literary work of art

chapter 1

literary work of art

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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. The existence proves that print has become very important for the practice of poetry in modern times, as poetry is written for the eye as well as for the ear. Though the use of graphic devices is not indispensable, they are far more frequent in literature than in music, where the printed score is in a position similar to the printed page in poetry. In music such uses are rare, though by no means non-existent. There are many curious optical devices (colours, etc.) in Italian madrigal scores of the sixteenth century. The supposedly 'pure', 'absolute' composer Handel wrote a chorus speaking of the Red-Sea flood where the 'water stood like a wall', and the notes on the printed page of music form firm rows of evenly spaced dots suggesting a phalanx or wall.

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

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

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

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

Still, in some literary works of art (especially in lyrical poetry) the vocal side of poetry may be an important factor of the general structure. Attention can be drawn to it by various means like metre, patterns of vowel or consonant sequences, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc. This fact explains – or rather helps to explain – the inadequacy of much translating of lyrical poetry, since these potential sound-patterns cannot be transferred into another linguistic system, though a skilful translator may approximate their general effect in his own language. There is, however, an enormous literature which is relatively independent of
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. It justifies much historical research and is at the bottom of many arguments in favour of specific interpretations. However, for most works of art we have no evidence to reconstruct the intentions of the author except the finished work itself. Even if we are in possession of contemporary evidence in the form of an explicit profession of intentions, such a profession need not be binding on a modern observer. 'Intentions' of the author are always 'rationalizations', commentaries which certainly must be taken into account but also must be criticized in the light of the finished work of art. The 'intentions' of an author may go far beyond the finished work of art: they may be mere 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 Poppelmann, 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. 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 symbolical novels. Gogol thought of himself as a social reformer, as a 'geographer' of Russia, while, in practice, he produced novels and stories full of fantastic and grotesque creatures of his imagination. It is simply impossible to rely on the study of the intentions of an author, as they might not even represent an accurate commentary on his work, and at their best are not more than such a commentary. There can be no objections against the study of 'intention', if we mean by it merely a study of the integral work of art directed towards the total meaning. 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 state which we have no means of reconstructing or even of exploring. Beyond this insurmountable practical difficulty, the solution is also unsatisfactory because it puts the existence of the poem into a subjective experience which already is a thing of the past. The experiences of the author during creation ceased precisely when the poem had begun to exist. If this conception were right, we should never be able to come into direct contact with the work of art itself, but have constantly to make the assumption that pure 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. That the whole content of
a door; a character can be seen in its 'inner' or 'outer' characteristic traits. And finally, Ingarden speaks of a stratum of 'metaphysical qualities' (the sublime, the tragic, the terrible, the holy) of which art can give us contemplation. This stratum is not indispensable, and may be missing in some works of literature. Possibly the two last strata can be included in the 'world', in the realm of represented objects. But they also suggest very real problems in the analysis of literature. The 'point of view' has, at least in the novel, received considerable attention since Henry James and since Lubbock's more systematic exposition of the Jamesian theory and practice. The stratum of 'metaphysical qualities' allows Ingarden to reintroduce questions of the 'philosophical meaning' of works of art without the risk of the usual intellectualist errors.

It is useful to illustrate the conception by the parallel which can be drawn from linguistics. Linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and the Prague Linguistic Circle carefully distinguish between langue and parole, the system of language and the individual speech-act; and this distinction corresponds to that between the poem as such and the individual experience of the poem. The system of language (langue) is a collection of conventions and norms whose workings and relations we can observe and describe as having a fundamental coherence and identity in spite of very different, imperfect, or incomplete pronouncements of individual speakers. In this respect at least, a literary work of art is in exactly the same position as a system of language. We as individuals shall never realize it completely, nor shall we 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 upon 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.

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

The work of art, then, appears as an object of knowledge and science which has a special ontological status. It is neither real (physical, like a statue) nor mental (psychological, like the experience of light or pain) nor ideal (like a triangle). It is a system of norms, real 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 recognized a certain structure as 'work of art' implies a judgement of value. The concept of pure-phenomenology is in the assumption that such a dissociation is possible, that values are superimposed on structure, 'inherent' on or in structures. The concept of analysis vitiated 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 judgements. A frozen Absolute faces a valueless flux of individual judgements.

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

We must, however, first try to examine the methods used in des-