Literature and The Value of Interpretation:

The Cases of The Tempest and Heart of Darkness

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Abbreviations

'UP' is used throughout for 'University Press'.

The abbreviated title of periodicals is used when this is common usage, for example 'TLS' for 'The Times Literary Supplement'.

The initial definite article has been omitted in the titles of periodicals and the name of publishers. Further, the shorter common usage of publishers' names has been used, for example 'Blackwell' for 'Basil Blackwell'.

Throughout, 'p.' for 'page' and 'n.' for 'note' are used.

Declaration

Chapter 6 of this study, 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: <u>The Tempest</u>' was published, with minor differences, in <u>The British Journal of Aesthetics</u>, 31 (1991), 122-133.

Summary

This study examines the value of literary interpretation. A case is argued on the basis of the possibility of literary works being understood as 'about' diverse 'themes'. The process of understanding literature, it is argued, inevitably involves the concerns and the personal and historical situatedness of the interpreter. In the performance history of Shakespeare's The Tempest we see clearly how the thematic focus and the representation of the elements of the work changes, sometimes radically, over time. An interpretation of The Tempest with an emphasis on today's concerns is the basis for a discussion which shows the interdependence of the questions of why literary works have survived as valued objects of attention over time, and how literature can matter to the reader. Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics shows, in its emphasis on the historical situatedness of understanding, how the reader's situation and concerns feeds into the process of making sense of literary works and thereby makes literary interpretation interact with the life of the interpreter.

'Themes', or what the work is seen to 'be about', is central to the process of literary interpretation. This, in particular, is where literature has its openness to accommodate application to diverse concerns and situations. To remedy the deficiency of Gadamer's hermeneutics on this point, the role of themes in literary interpretation is first illustrated by an interpretation of Conrad's Heart of Darkness and then analyzed.

The study argues that while different literary interpreters may have different purposes, for their procedures to constitute interpretations three criteria need to be observed. In having to reach an equilibrium between the requirements of faithfulness to the literary work on the one hand, and the understanding of it through one's own situation and concerns on the other, the process of literary interpretation makes a valuable contribution to understanding.

Introduction

Readers would hardly turn to literary works if they did not find it valuable to do so, but engaging with literature may be valued for different reasons. This study will mainly address an aspect of the question of why many readers have found that interpreting literature has, to use an imprecise formulation, changed and improved their understanding of themselves and their lives. Many would no doubt say that this comes about through 'what literary works tell us'. However, what the same work tells different people is often rather different. This would suggest that literary works are open to differing interpretations, which in its turn suggests that what the reader brings to the interpretation of the work affects what the work tells the reader. The main objective of this study is to analyze the nature of the process of literary interpretation and through this analysis find an answer, or answers, to how and why literary interpretation can 'change and improve' the readers' understanding of themselves and their lives.

The claim that literary works are open to differing legitimate interpretations is, of course, familiar. In The Open Work[1] Umberto Eco writes of the addressee's comprehension of the original artefact as 'always modified by his

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1. Umberto Eco, The Open Work, translated by Anna Cancogeni (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989).

particular and individual perspective'[2] and an openness of the work based on 'the theoretical, mental collaboration of the consumer'.[3] The views and theories of Eco constitute just one of a number of modern theories of literary interpretation, which it is not the role of this study to discuss. One should keep in mind, though, that interpretation of texts is not a recently invented activity and that disputes about the nature of this activity have been with us from the beginning of Western thought, most forcefully, perhaps, over the task of establishing the meaning of the Word of God. The modern phase of this history dates from the biblical hermeneutics of Schleiermacher. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in the second part of his Truth and Method,[4] discusses the history of modern hermeneutics to

2. Eco, 1989, p. 3.

3. Eco, 1989, p. 11.

4. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, edited by John Cumming and Garrett Barden, translated by William Glen-Doepel, from the second German edition (1965) of Wahrheit und Methode, second English edition (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979). References to Gadamer's work in this study will be to the English translation for reasons of linguistic consistency, though the most recent German edition has been consulted: Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge Einer Philosophischen Hermeneutik, Gesammelte Werke, Band 1, Sechste Auflage (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990). References to the German edition will be made in notes on

Heidegger.[5] Gadamer's work is seen in this study as a fruitful philosophical perspective on the role of the reader's situation with regard to the interpretation of texts. There are, however, serious shortcomings in Gadamer's hermeneutics with respect to literary interpretation since he does not address the particularities of <u>literary</u> interpretation.

It may at first sight look as if the <u>Rezeptionsästhetik</u> of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser could remedy these shortcomings. Both these theorists have learnt significant lessons from the hermeneutics of Gadamer, and the main focus for both is the reader in his or her encounter with the literary work.

Jauss is the one who follows Gadamer most closely. In contrast to the focus of this study, his main interest has been in literary history, and the use of the reader's horizon of expectation as an antidote to the prevalent

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the translation and will be given with page numbers only.

5. Gadamer, in the introduction to the first edition of <u>Truth and Method</u>, mentions Husserl, Dilthey and in particular Heidegger as his philosophical lineage. (Gadamer, 1979, p. xv). Though these philosophers, in particular Heidegger in <u>Sein und Zeit</u> (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986; first edition 1927), are very important for the character of Gadamer's hermeneutics, these connections will not be pursued in this study.

emphasis on author biography on the one hand and the construction of epochs, genres and tendencies on the other. Jauss maintains that a horizon of expectation can be identified from our own historical position,[6] which implies that we can ignore or bracket our historical situatedness. This seems to reintroduce the objectifying and somewhat scientistic attitude which was Gadamer's main object of attack in his Truth and Method. Though raising many of the important questions attendant upon the triangle of reader, work and history, Jauss's work lacks direct relevance to this study both in the fact that its main concern lies with literary history and in the nature of the theoretical construct itself.

Wolfgang Iser in The Act of Reading[7] is more interested in the process of making sense of a literary work than in literary history. The main difference between the approach taken in this study and Iser's, is that Iser conceives of literary interpretation largely as constructing mental images ('meaning is imagistic in character'),[8] whereas the aim of this study is to investigate how readers identify different parts of a literary text as more important than

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6. Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, translated by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 24.

7. The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (London: Routledge, 1978).

8. Iser, 1978, p. 8.

others, and how conceptual sense is made of these parts in an over-all interpretation of the work. Iser's 'imagistic' bias may be a product of the phenomenological orientation of Iser's theory, whose main influence is the phenomenologist and aesthetician Roman Ingarden,[9] rather than Gadamer. Ingarden emphasised that the various layers and dimensions he identified in literary works form schematic structures which must be filled in by the reader. For Ingarden, objects in literary works, in contrast to objects in the real world, are free of determinants and can in principle never be completely filled in.[10] Points of indeterminacy occur wherever it is impossible to say from the evidence of the text which attributes objects or objective situations have.[11] The indeterminacy he points out in the literary work is different from the one I wish to focus on, which is the indeterminacy concerning what in the work is interesting, relevant or fascinating to the reader, and not an indeterminacy of concretization such as whether Mrs. Dalloway

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9. Ingarden's main works in the theory of literature are The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature, translated by George G. Grabowicz (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1973) and The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art, translated by Ruth Ann Crowly and Kenneth R. Olsen (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1973). Both books were written in the 1930s.

10. Ingarden, The Literary Work of Art, p. 251.

11. Ingarden, The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art, p. 50.

wore black shoes or blue ones. Unfortunately it is this phenomenological perspective which directs Iser when he discusses how readers make sense of literary works. This bias can be seen most clearly when Iser discusses the cinematic representation of <u>Tom Jones</u>, which he says impoverishes the experience of one who has read the book first because it leaves no indeterminacies.[12]

This visual bias is as alien to this study as Iser's limitation of the reader's creative role in the reading process. When he introduces his foreground/background distinction, Iser makes it clear that what counts as either is manipulated by the text rather than influenced by the Gadamerian prejudices of the reader. Of his central theoretical construct, the Implied Reader, which is in a middle position between 'textual structure' and 'structured act', Iser nevertheless says that it 'embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect - predispositions laid down ... by the text itself'.[13] Further, when he discusses the similarities and differences between foreground/background and the figure-and-ground relationship in Gestalt psychology, he notes that a crucial difference is that 'figure and ground can be interchanged, with a resultant surprise effect, but this exchange is nearly always occasioned by outside influences,

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12. Iser, 1978, pp. 138-139.

13. Iser, 1978, p. 34.

whereas in literature the reversal is manipulated by structures within the text'.[14]

Fortunately free of any imagistic bias, Gadamer's perspective, grounded in the history of hermeneutics, is therefore a more fruitful theoretical perspective. Further, the best way to redress the lack of attention to the particular nature of literary interpretation in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is to engage with and in critical practice.

In the first section I offer the performance history of The Tempest as a diachronic illustration of how a literary work can be interpreted in different ways. I argue that the theatre offers a better perspective for this discussion than do the works of literary critics. Theatrical productions are interpretations of the work, in that they involve choices of what to present and how. However, unlike literary critics, the directors of plays have to appeal to an audience to remain in business. Therefore, the performance histories of plays are, in significant respects, public interpretation histories, and are more likely to reflect the changing concerns and tastes of the public. The investigation of the performance history of The Tempest, including a chapter of how the play has been interpreted in the context of post-colonial situations, shows that the concerns of the audiences have played a major part in how it has been represented on the stage. In the last chapter of the section I present a present-day, anachronistic interpretation of The

14. Iser, 1978, p. 95.

<u>Tempest</u>. The second part explores the basis of this reading and, with particular reference to Gadamer's hermeneutics, how the reader's situation may be a powerful influence on what he or she makes out as the theme of the work. My suggestion is that the potentialities some literary works have for 'application' to different concerns through openness to interpretation in terms of diverse themes, and the 'dialogue' with the audience that this feature invites, is an important element both in the value of literature and in the value of literary interpretation.

With the concept of 'theme' having been introduced in the last chapter of the section on <u>The Tempest</u>, the section on <u>Heart of Darkness</u> contains a detailed analysis of the process of identifying and justifying what the literary work 'is about', its theme. <u>Heart of Darkness</u> is a work which has been the focus of extraordinary critical attention, so much so that it has been called 'a literary critical highway'.[15] In the first chapter of the section on <u>Heart of Darkness</u>, 'Restraint in the Darkness', I join this highway by offering an interpretation of the work which uses the notion of 'restraint' to unify diverse elements of the work. This is an illustration of how one concept or notion can be used in interpretation to unify the work and make it address an issue, or a theme. This illustration forms the background for the detailed analysis of theme formation in three

15. At the first International Joseph Conrad Conference, Baranów Sandomierski, Poland, September 1991.

critical works on <u>Heart of Darkness</u>, which in its turn leads to a theoretical discussion of the role and sources of unity in literary interpretation, and the justification for attributing a theme to a literary work.

The last section of this study, 'A Theoretical Framework', is headed by a chapter which revisits some of the theorists discussed in the earlier, more critically involved sections,[16] with a discussion of the motivation and purpose of literary interpretation, and a further discussion of how literature is made to apply to the situation of the interpreter. This discussion is followed in the next chapter by the introduction of three criteria of literary interpretation. To avoid imposing a fixed view of literary interpretation, these criteria address the fundamental

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16. The sections on <u>The Tempest</u> and <u>Heart of Darkness</u> are case studies which suggest certain theoretical conclusions which can be demonstrated at a theoretical level. A full examination of these conclusions would involve a detailed testing of them against a wide range of examples, but there is not space for this in the present study. However, the two works are <u>prima facie</u> typical of literary works and definitely not marginal in that they are almost uniformly highly regarded. They also represent the theatrical as well as the narrative traditions. However, despite <u>The Tempest</u> being in verse form, some of the conclusions reached may not apply equally well to poetry. Some remarks on this aspect will be made in the study.

requirements of what it is for something to be related faithfully to something else. Models for these relationships are found in three truth theories in epistemology. It would seem that these criteria are applicable to written, as opposed to theatrical, interpretations, but it is less clear that they can be applied to theatrical interpretations; the discussion of this question forms the penultimate chapter. The final chapter relates the understanding of literary interpretation developed in this study to rational and reflective processes in other areas of inquiry, and concludes that we can, indeed, find value in the interpretation of literature.

SECTION I: THE TEMPEST

The Tempest and Theatrical Interpretations

Despite Aristotle's example, literary aesthetics and critical theory have only to a very limited extent concerned themselves with the theatre. There is an almost complete absence from the learned journals and the academic book-shelves of work done in this area. This goes for studies of how literary works are transformed by theatrical production, and also for the fact that remarkably few examples used in theoretical arguments relating to the literary arts are about productions or performances of plays. This section on Shakespeare's The Tempest will not in itself be able remedy this situation, but the hope is that the nature of this study will illuminate some of the central questions of literary aesthetics from this neglected source. That The Tempest as a play has had a life in two different, if related, traditions - those of literary interpretation and of stage performance - differentiates it from Heart of Darkness, which is the other main focus of this study, in relevant respects. The theatrical tradition has allowed greater scope for changes, adaptations and other creative licence than the academic tradition of literary inter-pretation has done. By bringing in the performance history of a well known and popular play such as The Tempest, a diachronic angle is provided for a discussion of the important question of how literature is interpreted and related to present situation and concerns. The reason for

this is that, as I shall argue below, the production of a play is a public interpretation of the text of it, which also has to appeal to the audience of the day.

In 'The Performance History of The Tempest', I trace the history of productions of the play mainly on the British Stage from 1611 to 1988. Of course, this history cannot be comprehensive in the present context. An inherent problem for this kind of study is the elusive nature of performances. This is, probably, one reason why literary critics and theorists usually refer to the text of the play rather than to actual performances, because the text is, in most cases, stable and unchanging. However, few plays are written only to be read (would they then have any claim to the genre of play?), and the author's intention in creating a play is in most cases to have it performed. Before the scrivener Ralph Crane transcribed The Tempest for the first Folio of 1623 one may even say that the play existed mainly as an anthology of performances; the only full copy of the text would be Shakespeare's manuscript. A written play is only a text, of course, the realization of which we see on stage. This truism, however, can only partly explain the great diversity of realizations of the text. Additional factors are the traditions of theatrical production and not least changes in taste and in the focus of popular interest.

Theatrical performances are ephemeral and usually we only have a few impressions from spectators to go on. John

Russell Brown may have put it too strongly when he said that: 'On no two occasions does a play seem the same; it cannot be held still for "examination"', but there is an element of truth in it.[1] Obviously, this presents us with considerable problems in tracing the performance history of a play in that the reliability of reviews and memoirs cannot be taken for granted. However, in the case of The Tempest we have access to a number of complete rewritings of the play. While these are not necessarily reliable guides to how the play was on stage, they still offer an opportunity to look closer at different conceptions of what the rewriters thought were the valuable features of The Tempest. While there are methodological problems with reviews and memoirs relating to productions of The Tempest, they are also valuable sources in themselves in that they record reactions and evaluations which, especially when they reflect different positions, are of great interest for this study. This is certainly the case when conflicting evaluations reflect opposition between the literary and the theatrical viewpoints. Lastly, there will be a discussion of three different productions of the play from 1988, where the methodological problem is different in that I was a member of the audience myself.

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1. John Russell Brown, 'The Theatrical Element of Shakespeare Criticism', in Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama, edited by Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia UP, 1969), pp. 177-195 (p. 182).

In the third chapter, 'Colonial Appropriations and Inter-pretations', I shall to a lesser extent concern myself with the diachronic reception of the play, but now with the focus on different interpretations of its 'colonial' theme, with particular attention to the adaptations of the play in the politically radical circles of the third world in the recent past. For radical political critics have found The Tempest to be a suitable vehicle for probing questions of colonial discourse and of imperialist bias in what they see as the Establishment literary canon. They argue that the conflict between the aesthetic qualities of the play and its political role is too often overlooked in Western societies, for, as one of them puts it: 'what for the English and, more generally, Europeans, could be a source of pride and a con-firmation of their civilization, for colonial subjects often became a chastening yardstick of their "backwardness"'.[2]

The fourth chapter of this section discusses the question of literary openness with special attention to the phenomenon of theatrical productions of The Tempest, their history and the fact that the play has been appropriated for political ends by anti-colonialist writers and directors. In other words it discusses the material presented in the two previous chapters. The similarities and differences between the reading and theatrical production situations of literary interpretation is a theme which runs through the chapter,

2. Rob Nixon, 'Caribbean and African Appropriations of The Tempest', Critical Inquiry, 13 (1987), 557-578 (p. 560).

concluding as it does with what I have chosen to call 'the paradigm of theatrical performance'.

The concluding chapter presents a reading of <u>The Tempest</u> which is anachronistic but also topical. The function of part one of this chapter is not to present this reading as the best or most comprehensive possible of the play, but to show how a contemporary concern with the powers of science and concern for the environment may lead a reader to appropriate the theme of the play to discuss this concern, the crucial move being to see Prospero as a proto-scientist. The second part of the chapter starts with a discussion of the rationale and status of such an interpretation, which in turn leads to a discussion of the relative value of topical versus perennial themes in literature and the motivation for identifying such classes of themes. In this context openness to accommodation as a criterion of literary excellence is also discussed.

The Performance History of The Tempest

According to the Revels Account of 1611, 'Hallowmas nyght was presented att Whithall before y⁴ kinges Maiestie a play Called the Tempest', by the troupe of the King's Players.[1] Since this date,[2] the first performance on record, The Tempest has been performed in different versions and under varying circumstances around the world. It is the purpose of this chapter to sketch the performance history of the play, with an emphasis on British productions. The theoretical consequences of the results from this chapter will be more fully discussed in the concluding chapter of this section.

As concerns the further history of the play in the theatre, we do not have much to go by in investigating the popularity of the play during the closure of the theatres, except for allusions in written work of this period. In The Shakespeare Allusion-Book, volume 1,[3] we find only nine allusions to the play dated before 1649. The second volume, which takes us from 1650 up to 1700, includes 31 allusions. In More

1. E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems, second volume (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), p. 342.

2. 1 November.

3. C. M. Ingleby, The Shakespeare Allusion-Book: A Collection of Allusions to Shakespeare From 1591 to 1700, revised and re-edited by John Munro, 2 volumes (London: Chatto, 1909).

Seventeenth Century Allusions to Shakespeare[4] we find nine allusions to The Tempest, none of which predate 1667, the year of its revival in an adaptation by John Dryden and Sir William Davenant called: The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island: A Comedy,[5] first published in 1670.

Less than a third is kept of Shakespeare's play, and much is added. Most productions of the Shakespearean classics are cut, that is sections of the text are left out for various reasons. The 'record' in the performance history of The Tempest, excluding rewritings, could well belong to Augustin Daley. For his New York revival, which opened 6 April 1897, The New York Times' estimate was that he had cut very nearly half of the lines of the original Folio version.[6] Most performances do not go quite as far, though, and in most cases we can no longer estimate the extent of the cuts because the plays are not available to us. In The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island: A Comedy the cuts are indeed

4. G. Thorn-Drury, More Seventeenth Century Allusions to Shakespeare (London: Dobell, 1924).

5. Davenant, Sir William, and John Dryden, 'The Tempest, or, The Enchanted Island: A Comedy', in The Works of John Dryden, volume 10, edited by Maximillian E. Novak, textual editor Robert Guffey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 1-103.

6. Mary M. Nilan, 'The Tempest at the Turn of the Century: Cross-Currents in Production', Shakespeare Survey, 25 (1972), 113-123 (p. 115).

available to us, but more interesting, perhaps, are the additions. Most significant are the new characters introduced by Davenant and Dryden. They are Hippolito, a boy that never saw a woman, Mustachio, Stephano's mate, Ventoso, a mariner, Dorrinda, also a daughter of Prospero who never saw a man, Milcha, a mate for Ariel and, of course, a sister to Caliban with the same name as his mother, Sycorax.

As one might guess from these additions to the cast, Davenant and Dryden were particularly concerned to explore 'the encounters of innocent love'. In fact, the four characters of Hippolito, Ferdinand, Dorinda and Miranda very nearly take over the play and Prospero, by most critics of Shakespeare's text of the play seen as its central character, is left with a less prominent position in the play. His role becomes that of a father who tries in vain to hold back the promptings of young libido. Jocelyn Powell puts this down to the Restoration need for precision and clarity of idea,[7] but does not address the main question this explanation raises: why should anyone find Miranda's innocence to be the most interesting theme to develop?

Dryden, in his preface, gives to his collaborator the dubious honour of having conceived the male counterpart to Miranda's innocence: 'he design'd the Counterpart to Shakespear's Plot, namely that of a Man who had never seen a

7. Jocelyn Powell, Restoration Theatre Production (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 68.

Woman; that by this means those two Characters of Innocence and Love might the more illustrate and commend each other'.[8] Hippolito is the Duke of Mantua, put in Prospero's charge by a dying father. Prospero finds that, according to his astrological calculations, Hippolito will perish if he sets eyes on a woman. Therefore, Hippolito is kept imprisoned so that he does not come in any kind of contact with Prospero's two daughters, Miranda and Dorinda. But of course it all ends well, and Hippolito is happily joined with Dorinda.

In The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island the plotters do not plot against Prospero but between themselves, which further contributes to putting Prospero out of focus. Two new characters, Ventoso and Mustachio, are followers of Stephano. This sub-plot has also been 'graced' with some love-interest, or lack of it. The upshot, at any rate, is a marriage of convenience between Trincalo (sic) and Sycorax, Caliban's sister, as she is thought by the plotters to be the inheritor of the island. The whole sub-plot ends with fighting over Sycorax. Of the other characters, Gonzalo is cut to a few lines, Sebastian is omitted altogether and Antonio does not plot against Alonzo. Ariel's mate Milcha is added, Jocelyn Powell suggests, to make full use of the flying machines the theatre uses for Ariel anyway. With the symmetry a mate affords, this prop can be exploited to the full by the two of them crossing each other in the air.[9]

8. Davenant and Dryden, p. 4.

9. Powell, p. 71.

<u>The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island</u> became a great success. Mrs. Inchbald, introducing John P. Kemble's 1789 version of <u>The Tempest</u>,[10] was prepared to claim of it even that 'it would never have become a favourite of the stage without the aid of Dryden's alteration. The human beings in the original drama had not business enough on the scene to make human beings anxious about them; and the preternatural characters were more wonderful than pleasing.'[11] So popular was their adaptation that the original was not again seen on the stage until 1746, when it ran for only six performances. In comparison, the Davenant and Dryden adaptation was performed thirty times more (180) in the period 1700-1750.[12]

Dutton Cook puts the success of Shadwell's 1673 version at the Dorset Gardens Theatre down to 'the novelty of its mechanical devices and decorations'.[13] Strangely, Cook says nothing about the fact that Shadwell revised Davenant and

10. John Philip Kemble, <u>The Tempest, or, The Enchanted Island</u>, performed 1797, edited by Martin Wright (London: Cornmarket Press, 1972).

11. John Russell Brown, 'Three Adaptations', <u>Shakespeare Survey</u>, 13 (1960), 137-145 (p. 139).

12. Charles Beecher Hogan, <u>Shakespeare in the Theatre 1701-1800: A Record of Performances in London 1701-1750</u> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), p. 460.

13. Dutton Cook, <u>Nights at the Play: A View of The English Stage</u>, Volume 1 (London: Chatto, 1883), '"The Tempest" at Queen's Theatre. - November 1871', p. 174.

Dryden's version into an _opera_. In this form it became hugely popular and was performed regularly well into the next century, with consistently high revenues for the theatre.[14]

The short run of the original version of The Tempest in 1746 was the only exception to the rule that Davenant and Dryden, or Shadwell, reigned supreme until 1756 when Garrick presented a new opera based on The Tempest at Drury Lane. Though it was well received on its opening night, with 'great applause' and receipts of £ 180, it ran to only six performances in all.[15] Only the bare essentials of Shakespeare's play were kept, and a few features from the late Restoration version brought in. It cannot have helped matters to fill the play with a total of 32 songs, only three of which were Shakespeare's.[16]

Garrick was also the director who restored the original The Tempest to the stage only a year later in October 1757. It became part of the repertory and ran until Garrick's retirement in 1776.[17] The text is relatively close to the

14. William Shakespeare, The Tempest, The Oxford Shakespeare, edited with an introduction by Stephen Orgel (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1987), pp. 66-67.

15. George Winchester Stone, jr., 'Shakespeare's Tempest at Drury Lane During Garrick's Management', Shakespeare Quarterly, 7 (1956), 1-7 (p. 3).

16. Stone, jr., pp. 4-5.

17. Orgel, p. 67.

original, in that only 14 lines are added and 432 cut. According to Stone, the cuts are made in fairly unimportant parts of the text.[18]

Says Stone: 'Apparently by 1757 the age was ready for the real Tempest.'[19] However, only 30 years later the age was again ready for a Davenant and Dryden-style Tempest, the 1789 text by John P. Kemble. Despite the popularity of the original in the thirty years preceding 1787, running to 114 London performances, it was not again performed on the London stage for the remainder of the eighteenth century after Kemble's version.[20]

In 1777 Sheridan produced a spectacular version at Drury Lane based on Garrick's text. According to Orgel[21] much of the appeal of Sheridan's production was due to spectacle, as was conceded by The Westminster Magazine when they criticized it for endeavouring 'to throw an enchantment suited to the childish taste of the present times'.[22]

Dutton Cook puts Kemble's relationship to the Davenant and Dryden version thus: 'John Kemble, though he mended it somewhat, was content to appear in Dryden's edition.'[23]

18. Stone, jr., pp. 5-6.
19. Stone, jr., p. 7.
20. Hogan, 1957, p. 717.
21. Orgel, p. 67-68.
22. Quoted by Orgel, p. 67.
23. Cook, p. 174.

However, it was mainly the Hippolito-Dorinda subplot Kemble took from Davenant and Dryden. In other respects it was much closer to the original. For instance, Ariel and Caliban do not have their female counterparts, and the comic scenes are more Shakespearean and free of the characters of Mustachio and Ventoso.

It was not, however, sufficiently Shakespearean to suit Hazlitt's taste. Though a popular play, Kemble's adaptation evidently did not please Hazlitt since he called it a 'sacrifice of poetical genius'.[24] In this review of Kemble's second version of The Tempest, Hazlitt vows never to go to another representation of a play of Shakespeare's by choice. 'To call it a representation, is indeed an abuse of language: it is travesty, caricature, any thing you please but a representation.'[25] It can safely be said that Hazlitt is going against the grain in his criticism, in that the popularity of the play, in Davenant and Dryden's version as in Kean's, was indisputable. It is quite evident that what Hazlitt deplores most is the cutting of Shakespeare's poetry. His eloquent condemnation bears quoting at length:

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24. William Hazlitt, A View of the English Stage: or A Series of Dramatic Criticisms, edited by W. Spencer Jackson (London; George Bell, 1906), p. 92.

25. Hazlitt, p. 89.

It was thought fit and necessary, in order to gratify the sound sense, the steady, sober judgment, and natural unsophisticated feelings of Englishmen a hundred years ago, to modernize the original play, and to disfigure its simple and beautiful structure, by loading it with the commonplace, clap-trap sentiments, artificial contrasts of situations and character, and all the heavy tinsel and affected formality which Dryden had borrowed from the French school ... These same anomalous, unmeaning, vulgar, and ridiculous additions, are all that take in the present farcical representation of The Tempest. The beautiful, the exquisitely beautiful descriptions in Shakespeare, the still more refined, and more affecting sentiments, are not only not applauded as they ought to be ... - they are not understood, nor are they even heard. The lips of the actors are seen to move, but the sounds they utter exciting no corresponding emotions in the breast. ... The ears of the audience are not prepared to drink in the music of the poet; or grant that they were, the bitterness of disappointment would only succeed to the stupor of indifference.[26]

From this we may safely conclude that Hazlitt was less than pleased with the production's emphasis on spectacle and the

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26. Hazlitt, p. 90.

encounters of innocent love, leading to the cutting and occlusion of Shakespeare's poetry. In other words, this quotation can be said to argue on the behalf of the 'readerly' qualities of <u>The Tempest</u>.

Dutton Cook is straightforward about this: 'Since the Restoration ... the "Tempest" has almost invariably been considered as a convenient vehicle for operatic and spectacular effects'.[27] However, Cook is no less scathing about the harm of touching the sacred work of Shakespeare. He writes of 'severe torture', wanton tampering and that Davenant and Dryden had made 'cruel havoc of the poet's intentions'.[28]

Dutton Cook reckons that Davenant and Dryden's adaptation was last performed on the English stage in 1838, at Drury Lane in Mr. Bunn's production, to rival Mr. Macready's revival of the original at Covent Garden.[29] The revival was apparently a success, yet it is a matter for speculation whether this was due to the manager's threat to expel Shakespeare altogether from his theatre if this revival did not bring in enough money.[30] It is unlikely that the financial considerations of theatre production in the days before government subsidies have ever been spelt out more

27. Cook, p. 173.

28. Cook, pp. 173 & 174.

29. Cook, p. 174.

30. Cook, pp. 175-176.

clearly. Success or failure of a production was very much in the hands of the paying public, and to fail to live up to audience expectations was financially and therefore also professionally perilous.

As we have seen, the spectacular qualities of The Tempest were very much at the centre of people's conception of the play from Davenant and Dryden on. Charles Kean's 1857 version can perhaps be seen as the culmination of this almost three centuries old tradition.[31] The text is heavily cut, as with most of the productions that emphasised the spectacle of the play. In his unpaginated introduction to the Cornmarket facsimile, Martin Wright reports that I,i is omitted altogether, I,ii cut by 160 lines, II,i by 137 and 'so on through the rest of the play'. The upshot is that many of the themes and plots we know from reading the original text conspicuously fail to develop. But Kean's strength as a producer lay elsewhere. Contemporary critics, according to Wright, praised the 'getting up' of the production. It was, not surprisingly, the 'getting up' that occasioned the liberal pruning of the text. Much of the cutting was made just prior to the opening night, which

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31. Charles Kean, The Tempest, performed 1857, edited by Martin Wright (London: Cornmarket Press, 1970).

still ran to a full five hours.[32] This is hardly surprising
when one takes into consideration that the production
required the impressive number of 140 operatives nightly to
work the machinery and carry out the various effects.[33]

Although there was little evidence of it in Kean's adapt-
ation, an interesting development in productions of The
Tempest can be seen towards the end of the Victorian period.
This was the changing conception of Caliban, which was in
part influenced by the work of Darwin, but also, one might
surmise, by the development of Great Britain as a major
colonial power.

A prime example of how contemporary events influenced the
role of Caliban can be found in The Enchanted Isle by
William and Robert Broughs.[34] In the cast list Caliban is
not a salvage and deformed slave but 'an hereditary bondsman
who, in his determination to be free takes the most fearful
liberties'.[35] The year of the writing and production of the
play was 1848 - which explains the satirical allusions to

32. Mary M. Nilan, 'Shakespeare Illustrated: Charles Kean's
1857 Production of The Tempest', Shakespeare Quarterly, 26
(1975), 196-204 (p.202).
33. Nilan, 1975, p. 202.
34. Quotations relating to this play are all from Trevor R.
Griffiths, '"This Island's Mine": Caliban and Colonialism',
The Yearbook of English Studies, 13 (1983), 159-180.
35. Griffiths, p. 161.

social upheaval. Caliban is textually identified with anti-slavery campaigns, a notable example is his reply to Miranda when she calls him a slave: 'Slave! Come, drop that sort of bother; Just let me ax, "Ain't I a man and a brother?"'. He further makes appeals to the audience to 'Pity and protect the slave'. But these political overtones would soon give way to the influence of Natural Science.

The clearest example of this kind of influence is Frank Benson's Caliban, in his 1891 production of The Tempest for the Stratford Festival. Benson saw the role of Caliban as so important that he starred himself. The basis for his conception of the role was a book published 18 years previously: Daniel Wilson's Caliban: The Missing Link.[36] In the introduction Wilson presents his intention thus:

> The leading purpose of the following pages is ...
> to show that [Shakespeare's] genius had already
> created for us the ideal of that imaginary
> intermediate being, between the true brute and
> man, which, if the new theory of descent from
> crudest animal organism be true, was our predeces-
> sor and precursor in the inheritance of this world
> of humanity.[37]

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36. Daniel Wilson, Caliban: The Missing Link (London: Macmillan, 1873).

37. Wilson, pp. xi-xii.

In the chapter 'The Monster Caliban', Wilson says that:

> There was obviously something marine or fishlike
> in the aspect of the island monster. 'In the dim
> obscurity of the past', says Darwin, 'we can see
> that the early progenitor of all vertebrates must
> have been an aquatic animal'. ... In Caliban there
> was undesignedly embodied, seemingly, an ideal of
> the latest stages of such an evolution.[38]

Benson kept close to Wilson's conception, studied the
behaviour of great apes, and gave a very athletic performan-
ce as Caliban. According to Mary M. Nilan,[39] Benson played
Caliban on all fours, made up to look like an ape and
'always entered with a large and very real fish clenched
between his jaws'. In relation to Shakespeare's text, of
course, this has the virtue of giving an explanation to
Trinculo's utterance as he is about to creep under Caliban's
gabardine to seek shelter from the imminent rain: 'What have
we here? a man or a fish? dead or alive? A fish: he smells
like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell.'[40] This
smell must have caused acute discomfort to Benson and his
cast since the property master forgot to change it often
enough.[41]

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38. Wilson, p. 73.

39. Nilan 1972, p. 115.

40. II,ii, 24-26.

41. Griffiths, p. 166.

Because of his extensive touring all over Britain for 50 years, Benson was an enormously influential director. His Caliban, thus, was seen all over the country over a considerable period of time - conditioning the public's conception of Caliban and The Tempest.

Herbert Beerbohm Tree's public, on the other hand, was the very influential London audience. Whereas Benson was driven by financial constraints to give a simpler version of The Tempest than his predecessors, even to the point of cutting the storm and shipwreck,[42] Tree found that 'of all Shakespeare's works The Tempest was probably the one which most demanded the aids of modern stage-craft'.[43] In his introduction to the play, 'A Personal Explanation', he is at pains to prove his critics, who favoured a less spectacular and more poetical Tempest, wrong. In a sense there is no need to do so, since the book was published to celebrate the 50th performance of his production - a fact he does not fail to mention. His 'philosophy' is that 'whatever tends to quicken the imagination of the audience - in fact , to create illusion, is justifiable on the stage'.[44] According to Nilan, his was the last of the great, spectacular Tempests in the tradition of Davenant and Dryden, and

42. Nilan, 1972, p. 115.

43. William Shakespeare, The Tempest, as Arranged for the Stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree (London: J. Miles & Co., 1904), p. v.

44. Tree, p. vi-vii.

Shadwell. Even Beerbohm Tree, apparently, came to see and agree with this change in public taste for, counter to the quotation from his introduction, in 1913 he says that 'the art of stage presentation has progressed – and I think rightly progressed – in the direction of a greater simplicity of treatment. ... – suggestion is often stronger than actuality where purely fantastic and imaginative works are concerned'.[45]

Nilan argues in the article already quoted, 'The Tempest at the Turn of the Century: Cross-Currents in Production', that at the turn of the century many productions of the play came to be less lavish and spectacular, and to rely more on Shakespeare's poetry for their effect. This was partly a conscious effort by some professional producers, but as always financial considerations played a part. It is significant that Benson should present a more pared down production since his company travelled extensively.

