[7] And a new look at the question may result also in a more accurate account of works whose formal features are so prominent that the critic proceeds directly from them to a statement of meaning without bothering to ask whether their high visibility has any direct relationship to their operation in the reader's experience.

This analysis of the *Phaedrus* illlustrates, not incidentally, the ability of the method to handle units larger than the sentence. Whatever the size of the unit, the focus of the method remains the reader's experience of it, and the mechanism of the method is the magic question, "what does this——— do?" Answering it of course is more difficult than it would be for a single sentence. More variables creep in, more responses and more different kinds of responses have to be kept track of; there are more contexts which regulate and modulate the temporal flow of the reading experience. Some of these problems will be considered below. For the present let me say that I have usually found that what might be called the basic experience of a work (do *not* read basic meaning) occurs at every level. As an example, we might consider, briefly, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

At one point in Bunyan's prose epic, Christian asks a question and receives an answer:

7 See Paul Alpers, *The Poetry of "The Faerie Queene"* (Princeton, 1967), where exactly this point is made.

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Chr. Is this the way to the Celestial City?
Shep. You are just in your way.

The question is asked in the context of certain assumptions about the world, the stability of objects in it, the possibility of knowing, in terms of measurable distances and locatable places, where you are; but the answer while it is perfectly satisfactory within that assumed context, also challenges it, or, to be more precise, forces the reader to challenge it by forcing him to respond to the pun on the word "just." The inescapability of the pun reflects backward on the question and the world view it supports; and it gestures toward another world view in which spatial configurations have moral and *inner* meanings, and being in the way is independent of the way you happen to be in. That is, if Christian is to be truly in the way, the way must first be in him, and then he will be in it, no matter where—in what merely *physical* way—he is.

All of this is *meant*, that is experienced, in the reader's encounter with "just" which is a comment not only on Christian for asking the question, but on the reader for taking it seriously, that is, simply. What has happened to the reader in this brief space is the basic experience of *The Pilgrim's Progress.* Again and again he settles into temporal-spatial forms of thought only to be brought up short when they prove unable to contain the insights of Christian faith. The many levels on which this basic experience occurs would be the substance of a full reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, something the world will soon have, whether it wants it or not.

The method, then, is applicable to larger units and its chief characteristics remain the same: (1) it refuses to answer or even ask the question, what is this work about; (2) it yields an analysis not of formal features, but of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time; (3) the result will be a description of the structure of response which may have an oblique or even (as in the case of *The Pilgrim's Progress*), a contrasting relationship to the structure of the work as a thing in itself.

The Affective Fallacy Fallacy
III.

In the preceding pages I have argued the case for a method of analysis which focuses on the reader rather than on the artifact, and in what remains of this essay I would like to consider some of the more obvious objections to that method. The chief objection, of course, is that affective criticism leads one away from the "thing itself" in all its solidity to the inchoate impressions of a variable and various reader. This argu-

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ment has several dimensions to it, and will require a multi-directional answer.

First, the charge of impressionism has been answered, I hope, by some of my sample analyses. If anything, the discriminations required and yielded by the method are too fine for even the most analytical of tastes. This is in large part because in the category of response I include not only "tears, prickles," and "other psychological symptoms,"[8] but all the precise mental operations involved in reading, including the formulation of complete thoughts, the performing (and regretting) of acts of judgment, the following and making of logical sequences; and also because my insistence on the cumulative pressures of the reading experience puts restrictions on the possible responses to a word or a phrase.

The larger objection remains. Even if the reader's responses can be described with some precision, why bother with them, since the more palpable objectivity of the text is immediately available ("the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical julgment, tends to disappear"). My reply to this is simple. The objectivity of the text is an illusion, and moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The illusion is one of self-sufficiency and completeness. A line of print or a page or a book is so obviously *there*—it can be handled, photographed, or put away—that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it. (I wish the pronoun could be avoided, but in a way *it* makes my point.) This is of course the unspoken assumption behind the word "content." The line or page or book *contains*—everything.

The great merit (from this point of view) of kinetic art is that it forces you to be aware of "it" as a changing object—and therefore no "object" at all—and also to be aware of yourself as correspondingly changing. Kinetic art does not lend itself to a static interpretation because it refuses to stay still and doesn't let you stay still either. In its operation it makes inescapable the actualizing role of the observer. Literature is a kinetic art, but the physical form it assumes prevents us from seeing its essential nature, even though we so experience it. The availability of a book to the hand, its presence on a shelf, its listing in a library catalogue—all of these encourage us to think of it as a stationary object. Somehow when we put a book down, we forget that while we were reading, *it* was moving (pages turning, lines receding into the past) and forget too that *we* were moving with it.

A criticism that regards "the poem itself as an object of specifically critical judgment" extends this forgetting into a principle; it transforms

8 Wimsatt and Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon*, p. 34.

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a temporal experience into a spatial one; it steps back and in a single glance takes in a whole (sentence, page, work) which the reader knows (if at all) only bit by bit, moment by moment. It is a criticism that takes as its (self-restricted) area the physical dimensions of the artifact and within these dimensions it marks out beginnings, middles, and ends, discovers frequency distributions, traces out patterns of imagery, diagrams strata of complexity (vertical of course), all without ever taking into account the relationship (if any) between its data and their affective force. Its question is what goes into the work rather than what does the work go into. It is "objective" in exactly the wrong way, because it determinedly ignores what is objectively true about the *activity* of reading. Analysis in terms of doings and happenings is on the other hand truly objective because it recognizes the fluidity, "the movingness," of the meaning experience and because it directs us to where the action is—the active and activating consciousness of the reader.

But what reader? When I talk about the responses of "the reader," aren't I really talking about myself, and making myself into a surrogate for all the millions of readers who are not me at all? Yes and no. Yes in the sense that in no two of us are the responding mechanisms exactly alike. No, if one argues that because of the uniqueness of the individual, generalization about response is impossible. It is here that the method can accommodate the insights of modern linguistics, especially the idea of "linguistic competence," "the idea that is possible to characterize a linguistic system that every speaker shares."[9] This characterization, if it were realized, would be a "competence model," corresponding more or less to the internal mechanisms which allow us to process (understand) and produce sentences that we have never before encountered. It would be a spatial model in the sense that it would reflect a system of rules pre-existing, and indeed making possible, any actual linguistic experience.

