

CHAPTER XII

The Analysis of the Literary Work of Art

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

In recent years a healthy reaction has taken place which recog-

nizes that the study of literature should, first and foremost, concentrate on the actual works of art themselves. The old methods of classical rhetoric, poetics, or metrics are and must be reviewed and restated in modern terms. New methods based on a survey of the wider range of forms in modern literature are being introduced. In France the method of *explication de textes*,² in Germany the formal analyses based on parallels with the history of fine arts, cultivated by Oskar Walzel,³ and especially the brilliant movement of the Russian formalists and their Czech and Polish followers⁴ have brought new stimuli to the study of the literary work, which we are only beginning to see properly and to analyze adequately. In England some of the followers of I. A. Richards have paid close attention to the text of poetry⁵ and also in this country a group of critics have made a study of the work of art the center of their interest.⁶ Several studies of the drama⁷ which stress its difference from life and combat the confusion between dramatic and empirical reality point in the same direction. Similarly, many studies of the novel⁸ are not content to consider it merely in terms of its relations to the social structure but try to analyze its artistic methods—its points of view, its narrative technique.

The Russian Formalists most vigorously objected to the old dichotomy of "content versus form," which cuts a work of art into two halves: a crude content and a superimposed, purely external form.⁹ Clearly, the aesthetic effect of a work of art does not reside in what is commonly called its content. There are few works of art which are not ridiculous or meaningless in synopsis (which can be justified only as a pedagogical device).¹⁰ But a distinction between form as the factor aesthetically active and a content aesthetically indifferent meets with insuperable difficulties. At first sight the boundary line may seem fairly definite. If we understand by content the ideas and emotions conveyed in a work of literature, the form would include all linguistic elements by which contents are expressed. But if we examine this distinction more closely, we see that content implies some elements of form: e.g., the events told in a novel are parts of the content, while the way in which they are arranged into a "plot" is part of the form. Dissociated from this way of arrangement they have no artistic effect whatsoever. The common remedy pro-

posed and widely used by Germans, i.e., the introduction of the term "inner form," which originally dates back to Plotinus and Shaftesbury, is merely complicating matters, as the boundary line between inner and outer form remains completely obscure. It must simply be admitted that the manner in which events are arranged in a plot is part of the form. Things become even more disastrous for the traditional concepts when we realize that even in the language, commonly considered part of the form, it is necessary to distinguish between words in themselves, aesthetically indifferent, and the manner in which individual words make up units of sound and meaning, aesthetically effective. It would be better to rechristen all the aesthetically indifferent elements "materials," while the manner in which they acquire aesthetic efficacy may be styled "structure." This distinction is by no means a simple renaming of the old pair, content and form. It cuts right across the old boundary lines. "Materials" include elements formerly considered part of the content, and parts formerly considered formal. "Structure" is a concept including both content and form so far as they are organized for aesthetic purposes. The work of art is, then, considered as a whole system of signs, or structure of signs, serving a specific aesthetic purpose.

How, more concretely, can we envisage an analysis of this structure? What is meant by this totality, and how can it be analyzed? What is meant by saying that an analysis is wrong or mistaken? This raises an extremely difficult epistemological question, that of the "mode of existence" or the "ontological situs" of a literary work of art (which, for brevity's sake, we shall call a "poem" in what follows).¹¹ What is the "real" poem; where should we look for it; how does it exist? A correct answer to these questions must solve several critical problems and open a way to the proper analysis of a work of literature.

To the question what and where is a poem, or rather a literary work of art in general, several traditional answers have been given which must be criticized and eliminated before we can attempt an answer of our own. One of the most common and oldest answers is the view that a poem is an "artifact," an object of the same nature as a piece of sculpture or a painting. Thus the work of art is considered identical with the black lines of ink on white paper or parchment or, if we think of a Babylonian poem, with

the grooves in the brick. Obviously this answer is quite unsatisfactory. There is, first of all, the huge oral "literature." There are poems or stories which have never been fixed in writing and still continue to exist. Thus the lines in black ink are merely a method of recording a poem which must be conceived as existing elsewhere. If we destroy the writing or even all copies of a printed book we still may not destroy the poem, as it might be preserved in oral tradition or in the memory of a man like Macaulay, who boasted of knowing *Paradise Lost* and *Pilgrim's Progress* by heart. On the other hand, if we destroy a painting or a piece of sculpture or a building, we destroy it completely, though we may preserve descriptions or records in another medium and might even try to reconstruct what has been lost. But we shall always create a different work of art (however similar), while the mere destruction of the copy of a book or even of all its copies may not touch the work of art at all.