In 1897 William Poel's London based Elizabethan Stage Society presented a Tempest in a very simple production, re-created to resemble the society's conception of the original Elizabethan one.[46] This was indeed a radical departure from the tradition of The Tempest productions, one needs only to recall Kean and his 140 operatives to see how radical.

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45. Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Thoughts and After-Thoughts, popular edition (London: Cassel, 1915), pp. 223-224.

46. Nilan, 1972, p. 116.

At least, one notable man of the theatre at the time praised the production for its radical departure from tradition. In The Saturday Review George Bernard Shaw said that:

> The poetry of The Tempest is so magical that it would make the scenery of a modern theatre ridiculous. The methods of the Elizabethan Stage Society ... leave to the poet the work of conjuring up the isle "full of noises, sounds and sweet airs". And I do not see how this plan can be beaten. If Sir Henry Irving were to put the play on at the Lyceum next season ..., what could he do but multiply the expenditure enormously, and spoil the illusion? ... The reason is, not that a man can _always_ imagine things more vividly than art can present them to him, but that it takes an altogether extraordinary degree of art to compete with the pictures which the imagination makes when it is stimulated by such potent forces as the maternal instinct, superstitious awe, or the poetry of Shakespeare.[47]

The case for 'the words on the stage', as it were, could hardly be put more clearly. Yet the lavish production of Beerbohm Tree post-dated Poel's production by seven years,

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47. Edwin Wilson, editor, Shaw on Shakespeare: An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Production of Shakespeare (London: Cassell, 1961), p. 183-184.

and in America the no less spectacular and highly technical Warde-James production toured extensively in 1903.[48]

However, at this point even critical opinion had begun to swing. Mary M. Nilan quotes from American newspaper reviews of the Warde-James productions which are less than enthusiastic about it.[49] In England a small and simple production at the Royal Court theatre had a great success the same year, with close to 80 performances. The simple and pared-down setting received favourable comment for letting the audience's attention stay with the poetry.[50] The next year critics compared Tree's production unfavourably with Poel's and Benson's.[51] The Times stressed that 'above all Prospero is a man of words. Ariel is a sprite of words. And Caliban is a monster of words. Shakespeare got his atmosphere mainly through the utterances of his personages'.[52]

Although, as we have seen, Tree's production was very popular, it seems to have been the last of its kind. The trend appears to have been set firmly for the simpler way of going about the production of The Tempest.

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48. Nilan, 1972, p. 117.

49. Nilan, 1972, pp. 117 & 118.

50. Nilan, 1972, p. 118.

51. Nilan, 1972, p. 122.

52. The Times, 15 September 1904.

In 1914 Ben Greet's production for the Old Vic had no special effects, and consequently had a running time of only two hours.[53] For the 1919 season at Stratford, William Bridges-Adams wanted to return the play to history by linking the production directly to the occasion for which he believed The Tempest had been specifically designed: the betrothal of Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine.[54] This move was followed up in the critical sphere by Ernest Law's pamphlet for the Shakespeare Association Shakespeare's 'Tempest' as Originally Produced at Court in 1920, and Dover Wilson's introduction to his New Cambridge edition of the following year. However, this development had little effect on subsequent productions.

Nilan's thesis is that the critical consensus which developed around the turn of the century influenced the staging of The Tempest in the first half of the present century.[55] In a footnote to this contention she adds that the situation has changed somewhat since the Second World War, with the use of more magical effects, music and scenic displays.

Giorgio Strehler's Tempest for the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, playing at the larger theatre of Lirico in Milan, was certainly an example of spectacle, the initial storm lasting

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53. Orgel, p. 74.

54. Orgel, p. 75.

55. Nilan, 1972, p. 123.

a full 15 minutes.[56] Strehler's conception of Prospero was that he was a man of the theatre, and Strehler's direction used his conjuring skills as a metaphor for the power of the theatre to change the world. This had the consequence of strengthening any autobiographical element in Shakespeare's play, since the stress was on _theatrical_ magic.

It is arguable that the age of wholesale rewriting was over at the turn of the century, with the notable exception of Aimé Césaire,[57] though the age of the creative director was by no means over, as we shall see shortly. Even directors who consciously keep close to the Folio text give lines I,ii, 353-364 ('Abhorred slave,/ Which any print of goodness wilt not take ...') to Prospero rather than to Miranda, a decision sanctioned by the tradition of producing _The Tempest_. This is by no means the only example. Other lines found problematical and often cut include 'Well demanded, Wench', (I,ii, 139) - the tone of which was found so problematical that well into this century it was rather omitted, and the same goes for 'Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and/ She said thou wast my daughter' (I,ii, 56-57) in response to Miranda's question of whether Prospero is her father.[58]

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56. See Jan Kott, 'Prospero or the Director: Giorgio Strehler's _The Tempest_ (Piccolo Teatro di Milano)', _Theater_, 10 (1979), 117-122.

57. See the next chapter: 'Colonial Appropriations and Interpretations'.

58. Orgel, p. 16.

Prospero's age has been an element of difference in various performances of <u>The Tempest</u> this century. With literary critical opinion divided as to how far Prospero, with his theatrical machinations on the island, is Shakespeare retiring from the life of the theatre, productions have variously depicted him as old or young. Previously, the element of magic in Prospero's power meant that he, as a wizard of sorts, was portrayed as an old man with white beard and all the paraphernalia associated with a man of magic. With John Gielgud, at 26, cast in the role at The Old Vic in 1930 this conception has changed. However, the most significant move in the interpretation of the role has been from the serene and benign old man to the unreliable and vengeful man of power. The highly influential directors Jonathan Miller[59] and Peter Hall have both broken the mould in this respect.

Peter Hall produced <u>The Tempest</u> for the Old Vic in 1973.[60] He took up a tradition from the twenties and thirties by conceiving of the play as a court masque, but differed by treating Jacobean masques more as forms and expressions of royal power than simply as theatrical spectacles. This meant

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59. I deal with Miller's 1970 production at the Mermaid in the chapter 'Colonial Appropriations and Interpretations', since this production is specifically a comment on the colonialist mind.

60. My exposition here is based on Orgel, pp. 85-86. All quotations are Orgel's.

abandoning Prospero's traditional role in favour of 'a man of power, of intelligence, as shrewd and cunning and egocentric as Churchill'. Hall ended up with Gielgud as Prospero, having to accept that Olivier could not take the role. Obviously this presented some problems since Gielgud so much epitomised the traditional conception of Prospero which Hall wanted to challenge, and Gielgud's sensitivity and mastery as a verse speaker did endanger the new conception. However, according to Hall's diaries, his own conception of the role grew ever 'darker' during rehearsals, seeing the role of Prospero in the light of that of Macbeth. Dennis Quilly's Caliban also represented an interesting visualization of his character. The make-up he wore was bisected: one half representing the 'salvage and deformed slave' and the other an image of a noble savage.

There is no doubt that developments like this one are motivated more from the text than from a challenge to the theatrical tradition.

Peter Brook's experiment at the London Roundhouse in 1968, on the other hand, was more of a development from inside the tradition of acting itself than from the tradition of Tempest productions.[61] A significant inspiration was the French actor-director Jean-Louis Barrault, and in keeping

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61. My exposition here is mainly based on Ruby Cohn, Modern Shakespeare Offshoots (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976), pp. 292-295.

with his theories the main purpose of the production was to use the cast to explore a few questions of theatrical production through the play of <u>The Tempest</u>. These were, 'What is theatre? What is a play? What is the relationship of the actor to the audience? What are the conditions which serve all of them best?'. The use of <u>The Tempest</u> was to see if the play could help them see the power and the violence that is in the play, according to Brook.

The result of the experiment, also dealt with in the chapter on Colonial Appropriations and Interpretations, is in its basic elements quite typical of the experimental theatre at the time. The emphasis was on creativity, and the hidden violence of the text. The play could be described as physical and spontaneous, without playing-room restraint or props, sets or costumes'. In other words what we have come to expect from the New Theatre experiments.

In a way, the Cheek-by-Jowl production of 1988 recalls some of the central tenets of the New Theatre.[62] Declan Donnellan's production started with the cast chatting with members of the audience, before they all assembled, seemingly disorganized on stage for rehearsal. Through singing and movement, the storm developed gradually and unsuspected.

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62. I rely in this exposition on a performance by Cheek-by-Jowl at the Arts Centre, University of Warwick, 19 November 1988.

His eyes suppurating, Timothy Walker as Prospero sat on the right of the stage brooding on his own reflection in the dressing-room mirror, throughout the play seemingly its demented, snarling and anxious, actor-manager. He seemed to try and cover up his insecurity of purpose by slapping on an increasingly bizarre mask of make-up, which also emphasises the brittleness of his authority over the course of the play. His dividedness over the love of Miranda and Ferdinand gets overdone when, in a strange ceremony, he gives away his daughter, Dracula-pale and wearing a Victorian funeral director's outfit.

More successful is Prospero's gesture early in the play when he recounts to Miranda the circumstances of their banishment. Prospero throws his silly chinstrap-fitted crown on the floor in the direction of Antonio. This accentuates the ambiguity, central to the play, about to what extent Prospero tempted his brother to usurp his power by his bookishness.

Less successful, perhaps, in relation to the themes of the play, but very funny were Keith Bartlett and Michael Jenn as Stephano and Trinculo. They come across as a tacky vaudeville act, but they appear far too intelligent in some of their lines and songs ('there's no such thing as society') and not at all drunk. This undermines one of the play's most powerful images of enslavement; addiction to the bottle. Their political observations undermine their juxtaposition

with Caliban, which in the text of the play comes across as not only less vulgar than the two, but also rather less stupid.

Another novelty is the Queen of Naples. This is also the production's comment on current political affairs, since Anne White plays the role with a very Mrs. Thatcherish handbag over her arm. She comes across as a very hard-nosed leader type of woman, with no capacity for compassion. This also has the unfortunate consequence of obscuring Alonso's morally enlarging grief over his supposedly dead son, experiencing the greatest inner change of the shipwrecked malefactors.

At approximately the same time there were three other productions of The Tempest running in Britain, two of which will be dealt with briefly here.

Jonathan Miller's production for the Old Vic, opening 6 October 1988, was far less radical than his 1970 production. Max von Sydow was an elderly, grave and slightly impatient patriarch. The programme gave extracts from Octave Mannoni's Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization, but any influence from this source was hard to detect in the play itself.

Nicholas Hytner's production for the RSC, opening 7 July the same year, had John Wood as Prospero changing his portrayal

of the role at some time during the run of the production. In the summer he was playing it very much like von Sydow, but toward the end of the year, certainly by the end of November, he played Prospero as a weak and indecisive character. Quite revealing in this respect was his delivery of the epilogue, which came hesitantly in a stumbling doggerel - not at all the Prospero who is in charge of this island turned into a stage on a stage which is turned into an island. This is quite a departure for Stratford, and one which makes it easier to identify with Prospero and his plight. There is nothing in the text of the play to determine once and for all how Prospero is to deliver the epilogue, but it does make a significant change in one's perception of the themes of the play. A weak Prospero is, for instance, less likely to be seen as the scheming manipulator in the pursuit of power, than the conciliatory wise man who steers the course of events to a happy result by benign design.

Colonial Appropriations and Interpretations

The Tempest came to serve as a Trojan horse,
whereby cultures barred from the citadel of
'universal' Western values could win entry and
assail those global pretensions from within.[1]

This quotation sets the context for my discussion of some of
the interpretations and adaptations of The Tempest that came
out of the awakening of political consciousness among the
peoples of colonial and imperial countries. The tension
between the aesthetic qualities of the play and the
political use to which it has been put raise a number of
questions which are central to this study.

Shakespeare himself can reasonably be said to have invited
responses to the difference between 'developed' cultures in
the north and 'primitive' cultures in the south by setting
the island between Renaissance Italy and Africa. This,
strangely, is a point rarely if ever touched by anti-
imperialist critics and directors, most of whom tend to
overlook this completely and give prime importance to the
highly likely, if not established, circumstance that
Shakespeare had read pamphlets describing a shipwreck off

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1. Nixon, p. 578.

the Bermudas in 1609.[2] This has lead critics to link the play directly with one of the first English colonial enterprises, a link which has been exploited to such an extent that Elmer Edgar Stoll had to remind his fellow critics as early as 1927 that 'there is not a word in The Tempest about America or Virginia, colonies or colonizing, Indians or tomahawks, maize, mocking-birds, or tobacco. Nothing but the Bermudas, once barely mentioned as a faraway place.'[3] Nevertheless, there are good reasons why the play has excited responses on the theme of colonialism, some can be found in the play itself.

Prospero comes to the island, the victim of a coup in Milan, empowered with the force of magic and puts the two in-habitants, the spirit Ariel and the 'salvage and deformed slave' Caliban to work for him. He maintains his power by threats, punishment, promises and by his superior knowledge, most potently realized in his magic. The two subjects are indeed different. Ariel is a spirit, and it remains difficult to know whether he can be said to be a person, with the rights dependent on personhood. Caliban, on the

2. Frank Kermode, Editor's introduction to The Tempest, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1954), pp. xxvi-xxx. Later references to The Tempest, given with act, scene and line number(s), are to this edition of the play.

3. Elmer Edgar Stoll, 'Certain Fallacies and Irrelevancies in the Literary Scholarship of the Day', Studies in Philology, 24 (1927), 485-508 (p. 487).

other hand, is earthy and in every way the child of nature
and the slave of instinct, right down to attempting to rape
his master's daughter, Miranda. The difference between the
subjects is also reflected in their attitudes to their
master. Ariel is compliant, though he repeatedly asks his
master to be set free. Caliban, on the other hand, claims
right to the island by his mother, the witch Sycorax,[4] and
hatches a plot to overthrow Prospero together with the two
ship-wrecked fools.

Not least this latter fact, together with Caliban's claim
that the island is his own, has inspired third-world critics
and dramatists to portray him as the oppressed native
struggling to break free of the oppressor from a developed
country. As early as in the French philosopher Ernest
Renan's adaptations, Caliban (1877) and L'Eau de Jouvence
(1879), Caliban represented democracy, and it is this aspect
of the character in The Tempest which has inspired anti-
colonialist adaptations and productions of the play.[5]

Of these Aimé Césaire's Une Tempête (1969) is perhaps the
most illuminating example. It is worth noting that the title
of Césaire's play is in the singular: it is implied that
this tempest is only one of many, because wherever and
whenever there is oppression, there will be a tempest to
overthrow the oppressors.

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4. I,ii, 333-334.

5. My source for Renan is Cohn.

Aimé Césaire is a novelist, playwright and politician of Martinique in the West Indies. He has been very clear and outspoken about his intentions in writing Une Tempête, which had its world permière at the Festival of Hammamet in Tunisia.[6] Césaire wanted to 'de-mythify' The Tempest, and continually broke away from the original in making his own version. His justification for this is that a great work of art, such as The Tempest, belongs to humanity and as such can undergo as many reinterpretations as the myths of classical antiquity. As Césaire sees Shakespeare's Prospero, he is still the Renaissance Man, but what is most obvious is his absolute will to power: he is a totalitarian. These traits are not contradictory, according to Césaire, because in Europe the world of reason has inevitably led to various kinds of totalitarianism.

Césaire's Caliban is also Natural Man, to a great extent. He can still take part in a world of marvels, whereas Prospero can only create them. Most significantly, though, he is a rebel. This requires a new ending of the play. Césaire believes that Prospero has become a prisoner of the power he has wielded over Caliban and the island over twelve years, so at the last moment he decides to stay.

6. Based on S. Belhassen's interview with Césaire in S. Belhassen, 'Aimé Césaire's A Tempest', in Radical Perspectives in the Arts, edited by Lee Baxandall (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 175-177.

One other significant difference between Shakespeare's The Tempest and Césaire's adaptation is the latter's starker depiction of Caliban's enslavement. This, of course, is in line with the focus on Prospero as the European man of methodological conquest and Caliban as slave and rebel in the making. However, it is also worth noting that the occasion of Césaire's adaptation was a suggestion from the director Jean-Marie Serreau to adapt The Tempest for an all black cast.[7] Césaire's actors work in an atmosphere of psychodrama, with actors choosing their roles by putting on a mask. As in psychodrama proper the assumption behind this kind of acting is that by acting out their roles, the actors will effect a 'cure' of themselves. It is interesting to note that, first of all, The Tempest was chosen for such a purpose, but even more telling that Césaire uses more of Shakespeare's plot than do other offshoots of The Tempest.[8]

However, much dialogue is cut in order to focus more clearly on the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. In aid of Caliban's new role as revolutionary in the making, Césaire has inserted a debate between the gradualist Ariel, who is

7. The full title of the play is Une tempête; d' apres 'La tempete' de Shakespeare. Adaption pour un thèâtre nègre (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

8. Cohn, p. 299.

played by a mulatto,[9] and Caliban the revolutionary. From the latter's perspective Ariel is a collaborator.

A more significant shift, no doubt also designed to focus attention on the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, is that Césaire's Prospero decides to pardon the Europeans as early as in act I, scene ii, after securing their submission, while the official pardon is withheld until the last act. This makes Prospero's forgiveness less of a personal triumph over his baser instincts than just a necessary expedient of continued colonial rule. Thus, playing down one theme effects a sharper focus on the one Césaire wants to promote.

Césaire's changes at the level of language are no less notable. Caliban complains, not that the sole profit of learning Prospero's was to learn how to curse,[10] but that the one reason Prospero taught him only to jabber his language was for him to understand his commands for work to be done. In other words, the language was not meant to be used as a medium of communication, talking together, but for wielding power only. On the other hand, Césaire's Caliban is given the most lyrical lines, which is not such a great departure from Shakespeare's Caliban, who speaks arguably the most beautiful lines of the whole play in his ' the isle is full of noises' speech.[11] However, the new context

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9. According to Nixon, p. 573.

10. I,ii, 365-367.

11. III,ii, 133-141.

is most important, since colloquial French is used for the body of the play, which robs the European nobles of their nobleness and reverses the stylistic embodiment of supremacy.

Caliban's vocabulary is also an indication of how far Césaire's adaptation has gone in order to reach a contemporary audience, and direct that audience's response to current political issues. Significantly, Caliban's first word to his master is 'uhuru', the Swahili word for freedom, which gained international currency through the much publicized struggles for freedom in East-African countries in the 1950s and 60s. Like American black muslims of the period of the civil rights movements, he changes his name to 'X', from the probable 'cannibal'-derivation Caliban, to signify his name lost through the imposition of a new identity through his subjugation by the colonial master.

This desire to determine his own identity also signals that Une Tempête is, in a manner of speaking, a Bildungsdrama. Despite Caliban's cry for freedom (Uhuru!) in the first line of Une Tempête, he is not a ready-made hero of the freedom-struggle at the beginning of the play. As with Shakespeare's Caliban, his main educational experience proves to be the plot with Stephano and Trinculo to take over the island. When he sees through them and learns to scorn them, he sees more clearly his own slave mentality, and that he has to

redefine his own identity through confronting his oppressor on his own.

This confrontation occurs when we return to Césaire's new ending of the play. The curtain is half lowered to indicate the passing of time, and when it goes up again we see a much aged Prospero, his gestures spare and his language impoverished. He shouts for Caliban, presumably to fetch some wood for he is shivering. But nothing happens. Caliban is offstage and chanting 'freedom - freedom'. This tempest has taken its course, and has left broken the racial and cultural hierarchy of the European tradition.

In a way, what Césaire has done with Shakespeare's The Tempest has a parallel in the abridged versions of Shakespeare produced for natives. The cuts he has made have thus a double genesis; one in the time-honoured theatrical practice of cutting dialogue from plays for the purpose of performance, and the abridgement made so that the classics will be easier to understand for foreign speakers of the language.

This latter parallel is perhaps the most instructive, since the gaps have been filled, not with elaborate explanations but with the discourse and political reality of the day: Ariel does not use magic or song to coerce the plotters, but riot-gas. Gonzalo wants to keep the island unspoiled for tourists to enjoy.

The spaces opened up, Césaire has filled with the culture and political concerns of its audience. This is Gadamer's horizontverschmeltzung in its most radical sense: the western icon of culture is cut open and filled with the self-understanding and concerns of a different culture. Thus, Césaire's Une Tempête is not just an adaptation of The Tempest, it is an appropriation of the kind advocated in my opening quotation about the Trojan Horse.

Césaire's Une Tempête was not the first theatrical attempt to make The Tempest relevant to the conflict between colonialist and colonized, even if it was the most thorough-going in teasing out the colonialist conflict in the play.

Between the Restoration and Macready's 1838 production Davenant and Dryden's version reigned supreme on the British stage. This meant that Caliban was, along with Sycorax (here his sister), a monster of the isle.[12] Though Caliban's claim to the island is kept,[13] much more is made of the comic potential in his discovery of liquor.

William and Robert Brough's Enchanted Isle, of 1848, gave a republican Caliban and was full of allusions to the political events of that year. Caliban's resentment of his slavery is also given its full due.

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12. Davenant and Dryden, p. 8.

13. Davenant and Dryden, I,ii, 252-253.

John Ryder's production of 1871 was the first to end with Caliban left in charge of the island - and Caliban quite enjoyed it.

W. T. Stead, who saw Beerbohm Tree's rather jingoistic production, discusses the play also under the heading 'What About Rhodesia?',[14] along with more far-fetched analogies, and was probably the first to link the play to a specific context of contemporary colonialism. He remarks that Caliban's case is similar to that of the Matebele.[15] Stead then goes on to discuss the play in the context of the South African war and other contemporary events in Southern Africa. Era took exception to Stead's heavy allegorising, only to fall into that line of thinking a few lines later, by making a parallel between Caliban's intention to people island with his brood and the argued higher fertility rate of the Dutch over the British in South Africa.[16] In brief, it is fair to say that Caliban at this date was a character through which topical themes were discusses in a less than dispassionate manner.

Roger Livesey's Caliban in Tyrone Guthrie's 1934 Old Vic production appears to have been the first Caliban ever to

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14. W. T. Stead, 'First Impressions of The Theatre: I. - My First Play: "The Tempest", at His Majesty's', Review of Reviews, 30 (1904), 360-367 (pp. 364-365).

15. Stead, pp. 364-365.

16. Griffiths, p. 172.

have been black, if only by liberal doses of grease-paint. While this, according to Griffiths,[17] was not commented on as an interpretation of the role, several critics developed political insights from the role of Caliban along the lines of conflict between colonialist and aboriginal.

Griffiths finds that the critic Ivor Brown was a consistent advocate of Caliban as the 'dispossessed aboriginal'[18] from 1934 onwards. But there were very few productions of The Tempest in the fifties and sixties, and Brown was a lonely voice in his focus on the colonial aspects of what productions there were. One should be wary of drawing conclusions from this, but two different lines of thought might draw strength from it. One is that The Tempest could all too easily be interpreted as a damning indictment of British colonialism - which at this time was in the process of being dismantled. The struggle between Prospero and Caliban, and the latter's claim to the island would on this explanation be too topical for the comfort of the British theatre public.

Another explanation is that Caliban, now more easily seen as the aboriginal because of contemporary events, was too unsympathetic a character to present on the stage as a steady stream of immigrants from former colonies came to Britain to people the busy factories. It could be that the

17. Griffiths, p. 175.

18. Griffiths, p. 176.

'savage and deformed slave' and the general grotesqueness of the character was, in the contemporary context, likely to fuel resentment against large-scale immigration. Or, more likely given the make-up of British theatre audiences, seen as a racist insult against this new group of British citizens. In any case, this remains speculation and it could be that pure coincidence kept The Tempest from the stage over long periods in the fifties and sixties.

This 'silence' was broken at the end of the sixties. The whole political climate had changed dramatically. 1968 saw student revolt all over the western world as post-war baby-boomers acted out their radical political convictions. Experiment in the theatre took off, boosted by the new revolutionary zeitgeist.

I deal more extensively with Peter Brook's 1968 production of The Tempest in the chapter on performance history. In this context the relevance of his theatrical experiment at the London Roundhouse, otherwise a venue for rock concerts, was that the relationship between Prospero and Caliban was very clear indeed.[19] A very free adaptation, Brook has Caliban born by Sycorax about half-way through the play and immediately captured by Prospero. Caliban's language learning is enacted rather brusquely, leading Caliban to escape after learning 'master' and 'slave'. Pursuing Miranda to rape her, Caliban bellows 'I am subject to a tyrant'.

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19. My exposition here is based on Cohn, pp. 292-295.

Escaping from captivity, Caliban takes command of the island dwellers and directs a sex-orgy before the cast form a human pyramid which crumbles into a pack of dogs which attack Prospero sexually.

In a rather un-subtle production the portrayal of Caliban is highly politicized with regard to the issue of colonialism and oppression, without in any way glossing over his uninhibited nature. Rather than Caliban getting drunk with Stephano and Trinculo, we have him taking a leading role in group sex and a ferocious collective rape. This would have the effect of canvassing sympathy for Prospero's tyranny, and is thus very much a double-edged sword in the context of an anti-colonialist theme.

Clearer in this respect was Jonathan Miller's 1970 production at the Mermaid theatre. This production was heavily influenced by Octave Mannoni's anthropological study of the 1947 riots on Madagascar, <u>Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonialisation</u>.[20] Mannoni used Shakespeare's characters more as useful metaphors than as in any way direct models for the characterization of colonizer and colonized.

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20. Octave Mannoni, <u>Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization</u>, translated by Pamela Powesland, with a foreword by Philip Mason, second edition (New York: Praeger, 1964).

Miller's motivation for using Mannoni[21] is that he mistrusts a reliance on theatrical sources and that he regards the philosophical context of Shakespeare as of prime importance.[22] Miller's main concern, which he seeks to express in the production, is that the play represents the tragic disintegration of a more primitive culture as the consequence of European colonialization. Having studied accounts of European encounters with different peoples at Shakespeare's time, Miller concluded that Caliban's monstrosity could be put down to the Europeans never having seen anyone like him before.[23] Therefore, in the programme, Caliban was without his traditional description as 'a savage and deformed slave'.[24]

Miller's production was probably the most overtly colonial stage interpretation since Beerbohm Tree's production of 1904, but unlike Tree's this production was definitely not jingoistic. Miller's production was, with few exceptions greeted with critical acclaim. Could it be that now, in

21. My source is David L. Hirst, The Tempest (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 50-51, whose source in turn is an interview with Miller 22 September 1983. Hirst gets Mannoni's name wrong as 'Otto Manonet'.

22. Hirst does not explain how Miller could think that a fairly recent anthropological study was a guide to Shakespeare's philosophical thought.

23. Hirst, pp. 49-50.

24. Griffiths, p. 177.

1970, after the break-up of the Empire and with a more radical political atmosphere, it was possible, without too much risk, to take up the colonial elements of the play again? Popularity for a production with such an overtly colonial theme could certainly count as a strong indication of the topicality of colonialism - and of a change in attitudes as to what degree mainstream theatrical productions[25] could deviate from the original.

Says Jonathan Miller: 'I think that .. some of the ways in which we visualize the ironies of colonialism have only become available to us since we have seen the break-up of the colonial system and of the colonial mind. ... In dissolution we begin to see the component parts and how they are related to one another.'[26]

While Griffiths claims that Miller's production was the first time Caliban and Ariel were played by black actors,[27] this can only be the true of the British stage since Césaire had an all-black cast for Une Tempête in Tunisia. Further, the use of black actors for the role of Caliban was

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25. Thus excluding Brook's experiment.

26. Jonathan Miller, in On Directing Shakespeare, edited by Ralph Berry (London: Croom Helm, 1970), pp. 29-40 (pp. 33-34).

27. Griffiths, p. 177.

premiered in the United States with Margaret Webster's production at the Alvin Theatre, New York, in early 1945.[28]

By making both Caliban and Ariel black Miller could explore two different native reactions to colonialism. Not surprisingly, Caliban represents ' a detribalised, broken-down, shuffling, disinherited feeling' and Ariel 'a sophisticated technology-capable, fast-learning response'.[29] This was also visualised by Ariel as a dignified butler and Caliban as a field-hand in an ill-fitting greatcoat. This is a direct adaptation of Mannoni's model of the characters, for, to Miller 'the scaly , webfooted monster of Caliban just didn't tell me anything about anyone, it wasn't a monster which meant anything in my imagination and it actually clotted my imagination and stopped it from thinking'.[30] The 'director's block', as it were, was broken by Mannoni. This is a good example of how a non-literary source is brought in to illuminate a literary work, for it is, after all, Ariel who is the native of the island and the most accomplished of the two.

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28. Errol G. Hill, 'Caliban and Ariel: A Study in Black and White in American Productions of The Tempest 1945-1981', Theatre History Studies, 4 (1984), 1-10 (p. 2).

29. Hirst, p. 50, based on an interview with Miller of 22 September 1983.

30. Miller, p. 34.

Miller's production also makes the 'component parts' of <u>The Tempest</u> relate to his over-all idea. For example, Miller managed to integrate the scenes of low-comedy in what Paul Brown has called the 'antimasque':[31] the plot of Caliban and the two drunken sailors Stephano and Trinculo. Miller based these scenes on the image of present-day sailors in Port Said 'making the natives drunk, patronising them and bullying them',[32] thus mirroring the colonial power-relation. Paul Brown, not relating to any one production of the play, argues the same. 'Ostensibly the "low" scenes of the play are courtly actions and demonstrate the latter's superiority' but 'what this misalliance mediates, in "low" terms, is precisely a colonising situation. Only here can the colonising process be viewed as nakedly avaricious, pro-fiteering, perhaps even pointless.'[33]

Miller's ending is significantly different from the most 'colonialist' production so far: Beerbohm Tree's. The latter's production ends thus:

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31. Paul Brown, '"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine": <u>The Tempest</u> and The Discourse of Colonialism', in <u>Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism</u>, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985), pp. 48-71 (p. 64).

32. Hirst, p. 51, again based on the interview.

33. Brown, pp. 64-65.

Caliban listens for the last time to the sweet air, then turns sadly in the direction of the departing ship. The play is ended. As the curtain rises again, the ship is seen on the horizon, Caliban stretching out his arms towards it in mute despair. The night falls, and Caliban is left on the lonely rock. He is a King once more.[34]

Nothing like it in Miller's production. 'The production ended with the provocative picture of Caliban shaking his fist at the disappearing ship while Ariel picked up Prospero's staff and began to straighten it.'[35] I cannot put it more clearly than Griffiths does: 'The difference between Tree's tableau and this picture is truly indicative of the aesthetic distance between the two productions'.[36]

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34. William Shakespeare, <u>The Tempest, as Arranged for the Stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree</u> (London: J. Miles & Co., 1904), III,iii, Final Tableau.

35. Hirst, p. 50.

36. Griffiths, p. 178.

Theatrical and Readerly Interpretations of Literature

This chapter will discuss the theoretical upshot of the previous chapters of this section, and assess some of the wider implications for literary aesthetics. One central issue is the phenomenon of theatrical production and performance, and the differences between this form of literary communication and the reading situation.

Says David Ward:

> The play moves on so rapidly, in the real time of
> performance, throwing up different hints,
> suggestions, ghosts of allusions, that we're not
> allowed to dwell on any one lead for long enough
> to make complete sense of it.[1]

There are, no doubt, substantial differences in the situation of interpretation between curling up in the privacy of one's own home with a book and a nice cup of tea and sitting in an audience watching a play performed before one's eyes. In the latter situation there is no opportunity to reflect, flick back and check something or read a passage over again. On the other hand, neither will the private

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1. David Ward, '"Now I will believe there are unicorns": The Tempest and Its Theatre', English, 36 (1987), 95-110 (p. 105).

reading situation give the reader the immediacy and the vivid sense of colour, sound and smell of the theatrical performance.

The question, then, is what the implications are for interpretation. Can one say anything in general about literary interpretation in the two situations just outlined?

The first thing to do is to grant a point to Ward. To take a metaphor from photography: the interpretive situation for the theatrical audience is more coarse-grained than the reading situation. One has no opportunity to go back to elements of the work and reassess their significance in the unfolding totality of the work.[2] Consequently, the work as interpreted for the production has a stronger position vis-a-vis the audience than in a reading situation. At the same time, in presenting the play choices will have had to be made out of many possibilities, effectively amounting to an interpretation of the play. The phenomenological situation of performance and the fact that a production is an interpretation of the play together mean that the power of the theatre to challenge the audience's preconceptions is strong in relation to the reading situation, where the reader has greater freedom to accommodate her preconceptions. It is only when one encounters something one has

2. This is an important difference from film and video, where one can go back and forth in the work. The same is true of taped theatrical performances, of course.

not been led to expect that one is significantly challenged. On the other hand, while the presented play does not 'close' the possibilities of different interpretations of the performance, the spectator situation, as Ward points out, does not invite the close scrutiny often involved in academic-style interpretations of the written work. No doubt, this is one reason why very few, if any, well known academic interpretations of plays have been based on performances rather than the text of it, the unfortunate consequence being a lack of attention to the theatrical aspect of plays.

If it is the case that the situation of the theatrical audience makes it virtually impossible for a member of the audience to form an independent conception of the whole work while watching it, then there will be no other over-all conception governing the significance of the elements of the play than the director's.[3] In the terminology of communication, it is the advantage of the communicator over the audience. That means that, compared to the reading situation, the potential for creativity on the part of the latter is substantially diminished.

These considerations merely affirm the common assumption that the director presents his or her conception or

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3. I use 'director' for the person who has the artistic responsibility for the production, and who supervises and instructs the actors and actresses.

interpretation of the play and thus takes, with respect to creativity, the place of the reader in the reading situation.

For the present study these considerations have an interesting consequence: one does not have to go to particular readers to find what they have made of the play, for the theatrical performance is itself an object of study sufficient for this purpose. This has the further advantage, of course, that a theatrical performance is a public affair and also, in most cases, a commercial venture. It follows that the interpretation of the play has to appeal to the public of the day. Thus, though one should be wary of drawing quick conclusions on this point, one may be able to see from the public appeal of productions which interpretations focused themes with an appeal to the public. Caution in this matter has to be urged, but it seems that my study of the performance history of The Tempest gives credence to such a proposition.

Another phenomenon central to understanding the nature of theatrical performance of a play is to understand the way all elements of the performance can influence the effect on an audience. Quite apart from cutting and other means of textual amendment, casting, make-up, scenery and delivery are also highly important elements to account for. Obviously, in an actual performance the contribution of one such factor can hardy be considered in isolation from the

cumulative effect of them all, but here I wish to treat them in relative isolation for reasons of clarity.

Casting is one obvious way in which a production can provide a new angle on a play. An actress or actor is not only the physical appearance of the character in the play, but also brings to the play a presence and a personality which go far beyond the characteristics given to any character by the author of the play. This is not news to anyone who has seen more than one production of a play or, indeed, to anyone who has seen a well-known comic actor or comedian in his or her first serious role. Significantly, neither is it news to people who see the theatrical or cinematic version of a play or a novel they have previously read.

The reason this is significant is that it shows that readers endow a character with certain characteristics which are not, as the case might be, realized by the actor playing the role in question. This is not just a case of taste, but also of interpretation. The place of a character in the inter-pretation of a play is not independent of how the character is realized. A few examples from the previous chapters will serve to illustrate this point.

The two actors John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier represented two rather different ways of acting Shakespeare, as was seen in Peter Hall's problems over casting for a new conception of the role of Prospero for his Old Vic production of 1973.

