

JAMES BRITTON'S THEORY OF LANGUAGE AND LEARNING
AND THE RECENT 'AFFECTIVE' LITERARY CRITICS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the theories of some recent 'affective' literary critics in the light of James Britton's theory of language and learning. Until recently, literary criticism generally has not been concerned with the relationship between the text and the reader; it has concerned itself either with the poem as a static verbal object, as in New Criticism, or with the writer-text relationship, as in biographical criticism. With the neglect of the text-reader relationship, the study of literature has also ignored a basic aesthetic principle -- that the relationship between a work of art and its percipient is a dynamic interaction where 'ordinary' experience cannot be separated from aesthetic experience. Chapter I delineates this principle proposed primarily by John Dewey, whose theory is complemented by those of R.G. Collingwood, Susanne Langer, and George Kelly. Chapter II identifies and examines the recent theories of seven literary critics who discuss the 'affective' relationship between the reader and the text -- Norman Holland, Standly Fish, Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Iser, Georges Poulet, Wayne Booth, and Walter Slatoff. Two

ideas emerge which are related to the aesthetic principle espoused by John Dewey and others: 1) our aesthetic responses to literature are natural extensions of our mundane selves; and 2) literature as art is still a linguistic utterance, and as such is related to other ordinary kinds of language use. But these ideas are rudimentary and fragmented and there is a need for a more general theory to integrate them. James Britton's theory of language in Chapter III, contained mainly in his book Language and Learning, provides a structure which subsumes these fragmented ideas so that a perspective can be gained on this new criticism. Britton puts forth the view that literature is a manifestation of man's linguistic activity in what he calls the 'spectator role'. This theory integrates the critical ideas arising out of Chapter II and also places literature in a new perspective with other of man's spectator role activities, both linguistic (gossip, personal letter-writing) and non-linguistic (play, dream, fantasy, ritual). Britton points to the importance of spectator role activities in personal development.

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INTRODUCTION

In the reading of any work of literature, a relationship exists between the writer, the text, and the reader. Until recently, literary criticism has been concerned either with the relationship between the writer and the text, as in biographical criticism, or solely with the text itself, as in New Criticism. The relationship between the reader and the text has been implied or ignored altogether.

With the neglect of the text-reader relationship, the study of literature has also ignored a basic aesthetic principle -- that the relationship between a work of art and its percipient is a dynamic interaction where 'ordinary' experience cannot be separated from aesthetic experience.

Recently, however, a group of critics has begun to consider the text-reader relationship more thoughtfully. This relationship is no longer presupposed, as it was with New Criticism; with these 'affective' critics, the text is no longer viewed as a static object to which we respond only by formal analysis. These critics cannot really be considered a school as they have had relatively little influence upon one another, but their views represent a common concern -- a reaction to the New Critical approach.

James Britton's interest in man's linguistic activity has led him, from a different direction to the same problem. Britton proposes a theory of man's linguistic activity of which literature is an integral part. I believe that through Britton, because of his wider perspective, we are able to see much more clearly the validity of this new trend in 'affective' criticism and to see, as well, where this trend is leading.

Chapter I delineates a basic aesthetic principle proposed primarily by John Dewey, whose theory of art and perception is complemented by those of R. G. Collingwood, Susanne Langer, and George Kelly. Dewey's claim is that there is no real qualitative difference between art and life, between aesthetic experience and ordinary experience. This principle is picked up and developed piecemeal by the various critics in Chapter II, and is central to James Britton's theory in Chapter III.

Chapter II examines the 'affective' critics who have begun to look at the text-reader relationship. Here the aesthetic principle discussed in Chapter I is developed specifically in terms of literature. We find some critics saying that when we respond aesthetically to literature, our responses are, can only be, natural intentions of our mundane selves. Interestingly, others move into the area of language, making a related claim that

literature as art is still a linguistic utterance, and as such is related to ordinary linguistic utterances. The ideas which emerge from a study of these critics are fragmented, unrelated, even crude. There is need for a more general theory to integrate these ideas.

Chapter III delineates James Britton's theory of language and learning which has integrated both Dewey's aesthetic principle about experience, and the notion that literary language cannot be separated from ordinary language. For Britton, literature arises quite organically out of linguistic activity in what he calls the 'spectator mode'.

The 'aesthetic' experience of reading literature is likewise organically connected to 'ordinary' experience. Aesthetic experience, in the end, has not so much to do with art as with personal growth. Britton provides a general theory which subsumes the insights of the 'affective' critics, enabling us to gain a perspective on them.

I - PERCEPTION AND AESTHETIC RESPONSE

If we look beyond the bounds of literary theory, we immediately encounter an idea which has been largely ignored until recently by literary criticism. The foremost claim of the first major aesthetic theory in the English language, John Dewey's Art As Experience (1934) is that art cannot be separated from life. Aesthetic experience has its roots in ordinary experience; the former naturally extends out of the latter.

Chapter I delineates this idea contained in Dewey's book and complemented by several other theories of perception and aesthetic response: R.G. Collingwood's The Principles of Art (1938), George Kelly's A Theory of Personality (1955), and Susanne Langer's Philosophy in a New Key (1942) and Feeling and Form (1953).

a) The Nature of Experience

According to Dewey, our concept of the physical world as finite is an illusion. The 'wholeness' we perceive in our environment is entirely of our own individual constructions. What we normally regard as our 'world' stretches out into the infinity of the universe. There are no bounds which mark off our planet as a unified whole; that is to say, there are no bounds which exist of themselves, for the bounds which we perceive we have conferred

upon ourselves. "We are accustomed to think of physical objects as having bounded edges," states Dewey, "things like rocks, chairs, books, houses, trade, and science with its efforts at precise measurement, have confirmed this belief. Then we unconsciously carry over this belief in the bounded character of all objects of experience (a belief founded ultimately in the practical exigencies of our dealings with things) into our conception of experience itself." ¹ We experience the world 'subjectively' and although the objective world is not chaotic, our experience of it can be. This only makes sense, for we begin as relatively inexperienced organisms confronting an infinite whole which we can perceive only piecemeal. The universe itself runs like a clockwork, but as subjective organisms we naturally cannot grasp any such conception of wholeness at the outset of life.

For example, the images on a television screen are two quite different things to a six month old child and to its mother. Obviously there is an accumulation of some kind where we build our own experiences. In a sense we build our world, or at least our view of the world, as we grow. Dewey maintains that as organisms, we seek wholeness; we construct it out of our subjective experience of the world. Although our experiences take place in an

indefinite total setting where objects in the world " ... are only focal points in a here and now that stretches out indefinitely,"² we sense that our experience takes place within a wholeness -- our family, our city, our country, our world. "The sense of an extensive and underlying whole," states Dewey, "is the context of every experience and it is the essence of sanity."³

How then does the experiential content of the six month old child expand to the extent that the child will be able to make sense out of the images on the television screen? George Kelly's A Theory of Personality provides some insights. "There is a world which is happening all the time," states Kelly. "Our experience is that portion of it which is happening to us."⁴ Kelly's claim is a simple one: in our exposure to the circumstances in our environment, we necessarily look for something that repeats itself. "Once we have abstracted that property," states Kelly, "we have a basis for slicing off chunks of time and reality and holding them up for inspection one at a time. On the other hand, if we fail to find such a property, we are left swimming in a shoreless stream, where there are no beginnings and no endings to anything."⁵ For Susanne Langer, in Philosophy in a New Key, the organism is in the unavoidable position of " ... construing the pandemonium of

sheer impressions ... " ⁶ which surrounds and threatens to engulf it. Her point is similar to Kelly's; according to Langer the things which repeat themselves in the environment (and thus which we are capable of construing), are derived of the eternal regularities and rhythms of nature and their subsequent ramifications on human behavior. The ability to 'construe' (Kelly's term) repetitions in the flow of circumstances which surround the organism is for Langer the ability to recognize forms. And our way of perceiving these forms is to represent them to ourselves.

Kelly characterizes life as involving " ... an interesting relationship between parts of our universe wherein in one part, the living creature, is able to bring himself around to represent another part, his environment." ⁷ Kelly initially makes no distinction between animal life and human life but implies that the difference lies in the relative sophistication of representation. Langer, however, is more explicit. For her, the key to what separates man from the other animals is man's unique ability to recognize symbolic forms. Out of the bedlam of circumstance about us, " ... our sense organs must select certain predominant forms, if they are to make report of things and not of mere dissolving sensa." ⁸ The human organism is unique because it has the ability to represent things

(symbolize) rather than merely indicate them (signify). Thus we are able to represent experience to ourselves. And in the formative stages of the organism's life this representation is achieved through an " ... unconscious appreciation of forms ... " ⁹

The human organism, then, finds itself confronted with a flux of circumstances and energies out of which it must make some sense. In Dewey's view, the organism absolutely must make sense of its surroundings in order to survive, in order, quite literally, to grow. The organism, by virtue of being alive, acts upon the environment which, in all normal human activities resists, causes disparity or disharmony as in the organism's state of hunger, for example. The infant is hungry and left unfed; it cries; it is fed. In the normal process of living the human organism undergoes alternative phases of harmony and disharmony. It is bound to recover from disharmony if it is to remain alive. Moreover, in the recovery, the organism never returns to its prior state, but is enriched by the disparity; growth occurs: "Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives." ¹⁰ Thus the organism, through many such successive phases of disparity and harmony, builds a more elaborate

and sophisticated representation of the environment.

In Kelly's view, "The person moves out toward making more and more of the world predictable ... " ¹¹ Kelly's view of man is that he is essentially a predictive animal who comes to understand his world through a successive series of approximations of his experience in it; he is constantly seeking to improve his predictive apparatus. Kelly calls our ways of construing the world 'constructs', which, in the initial stages of life, are very crude but which as we grow, evolve into an elaborate and sophisticated system. "Man looks at his world through transparent patterns or templates," states Kelly, "which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed." ¹² As constructs become inoperative or inadequate in predicting the realities of the world, they are discarded or modified in order to accommodate inconsistencies in the face of disparate experiences which confront us. And, according to Kelly, a person will normally choose to elaborate his system of constructs.

Constructs are not necessarily even conscious. Langer maintains that our recognition of forms is not necessarily confined to forms which are conceived through discursive thought. "Now, I do not believe that 'there is a world which is not physical or not in space-time'," she

states, "but I do believe that in this physical, space-time world of our experience there are things which do not fit the grammatical scheme of things. But they are not necessarily blind, inconceivable, mystical affairs; they are simply matters which require to be conceived through some symbolistic schemā other than discursive language." ¹³

For Langer there is a 'non-discursive symbolism' which consists of the abstractions made by our sense organs, containing meanings which are too complex to be handled by a discursive representation.

What, then, constitutes what we call an 'experience'? The organism, having achieved a state of harmony with its environment, acts, meets resistance, and falls into a state of disparity from which it must recover. Upon recovering, achieving a state of harmony, the organism has grown. It is no longer what it was, nor does it perceive its environment in the same way. In a sense, the organism has achieved an awareness of new possibilities; by virtue of the experience it has undergone, the organism can predict possibilities for future activities in a more sophisticated manner. In Kelly's terms, the organism has elaborated its construct system in order that the system be better capable of predicting future experience. The interaction between the organism and its environment,

in which the organism can be said to have grown, is what Dewey defines as experience, a definition which can be applied to human and non-human organisms. But human experience is then to be distinguished as 'conscious' experience. The relations between organism and environment, which remain those of 'cause and effect' for most animals, become relations of 'means and consequence' for human beings. Animals are riveted to the concrete world because, according to Langer, they lack the ability to symbolize. But human beings are capable of representing their world. The awareness of possibilities of experience is an awareness of pattern or form. Langer has suggested that our recognition of such forms is not necessarily an awareness which is discursively known, rather these forms are patterns of feelings and emotions which we recognize intuitively and which often remain inarticulate in any discursive way.

What is the nature of the change which we undergo in having an experience? Kelly has said that we discard or modify our constructs. Dewey explains: "There is ... an element of undergoing, of suffering in its large sense, in every experience. Otherwise there would be no taking in of what preceded." ¹⁴ These new experiences are not merely understood intellectually and catalogued; if we

are to believe Kelly, there is a much more subtle and profound process at work: " Construing is not something that happens to a person on occasion; it is what makes him a person in the first place." ¹⁵ Kelly's view of man is significant: he sees the individual as a dynamic process of perception. Thus the relationship between a human being and his environment is never static. Dewey maintains that as we act upon our environment and as our action is restricted or thwarted, we are forced into reflection: " ... what is turned back upon is the relation of hindering conditions to what the self possesses working capital in virtue of prior experiences." ¹⁶ Essentially we are forced to be spectators on our own lives, to look at our new experience in the light of our experience accumulated from the past. If the new experience is incongruous with our accumulated construct system, that is, if we fail to predict accurately, our perception will initially be chaotic and must be ordered if we are to continue to grow. Thus, to achieve harmony, the past must be reconstructed, elaborated to encompass this new experience: "The junction of the new and the old is not a mere composition of forces, but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the 'stored', material is literally revived, given new

life and soul through having to meet a new situation."¹⁷ What is successively reconstructed is our representation of the world, or world view. If we continue to grow, our world view grows with us. Essentially, the potential for growth is infinite. "There is, in fact," says Langer, "no such thing as the form of the 'real' world."¹⁸

For Dewey, the aesthetic experience and the creative process have their roots in ordinary experience.