The interest of this for me is its bearing on the problem of specifying response. If the speakers of a language share a system of rules that each of them has somehow internalized, understanding will, in some sense, be uniform; that is it will proceed in terms of the system of rules all speakers share. And insofar as these rules are constraints on production—establishing boundaries within which utterances are labelled "normal," "deviant," "impossible," and so on—they will also be constraints on the range, and even the direction, of response; that is, they will make response, to some extent, predictable and normative. Thus

9 Ronald Wardhaugh, *Reading: A Linguistic Perspective* (New York, 1969), p. 60.

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the formula, so familiar in the literature of linguistics, "Every native speaker will recognize. . . ."

A further "regularizing" constraint on response is suggested by what Ronald Wardhaugh, following Katz and Fodor, calls "semantic competence," a matter less of an abstract set of rules than of a backlog of language experience which determines probability of choice and therefore of response. "A speaker's semantic knowledge," Wardhaugh contends,

> . . . is no more random than his syntactic knowledge . . .; therefore, it seems useful to consider the possibility of devising, for semantic knowledge, a set of rules similar in form to the set used to characterize syntactic knowledge. Exactly how such a set of rules should be formulated and exactly what it must explain are to a considerable extent uncertain. At the very least the rules must characterize some sort of norm, the kind of semantic knowledge than an ideal speaker of the language might be said to exhibit in an ideal set of circumstances—in short, his semantic competence. In this way the rules would characterize just that set of facts about English semantics that all speakers of English have internalized and can draw upon in interpreting words in novel combinations. When one hears or reads a new sentence, he makes sense out of that sentence by drawing on both his syntactic and his semantic knowledge. The semantic knowledge enables him to know what the individual words mean and how to put these meanings together so that they are compatible. (p. 90)
>
> The resulting description could then be said to be a representation of the kind of system that speakers of a language have somehow internalized and that they draw upon in interpreting sentences. (p. 92)

Wardhaugh concedes that the "resulting description" would resemble rather than be equivalent to the system actually internalized, but he insists that "What is really important is the basic principle involved in the total endeavor, the principle of trying to formalize in as explicit a way as possible the semantic knowledge that a mature listener or reader brings to his task of comprehension and that underlies his actual behavior in comprehension" (p. 92). (Interestingly enough, this is a good description of what Empson tries to do, less systematically of course, in *The Structure of Complex Words.*) Obviously the intersection of the two systems of knowledge would make it possible to further restrict (i.e., make predictable and normative) the range of response; so that one could presume (as I have) to describe a reading experience in terms that would hold for all speakers who were in possession of both competences. The difficulty is that at present we do not have these systems. The syntactic model is still under construction and the semantic model has hardly been proposed. (Indeed we will need not a model, but

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models, since "the semantic knowledge that a mature . . . reader brings to his task of comprehension" will vary with each century or period.[10]) Nevertheless, the incompleteness of our knowledge should not prevent us from hazarding analyses on the basis of what we presently know about what we know.

Earlier, I offered this description of my method: "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader to the words as they succeed one another on the page." It should now be clear that the developing of those responses takes place within the regulating and organizing mechanism, pre-existing the actual verbal experience, of these (and other) competences. Following Chomsky most psychologists and psycholinguists insist that understanding is more than a linear processing of information.[11] This means, as Wardhaugh points out that "sentences are not just simple left to right sequences of elements" and that "sentences are not understood as a result of adding the meaning of the second to that of the first, the third to the first two, and so on" (p. 54). In short something other than itself, something existing outside its frame of reference, must be modulating the reader's experience of the sequence.[12] In my method of analysis, the temporal flow is monitored and structured by everything the reader brings with him, by his competences; and it is by taking these into account as they interact with the temporal left to right reception of the verbal string, that I am able to chart and project *the* developing response.

It should be noted however that my category of response, and especially of meaningful response, includes more than the transformational grammarians, who believe that comprehension is a function of deep structure perception, would allow. There is a tendency, at least in the writings of some linguists, to downgrade surface structure—the form of actual sentences—to the status of a husk, or covering, or veil; a layer of excrescences that is to be peeled away or penetrated or discarded in favor of the kernel underlying it. This is an understandable consequence of Chomsky's characterization of surface structure as "misleading" and "uninformative"[13] and his insistence (somewhat modi-

10 That is to say, there is a large difference between the two competences. One is uniform through human history, the other different at different points in it.

11 *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague, 1957), pp. 21-24.

12 See Wardhaugh, p. 55: Sentences have a "depth" to them, a depth which grammatical models such as phrase structure models and generative-transformational models attempt to represent. These models suggest that if a left-to-rightness principle is relevant to sentence processing, it must be a left-to-rightness of an extremely sophisticated kind that requires processing to take place concurrently at several levels, many of which are highly abstract: phonological or graphological, structural, and semantic."

13 *Language and Mind* (New York, 1968), p. 32.

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fied recently) that deep structure alone determines meaning. Thus, for example, Wardhaugh writes that "Every surface structure is interpretable only by reference to its deep structure" (p. 49) and that while "the surface structure of the sentence provides clues to its interpretation, the interpretation itself depends on a correct processing of these clues to reconstruct all the elements and relationships of the deep structure." Presumably the "correct processing," that is, the uncovering of the deep structure and the extraction of deep meaning, is the only goal, and whatever stands in the way of that uncovering is to be tolerated, but assigned no final value. Clues, after all, are sometimes misleading and give rise to "mistakes."

> For example, we sometimes anticipate words in a conversation or text only to discover ourselves to be wrong, or we do not wait for sentences to be completed because we assume we know what their endings will be. . . . Many of the mistakes students make in reading are made because the students have adopted inappropriate strategies in their processing. (pp. 137-138)

In my account of reading, however, the temporary adoption of these inappropriate strategies is itself a response to the strategy of an author; and the resulting mistakes are part of the experience provided by that author's language and therefore part of its meaning. Deep structure theorists, of course, deny that differences in meaning can be located in surface forms. And this for me vitiates the work of Richard Ohmann, who does pay attention to the temporal flow, but only so that he can uncover beneath it the deep structure, which, he assumes, is really doing the work.