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

Still, this negative conclusion should not blind us to the enormous practical importance, since the invention of writing and printing, of our methods of recording poetry. There is no doubt that much literature has been lost and thus completely destroyed because its written records have disappeared and the theoretically

possible means of oral tradition have failed or have been interrupted. Writing and especially printing have made possible the continuity of literary tradition and must have done much to increase the unity and integrity of works of art. Besides, at least in certain periods of the history of poetry, the graphic picture has become a part of some finished works of art.

In Chinese poetry, as Ernest Fenollosa has shown, the pictorial ideograms form a part of the total meaning of the poems. But also in the Western tradition there are the graphic poems of the *Greek Anthology*, the "Altar" or the "Church-floor" of George Herbert, and similar poems of the *Metaphysicals* which can be paralleled on the Continent in Spanish Gongorism, Italian Marinism, in German Baroque poetry, and elsewhere. Also modern poetry in America (e. e. cummings), in Germany (Arno Holz), in France (Apollinaire), and elsewhere has used graphic devices like unusual line arrangements or even beginnings at the bottom of the page, different colors of printing, etc.¹² In the novel *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne used, as far back as the eighteenth century, blank and marbled pages. All such devices are integral parts of these particular works of art. Though we know that a majority of poetry is independent of them, they cannot and should not be ignored in those cases.

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

ing of the Red Sea flood where the "water stood like a wall," and the notes on the printed page of music form firm rows of evenly spaced dots suggesting a phalanx or wall.¹³

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

But most importantly, every reading of a poem is more than the genuine poem: each performance contains elements which are extraneous to the poem and individual idiosyncrasies of pronunciation, pitch, tempo, and distribution of stress—elements which are either determined by the personality of the speaker or are symptoms and means of his interpretation of the poem. Moreover, the reading of a poem not only adds individual elements but always represents only a selection of factors implicit in the text of a poem: the pitch of the voice, the speed in which a passage is read, the distribution and intensity of the stresses, these

may be either right or wrong, and even when right, may still represent only one version of reading a poem. We must acknowledge the possibility of several readings of a poem: readings which we either consider wrong readings, if we feel them to be distortions of the true meaning of the poem, or readings which we have to consider as correct and admissible, but still may not consider ideal.

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

Still, in some literary works of art (especially in lyrical poetry) the vocal side of poetry may be an important factor of the general structure. Attention can be drawn to it by various means like meter, patterns of vowel or consonant sequences, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc. This fact explains—or rather helps to explain—the inadequacy of much translating of lyrical poetry, since these potential sound-patterns cannot be transferred into another linguistic system, though a skillful translator may approximate their general effect in his own language. There is, however, an enormous literature which is relatively independent of sound-patterns, as can be shown by the historical effects of many works in even pedestrian translations. Sound may be an important factor in the structure of a poem, but the answer that a poem is a sequence of sounds is as unsatisfactory as the solution which puts faith in the print on the page.

The third, very common answer to our question says that a

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

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

proaches. Curiously enough, Richards, who constantly criticizes the experiences of his pupils, holds to an extreme psychological theory which is in flat contradiction to his excellent critical practice. The idea that poetry is supposed to order our impulses and the conclusion that the value of poetry is in some sort of psychical therapy lead him finally to the admission that this goal may be accomplished by a bad as well as a good poem, by a carpet, a pot, a gesture as well as by a sonata.¹⁴ Thus the supposed pattern in our mind is not definitely related to the poem which caused it.

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

The psychological theory is only very slightly improved by I. A. Richards when he defines a poem as the "experience of the right kind of reader."¹⁵ Obviously the whole problem is shifted to the conception of the *right* reader—and the meaning of that adjective. But even assuming an ideal condition of mood in a reader of the finest background and the best training, the definition remains unsatisfactory, as it is open to all the criticism we have made of the psychological method. It puts the essence of the poem into a momentary experience which even the right kind of reader could not repeat unchanged. It will always fall short of the full meaning of a poem at any given instance and will always add inevitable personal elements to the reading.

A fourth answer has been suggested to obviate this difficulty.