In the organism's reattainment of harmony and equilibrium with its environment, Dewey sees this link: "For only when an organism shares in the ordered relations of its environment does it secure the stability essential to living. And when the participation comes after a phase of disruption and conflict, it bears within it the germs of the esthetic."¹⁹ In Principles of Art, R. G. Collingwood, by no means committed to Dewey's way of looking at things, yet states something curiously similar to what Dewey proposes: "[the aesthetic emotion] resembles the feeling of relief that comes when a burdensome intellectual or moral problem has been solved. We may call it, if we like, the specific feeling of having successfully expressed ourselves; and there is no reason why it should not be called a specific aesthetic emotion."²⁰ Dewey would be more adamant about this relationship between

the ordinary and aesthetic; the two experiences are not similar but identical, or at the least, the latter is derived out of the former.

What Dewey maintains is that the reconstruction of our world view is essentially or germinally an aesthetic act. When we confront a new experience, much of what 'happens' is too unrelated or mechanical to be perceived as conscious experience. What governs our construction of the experience and hence re-construction of our world view and serves as the unifying factor is emotion: "Emotion is the moving and cementing force. It selects what is congruous and dyes what is selected with its color, thereby giving qualitative unity to materials."²¹ Langer, if I understand her, would elaborate to say our sentient being has the ability to abstract patterns of experience which are not often conscious and certainly too complex to be expressed in discursive symbolism. Moreover, Langer maintains that these patterns or forms of feeling perceived in ordinary experience are expressed in art, in fact, can only be expressed in art. "Form," Dewey states, "as it is present in the fine arts, is the art of making clear what is involved in the organization of space and time prefigured in every course of a developing life-experience."²² For Langer these are the forms of feeling;

just as discursive forms are characteristic of metaphysics, so forms of feeling are characteristic of art. "Because experience is the fulfillment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things," states Dewey, "it is art in germ."²³ The artist creates out of the powerful feelings and experiences he undergoes in the world. The reconstruction of our world view which we must carry out in the face of powerful experiences is germinal to art in the case of the artist. He expresses his emotional experience, though not in any discursive way. And as percipients of art, we undergo an experience similar or identical to 'real' experience. Dewey states: "... in order to perceive esthetically, [the percipient] must remake his past experiences so that they can enter into a new pattern."²⁴ Thus the art object does not exist independently of its percipient.

b) Aesthetic Experience

The artist, then, expresses his emotional experiences through constituted non-discursive symbolic forms of feeling. The point at which we re-create our world view in the face of new experience is precisely the point where Dewey feels that human activity has the potential to become artistic expression. Just as ordinary human beings 'create' experience in the act of perception and

'reconstruct' their accumulation of experience as they undergo the process of living, so does the artist 'create' experience, only in his case, it is imaginative experience given concrete form through some medium in the environment -- stone, paint, language. For Langer, the artist does not directly express his powerful feelings, but he abstracts them into symbolic forms; these forms are made articulate for us (though, again, not discursively) in the work of art. Langer states: "... what art expresses is not actual feeling, but ideas of feeling; as language does not express actual things but ideas of them." ²⁵

Dewey's similar claim is that the artist clarifies and distills by way of form meanings found in scattered and weakened ways in ordinary experience: "... the expression of the self in and through a medium, constituting the work of art, is itself-a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions, a process in which both of them acquire a form and order they did not at first possess." ²⁶ This is similar to the process of acquiring 'ordinary' experience. What is perceived (raw) experience) is assimilated by the perceiver, but at the same time the perceiver must 'grow' in order to accommodate disparate experience. Just as the ordinary perceiver creates an experience out of the raw materials of

sense impressions by selecting what he is capable, at that particular time, of accommodating, so the artist creates a work of art which is, in a very real way, an 'experience.'

Collingwood attempts to clarify this process. He proposes that the artist's inward experience of crude sensation, emotion, impression is converted into imaginative experience by an act of consciousness. This imaginative experience is then externalized as a work of art. The act of consciousness is not discursively formulated; rather it is pre-discursive. There are genuine modes of thought whose final articulation is not necessarily linguistic. In the perception of art, there is a converse process, according to Collingwood, where the perceiver begins with the outward experience of the work of art: " ... the outward experience comes first, and this is converted into that inward experience which alone is aesthetic." ²⁷ Dewey states that there is an organic connection between the artist's act of expression and the percipient's aesthetic experience. The percipient must recreate for himself the imaginative act of the artist; he must undergo relations similar to what the artist experienced in creation: "Without the act of recreation, the object is not perceived as a work of art." ²⁸ If Dewey is correct in saying that the processes in having an

an 'aesthetic experience' are similar, and not merely analogous, to the processes we undergo in having an 'ordinary' experience, then our world representation (or in Kelly's terms our construct system) of accumulated past experiences will be called into play as we respond to art. Dewey states: "... when excitement about subject matter goes deep, it stirs up a store of attitudes and meanings derived from prior experience."²⁹ How heavily do our world views come to bear on aesthetic perception? In a discussion of pictorial art, Collingwood states: "The imaginary experience which we get from the picture is not merely the kind of experience the picture is capable of arousing, it is the kind of experience we are capable of having."³⁰ The work of art is a new experience; it will bring to bear all those processes which we normally undergo in having an experience. The ability to perceive art is not a constant, but is dependent upon the maturity of the perceiver. There can really be no such thing as an 'objective' response. To understand the nature of aesthetic response, then, one must realize that the interaction between work and percipient is paramount.

In Langer's words, what the aesthetic experience does to us is: "... to formulate our conceptions of feeling and our conceptions of visual, factual, and audible reality together. It gives us forms of imagination

and forms of feeling, inseparable; that is to say, it clarifies and organizes intuition itself. That is why it has the force of a revelation, and inspires a feeling of deep intellectual satisfaction, though it elicits no conscious intellectual work (reasoning)."³¹ Moreover, the work of art does not present symbolically a series of feelings which the artist wished to express. The work of art itself is a single symbol, not a string of symbols. The corollary to this is that the intuitive perception of the work of art must be in toto. The import of an art work is grasped initially or not at all. Dewey agrees that artistic perception involves just such direct and unreasoned perception. The art symbol is nothing that can be explained discursively; no one can explain the import of a work of art. This is especially apparent in literature, when our attempts to convey the import (say) of King Lear so often degenerate into banal moral statements or emotional responses. The insights of scientific thought, unlike those of art, can be conveyed by discursive symbolic forms. Instead of the intuitive grasp of the whole as in art, a scientific treatise leads us step by step from one insight to the next, to the final import of the treatise.

On the other hand, according to Langer, the artist:
 " ... is not saying anything, not even about the nature

of feeling; he is showing. He is showing us the appearance of a feeling, in a perceptible symbolic projection; but he does not refer to the public object, such as a generally known 'sort' of feeling, outside his work. Only in so far as the work is objective, the feeling it exhibits becomes public; it is always bound to its symbol." 32

Thus in literature even the knowledge of the discursive linguistic symbols for the emotions which a poet might want to express will not help him. It is, in fact, in literature where it is most difficult to see how the artist presents a form symbolic of human feeling because the material of the poet's art is also the means of discursive reasoning. Langer sees grave limitations to the knowledge which discursive language is capable of expressing. Her book Philosophy in a New Key sets out to destroy the notion that human knowledge must be bound by the limitations of what can be expressed discursively. Quite simply, there are other ways of 'knowing' and other things to 'know'. Such is the essence of art. Through art we are capable of expressing or experiencing, as the case may be, experiences which are not formally amenable to discursive expressions. Philosophy in a New Key, in fact, attempts to account for ritual, myth, fantasy, dream with different lines of this same principle. Art has the office of

expressing " ... the rhythms of life, organic, emotional, and mental ... ", the very rhythms which Dewey characterizes as the perpetual alternative stages of harmony and disparity which a growing organism undergoes. All together these rhythms compose: " ... the dynamic pattern of feeling. It is this pattern that only non-discursive symbolic forms can present, and that is the point and purpose of artistic construction." ³³ Art provides insight into "unspeakable realities." ³⁴ And thus for Dewey: "If all meaning could be adequately expressed in words, the arts of painting and music would not exist." ³⁵ Non-discursive 'meanings' will inevitably manifest themselves.

Collingwood sees no distinction in kind between the expression of the artist and the response of the percipient. The percipient must undergo the same processes, though reversed, which the artist underwent in the creation of his work. The difference between the two activities is that while the artist expresses himself, the audience is made to respond because the artist shows it how to respond. Of course that is not accomplished by the artist in any overt way. Rather the work of art itself must do this for him; the 'showing' will be implicit. "By creating for ourselves an imaginary experience or activity," says Collingwood, "we express our emotions;

and this is what we call art."³⁶ The work of art must do something; in Collingwood's terms, it must show us how to express our feelings, and the qualities embodied in a work of art must be funded in such a way that this act is accomplished for its percipients.

Dewey concurs with Collingwood here, as in poetry for example, where Dewey believes that if a poem is read properly, that is to say artistically or poetically, a new poem is created at each reading in the reader's imagination. Emotion is not rendered intellectually, rather, in Dewey's words, art "does the deed that breeds the emotion."³⁷ In a very significant sense, an object of art is what it is because of what it does. In science, discourse leads us step by step to an insight. Once the insight has been achieved, much of the discourse can be discarded since it consisted of sequential parts leading to the insight. In art nothing can be discarded. A work of art does not lead its percipient to an experience. Rather it constitutes an experience. An object of art is an integral whole. "Through art," states Dewey, "meanings of objects that are otherwise dumb, inchoate, restricted and resisted are clarified and concentrated, and not by thought working laboriously upon them, nor by escape into a world of mere sense, but by the creation of a new

experience." ³⁸ This explains for Dewey why we have the feeling in responding to art that what we perceive is an impression of life. If the aesthetic experience can be viewed as a new experience, though of a very special kind, then we must respond in a very real way to the work of art as an experience. That is to say all those processes which I have described in connection with 'ordinary' experience are called into play in our response to art. A work of art will have the ability to show us new insights, new ways of feeling, new ways of knowing which, since these experiences are new and hence disparate, will call into play that reconstruction of our world view, of our construct system -- that process which is so essential to growth. It is as if the work of art presents us with a 'pre-ordered' experience where our 'selecting' has been done for us already. The corollary here is that art exists only by virtue of the way human beings perceive ordinary experience. The experience of art is not analogous to our ordinary experience, but is a very real and vital extension of it.

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed Dewey's view of the world as mass of energies and circumstances which the organism must construe in order to survive. This construal amounts to the cumulative construction of a

world view or representation which we must constantly preserve from fragmentation (through reconstruction) in the face of disparate experience. In normal life we attempt to maintain an extensive and underlying whole which is the essence of our sanity. Dewey is convinced of the role of art in maintaining that wholeness: "A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live. This fact, I think, is the explanation of that feeling of exquisite intelligibility and clarity we have in the presence of an object that is experienced with esthetic intensity. It explains also the religious feeling that accompanies intense esthetic perception." ³⁹

Langer has suggested that what we experience through art we may well not be able to experience any other way. She points to a strain of human activity which may be necessarily artistic, perhaps not artistic in the strict sense, but activity which is in the 'artistic mode', the use of which would be to preserve our world views from fragmentation. Langer states: "... art penetrates deep into the personal life because in giving form to the world, it articulates human nature: sensibility, energy,

passion, and mortality. More than anything else in experience, the arts mold our actual life of feeling." ⁴⁰

Of course, societies and individuals can exist without high art, but there is a positive need to express patterns of feelings and rhythms of life which cannot be articulated by discursive means, for the ideas of them are too complex. Philosophy in a New Key points to other human activities which are encompassed in what I will call the artistic mode of life -- sacrament, ritual, fantasy, myth, dream. Although not necessarily culminating in 'high art', the artistic mode always manifests itself in human activity.

Dewey's idea, that aesthetic experience is a very natural extension of ordinary experience is valuable, and the complementary theories which support it lend credence to its importance. Though this principle has been ignored to an astonishing extent by literary theorists and critics, we will find in Chapter II recent literary criticism grappling with this idea, and with another closely related aesthetic problem -- language in literature. Just as Dewey, considering art in general, relates aesthetic experience to ordinary experience, so some of these literary critics relate the aesthetic use of language (that is, literature)

to ordinary uses of language. It is interesting that John Dewey was so blatantly ignored for so long. Art as Experience, published in 1934, is strikingly similar in theory to James Britton's Language and Learning (1970).

The ideas which arise out of the next chapter, however, are fragmented and piecemeal. But through James Britton's theory in Chapter III, where Dewey's aesthetic principle is again taken up, we will see how the fragmented insights of the group we loosely label the 'affective' critics can be integrated.