The key word is of course experience. For Wardhaugh, reading (and comprehension in general) is a process of extraction. "The reader is required to get the meaning from the print in front of him" (p. 139). For me, reading (and comprehension in general) is an event, no part of which is to be discarded. In that event, which is the actualization of meaning, the deep structure plays an important role, but it is not everything; for we comprehend not in terms of the deep structure alone, but in terms of a *relationship* between the unfolding, in time, of the surface structure and a continual checking of it against our projection (always in terms of surface structure) of what the deep structure will reveal itself to be; and when the final discovery has been made and *the* deep structure is perceived, all the "mistakes" the positing, on the basis of incomplete evidence, of deep structures that failed to materialize, will not be cancelled out. They have been experienced; they have existed in the mental life of the reader; they *mean*. (This is obviously

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the case in our experience of the line "Nor did they not perceive the evil plight.")

All of which returns us to the original question. Who is *the* reader? Obviously, my reader is a construct, an ideal or idealized reader; somewhat like Wardhaugh's "mature reader" or Milton's "fit" reader, or to use a term of my own, *the* reader is the *informed* reader. The informed reader is someone who

1.) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up.
2.) is in full possession of "the semantic knowledge that a mature . . . listener brings to his task of comprehension." This includes the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc.
3.) has *literary* competence.

That is, he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalized the properties of literary discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, etc.) to whole genres. In this theory, then, the concerns of other schools of criticism— questions of genre, conventions, intellectual background, etc.—*become redefined in terms of potential and probable response*, the significance and value a reader can be expected to attach to the idea "epic" or to the use of archaic language or to anything.

The reader, of whose responses I speak, then, is this informed reader, neither an abstraction, nor an actual living reader, but a hybrid—a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed. That is, I can with some justification project my responses into those of "the" reader because they have been modified by the constraints placed on me by the assumptions and operations of the method: (1) the conscious attempt to become the informed reader by making my mind the repository of the (potential) responses a given text might call out and (2) the attendant suppressing, in so far as that is possible, of what is personal and idiosyncratic and 1970ish in my response. In short, the informed reader is to some extent processed by the method that uses him as a control. Each of us, if we are sufficiently responsible and self-conscious, can, in the course of employing the method become the informed reader and therefore be a more reliable reporter of his experience.

(Of course, it would be easy for someone to point out that I have not answered the charge of solipsism, but merely presented a rationale for a solipsistic procedure; but such an objection would have force only if a better mode of procedure were available. The one usually offered is to regard the work as a thing in itself, as an object; but as I have

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argued above, this is a false and dangerously self-validating objectivity. I suppose that what I am saying is that I would rather have an acknowledged and controlled subjectivity than an objectivity which is finally an illusion.)

In its operation, my method will obviously be radically historical. The critic has the responsibility of becoming not one but a number of informed readers, each of whom will be identified by a matrix of political, cultural, and literary determinants. The informed reader of Milton will not be the informed reader of Whitman, although the latter will necessarily comprehend the former. This plurality of informed readers implies a plurality of informed reader aesthetics, or no aesthetic at all. A method of analysis that yields a (structured) description of response has built into it an *operational* criteria. The question is not how good is it, but how does it work; and both question and answer are framed in terms of local conditions, which include local notions of literary value.

This raises the problem of the consideration of local beliefs as a possible basis of response. If a reader does not share the central concerns of a work, will he be capable of fully responding to it? Wayne Booth has asked that question: "But is it really true that the serious Catholic or atheist, however sensitive, tolerant, diligent, and well-informed about Milton's beliefs he may be, enjoys *Paradise Lost* to the degree possible to one of Milton's contemporaries and co-believers, of equal intelligence and sensitivity?"[14] The answer, it seems to me, is no. There are some beliefs that can not be momentarily suspended or assumed. Does this mean then that *Paradise Lost* is a lesser work because it requires a narrowly defined (i.e., "fit") reader? Only if we hold to a universal aesthetic in the context of which value is somehow correlated with the number of readers who can experience it fully, irrespective of local affiliations. My method allows for no such aesthetic and no such fixings of value. In fact it is oriented *away* from evaluation and toward description. It is difficult to say on the basis of its results that one work is better than another or even that a single work is good or bad. And more basically, it doesn't permit the evaluation of literature as literature, as apart from advertising or preaching or propaganda or "entertainment." As a report of a (very complex) stimulus—response relationship, it provides no way to distinguish between literary and other effects, except perhaps for the components which go into one or the other; and no one, I assume, will assent to a "recipe" theory of literary difference. For some this will seem a fatal limitation of the method. I welcome it, since it seems to me that we have for too long,

14 *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), p. 139.

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and without notable results, been trying to determine what distinguishes literature from ordinary language. If we understood "language," its constitutents and its operations, we would be better able to understand its sub-categories. The fact that this method does not begin with the assumption of literary superiority or end with its affirmation, is I think, one of its strongest recommendations.

This is not to say that I do not evaluate. The selection of texts for analysis is itself an indication of a hierarchy in my own tastes. In general I am drawn to works which do not allow a reader the security of his normal patterns of thought and belief. It would be possible I suppose to erect a standard of value on the basis of this preference—a scale on which the most unsettling of literary experiences would be the best (perhaps literature is what disturbs our sense of self-sufficiency, personal and linguistic)—but the result would probably be more a reflection of a personal psychological need than of a universally true aesthetic.

Three further objections to the method should be considered if only because they are so often made in my classes. If one treats utterances, literary or otherwise, as strategies, does this not claim too much for the conscious control of their producer-authors? I tend to answer this question by begging it, by deliberately choosing texts in which the evidence of control is overwhelming. (I am aware that to a psychoanalytic critic, this principle of selection would be meaningless, and indeed, impossible.) If pressed I would say that the method of analysis, apart from my own handling of it, does not require the assumption either of control or of intention. One can analyze an effect without worrying about whether it was produced accidentally or on purpose. (However I always find myself worrying in just this way, especially when reading Defoe.) The exception would be cases where the work includes a statement of intention (to justify the ways of God to man), which because it establishes an expectation on the part of a reader becomes a part of his experience. This of course does not mean that the stated intention is to be believed or used as the basis of an interpretation, simply that it, like everything else in the text, draws a response, and, like everything else, it must be taken into account.

The second objection also takes the form of a question. If there is a measure of uniformity to the reading experience, why have so many readers, and some equally informed, argued so well and passionately for differing interpretations? This, it seems to me, is a pseudo-problem. Most literary quarrels are not disagreements about response, but about a response to a response. What happens to one informed reader of a work will happen, within a range of nonessential variation, to another. It is only when readers become literary critics and the passing of judg-

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ment takes precedence over the reading experience, that opinions begin to diverge. The act of interpretation is often so removed from the act of reading that the latter (in time the former) is hardly remembered. The exception that proves the rule, and my point, is C. S. Lewis, who explained his differences with Dr. Leavis in this way: "It is not that he and I see different things when we look at *Paradise Lost*. He sees and hates the very same things that I see and love."