The poem, we hear, is the experience of the author. Only in parenthesis, we may dismiss the view that the poem is the experience of the author at any time of his life after the creation of his work, when he rereads it. He then has obviously become simply a reader of his work and is liable to errors and misinterpretations of his own work almost as much as any other reader. Many instances of glaring misinterpretations by an author of his own work could be collected: the old anecdote about Browning professing not to understand his own poem has probably its element of truth. It happens to all of us that we misinterpret or do not fully understand what we have written some time ago. Thus the suggested answer must refer to the experience of the author during the time of creation. By "experience of the author" we might mean, however, two different things: the conscious experience, the intentions which the author wanted to embody in his work, or the total conscious and unconscious experience during the prolonged time of creation. The view that the genuine poem is to be found in the intentions of an author is widespread even though it is not always explicitly stated.¹⁶ It justifies much historical research and is at the bottom of many arguments in favor of specific interpretations. However, for most works of art we have no evidence to reconstruct the intentions of the author except the finished work itself. Even if we are in possession of contemporary evidence in the form of an explicit profession of intentions, such a profession need not be binding on a modern observer. "Intentions" of the author are always "rationalizations," commentaries which certainly must be taken into account but also must be criticized in the light of the finished work of art. The "intentions" of an author may go far beyond the finished work of art: they may be merely pronouncements of plans and ideals, while the performance may be either far below or far aside the mark. If we could have interviewed Shakespeare he probably would have expressed his intentions in writing *Hamlet* in a way which we should find most unsatisfactory. We would still quite rightly insist on finding meanings in *Hamlet* (and not merely inventing them) which were probably far from clearly formulated in Shakespeare's conscious mind.

Artists may be strongly influenced by a contemporary critical situation and by contemporary critical formulae while giving

expression to their intentions, but the critical formulae themselves might be quite inadequate to characterize their actual artistic achievement. The Baroque age is an obvious case in point, since a surprisingly new artistic practice found little expression either in the pronouncements of the artists or the comments of the critics. A sculptor such as Bernini could lecture to the Paris Academy expounding the view that his own practice was in strict conformity to that of the ancients and Daniel Adam Pöppelmann, the architect of that highly rococo building in Dresden called the Zwinger, wrote a whole pamphlet in order to demonstrate the strict agreement of his creation with the purest principles of Vitruvius.¹⁷ The metaphysical poets had only a few quite inadequate critical formulae (like "strong lines") which scarcely touch the actual novelty of their practice; and medieval artists frequently had purely religious or didactic "intentions" which do not even begin to give expression to the artistic principles of their practice. Divergence between conscious intention and actual performance is a common phenomenon in the history of literature. Zola sincerely believed in his scientific theory of the experimental novel, but actually produced highly melodramatic and symbolic novels. Gogol thought of himself as a social reformer, as a "geographer" of Russia, while, in practice, he produced novels and stories full of fantastic and grotesque creatures of his imagination. It is simply impossible to rely on the study of the intentions of an author, as they might not even represent a reliable commentary on his work, and at their best are not more than such a commentary. There can be no objections against the study of "intention," if we mean by it merely a study of the integral work of art directed towards the total meaning.¹⁸ But this use of the term "intention" is different and somewhat misleading.

But also the alternative suggestion—that the genuine poem is in the total experience, conscious and unconscious, during the time of the creation—is very unsatisfactory. In practice, this conclusion has the serious disadvantage of putting the problem into a completely inaccessible and purely hypothetical α which we have no means of reconstructing or even of exploring. Beyond this insurmountable practical difficulty, the solution is also unsatisfactory because it puts the existence of the poem into a sub-

jective experience which already is a thing of the past. The experiences of the author during creation ceased precisely when the poem had begun to exist. If this conception were right, we should never be able to come into direct contact with the work of art itself, but have constantly to make the assumption that our experiences in reading the poem are in some way identical with the long-past experiences of the author. E. M. Tillyard in his book on *Milton* has tried to use the idea that *Paradise Lost* is about the state of the author when he wrote it, and could not, in a long and frequently irrelevant exchange of arguments with C. S. Lewis, acknowledge that *Paradise Lost* is, first of all, about Satan and Adam and Eve and hundreds and thousands of different ideas, representations, and concepts, rather than about Milton's state of mind during creation.¹⁹ That the whole content of the poem was once in contact with the conscious and subconscious mind of Milton is perfectly true; but this state of mind is inaccessible and might have been filled, in those particular moments, with millions of experiences of which we cannot find a trace in the poem itself. Taken literally, this whole solution must lead to absurd speculations about the exact duration of the state of mind of the creator and its exact content, which might include a toothache at the moment of creation.²⁰ The whole psychological approach through states of mind, whether of the reader or the listener, the speaker or the author, raises more problems than it can possibly solve.