¹ John Dewey, Art As Experience (1932: rpt. New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), p. 193

² Dewey, p. 193

³ Dewey, p. 194

⁴ George A. Kelly, A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs (1955: rpt. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 120

⁵ Kelly, p. 120

⁶ Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 58

⁷ Kelly, p.8

⁸ Philosophy in a New Key, p. 89

⁹ Ibid., p. 89

¹⁰ Dewey, p. 14

¹¹ Kelly, p. 157

¹² Kelly, pp. 8-9

- 13 Philosophy in a New Key, p. 88
- 14 Dewey, p. 41
- 15 Kelly, p. 75
- 16 Dewey, p. 60
- 17 Dewey, p. 60
- 18 Philosophy in a New Key. p. 91
- 19 Dewey, p. 15
- 20 R. G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art (1938; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 117
- 21 Dewey, p. 42
- 22 Dewey, p. 24
- 23 Dewey, p. 19
- 24 Dewey, p. 138

25 Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 59

26 Dewey, p. 65

27 Collingwood, pp. 301-302

28 Dewey, p. 54

29 Dewey, p. 65

30 Collingwood, p. 150

31 Feeling and Form, p. 397

32 Ibid., p. 394

33 Ibid., p. 241

34 Philosophy in a New Key, p. 260

35 Dewey, p. 74

36 Collingwood, p. 151

37 Dewey, p. 67

38 Dewey, p. 132

39 Dewey, p. 195

40 Feeling and Form, p. 401

II - THE RECENT 'AFFECTIVE' LITERARY CRITICISM

If we entertain the aesthetic principle in Chapter I, then we can see that the relationship between an art object and its percipient (a literary text and its reader) is dynamic, vitally connected to personal development. We only need consider how our attitude might change towards a single novel in the course of a lifetime to see that our responses are not static. The New Critical attitude, however, where the text is considered a static verbal object (a verbal icon) has ignored the aesthetic principle espoused by Dewey and others, and is an opposite extreme. New Critics assumed that meanings of poems were more or less fixed and that 'objective' meanings could be determined from the static structures of the text. Recently, however, certain critics have recognized the significance of the reader's personal interaction with the literary text.

New Criticism, perhaps crystallized by W. K. Wimsatt's "The Affective Fallacy" (1947), saw the poem as a verbal object, the import of which was to be explained solely in terms of its formal features. The New Critical method became firmly entrenched in England and North America in the 1940's and 1950's as a critical and an

educational tool. But perhaps when literary study turned to the novel, the New Critical method of close reading became inadequate. Unlike the short poem, the novel cannot be perceived at once as a whole; since the reading process must obviously take place in time, the analysis of static forms is inadequate and inappropriate.

Critics of the novel, beginning with Wayne Booth (The Rhetoric of Fiction, 1962), became concerned with different aspects of literary analysis, resulting in a reconsideration of literary theory. Serious critics of the novel have had to consider the relationship between the reader and the text. Thus, a handful of critics, whose influence upon one another is minimal, has been struggling (each in his own way) to account for the dynamic experience of reading. Though, as we shall see, the concerns of each diverge considerably, I choose (with reservations) to call these critics 'affective' because their interest lies in the text-reader relationship.

This chapter will present an overview of this recent trend in criticism after a brief discussion of Wimsatt's influence on critical thought. We will see these critics coming to realizations about literature and language which are correspondent to Dewey's aesthetic

principle about experience -- ordinary and aesthetic -- delineated in Chapter I.

a) W. K. Wimsatt: The Affective Fallacy

W. K. Wimsatt's influential essay "The Affective Fallacy" is an attempt, not to deny the emotional aspects of literary response, but to clarify the relationship of emotion to poetry. Wimsatt wrote his essay with a polemical intent as a reaction to the critical impressionism and relativism which had preceded him: the outcome of such criticism, he maintained, "... is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear."¹

Wimsatt deals in turn with what he labels the emotive, imaginative, physiological, hallucinatory, and historical forms of affective criticism. In the emotive and imaginative forms respectively, critics would describe the feelings they experienced as they read, or they would empathize with the poetic situation. What Wimsatt calls physiological criticism judged poetry by bodily reactions like the tingling of spines or the bristling of skin. In hallucinatory or hypnotic criticism, the reader gave himself wholly to the poetic illusion and described his reactions to this 'mystical' experience. Finally, a his-

torical affective critic, rather than defining his own emotive reactions to a poem, attempted to exhume those of the original readers. By way of summary Wimsatt states: "The report of some readers ... that a poem or story induces in them vivid images, intense feelings, a heightened consciousness, is neither anything which can be refuted nor anything which it is possible for the objective critic to take into account. The purely affective report is either too physiological or too vague."²

Now Wimsatt does not deny that we react emotionally to poetry, but he does insist that we must look to the poem as an object if we are to discern its emotive quality. "The objective critic," he states, "... must admit that it is not easy to explain ... how poetry makes ideas thick and complicated enough to hold on to emotions."³ Wimsatt rests on Eliot's explanation of the 'objective correlative'. In his essay on Hamlet, Eliot had said: "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative': in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."⁴ Wimsatt

uses this theory to explain why poetry is eternal, why it can outlive its own time, and why readers in later centuries can respond to it. "Poetry is a way of fixing emotions," Wimsatt states, "or making them more permanently perceptible when objects have undergone a functional change from culture to culture, or when as simple facts of history they have lost their emotive value with loss of immediacy."⁵

In the end Wimsatt attempts, as a reaction to impressionism, to propose a theory of how literature works. Wimsatt has demarcated two interrelated concerns. One is his curiosity about the literary object and that object's ability to have an emotional effect on its readers. And the second, arising out of the first, is his concern to explain how poetry works, to explain essentially the nature of our processes as we read and respond to literature. Wimsatt suggests that literary objects are constituted of sets of objects, chains of events, or situations which have fixed emotional meaning. For Wimsatt, poetry works, at least by analogy, by discursive means; "Poetry is characteristically a discourse about both emotions and objects."⁶ And thus poets become " ... expositors of the laws of feeling." (my emphases).

Wimsatt suggests that because affective responses are too physiological or too vague they should not be dealt

with by the literary critic. There is a danger here, I think, because Wimsatt would seem to limit 'legitimate' responses only to those which can be expressed discursively. We must remember Langer's view that all art expresses non-discursive symbolic forms of feeling which, she would suggest, can only be expressed in art. To deny the validity of all but discursive forms of response is to dehumanize literature.

Wimsatt also has nothing to say about works of literature being 'constituted experiences.' He would say that poems are autonomous verbal objects which exist in their own right exclusive of any perceiver. The psychoanalytic theory of Norman Holland offers a good contrast to Wimsatt's. Wimsatt's greatest fear of affective criticism is that the text all but disappears. In Holland's view, the verbal structure of the text is considered much less important than the psychological fantasies generated by the text.

b) Norman Holland: Psychoanalytic Theory

"The psychoanalytic theory of literature," states Norman Holland in Dynamics of Literary Response, "holds that the writer expresses and disguises childhood fantasies. The reader unconsciously elaborates the fantasy

content of the literary work with his own versions of these fantasies ... " 8

The literary text provides the reader with a nuclear fantasy to which he reacts unconsciously. The fantasy of the writer becomes the reader's, or at the least, triggers an aggressive fantasy in the reader. Then there follows a subsequent defensive modification of the aggressive fantasy which results, ultimately, in intellectual meaning. Literature transforms the reader's primitive wishes and fears into significance and coherence through literary form. Unconscious meaning underlies all other meanings, which are arrived at only through successive abstraction of the nuclear fantasy presented in the text. Literary form is a mastery of that fantasy; the literary work is a transformation of a fantasy, and according to psychoanalytic theory, this transformation is what gives us pleasure when we read. The classic conflict of the unconscious is the struggle between drive and defense with the subsequent compromise. For Holland the tension between life and art, between an aggressive fantasy and the defense of it, is another manifestation of that struggle. Literature attains its force from the tension: "It is from such deep and fearful roots of our most personal experience that literature derives its power and drive." 9

Part of this literary process is achieved because the reader is disengaged or derailed from the normal, purposeful action by the act of reading; he is not caught up in the affairs of the world for the time that he reads. The reader is able to experience his fantasy vicariously, experience it at least 'once removed' from the activity of the world. This is one of the attractions of literature; it allows the reader all the trappings of a fantasy with none of the real life consequences. "In effect," says Holland, "the literary work dreams a dream for us."¹⁰

For the psychoanalytic theorist, this accounts for part of our pleasure in the experience of reading. The other part of our pleasure comes from the management of fantasies while we experience them. Usually the management of fantasies causes anxiety. But the reader, so to speak, has it both ways. He gains pleasure from the enactment of an aggressive fantasy, while at the same time taking pleasure in the way the author has managed to control his own fantasy through form: "In life, defenses stand off and modify drives and so cut down the amount of pleasure we get even if the drives are satisfied. If, however, the defense itself gives pleasure, there is a net increase in pleasure, and that increase in pleasure

(according to Freud) buys a permit for 'a still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources,' the gratification of the drive (or, in literature, unconscious content)."¹¹ As well, our inevitable search for meaning in a text is a kind of device or defense we employ in order to justify our primitive pleasures derived from the experiences of the fantasy. "In a way," says Holland, "we seek literary forms because we wish we could manage life itself as adroitly as a sonnet does."¹² Even if in reading a work we feel guilt or pain or anxiety, the work will manage those feelings for us; as well, the fantasy is only a vicarious one upon which we are not required to act and react in the 'real' world.

Holland strikes two significant chords. First, he views literature as experience; a literary work provides readers with a kind of vicarious fantasy. Second, he identifies (but does not develop) the significance of the communication of author and reader through the text; the author is important to the reader as a valuable source of vicarious fantasy. Holland ultimately differs from Langer because he equates dream and literature; while both may be manifestations of our affective being, he de-emphasizes the fact that writing literature is a highly conscious act.

c) Stanley Fish: Affective Stylistics

Stanley Fish's essay "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," if not directly attacking some of Wimsatt's notions, at least uses them as a springboard from which to propose a divergent theory. "The Affective Fallacy," Wimsatt has said, "is a confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does) ... " ¹³ While Wimsatt has maintained that poems must be considered as objective verbal structures, Fish just as emphatically denies the validity of this approach because it ignores the reading process.

Fish claims that much contemporary criticism sells literature short because it largely ignores that responses to the literary text take place as processes within individual readers: "[Criticism] transforms 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."¹⁴ The experience of reading, as Fish sees it, takes place in time; readers respond not to whole utterances but to their word by word temporal flow. There is a difference in meaning, to illustrate with his simple examples, between the statements 'He is sincere' and

'Doubtless, he is sincere,' because as statements they do different things. Fish delineates his method: "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 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." 15

For Fish, works of literature do what they mean. His theory denies the initial importance of 'deep structure' in the reading process in favour of 'surface structure.' 'He is sincere' and 'Doubtless, he is sincere' may possess the same extractable meanings but because they do not 'do the same meaning', their meanings are different. The extracted meaning of a deep structural analysis is somehow secondary for Fish, what he would call a 'response to a response.' Hence two radically different sentences making the same 'point' in no way mean the same thing. "It is the experience of an utterance," Fish states, " -- all of it and not anything that could be said

about it, including anything I could say -- that is its meaning." ¹⁶ Fish happily confesses that his method is descriptive and impractical. He makes no attempt to distinguish between literature and " ... advertising or preaching or propaganda or 'entertainment'." "For some this will seem a fatal limitation of the method," states Fish, "I welcome it, since it seems to me that we have for too long, and without notable results, been trying to determine what distinguishes literature from ordinary language." ¹⁷ Here Fish wants to view works of literature not as aesthetic objects but as verbal utterances; thus his view of literature is not normative.

In his consideration of the reader who reads his book in time, word by word, from left to right, page by page he is directly opposed to Wimsatt. How would Fish answer the question: What does literature do? Literature plainly just does, and all Fish is concerned about is to describe a basic word by word response. The corollary here is that the reader must strive to become 'the informed reader' who possesses semantic competence and whose textual methodology is 'radically historical.' ¹⁸ "In the analysis of a reading experience, when does one come to the point?" Fish asks coyly. "The answer is, 'never',

or, no sooner that than the pressure to do so becomes unbearable (psychologically)."¹⁹

Wimsatt has said that with affective criticism, the text tends to disappear. Fish gladly agrees: "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."²⁰ Just as Holland plays down the importance of the formal features of the text, so Fish welcomes the disappearance of the text as verbal object. Literature is "kinetic art," the great merit of which is " ... that it forces you to become aware of 'it' as a changing object -- and therefore no 'object' at all -- and also to be aware of yourself as correspondingly changing."²¹ Fish's method precludes any analysis of static structures of the text. The difference here between Wimsatt and Fish is great. For Wimsatt a poem is a formal, static structure which works as a discourse about the emotive quality of objects, a 'discourse' from which meaning can be extracted. For Fish a poem is a kinetic art which 'does not lend itself to static interpretation because it refuses to stay still and doesn't let you stay still either.'²²

Fish's tendency is to view a work of literature as a verbal utterance which takes place in time (that is,

at a certain time in history) and which must be read in time (not only at another time in history, but also word by word, from left to right on the page). His prime critical concern is to analyze the developing responses of an 'informed' reader.

d) Roland Barthes: Structuralist Analysis

Roland Barthes's theory is an interesting counterpart to Fish's. While Fish will not acknowledge the 'literary object', Barthes does. Yet their theories are compatible. Barthes proposes an analysis of the literary object to discover how it works, but from the point of view of a structuralist. He first assumes that the literary text achieves its status as an object because of its form. "The goal of all structuralist activity," says Barthes, "whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning ('the functions') of this object."²³ The functions of an object are its internal relationships which hold it together and maintain its integrity as an object. The structuralist first attempts a dissection of the object to determine the smallest units of its functions, and a subsequent articulation which resolves these units into the object once again by establishing for them "certain rules

of association." 24

Much structuralist activity has centered on the study of language, specifically the 'sentence-object.' In "An Introduction to the Structuralist Analysis of Narrative," 25 Barthes states: "Structurally, narrative belongs with the sentence without ever being reducible to the sum of its sentences: a narrative is a large sentence, just as any declarative sentence is, in a certain way, the out-line of a little narrative." 26 The structuralist analysis of the sentence, then, is to be more than a mere guiding analogy to facilitate the study of a literary text: precisely the same principles apply in both cases.