The third objection is a more practical one. In the analysis of a reading experience, when does one come to the point? The answer is, "never," or, no sooner than the pressure to do so becomes unbearable (psychologically). Coming to the point is the goal of a criticism that believes in content, in extractable meaning, in the utterance as a repository. Coming to the point fulfills a need that most literature deliberately frustrates (if we open ourselves to it), the need to simplify and close. Coming to the point should be resisted, and in its small way, this method will help you to resist.

Other Versions, Other Readers
IV.

Some of what I have said in the preceding pages will be familiar to students of literary criticism. There has been talk of readers and responses before and I feel some obligation at this point both to acknowledge my debts and to distinguish my method from others more or less like it.[15]

One begins of course with I. A. Richards, whose principal article of faith sounds very much like mine:

> . . . the belief that there is such a quality or attribute, namely Beauty, which attaches to the things which we rightly call beautiful, is probably inevitable for all reflective persons at a certain stage of their mental development.
>
> Even among those who have escaped from this delusion and are well

15 What follows is by no means exhaustive; it is selective in three directions. First I arbitrarily exclude, and therefore lump together in one undifferentiated mass, all those whose models of production and comprehension are primarily spatial; all those who are more interested in what goes into a work rather than what goes into and out of the reader; all those who offer top to bottom rather than left to right analyses: statisticians of style (Curtis Hayes, Josephine Miles, John Carroll), descriptive linguists (Halliday and Company), formalist-structuralists (Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes), and many more. (In the longer study to which this essay is preliminary, these men and women will be considered and discriminated.) I am also selective in my discussion of psychologically oriented critics; and within that selection I must make further apologies for considering their work only in relation to my own methodological concerns which are on the whole narrower and less ambitious than theirs. In short, with the possible exception of Michael Riffaterre, I shall do less than justice to my predecessors.

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aware that we continually talk as though things possess qualities, when what we ought to say is that they cause effects in us of one kind or another, the fallacy of "projecting" the effect and making it a quality of its cause tends to recur. . . .

Whether we are discussing music, poetry, painting, sculpture or architecture, we are forced to speak as though certain physical objects . . . are what we are talking about. And yet the remarks we make as critics do not apply to such objects but to states of mind, to experiences.[16]

This is obviously a brief for a shift of analytical attention away from the work as an object to the response it draws, the experience it generates; but the shift is in Richards's theory preliminary to *severing* one from the other, whereas I would insist on their precise interaction. He does this by distinguishing sharply between scientific and emotive language:

A statement may be used for the sake of the *reference* true or false, which it causes. This is the *scientific* use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude produced by the reference it occasions. This is the *emotive* use of language. The distinction once clearly grasped is simple. We may either use words for the sake of the references they promote, or we may use them for the sake of the attitudes and emotions which ensue. (p. 267)

But may we? Isn't it the case, rather, that in any linguistic experience we are internalizing attitudes and emotions, even if the attitude is the pretension of no attitude and the emotion is a passionate coldness? Richards's distinction is too absolute and in his literary theorizing, it becomes more absolute still. Referential language, when it appears in poetry, is not to be attended to as referential in any sense. Indeed, it is hardly to be attended to at all. This is in general the thesis of *Science and Poetry*[17]:

The intellectual stream is fairly easy to follow; it follows itself, so to speak; but it is the less important of the two. In poetry it matters only as a *means*. (p. 13)

A good deal of poetry and even some great poetry exists (e.g., some of Shakespeare's Songs and, in a different way, much of the best of Swinburne) in which the sense of the words can be *almost* entirely missed or neglected without loss. (pp. 22-23)

Most words are ambiguous as regards their plain sense, especially in poetry. We can take them as we please in a variety of senses. The sense we

16 *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York, 1959 [1924]), pp. 20-22.

17 London, 1926.

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are pleased to choose is the one which most suits the impulses already stirred through the form of the verse. . . . Not the strictly logical sense of what is said, but the tone of voice and the occasion are the primary factors by which we interpret. (p. 23)

It is never what a poem *says* which matters, but what it *is*. (p. 25)

Well what is it? And what exactly is the "form of the verse" which is supposed to displace our interest in and responsibility to the sense? The answers to these questions, when they come, are disturbing: The cognitive structure of poetic (read literary) language is a conduit through which a reader is to pass untouched and untouching on his way to the *impulse* which was the occasion of the poem in the first place:

The experience itself, the tide of impulses sweeping through the mind, is the source and the sanction of the words . . . to a suitable reader . . . the words will reproduce in his mind a similar play of interests putting him for the while into a similar situation and leading to the same response.

Why this should happen is still somewhat of a mystery. An extraordinarily intricate concourse of impulses brings the words together. Then in another mind the affair in part reverses itself, the words bring a similar concourse to impulses. (pp. 26-27)

Declining to identify message with meaning, Richards goes too far and gives the experience of decoding (or attempting to decode) the message no place in the actualization of meaning. From feeling to words to feeling, the passage should be made with as little attention as possible to the sense, which is usually "fairly easy to follow" (i.e., disposable, like a straw). In fact, attention to the sense can be harmful, if one takes it too seriously. Assertions in poetry are "pseudo-statements": "A pseudo-statement is a form of words which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes (due regard being had for the better or worse organizations of these *inter se*); a statement, on the other hand, is justified by its truth, i.e., its correspondence . . . with the fact to which it points" (p. 59). This would be unexceptionable, were Richards simply warning against applying the criterion of truth-value to statements in poetry; but he seems to mean that we should not experience them as statements at all, even in the limited universe of a literary discourse. That is, very little corresponding to cognitive processes should be going on in our minds when we read poetry, lest the all important release of impulses be impaired or blocked. Contradictions are not to be noted or worried about. Logical

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arguments need not be followed too closely ("the relevant consequences are . . . to be arrived at by a partial relaxation of logic"). But while this may be the response called forth by some poetry (and prose), it is by no means universally true that in reading literature we are always relieved of our responsibility to logic and argument. Very often, and even when the sense is "fairly easy to follow," cognitive processes—calculating, comparing, deducting, etc.—form the largest part of our response to a work, and any description of its effects must take this into account. Richards arbitrarily limits the range of meaningful response to feelings (impulses and attitudes) and of course here I can not follow him. (In seventeenth century literature, for example, the impact of a work often depends on the encouragement and manipulation of ratiocinative patterns of response.)