By this time Gielgud's and Olivier's acting personae were so infused with their well known personalities, and not least their previous renditions of the role of Prospero, that the casting decision - had one been possible at the time - would in itself be an interpretation of the play. Just casting powerful stage personalities like Gielgud or Olivier represents a judgement of the importance of Prospero. It remains an open question whether Hall's conception of Prospero as a cunning power-broker was prior to wanting Olivier in the role. That it can be an open question is a reminder of the power of an actor's personality to focus and accentuate possibilities in the play as we have it from the author's hand.

An actor's personality and stage appearance are quite stable factors, but concepts so general that it is problematic to analyze them in a close and detailed way. Delivery is different in these respects. The voice and the modulation of it are important indicators of character and not least of attitude, as any enthusiastic listener to radio drama will know. A clear illustration of this phenomenon was John Wood's change, whether gradual or not I do not know, of Prospero's delivery of the Epilogue. Most likely, the change was not abrupt but was the product of a changed inter-pretation of Prospero's attitude to and influence on the events of The Tempest. Also, it could be that the third line of the epilogue was interpreted to refer to an absolute lack of strength, rather than relative, but the likelier

alternative lies in an interpretation of the totality of the play rather than a literal interpretation of this particular line. In any case, very clearly the manner in which the epilogue was spoken by Wood later in the Stratford season threw the seasoned Shakespeare audience into reflections on how Prospero could be a weak or weakened character at the end of the play, which in turn would have consequences for their interpretation of his motives and therefore, quite likely, the theme or themes of the play

Nevertheless, there is and remains nothing in the text of the play to give clear instructions on how to deliver the Epilogue. This only means that any reader of the play is also free as to how she imagines the delivery of this passage of the text. Whether forceful or meek, it will be the product of an interpretation of the work. That Wood's delivery was a new departure holds good only in the context of Tempest productions. That there has been a long history of cross-influences between the literary and the theatrical spheres is beyond doubt,[4] but is not the point in this context. The most interesting point about it for present purposes is that theatrical openness and hence variation under the 'control' of tradition is only a more public manifestation of a matching openness in the reading and interpretation of plays and other literary works. For the reader has as much, if not more, control over what she decides to make out of the characters of a play, their

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4. See, for instance, Nilan, 1975, pp. 196-197 & 204.

voices, personalities, looks and other variables as the director has, elements which are no less central to the reader's interpretation of the work than to the director's. Similarly, which parts of the text are seen to be the crucial ones will depend on the interpreter's situation and concerns, whether reader or director. According to Jonathan Miller:

> Each generation tends to regard certain lines as the crucial ones, but that is because that generation has decided to focus upon one particular plane of interest or meaning within the play, and within that plane certain lines obviously assume a dazzling precedence.[5]

It is against this background that I find the performance history of a play to be of particular theoretical significance. Provided it can be established that both readings and performances are interpretations, it makes the performance history of a play into a public interpretation history with one important difference from literary interpretation: the performed performance must be found valuable by a sufficient number of the paying public, thus having to appeal more to the Zeitgeist than a private reading or a literary critical work has to do.

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5. Miller in Berry, p. 39.

It is not only the auditive part of a performance that can alter an audience's interpretation of a theatrical character. Peter Hall's 1973 production presented, as we have seen above, a Caliban whose make-up clearly illustrated the power of the visual in giving an interpretation of a character, by presenting half of Caliban's face in a way which suggested a 'salvage and deformed slave' and the other as a 'noble savage'. Thus also dress. With the outfit worn by Timothy Walker as Prospero in the 1988 Cheek-by-Jowl production, it did not require much acting to present Prospero as neurotic and unstable, and thus to question the nature of his control over the events of the play and the motives on which Prospero acted.

One of the more blatant and 'loud' examples in this category is Herbert Beerbohm Tree's Caliban. On all fours and with a fish in his mouth, it would require interpretive acrobatics on an unprecedented scale for an audience to see him as a 'noble savage', let alone a suppressed native with rights to the island on which he lived before the 'colonialization' by Prospero.

A major visual aspect of a performance is scenery and setting. I will not discuss this aspect fully here, only point to an example Errol G. Hill gives where casting and scenery, in the wide sense, has obvious consequences for the interpretation of the play.[6]

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6. Hill, p. 8.

Gerald Freedman directed The Tempest for The American Shakespeare Theatre. Freedman saw Caliban as the libidinal aspect of Prospero's character and Ariel as the creative. Unfortunately, he cast a black actor in the role of Caliban, and as the interpretation of Caliban and Ariel as aspects of Prospero's psyche is very difficult to realize on the stage, the net result in Hill's opinion was that the production represented blacks as barbaric. Scenery comes in when Caliban at the end descends into the orchestra pit and Ariel ascends to the upper stage. The metaphysical implications cannot be missed.

This also reveals the limitations of theatrical performances in presenting interpretations of the play. A very clever director may be able to make clear that Ariel and Caliban represent aspects of Prospero's psyche, but only rather laboriously and with the risk of suppressing the finer ambiguities of the relationships involved. By casting both Caliban and Ariel as blacks, as Jonathan Miller has done, one avoids racism but to direct in a way which makes it clear that they are both extensions of Prospero's mind is a tall order. In the case of Ariel it can be done since he is a disembodied spirit. In all productions with Gielgud as Prospero, Gielgud has made a point of not confronting Ariel face to face, but rather have him suspended above his head hence as an extension of his mind. A corresponding staging involving Caliban would be impossible for obvious reasons.

The presentation of Caliban and the relative interest given to this character in productions of <u>The Tempest</u> is an interesting example of how directors have used the cultural background of their audiences to bring out new interpretations of <u>The Tempest</u>. As a central and yet very unconventional character Caliban provides great scope for different conceptions, having repercussions for the play as a whole.

Caliban has, as we have seen in the first two chapters above, changed a great deal since the first impressions we have of <u>The Tempest</u> performances. As 'a salvage and deformed slave' and 'monster' he was sufficiently out of the ordinary to be appropriated by changing interests. Going by what we know, it appears that Caliban the oppressed slave was first emphasised in 1848, and the missing link aspect as late as 1891. In more recent years he has been, in various combinations, an ineducable brute, a sensitive savage, a European wild man, a New-World native, ugly, attractive, tragic, pathetic, comic, frightening, the rightful owner of the island and a natural slave.

The social and intellectual concerns of the day have had a great influence on the conception of this character in the theatre. We ought to keep in mind that the theatres of the Victorian era were commercial ventures, and that the way a production presented Caliban was more likely to cater to the

public's concerns than to be just a passing intellectual or theatrical fad. To have Caliban speak the contemporary language and phrases of the oppressed slave, and to act the part as well, addressed a contemporary concern and engaged a response to a relationship in the play, that between the Master Prospero and the slave Caliban, that would have seemed of less importance had not contemporary issues been invoked in the same way.

With Caliban we can again see the power of casting and make-up in presenting an interpretation of the play. When he was first played by a blackened actor, this in itself evoked the budding struggle of third world countries to break free of colonial rule.[7] The decision to portray Caliban as black would have at least as much to do with the common background of audience concern as presenting him as the Missing Link, with the doubtless difference that the former would do more to illuminate and enrich the significance of his relationship with Prospero. The connections between casting decision, interpretation, the audience's concerns and the current political and cultural climate are problematic. Rather than argue about which one is prior and primary in a causal chain, it would be more fruitful to see that they are all interconnected and that any analysis of one factor would have to take proper account of the influence of all the others. For the present study the significance lies in the

7. Roger Livesey's Caliban in Tyrone Guthrie's 1934 Old Vic production.

interconnectedness of cultural background, theatre produc-
tion and interpretation of the play, not in which is primary
or the most important factor at work.

In discussions of literary openness one does well to
remember that with the exception of their varying adherence
to the aspect of 'salvage and deformed slave', all the
conceptions of Caliban we have examined in this section,
with the exception of Peter Brook's 1968 production, have
been founded in the text of The Tempest. If, as I have
argued, a production of a play is a type of interpretation
of the work, the portrayals of Caliban in these productions
suggest that the scope for readers to interpret the
character is indeed wide. Both Darwinist and anti-colonial-
ist types of interpretations claimed fidelity to the text
of the play. Daniel Wilson, as we have seen, even going so
far as to imply that Shakespeare's genius had already
conceived of Darwin's Missing Link in creating the character
Caliban.

It is quite obvious that productions of The Tempest have
been highly receptive to outside influences in ways
indicated above. Less obvious are the ways in which
productions have influenced literary conceptions. Granted
that plays are works both to be performed and to be read,
stage representations would be powerful influences on how
readers make sense of the plays. This would be more likely
to happen the greater the unanimity among directors on the

interpretation of the work, and also the more ubiquitous the performance - Benson's 'Missing Link' production which toured Britain extensively for a considerable period of time is a case in point. Hazlitt is a witness to the power of stage productions to change an individual's interpretation of a work when he said of Kean's Shylock that he was disappointed because he had taken his idea of the play and the character from previous productions, not from the text itself. It was only by going back to the text that he saw this, for him, new Shylock was as legitimate and also better than the previous interpretations known to him.[8]

Emphasis on the text of the play, rather than on the possibilities for making a spectacle out of The Tempest can be seen to have gathered strength around the beginning of this century, as documented by Mary M. Nilan[9] and examined in 'The Performance History of The Tempest'. The possibility that this trend was just a fluke, with no particular cause, cannot be ruled out. Yet, explanations with some plausibility can be put forward in the absence of any put forward by Nilan herself.

The beginning of this century saw the advent of new media for spectacle and appeal to the vision. Popular cinema had the attraction of being a novelty, and it thus seems likely that theatre directors facing this competition either

8. In Nilan, 1975, pp. 196-197.

9. Nilan, 1972, pp. 113-123.

decided to cater for a more 'literary' taste in their productions of The Tempest or to do something else entirely.

Because of the 1870 Education Act, mass literacy had fed through to a significant proportion of the population of Britain by the turn of the century. If this had led to a larger proportion of the public being literate and taking up reading literature as a leisure activity, it could have lead to 'consumer demand' for more emphasis on the poetry of the play and also keeping performances closer to the text of the play - by now better known to the public at large.

Against this thesis it might be argued that the theatre audience was at any time largely confined to the educated middle classes, and that the rise of literacy was a phenomenon with little or no influence on the theatre and the taste and preferences of the public.

However, another development of the same period may have more explanatory force. The study of English as an academic subject and in the schools was established around the turn of the century.[10] With this, it can be argued, came a wider awareness of the literary and poetical qualities of Shakespeare, since Shakespeare obviously had a central position in curricula of English Literature. On balance, it seems that this development would be the greatest influence

10. The Honour School of English Language and Literature at Oxford University, for example, was established in 1893.

on the taste and opinion of the relevant part of the public at the time considered, and is the direction in which to look if one wants to examine more extensively why the turn of the century saw a change of emphasis in productions of The Tempest.

It could also be the explanation of why, with the known exception of Aimé Césaire's Une Tempête, the re-writings of The Tempest came to an end. John Russell Brown claimed that 'since Dryden's day, Shakespeare's plays have been so much studied in schools and elsewhere, so that public opinion has turned against large-scale rewriting'.[11] It would be futile to argue against the view that Shakespeare's stature had grown, over the years, to an unprecedented level and was never before so widely read. Dr. Johnson's highly influential and laudatory Preface to Shakespeare of 1765 was one major influence on this development. Still, despite Hazlitt's eloquent condemnation of the lack of poetic qualities and lack of fidelity to Shakespeare,[12] Kemble's spectacular 1789 version was no less popular for it. Neither was Kean's 1857 version, the last production of the Davenant and Dryden adaptation 19 years previously nor Beerbohm Tree's production of 1904.

What all these productions had in common was their emphasis on spectacular qualities. Hazlitt's condemnation can only be

11. John Russell Brown, 1960, p. 140.

12. Hazlitt, 1906, p. 90.

understood in the context of a fight over the various qualities of The Tempest, between spectacular, visual and romantic appeal on the one hand and the poetic and cerebral qualities on the other. The re-writings from Davenant and Dryden on were all geared to emphasise the former set of qualities, the text altered, cut and added to in order to get maximum effect out of these qualities. Thus, if the reading and studying of Shakespeare were to have had an effect on the production of The Tempest one would have to date it far later than 'Dryden's day'.

This turns us back to what was argued above about alternative sources of spectacle, and about the growth and growing influence of the academic profession of literary criticism as opposed to criticism in the popular journals and the newspapers of the day.

If this is the case, it shows yet again how the theatre and theatrical productions have had to respond to the background and demands of its audience. It remains to find an explanation for why Davenant and Dryden, and their followers, should have wished to stress the comic and spectacular qualities of The Tempest.

The Restoration as an epoch can be characterized as a period of relative frivolity and cultural freedom. This freedom also allowed women to take to the stage, which was exploited by Davenant and Dryden's addition of three female parts to

their adaptation of _The Tempest_. The success of the rewriting and the productions of it is beyond doubt and testifies to the popularity of light comedy. The focus on the encounters of innocent love is really quite sickening to anyone who has learnt to appreciate the poetic genius of Shakespeare. The Restoration public, evidently, had no such qualms. The subsequent re-writings exploited to the full developments in stage technology, focusing yet other qualities of the play to the delight of the audience of the day, if not all the critics.[13]

The performance history of _The Tempest_, therefore, casts considerable doubt on the theory that the classics of literature are classics precisely because they have been shown to have a perennial theme which is equally relevant to any period and epoch because they deal with the central human problems. _The Tempest_, though, was kept in production and thus in the theatrical canon and in public esteem by exploiting the spectacle the play invited, and the often unrefined comedy of 'innocent love'. Up to the present century, therefore, the history of _The Tempest_ in the theatre has been one where the qualities of sentimentality

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13. In _An Essay on the play of The Tempest_, P. MacDonnell even maintained that 'some of the characters drawn by Shakespeare were never altogether understood till the excellence of the histrionic art developed them'. Quotation in Griffiths, p. 160.

and vulgarity[14] have been central to its appeal and consequently for its canonicity. That we have, comparatively recently, seen productions and interpretations focusing themes of a more cerebral and 'deep' nature should not make us forget that the popularity of the play has been based on these other interpretations of it. Neither should it be forgotten that interpretations of the latter kind have made much of its audience's concerns and of topical themes.

Most of these have been developed without rewriting The Tempest because, as John Russell Brown puts it: 'poets are no longer employed to alter Shakespeare and the responsibility has devolved entirely on theatre managers and directors'.[15] Not that this necessarily causes less variation than the rewritings of the previous centuries, as we have seen in previous chapters of this section. It is rather an example of the creative scope of theatrical production considered as an interpretation of the work.

We have already seen the interpretive scope in such basic factors as casting, make-up, delivery and scenery. It falls on the director, in most cases, to give the production direction and thus assure that decisions on all levels

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14. Qualities left little honour by Anthony Savile, The Test of Time: An Essay in Philosophical Aesthetics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) pp. 236-261.

15. John Russell Brown, 1960, p. 140.

contribute to make a performance with an over-arching conception.

Says Jonathan Miller:

> In the first place you simply elicit from the actors those inflexions and tones which illustrate those moral ideas which interest you at the time. You do this by simply explaining to the actor what you feel the leading salient issues of the play are for you at the moment, making it quite clear to them that you do not regard this as the definitive, final interpretation. This is simply a provisional hypothesis.[16]

> The great mystery and excitement of rehearsing and directing a play is the discovery of themes and items and features which are congruent with one's first intention, consistent with it, but nevertheless not anticipated at the time when you actually had that intention.[17]

In this situation the director has the power to fashion the production according to his or her ideas. With this power in mind it is not difficult to understand why some productions, like the Cheek-by-Jowl production of The Tempest dealt with

16. Miller in Berry, p. 36.

17. Miller in Berry, p. 37.

above, have represented Prospero as a theatre director. For Prospero can be seen as a man with a book who creates a kind of theatre on the island/stage, he turns the island into a theatre in an inverse mirror image of the way the players and with them the audience turns the theatre into an island.

Yet, the director, like Prospero, is not free to do whatever he or she wants. There are many constraints operating in any one production, notably resources and time. Here I shall only discuss some of the general constraints.

Obviously, the director is as much part of the cultural climate as any reader or member of the audience - a fact which only makes it easier to communicate the interpretation the production constitutes. But the cultural climate also creates a set of assumptions it is hard, if not impossible, for the director to go beyond. This, in one sense, constraint is also the fertile ground from which aspects of the play can be focused and given an interpretation that governs the production.

Among other constraints, the presence of the theatrical tradition should not be ignored. Even radical departures from it, like Peter Brook's Roundhouse experiment in 1968, are dominated by it in their attempts to break free of it. Jonathan Miller, sometime radical of the theatre, confirms the power of the theatrical tradition quite clearly by saying that

Well, in a sense I am lucky in that I am ignorant
of the theatre. I have never been a theatre
enthusiast, in the past I didn't go very much to
the theatre, and therefore I had no knowledge
really of the standard ways of doing a play.[18]

If the contrast between his 1970 and his 1988 productions of
The Tempest is anything to go by, it would appear that he
now *has* gained knowledge of the standard ways of doing a
play.

Nevertheless, we have seen from the history of The Tempest
productions that the creative licence given by the theatri-
cal tradition was great. Literary critics though, like
Hazlitt, were heard speaking out against this licence. It
seems that the influence of the literary critics gained a
great deal roughly around the beginning of this century, as
argued above. This can also be seen from the degree of
critical hostility to the modern innovatory productions
examined in previous chapters, mostly from literary critical
rather than theatrical quarters. There was no such hostility
from T. S. Eliot, though, and I quote an exchange between
Eliot and Nevill Coghill about Rupert Doone's production of
Sweeney Agonistes:

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18. Miller in Berry, p. 32.

Myself: I had no idea the play meant what he made of it ... that everyone is a Crippen. I was astonished. Mr. Eliot: So was I. Myself: Then you had meant something very different when you wrote it? Mr Eliot: Very different indeed. Myself: Yet you accept Mr Doone's production? Mr Eliot: Certainly. Myself: But ... but ... can a play mean something you didn't intend it to mean, you didn't know it meant? Mr Eliot: <u>Obviously it does</u>. Myself: But can it then also mean what you did intend? Mr Eliot: I hope so ... yes, I think so. Myself: But if the two meanings are contradictory, is not one right and the other wrong? Must not the author be right? Mr Eliot: Not necessarily, do you think? Why is either wrong?

This was to me so staggering a point of view that I could not put it down to modesty. I therefore abandoned this attack for one more frontal. Myself: Tell me, Mr Eliot, who <u>is</u> Sweeney? How do you see him? What sort of a man is he? Mr Eliot: I think of him as a man who in younger days was perhaps a professional pugilist, mildly success-

ful; who then grew older and retired to keep a pub.[19]

What Eliot possibly knew was that the pressures on a theatrical interpretation are greater than on the academic critic. The former will have to make the interpretation of the play work in the medium for which it is primarily intended. But the pressure does not stop there, the working play will still have to appeal to the public. Only the existence of state subsidies for some theatres blurs the picture of the audience's indulgence at the box office being the only means of setting the director free. In comparison, the academic critic has a far easier time of it.

It may well be for this reason that the more radical directors have little to offer in the way of praise for academic critics of literature and what they take to be their attitude to the Shakespearean theatre:

> To make matters worse there is always a deadly spectator, who for special reasons enjoys a lack of intensity and even a lack of entertainment, such as the scholar who emerges from routine performances of the classics smiling because nothing has distracted him from trying over and

19. Nevill Coghill, 'Sweeney Agonistes', in T.S. Eliot: A Symposium, edited by Tambimuttu & Richard Mach (London: Frank & Cass, 1965), pp. 82-87 (p. 86).

confirming his pet theories to himself, whilst reciting his favourite lines under his breath. In his heart he sincerely wants a theatre that is nobler-than-life and he confuses a sort of intellectual satisfaction with the true experience for which he craves. Unfortunately, he lends the weight of his authority to dullness and so the Deadly Theatre goes on its way.[20]

The responsibility of the director has to go further than that of the literary scholar and critic. Too much emphasis on the poetical qualities of The Tempest and the result might turn into a dramatized reading or lecture which falls dead on arrival, rather than an experience which is not only an appeal to the senses but also to the imagination.

Not surprisingly, some found that Miller's production of The Tempest at the Mermaid was anachronistic. B. A. Young in Financial Times, 16 June 1970, argued that 'colonialism, the domination of one race (as opposed to one nation) over another, is something that Shakespeare had never heard of'

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20. Peter Brook, The Empty Space (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 10.

and that 'it isn't possible to set any party unequivocally in the position of colonialist or of subject'.[21]

This is probably true, but how relevant is it? Should a theatrical performance be a museum piece or more like a living organism, adapting to the changing climate of reception? It must be kept in mind that while the text of The Tempest does not change, audiences _do_ change, which means that the reception of the theatre's texts are affected by history. Trying to present the plays as they would have been presented to the original audience would not produce the same response, but more likely give weight to 'the deadly theatre'. Miller was not violating The Tempest in order to force the colonialist themes on an unsuspecting audience, but rather using 'the whole colonial theme as knowledge which the audience brought to bear on Shakespeare's play'.[22]

Miller does not see himself as building the Trojan horse invoked in my opening quotation to the chapter 'Colonial Appropriations and Interpretations': '(I do not) wish to seize The Tempest or to hijack The Tempest and fly it to a modern airport and make it do the work of anti-colonial radicalism, that would be I think a very crude and brutal

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21. B. A. Young, 'The Tempest', _Financial Times_, 16 June 1970, p. 3.

22. Miller in Berry, p. 35.

thing to do. It is just that by bringing out that particular theme in The Tempest something rather rich happens which wouldn't occur if one simply played the rather romantic version of The Tempest.'[23]

Still, whatever Miller did or did not wish to do with Shakespeare's play the fact remains that he took liberties with the text in the view of the tradition of literary critical interpretations of The Tempest by focusing on what he found to be a theme in the play relevant to his audience's concerns. The test of the theatrical pudding is the box office, and the reason why productions like Miller's caught on was that, apart from its histrionic qualities, it also showed that the emphasis was felt to be in tune with the audience's thinking and weltanschauung. Taking liberties with the source has precedent in theatrical practice, from wholesale rewritings like Davenant and Dryden's The Tempest, or, The Enchanted Island, to customary cutting of dialogue for performance. Textual interpretations of literature, on the other hand, seemingly, have no such tradition.[24] However, with the 'input' of impulses from Marxism and Linguistics literary criticism has changed in this respect. In the case of The Tempest, for instance, essays in three collections on Shakespeare from the middle 1980s linked the play with the wider context of colonialism through the

23. Miller in Berry, p. 34.

24. I shall return to this issue in the chapter 'Theatre: The Test of the Limit' below.

notion of 'discourse'.[25] The argument is, in the words of Barker and Hulme, that 'each individual text, rather than a meaningful unit in itself, lies at the intersection of different discourses which are related to each other in a complex but ultimately hierarchical way'.[26] Paul Brown goes so far as to say that The Tempest 'exemplifies not some timeless contradiction internal to the discourse ... but a moment of historical crisis. This crisis is the struggle to produce coherent discourse adequate to the complex requirements of British colonialism in its initial phase'.[27]

The essays to which I have called attention here are broadly within the critical movement called the 'new historicism'. The newness of this historicism lies in the focus on one aspect of history, namely social power relations and the ideology in which they are encoded. By going beyond The

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25. Paul Brown, '"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine": The Tempest and The Discourse of Colonialism', previously cited, Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, 'Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Con-Texts of The Tempest', in Alternative Shakespeare, edited by John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 191-205 and Thomas Cartelli, 'Prospero in Africa: The Tempest As Colonialist Text and Pretext', in Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology, edited by Jean E. Howard & Marion F. O'Connor (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 99-115.

26. Barker and Hulme, p. 197.

27. Brown, p. 48.

<u>Tempest</u> through the notion of 'discourse', the new histo-
ricists are not, unlike for example Miller, essentially
interested in making the work relevant to the concerns of
the reader. Rather, they wish to show how a culturally
valued artefact functions in a web of ultimately repressive
power-relations. <u>The Tempest</u> is thus primarily a pawn in the
game of stripping power of its cloak of culture, and it is a
moot point whether the 'new historicist' readings is better
classified as cultural criticism.

Meredith Anne Skura has taken issue with the 'new histo-
ricists' over <u>The Tempest</u>.[28] She argues that not only do
they flatten the play to fit the mould of colonialist
discourse, but they are also 'in danger of taking the play
further from the particular historical situation in England
in 1611 even as it brings it closer to what we mean by
"colonialism" today'.[29] Thus, it might even be that they
distort today's colonial discourse rather than reveal the
Jacobean one, because 'we have no <u>external</u> evidence that
seventeenth-century audiences thought the play referred to
the New World.'[30] Ultimately, this 'new historicist' project
fails because of the lack of colonialist discourse in
1611.[31] Shakespeare in <u>The Tempest</u> was to make the encounter

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28. Meredith Anne Skura, 'Discourse and the Individual: The
Case of Colonialism in <u>The Tempest</u>', <u>Shakespeare Quarterly</u>,
40 (1989), 42-69.

29. Skura, p. 47.

30. Skura, p. 47.

31. Skura, p. 56.

between oppressor and oppressed problematic enough to generate the present attention to the play. In this way, the general conflict is described in the play, which makes it possible to understand it in terms of ever new conflicts and fit it in in ever new weltanschauungen, or world-pictures.

Rob Nixon maintains that the era of liberation from colonialism showed, in the transgressive appropriations of The Tempest, that the status of value is an unstable social process.[32] However, it seems that Nixon inverts the true situation, for these appropriations are not a way of taking the shine off the western cultural icon, for the reason that The Tempest has value for a new and different audience, for reasons which are different from the ones which gave The Tempest its position in the western canon of cultural artifacts. So, contrary to Nixon, it shows that a cultural object like The Tempest has survived as a valued literary work because of its ability to address different tastes and concerns. Depending on one's viewpoint, this might say something about the contingencies of value, but it also speaks volumes about the stable value of its source.

The chapters of this section dealing with the production history and the colonial interpretations of The Tempest have shown that the play has been a gauge of changing inter-pretive interests on the part of its directors and, because of the public nature of the theatre, also of its public. So

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32. Nixon, p. 558.

far as a study such as the present can establish anything, this one has shown it to be the case that a literary work has been interpreted differently by different audiences along the historical axis and to some degree also the cultural axis, as we saw in the chapter 'Colonial Appropriations and Interpretations'. Summing up the relationship between interpretations of The Tempest and the cultural and political scene, Trevor R. Griffiths declares:

> The various interpretations we have examined ...
> do show that The Tempest has acted as a barometer
> of the changing fortunes and particular relevances
> and resonances, critical, social, political, and
> theatrical, of (its colonial) themes.[33]

On the same issue Rob Nixon remarks that it appears that the interest of The Tempest for African and Caribbean intellectuals faded when 'the plot ran out', for the play ends before anything that can be interpreted as post-colonial conflicts are dealt with.[34] That might be the case, but Aimé Césaire argues for the timeless relevance of The Tempest, for 'a great work of art such as Shakespeare's play belongs to all humanity - and, as such, it can undergo as many reinterpretations as do the myths of classical antiquity'.[35] Still, this is a statement yet a long way from being

33. Griffiths, pp. 180.

34. Nixon, p. 576.

35. S. Belhassen, p. 176.

verified and it raises the question of the limits of literary interpretation. Which are the criteria by which one may say of an interpretation that it is not an interpretation, that it is just 'wild' and wide of the mark?

This is a profound and serious question for literary aesthetics, which I will deal with more extensively in the chapters 'Three Criteria of Literary Interpretation' and 'Theatre: The Test of the Limit' below. In this context I will just call attention to the fact that there is a distinction between adaptations of a play and transformations of it. The former, in the words of Christopher Spencer, 'include substantial cuts of scenes, speeches, and speech assignments; much alteration of language; and at least one and usually several important (or scene-length) additions'.[36] Transformations take characters, often simplified, from one play, and put them through a partly or wholly new plot, sometimes with the introduction of new characters as well.[37] Little is won by assigning the productions we have examined to one or the other group, but a general observation is that theatre productions of The Tempest will more or less fit in the first category of adaptations. As we have seen, in nearly all productions of The Tempest the text is cut and the 'abhorred slave' speech is assigned to Prospero rather than to Miranda. Re-writings, on the other hand, fit more neatly into the latter category.

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36. Quoted in Cohn, p. 3.

37. Cohn, p. 4.

A more pertinent question is whether the latter is more of a transgression than the former?

One central consideration is what kind of attitude they display towards the text. It can be argued that the latter discard the text altogether, using it as a starting point, and that the former just has a rather free attitude to it. The issue of transgression must be seen against this background. If the play just uses the name of The Tempest, some of its characters and parts of the plot it might be argued that it is not a transgression but a development or a literary or theoretical comment. If the production is free with the text and radical in the way it is realized to focus on a theme interpreted in the text, it is hard to see it as a transgression. Transgression comes up as an issue if one uses criteria of academic literary interpretation in the context of theatrical production. The theatrical criteria of topicality and relevance guides an approach significantly different from the one which follows from the literary critical criteria of textual fidelity.[38]

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38. What I call the literary critical attitude here is a simplification and refers to the more conservative school of literary criticism, since more recent developments in the field, in particular 'deconstruction', have stressed the virtues of free play with the text. These recent developments are not to be confused with what I call the theatrical attitude, though, because the latter is motivated by

Jonathan Miller displays the theatrical attitude when he argues, in a rather 'purple passage', that fidelity is not the right approach for the director:

> The job of the artist in the theatre is illumination and reconstruction and the endless task of assimilating the objects of the past into the interests of the present ... Literary and dramatic matter is being continuously created out of fundamental substance created in the early history of the literary universe.[39]

Miller's experience of directing Shakespeare is revealing also with respect to how individual readers make sense of literary works. The main difference is that, in most cases, the director and the company will spend more time and energy on the interpretation, another that we can go and see it every night for as long as the production runs. The reader of a literary work has many motives for reading the work, and different readers have different motivations for doing so. The theatre, as I have argued above, is subject to the influence of its audience. That implies that the interpretations it stages have to appeal to the audience in different ways. We have seen how some of the elements of a

relevance to the concerns of the public and the former appears to be motivated by a skeptical position in the philosophy of language.

39. Miller in Berry, p. 40.

production can change the interpretation of the text of the play in quite radical ways, and we have through the production history of <u>The Tempest</u> seen how the changing concerns of its audience have been reflected in themes explored in the productions of the play over a long period. On reflection, we can see that this is similar to the reading situation. The individual reader is no more restricted in what to make of, for example, characters, what they look like, in what manner they speak and 'what it is all about'. Likewise, only more directly, will what readers make of the literary work be guided by their concerns and their situation. This is what I have chosen to label 'the paradigm of theatrical performance', by this indicating that what actually happens in literary interpretations that are not controlled by the criteria of academic literary criticism is more concerned with the relevance of the work to the reader or the audience than with textual accuracies and subtleties.[40] This is not to say which is 'the better' but to point out that the paradigms of the two practices are in crucial respects different, and that no account of literary interpretation that does not take this into account is complete.

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40. I shall argue this below.

Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value:

The Tempest

In the previous chapter we discussed the result of the case studies of the chapters 'The Performance History of The Tempest' and 'Colonial Appropriations and Interpretations' with particular reference to the nature of theatrical productions as interpretations. Having previously seen how the theatrical interpretations of The Tempest changed over time, the focus was on how the situation, broadly conceived, of theatre productions influenced their interpretations of the work. I ended the discussion with the suggestion that the openness to changing concerns and tastes witnessed in the performance history of The Tempest is mirrored in the reading situation, and that theatrical performance can be seen as a paradigm of how readers make sense of literary works.

The primary concern of this chapter is to continue, in a new context, the exploration of how the concerns of the period in which a literary work is read and the concerns of the individual interpreter in that period influences inter-pretation. It has been shown by the preceding chapters that constructive activity beyond the level of determining sentence-meaning is involved in interpreting literature and that the assumptions and concerns of the interpreter, and consequently of the historical moment in which he or she

lives, plays a part in determining which elements of the work are regarded as important, how they are related to each other by the interpreter and, more generally, how they are understood.

In order to provide a new and specific context for the further discussion of these issues, part I of the chapter provides an interpretation of The Tempest which focuses on the role of Prospero as 'prime mover', with particular reference to his 'art' not only in steering the course of events, but also in the manipulation of the natural environment. This modern interpretation acknowledges that the concerns of today embrace an awareness of the power of modern science and technology to destroy the natural environment, and proposes that Prospero's position in the play with regard to his power on the island can be seen to be analogous to the power of the scientist to manipulate the environment in the present day.

It is plausible to suppose that the reader/spectator of today will approach Prospero's powers over the natural environment of the island through his 'art' with an awareness of the powers of science over the natural environment of the earth. I shall argue that in the context

of the play it is possible that a reflecting modern audience[1] will see Prospero's 'art' as suggestive of the powers of today's science over the environment, be it through its most dramatic manifestation, nuclear weapons, or through other means devised by science to modify the natural environment. I shall further argue that the topicality of the connection between Prospero and modern science can lead to an identification of Prospero with humanity as a whole in a way that would not be plausible before, say, this century, because of the way our self-conception has changed with regard to our position in relation to nature. Only with the now almost boundless powers of knowledge, in the form of science, can this connection between Prospero and humanity be made. Thus, I argue, the topical theme of ecology leads easily into the perennial themes of 'nature versus nurture', and/or 'revenge and restraint'. My discussion of The Tempest in the first part of this chapter will therefore focus on the formation of such themes with close reference

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1. I shall use 'the modern audience' in a more restricted sense than to mean just any possible contemporary audience or readership. I assume a higher degree of theatrical and literary knowledge and sophistication than one might expect from, say, picking a contemporary audience at random in London's West End.

to the text of the play.[2] The theoretical soundness or otherwise of such moves will be taken up in the latter part of the chapter.

I

The central issue in any attempt to elicit The Tempest's 'ecological theme' is the nature of Prospero's command over the course of events in The Tempest. It seems that his powers do not go beyond the vicinity of the island:

> By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
>
> ... hath mine enemies
>
> Brought to this shore.[3]

As it is, his powers of manipulation on the island seem extensive. He creates the tempest, saves all the passengers

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2. Part I does not attempt to draw all the interrelated elements of the play together into a comprehensive interpretation. Rather, it presents a way of viewing a selection of aspects the modern audience may foreground when seeing or reading the play. This foregrounding does not entail blotting out other aspects of the play, like the political themes, but is an expansion rather than an alternative. Literary aesthetics has all too often taken for granted that the way critics present their papers is the way readers make sense of literary works. This is, as I argued in the previous chapter, a serious mistake.

3. I,ii, 178-180.

from drowning, and has them stranded at different spots on the island's shore with their garments restored, and finally with the ship intact.

From the second scene of the first act the text emphasises the importance of Prospero's powers, from the visual presence of his 'magical garment'[4] to Miranda's plea that

> If by your Art, my dearest father, you have
> Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.[5]

The scenes conjured up by Miranda's colourful imagination in the lines following this quotation bring home to the modern audience the fearful consequences the exercise of Prospero's powers could have. The world of the play, we are reminded, can be brought to the most terrible end by the powers of this man.