The functional units of the sentence are the levels of the contextual, grammatical, phonological, and phonetic; moreover, these levels are hierarchial, the contextual subsuming the grammatical, the grammatical subsuming the phonological and so on. Although we read a sentence distributed word by word from left to right on a page, it does not follow that our understanding of it is the result of our construal of its linear progression. Clearly, there is more afoot:

Sign distortions exist in language, and Bally analyzed them in his comparative study of French and German; dystaxie [dystaxy] occurs

as soon as the signs (of a linguistic message) are no longer juxtaposed, as soon as the linear (logical) order is disturbed (for instance the predicate preceding the subject). One typical form of dystaxy occurs when the different parts of one sign are separated by other signs along the chain of the message (for instance the negative ne jamais and the verb a pardonné in: elle ne nous a jamais pardonné): the sign being fractured, its signified is distributed among several signifiers, separated from each other, none of which can be understood by itself. 27

What Barthes proposes is that as we read we construe not only linearly (distributively, syntagmatically) but we also construe in an hierarchical manner, resolving the various functional units of the sentence in order to grasp the meaning of the whole. We do not have to read to the end of the sentence and then figure out its meaning. Barthes would illustrate his 'sentence-object' with axes -- the distributive construing of signs on a horizontal axis, the hierarchical construing of signs on a vertical axis.

Now Barthes asserts that in our construing of a literary text, precisely the same thing happens, only the units of the text are different. Instead of the hierarchical linguistic levels of contextual, grammatical, and so on, there are three textual levels -- function, action, and narration. Perhaps certain 'non-structur-

alist' comparisons can be drawn: 1) functions -- 'movements' which occur, both trivial and important, such as the lighting of a certain brand of cigarette by the hero of a James Bond novel, or his shooting of the villain; 2) action -- the level of characters ('actants') which initiate and respond to functions; 3) narration -- the narrative presence, the attitude to the characters and events. As in his understanding of sentences, the reader construes a narrative text both distributively and hierarchically. This makes a good deal of common sense because if a reader only construed the linear progression of events he would have absolutely no idea of character or narrative attitude until he had reached the end of the text. The level of functions is subsumed by the level of action, and it by the level of narration. "To understand a narrative," says Barthes, "is not only to follow the unfolding of the story but also to recognize in it a number of 'strata,' to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read a narrative (or listen to it) is not only to pass from one word to the next, but also from one level to the next." ²⁸ Functions are integrated and stored around a given actant to give us the conception of

a character. Then as actants are themselves integrated, the reader becomes aware of the force which is giving shape to events; the text is construed as a kind of world in which actants participate in events.

Describing what structuralist analysis of the text attempts to accomplish, Barthes states: "... the goal is to give a structural description to the chronological illusion ... " ²⁹ In summary, Barthes states: "Narrative thus appears as a succession of tightly interlocking mediate and immediate elements; dystaxy initiates a 'horizontal reading, while integration superimposes on it a 'vertical' reading." ³⁰ A structuralist analysis is unemotional or non-emotional; there is no attempt to go beyond the text, to give, for example, psychological qualities to an actant; "Just as linguistics stops at the sentence, the analysis of narrative stops at the analysis of discourse: from that point on, it is necessary to resort to another semiotics." ³¹ If this horizontal/vertical construal of the text, however, is in fact how any normal reader reads, then it is easy to see that actants may be viewed as characters or people, and not mere 'êtres de papier.' By the same notion, the narrative level becomes a view or representation of the

world. Barthes' method, though objective in itself, may provide important insights into our more subjective responses to literature.

Fish makes no distinction between kinds of linguistic utterances; Barthes does. Barthes' structuralist analysis complements Fish's theory, allowing for a difference between non-discursive and discursive linguistic utterances. As Langer has said, we tend to discard discursive symbols as we use them to lead us step by step to an insight. In a non-discursive symbolic form, such as a novel, we discard nothing: as we construe linearly, we also do so vertically, constructing, in the case of the novel, a virtual world.

Wolfgang Iser proposes something similar to Barthes in suggesting that the narrative text is a 'performative' utterance.

e) Wolfgang Iser: Indeterminacy

Wolfgang Iser's approach to literature shares a similar concern, at least initially, with that of Fish. His essays "The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach" and "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction" both stress the necessity of considering the reader's response in that no text can exist

independently of a reader for it is he who gives meaning or life to the text. Meanings are generated by the act of reading.

Iser proposes that the literary text is what he calls 'performance' rather than 'statement', an utterance that creates its own object and does not refer to specific objects in the 'real' world: "[The literary text] differs from other forms of writing in that it neither describes nor constitutes real objects; ... it diverges from the real experiences of the reader in that it offers views and opens up perspectives in which the empirically known world of one's own personal experience appears changed." ³² Iser is rather imprecise, however, about this distinction and acknowledges his confusion: how can literary texts which do not refer to anything objectively real be considered realistic (as they commonly are)? Iser answers: "The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents." ³³

Having established, or at least proposed this explanation of the nature of literary texts, Iser then sets out to describe the dynamic relationship between text and reader. His initial explanation is that the reciprocal process between the text and the reader takes place at the

level of the sentences, which are read in time: " ... the activity of reading can be characterized as a sort of kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions, recollections. Every sentence contains a preview of the next and forms a kind of viewfinder for what is to come; and this in turn changes the 'preview' and so becomes a 'viewfinder' for what has been read." ³⁴ Similarly, upon the second reading of a text, the reader will bring different expectations with him. Every reading for Iser is unique.

Iser proceeds to say that the linguistic apparatus of a text will set up expectations in the reader which, in good texts, are either frustrated or modified. This essentially is his phenomenon of 'indeterminacy'. This building up of expectations and the subsequent modifications of them are engineered by what Iser labels 'gaps of indeterminacy', which are the product of a repertoire of structures manipulated by the author. A chapter in a novel, to take an obvious example, which ends at a very suspenseful moment will produce such a gap, which the reader must fill in for himself, and then gauge the accuracy of his expectations later. More subtle gaps might be produced by a sudden shift in point of view, or even a change of tense. These gaps can occur at many levels in the text -- at the level of narrative strategy,

character portrayal or at syntactic and semantic levels -- all these gaps working on the same principle that the reader must fill them in for himself and await confirmation (or modification) of his expectations as he proceeds to read. According to Iser, the author never gives the reader the 'whole story'.

As he reads, the reader seeks a consistent pattern in the text and a worthwhile piece of literature will stretch the reader beyond the limits of what he normally expects. This explains for Iser why some literature has the power to move us deeply: "In seeking the balance [or consistency] we inevitably have to start out with certain expectations, the shattering of which is integral to the aesthetic experience." ³⁵ It is the forced expansion of reader expectations that leads Iser to conclude that reading literature is analagous to having an actual experience:

The efficacy of a literary text is brought about by the apparent evocation and subsequent negation of the familiar. ... What at first seemed to be an affirmation of our assumptions leads to our own rejection of them, thus tending to prepare us for re-orientation. And it is only when we have outstripped our preconceptions and left the shelter of the familiar that we are in a position to gather new experiences. As the literary text involves the reader in the formation of illusions and the simultaneous formation of means whereby the illusion is

punctured, reading reflects the process by which we gain experience. ³⁶

So for Iser the literary text is something different from written assertions of fact, something that creates its own object by describing, not objects in the real world, but reactions to them. The reading process is facilitated by gaps of indeterminacy which draw the reader into the text and make him an inseparable element of it. In this process, the reader undergoes something like an experience which, in good literature, expands his imagination. While Wimsatt would say that great works of literature are eternal because they discourse eternal 'laws of feeling,' Iser says literature creates a world (but not the 'real' and hence mutable world of referential writing) into which the reader is drawn through the structure of the text.

Three important ideas which others have so far touched upon are reinforced by Iser. First, a literary text is an utterance, as Fish has mentioned. Second, the literary text is an object -- in Iser's words a performative utterance -- as Barthes has claimed. Third, the interaction between the text and reader is an experience, a claim for which Holland attempted to make a case.

f) Georges Poulet: Phenomenology

Georges Poulet extends the view of literature as utterance. His essay "Phenomenology of Reading" begins with a casual discussion of the physical realizations of art objects such as vases or statues as compared to the physical entities of books. For Poulet a statue remains essentially external and impermeable whereas a book opens itself to its reader, enters into the reader. This is similar to Iser's claim that the existence of the text is dependent upon the reader's bringing it to life.

But there are significant differences between Iser and Poulet on this point. Poulet goes so far as to say that the reader's consciousness is usurped by the literary text. He describes it thus:

At the precise moment that I see, surging out of the object I hold open before me, a quantity of significations which my mind grasps, I realize that what I hold in my hands is no longer just an object, or even simply a living thing. I am aware of a rational being, of a consciousness, the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard-of license, to think what it thinks and to feel what it feels.³⁷

This last aspect, the reader's facile ability to think the thoughts and feel the emotions of another consciousness, curiously disturbs Poulet in one sense. "I become the prey of language,"³⁸ he comments, implying that he has given up the direct perception of reality to surround himself with unreality. He also claims to identify a curious epistemological problem which is the unique condition of reading a literary word: "I am someone who happens to have as objects of his own thought, thoughts which are part of a book I am reading, and which are therefore the cogitations of another. They are the thoughts of another, and yet it is I who am their subject. ... I am thinking the thoughts of another. Of course, there would be no cause for astonishment if I were thinking it as the thought of another. But I think it as my very own."³⁹ According to Poulet, then, the reader entertains thoughts which are alien to himself and also, by necessity, he entertains the force or principle which has shaped those thoughts, an alien consciousness.

Poulet discusses at some length the nature of this consciousness as something akin to a narrative presence, but by no means to be identified as the biographical entity of the author. It would be more accurate to

describe this consciousness as a force shaping the events of the book and imbuing it with certain attitudes.

How, then, does literature work, in Poulet's view? While he has described the reading process as an initial usurpation of the reader's consciousness, he asserts that the reader is not victimized by the alien consciousness. Poulet's abstruse corollary here is that a reader is able to entertain the consciousness of another (as his own) and at the same become aware of that alien consciousness. More simply perhaps, the reader is able to evaluate the attitude of narrative presence at the same time he is involved in the literary work. "I am a consciousness," states Poulet, "astonished by an existence which is not mine, but which I experience as though it were mine."⁴⁰ This reminds us of Iser's claim that gaps of indeterminacy have the power to modify the reader's expectations to the point where he undergoes a broadening experience. Poulet's more flavourful conclusion is that: "... a work of literature becomes ... a sort of human being, which is a mind conscious of itself and constituting itself in me as the subject of its own object."⁴¹

A work of literature ceases to be an object in the 'real' world when it is read, unlike the statue and the vase. It is transformed into an 'interior object'.

"In short," says Poulet, "the extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside." 42

The vital element in reading literature is, according to Poulet, our response to the consciousness behind the text. He is not particularly concerned about linguistic structures. The experience of literature is the interaction between the consciousness of the text and that of the reader.

Wayne Booth and Walter Slatoff develop the same idea along slightly different lines.

g) Wayne Booth: Interests, Emotions, Beliefs

In Wayne Booth's The Rhetoric of Fiction, the chapter entitled "Emotions, Beliefs, and the Reader's Objectivity" rejects the notion that the reader must be dispassionate, keeping an 'aesthetic distance' from the text. "Every literary work of any power", Booth states, " -- whether or not its author composed it with his audience in mind -- is in fact an elaborate system of controls over the reader's involvement and detachment along various lines of interest. The author is limited only by the range of human interests." 43

Booth divides these human interests into three basic types which he calls intellectual, qualitative, and practical. First, as we read, our intellectual curiosities may be engaged and we desire to know the 'truth' or the 'facts'; be it the facts of a case in a detective novel, or on a more sophisticated level, psychological or philosophical truth. A qualitative interest is defined by Booth as a desire to see a pattern or form (of narrative or structure for example) completed or developed. At a basic level the reader's interest is caught by cause-and-effect patterns in the plot. There are also expectations of literary conventions. (Writers can, of course, exploit these and shatter conventions!) Booth also identifies certain abstract forms as qualitative interest: balance, symmetry, repetition, contrast, comparison for example. Finally certain 'promised qualities' may be identified by the reader at the outset of the text, which he desires to see continued: a stylistic brilliance, for example, or an original wit.