The range of response is further narrowed when Richards argues for a hierarchy of experiences. What is the best life one can live, he asks? "The best life . . . which we can wish for our friend will be one in which as much as possible of himself is engaged (as many of his impulses as possible). The more he lives and the less he thwarts himself the better . . . . And if it is asked, what does such life feel like . . . the answer is that it feels like and is the experience of poetry" (p. 33). The best poetry then is the poetry that gives the most impulses, with the greatest intensity, and, presumably, with the least ratiocinative interference. It is hardly surprising, given this theory of poetic value, that Richards is not really interested in the sequence of the reading experience. His analysis of reading a poem (*Principles*, chapter XVI) is spatial, in terms of isolated word-impulse relationships, exactly what we might expect from an aesthetic which regards the ligatures of thought as a kind of skeletal container, holding the experience in, but not forming any considerable part of it.

Richards's theories and his prejudices weigh heavily on his protocols and account, in part, for their miserable performance in *Practical Criticism*.[18] They begin not with a sense of responsibility to language in all of its aspects, but with a license and, indeed, an obligation to ignore some of them. They are simply reporting on the impulses and attitudes they experience while reading, presumably under the influence of Richards's anti-cognitive bias. It is ironic and unfortunate that the case against analysis in terms of reader response is often made by referring to the example of a group of readers whose idea of response was disastrously narrow, and whose sensitivity to language was restricted to only one of its registers. If *Practical Criticism* makes any case, it is a case for the desirability of my informed reader; for it shows what happens when

18 London, 1929.

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people who have never thought about the language they use every day are suddenly asked to report precisely on their experience of poetry, and even worse, are asked to do so in the context of an assumption of poetic "difference."

In all of this, of course, I have been anticipated by William Empson:

> ... when you come down to detail, and find a case where there are alternative ways of interpreting a word's action, of which one can plausibly be called Cognitive and the other Emotive, it is the Cognitive one which is likely to have important effects on sentiment or character, and in general it does not depend on accepting false beliefs. But in general it does involve a belief of some kind, if only the belief that one kind of life is better than another, so that it is no use trying to chase belief-feelings out of the poetry altogether.
>
> The trouble I think is that Professor Richards conceives the Sense of a word in a given use as something single, however "elaborate," and therefore thinks that anything beyond that Sense has got to be explained in terms of feelings, and feelings of course are Emotions, or Tones. But much of what appears to us as a "feeling" (as is obvious in the case of a complex metaphor) will in fact be quite an elaborate structure of related meanings. The mere fact that we can talk straight ahead and get the grammar in order shows that we must be doing a lot more rational planning about the process of talk than we have to notice in detail.[19]

Empson agrees with Richards that there are "two streams of experience in reading a poem, the intellectual and the active and emotional" but he objects to the suggestion that the interconnection between them "had better be suppressed" (p. 11). In short, his position, at least on this point, is very close to (and is probably one of the causes of) my own. And his insistence that words carry with them discriminations of sense and feeling of which we are not always consciously aware goes a long way to making my case for the complexity, again largely unconscious, of the response these same words evoke.

We differ however in the scope and direction of our analyses. Empson does not follow the form of the reader's experience, but some form, usually arbitrary, which allows him to explore in depth isolated moments or potential moments in that experience. (I say potential because his emphasis is often on what has gone into a word rather than an account of its effect.) Why *seven* types of ambiguity? I like the explanation offered recently by Roger Fowler and Peter Mercer: "Empson's categories are thrown off with a marvellous disbelieving *panache*—if there had been eight and not the magical seven we might have had to

19 *The Structure of Complex Words* (London, 1951), pp. 10, 56-57.

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worry—but there are only as few or as many types as you want."[20] As you *need,* to write a book, that is to generate a sufficient number of categories to contain and at least keep physically separate the points you would like to make. The categories of *The Structure of Complex Words* are to be taken no more seriously, that is, absolutely, than the seven types, and of course Empson never asks that you do. They are simply (or not so simply) containers, and boundaries, artificial, but necessary, if he is to manage the discussion (which is often a matter of keeping a great many balls in the air at once) and if we are to have the aid and comfort of some sort of ordering principle as we follow him.

The results, as Fowler and Mercer point out, are "scores of analyses probably unequalled in brilliance, if also at times, unequalled in ingenuity, which proceed for the most part as fragmented . . . imitations of the many-dimensional poetic object" (p. 58). In a word, the method tends to be atomistic, in-depth analyses of lexical and semantic complexity without the restraint imposed by the consideration of the mind's involvement with the ligatures of thought. And if it is true, as some have argued, that Empson equates value with this kind of complexity (a standard not unlike Richards's intensity and frequency of impulse), one can see why he would avoid any methodological strategy which would prevent him from fully attending to it. (In my analyses, the range of associations and therefore of response is always being narrowed and directed by decisions made or actions taken as a result of earlier events in the meaning experience.) Even when Empson considers whole poems—he is more likely to subsume parts of poems under his various categories—the atomism and fragmentation is obvious. What he always looks for, or constructs, is some classificatory mechanism which relieves him of the responsibility for a sequential reading of the poem. The most obvious device is the emphasis on a single word, i.e., "all" in *Paradise Lost;* but even here he does not follow the word through the poem, but sets up "classes" of occurrence ordered on the basis of certain emotions (p. 102). In *Some Versions of Pastoral,* the categories of Bentleyan error serve the same purpose; and the thesis which later becomes *Milton's God*—a book on the argument of *Paradise Lost,* notable for the *absence* of semantic analysis—is developed in the spaces *between* the explorations of verbal texture rather than as a consequence of them.

The reading of Marvell's "Garden" displays the same characteristics. Here there is a gesture in the direction of considering the poem in the order of its stanzas, but at a certain point Empson surrenders to his genius: "*Green* takes on great weight here . . . because it has been a pet word of Marvell's before. To list the uses before the satires may

20 "Criticism and the Language of Literature: Some Traditions and Trends in Great Britain," *Style,* III (1969), 59.