The modern audience is unlikely to see or read this, and reflect,[6] without bringing knowledge of the present predicament to bear on the interpretation of the play. The development of physics, for example, has given us nuclear

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4. I,ii, 24.

5. I,ii, 1-2.

6. The importance of reflection should be stressed, since interpretation requires constructive activity. It is all too tempting for the theorist to assume that any audience will respond with a high degree of sophistication.

fission. With a power source of such immense force, anyone who possesses it holds a destructive potential over the real world of a magnitude at least matching that of Prospero's over his island.

Prospero, very modestly, calls himself 'master of a full poor cell'.[7] The discrepancy between this self-description and the power he has wielded to bring about the tempest borders on the self-deflatory as it is clear that the cell is where he keeps his books, which are the very source of his power. That it is a source is brought out by Prospero saying that

> I'll to my book;
> For yet, ere supper-time, must I perform
> Much business appertaining.[8]

From this it is clear that the book (or books) is the source of his power, which in the fifth act is vindicated by his pledge to abjure his power[9] and consequently drown his book deep in the sea.[10] It is therefore less ironic when Prospero later refers to his 'poor cell'[11] if he makes good his pledge.

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7. I,ii, 20.

8. III,i, 94-96.

9. V,i, 50-51.

10. V,i, 56-57.

11. In V,i, 301.

The book, of course, should only strengthen the link the modern audience makes between Prospero and the notion of this character as a proto-scientist. A production might very well strengthen this link by showing the cell with book(s).

Much has been made of Prospero as magician, even 'white magician' in contrast to Sycorax's black magic.[12] However, no matter what colour one attributes to his magic, it cannot be expected of the modern audience that it will easily interpret the character of Prospero in this way. The thought-world in which magic is a serious option is one which it takes great mental effort to enter. To relate to the powers of Prospero, and appropriate the themes of the play for present concerns, it seems more fruitful to see him as the proto-scientist suggested earlier.[13]

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12. See Frank Kermode's Introduction to the Arden Shakespeare, William Shakespeare, The Tempest, The Arden Shakespeare, edited by Frank Kermode (London: Macmillan, 1954), for the distinction between Sycorax's and Prospero's magic, pp. xl-xli, and the nature of Prospero's magic, pp. xlvii-li.

13. 'Magic sought power over nature; astrology proclaimed nature's power over man. Hence the magician is the ancestor of the modern practicing or 'applied' scientist, the inventor ... '. C.S. Lewis, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature, Collected by Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966), p. 56.

The modern audience may also note that the relation between Prospero and his powers is a _role_ he can enter or leave at will, thus providing a further analogy to the modern scientist, who typically is a scientist by profession not vocation. The character of Prospero sanctions such an interpretation, since after Miranda has taken off his 'magic garment' he addresses it: 'Lie there, my Art'. The modern popular conception of the scientist as a person in a white robe with a test tube in hand does nothing to undermine the plausibility of this connection.

An example of how the reception situation of The Tempest today gives us access via a topical to a perennial theme that was not as readily available before, is the conflict of 'revenge versus restraint'.

With regard to the nature of Prospero's 'art', it seems that his powers are significantly contrasted with the baser instincts of mankind, since his 'art' does not stick on 'the beast Caliban':

> A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
>
> Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,
>
> Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
>
> And as with age his body uglier grows,
>
> So his mind cankers. I will plague them all,
>
> Even to roaring.[14]

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14. IV,i, 188-193.

It is evident here that Prospero's impotence in the face of unyielding nature torments him to distraction. He is quite clearly not omnipotent in the contest with stupid primitivity, represented by Caliban.[15] Prospero's inclination to take out his frustration on Caliban illustrates the conflict between the 'Art' and the emotional immaturity of mankind, since the powerful Prospero does not automatically act virtuously despite all his knowledge and learning.

Knowing what we do about the probable effects of thermonuclear warfare, Prospero's battle with his own emotions is indeed a highly topical theme. It is natural to worry about what would happen if the power inherent in scientific knowledge was exercised by an over-heated brain. In The Tempest Prospero fights this battle within himself. The desire is for revenge over his brother, who usurped his political powers in Milan, and he battles with his rage against the obdurate ignorance of Caliban and the plot hatched by him and the drunkards. In the last act the 'good' prevails[16] as he says:

> Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
>
> Do I take part: the rarer action is
>
> In virtue than in vengeance.[17]

15. Note how the location of the island, between 'primitive' Africa and Renaissance Italy, is also relevant in this conflic

16. But they have suffered for their treason: IV,i, 258-262.

17. V,i, 26-28.

Both in our world and in that of the play, power to command
nature and power to command men are independent. In the play
Prospero's powers to integrate them are at issue. He ends
having shown his capacity to rule wisely. In our world, we
hope against hope for a similar outcome.

A further, related, example of how the reception situation
changes the theme of the interpretation is the new content
the modern audience can give to the perennial theme of
'nature versus nurture'. 'Nature', in this context, is
understood in contrast to the socially conveyed virtues of
'nurture'. The fundamental change comes with the perception
of Prospero as the scientist. The concept of 'The Mage'
implied a certain type of virtue, because the superior
knowledge of 'The Mage' made him wise. This connection is
now missing, given the identification of Prospero with the
scientist and the modern awareness that power and intelli-
gence do not entail wisdom. The ability to react maturely to
social and emotional conflicts and crises, we know, has not
kept pace with the improvements in humanity's scientific
knowledge. The awareness of the modern audience of this
characteristic of the present situation highlights those
aspects of the play that deal with similar situations. The
failure of Prospero to improve the nature of Caliban is made
all the more serious by the fact that Caliban is easily led
by the drunkards Stephano and Trinculo.[18] Without the link
between knowledge, power and virtue provided by the concept

18. See the end of II,ii.

of 'The Mage', the plot hatched by Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano[19] puts before us the possibility of a 'Caliban mind' with 'Prospero power'.[20] In other words, the current situation makes it more likely that the modern audience will see these connections in the play. The concerns of the modern audience give a content to the theme of nature versus nurture that is different from any available to Shakespeare's contemporary audience.

So, if the modern audience looks for a fictional treatment of humanity's predicament of having the power to destroy the earth as we know it, yet still being immature in ability to resolve emotional conflicts, Prospero's dilemma with regard to revenge against his treacherous brother, his frustration with the unyielding nature of Caliban and the plot to oust him, offers scope for these themes. The conflicts fortunately also have happy endings. By the time Prospero is prepared to choose 'virtue', he has more or less achieved his objectives and successfully fought the urge to take revenge - so graphically described in his rage against Caliban in the preceding act.[21]

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19. VI,i.

20. Cosmo Corfield, in 'Why Does Prospero Abjure His "Rough Magic"?', Shakespeare Quarterly, 36 (1985), 31-48, argues that the opposition between Ariel and Caliban is an allegory of Prospero's mind. That would, of course, make 'Prospero power with Caliban mind' a real alternative in the play.

21. VI,i, 188-193.

Thus, for the modern audience Prospero resembles a symbol of modern science: frail in the face of evil and humanity's emotional immaturity, yet with a power that can, if injudiciously applied, be horrible in its consequences, and that on a scale far larger than Prospero's revenge.

On the other hand, we also see that Prospero can use his 'art' to please, not only manipulate for his own ends, as is shown in the masque he puts on for Miranda and Ferdinand:

> I must
> Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple
> Some vanity of mine Art; it is my promise,
> And they expect it from me.[22]

This contrast between the 'revenge and reconciliation' aspects of his 'art' is only resolved in the last act of the play in the soliloquy where he lists the various destructive and fiercely manipulative powers of his 'so potent Art':

> But this rough magic
> I here abjure; and, when I have requir'd
> Some heavenly music, - which even now I do,-
> To work mine end upon their senses, that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,

---

22. IV,i, 39-42.

> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
>
> I'll drown my book.[23]

This is where Prospero relinquishes his powers. In his last act before breaking his staff and drowning his book he uses the power to give heavenly music to the senses of the people he manipulates.[24]

Having established the nature of Prospero's art and that it is confined to the island and its vicinity, the next step in an interpretation that tries to relate the play to the power of science over nature must be to inquire into the status of the island within such an interpretation.

In his Shakespeare Our Contemporary Jan Kott claimed that for the Elizabethans 'the stage was the world, and the world was the stage'.[25] Now, even if we do not accept this claim, or deem it irrelevant on the ground that the modern audience will not bring Elizabethan assumptions to bear even on an interpretation of a play from that particular epoch, it still remains the case that for any audience the phenomenological character, in a certain sense of the term, of the

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23. V,i, 50-57.

24. These now include the audience since they also will hear the music.

25. Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, translated by Boleslaw Taborski, second edition (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 250.

spectator situation <u>makes</u> the world of the play to all intents and purposes appear to be the real world.

Both in our world and in that of the play, power to command nature and power to command men are independent. In the play Prospero's powers to integrate them are at issue. He ends having shown his capacity to rule wisely. In our world, we hope against hope for a similar outcome.

II

Given contemporary concern with the environment, and the quite recent realization that we might be in the process of destroying the basis of our way of life by the effects of the very same way of life, the 'ecological theme' of <u>The Tempest</u> that I have outlined above is indeed topical.

It is maintained by most theorists who have discussed the nature and value of theme formation in literary criticism that topical themes are particularly fragile when put through the test of time.[26] They argue that it is the

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26. See in particular Anthony Savile, <u>The Test of Time: An Essay in Philosophical Aesthetics</u> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) and Stein Haugom Olsen, 'Thematic Concepts: Where Philosophy Meets Literature', in <u>Philosophy and Literature</u>, edited by A. Phillips Griffiths, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), pp. 75-93, and 'Topical Themes and Literary Value', in <u>Fors-kningsprosjektet KRITIK och KONST</u>, edited by Gøran Sørbom,

perennial themes which define great literature, and that the treatment of topical themes is the mark of ephemeral works. The interpretation of The Tempest proposed above can be seen to offer a new angle on this discussion.

For earlier critics Prospero has been 'The Mage'. With the modern, topical and anachronistic conception of Prospero as the scientist proposed in the first part of this chapter, we can see that a new interpretation of the play is available to us that could not have been available to an earlier audience. This possibility arises from mankind's changing self-conception.

It is arguable that we live in 'the age of science'. The role of humanity has changed in important respects in a short period of time. The realm of the possible has expanded beyond the wildest dreams of earlier generations, and our daily lives have been radically transformed. If there is a single concept which represents the forces that have caused this momentous change it must be 'science'. It is thus plausible to claim that the present-day conception of humanity, our 'self-conception', is that of 'scientific man', and that this self-understanding has wide currency in present-day western societies. The next step, then, is to suggest that the topical interpretation of· The Tempest in this chapter implies that 'Prospero the scientist' represents humanity as a whole. This transformation does not have

to be at all abrupt in order for this relation to be productive in the understanding of the play. The transformation of Prospero the arch-scientist to Prospero as representing humanity happens just because of the change in self-conception which has occurred, in a historical perspective, quite recently.

Thus, the transformation of the role of Prospero from 'Mage' to 'Scientist' is brought about by the topicality of ecology and our manipulation of nature, and by our new self-conception. The further transformation of the character into a representative of humanity as a whole would appear to be virtually inevitable because of the present situation of the whole of humanity, posing a possible threat to ourselves by the power wielded by knowledge under the mantle of science. The upshot of these considerations is that the reception situation of today can change our interpretation of the play in a way previously impossible. At a higher level of generality the situation problematized by this interpretation is that of the perennial dilemmas of 'revenge and restraint', and 'nature versus nurture'.[27] These are perennial themes which previous generations of interpreters may have arrived at through different topical themes, or not at all.

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27. At an even higher level of generality these two dilemmas can, I think, be unified in one theme. I shall not attempt to do so here, and it is in any case doubtful if such a move would serve any purpose.

However, despite the possible identity of themes at the higher level of generality, the change in the way the modern audience conceives of Prospero is profound. As 'Mage' Prospero is set apart from the modern audience by the mystical and esoteric nature of his knowledge. The 'Mage' was further a marginal figure in the eyes of Elizabethan society as a whole. On the other hand, Prospero as 'Scientist' brings him closer to the modern audience by the public nature of his 'art', which also makes it much easier for the modern audience to identify with him. The powers of science are the powers of society. Despite the long initiation process, there is nothing inherently secret about the powers of science, and science is embraced by society. So much so, that modern society may well be said to conceive of itself as 'scientific society'. Thus, it can be said that changes in society have brought Prospero from the elevated and esoteric level of the 'Mage' down to the public in a way that was previously unthinkable. In terms of this background it is arguable that The Tempest is a play more relevant to the present audience than to Shakespeare's contemporary audience.

This raises the question how such a move can be justified in the face of interpretations more plausible from the point of view of readings rooted in the Elizabethan era.

Since the interpretation I have suggested here is based on assumptions about the concerns of the modern audience,

topical questions, this is to enter upon a continuing debate about topical and perennial themes in literary works. The critic and theorist Frank Kermode seems to favour openness to topical themes:

> It seems that on a just view of the matter the books we call classics possess intrinsic qualities that endure, but possess also openness to accommodation which keeps them alive under endlessly varying dispositions.[28]

The more 'austere' view is held by, among others, Stein Haugom Olsen.[29] He defines a topical theme as

> a formulation of problems and issues of particular interest to a group of people (a society, a class, ...) for a certain period. These problems and issues are related to a specific situation in which that group of people sees itself or society/mankind as a whole as being, at that particular time.[30]

On this account the topical theme is transitory and cannot be used to explain how it is that the great works have

28. Frank Kermode, The Classic (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983), p. 44.

29. Olsen is influenced by Savile.

30. Olsen in Sørbom, p. 54.

survived over the ages to delight and enrich the lives of new generations. The austerity of his view is brought out by his strict definition of 'literature' according to which

> it is necessary for a piece of discourse to invite construal in thematic terms if it is to merit the label 'literary work'.[31]

The only valuable themes are perennial ones:

> Literary appreciation ... always involves an attempt to apprehend the theme of a work using such thematic concepts as come closest to being perennial thematic concepts.[32]

Olsen defines perennial themes in opposition to topical ones, such that

> a perennial theme differs from a topical theme in two respects: in the nature of the concepts which are used to define it, and in its lack of connection with a specific social/historical situation.[33]

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31. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 81.

32. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 86.

33. Olsen in Sørbom, p. 58.

According to Olsen perennial concepts describe aspects of human nature and existence which have given rise to existential and metaphysical problems that we have not been able to solve, and which remain of continuing human interest.

However, it need not be the case that the views of Kermode and Olsen are irreconcilable. It can be argued that the great themes are the meta-level of more topical themes, and that the relation between them resembles that between type and token. Indeed, Olsen concedes that topical themes can constitute an element in the development of a perennial theme.[34] It is far from clear, however, whether this modification changes the general picture significantly. The most problematic element in Olsen's account lies in his assumption that thematic concepts and themes are there in the literary works.[35] It is an empirical fact that interpretations of literary works reach different results, and even if some of the interpretations are good and others bad, it does not follow that the demarcation criterion we employ is whether the interpreter has got the perennial theme right.

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34. Olsen in Sørbom, p. 59.

35. Witness that he stresses that the correct description of the literary response to a literary work is 'imaginative reconstruction of its literary aesthetic features'. (My emphasis). Stein Haugom Olsen, The End of Literary Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), p. 16.

A common assumption underlying the various theories which assume that there is a single theme in a literary work, is that the interpreter has no role to play other than eliciting whatever is there already. The assumption is, however, implausible, and Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of understanding, his hermeneutics, helps us to see how it may be coherently rejected.

Gadamer offers a theoretical account of the relationship between text, reader and the situation of reception that takes account of the fact that in the process of understanding all three elements interact. One of the more provocative elements of his theory is that one's 'prejudices' (Vorurteile) are the productive ground of understanding. 'The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the enlightenment, will prove to be itself a prejudice'.[36] Gadamer is concerned to 'rescue' the term from the enlightenment's discrediting account of the term by pointing out that rather than impede understanding, the judgments one makes before encountering a phenomenon are preconditions for understanding the phenomenon. This is because 'the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments,

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36. Gadamer, 1979, p. 244. In this translation 'sich ... erweisen' (p. 280) has been rendered as 'prove ... itself', whereas 'show ... itself' would capture the German sense better at this point, and would be more in keeping with Gadamer's anti-scientistic stance.

constitute the historical reality of his being'.[37] This is because understanding takes place in a situation, and 'the very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it'.[38] This rules out any purely 'objective' conception of literary interpretation, since prejudices, in Gadamer's sense, will always be with the interpreter. In other words: prejudice is the very stuff understanding is made of.

Gadamer emphasises 'application' of the issues discussed to the situation of the interpreter as the very nature of hermeneutics, since the interpreter's situation and concerns are unavoidable elements in the process of understanding. Gadamer's model for the role of application in understanding is _legal_ hermeneutics. The meaning of a law is not fixed by the original statement of the law, but is realized, expanded and modified, within limits, by its application to ever new situations which are seen to be governed by the law. The phenomenon of understanding a text works in a corresponding way: it is by applying the text to one's own situation that its meaning can be understood. This is part of the background for Gadamer's notorious claim that 'we understand in

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37. Gadamer, p. 245.

38. Gadamer, p. 269.

a different way, if we understand at all'.[39] However, to use Gadamer's term, the interpreter's relation to the text is one of 'dialogue'. As well as inviting discussion of a <u>Sache</u> (subject matter),[40] the text 'speaks to you'. This should be emphasised, since one can be misled by a relativist euphoria when encountering Gadamer for the first time. So, one's prejudices may well be confounded. However, the notion of '<u>Sache</u>' is problematic in literary interpretation. The reason may well be that Gadamer's hermeneutics is not developed in response to questions that have arisen in the interpretation of literary works. One way to bring out this deficiency is to ask what the <u>sache</u> is in, for instance, the work interpreted in the next chapter: Joseph Conrad's <u>Heart of Darkness</u>. Is it imperialism? Is it Conrad's own journey up the Congo? Can it be the nature of evil? The importance of moral restraint in the absence of social cohesion? The moral effects of culture shock? We know that these and other answers to the question have been provided. It is a good deal easier to answer questions about the <u>Sache</u> of different laws, Kant's <u>Critique of Pure Reason</u> and Adam

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39. Gadamer, p. 264. The German is 'man <u>anders</u> versteht, <u>wenn man überhaubt versteht</u>' (p. 302). These are Gadamer's emphases, which are not represented in the translation.

40. Gadamer says that 'the first of all hermeneutic requirements remains one's own fore-understanding, which proceeds from being concerned with the same subject.' Gadamer, 1979, p. 262. In the German 'same subject' is '<u>gleichen Sache</u>' (p. 299).

Smith's _Wealth of Nations_; the difference stems from the 'openness' of literary works, their openness to be interpreted as addressing different issues and concerns. But there is one limiting factor at work in determining which issues or subject matters we take the literary works to address: the tradition which transmits preconceptions about the works through previous generation's encounters with them.[41] In Gadamer's terminology this is _wirkungsgeschicht-liche Bewusstsein_ (effective-historical consciousness).

The most important of these preconceptions or prejudices in the interpretative situation is that we deem the object for interpretation interesting. To do that we have to pre-judge the object to be worthy of our interest. The main class of objects which are judged worthy of interest for us by the culture in which we live are the classical works.

This is where we return to Kermode's claim about the intrinsic qualities of the text and its openness to accommodation. Gadamer's account allows for the possibility that the intrinsic qualities, the beautiful form, entertainment and the eternal truths[42] it contains are, along with

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41. Gadamer, p. 268.

42. What I mean by 'eternal truths' is more like the statements of the text, like 'we are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little lives rounded by a sleep', than the 'perennial themes' Olsen argues for. The former may form

its openness to accommodation, the reasons why ever new generations return to the same texts. It can be argued that the spectacle and beauty, as well as the profundity of the soliloquies, are the main reasons for _The Tempest's_ standing. So, we may not need to postulate treatment of perennial themes as the reason for the survival over the ages of the canonical, or great, works. This implies that we have an alternative conception to Olsen's, and that his view that

> a formulation of theme which does not go beyond
> the level of topical thematic concepts aborts the
> aesthetic significance of the work and is
> therefore unsatisfactory[43]

is itself unsatisfactory.

It is by reference to this broad theoretical background that I would claim theoretical validity and plausibility for the interpretation of _The Tempest_ that I have presented above. The rationale for interpreting _The Tempest_ in the way I have outlined is that it displays the play's relevance to the concerns of the modern audience, in a way that provides a fictional playing out through this great work of those

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part of the latter, but the 'perennial themes' are at a higher level of generality and stand in relation to several elements of the work.

43. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 87.

concerns in a dialogue between the text/performance[44] and the concerns of the lives of the interpreters. I suggest that interpreters, in the constructive effort involved in interpretation, apply concepts and concerns from their own lives in a way that my interpretation illustrates. The question, then, is more specifically what <u>kind</u> of application this is.

In the interpretation of <u>The Tempest</u> provided above, for example, one can hold that on the one hand Prospero represents the scientist's power over the environment, enacting humanity's dilemma of the power we have and the frail character of the ecological <u>status quo</u> - the topical theme built around ecological concerns in the broad sense- and on the other hand that the play deals with the perennial themes of 'revenge and restraint', and/or 'nature versus nurture'. The latter are only a more general description of the former and may not be available for the modern audience save through the topical theme and the topical thematic concepts which lead up to it. On this account, the relation between topical and perennial themes is such that the former provides access to the latter, and divining the perennial theme of one particular work is a creative and not a recreative activity. It also suggests that we can do without

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44. I do not suggest that these modes of representation of <u>The Tempest</u> are similar, only that they in this respect play a corresponding role as the source for reflection and interpretation.

the added level of generality to explain why literary works survive over the ages.

However, it may also well be that one literary work can be interpreted as addressing different topical themes for different audiences, and that all of these can be seen at a higher level of generality to be perennial because the types of conflict, or comparable themes, are inherent in the human predicament. A consideration which supports Kermode's claim that 'openness to accommodation' is a criterion for literary survival.

SECTION II: <u>Heart of Darkness</u>

Restraint in the Darkness

Having discussed The Tempest and the production and performance of plays in relation to the questions of interpretation and the value of this process, we shall now extend the scope of the discussion to include a study of a work in prose, meant to be read rather than produced for the stage, and of a more recent date.

In the previous chapter the notion of 'theme' was introduced but not analyzed. In this section an analysis of this concept will be conducted with particular reference to Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. What makes this work a particularly suitable one for a closer analysis of the notion of 'theme' is that it has given rise to a profusion of interpretations.

In the next chapter, 'Heart of Darkness, Themes, and the Value of Unity', I present and analyze three of these interpretations of Heart of Darkness. Two of the three interpretations see, in various ways, Heart of Darkness as being about a journey of inner discovery. Both the contrast between these two interpretations in how they identify and justify both the theme of the work, and the elements supporting it, and the contrast with the interpretation focusing imperialism sets the scene for an analysis of the role of themes in literary interpretation.

First we need to see how the notion of 'theme' can unify the interpretation of a literary work, and this cannot be done in splendid isolation from practical involvement with a literary work. The critical cruxes of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>,[1] as well as the style of the work, are well rehearsed themes in literary criticism. In what follows I shall discuss in what way the notion of 'restraint' can illuminate and unite both stylistic and thematic elements of the work. Since the merits or demerits of my own interpretation will not, for obvious reasons, be discussed extensively by myself, the critical work of 'Restraint in the Darkness' serves mainly as an illustration for the discussion to follow.

'Restraint' is often introduced into the text, and reflected in it. This concept has a heuristic and thematic function in <u>Heart of Darkness</u> that has to a great extent been overlooked by critics. 'Restraint' as a valuable quality[2] is established in the course of <u>Heart of Darkness</u> through Marlow's

1. References to <u>Heart of Darkness</u> will be given in the text, and refer to the Oxford University Press 'The World's Classics' series, Joseph Conrad, <u>Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether</u>, edited by Robert Kimbrough (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984).

2. For a discussion of the wider political aspects of 'restraint' in <u>Heart of Darkness</u>, see J. P. Geise and L. A. Lange, 'Deliberate Belief and Digging Holes: Joseph Conrad and the Problem of Restraint', <u>Interpretation</u>, 16 (1989), 193-209.

evaluations as well as the concern in the work with the relation between language and reality. This concern with restraint and the use of language develops, as we shall see, a tension between Marlow's evaluations on the one hand and the work ethic and its relation to language on the other. I shall argue that this tension is provisionally resolved, though with a degree of self-reflective irony, in the act of narration itself, which can be said to be 'the third term'. I shall begin by considering Marlow's description of the accountant at the outer station, and conclude the main discussion with the culminating scene in the book: Marlow's lie to the Intended.

Critics have often dismissed Marlow's praise of the accountant at the Outer Station as simple irony, or as half-ironic,[3] whereas critics like Lawrence Graver have accepted that his outward appearance commands 'a certain measure of amused respect' in the eyes of Marlow.[4] Jeremy Hawthorn, in his latest book on Conrad, gives three possible reasons why Marlow should praise the accountant. One possibility is that we are invited to see the difference between the narrated and the narrating Marlow, another that this distance is not present and that it is Conrad who makes the readers see that Marlow is not an ethically reliable narrator. However, the

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3. Ian Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century (London: Chatto, 1980), p. 221.

4. Lawrence Graver, Conrad's Shorter Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 82.

reason Hawthorn seems to settle for is that his immaculate dress and style are an outward signs of inner restraint.[5]

The encounter with the accountant is of particular interest because it introduces several of the central themes of the narrative. Let us take them in order of appearance.

After witnessing the natives dying in the grove of death, Marlow walks towards the station, where he first meets the accountant, who is so elegantly dressed that he first thinks him a vision. He regards him as 'amazing' and a 'miracle' (p. 67).

> I respected the fellow. ... His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character. (p. 68)

When asked how he keeps his linen, he says:

> 'I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.' Thus this man had verily accom-

5. Jeremy Hawthorn, <u>Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment</u> (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), p. 181.

plished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order. Everything else about the station was in a muddle. (p. 68).

It is worth noting how Marlow's style changes in these two quotations. In the first one, referring to the accountant as a hairdresser's dummy, he distances himself from the accountant before praising him. In the second the accountant's 'bureaucratese' gives way to Marlow's praise which is rather solemn in style, then a quick detour into colloquial English ('apple-pie order'), before he is back in his plain prose and usual register. These quick changes in style serve to heighten the solemnity, which gives weight to his praise.

It is also significant that while waiting in the station Marlow goes into the accountant's hut 'to be out of the chaos'. When a sick agent is brought into the office the accountant complains that '"the groans of the sick person ... distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate"' (p. 69).

The accountant is introduced as a contrast to the 'great demoralization of the land'. The obvious contrast between his appearance and the chaotic surroundings is the reason why Marlow is amazed and thinks him a miracle. At the centre of the accountant's cosmos are the books he keeps. The dying agent who is moaning is a threat to the ordering force of

the book-keeping because he distracts attention from the meticulous work of keeping them. The emphasis is indeed on the making of 'correct entries' (p. 70). The exacting attention needed in keeping the books is the accountant's source of saving restraint. The work of keeping the accounts is a matter of attending to the necessary one-to-one relation between the figures and the hard facts of the trade in ivory. The world outside is a flux of decay and disorder, and it seems that the chaotic character of this world, brought inside by the ailing agent, is involved in the accountant's reference to 'the climate'. It is this moral climate, the corrupted environment, that one must be on guard against. While the accountant's single-mindedness can be represented as callousness in the face of human suffering, Marlow's story is full of the saving grace of attention to work, and the contact it provides with reality. The accountant has 'verily accomplished something' by forcing the native woman to work despite her distaste for it.

It is by missing the role of restraint, and one of its sources in the book-keeping, that Cedric Watts, among others, can say that the final effect of Marlow's description and his comments is one of 'condemnation by juxta-

position'.[6] Juxtaposition, that is, of the accountant's meticulous order and his behaving like an 'ostrich' in the face of human suffering:

> The accountant is like an ostrich with its head in the sand: surrounded by the vile and horrific, he can be seen as taking refuge in myopic devotion to his books and clothing.[7]

Critics like Watts may have read too much of their own attitude into that of Conrad. We have seen that the context of Marlow's praise of the accountant's order suggests a strong predilection for the myopic attention to work on the part of Marlow. Conrad presumably recognized that readers would sympathize with the suffering people of Heart of Darkness, but that gives us all the more reason to pay attention to Marlow's praise of the restraining power of work even to the degree of excluding compassion.[8] When a

6. Cedric Watts, Conrad's Heart of Darkness: A Critical and Contextual Discussion (Milan: Mursia International, 1977), p. 78.

7. Watts, 1977, p. 79.

8. We should also keep in mind Conrad's earlier novel The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', first published serially in 1897, in which the sympathy provoked by James Wait's illness is portrayed as a force corrupting the attention to duty and the solidarity of the crew to the point of mutiny. Thus, it

narrator who we, as readers, have been led to trust makes judgments in violation of established ethical norms we are alerted to the possibility of a different kind of moral universe. The alternative to seeing the choice between compassion for the dying man and the correct entries as an exclusively moral one, is to see it as a choice between restraint and demoralization. If this alternative is chosen, the episode of the dying man emphasises the strong need for restraint even to the exclusion of compassion.[9] However, there is an ambiguity here which is signalled by the way Marlow distances himself from his praise of restraint in this instance, to which we shall return. Further, there is also a tension in Marlow's praise of restraint and the dogged attention to work, which is that while this guards against the demoralization of the land, as it were, the mindless work is carried out to the benefit of the company which pillages the land and exploits the natives. Marlow's tale is also an explicit indictment of this exploitation. This creates a tension which we will encounter later in Heart of Darkness, and which is not resolved within the story itself. Thus, in Marlow's encounter with the accountant we see an early example of the relation explored in Heart of Darkness between work, language, restraint and

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can be argued that The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' questions the moral self-evidence of compassion.

9. We remember the alienist's advice to Marlow: 'Du calme, du calme' (p. 58).

self-preservation, and of the moral tension this involves in relation to the anti-imperialism of Marlow's tale.

A crucial element in understanding Heart of Darkness is that external checks are conspicuously absent from the world through which Marlow travels. In one of the most important episodes of the narrative their importance is most forcefully brought to the centre of attention:

> 'Absurd!', he cried. 'This is the worst of trying to tell. ...Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal - you hear - normal from year's end to year's end. And you say , Absurd! Absurd be-exploded'. (p. 114).

Here Marlow brings the lack of external checks to the heart of the narrative once again. Basic necessities, like food, and the controlling forces, like the police, are just not present in the jungle. The implication is that the audience cannot properly appreciate the moral and existential significance of being without these anchor points, and that the proper perspective under which to judge the moral implications of the narrative is just not readily available to the audience despite 'the bond of the sea' (p. 45). Likewise, this is of course a reminder to the reader, who is

warned against automatically applying the moral concepts of 'civilized' life.

The discrepancy between Marlow's tale and the audience's capacity for understanding it is again highlighted when Marlow says that

> [Kurtz] was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream-making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewild-erment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams. ...'. (p. 82).

In what sense is Marlow telling his audience a dream? In more than one sense. That he should stress this can be interpreted as an alienation-effect operating on two levels: Marlow calls attention to the necessarily limited character of the story in comparison with what he actually experi-enced, and Conrad is reminding the reader that this is a

fictional story,[10] just like a dream, with the difference that in this dream you will not have the sensation of being part of the experience yourself.

On both levels the notion of 'restraint' is not far below the surface. When Marlow tells the story, many details will have to be ignored, experiences discarded and a 'backbone'[11] imposed on the flux of experience in order to narrate it in an effective way. In the case of Marlow's narrative this flux of experience is given freer rein than in most narratives. But the fact remains that in order to present a narrative at all, it has to be put into a system of language which can be understood by an audience. In other words: restraint has to be exercised for the benefit of intelligibility. On the other hand, bringing in the concept of dream highlights the problem of language that cannot be checked

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10. To the same effect the first seven pages of Heart of Darkness constitute a transition over to Marlow's story. It is not just an introduction followed by Marlow's tale, which would be the simple pattern, but a kind of stop-go alteration in which the voice of Marlow is repeatedly broken by comments from the outside narrator. It seems that the point is to call attention to, and establish, that the story is reported by the outside narrator and not directly by Marlow.
11. Just like the 'backbone' Marlow ascribed to the accountant at the outer station, which I have argued is a consequence of his duty to keep the books in an exact correspondence with the facts (p. 68).

directly in its interaction with reality. A dream is the ultimate flux of experience, where the ordinary sequence of cause and effect is suspended for the dream's own logic, or lack of it. What happens in a dream need not have anything to do with what is real. Conrad reminds the reader that the story is fictional, a case of restraint on the author's part in the fictional pretence of reality.

However, the notion of dream carries other implications as well. A dream overturns, as already mentioned, the sequence of cause and effect, and appears unreal and unintelligible. This is at the very root of Marlow's tale. The experience of going up the river and meeting Kurtz is so different from the set of experiences Marlow has had, which we assume the audience share through 'the bond of the sea' (p. 45), that what meets him cannot be rendered intelligible through assimilation to the old set.[12] Without this set we have no analogies through which we can invest what happens with some kind of intelligibility. Thus, a feeling of incomprehension, unreality and ultimately of living a dream

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12. 'It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), part I, paragraph 241. Not having participated in the form of life Marlow has been so affected by, his audience share his language only to a limited extent.

accompanies his experiences. This is sometimes directly stated in the text, as when Marlow observes the 'pilgrims' at the central station:

> I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life. Still, one must look about sometimes; and then I saw this station, these men strolling aimlessly in the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself what it all meant. They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. (pp. 75-76).

This passage deals with a series of themes. First, Marlow engages in physical labour in order to 'keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life'. When he eventually looks up he sees 'the pilgrims' stroll aimlessly around, hence without the redeeming restraint of work. This induces incomprehension ('what it all meant'). Further, greed is the faith that motivates them. Through greed they are 'bewitched', thus beyond reason and restraint - the lack of which is further

emphasised by the 'rotten fence' of Marlow's simile. The emphasis on faith and on lack of reason ('imbecility') further brings out the element of unrestrained avarice.

As soon as Marlow lets loose of 'the redeeming facts of life' and reflects on the pilgrims he descends the slippery slope through incomprehension ending in a feeling of unreality that prompts the outburst. This is not the only instance in _Heart of Darkness_ when Marlow is overwhelmed by a feeling of unreality.

When he recounts his taking leave of the Russian, he says: 'Sometimes I ask myself whether I had ever really seen him- whether it was possible to meet such a phenomenon!'
(p. 140). Another instance is when Marlow reflects on the encounter on the outskirts of the jungle, when he has just intercepted Kurtz crawling towards the drum:

> I've been telling you what we said - repeating the
> phrases we pronounced - but what's the good? They
> were common everyday words - the familiar, vague
> sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But
> what of that? They had behind them, to my mind,
> the terrible suggestiveness of words heard in
> dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. (p. 144).

The feeling of unreality is caused by an unfamiliar situation, where even the meaning of the words of the

language Marlow speaks cannot be taken on trust. The context is so different that they take on 'the terrible suggestiveness of words heard in dreams'. The telling phrase is: 'to my mind', because what we have seen in these examples is that Marlow, in narrating the story, is to a great extent 'telling his mind', he is re-living his frame of mind at the time of the experiences he recounts, as can be seen, for example, when he relates that during the attack on the boat 'the bush began to howl' (p. 110). Through these episodes Marlow's story dramatizes the conflict between the need for restraint to aid intelligibility, and the impressionistic power of the experiences which are so alien to his audience.