Practical interests operate at the level of character. The characters are people in whom we become interested. "If we look closely at our reactions to most great novels," says Booth, "we discover that we feel a

strong concern for the characters as people; we care about their good or bad fortune. In most works of any significance, we are made to admire or detest, to love or hate, or simply to approve or disapprove of at least one central character, and our interest in reading from page to page, like our judgment upon the book after re-consideration, is inseparable from this emotional involvement." ⁴⁴ These pragmatic interests can also exist in either of the other levels. In the intellectual sphere we may desire an intellectual change in a character. Or in the qualitative sphere, we may appreciate the author's portrayal of a certain character because it is 'round' rather than flat.

Characters become people who are important to us, who are cause for our concern, and, according to Booth, we will not be able to avoid judging characters on their intellectual and moral behavior. As mundane as this may seem, Booth maintains that: "... the very structure of fiction, and hence of our aesthetic apprehension of it is often built of such practical, and in themselves seemingly 'non-aesthetic,' materials." ⁴⁵

Booth proceeds to discuss the role of the reader's belief in the reading process. Since the reader cannot

avoid judging the moral quality of the characters, it would seem that his beliefs are necessarily implicated. Booth's theory is that the author creates an implied reader for the text he writes who will be sympathetic to his beliefs, to his attitude. It is as if the author, in giving shape to the event he portrays, has in mind some kind of hypothetical reader who will approve of his creation. Thus E. M. Forster said he wrote for the people whose respect he desired and John Milton wrote for his 'fit audience, though few'. The corollary here is that the (implied) reader must largely agree with the attitudes and beliefs of the author if he is to appreciate fully the literary work. Booth is outspoken about this matter: "To pretend that we read otherwise, to claim that we can make ourselves into objective, dispassionate, thoroughly tolerant readers is in the final analysis nonsense." ⁴⁶

For Booth, then, the literary object exists as a kind of rhetorical situation where an 'implied' author implicates an 'implied' reader by interesting him on one or a combination of levels -- the intellectual, the qualitative, and the practical. Booth suggests that the practical level of interest is more integral to the reading process than is usually assumed. Even in great literature our aesthetic responses follow our

practical, emotional response. And in structuring his work, the author counts on this.

A major tenet of Booth's theory is similar to Poulet's: there is an interaction of consciousnesses -- in Booth's case, the implied author and reader. For Booth, too, literature is utterance as the title of his book implies.

h) Walter J. Slatoff: Subjectivity

Like Booth, Walter Slatoff is concerned with the reader's subjective responses to literature; his tone, however, in With Respect to Readers, is much more polemical. Whereas Booth includes the response to formal qualities and structures in a work as 'qualitative interests,' Slatoff doubts the integrity of responding to those things at all: "To limit our concern to literary history or formal analysis ... , to ignore problems of value and human response, is to ignore the very qualities of literature which have led us to be concerned with it in the first place." ⁴⁷ His opinion stems from a frank belief in the inability of discursive thought to articulate or contain the responses we feel when reading literature. Slatoff also denigrates the idea of the disinterested, ideal reader 'invoked' by certain critics, because he finds this hopelessly

naive and inhuman. In fact he marvels that there can be such a consensus of response about a particular piece of literature when one considers the possibilities for idiosyncratic readings. First of all, according to Slatoff, individual responses to a given text will vary according to the reasons that text is read: a text read for the purposes of an examination will furnish a different response when read for pleasure. Then, in reading any book, there will be an inevitable distorting temporal gap between the time the book is written and when it is read which, as that gap increases, will increase its possibility to distort response. Finally, there are inevitable psychological differences between reader and reader; individuals will vary greatly in their reaction to real human suffering and, hence, fictional human suffering. This same kind of difference can exist between the author and the reader. Booth touched on this conflict, maintaining that we may simply dislike the attitude which an 'implied author' adopts to the characters and events he depicts.

This sense of authorial presence is paramount for Slatoff: " ... literary works require that we respond not only to the words and formal structures themselves but to qualities of mind and temperament that they suggest and reflect." ⁴⁸ When we read we have " ... a sense of being

talked to by someone." ⁴⁹ Again this 'someone' is not to be associated directly with the biographical entity of the author, but more with a kind of narrative presence which exists within and only within a particular work. Slatoff even goes so far as to say that part of our response is a sharing of the author's artistic attempts to handle his material; thus we respond to formal elements, but those by no means are the necessary focus of our response. Nor is that response to the presence of the author confined to fiction: "But I believe too," says Slatoff, "it is more generally recognized that poems are usually the utterances of particular consciousnesses and are responded to as such." ⁵⁰

Slatoff also attacks the notion that characters are to be conceived as mere verbal constructions, who have no 'real' existence outside the text. In fact, we have to think of characters as real people in order for fiction to work. That we do in fact imagine characters in this manner is shown by the fact that we imagine characters as having ongoing lives, just like people; if we did not, if characters were mere verbal constructions, they would have to be recreated each time they appeared 'on the scene'. As well, despite the great variety in literary

structures and verbal constructions, we are able to conceive of characters -- say Emma, Molly Bloom, Mrs. Dallo-way, and Pamela -- in much the same way, that is, as people who are "similarly immediate, full, and alive." ⁵¹ This is a kind of 'filling in' which is required of the reader in order to make literature work; and it is not confined to characters. We do the same kind of thing with 'scenes' and 'atmospheres'. Finally, Slatoff maintains that to distinguish between real and literary characters is to maintain too glibly that we have a solid understanding of the essence of real people. (In an ironic sense, fictional people can be more real than 'real' people for we are allowed to know them better).

Literature has the ability to move the reader profoundly, even disturbingly; indeed, this is its value. And its power to do so lies in the implication of our deepest emotions and intellectual beliefs. And it has the power to disturb us because it opens up new experiences for us, different ways of thinking and knowing. "In a word," says Slatoff, "because literature counts on it, the reader must bring his own consciousness and experience to bear." ⁵² For Slatoff then, what literature does is to implicate us, to extend our experience, our ways of knowing

and feeling. Literature is closely linked with life and Slatoff sees a danger in the attempts of criticism to separate them.

Slatoff's position may be regarded, from our viewpoint, as a refinement of Booth's. In the interaction between author and reader, the author implicates and plays upon the reader's beliefs.

We concluded Chapter I by suggesting the need for literary criticism to examine more closely the interaction between text and reader. The 'affective' critics have done that, each in his own way. Some have found, as Dewey has suggested, that aesthetic experience cannot be separated from ordinary experience. Booth has argued vehemently that our mundane feelings are implicated as we read literature, and are necessarily so to make literature work. Both Iser and Holland maintain that in literature, we have access to vicarious experience (fantasy, in Holland's case), and Iser suggests a connection between reading literature and personal development, a connection which Dewey suggests about art and which Britton takes up in his theory. As well, Fish, Iser, Slatoff, and Barthes all hit upon the idea that we, as readers, are called upon to fill in

narrative gaps in fiction from our own experience of the world; in fact, for them, this is how fiction works.⁵³

At the same time, we see a parallel aesthetic principle developing with these critics -- the idea that a work of literature as a linguistic utterance cannot really be divorced from other kinds of verbal utterances. This, as we shall see, is a basic tenet of Britton's theory. Fish begins by stating that he sees no point in distinguishing between the literary use of language and other uses of language. Most strikingly, Poulet, Booth, Iser, Holland, and Slatoff all discuss the sense of being talked to by someone when they read -- a narrative presence. Also Barthes' structuralist analysis of narrative provides for the narrative presence. The relationship between what Booth has called the 'implied' author and the 'implied' reader is also developed by Britton. Finally, it is interesting that Fish and Poulet find that a work of literature can have no extractable meaning. For this, too is an ultimate implication of Britton's theory.

The ideas of this critical movement, though important, are fragmented. There is a need to integrate them into a more general theory. James Britton's theory of response provides a structure which subsumes these

fragmented ideas, enabling us to gain a perspective on these critics and to discern the direction in which they point.

Footnotes

¹ W. K. Wimsatt, "The Affective Fallacy," The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1954), p. 21.

² Wimsatt, p. 32

³ Wimsatt, pp. 34-35

⁴ T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1934), p. 145

⁵ Wimsatt, p. 38

⁶ Wimsatt, p. 39

⁷ Wimsatt, p. 39

⁸ Norman N. Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 52.

⁹ Holland, p. 30

¹⁰ Holland, p. 75

¹¹ Holland, p. 132

¹² Holland, p. 161

13 Wimsatt, p. 21.

14 Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 401.

15 Fish, pp. 387-388.

16 Fish, p. 393

17 Fish, p. 408

18 Fish, p. 407

19 Fish, p. 410

20 Fish, p. 401

21 Fish, pp. 400-401

22 Fish, pp. 400-401

23 Roland Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," The Structuralists from Marx to Lévi-Strauss, ed. Richard T. and Fernande M. De George (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972), p. 149.

24 Ibid., p. 152

25 First published in Communications VIII (1966)
pp. 1-27

26 Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the
Structuralist Analysis of Narrative," New Literary History
VI, 2 (1975), p. 241.

27 Ibid., p. 266

28 Ibid., p. 243

29 Ibid., p. 251

30 Ibid., p.270

31 Ibid., p.265

32 Wolfgang Iser, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's
Response in Prose Fiction," Aspects of Narrative, ed.
J. Hillis Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press,
1972), p. 8.

33 Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomen-
ological Approach," New Literary History, III (1972), p.
284.

34 Ibid., p. 284

35 Ibid., p.292

36 Ibid., p. 295

37 Georges Poulet, "Phenomenology of Reading," Issues in Contemporary Criticism, ed. Gregory T. Polletta (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973), p. 104

38 Poulet, p. 105

39 Poulet, p. 106

40 Poulet, p. 110

41 Poulet, p. 109

42 Poulet, p. 104

43 Wayne Booth, "Emotions, Beliefs, and the Reader's Objectivity," The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961; rpt. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 123.

44 Booth, p. 129

45 Booth, p. 133

46 Booth, p. 147

47 Walter J. Slatoff, With Respect to Readers: Dimensions of Literary Response (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 24.

48 Slatoff, p. 132

49 Slatoff, p. 93

50 Slatoff, p. 99n.

M. H. Abrams also expresses similar ideas about poetry in "Belief and the Suspension of Disbelief," Literature and Belief: English Institute Essays 1957 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) _/

"... I think the issue of morality and belief in poetry has been made to seem unnecessarily recondite because of the common tendency to define a poem as a special kind of language, or a special structure of words and meanings, and then to slip in characters and actions quietly through the back door." (p. 13)

"The skillful poet contrives which of our beliefs will be called into play, to what degree, and with what emotional effect. Given a truly impassive reader, all his beliefs suspended or anaesthetized, he would be as helpless in his attempts to endow his work with interest and power, as though he had to write for an audience from Mars." (p.17)

51 Slatoff, p. 16

52 Slatoff, p. 66

53 There is some interesting recent psycholinguistic research which suggests that something like this happens in ordinary verbal communication. Bransford, J. D., Barclay, J. R., and Franks, J. J., "Sentence Memory: A Constructive Versus Interpretive Approach," Cognitive Psychology, III (1972, 193-209)_/ "In a broader sense," the study concludes, "the constructive approach argues against the tacit assumption that sentences "carry meaning." People carry meanings, and linguistic inputs

merely act as cues which people can use to recreate and modify their previous knowledge of the world. What is comprehended and remembered depends on an individual's general knowledge of his environment." (p. 207)

III - James Britton

Unlike the critics in the previous chapter, James Britton is not solely concerned with literature and literary response. He approaches those topics from the much broader overview of man's entire linguistic activity, placing literature in a more encompassing perspective than most literary critics do. Britton theorizes that man, for different purposes, assumes either the role of participant -- to carry out practical matters in his world -- or the role of spectator -- to detach himself from his world and evaluate his life and the lives of those around him. Each role is characterized by a special kind of language use -- literature being a manifestation of language use in the spectator role. The major statement of his linguistic theory is contained in Language and Learning (1970). As well, two essays, "Response to Literature" (1968) and "The Role of Fantasy" (1971) complement the theory put forth in his book.

It should be noted at the outset that Britton's viewpoint is primarily, though not exclusively, that of an educator: his views on literature are grounded in studies of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, as well as literary theory. To a certain

extent Britton is behaviorally oriented, concerned as he is with theories, experiments, and personal observations about how we use language. Such practical concerns serve to liberate Britton from the potential myopia of a viewpoint which is solely literary. Indeed, his extra-literary background makes his view of literature all the more interesting and extensive.

At the end of the last chapter, we saw that two significant ideas about the nature of literary response emerged from a discussion of what we might call the 'affective' critics. The ideas however remained rudimentary and unrelated. James Britton's theory of literary response will prove useful in integrating these fragmented ideas.