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seem an affectation of pedantry, but shows how often the word was used; and they are pleasant things to look up."[21] Empson is off and running, from Lawrence to Whitman to Wordsworth to Donne to Shakespeare to Homer to Milton and even (or inevitably) Buddha, returning to "The Garden" only in a closing sentence whose impact is derived from our awareness of its arbitrariness. It doesn't conclude the essay or the reading of the poem; it merely *closes off* this particular section of the lifelong dialogue Empson is having with his language, its creations and their creators. And who would want it otherwise? What Empson does, he does better than anyone else; but he does not analyze the developing responses of the reader to the words as they succeed one another in time.

Finally, I come to Michael Riffaterre whose work has only recently been called to my attention. Mr. Riffaterre *is* concerned with the reader's developing responses, and insists on the constraints imposed on response by the left to right sequence of a temporal flow, and he objects, as I do, to methods of analysis that yield descriptions of the observable features of an utterance without reference to their reception by the reader. In a reply to a reading by Jakobson and Levi-Strauss of Baudelaire's "Les Chats," Riffaterre makes his position on these points very clear.[22] The systems of correspondences yielded by a structuralist analysis are not necessarily perceived or attended to by the reader; and the resulting data, encased as it often is in formidable spatial schematizations, often prevents us from looking at what is going on in the act of comprehension. The question, Riffaterre insists, is "whether unmodified structural linguistics is relevant at all to the analysis of poetry" (p. 202). The answer, it seems to me, is yes and no. Clearly we must reject any claims made for a direct relationship between structurally derived descriptions and meaning; but it does not follow for me, as it does for Riffaterre, that the data of which such descriptions consist is therefore irrelevant:

> The authors' methods is based on the assumption that any structural system they are able to define in the poem is necessarily a poetic structure. Can we not suppose, on the contrary, that the poem may contain certain structures that play no part in its function and effect as a literary work of art, and that there may be no way for structural linguists to distinguish between these unmarked structures and those that are literarily active? Conversely, there may well be strictly poetic structures that cannot be recognized as such by an analysis not geared to the specificity of poetic language. (p. 202)

21 *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Norwalk, Conn., n.d.), p. 121.

22 "Describing Poetic Structures," *Yale French Studies,* XXXVI—XXXVII (1966).

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Here the basis for both my agreement and disagreement with Riffaterre is clear. He is a believer in two languages, ordinary and poetic, and therefore in two structures of discourse and two kinds of response; and he believes consequently, that analysis should concern itself with "turning up" features, of language, structure and response, that are specifically poetic and literary.

> Poetry is language, but it produces effects that language in everyday speech does not consistently produce; a reasonable assumption is that the linguistic analysis of a poem should turn up specific features, and that there is a casual relationship between the presence of these features in the text and our empirical feeling that we have before us a poem. . . . In everyday language, used for practical purposes, the focus is usually upon the situational context, the mental or physical reality referred to . . . In the case of verbal art, the focus is upon the message as an end in itself, not just as a means. . . . (p. 200)

This is distressingly familiar deviationist talk, with obvious roots in Mukarovsky's distinction between standard language and poetic language and in Richards's distinction between scientific and emotive language. Riffaterre's conception of the relation between standard and poetic language is more flexible and sophisticated than most, but nevertheless his method shares the weakness of its theoretical origins, the *a priori* assumption that a great deal doesn't count. Deviation theories always narrow the range of meaningful response by excluding from consideration features or effects that are not poetic; and in Riffaterre's version, as we shall see, the range of poetic effects is disastrously narrow, because he restricts himself only to that which is called to a reader's attention in the most spectacular way.

For Riffaterre, stylistic study is the study of SD's or stylistic devices which are defined as those mechanisms in the text which

> prevent the reader from inferring or predicting any important feature. For predictability may result in superficial reading; unpredictability will compel attention: the intensity of reception will correspond to the intensity of the message.[23]

Talking about style then is talking about moments in the reading experience when attention is compelled because an expectation has been disappointed by the appearance of an unpredictable element. The relationship between such moments and other moments in the sequence which serve to highlight them is what Riffaterre means by the "stylistic context":

23 "Criteria for Style Analysis," *Word*, XV (1959), 158.

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The stylistic context is a linguistic *pattern suddenly broken by an element which was unpredictable*, and the contrast resulting from this interference is the stylistic stimulus. The rupture must not be interpreted as a dissociating principle. The stylistic value of the contrast lies in the relationship it establishes between the two clashing elements; no effect would occur without their association in a sequence. In other words, the stylistic contrasts, like other useful oppositions in language, create a structure. (p. 171)

Riffaterre is more interesting than other practitioners of "contrast" stylistics because he locates the disrupted pattern in the context rather in any pre-existing and exterior norm. For if "in the style norm relationship we understood the norm pole to be universal (as it would be in the case of the linguistic norm), we could not understand how a deviation might be an SD on some occasions and on others, not" ("Criteria," p. 169). This means, as he points out in "Stylistic Context,"[24] that one can have the pattern *Context-SD starting new context—SD*: "The SD generates a series of SDs of the same type (e.g., after an SD by archaism, proliferation of archaisms); the resulting saturation causes these SDs to lose their contrast value, destroys their ability to stress a particular point of the utterance and reduces them to components of a new context; this context in turn will permit new contrasts." In the same article (pp. 208-9) this flexible and changing relationship is redefined in terms of microcontext ("the context which creates the opposition constituting the SD") and macrocontext ("the context which modifies this opposition by reinforcing or weakening it"). This enables Riffaterre to talk about the relationship between local effects and a series of local effects which in its entirety or duration determines to some extent the impact of its members; but the principle of contextual norm, and its advantages, remains the same.

Those advantages are very real; attention is shifted away from the message to its reception, and therefore from the object to the reader. (Indeed in a later article Riffaterre calls for a "separate linguistics of the decoder" and argues that SF, the impact made on the reader, "prevails consistently over referential function," especially in fiction.[25] No fixed and artificial inventory of stylistic devices is possible, since in terms of contextual norms anything can be a stylistic device. The temporal flow of the reading experience is central and even controlling; it literally locates, with the help of the reader, the objects of analysis. The view of language and of comprehension is non-static; the context

24 *Word*, XVI (1960).

25 "The Stylistic Function," *Proceedings of the 9th International Congress of Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 320, 321.

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and SDs are moving and shifting; the reader is moving with them and through his responses, creating them, and the critic is moving too, placing his analytic apparatus now here, now there.