A better way is obviously in the direction of defining the work of art in terms of social and collective experience. There are two possibilities of solution, which, however, still fall short of solving our problem satisfactorily. We may say that the work of art is the sum of all past and possible experiences of the poem: a solution which leaves us with an infinity of irrelevant individual experiences, bad and false readings, and perversions. In short, it merely gives us the answer that the poem is in the state of mind of its reader, multiplied by infinity. Another answer solves the question by stating that the genuine poem is the experience common to all the experiences of the poem.²¹ But this answer would obviously reduce the work of art to the common denominator of all these experiences. This denominator must be the *lowest* common denominator, the most shallow, most superficial and trivial

experience. This solution, besides its practical difficulties, would completely impoverish the total meaning of a work of art.

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

The term "norms" as used here should not, of course, be confused with norms which are either classical or romantic, ethical or political. The norms we have in mind are implicit norms which have to be extracted from every individual experience of a work of art and together make up the genuine work of art as a whole. It is true that if we compare works of art among themselves, similarities or differences between these norms will be ascertained, and from the similarities themselves it ought to be possible to proceed to a classification of works of art according to the type of norms they embody. We may finally arrive at theories of genres and ultimately at theories of literature in general. To deny this as it has been denied by those who, with some justification, stress the uniqueness of every work of art, seems to push the conception of individuality so far that every work of art would become completely isolated from tradition and thus finally both incommunicable and incomprehensible. Assuming that we have to start with the analysis of an individual work of art, we still can scarcely deny that there must be some links, some similarities, some common elements or factors which would approximate two or more given works of art and thus would open the door to a transition from the analysis of one individual work of art to a type such as Greek tragedy and hence to tragedy in general, to literature in general, and finally to some all-inclusive structure common to all arts.

But this is a further problem. We, however, have still to decide where and how these norms exist. A closer analysis of a work of art will show that it is best to think of it as not merely one system of norms but rather of a system which is made up of several strata, each implying its own subordinate group. The Polish philosopher, Roman Ingarden, in an ingenious highly technical analysis of the literary work of art,²² has employed the methods of Husserl's "Phenomenology" to arrive at such distinctions of strata. We need not follow him in every detail to see that his general distinctions are sound and useful: there is, first, the sound-stratum which is not, of course, to be confused with the actual sounding of the words, as our preceding argument must have shown. Still, this pattern is indispensable, as only on the basis of sounds can the second stratum arise: the units of meaning. Every single word will have its meaning, will combine into units in the context, into syntagmas and sentence patterns. Out of this syntactic structure arises a third stratum, that of the objects represented, the "world" of a novelist, the characters, the setting. Ingarden adds two other strata which may not have to be distinguished as separable. The stratum of the "world" is seen from a particular viewpoint, which is not necessarily stated but is implied. An event presented in literature can be, for example, presented as "seen" or as "heard": even the same event, for example, the banging of a door; a character can be seen in its "inner" or "outer" characteristic traits. And finally, Ingarden speaks of a stratum of "metaphysical qualities" (the sublime, the tragic, the terrible, the holy) of which art can give us contemplation. This stratum is not indispensable, and may be missing in some works of literature. Possibly the two last strata can be included in the "world," in the realm of represented objects. But they also suggest very real problems in the analysis of literature. The "point of view" has, at least in the novel, received considerable attention since Henry James and since Lubbock's more systematic exposition of the Jamesian theory and practice. The stratum of "metaphysical qualities" allows Ingarden to reintroduce questions of the "philosophical meaning" of works of art without the risk of the usual intellectualist errors.

It is useful to illustrate the conception by the parallel which can be drawn from linguistics. Linguists such as the Geneva

School and the Prague Linguistic Circle carefully distinguish between *langue* and *parole*,²³ the system of language and the individual speech-act; and this distinction corresponds to that between the individual experience of the poem and the poem as such. The system of language is a collection of conventions and norms whose workings and relations we can observe and describe as having a fundamental coherence and identity in spite of very different, imperfect, or incomplete pronouncements of individual speakers. In this respect at least, a literary work of art is in exactly the same position as a system of language. We as individuals shall never realize it completely, for we shall never use our own language completely and perfectly. The very same situation is actually exhibited in every single act of cognition. We shall never know an object in all its qualities, but still we can scarcely deny the identity of objects even though we may see them from different perspectives. We always grasp some "structure of determination" in the object which makes the act of cognition not an act of arbitrary invention or subjective distinction but the recognition of some norms imposed on us by reality. Similarly, the structure of a work of art has the character of a "duty which I have to realize." I shall always realize it imperfectly, but in spite of some incompleteness, a certain "structure of determination" remains, just as in any other object of knowledge.²⁴