"The role of Fantasy" is a brief article about the nature of children's play; in it James Britton suggests: '... that the arts (including literature) represent a highly organized activity within the general area of 'play' ... " ¹ This statement may at first seem absurd, or certainly naive, but Britton's assumption is based on a belief, suggested by Langer, that life has its 'artistic mode'. Basing his views on the study of children, Britton believes that man's experience comes to him primarily in the form of images which antedate his use

of words (his discursive understanding), and which continue to function in association with, and independently of, words. On the one hand Britton has distinguished a mode of activity whereby man attempts to understand the actual world, to picture an increasingly more accurate representation of it -- his acquisition of discursive knowledge. But on the other hand, there are times when human beings improvise on that representation for seemingly very impractical purposes. This is especially true of children's play, or of adult day-dreaming, or of dreams themselves. The point Britton wishes to make here is that while we are involved in such fantastic activities, there may be little concern for verisimilitude and the events acted out may take place in an unfaithful representation of the 'real' world, but that this does not mean that the activity lacks organization altogether. Like Langer, Britton claims there are alternative ways of organizing experience, alternative ways of knowing. Interestingly Britton sees literature to which we respond aesthetically, as a manifestation of the same mode of organization which operates in children's play.

a) The Nature of Experience

Like Dewey, Britton believes that we construct for ourselves a view of the world, which changes and grows as we assimilate experience. In Language and Learning Britton states: "... we construct a representation of the world as we experience it, and from this representation, this cumulative record of our past, we generate our expectations concerning the future; expectations which, as moment by moment the future becomes the present, enable us to interpret the present." ² I have suggested that we construct this world view by two modes of understanding -- in Langer's terms, the discursive and the non-discursive. Dewey has hypothesized that the human organism is perpetually involved in the activities of 'doing' and 'undergoing': the organism acts, and when this action is thwarted, the organism is forced into reflection. For Dewey this, in essence, is the fundamental rhythm of human life. Forced into reflection, we must bring to bear our past experience to deal with a new, disparate experience. Having re-achieved a state of harmony after a particular disturbing phase of disparity, we are conscious of having had a very powerful experience. And what gives this experience its power is its emotion. The

organism's reflection is not purely discursive; our sentient being comes into play.

Britton has identified two main activities by which human beings deal with their world which he calls the participant role and the spectator role. ³

In the participant role we are preoccupied with getting things done in the world, and this involves behavior which is both overt purposeful activity, and covert mental activity. Our chief concern is to function in or to establish a coherent, accurate representation of the world.

In the role of spectator, however, our concerns are no longer so practical. The mode of activity in the spectator role -- as opposed to participant activity: overt purposeful activity; intellectual comprehension; and perception -- is the mode of detached evaluation. In the participant role, we are concerned with 'the way things are' in the world; in the spectator role, our concern is with 'the way we feel about things!'. Our evaluation is an emotional one. This is not to say that we adopt the role of spectator only when we are isolated from participant activities. Certainly there are times when we do, but often we are evaluating almost as we

participate; in fact, as we live we adopt and interchange the two roles continuously, often almost simultaneously. But there will also be times when we deliberately detach ourselves from our activities in the world in order to step back and evaluate what we are doing or what is going on around us. Also, it is important to realize that both roles of activity exist at every level of human endeavour, however mundane or sophisticated. "Both 'spectator' and 'participant'," states Britton, "... are used in a special and restricted sense: 'participant' is the key word to mark out someone who is participating in the world's affairs: 'spectator' is the label for someone on a holiday from the world's affairs, someone contemplating experiences, enjoying them, vividly reconstructing them perhaps -- but experiences in which he is not taking part." ⁵

Two things should be noted here. In the first place, participation does not necessarily mean physical action; our concern as participants is with 'the way things are', and our activity may well be mental. In the second place, detached evaluation in the spectator mode does not imply that we are not involved in what we observe. Britton illustrates the difference in the two modes of activity. He claims that in either mode, we tend to classify things

in our world. A domestic cat classified by 'the way things are' belongs to the same group as the tiger. But classified according to 'the way we feel about things', the domestic cat becomes something quite different from the tiger. The point Britton makes is that both classifications are essential and inevitable to the formulation of a coherent and balanced representation of the world.

Dewey has mentioned the role of emotion in constructing experience and Langer has written of the ability of our sentient being to 'perceive' experience. These two ideas relate to Britton's theory of the spectator role, where our detached evaluation is an emotional one. All three theories point to the formative importance of the spectator role.⁶ As spectators we can carry out our activity of detached evaluation as individuals where we witness and evaluate actual events. What comes into play in our evaluations are our interests, desires, sentiments, and ideals. We are no longer interested necessarily in comprehending events and could quite well be concerned only for the appearance of things. For example, at a football game, we may cease to be concerned about how the game works and become caught up in the game's similarity to war. The attitudes evoked in us can be more or less

intense depending upon our relationship to the participants and upon the bearing the event has to our own system of values. If we personally know one of the players at our football game, or if we have vivid and exciting memories of our own football games in youth, our evaluative attitudes will be affected. It is perhaps worth restating here Langer's view that the patterns of our sentient beings may often be unconscious, or ineffable; thus, we may be in a situation where we have a powerful reaction to some event we have witnessed and not really know why.

I mentioned earlier that the mode of detached evaluation can exist in close association with participant activities. Our detachment however will be vitiated the closer we are to participant activities, as in situations where we have tried unsuccessfully or have neglected an obligation to participate in events or in a situation where we are preparing for overt activity. The more we can detach ourselves, the more comprehensive will be our evaluation.⁷ Such detachment enables us to be more aware of our surroundings, more aware of possibilities of experience, simply by virtue of watching and evaluating events around us in terms of the way we feel about them. No doubt what we see will not merely confirm what we

already feel but will surprise us and extend our expectations of human experience. This notion relates to the theories of growth proposed by Dewey and Kelly. Britton has stated that as spectators: " ... in contemplating the new (the experience of which we are spectators) we are more than usually concerned with our total world view." ⁸

We are concerned with organizing the new experience in the light of the old, with anticipating future events, and with preserving our world view from fragmentation.

One more aspect of our role as individual spectators must be mentioned. While we are able to witness actual events, we are also able to remember and evaluate things in the past and perhaps, by virtue of this, anticipate future events; we also might imagine what we might have been, or what might be, as in fantasy or day-dreams.

But our social experience as spectators is liable to have an even more profound effect upon us. There can be no doubt that we are inescapably social. As spectators surrounded by our fellows, we may witness actual events; here we can be influenced even by the non-verbal reactions of those around us, their gestures, tears, laughter. Undoubtedly, we define ourselves (antagonistically, or congenially) by those around us. And here language has a

great impact upon our spectator experience because we are able to listen to someone's representation of events which have happened. There are social counterparts to the solitary spectator activities of day-dreaming, remembering past events, anticipating future events. One counterpart is the cooperative play which children engage in; the other is gossip.⁹

Britton has stated that in the spectator role we are more than usually concerned with our world view, and one aspect of our concern is to preserve it from fragmentation, or, in Dewey's terms, to maintain the sense of a unified whole which is the essence of sanity. Gossip provides us with the opportunity of social interaction where we can share experiences and our attitudes to those experiences. "We become experienced people," states Britton, "... as a result of the fusion of other people's experience with our own."¹⁰ Spectator role activity is life in the artistic mode (in Langer's sense). For Britton, what we have come to regard as artistic literature is organically rooted in gossip.

b) The Role of Language

Britton's main interest is in the linguistic activity of the participant and spectator roles,

particularly the latter. In the Foreword to Language and Learning, he states: "As spectators we use language to contemplate what has happened to us or to other people, or what might conceivably happen; in other words, we improvise upon our world representation and we may do so either to enrich it, to fill its gaps and extend its frontiers, or to iron out its inconsistencies. In Britton's view, literature is one, but only one, manifestation of linguistic activity in the spectator role. Here Britton's difference from the critics discussed in Chapter II must be stressed; their points of view are almost exclusively confined to literature, whereas Britton's encompasses linguistic activity in general.

Britton stresses the crucial part which language plays in our lives; it is the prime tool by which we negotiate experience. Britton states: "Before a child can 'make something' of experience, in the sense of turning it to his advantage, he must make something of it in the sense of reducing flux to order and there can be no doubt whatever that language is a principal agent in achieving this in all normal cases."¹¹ This ability to use language is uniquely human. In the rudimentary stages of our development as children, our speech is riveted to

the concrete environment until we learn that words can take the place of objects in it. For the human being words become symbols, and, as Susanne Langer emphatically points out, man's power of symbolizing is the essence of his humanity. Britton, agreeing with Jerome Bruner, states that a child's first use of language serves to regulate, organize, and extend the representations of his world made in the 'enactive' and 'iconic' modes of perception. It is as if we construct a representation of the world by constructing a filing system which processes the images of our experience. Language then facilitates a more extensive and efficient system. ¹²

Britton states: "... language is a highly organized, systematic means of representing experience, and as such it assists us to organize all other ways of representing." ¹³ Language used strictly in this manner is language used in the participant role. It is essentially discursive, a classification system according to 'the way things are', and is used to construct an increasingly faithful representation of the world.

In our discursive use of language we are largely concerned with practical matters, with the way things are. "We did observe, however," states Britton, "that our

representation of the world is affected also by the projection of individual feelings, our needs and desires: let us regard this now as involving an alternative mode of classifying -- a classification in accordance with 'the way I feel about things.'¹⁵

In Britton's view, a kind of polarity exists in linguistic activity. Discursive thought gives rise to a scientific use of language which becomes gradually more objective so as to evolve into pure symbol systems. Non-discursive thought, on the other hand, gives rise to literature and art, generally. On one end of this language activity continuum, then, we have the discursive use of language which culminates in a scientific treatise; on the other end we have the non-discursive use of language (gossip) which culminates in a work of literature. In between these two poles fall what could be called artistic and scientific modes of activity; activities in these modes, of course, culminate in neither art nor science, but lie somewhere in between. Moreover, Britton would say that activity in the artistic mode is that of the spectator role, and activity in the scientific mode is that of the participant. Language in the spectator role Britton calls the poetic use of language; language in participant role,

'rudimentary' class of utterances than gossip, which functions in what Britton calls 'the expressive mode'. Such a class of utterance is entirely embedded in the immediate situation, and can only be understood by those involved in that situation. For example, a good friend of mine may ask me what I think of so-and-so, a mutual acquaintance. My reply might be simply, "Ugh!" accompanied by a grimace. Here is a one syllable reply, not even a word really, and yet its 'meaning' will be conveyed in a perfectly clear fashion to my friend; there is no doubt how I feel about our mutual acquaintance. I can get away with my sparse reply because of the absolute mutuality and reciprocity I have with my friend -- we share a common world of experience. This combination of speech (or sound) and gesture which together becomes a kind of speech act occurs much more commonly than we perhaps realize. The expressive mode comes into play whenever speaker and listener share a common world of experience, for however brief a time. Even when I seek to purchase gasoline at a service station, often all I need to do is hold up a five dollar bill and indicate the appropriate pump to the attendant. The first example of language use in the expressive mode, the interchange with my friend, might be considered as a classifica-

tion according to the way I feel about things (the spectator role); the second is a 'gesture-utterance' for the purpose of getting things done in the world (the participant role). But as utterances divorced from their respective receivers (i.e. removed from the immediate situation), they would be totally meaningless. Speech in the expressive mode is entirely dependent upon a shared world of experience between speaker and hearer.

The corollary to this is that there will be pressure on the expressive mode as soon as one of the hearers no longer shares a common world of experience. My friend may ask me what I think of so-and-so, a person of whom he knows virtually nothing. Or, to take our other example, my station attendant's son, who knows nothing about gasoline pumps, is left to mind the station when I happen to arrive in my car. In each of these situations my hearer and I no longer share the same context of experience. If I reply "Ugh!" to my friend's request, he will not know what I mean. Or if I gesture to the boy at the gasoline pumps, he will first need to have more explicit information before he can comply with my request. We are forced out of the expressive centre into the transactional or poetic mode of language use, as the case may be.

Now as the hearer shares less and less of his speaker's world of experience, the utterances must become gradually more explicit to account for this lack of mutuality. In the transactional mode, as we move from the expressive centre to the pole, we have manifestations of the transactional use of language in which the speaker and hearer have less and less personal reciprocity -- the play-by-play description of a televised hockey game, an on-the-scene news report, a newspaper article, a scientific text book. Each of these is increasingly more explicit. Langer maintains that discursive symbolism, as opposed to presentational, culminates in symbolic logic, an absolutely explicit discursive form. It should be added that transactional language activities are often embellished with rhetorical devices from the poetic mode. But transactional speaking and writing generally deal the 'way things are' in the world; transactional language is concerned essentially with the 'facts' of the world, however transient and mutable these 'facts' may prove to be.

c) Literature as Experience

Of the transactional and poetic modes of language activity, Britton states: "We all use language in both these ways, to get things done in the outer world and to

manipulate the inner world. Action and decision belong to the former use; freedom from them in the latter enables us to attend to other things -- to the forms of language, the patterns of events, the feelings. We take up as it were the role of spectators: spectators of our own past lives, our imagined futures, other men's lives, impossible events. When we speak this language, the nearest name I can give it is 'gossip'; when we write it, it is literature." ¹⁷ Britton's definition, of course, is not normative; that is, he does not define literature as writing which surpasses some threshold of excellence. Rather, for Britton, literature is writing in the spectator role and his interest lies in studying literature to see if its roots lie in common experience.