All of this, however, is vitiated for me by the theory of language and style in the context (that word again) of which the methodology operates. I refer of course to the positing of two kinds of language and the resulting restriction of meaningful or interesting response to effects of surprise and disruption. Riffaterre is very forthright about this:

> *Stylistic facts can be apprehended only in language, since that is their vehicle*; on the other hand, *they must have a specific character*, since otherwise *they could not be distinguished from linguistic facts.*
>
> It is necessary to gather first all those elements which present stylistic features, and secondly, to subject to linguistic analysis only these, to the exclusion of all others (which are stylistically irrelevant). Then and only then will the confusion between style and language be avoided. For this sifting, preliminary to analysis, we must find specific criteria to delineate the distinctive features of style.
>
> *Style* is understood as an emphasis (expressive, affective, or aesthetic) added to the information conveyed by the linguistic structure, without alteration of meaning. Which is to say that language expresses and that style stresses.[26]

"Stylistic facts"—"Linguistic facts," "stylistically irrelevant," "distinctive features of style," "emphasis . . . added to the information . . . without alteration of meaning." This is obviously more than a distinction, it is a hierarchy in which the lower of the two classes is declared uninteresting and, what is more important, *inactive.* That is, the stress of style is doing something and is therefore the proper object of attention, while the expression, the encoding and decoding of information, the meaning, is just there, and need not be looked into very closely. (Language expresses, style stresses.) One could quarrel with this simply on the basis of its radical separation of style and meaning, and with its naive equation of meaning with information; but for my purposes it is enough to point out the implications for the specifying and analysis of response. Underlying Riffaterre's theorizing is the assumption that for long stretches of language, in both ordinary and literary discourse, there is no response worth talking about because nothing much is happening. (Minimal decoding minimal response.)

This assumption is reflected at every level of his operation. It is the basis of his distinction between what is and what is not a literary struc-

26 "Criteria for Style Analysis," pp. 154-55.

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ture. It is the basis too, of the context-SD relationship that obtains once a literary structure has been identified. That relationship, is, as Riffaterre says, one of "binary opposition" in which "the poles cannot be separated."[27] Of course these are variable, not fixed, poles; but within their individual relationships one is always doing nothing but preparing the way (passively) for the other, for the "big moment" when the contextual pattern is disrupted and attention is compelled (i.e., response occurs). And finally, it is the basis of Riffaterre's use of the reader as a locating device. Since all the features yielded by a linguistic analysis are not poetically active, there must be a way of isolating those features that are; and since these are the features that disrupt pattern and compel attention, we shall locate them by attending to the responses of actual readers, whether they are readers in our classroom-laboratory or readers who have left us a record of their experience in footnotes or articles. Riffaterre's reader is a composite reader (either the "average reader" or "super-reader"), not unlike my informed reader. The difference of course is that his experience is considered relevant only at those points where it becomes unusual or "effortful."

> Each point of the text that holds up the superreader is tentatively considered a component of the poetic structure. Experience indicates that such units are always pointed out by a number of informants.[28]

I am less bothered by the idea of a superreader than by what happens to his experience in the course of a Riffaterrian analysis. It too will become binary in structure, a succession of highlighted moments alternating with and created by intervals of contextual norm, more cyclical than linear, and of course, in a large part of it, nothing will be happening. At one point in his reading of "Les Chats," Riffaterre comes upon the line "*Ils cherchent le silence*" and here is what he has to say:

> Informants unanimously ignore *Ils cherchent le silence*. Undoubtedly *cherchent* is the poetic or high-tone substitute for *rechercher* or *aimer*, but this is no more than the normal transformation of prose into verse: the device marks genre, as do verse and stanza, setting the context apart from everyday contexts. It is expected and not surprising.[29]

In other words, nobody noticed it or had any trouble with it; it's perfectly ordinary; therefore it's not doing anything and there's nothing to say about it.

Even when Mr. Riffaterre finds something to talk about, his method

27 "Stylistic Context," p. 207.

28 "Describing Poetic Structures," pp. 215-16.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

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does not allow him to do much with it. This analysis of a sentence from *Moby Dick* is a case in point:

> "And heaved and heaved, still unrestingly heaved the black sea, as if its vast tides were a conscience. . . ." We have here a good example of the extent to which decoding can be controlled by the author. In the above instance it is difficult for the reader not to give his attention to each meaningful word. The decoding cannot take place on a minimal basis because the initial position of the verb is unpredictable in the normal English sentence, and so is its repetition. The repetition has a double role of its own, independent of its unpredictability: it creates the rhythm, and its total effect is similar to that of explicit speech. The postponement of the subject brings unpredictability to its maximum point; the reader must keep in mind the predicate before he is able to identify the subject. The "reversal" of the metaphor is still another example of contrast with the context. The reading speed is reduced by these hurdles, attention lingers on the representation, the stylistic effect is created.[30]

"Stylistic effect is created." But to what end? What does one do with the SDs or with their convergence once they have been located by the informer-reader? One cannot go from them to meaning, because meaning is independent of them; they are stress. ("Stress" occupies the same place in Riffaterre's affections as does "impulse" in Richards's and they represent the same narrowing of response.) We are left with a collection of stylistic effects (of a limited type), and while Mr. Riffaterre does not claim transferability for them, he does not claim anything else either. And their interest is to me at least an open question. (I should add that Riffaterre's analysis of "Les Chats" is brilliant and persuasive as is his refutation of the Jakobson-Levi-Strauss position. It is an analysis, however, which depends on insights his own method could not have generated. He will not thank me for saying so, but Mr. Riffaterre is a better critic than his theory would allow.)

The difference between Riffaterre and myself can be most conveniently located in the concept of "style." The reader may have wondered why in an essay subtitled "Affective Stylistics," the word has been so little used. The reason is that my insistence that everything counts and that something (analyzable and significant) is always happening, makes it impossible to distinguish, as Riffaterre does, between "linguistic facts" and "stylistic facts." For me, a stylistic fact is a fact of response, and since my category of response includes everything, from the smallest and least spectacular to the largest and most disrupting of linguistic experiences, everything is a stylistic fact, and we might as well abandon

30 "Criteria for Style Analysis," pp. 172-73.

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the word since it carries with it so many binary hostages (style *and* —).

This of course commits me to a monistic theory of meaning; and it is usually objected to such theories that they give no scope to analysis. But my monism permits analysis, because it is a monism of effects, in which meaning is a (partial) product of the utterance-object, but not to be identified with it. In this theory, the message the utterance carries —usually one pole of a binary relationship in which the other pole is style—is in its operation (which someone like Richards would deny) one more effect, one more drawer of response, one more constituent in the meaning experience. It is simply not *the* meaning. Nothing is.