Modern linguists have analyzed the potential sounds as phonemes; they can also analyze morphemes and syntagmas. The sentence, for instance, can be described not merely as an *ad hoc* utterance but as a syntactic pattern. Outside of phonemics, modern functional linguistics is still comparatively undeveloped; but the problems, though difficult, are not insoluble or completely new: they are rather restatements of the morphological and syntactical questions as they were discussed in older grammars. The analysis of a literary work of art encounters parallel problems in units of meaning and their specific organization for aesthetic purposes. Such problems as those of poetic semantics, diction, and imagery are reintroduced in a new and more careful statement. Units of meaning, sentences, and sentence structures refer to objects, construct imaginative realities such as landscapes, interiors, characters, actions, or ideas. These also can be analyzed

in a way which does not confuse them with empirical reality and does not ignore the fact that they inhere in linguistic structures. A character in a novel grows only out of the units of meaning, is made of the sentences either pronounced by the figure or pronounced about it. It has an indeterminate structure in comparison with a biological person who has his coherent past.²⁵ These distinctions of strata have the advantage of superseding the traditional, misleading distinction between content and form. The content will reappear in close contact with the linguistic substratum, in which it is implied and on which it is dependent.

But this conception of the literary work of art as a stratified system of norms still leaves undetermined the actual mode of existence of this system. To deal with this matter properly we should have to settle such controversies as those of nominalism versus realism, mentalism versus behaviorism—in short, all the chief problems of epistemology. For our purposes, however, it will be sufficient to avoid two opposites, extreme Platonism and extreme nominalism. There is no need to hypostatize or “reify” this system of norms, to make it a sort of archetypal idea presiding over a timeless realm of essences. The literary work of art has not the same ontological status as the idea of a triangle, or of a number, or a quality like “redness.” Unlike such “subsistences,” the literary work of art is, first of all, created at a certain point in time and, secondly, is subject to change and even to complete destruction. In this respect it rather resembles the system of language, though the exact moment of creation or death is probably much less clearly definable in the case of language than in that of the literary work of art, usually an individual creation. On the other hand, one should recognize that an extreme nominalism which rejects the concept of a “system of language” and thus of a work of art in our sense, or admits it only as a useful fiction or a “scientific description,” misses the whole problem and the point at issue. The narrow assumptions of behaviorism define anything to be “mystical” or “metaphysical” which does not conform to a very limited conception of empirical reality. Yet to call the phoneme a “fiction,” or the system of language merely a “scientific description of speech-acts,” is to ignore the problem of truth.²⁶ We recognize norms and deviations from norms and do not merely devise some purely verbal de-

scriptions. The whole behaviorist point of view is, in this respect, based on a bad theory of abstraction. Numbers or norms are what they are, whether we construct them or not. Certainly I perform the counting, I perform the reading; but number presentation or recognition of a norm is not the same as the number or norm itself. The pronouncement of the sound *h* is not the phoneme *h*. We recognize a structure of norms within reality and do not simply invent verbal constructs. The objection that we have access to these norms only through individual acts of cognition, and that we cannot get out of these acts or beyond them, is only apparently impressive. It is the objection which has been made to Kant's criticism of our cognition, and it can be refuted with the Kantian arguments.

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

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

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

out the process of history while passing through the minds of its readers, critics, and fellow artists.²⁷ Thus the system of norms is growing and changing and will remain, in some sense, always incompletely and imperfectly realized. But this dynamic conception does not mean mere subjectivism and relativism. All the different points of view are by no means equally right. It will always be possible to determine which point of view grasps the subject most thoroughly and deeply. A hierarchy of viewpoints, a criticism of the grasp of norms, is implied in the concept of the adequacy of interpretation. All relativism is ultimately defeated by the recognition that "the Absolute is in the relative, though not finally and fully in it."²⁸

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

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

The unsound thesis of absolutism and the equally unsound antithesis of relativism must be superseded and harmonized in a new synthesis which makes the scale of values itself dynamic,

but does not surrender it as such. "Perspectivism," as we have termed such a conception,²⁹ does not mean an anarchy of values, a glorification of individual caprice, but a process of getting to know the object from different points of view which may be defined and criticized in their turn. Structure, sign, and value form three aspects of the very same problem and cannot be artificially isolated.