Shortly before Marlow's outburst of 'Absurd' (p. 114), he has told his audience about the attack on the boat as they approached the central station. This episode offers an interesting parallel to the accountant and the grove of death.

The boat is attacked from the shore by a shower of arrows. The situation is chaotic. The helmsman is unrestrained: he drops everything 'to throw the shutter open and let off that Martini-Henry', and stands before the wide opening 'shaking the empty rifle and yelling at the shore' (p. 111). Through Conrad's narrative method of 'delayed decoding'[13] we are given to understand that he is hit by a spear as he foolishly displays his body in the wide opening. Marlow has

13. See Watt, pp. 177-178.

to take over the steering of the boat that the helmsman has left in a rage to shoot at the shore. The similarity with the accountant's attention to work is that the work, and dogged attention to duty, provides a close relation with reality paired with the conscious neglect of human suffering. Marlow takes the steering and says: 'I had to make an effort to free my eyes from his gaze and attend to the steering' (p. 112).

Compassion is a corrupting force when it gets in the way of work. Both the accountant and Marlow have important duties to attend to, duties which have to be carried out with great accuracy. Marlow's praise of the accountant's myopic attention to keeping his books in 'apple-pie order', and his attention to his immaculate appearance can be better understood in the wider context of the moral themes of Conrad's work ethic,[14] and the notion of 'restraint'. It is obvious that Marlow has to exercise an amount of restraint in attending to the steering rather than the suffering helmsman. The helmsman's excess in following the impulse of his rage is his downfall. If Marlow, or indeed the accountant, were to follow compassion or impulse rather than the call of duty, it would be the ruin of the boat and of the company.

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14. For a useful discussion of Conrad's work ethic, see Ian Watt's 'Marlow's Victorian Ethic', in Watt, p. 148-151.

This dogged attention to duty and to work is a source of re-
straint, a saving force in the face of darkness. While
telling the audience about the progress of the boat up the
river, Marlow reflects:

> The mind of man is capable of anything - because
> everything is in it, all the past as well as all
> the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear,
> sorrow, devotion, valour, rage - who can tell?-
> but truth - truth stripped of its cloak of time.
> ... Let the fool gape and shudder - the man knows,
> and can look on without a wink. ... He must meet
> that truth with his own true stuff - with his own
> inborn strength. Principles won't do. ... No; you
> want a deliberate belief. ... You wonder I didn't
> go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no - I
> didn't. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments,
> be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with
> white-lead and strips of woollen blanket helping
> to put bandages on those leaky steampipes - I tell
> you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent
> those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or
> by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these
> things to save a wiser man.[15] (pp. 96-97).

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15. It is tempting to interpret 'a wiser man' as referring
to Kurtz rather than it being just a turn of phrase.

This is a reflection on the nature and sources of strength in the face of the unknown, dark and alluring. The praise of inborn strength gives way to Marlow admitting that what saved him from giving himself over to the temptation of the wild, seemingly unrestrained, world on the shore was attention to his work. This admission on his part is important. It shows that he has attained a degree of self-knowledge, a knowledge of his own limitations. But more importantly he highlights, by implication, how even the praise of inborn strength in a sense is mere 'principles' (in his own words they 'won't do') since only his attention to work and duties 'saved' him. The truth is to be found in the attention to work, the direct mediation between man and reality. It saves the mind from attending to temptation and too much thinking.[16]

Temptation is represented by the shore. If, as some critics have maintained, the shore represents darkness and cor-

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16. Conrad's predilection for mindless attention to physical labour is perhaps most notable in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and is reflected in the following quotation: 'What makes mankind tragic is not that they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it. ... Our refuge is in stupidity ... there is no morality, no knowledge, and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves ... .' In a letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, 31 January 1898, in G. Jean-Aubry, editor, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, volume 1 (London: Heinemann, 1927), p. 226.

ruption, then the river may indeed be seen as 'the straight and narrow'. The implication of being 'lost' if the boat runs aground reinforces this reading. By getting the boat around snags and other impediments by attending to the duty of work, Marlow finds enough 'surface-truth' in this work to be saved. In other words, the mindless attention to keeping to the narrow path is in itself the safest method of keeping to it.

This passage also prepares for the seemingly heartless neglect of the suffering helmsman. Marlow's attention to the boat is given in the vocabulary of nursing: he bandages the steampipes. But also in another way: the importance of attending to the work, the neglect of which leads away from the straight and narrow. Note the central statement on the value of work in Heart of Darkness:

> No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work - no man does - but I like what is in the work, - the chance to find yourself. Your own reality -for yourself, not for others - what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and can never tell what it really means. (p. 85).

The restraint that this work provides is a saving force in two respects: the grip on one's own reality and mental

reactions, the necessary bond with reality rather than dreamt up illusions and intentions; and the saving of the vessel which, as always with Conrad, is a symbol of the community of man. However, and this is another parallel with the accountant and the ailing agent, Marlow's attention to his work and the job of getting the vessel safely to the inner station is also benefiting the company and its exploitation of the natives.

When trapped in the fog on the river, Marlow is suddenly made aware that the natives on the boat, or the 'cannibals' as he calls them, are near starvation as their leader asks Marlow to catch the people on the shore to give them to eat (p. 103). This request is made, it is worth noting, in very restrained language. It mystifies Marlow why they did not eat the white men on the boat:

> Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of
> hunger they didn't go for us - they were thirty to
> five - and have a good tuck in for once, amazes me
> now when I think of it. (p. 104)

And when he considers the reason, his interest and admiration only grows:

And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there. I looked at them [the natives] with a swift quickening of interest. (p. 104).

This interest is also a search for the source of the restraint:

Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear - or some kind of primitive honour? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze. Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thoughts, its sombre and brooding ferocity? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly. ... Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses on a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me. (p. 105).

A clearer example of Marlow's praise of restraint, and the wonder of its existence in 'the cannibals', could not have been wished for. The source of restraint is, after a round of discussing possible alternatives on Marlow's part, found

to be 'inborn strength'. In this they are significantly different from the helmsman, the demise of whom we considered above, on whom Marlow finally passes this sentence:

> Poor fool! If he had only left the shutter alone.
> He had no restraint, no restraint – just like
> Kurtz – a tree swayed by the wind. (p. 119).

The next occurrence of the word restraint in the text, significantly, relates to Kurtz. Marlow comments on the heads on the stakes near Kurtz's quarters:

> ... there was nothing exactly profitable in these
> heads being there. They only showed that Mr. Kurtz
> lacked restraint in the gratification of his
> various lusts, that there was something wanting in
> him – some small matter which, when the pressing
> need arose, could not be found under his magnifi-
> cent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency
> himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to
> him at last – only at the very last. But the
> wilderness had found him out early. (p.131).

In this passage, Kurtz's lack of restraint is coupled with his eloquence. His idealistic rhetoric is presented as impeding access to any kind of inner strength, but Marlow also states that the 'something' is just not there in Kurtz. These themes are brought out even more forcefully when

Marlow reflects on the scene when he intercepts Kurtz crawling towards the drum:

> He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. (p. 144).

> ... his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. ... No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. ... I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. (p. 145).

We see that Kurtz, symbolically, has even given up the most basic physical restraining force of all: gravity. He has 'kicked himself loose of the earth', thus there are no restraining forces to bear on him anymore. To seize Kurtz from his 'monstrous passions' (p. 144), Marlow has to invoke his exalted self. But Marlow's position, between the unrestrained Kurtz and the wilderness, is a precarious one. He is alone, and in this position he is also doubting his grip on reality. That Marlow was overcome by the unreality of the situation is also clear from his insistence that the

whole experience was dream-like. Yet, the feeling of unreality is only to be expected, for there could not be anything in his history up to this point to prepare him for this kind of experience. So, in a sense it is also himself that he wins over by using 'common everyday words' (p. 144). Despite the unreality in the situation, the 'common everyday words', forged with reality in their everyday usage, had the power to reach Kurtz and, as it were, to bring him back to the earth he had kicked himself loose of.

Here, and everywhere in Heart of Darkness, the dubious value of eloquence is brought up. Some critics, notably Jeremy Hawthorn,[17] have focused on Conrad's suspicion of language. Conrad's suspicion rests on the conviction that language 'at work', so to speak, in direct mediation with reality is 'restrained' by the check reality, or the world, provides. Language that is not restrained in this way, is not doing 'proper' work. It is at best empty, at worst deceptive and corrupting in its power to sway the human mind. Heart of Darkness highlights this by juxtaposing two pieces of writing; Kurtz's report for 'The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs' and An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship.[18]

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17. Jeremy Hawthorn, Joseph Conrad: Language and Fictional Self-Consciousness (London: Edward Arnold, 1979).

18. Kurtz's report can also fruitfully be contrasted with the accountant's book-keeping.

In a hut fifty miles below the inner station, Marlow finds
An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship. Reporting on this
find, Marlow's narration takes on an elevated style:

> It was an extraordinary find. ... I handled this
> amazing antiquity with the greatest possible
> tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands.
> ... Not a very enthralling book; but at the first
> glance you could see there a singleness of
> intention, an honest concern for the right way of
> going to work, which made these humble pages ...
> luminous with another than a professional light.
> The simple old sailor ... made me forget the
> jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation
> of having come upon something unmistakably real
> (p. 99).

It is important to note that this 'singleness of intention'
and 'honest concern for the right way of going to work' is a
'luminous' presence in the general darkness of the jungle.
It is unmistakably real because the language of the advice
it offers is forged in the direct relation with the factual
subject matter it deals with. So powerful is the presence of
An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship that Marlow admits
to his audience that 'to leave off reading was like tearing
myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship'
(pp. 99-100).

Indeed, such a 'saving force' is this book that when the Russian, on Marlow's warning (p. 139), takes off into the wilderness it is one of the essentials for survival:

> One of his pockets ... was bulging with cartridges, from the other ... peeped 'Towson's Inquiry,' etc., etc. He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness. (p. 140).

It seems that it can be a kind of ammunition against going mad in the jungle. Not so with Kurtz's report to the Society.

> It was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung, I think. Seventeen pages of close writing he had found time for! But this must have been before his - let us say - nerves, went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites. ... But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. ... 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert power for good practically unbounded,' etc. etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. ... This was the unbounded power of eloquence - of words - of burning noble words. There were no

practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later, in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method. ... 'Exterminate all the brutes!'. (pp. 117-118).

Unlike An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship this report has 'no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases'. By simple idealism, the power of good can be exercised practically unbounded. As unbounded, or un-restrained, (by not referring back to reality through 'practical hints', possibly) as the power of eloquence with which it is written. And the conclusion of this unbounded, unrestrained piece of writing is indeed unrestrained: 'Exterminate all the brutes'.

Such is the danger of letting language loose from its connection with reality. Idealism will not do in the face of darkness, only man's inborn strength or the saving restraint of work and/or language forged in a bond with reality through work can help one put up some kind of resistance. Note that Marlow compares stopping reading An Inquiry with tearing himself away from an old and solid friendship (p. 100). The book is all about sailing a ship, Conrad's symbol of the community of mankind, where the language used must, in the interest of all on board, be functional and correct.

In other words, the relationship between words and deeds is an ethical matter, as is the devotion to one's work.

The opposite is the case with the language used by the western exploiters, most notably by Kurtz in his report. The discrepancy between the lofty ideals and the corrupt and unrestrained practice, brought out very clearly by Kurtz's 'appendix', is the obvious antithesis to the book on seamanship.

Significantly, Marlow's style when he tells his story reflects the opposition between these two pieces of writing. Marlow's language is 'doing work' when he actually describes what happens in his story, it is connected with what happened. However, when he departs from the trodden path to ramble about his impressions, this relation is no longer in operation. The hallucinatory and dreamlike quality of these reports thus have a thematic function in Heart of Darkness. The outside narrator comes in, tellingly, in the middle of Marlow's reflections on the jungle and on going up the river. His ramblings led to an insult to which one of the audience responds: '"Try to be civil, Marlow", growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself' (p. 94). Marlow's rambling is language let loose of the anchor of the facts of his experience, which makes him more unrestrained. In addition, the alienation effect of breaking the illusion of reality, by the outside narrator's interjection, highlights Marlow's lack of

restraint at this point in the narrative. It is also in the context of Marlow's lack of restraint that we can make sense of Conrad's stylistic 'flaw' of 'adjectival insistence' and Marlow's 'delayed decoding'.

In his influential book The Great Tradition, F. R Leavis coined the term 'adjectival insistence' for Conrad's profuse use of adjectives in Heart of Darkness.[19] In its wake, critics have argued that this is not a stylistic flaw, but a conscious choice on Conrad's part to use words so as to draw attention to themselves, rather than convey a meaning.[20] I shall discuss 'delayed decoding' and 'adjectival insistence' in conjunction to show how both these devices are used in Heart of Darkness to reflect at the stylistic and narrative levels the thematic concern with language, reality and restraint.

'Delayed decoding' is a feature of Marlow's narrative which is crucial for our understanding of Marlow and the way he tells the story. This narrative impressionism accentuates the lack of forged links between his past experiences and

19. F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, second edition (London: Chatto, 1948), p. 177. Conrad 'is intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means', p. 180.

20. 'Just as we are to look at Marlow's experiences rather than to experience them, so too there may be occasions where Conrad wants us to look at words, rather than to experience sensations through them.' Hawthorn, 1979, p. 31.

the new ones, and hence between his language and the new reality. Above we have seen one example of 'delayed decoding', when Marlow recounts how the boat was attacked.

Bruce Johnson argues that Marlow's 'Sticks, little sticks, were flying about' (p. 109) is an 'unmediated observation' and an 'aboriginal observation before rational categories are brought to bear',[21] as if 'sticks' and 'flying about' are not rational categories and not mediated through language. It is obviously neither unmediated nor an observation uncontaminated by rational categories, but interestingly mediated by the categories Marlow brought to bear on his experience at the time he had it. He thus restrains himself from bringing in categories applied to his experiences later and is truthful to the actual sequence of experience and the application of concepts.

In drawing attention to the inability of his language to convey the new experience, most disturbingly in the 'adjectival insistence', Conrad highlights the theme of restraint through the style of Marlow's delivery. Through a few examples from <u>Heart of Darkness</u> we will see that the instances of 'adjectival insistence' have an interesting distribution. This stylistic phenomenon occurs when Marlow

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21. Bruce Johnson, 'Conrad's Impressionism and Watt's "Delayed Decoding"', in Joseph Conrad, <u>Heart of Darkness</u>, edited by Robert Kimbrough, Norton Critical Editions, third edition (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 345-357 (p. 346).

is reflecting and commenting, often on the wilderness or on the character of Kurtz.

'It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention' (p. 93). Marlow seems to be on the point of being seduced by the unknown. He speaks about the 'overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants' (p. 93). This sense of incomprehension, of being overpowered by an alien reality is clearly reflected in this prime example of 'adjectival insistence', a style which gives the reader an almost palpable feeling of Marlow not being in control of his language.

It is important to note that Marlow loses control over language only when he is describing and commenting, rather than relating a series of events. It is significant that the kind of restraint Marlow exercises when actually recounting the series of events is present to the extent that he delays the decoding of his experiences. But when his language is not engaged in conveying events it is not restrained by what has happened. Commenting, impressions gain the upper hand over sober fact. His comments and reflections lack this bond with the series of events that is the backbone of his narrative, and becomes more like Kurtz's report to 'The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs' than An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship.

Just after saying of Kurtz that 'I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing', Marlow comments that

> ... of all his gifts the one that stood out preëminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness. (pp. 113-114).

This passage contains all the characteristics of Kurtz's own prose that Marlow condemns. It is full of adjectives, heaped on top of each other, and thus qualifies as being an instance of the 'adjectival insistence'. But what else is it?

It is at the very least ambiguous. Kurtz's eloquence is described as bewildering and illuminating, exalted and contemptible and lastly, both as a stream of light and a deceitful flow from the heart of darkness. It is given a series of qualities <u>and</u> their opposites, except for the last set where the disjunctive 'or' can be read in both its inclusive and its exclusive sense. On balance, though, the context of oppositions favours the exclusive sense. By the weight of his own style Marlow confirms the contagious character of this flow from the heart of darkness. By the

same token, the characteristics bestowed on Kurtz's style of speech must also be taken to be reflected in his own.

Further, when Marlow speculates on Kurtz and the natural environment, these matters have some characteristics in common with Kurtz's report. They are unrestrained by direct mediation with an outside reality, and in Marlow's code of seamanship they are thus highly questionable.

That the stylistic phenomenon of 'adjectival insistence' is the product of a lack of restraint can be seen from another example, where Marlow has just burst out in response to a member of the audience presumably saying 'absurd' in response to his narrative (p. 114 and above). He first restrains himself by lighting his pipe, but this kind of 'counting to ten' is of little avail as his next passage is rather unrestrained, and ends in incoherence:

> the memory of that time itself lingers around me,
> impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense
> jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or
> simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices,
> voices - even the girl herself - now - (p. 115).

After this he falls silent for a long time. It is as if Marlow senses that he has worked himself up to the point where he has lost control of the language. All that was remarked above of the 'adjectival insistence' coming always

when Marlow reflects or when attending to memory is true also in this case. It is significant that at this point the frame narrative breaks in to simply state that: 'He was silent for a long time' (p. 115). The frame narrative is not just an alienation effect in that it here draws attention to Marlow's attempts at self-restraint, made all the more difficult by the nature of the language he uses.

Thus, 'restraint' can be seen to inter-relate Conrad's work ethic, his narrative technique, his style, and his view of language. However, to have the power of a thematic concept in Heart of Darkness the integration and coherence it provides must also subsume the bone of critical contention: the lie to the Intended. If the author is to be trusted in this matter, it 'locks in ... the whole 30000 words of narrative description'.[22]

Marlow has at an early point made clear to his audience how much he loathes lying:

> You know how I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie,
> not because I am straighter than the rest of us,
> but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint
> of death , a flavour of mortality in lies - which
> is exactly what I hate and detest in the world-

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22. In William Blackburn, editor, Joseph Conrad: Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum (Durham, North Carolina: Duke UP, 1958), p. 154.

what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and
sick, like biting something rotten would do.
Temperament, I suppose. (p. 82).

Further, when Marlow returns to 'the sepulchral city', he
walks the streets where he feels separated from the people
he meets in virtue of his recent experiences:

> They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to
> me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure
> they could not possibly know the things I knew.
> ... I had no particular desire to enlighten them,
> but I had some difficulty in restraining myself
> from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid
> importance. ... I admit my behaviour was inexcus-
> able, but then my temperature was seldom normal
> in these days. (p. 152).

It is in the light of these two factors that we must
evaluate the urge in Marlow to tell the truth to the
Intended. However, despite his abhorrence, Marlow has been
what we might call 'economical with the truth' on three
occasions before his interview with the Intended. The first
in letting the brickmaker believe he (Marlow) has influence
in Europe, the second in not telling the Russian about
Kurtz's excesses and the third in telling Kurtz that his
success in Europe is assured. Of these instances only the
latter could be judged to be a proper lie, and it is told to

save Kurtz from 'his own exalted self'. As we shall see, the telling of this lie and the lie to the Intended have something in common.

During the interview with her the room grows darker 'with every word spoken'. It is only the Intended's forehead that remains light (p. 158). Finally, she presses for Kurtz's last words:

> 'His last word - to live with,' she insisted.
> 'Don't you understand I loved him - I loved him-
> I loved him!'
> I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.
> 'The last word he pronounced was - your name.' ...
> Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I
> couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been
> too dark - too dark altogether. (pp. 161-162).

With the background of Marlow's loathing of lies, we can appreciate what a victory of self restraint this is. But what is its significance? The clue is given when Marlow, after being interrupted by one of the audience (presumably) shouting 'absurd' at his tale, goes on to present the audience with the essentials of the story:

> 'I laid the ghost of his gifts with a lie,' he
> began suddenly. 'Girl! What? Did I mention a girl?
> Oh, she is out of it - should be out of it. We

must help them to stay in that beautiful world of
their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be
out of it'. (p. 115).

In the final section of Marlow's narrative the Intended is
described as the bearer of light against the darkness that
deepens with every word. She is 'illumined by the unex-
tinguishable light of belief and love' (p. 158). At the
crucial moment Marlow is able to restrain himself, in the
face of his mortal abhorrence of lies, from extinguishing
this source of light. The object is, ultimately, to prevent
the initiated world from growing worse by preventing the
source of love and belief from being initiated into the
darkness. Thus, both of Marlow's lies serve much the same
purpose. By preventing Kurtz from crawling[23] off to an
'unspeakable rite' and by leaving the Intended in her saving
delusion Marlow has mastered his revulsion of lies for the
service of good. As Juliet McLauchlan observes: 'It is ...
some slight hope which survives through Marlow's lie: the
survival of ideals and aspirations will provide a standard
by which humanity can at least continue to judge its

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23. Marlow sees a trail through the wet grass on the bank
(p. 142). Thus, Kurtz is brought even closer to an image of
evil in that a trail in wet grass is indicative of a
serpent.

degradation.'[24] Kurtz's judgement of his actions: 'The horror! The horror!' can only be a victory for him because it shows that he has preserved this standard despite his 'fall' in the jungle, that at the very last he judged on the discrepancy between words and deeds, and on the restraint that was 'wanting ... under his magnificent eloquence' (p.131). Thus, Marlow's lie sums up the moral concerns of the narrative in the notion of 'restraint'. 'Restraint', as we have seen, has also informed important stylistic and narrative elements of the work, as well as the work's preoccupation with the capacity of language both to refer and to deceive.

But restraint is, as we have seen, by no means an exclusively positive quality. Both at the outer station, with the accountant, and on the boat going up the river the restraint exercised also benefits the company for which both the accountant and Marlow worked, a company which is engaged in the exploitation of Africa and its peoples. This tension is only resolved, ultimately, in Marlow's narration. At the beginning of the story we are told the composition of his audience, who apart from sharing 'the bond of the sea' can also be assumed to have more than a finger in the imperialist pie. The narration of his story to the imperialists is

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24. Juliet McLauchlan, 'The "Value" and "Significance" of Heart of Darkness', in Conrad, Heart of Darkness, edited by Robert Kimbrough, Norton Critical Editions, third edition (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 374-391 (p. 384).

Marlow's act of conscience, his 'atonement' for being faithful to the company while in Africa.[25] We also see that his story has an effect on at least one member of Marlow's audience, the outside narrator. Both the content and the restrained nature of Marlow's concluding paragraph attest to the impact of his narration. The fact of his narration is also an implicit recognition of limitations in the view of language we have found in Heart of Darkness. In the story the contrast between the restrained language forged in a one to one relation with reality, exemplified by the Towson book, and unrestrained rhetoric as in Kurtz's report is, as we have seen, noticeable. The former is specific and trustworthy, but limited, and the rhetoric has the power to sway minds but is unrestrained by anything and ultimately treacherous. This leaves us looking for something in between, a 'third term'. The language of Heart of Darkness has to be more like the language of Kurtz in order to influence minds, our minds, and we read several times over that Kurtz to Marlow, and Marlow to his audience were both 'voices',[26] thereby linking the two men and their styles of language. Still, Heart of Darkness, as we have seen, stresses the ultimately treacherous qualities of this kind of language, and praises language forged in close contact with reality. The praise of restrained language, forged in

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25. Conrad's first audience, the readers of Blackwood's Magazine, were mirrored in Marlow's audience. Both audiences were the males of the colonial service class.

26. P. 83, p. 97, p. 113, p. 115, etc.

direct interaction with reality, could not be communicated to us without the medium of Marlow's narration, and of Conrad's story, both of which have disturbing analogies with the language of Kurtz. This is why the opposition between the two pieces of writing in Heart of Darkness is so important: it brings the reader to reflect on the nature of the piece of writing before her. In this way the praise for restrained language and the contempt for eloquence is also an alienation effect: it brings the reader to question the status of Conrad's craft. In Heart of Darkness, therefore, Marlow's story provides the third term, the synthesis of the opposition between the two forms of language. However, the problematic status of this synthesis is itself recognized by Conrad. Early on in Heart of Darkness the outside narrator reflects on the nature of Marlow's stories:

> The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (p. 48).

It is tempting to see this as an authorial comment on the nature of 'the meaning' of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>, that the outside which is to give meaning to Marlow's story is the meta-perspective argued for above. But any such reading needs to take account of the ambiguity of the final phrase; the comparison of Marlow's mode of 'yarning' with 'moonshine' suggests a self-reflective irony on the narrator's part which is of a piece with the way Marlow distances himself from his early endorsement of restraint as against demoralization in the case of the accountant. In inviting this level of narrative questioning of the status of the work's apparent resolution of the tension between the modes of language explored in the text, Conrad shows a delicacy of meta-fictional awareness that is regrettably a neglected aspect of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>.

Heart of Darkness, Themes, and the Value of Unity

It does not require long study to find that the critics[1] have proposed rather different answers to the question of what Heart of Darkness is about. Allon White, for example,

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1. The epistemic position of a study like the present is that one has to start with the way professional literary critics present their interpretations to a largely professional audience. However, the interpretations may have been arrived at in a different way from that in which they are presented. Indeed, with the conventions of academic publication in mind, it is very likely that they have been arrived at in a different way. It is therefore disingenuous of literary theorists to pretend that by looking at professional literary criticism we can learn how readers make sense of literary works, as I argued in the section on The Tempest above. However, it is a daunting and probably impossible task to go into the minds of readers and find the way they interpret literary works, and the interpretive situation in the theatre, at performances or at rehearsals, is not conducive to the kind of analysis proposed in this chapter. Consequently, for better or for worse, the epistemic situation for the present study is as outlined above, and the only antidote to the inherent problems is to be aware of the limitations of this approach.

claims to have read 112 interpretations of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>.[2] In this chapter I shall discuss three different interpretations of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>, and also use my own interpretation 'Restraint in the Darkness' as illustration. The first part of the discussion will be a close look at these three interpretations, the second part an analysis of how the interpretations differ and where they show similarities. A more theoretical discussion of the merits or otherwise of theme formation in literary criticism will form the third part of the chapter. This discussion will centre on the notion of unity and the value of unity in a literary work.

I

With such a multitude of interpretations to choose from, definite criteria will have to be provided for the choice. For one thing, it is of little merit to pick an interpretation for its extremity in the interpretive continuum. One is better served with interpretations that have proved to be influential, thus more likely to be in the mainstream of criticism. However, the two schools of <u>Heart of Darkness</u> interpretation should both be represented. One consists of those who see in <u>Heart of Darkness</u> a work which deals with psychological themes, often pointing in a metaphysical direction. The other school see the work mainly as a critique, successful or otherwise, of imperialism. The

2. Allon White, <u>The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism</u> (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 175, n. 44.

former form a school only to the extent that they have to argue that the work is really about something it does not appear to be about, whereas the latter more clearly can point to 'the surface' of the work and the reaction of its original audience, for it is worth noting that the first reviews of Heart of Darkness saw the work mainly in the light of contemporary imperialism. An unsigned review in Athenaeum states that it deals with 'life on the Congo and the Belgian ivory-hunt'.[3] Edward Garnett, in an unsigned review in Academy and Literature, was a little less specific and stated that Heart of Darkness

> to present its theme bluntly, is an impression
> taken from life, of the conquest by the European
> whites of a certain portion of Africa, an
> impression in particular of the civilizing methods
> of a certain great European Trading Company face
> to face with the 'nigger'.[4]

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3. Norman Sherry, editor, Conrad: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 139.

4. Sherry, 1973, p. 132. However, later on the same page of the (reprinted) review Garnett says that 'the art of Heart of Darkness ... implies the acutest analysis of the deterioration of the white man's morale, when he is let loose from European restraint.' Critical opinion today would probably regard this as a more perceptive statement of the theme than the former quotation.

On the other hand, an unsigned review in Manchester Guardian was prepared to say that 'it must not be supposed that Mr. Conrad makes attack upon colonization, expansion, even upon Imperialism. In no one [story] is the essence of the adventurous spirit more instinctive.'[5]

Moving closer to our own time, other themes have come to occupy centre stage in the interpretive activity. Albert Guerard's 'The Journey Within' is an anthologized and highly influential study of Heart of Darkness, first appearing in his book Conrad the Novelist.[6] In this work it is hard to find any reference to the colonial or imperialist theme of the work. The only hint of Guerard recognizing a theme of this kind in Heart of Darkness is a statement to the effect that Marlow, early on in his story, 'establishes certain political values'.[7]

The central idea of Guerard's reading of Heart of Darkness is that Marlow is the central character, and that the story he tells the listeners on the Nellie is a 'night journey into the unconscious, and confrontation of an entity within the self'.[8] Thus, Guerard's reading has to establish that the narrative in fact has the characteristics of a night

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5. Sherry, 1973, p. 135.

6. Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1958).

7. Guerard, p. 45.

8. Guerard, p. 39.

journey into the self. He defines this night journey as 'the story of an essentially solitary journey involving profound spiritual change in the voyager'. And that 'very often the dream appears to be about the introspective process itself: about a risky descent into the preconscious or even unconscious'.[9]

The crucial connection between Marlow's journey and the night journey is made when Guerard states that

> The true night journey can occur (except during analysis) only in sleep or in the waking dream of a profoundly intuitive mind. Marlow insists more than is necessary on the dreamlike quality of his narrative.[10]

In the space of just four pages Guerard presents his central thesis of what Heart of Darkness is about.[11] The rest of the essay is perceptive commentary on the work, but peripheral in relation to the night journey thesis which is further supported by a set of quotations from the story, principally Marlow's comments on the nature of his narrative; that it is like telling a dream, that before setting off it felt as if he was setting off for the centre of the earth, his feeling of incomprehension travelling up the river and finally that

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9. Guerard, p. 15.

10. Guerard, p. 39.

11. Guerard, pp. 39-43.

the approach to Kurtz was 'beset by as many dangers as though he has been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle'.[12] All these factors are assumed to be indications of the dream experience which is central to a journey into the self. Other necessary ingredients of such a journey are the aid of 'a savage or half-savage guide, and ... the token removal of civilized trappings or aids'.[13] This role is served by the dying helmsman (half-savage, presumably) who casts blood in Marlow's shoes (civilized trappings) as he falls over, leading Marlow to throw the shoes overboard. Guerard then speculates that it was a psychological need on Conrad's part which compelled him to postpone the meeting between Marlow and Kurtz for over three thousand words after announcing that it took place. This psychological need stems from Marlow's strong identification with Kurtz, an identification so strong that Guerard is prepared to classify it as a case of the double, and for this identification to be made material the confrontation between the two must be on board the boat. Thus, Guerard confuses Conrad and Marlow and makes a case of the double between two of Conrad's literary creations into a psychological need on the part of their creator so strong that it 'compelled' him into writing the work in a certain way.

Marlow's later shock on learning that Kurtz has escaped from his cabin is exceptionally strong because of this identifi-

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12. All quotations referred to: Guerard, p. 39-40.

13. Guerard, p. 40.

cation, an identification which remains after death to lay Marlow low with an illness that nearly cost him his life. But Marlow lives, and lays the ghost of Kurtz's gifts with the lie to the Intended, which also marks the end of the dream. Guerard's last two arguments in defence of the dream-thesis is that it explains Conrad's adjectival insistence and that 'if the story is not about this deeper region [of the mind], and not about Marlow himself, its length is quite indefensible'.[14]

Guerard's interpretation amounts to an argument that the geographical journey in Heart of Darkness is also a mental journey on Marlow's part, or that the geographical journey is just a part of the dream. Guerard is not quite clear on this point. The point of the journey, in any case, is Marlow's encounter with Kurtz, who is his double or an instance within Marlow's self.

K. K. Ruthven in 'The Savage God',[15] a work which also deals with D. H. Lawrence's Women in Love and The Rainbow, promotes the thesis that Heart of Darkness is 'an attack on the values of western society and an annunciation of the Savage God'.[16] The savage primitivism, of which Heart of Darkness, according to Ruthven, is the locus classicus[17] is

14. Guerard, p. 42.

15. K. K. Ruthven, 'The Savage God: Conrad and Lawrence', Critical Quarterly, 10 (1968), 39-54.

16. Ruthven, p. 41.

17. Ruthven, p. 41.

identified in the paper as 'a particularly intense form of primitivism that developed towards the end of the nineteenth century'. It 'is a destructive hatred of civilization: the savage primitivist envisages destruction as the only solution to the problems of a hypercivilized Europe and ... takes a compensatory interest in primitive peoples, particularly in primitive Africans'.[18] This interest was fuelled by reports from anthropologists who described societies where European restraints were absent, and where brutal murder and sexual promiscuity were parts of religious rituals.

Against this background Ruthven argues that Kurtz is the real hero of the work[19] because, in the world of the work, he chooses the horrific yet vital wilderness of Africa rather than the dead values of Europe.[20] In Conrad's African wilderness, the jungle, Ruthven sees the ancient core of the European mind, which Marlow penetrates in his journey up the river to meet Kurtz: sailing up the river is 'like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world' (p. 92), and Marlow responds to the savage yells of the natives for he reports that there was a meaning in them that even the

18. Ruthven, p. 39.

19. Although the wording is more tentative: 'it is possible to regard Kurtz as the hero of this story' (Ruthven, p. 41), Kurtz's status as the hero is a necessary premiss for the interpretation.

20. Ruthven, p. 41.

modern man, 'so remote from the night of first ages - could comprehend' (p. 96).[21] In this respect Ruthven finds that Conrad anticipates Freud and his notion of the id, and that 'the journey up the Congo, as Conrad describes it, is something in the nature of a psychic voyage into the innermost recesses of the mind'.[22]

According to Ruthven, Kurtz is Conrad's hero because Conradian heroes are characteristically the ones who 'immerse themselves in the destructive elements', a course of action Stein in Lord Jim recommends.[23] 'Kurtz releases his id from the restraints of his European ego', and so 'Kurtz had achieved a sort of moral emancipation' which meant that he was 'on the threshold of great things' (p. 143). Ruthven recognizes that this last statement might just as well refer to Kurtz's greed as ivory collector, but which 'we are tempted to interpret as a reference to Kurtz's

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21. Ruthven, p. 42.

22. Ruthven, p. 42.

23. 'A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns ... The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertion of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.' Stein's advice in Lord Jim, edited by Thomas Moser, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 130. For a discussion of this passage: Watt, pp. 325-331.

courage as a pioneer in the psychic wilderness of Africa'. Marlow's authority is dismissed because he 'disapproves of Kurtz too strongly to be a reliable commentator on him'. Rather, 'Kurtz has somehow entered a realm of experience which is beyond the conventional scope of good and evil, and this is something that Marlow, a mere tourist in the dark side of the mind, can barely understand.'[24]

Ruthven claims, in other words, that Conrad's assessment of Kurtz is radically different from Marlow's, and that Marlow is effectively an unreliable narrator. However, in affirming both that Kurtz's 'The horror! The horror!' was a victory (p. 151)[25] and that it was withering to one's belief in mankind (p. 145), Marlow effectively changes his mind about Kurtz, says Ruthven, and begins to understand that 'the truth is not always comforting and that the cry of the savage God, however horrific, is nevertheless authentic'. This change of mind, coming from a respectable man with Victorian values, makes it easier for Conrad to convince the Victorian reader to accept, despite the moral and intellectual climate of the time, that Kurtz was a hero.[26]

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24. All quotations in this paragraph are from Ruthven, p. 43, unless stated.