I have already discussed gossip to some extent. Through gossip, it is possible for someone to represent to me, for my evaluation, an event we have both participated in, or, equally, an event I may have missed altogether. From here it is only a step, though a crucial one, to say that it is possible for someone to represent to me for my evaluation an event which might happen, an imaginary event. And this is essentially what happens when we tell stories, and similarly, therefore, when we

write stories. According to this view, all forms of storytelling, true or fictional, spoken or written, are narratives which invite onlookers to join in evaluating some possibility of experience. ¹⁸

As the form of discourse in the transactional mode is conditioned by the audience, or more specifically by a gradually less immediate audience, so, too, in the poetic mode. I might write a letter to a close friend, in which I tell him an anecdote about some mutual acquaintances. This letter, if made public, would be intelligible to only a few people. A novelist, on the other hand, must write for an unknown public, and this audience will put pressure on him to objectify his writing. ¹⁹ In transactional writing an author offsets the personal anonymity of his audience by making his discourse more explicit. Langer has characterized art as a non-discursive symbol, as opposed to discursive articulation, so it follows that the novelist must make his creation more implicit to account for his public audience. A piece of literature is a created object rather than a discursive exposition of objects in the world. A simple illustration of this implicitness-explicitness principle is that a text which is clearly transactional will state its intention, as, for example,

I have in this thesis: Whereas in literature the intention is not stated but implicit, embedded in the utterance itself.²⁰ A novel will often plunge its reader into the midst of the action. It is as if the utterance supplies its own context. Discursive writing deals with a world of reality (though perhaps mutable) which is external to the reader, while literature must create a fictive world in which the reader places himself. At this point Britton's theory clarifies some of the ideas which emerged from Chapter II. For example, Britton's theory of implicit writing coincides with Booth's theory of the implied author and reader. As well, Iser has mentioned that what makes a literary text unique is that the reader is drawn into the world of the novel.

Britton regards literature as a highly specialized way of enlarging and extending the discussions which we ordinarily have with each other about life.²¹ The author offers the reader some possibility of experience; he structures his attitude (the way he feels) towards his characters and events in a way he feels appropriate. Both characters and events are open to evaluation by the reader who can agree or disagree and who will ultimately be either enthusiastic or disappointed with what the author offers.

The reader is also free to evaluate the attitude which the author conveys towards the events he describes, an attitude which is as often implicit as explicit. The author here is implied, that is, the author behind the events and characters in a novel is not necessarily to be associated with the biographical entity of the author. Nonetheless, we do not ignore the authorial presence giving shape to his discussions; rather we evaluate his attitude.²² Here, what Poulet, Booth, Slatoff, and to some extent Holland say about the relationship between the author and the reader becomes clear. Part of the power of literature is indeed the reciprocity of consciousness which results when the author imbues his fictive world with his personal (though implicit) attitudes. In Britton's mind, such reciprocities are quite literally discussions of the possibilities of experience.

What does Britton have to say about literature that is art? The gossip who shapes his story, giving form to his experiences, undergoes the same basic processes as the writer of fictional literature.²³ Of course, each has a different audience, but both, as they move out of the expressive mode, become caught up in the telling of the story; the story becomes something important for its own sake,

something to be shaped. "As expressive writing moves towards poetic," states Britton, "... it reaches a wider audience ... by heightening or intensifying the implicit. By the deliberate organizations of sounds, words, images, events, feelings -- by formal arrangement in other words -- poetic writing is able to give resonance to items which in a less carefully organized utterance would be so inexplicit -- so minimally supported or explained in the text -- as to be merely puzzling to a reader who was not intimate with the writer and his audience." ²⁴

Literature, then, is a manifestation of language use in the spectator mode and Britton views a work of literature as a special convention whereby the author 'discusses' some possibility of experience with the reader. Literature, of course, is communication of a special sort. The sophisticated reader is aware that his relationship with the author is a special one. The writing is objectified; the events read or heard are not real, but virtual. ²⁵ In reading a work of literature we have the illusion of having an experience; there is a semblance of experienced events. "The satisfaction I have in the story, says Britton, "is the kind of satisfaction I derive, not from having an experience, but from looking back

on one I have had: it is as though I were to go back over an experience I have not had!"²⁶ Thus, for Britton, the experience of literature is not vicarious participation, but, as it were, vicarious spectating. Literature enables us to achieve an imaginative insight into the experiences of others.

Here Britton integrates another idea from Chapter II. Both Iser and Holland made claims that a work of literature is an experience which the reader undergoes. Less explicitly, Booth, Poulet, and Slatoff support this view as well. Britton relates two important concepts: literature as experience and literature as utterance. Now we are able to see how the two notions are compatible. How, then, does Britton account for our aesthetic responses to literature?

Britton accounts for them much in the same way as Dewey has accounted for our responses to art. The power of literature, taken in Britton's sense of virtual experience, is that it can be as formative as raw experience. The processes which are called into play in the assimilation of primary experience, can also be called into play to assimilate virtual experience. We are able, and sometimes forced, to reconstruct our world view. Britton states: "... new experiences are interpreted, structured

in the light of the old, and in that modified form incorporated: the body of experience, the world representation, is modified, reinterpreted, in the light of the new, and its comparative unity and coherence as far as possible maintained." ²⁷ We acquire imaginative insight into the experience of others, thereby building up the social context in which we live. "Looked back on," Britton states, "the experience others have related merge into the experiences we have had ourselves: as a basis for making generalizations, judgments decisions, we call upon both. We become experienced people, in other words, as a result of the fusion of other peoples' experience with our own." ²⁸ Britton maintains ultimately that there is a positive human need for the spectator role -- the need to preserve our world views from fragmentation. According to Dewey, this preservation or reconstruction of the world view is the source of the aesthetic emotion. It follows that our capacity to assimilate virtual experience (literature) is not constant; the ability to respond to more sophisticated works of literature is related to a corresponding growth of the world view. Our sophistication of response to literature will grow as we gain more experience in both life and literature. We have all had the experience of re-reading a novel and finding what was once engrossing

re-reading a novel and finding what was once engrossing has become flat and trivial. But there are other works of literature which grow in richness as we grow, and even some we find rewarding where once we were incapable of response. For Britton, this involves the perception of forms in literature.

d) Perception of Form

In the spectator role, just as the writer is able to concentrate on the form of his writing, so the reader is able to pay more attention to form. For Britton, the perception of forms in literature is not excluded to the perception of the forms of the medium itself; we also perceive the pattern of events and the changing tensions and interactions of feeling. Our ability to perceive literary form is gradually achieved. "Our sense of form increases," says Britton, "as our frame of reference of reality grows with experience, primary and secondary, of the world we live in."²⁸ As we read more and as we experience more of the world, we are able to respond to more sophisticated works of literature. The interaction between the acquisition of both primary and secondary experience is reciprocal, each extending the other. "Progress

/in perceiving literary form/ lies in perceiving gradually more complex patterns of events," says Britton, "in picking up clues more widely separated and more diverse in character, and in finding satisfaction in patterns of events less directly related to ... expectations and, more particularly ... desires; at the same time, it lies in also perceiving the form of the varying relationships between elements in the story and reality, as increasingly /we/ ... come to know that commodity." 30 Thus the forms to which we respond in literature, are not confined to the linguistic forms. Britton states: "... the forms of language itself -- its words with their meanings and associations, its syntax, its sounds and rhythms, its images -- these contribute to the total form, not as fringe benefits but as inseparable elements of a single effect."³¹

Britton sees a distortion in responding only to the linguistic apparatus. Here Britton draws upon Langer's distinction between discursive and non-discursive symbolic form: "A work of art ... is not a sequence of systematically related symbolic items -- as a logical verbal statement is, or an algebraic equation -- but is itself a complete symbol. It has 'organic' shape, that is to say it reflects in some way the tensions and rhythms that are

characteristic of every act of all living creatures. It achieves uniqueness and unity as a result of the way diverse modes of experience interlock within its highly complex structure." ³² A successful piece of literature possesses significant form or vital import, much as any other work of art. Our response to that vital import will be, in Dewey's sense, direct and unreasoned.

A work of literature does not lead discursively to an insight: rather, it is a constituted insight. In Dewey's words, it does the deed that breeds insight. For Langer and Britton the term 'meaning' as applied to art, is inappropriate and misleading; art has import not meaning. Just as the import of a work of art cannot be explained, so there can be no formulas for producing genuine works of art and, hence, imitations are shabby. The perception of form in literature involves a paradox of sorts: a piece of literature is a non-discursive symbolic form which takes what we normally regard as discursive symbols for its matter. Moreover, our handling of these discursive symbols on their own terms is tied closely to our personal growth, our world view. To contemplate form in literature presents us with a problem which does not confront us in the other arts, ³³ for literature presents

us with an all-embracing 'significant form' which unifies the piece of literature and is the essence of its import.

Literature, then, is virtual experience, a kind of vicarious way of spectating on other peoples' experience. Literature, in Britton's view, can serve a purpose which is quite pragmatic. Reading literature is one of several imaginative spectator activities which functions " ... to preserve our view of the world from fragmentation and disharmony, to maintain it as something we can continue to live with as happily as may be." ³⁴ For Dewey, as we have seen, this also accounts for our aesthetic responses to literature. According to Britton we cease to operate on the actual world via the representation we have made of it, and begin to operate directly on the representation itself. "Why do men improvise upon their representation of the world?" Britton asks. "Basically because we never cease to long for more lives than the one we have; in the role of spectator we can participate in an infinite number." ³⁵

Britton's theory provides a structure through which we are better able to evaluate the nature and trend of the 'affective' criticism described in the previous chapter. He successfully integrates its two major ideas

which previously appeared somewhat unrelated -- literature as aesthetic experience is related to ordinary experience, and as aesthetic use of language is related to ordinary use of language.

e) Implications

The theories delineated in Chapter II represent, at least in part, a trend that is a reaction to the extremes of New Criticism where it was assumed that a poem was an autonomous verbal object, the meaning of which being more or less eternal. That we respond aesthetically to literature has always been taken for granted. The 'affective' critics have also proposed that we respond to a work of literature as an experience or an utterance, or both. James Britton substantiates this new development in critical thinking; he is, in fact, in the mainstream of it even though he is not even a literary critic. Britton's theory of literary response maintains, first, that literature is a manifestation of linguistic activity in the spectator mode, and that it is a natural extension of quite ordinary language use. A work of literature is a non-discursive symbolic form possessed of a particular emotional import; it conveys the illusion of experienced events or 'virtual experience'. It is this semblance of

experienced events to which we respond. A work of literature enacts its meaning; it is not a repository of extractable meaning. It 'does its meaning', and is, itself, the most perfect expression of what it means.

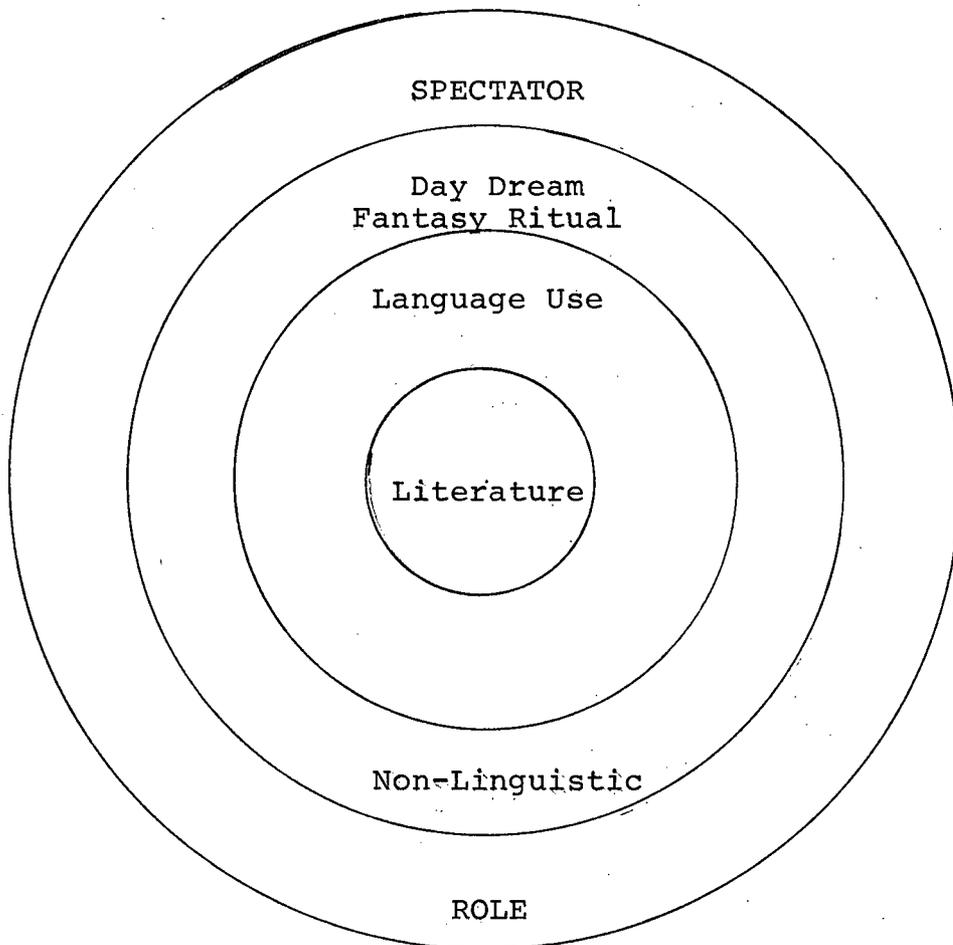
Britton has clearly demonstrated the relationship between the ideas of viewing literature as art, literature as experience, and literature as a particular linguistic phenomenon (utterance).³⁶ The difficulty with the 'affective' critics is that none adequately integrates these views of literature. Undoubtedly what enables Britton to gain an advantageous perspective on literature is simply that he is not solely preoccupied with literature and literary theory. His main concern is to establish a more general theory of language use and this necessarily leads him into other fields -- philosophy, sociology, psychology, linguistics. Indeed, his theory is all the more significant because much of it has been derived from actual observation of man's linguistic habits.