Perhaps, then, the word meaning should also be discarded, since it carries with it the notion of message or point. The meaning of an utterance, I repeat, is its experience—all of it—and that experience is immediately compromised the moment you say anything about it. It follows then that we shouldn't try to analyze language at all. The human mind, however, seems unable to resist the impulse to investigate its own processes; but the least (and probably the most) we can do is proceed in such a way as to permit as little distortion as possible.

Conclusion

V.

From controversy, I descend once more to the method itself and to a few final observations.

First, strictly speaking, it is not a method at all, because neither its results nor its skills are transferrable. Its results are not transferrable because there is no fixed relationship between formal features and response (reading has to be done every time); and its skills are not transferrable because you can't hand it over to someone and expect them at once to be able to use it. (It is not portable.) It is, in essence, a language-sensitizing device, and as the "ing" in sensitizing implies, its operation is long term and never ending (never coming to the point). Moreover, its operations are interior. It has no mechanism, except for the pressuring mechanism of the assumption that more is going on in language than we consciously know; and of course the pressure of this assumption must come from the individual whose untrained sensitivity it is challenging. Becoming good at the method means asking the question "what does that............... do?" with more and more awareness of the probable (and hidden) complexity of the answer; that is with a mind more and more sensitized to the workings of language. In a peculiar and unsettling (to theorists) way, it is a method which processes its own user, who is also its only instrument. It is self-sharpen-

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ing and what it sharpens is *you*. In short, it does not organize materials, but transforms minds.

For this reason, I have found it useful as a teaching method, at every level of the curriculum. Characteristically I begin a course by putting some simple sentences on the board (usually "He is sincere" and "Doubtless, he is sincere") and asking my students to answer the question, "what does that................do?" The question is for them a new one and they always reply by answering the more familiar question, "what does................mean?" But the examples are chosen to illustrate the insufficiency of this question, an insufficiency they soon prove from their own classroom experience; and after a while they begin to see the value of considering effects and begin to be able to think of language as an experience rather than as a repository of extractable meaning. After that, it is a matter of exercising their sensitivities on a series of graduated texts—sentences of various kinds, paragraphs, an essay, a poem, a novel—somewhat in the order represented by the first section of this paper. And as they experience more and more varieties of effect and subject them to analysis, they also learn how to recognize and discount what is idiosyncratic in their own response. Not incidentally, they also become incapable of writing uncontrolled prose, since so much of their time is spent discovering how much the prose of other writers controls them, and in how many ways. There are of course devices—the piecemeal left to right presentation of texts via a ticker tape method, the varying of the magic question (i.e., what would have happened were a word not there or somewhere else?)—but again the area of the method's operation is interior and its greatest success is not the organizing of materials (although that often occurs), but the transforming of minds.

In short, the theory, both as an account of meaning and as a way of teaching, is full of holes; and there is one great big hole right in the middle of it, which is filled, if it is filled at all, by what happens inside the user-student. The method, then remains faithful to its principles; it has no point of termination; it is a process; it talks about experience and is an experience; its focus is effects and its result is an effect. In the end the only unqualified recommendation I can give it is that it works.[31]

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31 Since this essay was written I have had the opportunity to read Walter J. Slatoff's *With Respect to Readers: Dimensions of Literary Response* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1970), a new book which addresses itself, at least rhetorically, to many of the issues raised here. The direction Slatoff takes, however, is quite different from mine.

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The chief difference (and difficulty) is Slatoff's notion of what constitutes "response." In his analyses, response is something that occurs either before or after the activity of reading. What concerns him is really not response, in the sense of the interaction between the flow of word on the page and an active mediating consciousness, but a response to that response. Recalling Conrad Aiken's description of Faulkner's novels as "a calculated system of screens and obtrusions, of confusions and ambiguous interpolations and delays," Slatoff makes the following distinction on the basis, or so he would claim, of a "divergence in responses":

> Some actively enjoy the delays and suspensions of a writer like Faulkner; others can barely abide them; still others are deeply ambivalent. Similarly we must vary greatly in our instinctive responses. . . . (p. 62)

Now response here clearly means what a reader is, by nature, disposed to like or dislike; and in that context there is surely a divergence. But there is no divergence at the level of response which is preliminary to this disposition. Whether the reader likes or dislikes or both likes and dislikes the experience of Faulkner's delays he will, in common with every other reader, experience them. That is, he will negotiate the confusions, struggle through the screens, endure the suspensions; and of course this uniformity of experience (and of response) is acknowledged by Slatoff himself when he makes it the basis of his observation of difference.

It could be said I suppose that Slatoff and I are simply interested in different stages of response: I am concerned with the response that *is* the act of perception, the moment to moment experience of adjusting to the sequential demands of prose and poetry; while he speculates on the "divergent" attitudes (what he really means by "response") a reader might take toward that experience after he has had it. But the case is more serious than that because Slatoff confuses the two (I wonder if they can really be separated) and makes the variability of one the basis of denying the uniformity of the other, even though it is that uniformity which makes talk about divergence possible.

The two thesis chapters of the book are entitled "Varieties of Involvement" and "The Divergence of Responses," and it becomes increasingly clear that the variations and divergences occur when a finished reader encounters a finished work. That is, in his theory the work is a repository of properties and meanings (corresponding to the intention of the author) which then come into contact with a reader more or less comformable to them. In other words, his is an "adversary" model—work *vs.* reader—in which readers rather than actualizing meanings react to it on the basis of attitudes they hold prior to the encounter.

In the end, Slatoff's program for putting the reader back into reading amounts to no more than this: acknowledging the fact that a reader has likes and dislikes which are not always compatible with the likes and dislikes informing a particular work. Despite his pronouncements to the contrary, Slatoff finally effects a radical divorce between work and reader and, what is more important, between reader and meaning. They are fixed in their respective positions before they meet, and their interaction does nothing but define the degree of their incompatibility. This is all that Slatoff intends by the phrase "divergence of response," and since the divergence is from a received (i.e. handed over) meaning—a response *after* the fact whereas in my model the response *is* the fact—it can be tolerated without compromising the integrity of the work. Indeed it can be celebrated, and this is exactly what Slatoff proceeds to do in the name, of course, of relevance.

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