25. Ruthven suggests that by just removing the disapproving adjectives, which are tokens of an obsolete morality, from Marlow's assessment of Kurtz's last words we have the key to Conrad's view of Kurtz's achievement.

26. All quotations, unless stated, are from Ruthven, p. 44.

Like Guerard, Ruthven claims that the journey up river is really a journey into the deeper recesses of Marlow's mind. However, unlike Guerard, Ruthven sets this journey in the context of the history of ideas, and of a particular movement in the 1890s, but curiously makes no attempt to show that Conrad was in any way influenced by this movement, or that he was in sympathy with their beliefs. This might be because of the difficulty, on the evidence of Conrad's extra-literary statements of his views, and likewise with evidence from the rest of his literary output, to show this to be the case.

However, compared with the first reviews of Heart of Darkness one noteworthy aspect of Guerard's and Ruthven's interpretations is their disregard of anything in the work amounting to a criticism of contemporary imperialism. This may be because the two interpretations are articles, and therefore have to focus on a certain aspect of the work. Yet the absence of any reference to what the work seems to be about, its surface story, is eloquent. Likewise, the assumption that both interpretations make, that Heart of Darkness can really be about something Joseph Conrad was unlikely to be aware of at the time of writing it, begs a number of questions.

Benita Parry, in <u>Conrad and Imperialism</u>,[27] moves far more at the surface of the work, but argues in similar fashion that Conrad was unaware of what he wrote, in this case of his implicit support of imperialism in <u>Heart of Darkness</u>.[28]

This is partly because Marlow speaks with two voices, 'one the sardonic and angry dissident denouncing imperialism's means and goals as symptoms of the West's moral decline, the other the devoted member of this world striving to recover a utopian dimension to its apocalyptic ambitions'. Parry sees the lie to the Intended as the point at which Marlow betrays the good cause: 'Marlow ... makes known at the outset his contempt for imperialism's sententious verbiage, and although his narration abundantly validates his view of colonialism as robbery with violence, his story concludes with an affirmation of loyalty to Europe's illusory pure form.'[29] This is because the Intended is 'the emblem of Europe's religious traditions and the symbol of an imperialism saved by visionary desires', as well as 'the false prophetess of imperialism's utopian impulse'.[30]

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27. Benita Parry, <u>Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers</u> (London: Macmillan, 1983).

28. Parry acknowledges that the 'rich possibilities for critical speculation are apparent' and gives several examples of themes found in the work by earlier critics. Parry, p. 20.

29. All quotations Parry, p. 38.

30. Both quotations Parry, p. 37.

This is not as contradictory as it first appears, for Marlow is an unreliable narrator by compromising his own standards 'in the name of higher corporate obligation ... and the contradictions in his stance are made transparent through the ironic juxtapositions of the "facts" he is narrating and his own interpretation of these situations'.[31] He also attaches a moral purpose to imperialism by his statement that '[w]hat redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea' (p.51), and thereby announces his own error of judgement.[32] Against this background, and what Marlow tells us about him, Kurtz emerges as outrageous because of his excesses rather than the essence of his conduct.[33]

It remains ambiguous to what degree Parry holds Conrad responsible in this respect. Marlow's admonitions and approbations do not carry textual approval, she says, and his contradictions are made transparent.[34] Yet, it must be Conrad's fault that

> in joining an allegory about the destiny of
> colonialism's meretricious aspiration with a
> mythopoeic narration of the West's penetration
> into the estranging world of its other, the

31. Parry, p. 38.

32. Parry, p. 27.

33. Parry, p. 28.

34. Parry, p. 38.

fiction paradoxically contains within itself the
seeds of an unorthodox apologia for values it has
discredited and disowned.[35]

So, the upshot of Heart of Darkness is the affirmation of an
ethnocentric system of values, a system which has produced
the behaviour the fiction ostensibly condemns:

> with the supervention of themes registering
> ethical standards as fixed by ethnic sentiment and
> servering [sic] acts of personal honour from a
> wider conception of moral responsibility, the
> political protest is crucially muffled and the
> grace of visionary aspirations invested in
> imperialism triumphs over representations of the
> disgrace attending its historical practice.[36]

The crucial premiss of this conclusion is an identification
of the Intended as being 'the false prophetess of imperial-
ism's utopian impulse',[37] but whether Parry believes Conrad
intended this to be perceived or whether he was guilty of
affirming the system of values propagating imperialism
remains unclear to the end.

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35. Parry, p. 20.

36. Parry, p. 21.

37. Parry, p. 37 and above.

Clearly, this question is not merely 'academic' in that it determines whether the work as a whole is an attack on imperialism and misguided critiques of it, like Marlow's, or that it itself is a misguided critique. It seems that Parry believes the latter to be the case, but nowhere states this clearly.

However, a number of suspect tropes of the fiction are necessarily from Conrad's hand. Parry criticizes 'the fiction's insistently dichotomous iconography', by which she seems to mean chiefly 'the commanding motif of white and black'.[38] She does not fail to notice that the dichotomy is subverted in Heart of Darkness,[39] and that this subversion results in Europe being 'deposed from its self-elevation as harbinger of light in a dark continent'. However, this does not include 'black', which together with 'dark' serve as 'equivalences for the savage and unredeemed, the corrupt and degraded, the abominable and the detestable, the cruel and atrocious'. Inexplicably, Parry then goes on to assert first that black and dark do signify positive qualities but ultimately that

> the fiction gravitates back to established
> practice, registering the view of two incompatible
> orders within a manichean universe, and by this

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38. Parry, p. 21.

39. Parry, p. 22.

obliquely conferring a specious righteousness on
an otherwise indefensible ethnic allegiance.[40]

Unfortunately, Parry does not explain what this gravitation
back consists in for, after all, the last scene in Marlow's
story is his interview with the Intended, where the
customary connotations of white are clearly subverted.
Presumably she means the last words spoken by Marlow in the
narrative where he says that he could not tell the Intended
the truth about Kurtz's last words because 'it would have
been too dark - too dark altogether' (p. 162). However, it
might be voiced against this assumption that for a dichotomy
to exist it has to rely on a fixed opposition between two
terms, and if one of them changes so, necessarily, does the
other: if white and light is bad, is dark and black bad as
well?

For Parry's interpretation of <u>Heart of Darkness</u> to work, the
Intended has to represent imperialism, she has to be 'the
false prophetess of imperialism's utopian impulse'.[41]
However, she also says of Marlow that the recipients of his
chivalry are the contrary and complementary incarnations of
a Europe formally committed to 'humanism and humanitarianism
while negating these in the pursuit of imperialist ambi-
tions'.[42] Nevertheless, it might very well be argued that

40. Quotations Parry, p. 23.

41. Parry, p. 37.

42. Parry, p. 36.

the Intended is meant to represent the humanism and humanitarianism untainted with the vile scramble for loot in Africa and the barbarism of 'the faithless pilgrims', of which she knows nothing, which would make of his lie to her an attempt to preserve this humanism from the despondency and disillusion which he thinks knowledge of Kurtz 'horror' would result in.

II

Allon White writes about 'the rhetoric of enigma' in Heart of Darkness, 'a dark rebus to which there must be some answer',[43] and claims that the

> usual critical activity in this respect is to fix
> upon one of the mysterious equivalents in the book
> ... and to provide a 'solution' to Heart of
> Darkness in terms of this single equivalent.[44]

In this section I focus on two elements, mysterious equivalents or otherwise, in the three interpretations of Heart of Darkness discussed in this chapter; the nature of Marlow's journey and Marlow's reliability as narrator. This is to provide a small core of examples to illuminate a discussion of some problems in the theory of literary interpretation. The identification of important elements of

43. White, p. 119.

44. White, p. 119.

the text and the construal of these will feature most prominently in the discussion.

We have seen that for Guerard's interpretation of Heart of Darkness the work represents a night journey into the unconscious, and that this is evident from Marlow's insistence on the dream-like aspects of his narrative. Ruthven's thesis has affinities with this view, but goes further to claim that the journey of Heart of Darkness is a return to a primitive stage in mankind's cultural development. Thus, Marlow's feeling of 'travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world' stand out as a clue to the real significance of the journey as atavistic.

Both interpretations are consequently in accord on the point of the journey up the river in Heart of Darkness being something more then that, but differing in the interpretive framework they use. For both Guerard and Ruthven, thus, the journey itself is an element[45] of the interpretation. If we

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45. I shall use the notion of 'element' to denote a constituent of the literary interpretation which is identifiable as a unit in its own right and which carries an interpretive description in the form of a construal which signifies the role the element has in the interpretive framework, and which makes it a part of the interpretation. It can be a textual segment, like Kurtz's 'The horror! The horror!', but it may also be a more broadly conceived

judge by the amount of textual support presented, it is even the most central element of their interpretations of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>. The interpretive frameworks, which it is tempting to suggest are derived less from a reading of the text than from broader theoretical considerations, give this single element two different, though to some degree overlapping, construals. If we grant that the journey is the 'mysterious equivalent' in both cases, the solutions are different. The upshot of this is that they do indeed identify the journey as the most central element of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>, but because of their different interpretive frameworks they end up by giving it different construals, which means that construal is sufficient for interpretive difference.

Disagreements between the same two interpretations are apparent in the narrative status accorded to Marlow. In Guerard's view he is the hero, whereas Ruthven argues that Kurtz is the real hero of the spirit and Marlow a fallible narrator. For Guerard Marlow takes centre stage because the night journey is necessarily <u>his</u> journey, and any clear distinction between Marlow and Kurtz made impossible by the latter's role as Marlow's <u>alter ego</u>. Ruthven's interpretive framework, as we know, amounts to the thesis that <u>Heart of Darkness</u> describes the discovery of The Savage God, and because the movement with which he links <u>Heart of Darkness</u>

aspect of the literary work, for example the status of Marlow's narrative comments.

sees civilization as a negative phenomenon, Kurtz, with his 'unspeakable rites' and other excesses, stands out as the real hero. This assumption of the interpretive framework, rather than identification of textual evidence, forms the support for the status of Kurtz and relegates Marlow to the status of fallible narrator.

In this way, the disagreement between these two interpretations on the issue of Marlow's reliability is one of whether this is an element in the interpretation or not. The disagreement on the nature of the journey, on the other hand, was one of construal. For Guerard, the issue of Marlow's reliability does not arise as such, but for Ruthven it follows logically from the status he gives Kurtz in accordance with his interpretive framework and the textual evidence of Marlow's attitude to him.

Marlow's unreliability, though, is an element in Parry's interpretation, and she identifies his status through being a loyal servant in the company, and through lying to the Intended in order to save what Parry sees as Europe's illusory pure form. This ensures that Marlow speaks with two voices, that his criticism of imperialism is not consistent and hence that he cannot be trusted as narrator. This does not lead Parry to conclude that he cannot be trusted in anything, but only to the more limited claim that his judgments of the facts he narrates are limited and that an ironic juxtaposition results from this tension. However,

this is bad enough in that Parry sees the whole work as guilty in this respect, and that the narrative impact is one of affirmation of the utopian impulse behind imperialism, which is only the cloak under which the imperialist dagger is hidden.

We can thus see that although Parry's 'element' can carry the same name-tag as Ruthven's, that Marlow is an unreliable narrator, both the support for the identification of the element and the roles it plays in the two interpretations are altogether different. For Ruthven the identification is derived from the assumption that Heart of Darkness describes the discovery of the Savage God, that Kurtz is the hero, and that because of his negative comments on Kurtz's achievements Marlow is an unreliable narrator. Parry's identification derives, as we have just seen, from two sources: being a loyal servant of the imperialist company as well as criticizing its workings, and from his ultimate affirmation of the utopian impulse behind the imperialist system.

The issue of compatibility or incompatibility between interpretations of the same work is a much discussed issue in literary theory and literary aesthetics, and at this point we can see that it is a relevant question to ask in the present discussion. Both Guerard and Parry acknowledge the existence of other themes in Heart of Darkness. What they do not clarify, interestingly, is whether they regard these other interpretations as misguided or if multifarious

interpretations do not bother them. In other words, if they see their own work as contributions to an additive enterprise, or to a field of competing interpretations. I shall return to this problem in the next section, but it is interesting to see how these interpretations construe different elements of Heart of Darkness. For the moment I wish to introduce the following, provisional, definition of incompatibility in interpretation:

> two interpretations are incompatible if they construe an element of a work in ways which makes it impossible to substitute either element with its construal for the other in the two interpretations.

In the present context we can see that Ruthven's case for the Savage God would be rendered impossible if Guerard's case of Marlow as the hero, rather than Kurtz, was introduced into his interpretation. This is true even if both interpretations agree on the point that the journey is an element; that its significance is central to the theme of Heart of Darkness. For Ruthven the journey's ultimate destination is the earliest beginnings of the world; the atavistic centre of European culture. For Guerard, however, the destination is squarely within Marlow as the journey is really a dream. Hence, no substitution is possible. The same is true of the element of Marlow's narrative reliability. Ruthven's theme of revolt against the dead values of Europe

would be null and void if Marlow was a reliable narrator, and conversely Guerard's theme of Marlow's night journey to meet an entity within his self rendered incomprehensible if Marlow was a fallible narrator.

For Parry the journey is simply the trip Marlow makes up the river, and deserves no attention as such. The journey, hence, does not register as an element of the interpretation, and to introduce either Guerard's or Ruthven's construal of the element of the journey would seriously disrupt Parry's focus on the theme of imperialism in her chapter on Heart of Darkness. The nature of this disruption would prove fatal, since it is implicit in the two construals of the journey that they also establish the theme of the work.

One result of this analysis is that these interpretations are not compatible on the criterion employed here. Therefore, they are competing interpretations. However, the criterion employed does not cover the case of the absence of any 'journey element' in Parry's interpretation. We have seen, though, that to introduce the element of the journey, construed in either of the two ways above, would make a difference to Parry's interpretation. Indeed, it would make it unintelligible. The ground is prepared, then, for a supplement to the criterion above, to the effect that

if an element and its construal are introduced
into another interpretation where it does not
occur, the two interpretations are incompatible if
this undermines the latter interpretation.

Another result of this analysis is that if two inter-
pretations identify the same element of a text that is not
sufficient to verify that its function in the interpreta-
tions is the same. Therefore, construal can be an altogether
different process from identification of elements, and for
two interpretations to identify the same element is not
dependent on similar support for its identification.

Construal, therefore, seems to have a strong correlation
with the interpretive hypothesis and does not depend wholly
on the textual evidence for the identification of the
element. However, it is only in analysis that we can
distinguish clearly between the way an element is identified
and the way it is made to support the interpretive hypo-
thesis. We see in practice that the interpretive hypothesis
can be so predominant that little textual support is used to
justify the identification of an element. One case is
Ruthven's identification of Kurtz as the hero of Heart of
Darkness, where the textual evidence is so dependent on the
interpretive framework that it could not add any support to
the interpretation without the assumptions on which it is
based. Without the framework of the discovery of the Savage
God, Ruthven could not so easily dismiss the value judgments

Marlow puts forward, and accord Kurtz the status of hero. Neither would it be so easy to assert that the journey up the river is really a voyage into the ancient core of the European mind.

This discussion has shown that the interpretive identification of elements of a text can depend heavily on the interpretive hypothesis, which strengthens its position over the evidence of the text. While this by no means implies normative support for the critic's adherence to his or her prejudices, it undermines the view that it is the salient elements of the text which present themselves to the critic.[46] This has the further consequence of making the critic's, or reader's, creative role more prominent, to the detriment of the author's power of determining through the text which elements are to guide the reader or critic to the correct understanding of the work. What is more is that we have found that the ways in which different critics argue for the identification of the same element can vary considerably. The case of Marlow's unreliability is rather different from the case of a typically textual element, where the agreement between critics is greater for obvious reasons, but merits note in that the ways in which Parry and Ruthven argue for their identification of this element also

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46. This tension between interpretive creativity and the 'evidence' of the text lies at the heart of much controversy in recent literary theory. This discussion shall be taken up in the last three chapters of this study.

determine the construal of the element as a constituent of the interpretations which they put forward. It is arguable that this is because the interpretive hypothesis is the sole criterion of relevance for the identification of an element as well as the source of purpose and direction for its construal in support of the interpretation. This should not be a surprising result for those who think that the hermeneutic circle is a useful way of thinking about the business of interpretation. As already mentioned, it is only in an analysis like the present one that we can carve the interpretive process up in this way and it should therefore not be surprising that the processes of identification and construal of elements in literary interpretation are highly integrated.

It is therefore important to establish whether this state of affairs is a threat to the identity of the element. In other words: does this mean that an element, like 'Marlow is an unreliable narrator', in one interpretation is not the same element in another interpretation for the reason that it has been identified in a different way and made to support a different interpretive claim? The identity test is similar to the criterion of incompatibility above: if the two elements presumed identical cannot be interchanged without disturbing the interpretations, they are not identical.

The case of Parry's and Ruthven's element of Marlow's unreliability is an instructive case to continue to discuss.

Ruthven finds Marlow to be unreliable because he assumes Conrad to value Kurtz higher, indeed as the hero of the work, than Marlow does. That is taken to mean that Marlow's evaluations cannot be trusted and that we are not meant to trust them. Parry's case for Marlow's unreliability is built on different assumptions, particularly on the assumption that Conrad is aware of the contradictions in Marlow's stance in Heart of Darkness, and that we are therefore meant to distrust Marlow's judgments in the narrative in the same way that Ruthven recommends. This makes Marlow's unreliability an element of the work, rather than a flaw in Conrad's own attitudes to the issue of imperialism. However, we have seen that this distinction becomes problematic in Parry's interpretation, and we are left uncertain to what degree Marlow's unreliability is really only Conrad's contradictory attitudes. The central question about this element, though, is what use the two interpretations make of this element. The use made of it is rather different, for reasons similar to the ways in which it was identified as an element. Ruthven uses the unreliability to overrule those of Marlow's judgments in the text which contain a moral condemnation of Kurtz's sins and excesses, whereas Parry uses the same unreliability to show the power of the imperialist ideology to subvert the well meaning criticism of imperialist practice. It seems, therefore, that to identify this kind of element, of the non-textual kind, in two different interpretations begs questions of identity. Even if we see that the interpretive claims can usefully be

encompassed in the same formula, in this case Marlow's unreliability as narrator, this does not mean that the elements are identical. This is because identity in the case of non-textual elements cannot be divorced from how they are construed; their function in the interpretation is the ultimate criterion for their identity, and as we have seen this makes them highly dependent on the interpretive framework. So, if the interpretive frameworks are different, the likelihood is that elements which seem at first identical do in fact support different claims and are thus not interchangeable.

One possibility we left unexplored above was the case of an easily reidentifiable textual element of the 'The horror! The horror!' variety. Critics too numerous to mention have given different interpretations to this simple repeated phrase, and in Allon White's words the phrase is indeed a 'mysterious equivalent' for many interpretations, though not for any of the three we have discussed above. Whereas the non-textual elements are dependent on the interpretive framework both for their identification and for their construal, the textual elements seem to be independent in the former part of the interpretive process in that they are easily reidentifiable and thus preserve identity untainted by the interpretive framework. This means that the author has more control over these elements and can foreground some of them and also provide clues to their construal, which presents a challenge to the interpreter and the

interpretive framework he or she is working with. However, two ways are open to the interpreter who finds his or her interpretive framework challenged by this element. The most common solution is to ignore the element, which simply means not to regard it as an element at all. A great number of interpretations of Heart of Darkness make much of Kurtz's last words, but none of the ones analyzed above. It is reasonable to assume that the great majority of readers wonder what Kurtz could mean by this whisper on his death-bed, and likely that Conrad intended this utterance as one of the salient features of his work. Still, critics also ignore the element because it does not contribute to the interpretation being presented, or because they see it as unproblematic, i.e that what Kurtz means by his utterance is obvious.

The other way open to the interpreter in dealing with the author's foregrounded element is to provide a construal of the element which makes it support the interpretive framework the interpreter is using. In Heart of Darkness there are several such elements, the 'horror' example only one of the more obvious ones, which critics construe to support an interpretive framework which is then presented as a 'solution' to the riddle posed by this textual element. It

is these elements Allon White names 'the mysterious equivalents'.[47]

In this section we have seen that the power of the textual elements as well as the non-textual elements to challenge the interpretive framework of the critic is more limited than seemed likely at the outset. The most important conclusion from this discussion may be that the critic has many ways of dealing with even the most intractable elements of the literary work, and that the construal of the element identified is the most important tool at his or her disposal to support the interpretive framework. A critical discussion of the role and nature of the interpretive framework, or the interpretive hypothesis, therefore, is crucial for an understanding of the nature of literary interpretation and the differences within it. I propose to focus this discussion on the notion of themes and thematic concepts.

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47. Another critical mode of operation is to focus on a less than obvious element and work a 'solution' to the interpretive questions of the work through the construal of this element. One has to keep in mind that the literary criticism from academic quarters is under considerable pressure to produce ever new interpretations of the works of the literary canon, and as the pressure to publish increases so does the number of these interpretations. This is a rather underestimated source of critical variety.

III

To simplify matters but a little, literary interpretations aspire to tell us what the works are about. Christopher Isherwood has a passage in his book <u>A Single Man</u> where he heaps scorn on the practice in literary studies of discussing what the books are 'about'.[48] However, it seems to be a ubiquitous phenomenon to see literary works as being about something. The three interpretations of <u>Heart of Darkness</u> above have three different answers to this question, and one must assume that there are other answers to the about-

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48. 'But, before we can go any further, you've got to make up your minds what this novel actually <u>is</u> about.' ... At first, as always, there is blank silence. ... <u>About. What is it about</u>? Well, what does George want them to say it is about? They'll say it's about anything he likes, anything at all. For nearly all of them, despite their academic training, deep down still regard this <u>about</u> business as a tiresomely sophisticated game. As for the minority, who have cultivated the <u>about</u> approach until it has become second nature, who dream of writing an <u>about</u> book of their own one say, on Faulkner, James or Conrad, proving definitely that all previous <u>about</u> books on that subject are about nothing- they aren't going to say anything yet awhile. They are waiting for the moment when they can come forward like star detectives with the solution to Huxley's crime. Meanwhile, let the little ones flounder. Let the mud be stirred up, first.' Christopher Isherwood, <u>A Single Man</u> (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 54.

question among the 112 interpretations of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>
that Allon White had read. It is also reasonable to assume
that none of them would say that <u>Heart of Darkness</u> is about
a guy who goes up a river in Africa as captain on a boat.
Up-river he meets a trader who has gone a bit over the top,
takes him with him on the boat where the trader dies, goes
back to Europe where the ex-captain feeds a line to the
trader's fiancée. This is just a superficial résumé of the
story, whereas a proper answer to what <u>Heart of Darkness</u> is
about would be expected to say something of a more profound
nature about the work. Defined negatively, a statement of
what a literary work is about is expected to be non-
superficial and non-obvious. This is intuitively right from
the premises that for people to need telling what a work is
about it cannot be obvious, and if it is superficial people
just would not want to know. The theorist Stein Haugom Olsen
puts it thus:

> Readers expect of a literary work that it should
> be interpretable in terms of ... higher-level
> general concepts, and they censure it as trivial
> if it is not possible to bring some of these
> 'interesting' concepts to bear on it in inter-
> pretation.[49]

At the lower level of the interpretive hierarchy, according
to Olsen, ordinary life-experiences play the greater part in

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49. Olsen, 1978, p. 196.

assigning a function to a passage. However, higher up in Olsen's picture of the interpretive hierarchy the level of generality and abstraction of the interpretive terms grows, and thus increases the scope for creativity on the literary critic's part.[50] These general and abstract terms are thematic concepts, a few examples of which are given by Olsen:

'freedom, determinism, responsibility, weakness of the will, continence/incontinence, sympathy, guilt, human suffering, divine order, purity, pollution, forgiveness, charity, reconciliation'.[51]

As we saw in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: The Tempest', Olsen argues that theme[52] is of the essence of

50. Olsen, 1978, p. 102.

51. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 78.

52. To avoid confusion it must be pointed out that what is meant by 'theme' in this study is significantly different from the meaning Wolfgang Iser gives it in his main theoretical work The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (London: Routledge, 1978). For Iser the terms 'theme' and 'horizon', terms he borrows from Alfred Schütz, are more or less exchangeable with 'focus' and 'backdrop'. He says of the reader that 'the view he is involved with at any one particular moment is what constitutes for him the

literature: 'theme is essential to the very definition of what literature should be, and the hypothesis that theme may be universal in literature but not essential to it must be rejected'.[53] Further, the theme one should look for should be of a perennial character, for 'a formulation of theme which does not go beyond the level of topical thematic concepts aborts the aesthetic significance of the work and is therefore unsatisfactory'.[54] This entails that literary interpretation, to qualify as such, must involve an attempt to apprehend the perennial theme of a work.·

Richard Levin in <u>New Readings vs. Old Plays</u> disagrees with such accounts.[55] In this book he is highly critical of thematic readings, and describes what he calls 'the thematic leap' as follows:

"theme"' (p. 97), which makes it clear that what Iser means by 'theme' is significantly different from an over-all conception of the work. See also his discussion on page 198 of the same work.

53. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 83. See also p. 81, quoted in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value:<u>The Tempest</u>'.

54. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 87.

55. The book is particularly concerned with Renaissance plays. Richard Levin, <u>New Readings vs. Old Plays</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 11-77.

it consists of seizing upon some particular components of the drama and making them the representatives or exemplars of a general class, which then becomes the subject of the play and the critic's analysis. The technique 'thematizes' these concrete particulars by transforming them into abstract ideas.[56]

It is worth noting that for Levin thematic readings are only one of the types of reading he selects for criticism in his book, the others being ironic and historical readings, whereas Olsen considers the construction or reconstruction of a theme as a necessary constituent of a literary reading. Levin favours a more particular approach to literary works, or to Renaissance dramas which are his main concern in the book. The focus on themes, he argues, only serves to debase the work in that this focus makes it too general and risks making it banal. The typical critical move in thematic readings, according to Levin, is what he labels the 'my-theme-can-lick-your-theme' gambit, by which the critic demonstrates that his or her theme is more inclusive than the ones advocated by previous critics,[57] and adds that he has yet to find a critic who 'would admit that even one significant dramatic component was not encompassed by his central theme'.[58] However,

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56. Levin, p. 23.

57. Levin, p. 30.

58. Levin, p. 33.

as the themes grow more and more universal they will of necessity be applicable to more and more plays. But unfortunately this enrichment is accompanied by a corresponding impoverishment, since the more plays that a central theme can apply to, the less it can tell us about any particular play ..., so it would seem that the critic should be asserting that his theme is more central than those of his predecessors because it is _less_ inclusive than theirs.[59]

Levin drives the point home by listing fifteen statements of theme in different plays from as many critics without disclosing which plays they refer to, and offering a prize to anyone who can fit more than fifteen per cent of the themes to the right play, and for good measure he also offers a second prize to those who can get a better than chance score in guessing whether the themes refer to a tragedy or to a comedy.[60]

This attack leaves us with the question of why the thematic approach has proved so successful, or even ubiquitous, that a theorist like Olsen is prepared to say that it is a criterion of a properly literary approach to literature, as opposed to, for instance, an historical or a philological

59. Levin, pp. 37-38.
60. Levin, p. 59.

approach. Levin's own answer is that the imposition of a theme serves to unify the work,[61] and to show that it is profound.[62] Further, since a theme can be pitched at any level of abstraction, one theme can be found to prove the work's relevance for our most pressing concerns.[63]

Though largely dismissed by Levin, these reasons are pointers to a more positive explanation of 'the thematic urge' which can be seen in much literary criticism. A work must be presented as being non-trivial in order to command any interest, as pointed out above, but why this interest should be seen to derive from the theme of the work is less obvious. The key here may be in the unity a theme confers on the work.

This is easier to explain if we grant that for all of us the first objects of interpretation, in the wide sense of 'interpretation', are other people, each and every one of whom we see as being one person with one personality, if at all possible.[64] If this proves impossible, we have to assume

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61. Levin, p. 16 and p. 19.

62. Levin, p. 55.

63. Levin, p. 63.

64. The analogy between understanding-a-novel and under-standing-a-person has been made by Peter Jones in Philo-sophy and the Novel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), pp. 196-197, but without giving primacy to any one of the two, and also

that the person suffers from a personality disorder, such as schizophrenia. The possibility that the person before us is more than one person is never an alternative. Even if the person appears different at certain times, or acts differently in two similar situations, the person is the same to our minds. Obviously, incongruous behaviour may modify our understanding of the personality of the person in question, but it virtually never leads us literally to posit another person.

The same goes for ourselves. The neurologist Oliver Sacks describes the case of a man suffering from severe Korsakov's disease and how he continuously applies a series of different identities to the people he meets, and to himself. As a result of his disease he cannot remember anything from one moment to the next, but significantly never attributes a series of competing or conflicting properties or facts to any one person he meets, or himself; what comes out is a continuous series of <u>distinct</u> personalities and traits.[65]

> Such a patient <u>must literally make himself (and
> his world) up every moment</u> ... If we wish to know
> about a man, we ask 'what is his story - his real,

without making any comments on the expectation of unity.

65. Oliver Sacks, <u>The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat</u> (London: Picador, 1986), 'A Matter of Identity', pp. 103-110.

inmost story?' - for each of us _is_ a biography, a story. Each of us is a singular narrative.[66]

This parallel with narratives and literature is not accidental. When we approach a book, or even a story in a book, the assumption is that it represents a whole, just as a personality does.[67] Not only are they often units in the brute physical sense of the word, though 'work' and 'volume' represent distinct ranges of concepts, but in most cases they are written by one person as well. For the fact that one mind produces a work makes the analogy even closer.

The person/literary work analogy can be supplemented by reference to the ubiquitous application of mental terms to works of art; though this is most noticeable in the case of music, it is also discernable in the cases of painting, sculpture and literature. Critics may say of a symphony that the second movement is sad, that the introduction is cheerful, or even that the way a theme is introduced is cheeky. To a greater or lesser extent this is also an ascription of intention to the composer, but anyone with an

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66. Sacks, p. 105.

67. Peter Lamarque argues much the same from premises of rational action and concludes: 'We need to make initial assumptions about the coherence of a work of fiction before we are able to reason to what is true in that work', in 'Reasoning to What is True in Fiction', _Argumentation_, 4 (1990), 333-346 (p. 342).

interest in classical music knows that a competent conductor has it in his or her power to change the 'personality', as it were, of the piece of music in question. This undermines any close parallel between the composer and the personality of the work, but strengthens the case for a connection between the interpretation of a work of art and the interpretation or understanding of a person. This anthropocentrism may be described as 'natural' since the interpretation of people and their personalities are the first interpretive acts of any kind a person is likely to perform, and what is learnt in the primary case is likely to be applied in similar operations. Even if literary works do not lend themselves as easily to mental characteristics as do works of music, they do not differ substantially in the anthropocentric primacy of interpretation, hence the pre-reflective assumption for a work to be a coherent whole.

Does interpreting literature as if it was a person then entail that we have the same moral obligations to literary works as to people? It could, perhaps, account for a sense of perversity faced with a 'wild' interpretation, but the significant difference is that misinterpreting a literary work does not carry the same consequences as misinterpreting (or more properly: misunderstanding) a person. If you understand Moby Dick as a plain tale of fishing, no one will suffer as a result. Except yourself, perhaps, in that you have failed to interpret the novel in a more interesting way. This is precisely the point: the ethical obligation in

literary interpretation is the obligation to one's own life and one's understanding of it, an obligation to oneself more than anybody else. The consequences of failing to understand it can only very indirectly affect others, and the ethical obligation is correspondingly weak, if at all existing. On my hypothesis of the paradigmatic function of person interpretation the role of coherence as a criterion of an interpretation's acceptability changes character from imposed norm to criterion _of_ interpretation. On the background of the coherence criterion's connection with the notion of a single source in the one work, we can see how it connects with the criterion of correspondence. In this sense coherence is the inclusive aspect of correspondence. The illumination by the analogy with understanding a person serves to focus the phenomenon that we seem to value inter-pretations that make the most unified sense of seemingly disparate elements.[68]

The question remains, though, whether this is the reason why we find coherence aesthetically satisfying. Even in the current phase of deconstructive popularity I have yet to hear judgments like: 'the poem was so fissured, fractured and incoherent that it completely bowled me over. The elements had nothing whatsoever to do with one another, and that is deeply satisfying'. One would have to be a more than usually committed deconstructionist to say something like

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68. It should be noted, though, that post-structuralists have serious misgivings about this phenomenon.

it, I believe. Indeed, it would be tantamount to a sensation, and quite counterintuitive, to find that we had been wrong about aesthetic satisfaction right from ancient Greece up until Paul de Man put us straight.

The unity in complexity of a literary work was one of the main tenets of what has been called 'The New Criticism', but its roots go back to classical Antiquity. The idea of a work as a coherent unity is found in Plato. In the _Phaedrus_ Socrates says that

> any discourse · ought to be constructed like a living creature, with its own body, as it were; it must not lack either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to suit each other and the whole work.[69]

Since the assumption of coherence and unity is ubiquitous throughout the history of interpretation, it would seem that

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69. Plato, _Phaedrus_, 264c, in _The Collected Dialogues of Plato: Including the Letters_, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, translated by R. Hackforth, Bollingen Series 71, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961). See George A. Kennedy, _Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times_ (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 56-57, for a discussion of this idea in the _Phaedrus_, its roots in the earlier work of Plato and its influence on Aristotle and the Neoplatonists.

it is the more recently advanced theories of dissonance and incoherence in the literary work which are most in need of explanation in terms of social or ideological factors. None, however, will be offered here. The concern, rather, will be to ask how the assumption of unity can lead to the imposition of themes on the literary work.

This seems fairly clear. If a literary work is to be unified its parts must have something in common, which is traditionally conceived a purpose towards which they contribute. We should not forget, however, that the purpose of the work may be other than presenting a theme, as we shall see later in a discussion of the imagist programme of literature. The main argument above was that the search for unity is a natural 'urge' stemming from the primary importance of the interpretation of people and their personalities. Since this principle of unity has roots as far back as classical antiquity, it is not a twentieth century invention by the New Critics, nor brought into critical discourse by organicist ideology. Indeed, the historical roots in Plato facilitate an analogy between this principle in operation and Plato's theory of forms: the theme's status in relation to the elements of the work identified by the literary interpretation is broadly comparable with the status of the form in relation to the physical objects which participate in it. In a literary interpretation the theme of the work is present in the identified instances, the elements of the interpretation. This theme, what one may call the purpose of

the work, cannot be seen in isolation from what one takes to be the implicit claim of the work to our attention. If something is presented to the public, the implicit claim of the author(s) and/or publishers is that it is worthy of the public's attention, but the reasons why it should be worthy of attention naturally varies with the content. The Kama Sutra would be perused with different expectations from the ones with which we approach Descartes' Meditations, yet the assumptions of unity are with us in both cases, unless the critic sets out to prove a thesis to the effect that the work is full of 'aporias'. In this way, the expectations of unity and interest are both present in the fundamental fact of presentation, or in the modern world the fact of publication.