The major implication of Britton's theory is that it furnishes a new way of looking at literature. Stanley Fish has mentioned that the meaning of a work of literature lies in what it does, and that to view it as a repository of extractable meaning is inappropriate.

Perhaps we have for too long tended to view pieces of literature as artifacts or products. According to Dewey, Langer, and Britton, works of art (literature included) are non-discursive symbolic forms which possess a vital import to which we respond intuitively. Some of our responses may be phrased in discursive language, but equally, many may well not be amenable to discursive forms. Langer has suggested that art exists because of the inability of discursive forms to accommodate the full 'meaning' of life. All this suggests that it is wrong to sanction only discursive responses, as New Criticism did. One may also question the study and teaching of literature as if it were a body of knowledge with extractable meaning; we have perhaps long been labouring under an illusion.

In "The Role of Fantasy," Britton suggests that it is appropriate to view literature in the same light as children's play. His claim for play is that it allows a child to improvise upon his representation of the world in order to extend it or make sense of it. In other words, play is a process by which a child learns to handle the non-discursive aspects of his experience. In a sense, then, the end result of play is rather practical. He

holds a similar view of literature; when we read works of literature, we are not examining them as products, we are involved in a process -- one which is closely related to our personal growth. We assume the spectator role, where we are involved in discussions with other human beings, much the same as we gossip with one another about the possibilities of life. Thus, Britton holds a non-normative view of literature. He considers any writing in the spectator mode as literature. One might diagram Britton's perspective on literature thus:



A work of literature placed in Britton's perspective tends to disappear as an object of discursive study.

There are also consequent ramifications for what has long been called 'aesthetic response'. Britton would say that all of what we come to call experience in the spectator role is aesthetic, a work of art or literature providing a very special kind of experience in that role. Dewey's theory certainly supports this view of things. Langer claims that there is a side of man which is 'artistic' by nature and which will manifest itself; this side of man might be called man in the spectator role. One can say, I think that it is our spectator role activity which provides the aesthetic element in our lives. Our relationship with a work of art is a process which, ideally, continues throughout a lifetime. This process might appropriately be called a learning experience for our personal growth is intimately implicated.

Britton's experience as an educator provides him with a view of literature as a manifestation of man's 'languaging' activity. A piece of literature is not only an acknowledged classic, it is also a schoolboy's poem about tadpoles. The single most interesting point about

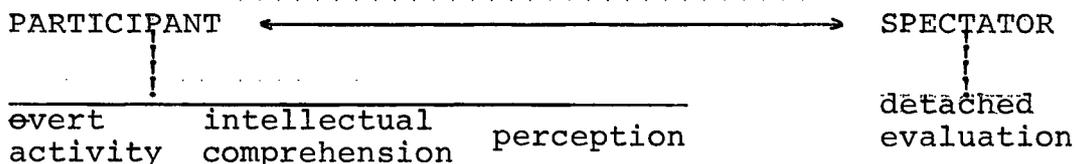
Britton's theory is that he quite literally puts literature in its place, and he is able to do so because his perspective is not solely literary. His preoccupation with language reflects, in turn, a preoccupation with learning: thus the title of his book. To expand one's view of the world is to learn, and literature provides an invaluable source of secondary experience by which to do this. As we read literature and respond to it, we learn -- about ourselves and about the world around us. For Britton such 'learning' is the aesthetic experience of literature.

Footnotes

¹ James N. Britton, "The Role of Fantasy," English in Education, V.3 (Winter, 1971), p. 42

² James N. Britton, Language and Learning (1970; rpt. London: Pelican Books, 1972), p. 13

³ The theory of the spectator-participant roles was first put forth by D.W. Harding in two essays. The ideas he proposed in "The Role of the Onlooker" / Scrutiny, VI, 3 (1937), pp. 247-58 / he later developed in "Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction" / British Journal of Aesthetics, II 2 (1962), pp. 133-45 / Harding proposes that in these roles we are involved in different modes of activity:



In the participant role we engage in purposeful action itself, activity to get practical things done in the world. But we also comprehend intellectually things around us, as (say) in figuring out how a machine works. As well, we look at things and listen to them, not always to understand them intellectually, but sometimes to organize them at the level or perception; we study a phenomenon or an experience for its own sake (as in looking at a stretch of landscape or studying the structure of a building) and make no attempt to evaluate. In this mode of perception We are primarily interested in the pattern of things. Harding states that we attempt: "... the effort simply to extend and refine our perceptual experience and to unify it into increasingly complex and subtle wholes,

always at the level of perception." ("The Role of the Onlooker," p. 249). Functioning in this mode of perception, however, we often cease to appreciate the mere pattern of things. In looking at the pattern of a country side, for example, we might often make statements about how pleasant the view is, or how it reminds us of the place where we grew up. A subtle shift has taken place: we have adopted the rolé of spectator. We are no longer concerned about establishing a coherent, accurate representation of the world. The mode of the spectator role is the mode of detached evaluation.

5. Language and Learning, p. 104

6 D. W. Harding states in "The Role of the Onlooker": "The event we look on at from a distance affects us, but it is set in a wider context than the urgencies of participating relationships usually permit us to call up around events. And for this reason, if we could obliterate the effects on a man of all occasions when he was 'merely a spectator' it would be profoundly to alter his character and outlook." (p. 253)

7 Harding states in "Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction": "Detached and distanced evaluation is sometimes sharper for avoiding the blurrings and bufferings that participant action brings, and the spectator often sees the event in a broader context than the participant can tolerate." (p. 136)

8. Language and Learning. p. 121

9 In "The Role of the Onlooker," Harding states: "Gossip is the second method through which the possibilities of experience -- reported or imagined -- may be communicated and evaluated." (p.257)

- 10 Language and Learning, p. 116
- 11 Language and Learning, p. 19
- 12 See Language and Learning, p. 190 ff.
- 13 Ibid., p. 21
- 15 Language and Learning, pp. 105-106
- 16 The model is largely adapted from Britton. I have added the 'scientific mode' and the 'artistic mode'.
- 17 James N. Britton, "Response to Literature," Response to Literature: The Dartmouth Seminar Papers, ed. James R. Squire (Champaign, Ill.: N.C.T.E., 1968), p. 9
- 18 In "Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction," Harding's intention is "... to view the reading of a novel as a process of looking on at a representation of imagined events, or, rather, of listening to a description of them." (p.134)
- 19 Collingwood has said: "The audience is perpetually present to [the artist] as a factor in his artistic labour; not as an anti-aesthetic factor, corrupting the sincerity of his work by considerations of reputation and reward, but as an aesthetic factor, defining what the problem is which as an artist he is trying to solve -- what emotions he is to express -- and what constitutes a solution of it. The audience which the artist thus feels as collaborating with himself may be a large one or a small one, but it is never absent.

20 An apparant contradiction of this would be something like Paradise Lost, where Milton states his intention is to justify God's way to man. Yet the fulfillment (or failure to do so) of this intention is not really why we appreciate Milton's epic.

21 Discussions of life may include, paradoxically, events which are clearly not possible in reality -- fantasies. "In all forms of fantasy," states Harding, "whether dreams, day-dreams, private musings or make-believe play, we give expression to perfectly real preoccupations, fears, and desires, however bizarre or impossible the imagined events embodying them." ("Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction," p. 136)

22 Harding elaborates: "The 'discussion' may seem a one-sided affair since the reader is unable to answer back. But he is none the less active in accepting or rejecting what the author asserts. In the first place, the author offers what he claims to be possibility of experience; the reader may in effect say 'No: that action of the hero is inconsistent with what he has said or done before; that monster of iniquity isn't humanly possible; that sudden repentence could never have happened ... ' Secondly, the author conveys what he regards as appropriate attitudes towards events, characters and actions. He is constantly -- but of course tacitly -- saying: 'Isn't this exciting ... He's attractive, isn't he ... Wasn't that tragic ... Isn't this moving ...?' Again the reader accepts or rejects the implied assessments." (Ibid., pp 139-40)

23 Britton's ultimate claim holds for poetry as well: "spectator role activity is primarily assimilative in function. Freed from the demands made upon us as participants in the world's affairs, we are able to take more fully into account our experience as a whole. To put the same point rather differently, even where a poet may focus narrowly upon some tiny particular such as a snowflake, yet it is with the whole of himself that he

looks. This item of his experience becomes as it were a small peephole through which we can see a great deal of his personality. A concern with the world-as-I-have-known-it, with my total representation, is essentially an assimilative activity -- a digestive activity, if the crude figure can be accepted." ("The Role of Fantasy," p. 42)

Also, Langer states: "Every successful work of literature ... is an illusion of experience. It always creates the semblance of mental process -- that is, of living thought, awareness of events and actions, memory, reflection, etc. Yet there need not be any person in the virtual world who sees and reports. The semblance of life is simply the mode in which virtual events are made." (Feeling and Form, p. 245)

Although there is an obvious difference between lyric poetry (say) and the novel, Langer suggests the difference is in rhetoric not in kind: "The virtual history that a lyric poem creates is the occurrence of a living thought, the sweep of an emotion, the intense experience of a mood ... The rhetorical form ∠ in lyric expression / is a means of creating an impersonal subjectivity, which is the peculiar experiential illusion of a genre that creates no characters and no public events." (pp. 259-60)

24 Language and Learning, p. 177

25 Britton adopts the notion of virtual experience from Langer. One of Langer's basic tenets is that all works of art create illusions of reality. "All forms in art," she says, "... are abstracted forms: Their content is only a semblance, a pure appearance, whose function is to make them, too, apparent -- more freely and wholly apparent than they could be if they were exemplified in a context of real circumstance and anxious interest. It is in this elementary sense that all art is abstract. Its very substance, quality without practical significance, is an abstraction from material

existence." (Feeling and Form, pp. 50-51) Thus, she says, in literature the poet "... uses discourse to create an illusion, a pure appearance, which is non-discursive symbolic form." (p. 211) The discursive forms of language when used in literature become, in a sense, transparent in order to facilitate the poetic illusion. "The experiences of events in our actual lives," says Langer, are fragmentary, transient, and often indefinite, like most of our experiences -- like the space we move in, the time we feel passing, the human and inhuman forces that challenge us. The poet's business is to create the appearance of 'experiences,' the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life." (p.212) The key to understanding art, for Langer, lies in the principle that we are perpetually constructing a sense of wholeness in our world; the work of art elicits and accentuates this sense of wholeness. Thus, a statue, to illustrate from the plastic arts, creates its own three-dimensional universe by creating the illusion of wholeness, of virtual kinetic volume, out of the infinity of volume around it; it makes tactual space visible. The plastic arts, Langer says, create the primary illusion of virtual space. The primary illusion of literature, she says, is virtual experience. Just as language is the dynamic symbolism of discursive thought, so, in art, it has the ability to represent experience intimately, in fact, create the illusion of experience. "Every successful work of literature," states Langer, "... always creates the semblance of mental process -- that is, of living thought, awareness of events and actions, memory, and reflection ... " (p. 245)

26. Language and Learning, p. 103

27. Language and Learning, p. 117

28 Ibid., p. 116

29 "Response to Literature," p. 5

30 Ibid., pp. 4-5

31 Ibid., p. 5

32 Language and Learning, p. 214

33 Langer, in claiming that any successful poem is a non-discursive symbolic form, claims insistence upon the extractable meaning of a piece of literature is caused by a confusion in realizing that the artist has used linguistic (discursive) forms as a medium to create a non-discursive symbol. "The natural result of the confusion between discourse and creation," she states, "is a parallel confusion between actual and virtual experiences. The problem of "Art and Life," which is only of secondary importance for the other arts, becomes a central issue in literary criticism." This confusion has implicated literary criticism in what Langer characterizes as a "welter of morals and politics, religion and modern psychiatry." (Feeling and Form, pp. 234-235)

34 Language and Learning, p. 117

35 "Response to Literature," pp.9-10

36 For an interesting theoretical application of Britton's classification of language use involving specific works of literature, see the second chapter, "The Modes of Discourse," of a dissertation by Arthur Applebee / The Spectator Role: Theoretical and Developmental Studies of Ideas about and Responses to Literature, with

Special Reference to Four Age Levels, unpublished dissertation (The University of London, 1973)./

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