While this may explain 'the thematic urge', it does not prove it to be essential in the way Olsen argues. Literary criticism, and not least literary readings, may still be particular and concerned with the detail of the work to the exclusion of any attempt to construct the theme of the work. Levin points out the absurdity of some of the themes attributed to Shakespeare's plays by constructing a conversation between Ben Johnson and Shakespeare in a tavern on the Bankside:

B. J.: What have you been doing lately, Will?

W. S.: I've been working on a new play.

B. J.: Oh, what will it be about?

W. S.: It will be a sustained meditation on

      reality and illusion.[70]

Levin argues for a more specific approach when he introduces a distinction between a theme and what a play is about, the latter being 'some specific information concerning its characters and action'.[71] While this avoids the inherent absurdity of the quotation above, it is difficult to see how it can satisfy expectations of profundity and unity. We should keep in mind that the value of· thematic inter- pretations does not lie in their summary statement, e.g. statements such as the one Shakespeare makes in Levin's example above, but in the interpretation itself, where the relevant elements of the work are identified and given a purpose, so that they can be seen to function in a concerted way toward a common purpose. Whereas a blunt statement of the theme can seem worthless or absurd, a full inter- pretation will ideally give both the specific information of its characters and action that Levin calls for, and show how these specifics are interrelated in a way that gives the whole work a purpose; a purpose, moreover, which will be the more appreciated the greater its profundity and its relevance to the reader. This argument shows that the distinction Levin makes between what a play is about and its theme is neither absolute, nor a particularly helpful one. Rather, it can be said that a theme without the 'about', as

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70. Levin, p. 17.

71. Levin, p. 17.

Levin defines it, is vacuous and that the 'about' without a
theme is incomplete. The three interpretations of <u>Heart of
Darkness</u> analyzed above may be used to provide this dis-
cussion with some examples.

Guerard and Ruthven are both clear about what the theme of
<u>Heart of Darkness</u> is, even though they do not agree on what
it is. Guerard's theme is 'the night journey', though it is
never stated that this is the theme, just that it is what
the work 'explores'. This may serve as a reminder that the
notion of 'theme' is very much a theorist's construction.
Few critics, and probably even fewer readers, consciously
apply this term to what they look for. The most common way
of speaking about this elusive purpose of the work is in
terms of what it is about, the very question the students in
the quotation from Isherwood were expected to answer.
However, the answer to this question of what the work is
about is not the kind of answer Levin would accept because,
as we have seen, his 'about' is distinct from 'theme' in
being far more detailed and concerned with the specifics of
the work. Isherwood's students would be asked to get to the
point if they went on about characters, events and the like
without stating fairly succinctly what they took it to be
about. So, Guerard's statement that <u>Heart of Darkness</u> is a
'night journey into the unconscious, and confrontation of an
entity within the self'[72] is a statement of what both Olsen
and Levin would call the theme of the work. However,

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72. Guerard, p. 39.

Guerard's theme conspicuously fails to fit Olsen's conception of what a theme or a thematic concept is.[73] Neither in arriving at the theme, nor in stating it has Guerard applied anything resembling what Olsen means by a 'thematic concept', which according to Olsen's criteria implies that Guerard's interpretation is not a literary one. Guerard has, by presenting the view of the night journey, asked us to see Heart of Darkness in a new way, to give different construals of elements of the work, and to emphasize elements that had been overlooked up to then, but in bypassing Olsen's criterion of applying thematic concepts and hence couching the statement of theme in those terms, he has failed to pass Olsen's criterion of being literary.

Ruthven's fails Olsen's test as well, though he does apply thematic concepts like 'vitality', 'civilization' and 'authenticity'. The principal failure, as with Guerard, lies in not proposing a thematically sound theme, as it were. The 'annunciation of the Savage God'[74] cannot suffice since it is inextricably linked with a specific intellectual movement at a point in history. We have seen above that this connection with a topical concern is lethal to its status as a literary interpretation on Olsen's criteria. It would be a heavy task to argue that Ruthven's interpretation of Heart of Darkness is so good that it proves Olsen's criteria wrong, but these two examples from literary criticism add to

73. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 78. Quoted above.

74. Ruthven, p. 41.

my discussion in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: The Tempest', and shed further doubt on the accuracy of Olsen's description of the literary institution through thematic concepts and perennial themes as constitutive criteria.

Guerard in particular shows that the theme of the work might be interesting though it is neither founded on the application of thematic concepts to elements of the text, nor amounting to a theme of the kind Olsen envisages. Rather, it shows how a particular view of the work succeeds in unifying elements of it, and in providing the reader with an original point of view. Guerard's is not an impressively comprehensive interpretation; its main exposition runs to only four pages in Guerard's book and leaves most of Heart of Darkness uninterpreted in terms of the 'night journey' thesis; further it is difficult to see how this thesis can be extended to more of the work without stretching it beyond breaking point. Yet, it has attracted sufficient interest and respect to survive three editions of the Norton Critical Edition of Heart of Darkness. Though the span of time from its first publication in 1959 will hardly suffice to pass 'the test of time' of critical works, it is a fair claim that it belongs to 'the canon' of Heart of Darkness criticism without satisfying Olsen's criteria. What makes it successful, despite the weaknesses Cedric Watts have pointed out,[75] is that it challenges mundane assumptions and

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75. See Watts, 1977, pp. 141-145.

substantiates the claim that the tale is more archetypal than it might appear to the unwary. It thus satisfies through profundity; it says that Heart of Darkness is 'deeper' than it appears and therefore has a greater claim on our attention. The structure of the 'night journey' interpretation is unifying through picking out salient features to back this claim, but the relative failure of comprehensiveness raises the question of whether this theme suggests a unity of the work, or if the unity is a product of the limited scope of the 'night journey' theme. On balance, the latter seems to be the case, which implies that with Guerard the price of unity has to be paid in the currency of comprehensiveness. The net result is that, though his theme is an interesting and profound one, the potential richness and suggestiveness of Heart of Darkness is seriously impaired if we allow Guerard's 'night journey' theme to direct our reading.

The value of unity through theme, therefore, can be bought too dearly, and has to be balanced against comprehensiveness and richness. It would appear to be an analogue of this tension which Levin has in mind when he distinguishes between 'about' and 'theme' in his book, defining the former as being more specific and dealing with what happens in the work and the characters involved.[76] We can see clearly, though, that Levin's 'about' can never achieve the unification bestowed by a theme for the very reason of its being

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76. Levin, p. 17.

specific. In the case of Guerard, on the other hand, his failure is clearly that he is short on 'about' to the degree of undermining his 'theme'.

Benita Parry's interpretation is not easy to define in terms of either 'about' or 'theme'. The reason for this is that her reading is a symptomatic one, the purpose of which is to prove that Conrad implicitly condones imperialism. She states this clearly in the introduction:

> this study will attempt to discuss how the inter-
> locution of narrative discourses in a set of
> Conrad's fictions transforms, subverts and rescues
> the established norms, values and myths of
> imperialist civilization.[77]

Keeping this aim in mind, it is a moot point whether her reading is at all interested in Heart of Darkness. The balance is in favour of saying that the work is treated as a symptom of Conrad's ambiguity in his attitude to imperialism. We have seen in the exposition of her interpretation that the focus is solely on the question of imperialism, but it must be kept in mind that the two other interpretations we have analyzed are no less exclusive. Exclusiveness is not in itself disqualifying. The format of an interpretation, published as an article or as a chapter in a book, is necessarily limited. Few have published book-length

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77. Parry, p. 7.

discussions of _Heart of Darkness_; the rest have had to make tough decisions on what to focus. It is wise, of course, to highlight aspects of the work nobody else has seen, or published anything about. The logic of academic publishing, therefore, makes for piecemeal interpretations in published form. This constraint is common to all the three interpretations of _Heart of Darkness_ which have been in focus throughout this chapter.

In all three, consequently, it is impossible to find fully exemplified Stein Haugom Olsen's outline of what a literary interpretation is. At most, we are presented with a thesis of what _Heart of Darkness_ is about and some aspects of the work which support this view. In Parry's case we are told, not what it is about, but that imperialist norms, values and myths are eventually rescued by the narrative. However, the support for this claim is very perceptive, and most readers of Parry will have their understanding of _Heart of Darkness_ greatly improved, even if she does not try to tell us what it is 'really about'.

Olsen's outline is hard to match with even full scale interpretive works on _Heart of Darkness_. Ian Watt in _Conrad in the Nineteenth Century_ devotes 127 pages to _Heart of Darkness_, but gives no prominence to the issue of what its theme is or what it is about. Rather than identify a set of elements which reflect and contribute to the theme of the work, Watt provides background knowledge, discussing in

detail ideological and critical perspectives, before following the course of the narrative and commenting on various aspects of it. Cedric Watts in Conrad's Heart of Darkness: A Critical and Contextual Discussion, does much the same. The only relevant difference is that Watts pays greater attention to formal issues, and has a chapter at the end of the book called 'Various Themes', where he discusses different critics' interpretations of the work.

In my own interpretation of Heart of Darkness, 'Restraint in the Darkness', my concern is to show how the notion of restraint is applicable to plot, narrative structure and style alike and thus unifies these aspects of the work. While this interpretation brings together various strands of the work under one heading it is also important to be aware of its limitations. Unlike the works of Watt and Watts, it does not attempt to shed light on all aspects of Heart of Darkness. In the shorter space of a chapter it picks out a few elements which are considered important and/or so far neglected by reviewers and literary critics. Even for the critic, in this case myself, there may be other elements of the work which are interesting and even important but which have either been given their due by earlier critics or which do not directly support, though they do not necessarily contradict, the over-all theme of the interpretation. This applies to the evident anti-imperialist theme of the work as well as its concern with the exploration of the deeper recesses of the mind. These inherent limitations of

published literary interpretations make it clear that theme(s) in literary criticism are very often a shorthand for which aspect(s) of the literary work the interpretive article deals with, or, to adopt a more cynical perspective; which theoretical doctrine the critic is trying to prove.

It seems, therefore, that themes are less central to interpretation than Olsen's theory allows for. Even though we have only discussed interpretations of Heart of Darkness in this chapter, there is no reason to suppose it to be a special case in this respect. In the case of Parry, someone arguing Olsen's position could say that it is not really a literary interpretation, but this is hardly a possibility in the cases of Watt and Watts. Nevertheless, where critics do argue a particular interpretation, it is in the form of what it is about. Though the term 'theme' may not be used by the critic herself, elements of the work are picked out so as to show that the work revolves around what the work is said to be 'about'. However, although this concern with unity in diversity is also separately to be found in the interpretation of poems, it is problematic to argue that a lyric or a haiku poem always has a theme.

Olsen uses Blake's 'The Sick Rose' as an example to the contrary. Though a short lyric poem does not involve the complexity of development that the action and characters of a more extensive work afford, he argues that the typical

critic 'links together the images and symbols of the poem by bringing them together under different thematic descriptions which he interrelates in statements about the theme'.[78] However, in the case of an imagist 'poem' (Olsen is unwilling to dispense with the quotation marks, as will become apparent) like Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro' any development proves impossible. Written in accordance with the imagist programme of literature conveying a fresh impression, the poem does not yield to further development. So, despite having rhetorical merit, Olsen hesitates to call it a 'genuine poem'.[79] Not so with the two lines:

Swiftly the years, beyond recall.
Solemn the stillness of this spring morning.

This is because it is quite possible to construe these two lines as dealing with the contrast between passing time and present moment, surely a perennial theme. Though undeveloped due to its brevity, as a unit these lines find favour with Olsen.[80] He goes on to argue that if it was part of the author's intention that 'In a Station of the Metro' was a poem like any other, it would have been a bad poem, but since the author subscribed to the imagist credo of giving fresh impressions and the poem (if it is a poem) cannot be seen to yield to thematic analysis its status is left

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78. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, pp. 80-81.

79. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, pp. 81-82.

80. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 82.

uncertain.[81] It is on the background of this argument that Olsen, as seen above, argues that theme is of the essence of literature. I shall address the problems of this definition later in this study, but at this point it is useful to point out that Olsen's thesis delineates literature as writing which can be analyzed as dealing with a theme and which is intended by the author to deal with a theme, rather than this possibility of being interpreted in terms of a theme being the upshot of a definition of literature through some other criterion or set of criteria. This means, it is worth keeping in mind, that it is enough for the author to intend that what he writes is literature for it to be literature, and the question of the work as dealing with a theme only a criterion of whether the work is a good one or not:

> A failure to find a theme would ... lead to a
> negative evaluation of the poem, but there would
> be no reason for the reader to hesitate about what
> he is faced with.[82]

Following what Olsen writes in this part of 'Thematic Concepts: Where Philosophy Meets Literature', it is curious that he should conclude that, as quoted above, 'theme is essential to the very definition of what literature should be' when he also makes it abundantly clear that the decision of whether a work is literature or not is left to the

81. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, pp. 82-83.

82. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, p. 83.

writer. This clearly undermines the status of literature as a value-concept, and leaves us with literature as a function-class containing members of highly variable merit.

In this chapter we have discussed interpretations of <u>Heart of Darkness</u>, how they differ and also in what ways these differences come about. In broad outline literary interpretations identify aspects of the text, elements, which they implicitly present as the most important or the most interesting ones.[83] These elements are not just any motley crew, but usually presented as taking part in and contributing to a theme, a profound issue or question the literary work is presented as being about. However, there is little if any critical consensus on what theme(s) the individual literary works deal with because the same literary work is presented as dealing with a whole range of themes, though the width of this range varies between individual works and between genres. Allon White and the 112 interpretations of <u>Heart of Darkness</u> he claimed to have read is an excessive example, and it is quite possible that a closer analysis would show that these interpretations could be grouped around a dozen or half a dozen different themes, arrived at and presented in 10-20 different ways, rather than 112

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83. 'Interesting' here may be taken to indicate that though these elements may not be the most important even to the mind of the critic, the emphasis put on them may be due to their having been ignored by other critics or the reading public.

different themes argued for in as many ways. Nevertheless, it is a feature of literary interpretations that they make differing claims to what the literary works are about. The causes of this variety may be many, but it is beyond doubt that the interest(s) of the interpreter/reader is a major factor. For 'the ordinary reader' these interests may relate to his or her own life, or to concerns current in the culture.

These interests are no doubt also there for the professional critic, but in addition the professional practitioner has to keep a number of other considerations in mind; considerations to do with the publication of his or her work and previous research done in the field, if any. We have already pointed to the fact that the short space of the literary critical article makes the full scale interpretation of any but the short lyric poem all but impossible, and that books of literary interpretation often deal with several works by one author or works by a number of authors, and are therefore more in the nature of collections of articles. If not, they are likely to go into works and their background in great detail, in such cases often giving up claims to present a unified picture of the work.

All this implies that the evidence from academic and other literary criticism may not bear out what some theorists want to argue is the truth about the way readers make sense of literary works. This, naturally, has implications for the

literary theorist or literary aesthetician as well. Theorists remain limited by their epistemic position vis-a-vis the phenomenon of literary interpretation. The most popular 'evidence' is published literary criticism by more or less renowned critics, and it is easy to see why this should be so: we, as literary aestheticians, have little else to go on, except our own theories of how we ourselves actually read literature. A survey, conducted by questionnaire or interview, could not be reliable for all sorts of reasons. The most important is that people are just not aware of how they perform mental processes, which is one of the reasons why 'expert systems' in Artificial Intelligence have been so difficult to construct: experts do not know how they come to arrive at their conclusions, be it to infer from symptoms to illness for a specialist doctor or how to decide between investment plans for a successful industrialist. For this reason we should be wary of 'observations' of our own readings; these observations are likely to be highly tinged with whatever theoretical colour we favour. This leaves us with published literary criticism by the said renowned critics.

This evidential basis provides a significant limitation on the scope of the conclusions one may reach. The themes we see in published literary interpretations are circumscribed by the circumstances of their publication, and can in many, perhaps even most, cases be described as shorthand for the aspect of the literary work that the critic in question

wants to highlight. There is, nevertheless, a case for saying that we think of literary works as being about something, and that the situation of the reader or spectator is a major influence on his or her interpretation.

This case is based on everyday discourse about literature, in which it is customary to say that literary works, as well as books dealing with particular subjects, are about something. The test of this thesis is simple, and consists in asking the next person reading a literary work one comes across what the work is about. If this person has read more than just a little of the work, she will tell you what it is about.[84] She might say about Huck Finn that it is about this boy and his friend who travel down the Mississippi on a raft and all the curious people they meet. Or, as the case may be, that Seize the Day is about the meaning of selfhood and opportunity. The kind of answer one gets may depend on the sophistication of the reader, the reader's personality or on what the reader is particularly concerned about at the time of reading the work.

'The about-question' is also one which the theatre director has to answer, since a performance needs a focus, a theme, to interest the public as well as to give direction to matters such as casting, staging, delivery and many others. We have seen in the discussion of The Tempest that directors

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84. Unless she is one of the students from Isherwood's book, that is, in which case the answer may be less than polite.

have indeed found various themes in the work, and have represented these themes on stage to captivate and satisfy their different publics. Therefore, we have in theatrical performances another source of interpretations to quarry for theoretical enlightenment.

Richard Levin apparently derives a substantial degree of merriment from revealing the profusion of themes attributed to Renaissance plays by professional critics. It can be argued that the professional climate dictates that they should apply their intelligence and ingenuity to the multiplication of literary interpretations. However, an important concern of the director of a play is to fill the theatre, if the economic incentive so dictates, so he or she has to be more alert to the wishes and concerns of the audience. This latter source of interpretive profusion is therefore more indicative of the situation of readers, because the pressure on the theatre director is 'consumer led'.

Themes, therefore, are the stuff literary interpretations are, if not made of, aspiring to. From a theoretical point of view, though, we have seen that to rely strongly on academic literary criticism as the guide to the nature of themes in literary interpretation increases the chances of distortion because of considerations internal to the profession of literary interpretation. However, they are likely to be more reliable when it comes to how the work is

made out to support an interpretive claim of one kind or another, the kind of study which was carried out in part II of this chapter. This is because the pressures we have identified relate more to the space allowed and the ingenuity required to produce an original interpretation. Even if this means that these interpretations have limited aims in terms of the scope of the themes they put forward, the way these themes are supported and identified is unaffected by the limitations we have pointed out. In the section on The Tempest we saw that directors in producing the play pick out elements of the play in just the same way as literary critics do, and construe these elements in a way to support the over-all conception of the play. Similarities also extend to the power of the interpretive hypothesis over textual evidence, as we have seen both in section II above and in the section on The Tempest. The literary critic's construal, of course, cannot not use the same means to construe elements to support the theme argued for, but it is clearly the same process of making sense of the literary work, as we shall see below in Chapter 11, 'Theatre: The Test of the Limit'.

SECTION III: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Purpose of Literary Interpretation

In the preceding two sections the discussion was centered around critical involvement, whether my own or that of others, with two literary works. In this section the theoretical arguments from the previous sections will be developed further in a philosophical context of debate.

In the study so far we have, _inter alia_, seen how the situation of interpretation has influenced theatrical interpretations over the performance history of a play, _The Tempest_. We further discussed the openness of theatrical interpretation and saw that the reader intrinsically has the same freedom as the director in what to make of the work. We then set this openness to interpretation in context with an anachronistic interpretation of _The Tempest_, and discussed how the reader's situation and concerns feeds into the process of making sense of literary works and thereby makes literary interpretation interact with the life of the interpreter. The importance of 'themes' in this process was recognized, and then illustrated and analyzed in the previous section on _Heart of Darkness_. However, we have yet to discuss whether the purpose of literary interpretation can be other than to recreate the author's intention, which we shall do in this chapter. In this discussion we shall revisit the work of some of the theorists, notably Hans-Georg Gadamer and Stein Haugom Olsen, discussed in previous

chapters. Interpretive diversity will be limited by the three criteria of literary interpretation I introduce in the next chapter, and their application to theatre will be the focus for the penultimate chapter. In the concluding chapter, 'Literary Interpretation as Reflective Equilibrium', we shall analyze literary interpretation as a process and compare it to other rational processes. The latter part of the chapter sums up the case for the value of literary interpretation.

Literary interpretation is the interaction of reader and text. This much is agreed by most theorists. However, agreement on the objective or objectives of the reading, and the relative authority of author, text and reader, is harder to come by. With the importance given to themes in the previous chapter, one may ask why we should not heed what the author meant the work to be about. The intentionalist school, represented by such theorists as E. D. Hirsch jr. and P. D. Juhl,[1] argue strongly for 'the author's intention' as the primary criterion of validity in literary interpretation. Earlier sections and chapters of this study have cast considerable doubt on the contention that readers and

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1. Their main works are: E. D. Hirsch, jr., <u>Validity in Interpretation</u> (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967), <u>The Aims of Interpretation</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) and P. D. Juhl, <u>Interpretation: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literary Criticism</u> (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton UP, 1980).

professional interpreters of literary works, such as theatre directors, search for the author's intention. Rather, we have seen that theatrical productions of The Tempest have had various aims, only one of which has been to represent Shakespeare's intentions, and that the thematic focus of productions of The Tempest has changed during the history of its performance. The need to appeal to the public has led directors to change their interpretations of the work. Likewise, my discussion in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: The Tempest' and the divergence of interpretations of Heart of Darkness shows that interpretive diversity is a phenomenon not confined to the diachronic dimension or the stage. However, we have identified aims and pressures particular to the profession of academic literary interpretation, and we have also seen that empirical studies of the reading process are fraught with difficulties. This situation leaves us with the option of a conceptual discussion of the conditions of literary interpretation. In hermeneutics we have a philosophy of interpretation with a history going back to before the Middle Ages, but it is not the aim of this study to explore the history of hermeneutics. Rather, a criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics, which in itself is very much a conscious development of the tradition of hermeneutics, is presented as the starting point for a discussion of the purpose of literary interpretation. Although Gadamer's theory was briefly discussed in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary

Value: *The Tempest*' above, some of the points made then should be restated in this context.

Hans-Georg Gadamer explains in *Truth and Method*, as we saw above, the understanding of a work in terms of a 'conversation' with *the text*, not the author. The 'conversation' deals with issues, or a subject matter (*Sache*), the truth of which is the general aim of the 'conversation'. Gadamer's notion of '*sache*' can be a fruitful point of departure if we wish to develop an understanding of literary interpretation which concentrates on the reader and his or her situation, broadly conceived, and how this can be productive in the process of interpretation. As we have seen in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: *The Tempest*', when it comes to literary interpretation the notion of '*sache*' is more problematic than in the interpretation of other types of text. When we read Aristotle's *Ethics*, for instance, it is fairly easy to agree that its *sache* is ethics, the theory of good conduct. While '*sache*' even in this context is a somewhat elusive notion, it becomes perplexing when we ask what the *sache* is in a literary works such as *Heart of Darkness*. In the section on *Heart of Darkness* we saw that the answers to this question provided by literary critics are numerous, and also quite different from each other in the way they show the text to support the views advocated. This suggests that to speak of *sache* in the singular is highly problematic in the case of literary works.

One reason for this deficiency in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is that it is a product of a tradition dealing with the interpretation of philosophical, legal, theological and historical documents, but not of specifically literary works. True, his theory claims to be universal, that is, to display transcendental conditions for understanding überhaupt, but the terminology is not sufficiently precise to be helpful in discussing the interpretation of literary works. That 'Literature' in its evaluative sense, the 'belles lettres', has no place on its own in the framework of Gadamer's hermeneutics is unfortunate. Particularly so because, as Gadamer emphasises again and again, when we approach any work we are not 'innocent': we necessarily have a set of 'prejudices',[2] one of which is that it is worthwhile to engage with this particular text.[3] Both of the works we have been concerned with in this study, Heart of Darkness and The Tempest, have been given very different interpretations and an idea from 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: The Tempest' worth taking up is that

2. Gadamer's use of 'prejudice' is intentionally polemical. He argues at great length in Truth and Method (a polemical or, rather, ironical title) that the enlightenment made prejudice a derogatory term, while 'prejudice' (Vorurteil) (a fore-judgment, or fore-conception of what is to be understood) is a positive, productive and necessary condition for understanding. Gadamer, 1979, pp. 235-274.

3. This is the working of 'effective-history' in Gadamer's terminology. Gadamer, 1979, pp. 267-268.

Gadamerian 'prejudices' are productive in generating this diversity. This makes us see that Gadamer can be turned against himself: he does not sufficiently consider the various approaches we have to different texts, and that these approaches may differ according to what we expect from the text, or what we take the text to be. This is an important part of our set of 'prejudices'; we classify the text according to what we expect from it, and will approach accordingly.

Gadamer's insights are important for literary interpretation in that his discussion of the concept of 'sache' focuses attention on the fact that the interest of reading is different from just discovering what the author meant by the work, or recreating his consciousness at the time of writing. This focus is most important if we wish to consider why reading literature is valuable, and to link the interest motivating the reading to the validity of the interpretation arrived at. However, we have seen that since Gadamer does not distinguish between different types of text, he cannot accommodate the possibility that our interests in them can vary, and hence that our interest in engaging with a work of literature may be different from the one that motivates us to read a newspaper. After all, we do not read literature with the expectation of learning the truth about a certain state of affairs in the empirical world; it is difficult to see how literature can meet Gadamer's condition that the aim of reading a text is to reach agreement concerning a subject

matter for the simple reason that 'the poet nothing affirmeth', and cannot be taken to court for lying. Similarly, even for comparatively clear and simple literary works, it is difficult to see how they can be said to deal with a single subject matter, and for some poems difficult to see how they could deal with a subject matter at all. This should give us reason to suspect that the point of a 'conversation' with a literary text can be other than reaching agreement with it on a subject matter.

It is reasonable to assume that we read literature in a different way from, say, newspapers. We do not expect the same reward from a literary work as from a newspaper, and we will adjust our approach accordingly. One way of defining literature is to use the way we approach literary works, with the expectation of something valuable that motivates this approach, as the primary criterion.

We have already seen that Stein Haugom Olsen has given an account of how literary interpretations are conducted at the most abstract level. In summary, Olsen argues that the parts of the literary work are construed, or reconstructed[4] in accord with the author's clues, to lead to an artistic treatment of profoundly important questions for us as mortal human beings; these questions come in the form of themes in

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4. Olsen's emphasis is on reconstruction, since he argues that the interpretation arrived at is the artistic intention we attribute to the author.

the literary work, and can be described as 'thematic concepts'.[5] As we have seen, Olsen even argues that the capacity of a work to sustain interpretations in terms of thematic concepts is essential to the very definition of what literature should be.

This is clearly a normative definition which will limit the field of literature to only the most profound texts. In this respect Olsen is in agreement with Gadamer, who stresses that it is only _eminent_ texts[6] which are suitable for the hermeneutic 'conversation'. These texts have authority in the culture through their capacity to deepen understanding. In Gadamer's philosophy this means that they can provide a deepened understanding of what it means to be a human being, what man's basic situation in the world is, and especially man's relation to time. In other words they are, as Olsen stresses, dealing with perennial questions for the human race.[7]

The emphasis on eminent texts, because they can be interpreted as contributing to our understanding of ourselves as human beings, offers a criterion of excellence for literary texts different from the notion of 'truth' which figures

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5. Olsen in Phillips Griffiths.

6. Again, this concept is not far from Olsen's notion of _the canon_. See especially Stein Haugom Olsen, _The End of Literary Theory_ (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), pp. 14-15.

7. See Olsen in Phillips Griffiths, pp. 75-93.

heavily in Gadamer's more normative comments on the phenomenon of understanding. In dealing with fictional or literary texts the criterion of truth cannot be conceived of in the usual sense of correspondence with a state of affairs for the simple reason that there is, normally, no state of affairs which corresponds to the reports or descriptions that we find in a literary work. Both Olsen and Gadamer, however, lack an understanding of the dynamic nature of the interaction between the concerns of the reader and what they make of the literary work, and consequently of how the process of interpretation can make literature matter to the lives of the readers. As argued in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: The Tempest', the view of this study is that the literary work's ability to sustain an interpretation in terms of the reader's concerns is and should be a criterion for its excellence. If this criterion is to be called 'truth', though, it must be in the sense of 'truth to', rather than 'truth of'. However, the use of this sense of 'truth' would only muddle the terminology unnecessarily, and should therefore be avoided.

The criteria of a text's excellence cannot be kept separate from the conceived purpose of engaging in an interpretation of it. Some theorists have failed to ask if determining the author's intention is the truly interesting thing about literary interpretation and the reason why we find that the greatest literary works have such a strong hold on our attention. One response to this type of question is to

conduct a thought-experiment around a literary work highly thought of and widely read, of which there are a number of rival interpretations, all consistent with the text. One day someone found an incontrovertible piece of evidence of the author's intention which showed that the author's conception of the work, quite consistent with the text, was an utterly trivial one. The question is which interpretation we would choose to support when we consider that the non-authorial interpretations, or some of them, construe the work as being far more interesting, profound and relevant than the authorial one. Here the purpose of literary interpretation comes clearly into focus, for the choice made commits the reader to a purpose for literary interpretation. This choice, roughly, is between an intentionalist or philologist position for which the important consideration is what the author had in mind or thought at the time of writing the work, and a position for which the reader/interpreter is the most important person in the reading situation, a position which may be called pragmatist.

Though in many respects more of a 'philologist' than a 'pragmatist', Gadamer subtly shifts the emphasis away from recreating the author's intention when he wrote the text: 'It is only when the attempt to accept what he has said as true fails that we try to "understand" the text, psychologically or historically, as another's meaning.'⁸ Quoting Hegel, Gadamer says that recreating the work of the Muses

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8. Gadamer, 1979, p. 262.

would only give us 'beautiful fruits torn from the tree ...
To place them in their historical context does not give one
a living relationship with them but rather one of mere
imaginative representation.'[9] Rather, the essential nature
of the historical spirit consists in 'thoughtful mediation
with contemporary life'.[10]

This emphasis on contemporary life stems from the fact that
an interpreter, or a reader of a work, cannot extinguish her
self in the process, but will always bring assumptions,
concerns, prejudices and not least her own preoccupations to
bear on the interpretation.[11] These are transcendental
conditions of understanding. But in his exposition at this

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9. Gadamer, 1979, p. 149.

10. Gadamer, 1979, p. 150. The German is 'denkenden
Vermittlung mit dem gegenwärtingen Leben' (p. 174), and is
emphasised by Gadamer. Again we see that Gadamer's emphases
are not carried over in the translation.

11. Strangely, Gadamer seems, despite himself, to be
innocent of this when he writes: 'the filtering process
brought about by temporal distance ... not only lets those
prejudices that are of a particular and limited nature die
away, but causes those that bring about genuine knowledge to
emerge clearly as such'. (Gadamer, 1979, p. 266). This would
appear somewhat optimistic. An argument is needed, which is
not given and would be difficult to construct, to show that
particular and limited prejudices would not be present at
any one time.

point[12] Gadamer switches to normative factors, or simply good advice, in that he says that 'the important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings'.[13] A little later he says that 'methodologically conscious understanding will be concerned not merely to form anticipatory ideas, but to make them conscious, so as to check them and thus acquire right understanding from the things themselves'.[14] As we have seen in 'Heart of Darkness, Themes, and the Value of Unity' and elsewhere in this study, it is far from clear what 'the things themselves' are in literary interpretation. This serves to re-emphasise that Gadamer's theory needs thorough revision to fit the sub-phenomenon of literary under-standing. There is nothing in these reasonable and, no doubt, good pieces of advice that is necessary for the phenomenon of understanding to exist; temperance in saddling up one's hobby horses is not an integral element in the phenomenon of understanding. The good advice offered by Gadamer need also to be supplemented by the question of whether literary texts can be interpreted without the

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12. Gadamer, 1979, p. 238.

13. Gadamer, 1979, p. 238.

14. Gadamer, 1979, p. 239. It is important to note that the German here (p. 274) is not the equivalent of 'things themselves' but Sachen, and hence gives a less objectivist conception of what one can check against.

constructive labour of one's own bias and fore-meanings.[15] As was argued in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: The Tempest', that we apply what we read to ourselves and our own situation is unavoidable, since the distinctions at our command are born out of our interests and concerns. The significance we give to the elements of the literary work we read is therefore not a product of a 'scientific-objective' classification but is a product of the life and the concerns of the individual. That is the sense in which application,[16] as relating the work to present concerns, is not an optional element in the interpretation of a literary work, but its very nature. Thus, the 'truth' of a literary work cannot be reached without one's bias and fore-meanings.

The last statement begs the question of our concept of truth. If our approaches to literary texts are different from the ones adopted towards other types of material, it is reasonable to assume that it may be because the expected

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15. Gadamer seems to imply that we cannot do without it when he says that 'understanding always involves something like the application of the text to be understood to the present situation of the interpreter.' Gadamer, 1979, p. 274. The German has 'Anwendung' for application (p. 313), which may also be translated as 'use'.

16. On 'application', see also 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: The Tempest' in this study.

reward is different. Olsen and others[17] explain this in terms of a literary institution and the conventions which define it. We need not, however, go that far in order to explain why certain approaches are adopted towards literary works. We have been told, or educated, to expect something profound from literary works if we engage in constructive labour.

The point of engaging with a revered text, then, can be taken to be to see what the text can give me, the reader (or, indeed, the spectator). A work like Heart of Darkness, therefore, can be read with different expectations and yield different reading experiences. If the reader expects just entertainment, it offers suspense, an exotic setting and other qualities that have made the thriller genre popular. If the reader approaches the text, rather, as an eminent (or canonical) text, the work will yield experiences of a different character.

An important sense in which a literary work can be said to 'speak to us' (a phrase Gadamer uses frequently) is that it can be construed to address our concerns. It is worth asking whether this ability, in works of a high standing (eminent

17. Christopher Butler, 'What is a Literary Work?', New Literary History, 5 (1973), 17-29, Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (London: Routledge, 1975), and John Ellis, The Theory of Literary Criticism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

or canonical texts), is a feature which defines them as a class of utterances. The way we construe a literary text is not only closely related to the distinctions at our disposal and the tradition in which we are embedded, but also the concerns we have as individuals.

Gadamer's classical, or eminent, texts are not literary ones, and they are further predominantly from the western tradition; Plato, Aristotle and traditions in which these are important sources alone, or in combination with the Bible. There is nothing in principle objectionable in transferring Gadamer's principles to other traditions that are based on certain texts, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, etc. We need not even limit this to high cultures with a written tradition, (Schriftkulturen), but may also include the so-called 'primitive' cultures which are based on a common mythos which is the base of a common ethos and ritus. All these basic traditions (in written and in oral form) have been interpreted by every new generation to answer basic questions on the human predicament. Gadamer's concept of tradition is, as we shall see, central to his hermeneutics, and warrants further discussion.[18]

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18. Gadamer's concept of 'tradition' and its role in understanding and in social science has been the focus for extensive debates, not least between Gadamer and the leading exponent of the Frankfurt school, Jürgen Habermas. Texts central to this debate can be found in Understanding and

In essentials, tradition in Gadamer's sense is the historic situatedness of our horizons of expectation, i.e. the past has furnished us with notions of what to expect from different texts and, not least, which texts to turn to. But 'tradition' is likely to extend beyond just this. In a sense, tradition will also furnish our minds with a certain approach to these texts. The Bible, for instance, has a certain 'horizon of approaches', to make a travesty of a Gadamerian concept. So much of our culture is understood in terms of Christian, or teleological, ideas that almost any approach to the reading of the Bible is likely to be highly coloured by the tradition of readings of the Bible. The set of distinctions at our disposal is conditioned by cultural transmission to an extensive degree. This is not a 'horizon of expectation' only, but a different sense of 'horizon'. It is more like a set of the distinctions we have at our disposal. This set is obviously not possible fully to specify since to delimit the class would indicate that it was transcended. It is this notion of cultural tradition, a cultural <u>Geworfenheit</u> (thrownness) if yet another travesty is permitted, that is an essential part of the interpretive horizon. It seems that it is this condition that Joseph Margolis calls 'a myth' when he defines it:

<u>Social Inquiry</u>, edited by Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1977).

... a myth is a schema of the imagination which, independently of the scientific status of the propositions it may subtend, is capable of effectively organizing our way of viewing portions of the external world in accord with its distinctions.[19]

The term 'myth' may not be ideal to name the phenomenon; it carries connotations of a set of ideas which can easily be specified. Another problem is that it is identified with 'primitive' cultures. The phenomenon on which I wish to focus goes beyond this, and in most cases it will be nearly impossible to identify. This is because most of the distinctions available to us are so obvious that we take them for granted. Even from outside the culture they would be difficult to pin down and label in an obvious way. This is exemplified by Hegel's dialectic of the limit. To identify the limit you have to be able to go beyond it, otherwise it would all be a continuum. To identify a set of distinctions that we employ to make sense of the world, and to interpret literary works, we would have to see that it was limited, and that other sets were available. It is in the nature of our historical and cultural situatedness that this is impossible. It is only by going back to other epochs, to confront another horizon of expectation or to

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19. Joseph Margolis, Art and Philosophy (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 152.

reflect on the conditions of understanding, that we can conclude that this has to be the case.

A more recent example, one which is particularly difficult to see objectively, is psycho-analysis. Since it is more of a sub-phenomenon of cultural myth it is closer to what Margolis means by myth than the kind of phenomenon briefly discussed above, but for the purposes of this study psycho-analysis has the advantage of having fairly recently been productive as a set of distinctions in. literary interpretation. The one-time popularity of psycho-analytical readings of literature derived, I think, from the psycho-analytical categories' power of organizing and explaining human motivation, actions and personalities. That the more moderate of these readings are still plausible after clinical and, especially, scientific psychology has more or less abandoned psycho-analysis, can be explained by the fact that psycho-analytical categories are now a part of 'folk-psychology', if only among the more educated strata of western society. Thus, the power of psycho-analysis to produce convincing interpretations of literary works does not depend on the scientific truth of the theory, but rather on the theory's prevalence in the way we make sense of the human world we inhabit.[20]

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20. Consequently, I side with Joseph Margolis, 1980, 'The Logic of Interpretation', pp. 145-164, against Annette Barnes in On Interpretation (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p.73.

However, not only our historical and cultural situatedness, but also our personal situation will influence how we make the text speak to us.[21] Gadamer does not offer a discussion of this, he says only that 'what we call "classical" is something retrieved from the vicissitudes of changing time and its changing taste'.[22] The reason Stein Haugom Olsen offers, that this is because the classical work addresses perennial questions, is only one possible answer. Another reason, which has been largely ignored in the literature on the question of literary value, is the possibility that classical works can address ever changing questions of more topical and personal interest and remain in the canon for the reason of its flexibility, as I argued in 'Anachronistic Themes and Literary Value: The Tempest'.

Summing up so far, it seems that the flexibility of literary texts to address themselves to the concerns of different readers can be a characteristic of this class of utterances.

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21. My emphasis here is on the constructive activity any reader will have to engage in. I also imply that the reader will use his categories to make the work address his concerns.

22. Gadamer, 1979, p. 256. He says, though, that 'even the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated'. He does not offer any account of the kind of cultivation needed. Gadamer, 1979, p. 250.

If this is the point of our engaging with a literary text, in the manner appropriate to its character, then I suggest that the notion of truth in interpretation should either be considered redundant, or be conceived of as a pragmatic notion. Thus, I follow Ronald Dworkin who maintains that:

> Interpretation of works of art and social practices ... is indeed essentially concerned with purpose not cause. But the purposes in play are not (fundamentally) those of some author but of the interpreter.[23]

In broad outline, this chapter has argued that a reader of a literary work will be in a situation where the distinctions at her disposal are limited, or at least circumscribed, by the culture, of which she is part. Further, that his concerns will be mirrored in the questions he tries to make the work answer in a reading process that is also governed by a tradition of approaches. The focus has been on the scope of interpretation, and we have discussed some of the reasons of interpretive diversity. In the next chapter, though, the primary question is how to deal with this interpretive flexibility of literary works, and three criteria will be introduced for what can count as a literary interpretation.

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23. Ronald Dworkin, <u>Law's Empire</u> (London: Fontana, 1986), p. 52.

Three Criteria of Literary Interpretation

Previous chapters have explored widely differing claims of various interpretations of literary works, some reasons for this variation and most recently we discussed the motivation for literary interpretation. However, for something to count as an interpretation of a literary work, criteria of some kind will have to be met, for the idea that 'anything goes' is clearly false. This chapter argues that the criteria for acceptability in interpretation can be modelled, very roughly, on the three main truth theories in epistemology.[1] While in epistemology these theories are rivals, the three criteria based on my use of the theories as models are complementary. The reason why these three main theories of truth in epistemology can act as models for the criteria of interpretive acceptability is that they focus on different aspects of what it is for something faithfully to relate to something else. One motivation for relying on such very general accounts of the relationship between interpreted and

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1. I shall not use the semantic theory (associated with Tarski) or the redundancy theory deriving from Ramsay (and well argued for in Paul Horwich, Truth [Oxford: Blackwell, 1990]), both more properly at home in the philosophy of logic. Both are also less 'meaty' than the ones I use, in that it is difficult to see how they can illuminate the relation between work and interpretation in any fruitful way.

interpretation for the source of the criteria is that it is dangerous, for reasons of circularity, for proposed criteria to prescribe how the literary interpretation should be conducted by being based on a particular picture of literary interpretation.

The theorist Stein Haugom Olsen ignores this danger in The Structure of Literary Understanding, and particularly in the chapter on 'The Validation of Interpretative Conclusions'[2]. Olsen's criteria: completeness, correctness, comprehensiveness, consistency and discrimination, are all dependent on a general picture of how literary interpretations are constructed, which by help of the normative force of the criteria is also transformed into how they should be conducted. The difference between the criteria I shall introduce and Olsen's is that my criteria are derived from the logical relations that have to hold between the interpretation and what is interpreted, which I suggest is a better foundation for criteria of interpretive acceptability than a circumscribed notion of 'the literary practice'. However, this is not to say that the criteria I suggest are free of all assumptions about what literary interpretation is. Assumptions of this kind are necessary to identify what one is looking for: what kind of relation obtains between theory and practice in a certain field of inquiry. Thus, my account cannot claim to be without preconceptions; nevertheless, I distinguish between the source for the criteria and

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2. Olsen, 1978, pp. 118-159.

their application, and in this way avoid the vicious circularity of Olsen's identification of a practice through the interpretive norms which constitute it, and <u>vice versa</u>.

To be more specific about this deficiency of Olsen's theory, one criterion is particularly conspicuous as a requirement: that literary interpretation is a redescription of segments of the work, which are identifiable independently of the interpretation, into a hierarchy in the form of a grid. So, for the criterion of completeness the requirement is as follows: 'An interpretative description of a segment is complete if it deals with the contribution each of these aspects makes to a higher-level description.'[3] Again, Olsen's criterion of correctness[4] is heavily dependent on the notion of authorial authority, since the interpretive descriptions at the lower levels of the interpretive hierarchy have to be authorized by the author or, if this fails, by convention.

A criterion that is less dependent on a required way of interpreting is Olsen's criterion of comprehensiveness,[5]: 'An interpretation is more consistent than another if it leaves fewer and less important groups of elements resistant to interpretation.'[6] It is virtually identical with an

3. Olsen, 1978, p. 126.

4. Olsen, 1978, p. 137.

5. Olsen, 1978, p. 145.

6. Olsen, 1978, p. 148.

aspect of my criterion of correspondence, which I explain in the next part of the chapter.

The Correspondence Criterion

The correspondence theory of truth[7] holds that truth consists in correspondence between 'x' and 'y', where 'x' represents propositions, knowledge, beliefs, statements or other entities, depending on the version of the theory, and 'y' objects, facts, reality, states of affairs or other entities, again depending on the version of the theory. Correspondence theories vary as to which entities correspond, but what matters in labelling the theory as a

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7. More extended expositions of the three truth theories, which broadly match my own accounts, may be found in Jonathan Dancy, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), Alfred Cyril Ewing, 'Truth', in Ernest Nagel & Richard A. Brandt, editors, Meaning and Knowledge (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), pp. 124-133, Gertrude Ezorsky, 'Pragmatic Theory of Truth', in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Susan Haack, Philosophy of Logics (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978), George Pitcher, editor, Truth (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), A. N. Prior, 'Correspondence Theory of Truth', in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Raymond Tallis, Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurean Literary Theory (London: Macmillan, 1988) and Alan R. White, 'Coherence Theory of Truth', in Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

correspondence theory is that the relation be one of correspondence.

The relevance of the correspondence criterion should be obvious. Correspondence is fundamental: an _interpretation_ could not be an interpretation without correspondence, in the loose sense of the word, with the interpreted. The text has to retain an identity - it cannot support just _any_ interpretation. An interpretation of, say, _Much Ado About Nothing_ cannot interchanged with one of Joyce's _Ulysses_ without creating absurdity. Or, if they could, neither would be interpretations of these works. Another example: if one takes grammatical incoherence to be an important datum for one interpretive strategy, one cannot _make_ grammatical incoherence in the text happen. The interpretation can be defeated by recourse to the text itself. It cannot create all the data by the interpretive strategy, even if the strategy determines which data are relevant. It is the criterion of correspondence which is the prime determinant for whether the interpretation is true _of_ the text. The point being that there is something outside the interpretation, and independent of it, to which the interpretation must be faithful. However, in the real world of literary criticism reference to the work itself is often given little emphasis or importance. We saw in the chapter on criticism of _Heart of Darkness_ that the three interpretations selected paid little respect to the text of the work. Though my selection cannot claim to be representative

on any statistical criteria, the three examples are by no means untypical of academic literary criticism. By contrast, my own 'Restraint in the Darkness' follows and makes reference to the text to a greater extent, partly because the textual evidence of 'restraint' is important to my interpretation of Heart of Darkness.[8]

To return to the theoretical issues, there are, if we grant correspondence status as a criterion of interpretive truth, several notions of correspondence in the literature. It is difficult, for example, to see how my notion of correspondence can be 'correspondence-as-correlation', to use George Pitcher's term,[9] where a member of a set is correlated, or paired off, with a member of another group in accordance with a rule. This because it is hard to conceive of a rule that could be the uniform mediator between work and interpretation in all possible instances of literary interpretation. Yet, if we try to conceive of this notion without this unique rule, fragmentation would be the result since all instances of interpretation could use a new rule and still claim to correlate to the original work. It is a requirement for this notion of correspondence that one operates with a privileged rule that has the function of guarantor for the relation of correspondence obtaining. In a

8. It may be that my preoccupation with theoretical issues such as the ones discussed in this chapter prompted a greater caution in straying far from the textual evidence.

9. Editor's introduction to Pitcher, 1964, p. 10.

derived sense of 'correspondence-as-correlation' one could perhaps say that my notion fits this pattern if we use my 'z', the creativity of the interpreter (see below), as the intermediary rule correlating interpreted and interpretation. However, the reasons I have given for the unfeasibility of applying the notion of 'correspondence-as-correlation' seem to be overpowering only if we operate with strict conformity between the original models and the derived use to which I put them here.

Pitcher contrasts 'correspondence as correlation' with 'correspondence-as-congruity', but the latter notion gives us little help. 'Congruity' is defined by the shorter OED as 'to answer to something else in the way of fitness; to agree with; be conformable to; be congruous or in harmony with'. Pitcher adds that 'all cases of correspondence-as-congruity can be qualified as perfect or exact, whereas this is not true of correspondence-as-correlation'.[10] But except in the case of quotation, one cannot claim that this relation could obtain at all in interpretation, and when it does one might reasonably question the use of the term 'interpretation' to characterize it. However, scholarly works of literary interpretation use quotations to show that interpretation and work correlate, i.e. that the elements of the work that are identified in the interpretation are indeed in the work and not conjured up. This relation is not correspondence-as-congruity but, so to speak, correspondence-as-identity. My

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10. Editor's introduction to Pitcher, 1964, p. 10.

notion of correspondence, as a criterion of the interpretation's acceptability, is to ensure that the relation between interpretation and work does obtain. To ensure that the relation is not haphazard and spurious is the role of the coherence criterion. The distinction between 'correspondence-as-correlation' and 'correspondence-as-congruity' is thus not relevant to the notion of correspondence I introduce.

Similarly, my notion cannot be 'correspondence with teeth', in Susan Haack's terminology[11] since this notion of correspondence is taken to involve a commitment to an ontology of facts, and to an explanation of truth as a structural isomorphism of truth-bearer to fact; this obviously cannot be the case for literary interpretation since there are no facts of the matter that can decide between two interpretations beyond what is represented in the text, but as we saw in '*Heart of Darkness*, Themes, and the Value of Unity', that is seldom at issue in literary interpretation. Conceived as 'correspondence without teeth', a variation on 'S is true just in case, *really, in fact*, p',[12] the relation is closer to everyday conceptions of correspondence. Whereas Susan Haack dismisses this notion of truth as toothless, J. L. Mackie devoted a substantial part of his *Truth, Probability and Paradox* to defending

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11. Susan Haack, '"Realism"', *Synthese*, 73 (1987), 275-299 (p.288).

12. Haack, 1987, p.288.

'simple truth': 'For any p, to say that p, where p, is true'.[13] So, simple truth is just saying that things are as they are, which is perhaps better brought out by a later formulation: 'To say that a statement is true is to say that things are as, in it, they are stated to be.'[14] However, 'the ordinary, simple, notion of truth involves a comparison between how things are and how they are said to be, not between word-sequences even subject to appropriate controls on sense and reference'.[15] Although the notion of simple truth, which I consider to be a version of the correspondence theory of truth, is the one I invoke, I do not endorse Mackie's indictment of word-sequences for the simple reason that the two poles of the correspondence relation in literary interpretation are indeed word sequences. For this reason one standard objection to the correspondence theory of truth is not applicable to my use of it; the objection which argues that no matching of 'reality' to 'truth bearers', whether these are propositions, sentences, states of the central nervous system or whatever, can ever correspond since the two sides are radically different entities. Another objection is that the variety of entities

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13. J. L. Mackie, _Truth, Probability and Paradox_ (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), p. 22.

14. Mackie, 1973, p. 50.

15. Mackie, 1973, p. 38.

presented by the author (or editor) but, quotation apart, correspondence must not be understood as 'being identical with'.

My concept of correspondence as a criterion of an interpretation's acceptability can be defined thus:

'X' corresponds to 'y' given the subtraction of 'z', where 'x' is the interpretation, 'y' is the semantic-syntactic constituents of the literary work and 'z' is the creative work of the interpreter.

The success of the correspondence must be supplemented by comprehensiveness; by the interpretation's ability to give an account of the whole work. An interpretation which corresponds with the text may nevertheless be very partial: selection of the elements of the work that constitute the interpretation may be so severe that sizeable chunks of it fall through the net of the interpretation. Comprehensiveness is the quantitative requirement of the 'correspondence' criterion, in that it demands that as much of the interpreted as possible be reflected in the interpretation. It is a measure of how much of the work, in terms of textual matter, is covered by the interpretation. The idea is that if 'y' is an interpretation of 'x', it should interpret 'x' and not just a part of it.

The analysis in the chapter on <u>Heart of Darkness</u> interpretations makes it clear why this requirement has to be introduced. The interpretations of Guerard, Ruthven and Parry are all interesting in that they put forward daring and innovative interpretations of the work, but all are conspicuously economical with the evidence they find for this in <u>Heart of Darkness</u>. In the chapter referred to it was argued that the interpretive hypothesis appeared to be more powerful than the text in directing the interpretation. In any case, when an interpretation identifies only one or a very few elements in the text and proposes a full interpretation of the work on the basis of this, the requirement of comprehensiveness rules in favour of interpretations more encompassing. The power of the interpretive hypothesis to select elements of the text, therefore, has to be counteracted by comprehensiveness to allow the work to modify or weaken the hypothesis. However, as has been argued in various contexts in previous chapters, not all parts of a literary text need be significant. There is a distinction between cutting and neglect, both in theatrical productions[18] and in literary interpretations for a reading audience. 'Cutting' can be defined as economizing with the text in order to concentrate on what those parts of the text the interpretation claims as important. 'Neglect' does much the same with the text, the only yet crucial difference is

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18. The problem of applying the criteria of literary interpretation to theatrical interpretations is discussed in the next chapter, 'Theatre: The Test of the Limit'.

that the parts left out would challenge and undermine the interpretation. Clearly, the charge of neglect can only be brought on the basis of a rival interpretation of the text, which shows that the parts neglected are vital to the interpretation of the work and in conflict with the interpretation advanced. Introducing this distinction does not weaken the comprehensiveness requirement, but reveals that the possible results for a given interpretation of taking more of the text into account can vary between greater tedium for the reader or spectator on the one hand, and undermining the interpretation on the other.

It is arguable that my interpretation of Heart of Darkness, 'Restraint in the Darkness', has a better correspondence with the text of the work and takes more of the work into account than do the three interpretations in the chapter on Heart of Darkness interpretations. However, a work like Ian Watt's interpretation of Heart of Darkness in Conrad in The Nineteenth Century is more comprehensive still. This is not because Watt uses more words in his interpretation than I do, nor because his identification of elements and his judgments are more perceptive than mine (though perhaps they are) but because more of the text is covered by Watt's interpretation. A league table of interpretations is hardly desirable, though, for it may be maintained that 'Restraint in the Darkness' presents a more unified interpretation than does Watt's analysis of different and not necessarily connected aspects of Conrad's work. Again, the three inter-

pretations denounced for their lack of comprehensiveness may be found by some to be more interesting than either 'Restraint in the Darkness' or Watt's full treatment.

The Coherence Criterion

The coherence theory of truth, in virtually all its formulations, maintains that what is needed for truth to obtain is not the relation between 'x' and 'y', but the coherence between the 'y's, which means that the theory holds that a proposition, belief, sentence or the like, is true if and only if it is a member of a coherent set.[19] On a coherence theory of truth, truth is considered to be relative to a theoretical perspective, and the question of whether one belief is true, absolutely so to speak, therefore makes no sense. The truth bearers are conceived of as belonging to a system, whether of propositions or beliefs, and epistemic value therefore depends on systemic values such as consistency. In keeping with this it can be argued that the coherentist does not profess to offer a definition of truth, since 'the theory does not identify

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19. Coherentists differ on the question of whether there can be only one coherent set of beliefs, with, generally, the great metaphysical system builders such as Hegel thinking that only one body of mutually coherent beliefs is possible, with logical positivists such as Neurath and Hempel rejecting this. See Carl Gustav Hempel, 'On the Logical Positivists' Theory of Truth', Analysis, 2 (1935), 49-59.

truth with coherence',[20] but offers a definition of the criteria for truth.

One standard objection to the coherence theory of truth is that it is absurd, since no matter how tightly coherence is defined it will allow for more than one coherent set of propositions.[21] Fortunately, this objection is not a problem for the criterion of coherence in literary interpretation. One reason is that it is supplemented by the correspondence criterion, the other is that literary interpretations are indeterminate: there are no facts of the matter against which they can be tested for truth, beyond the textual properties of the work covered by the correspondence criterion. This is what we may call the 'indeterminacy thesis of literary interpretation'. This lack of 'facts of the matter' is, of course, a reason for introducing criteria of interpretive acceptability in the first place.

The key point of the indeterminacy thesis is that a literary interpretation is underdetermined by the interpreted. No interpretation is entailed by the work, or even the elements of the work as selected by the interpretation. There will always be the possibility that another interpretation

20. Dancy, p. 113.

21. This is Russell's main objection in The Problems of Philosophy. Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, The Home University Library (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1912), p. 191.

explains the work equally well, or even better, than the interpretation at hand.

The interpretation defines elements of the work, only a few of which are obviously pre-identified, as it were, by the author.[22] In other words, the interpretive process is less a case of discovering what the author has put in the text, than a case of the interpreter identifying elements _in_ the work to fit his interpretive hypothesis, as we saw so clearly in the cases of _Heart of Darkness_ interpretations, though the relative weight of identification and creativity may vary with the text interpreted. The business of identifying elements is a search for relevance in the work. Thus, not only will this process define elements, it may also leave substantial parts of the work by the wayside, and classify some of the elements it identifies as more important than others. The extent to which this is appropriate may also vary from one literary genre to the other. So the single elements of the interpretation may not present themselves as candidates for inclusion in the privileged 'set' of the interpretation. Or to put it differently: the initial hypothesis, highly influenced by but not identical with the interpretive interest, is the measure against which

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22. An example of the latter kind, which I have mentioned elsewhere, is Kurtz's 'The horror The horror' in _Heart of Darkness_, and Marlow's later, veiled reference to this as 'his last cry' and The Intended's plea to have his last words.

elements of the work will have to be 'tested' to be deemed significant.

This is not a one-way process, however. The text might challenge the interpreter's presuppositions - that is, 'speak to you', in Gadamer's suggestive but imprecise terminology. Part of the reason is that the work highlights certain aspects of itself. The lack of any clear-cut distinction between elements that are picked out for their contribution to the hypothesis and elements that just cannot be ignored is theoretically troublesome. However, it explains why many, otherwise different, interpretations have a core of elements in common. No full interpretation I have come across of Heart of Darkness has ignored 'The horror! the horror!', to pick but an obvious example. Indeed, ignoring it would make one hesitate to call it a full interpretation of the work.

Consequently, the interpreter has a choice in what part of an interpretation he wants to change to make it correspond to the work, and thus there will be more than one way of effecting this change.[23] This is something that in itself contributes to differing interpretations, but they are not necessarily incompatible since there is no fact of the matter beyond the words on the page. What changes one makes,

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23. In the philosophy of science this is 'Duhem's thesis', see W. V. O. Quine, Ontological Relativity (New York: Columbia UP, 1969), p. 80.

faced with the problem of correspondence with the work, is also a matter of what one wants to achieve with the interpretation. I propose that this is one of the central principles behind interpretive accommodation, i.e. what element or elements one chooses to change to make the 'set' coherent as one goes along.[24] This process also illustrates that correspondence and coherence are intimately linked as criteria of literary interpretation.

'Mutually explanatory' is the notion of coherence I wish to use to make sure that an interpretation that is not unduly selective is still unified. It might be argued that the notion of 'unified' has more to do with aesthetic sentiment than with strictly logical requirements. However, it cannot be kept out of a discussion of coherence even at this level since an interpretation that fulfills the correspondence requirements can still offer an account of the elements of the interpreted that fails to show that the elements are related in any way whatever, and thus why they should all belong to the interpreted. A further reason why the notion

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24. Note that my theory here is meant to account for the procedure of interpretation, rather than how interpretations are presented in the learned journals, or even lectures or student essays. I know of no way to investigate the process in an empirical way, so I hope that the reasons I put forward make sense as a whole. 'The tribunal of experience' can only be readers' own experiences, but the most objective observers are unfortunately not the participants.

of 'unified' is relevant in this context might be that an interpretation is a <u>system</u> that stands or falls as a whole, in much the same fashion as some coherentists conceive of our beliefs as a system. This is because an interpretation will not give just a humdrum collection of elements from the interpreted, but provides the collection with interrelations. The significance of an element will be amplified if it can be shown that it is related to other elements in a way that enhances its importance for the interpretation, and thus provides a further reason for why it is selected for attention. Therefore, we need a stronger requirement than 'consistency' since any set can be consistent yet without any significant interrelations at all. The term 'coherence' goes further than 'consistency' in that it confers value on the degree to which elements depend on others, thus embracing the notion of 'mutual explanation'.

The requirement of 'mutual explanation' is directly linked to the notion of coherence.[25] This requirement means that preference is given to interpretations where more relevance is given to an element in a way that enhances its artistic importance for the interpretation as a whole. This also because it gives a further reason why the element has been identified in the first place over other possible identifications of elements. We can also see that this requirement

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25. It also has much in common with the notion of 'relevance', thus providing a link to the pragmatic criterion, which I shall explain below.

incorporates consistency, since a set of elements where the members are mutually explanatory cannot be inconsistent in the sense of contradicting other elements.[26]

In my interpretation of Heart of Darkness, 'Restraint in the Darkness', one can see 'mutual explanation' maximized in the interpretation by making elements contribute to the treatment of 'restraint'. It might be objected that 'Restraint in the Darkness' shows that mutual explanation can be won at the expense of comprehensiveness because a close and interrelated interpretation may leave parts of the work outside the interpretive focus. However, the more comprehensive the interpretation the better the check for the requirement of 'mutual explanation', since as it includes more of the work each element of the interpretation will be better explained by the rest, in a symmetrical relation.

The assumption is that not everything in the work is of significance for how we interpret it, though the degree to which this is the case varies between literary genres and also among works of one genre. In the Japanese 'haiku' poem,

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26. It also satisfies A. D. Woozley's definition of the ideal sense of coherence: 'the relationship holding between a body of propositions such that no one of them can be false if all the rest are true, and that no one of them is independent of the others'. A. D. Woozley, Theory of Know-ledge: An Introduction (London: Hutchinson, 1949), p. 157.

for example, every single word carries a great weight of the total significance. <u>Heart of Darkness</u> is one of the more dense works of prose fiction where, it sometimes appears, only lack of ingenuity in the critic limits the amount of significance elements in it can carry. Dickens's <u>Bleak House</u> is also a very rich novel, but it seems that only a limited number of its multitude of characters can play a significant role in the overall interpretation. The failure of an interpretation to integrate all possible elements into itself should not be taken to constitute failure to satisfy the criterion of coherence. The criterion of coherence can only operate on a comparative basis where one interpretation is measured against this criterion on the basis of comparison with other interpretations. Discussing various interpretations of <u>Heart of Darkness</u> Cedric Watts, without stating or discussing it as a criterion, defines my criterion of coherence very clearly:

> The better the interpretation of the text, the larger the number of salient narrative facts that interpretation will, in principle, accommodate.[27]

It is a consequence of the coherence theory of truth that coherence admits of degrees and can only be measured against rival systems (for truth), or in my use of coherence as a criterion: rival interpretations.

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27. Watts, 1977, p. 143.

But, it may be asked, would assumptions of the coherence of the literary work be as strong if the author's authority was banished completely? It would seem that the assumption of coherence is the byproduct of the assumption that the whole work is the product of one undivided and coherent consciousness. In other words, the search for the author's intentions appears to be behind all readings that attribute an allegorical/symbolic unity, on stylistic as well as thematic levels, to a work's diverse elements. This raises the further question of whether the disintegration of the literary work is the consequence of banishing the real or implied author, or whether the source for interpretive coherence is to be found somewhere else.

I suggested in the last part of the chapter on criticism of Heart of Darkness above that our understanding of a literary work is modelled on our understanding of people. The picture we try to assemble from the jig-saw puzzle pieces of evidence we have of a person, behaviour and direct information from the person or others, go together to form a unity. I argued that it is plausible to assume that we do conceive of personalities as unified, i.e. that traits are ascribed to one and the same entity: the person. If the traits fail to fit together, we feel uneasy and ultimately, if no unified picture can be construed, we still ascribe the traits to the same person but judge him or her in need of psychiatric assistance.

I further argued that our first 'objects' of interpretation are people. Ascribing significance, and inferring, to and from behaviour - ranging from simple actions to speech - set a pattern for the way we understand other phenomena that potentially carry meaning. This would imply that understanding a person is the paradigmatic or the natural way of interpretation. On this account it need not be the case that we seek the author's intention when we read/interpret a literary work, but we do read the work in a way similar to understanding the author - or, for that matter, any other human being. Even if one is not an intentionalist in the sense that one thinks this intentionality has to be identical with the author's,[28] it seems that in attributing intentionality to something, like a meaningful text, it is very easy to think about it in terms of concepts whose primary locus is that of discourse about the person.

At this level, the level of pure understanding, I proposed that the perceived unity, by graphic or other 'objective' but still non-natural means, guides the reader to assume that everything in it, or derived from it in the form of inferences or implications, can be traced back to one source. This source, however, need not be the real-life author. The pattern of interrelating all information from

28. It seems to me more than just an accident that Daniel Dennett in his book The Intentional Stance (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press/Bradford Books, 1988), when attributing intentionality to nature, personifies it as Mother Nature.

one source can be seen to be understanding <u>as if</u> it was a person, but only by stretching it would one be able to say that one does in fact interpret the person. Still, the dominant position of person interpretation in our lives may well be able to account for the popularity of author interpretation of literature.[29]

My argument in this section has been designed to show that there is little difference between coherence as a criterion of felicitously carried out interpretation, i.e. one that tries to account for the whole work, and coherence as, in Stein Haugom Olsen's terms, a 'goodmaking feature' of the interpretation. In its latter application the term has more to do with the interpretation relative to other interpretations in aesthetic terms, than with its ability to interrelate the elements of the whole work. On my account, however, the existence of interrelations between elements of the interpretation is a <u>criterion</u> of interpretation and not just a supervenient aesthetic quality. However, there is another attribution of coherence: the coherence of the work. This attribution is not a completely different matter, though, because any interpretation, for reasons I hope to have made clear, will attribute its findings to the work itself.

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29. One factor that should not be forgotten is that authors typically use elements from their own lives in their work.

The Pragmatic Criterion

Simplified, the pragmatic theory of truth is concerned with the evaluation of beliefs.[30] The American pragmatists[31] saw truth as a practical concern, and embedded in human enquiry, where the end of inquiry is the final arbiter. This is because there can be no difference that makes no difference, and consequently the end of inquiry is the truth. In other words, by the appropriate criteria, the truth is what it is right to believe. Thus, the pragmatic theory is a criterial theory; it is a theory that is concerned with the criteria for claiming something to be true, rather than defining the word 'truth'.

The reason for including this criterion with the criteria of correspondence and coherence is not that it is the third main type of truth theory in epistemology. The motivation is rather to capture the fact that the rationale for the practice of literary interpretation is to gain something from it: the end point of interpretation must be satisfactory on a criterion of what the interpreter wishes it to do, otherwise it fails as a literary interpretation. Analogously, as the criterion of correspondence required that the

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30. The pragmatists are particularly concerned with the truth of beliefs.

31. I refer to Peirce, James and Dewey in particular, but in such a short summary I make no attempt to distinguish their diverse theories of truth.

creative activity of the interpreter must be constrained by the text of the work, the pragmatic criterion states that

> for literature, if the interpretation fails to contribute significantly to our expectations of the work as literature, it fails as a literary interpretation.

This criterion leaves open what the specifically literary feature of the interpretation should be. This is not to say that the literary cannot be specified; it is rather to suggest that the literary is not some kind of Platonic form, stable and unchanging for all time. It is all too easy to assume that the present conceptions are stable and unchanging, and also to project the same conceptions back in time identifying a phenomenon which is virtually identical to the present, without pausing to consider that the past may have identified a phenomenon marginally or radically different from our own as the literary one, or indeed, that the past had no concept of the specifically literary.[32]

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32. Raymond Williams's discussion of 'Literature' in his _Keywords_ (London: Fontana, 1976), pp. 150-154 shows that its restrictive sense, as to denote the 'belle lettres', is very recent. I suggested in the concluding chapter to the section on _The Tempest_ that the rise of English as an academic subject may have produced the need to identify a specifically literary sphere. See also Bernard Bergonzi, _Exploding_

The pragmatic criterion is the criterion most contingently linked to its truth theory 'parent' among the three criteria advocated here. In contrast to the two previous criteria, its relation to the interpreted is overshadowed by its relation to the aims of the process of engaging with it. The aim of the interpretation is highly important because it contains the _motivation_ for the process of interpretation. Without fulfilling the aim of the process, it cannot possibly be successful. As with coherence, this is also a relative criterion: one interpretation can be measured only with a competing interpretation. Also, the interpretation has to be a literary one for this criterion to be fulfilled. While this allows for interpretations beyond a prescribed conception of what literature or literary interpretation is[33] and so gives us an elastic and non-essentialist notion

English: Criticism, Theory, Culture (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), particularly chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 26-70), for an extensive discussion of the rise of English as an academic subject.

33. In this I differ from Stein Haugom Olsen, since I leave the decision with the reader as to what is literature, where Olsen by defining literature as a function-class gives the author this authority, and thus gives up 'literature' as an evaluative term. I give this authority to the reader, the final judge of value, thus preserving 'literature' as an evaluative term. See also my _Stein Haugom Olsen's Institutional Theory of Literature: A Critical Assessment_ (Trond-

of 'literature', it still excludes interpretations which correspond and cohere[34] well while dealing with, say, the historical import of the work.

The criteria of correspondence and coherence are necessary for providing an account of the relationship which has to obtain between an interpretation and its object for it to qualify as an interpretation, which means that they are criteria _for_ interpretation. The pragmatic criterion provides the link between the phenomenon of literary interpretation and the _purposes_ governing this activity. Since literary interpretations are at a different level from the semantic-syntactic constituents of the work, they can, bar factual mistakes such as referring to non-existing characters, only be challenged from other interpretations. Thus, we do not have, simply, true or false interpretations. More suitable terms of evaluation are the likes of 'illuminating', 'rich', 'trite', 'simplistic' and 'deep'. The important role of the pragmatic criterion is to emphasise the fact that an interpretation has a purpose, and that this is as constitutive a criterion as the two former ones. Without a purpose, there is no interpretation. The pragmatic criterion is thus the variable in the 'interpretive equation', so to speak. The pragmatic criterion allows for

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heim: University of Trondheim, 1988), p. 68.

34. It may be argued, though, that for an interpretation to fulfill the requirement of 'mutual explanation' is to be engaged in a particularly literary form of interpretation.

aims and purposes of literary interpretation to vary between different interests. Thus, it does not circumscribe the notion of the literary unduly.

In this chapter I have discussed criteria for the acceptability of literary interpretations which place constraints on what can pass as legitimate interpretation of literature. However, in dealing with the relationship between the text and the literary interpretation we have left out of account the important sphere of theatrical and other performance which is characterised, as we have seen particularly in the chapters on The Tempest, less by concern with the source of the play (or film, or TV drama) than by the encounter of the production with the audience. In the next chapter we shall discuss how performance challenges the limits set by the three criteria advocated here.

Theatre: The Test of the Limit

The criteria for literary interpretation put forward in the previous chapter have been developed in relation to the traditions and practices of literary criticism. However, the section on The Tempest, in particular 'Theatrical and Readerly Interpretations of Literature', contrasted some of these traditions and practices with those of theatrical production. Some of these differences will be discussed here, with the aim of determining if or to what extent the two traditions can be covered by the criteria put forward in the previous chapter.

Considered as an interpretation, the theatrical production is in a rather different position from an interpretation by a literary critic. The literary critic will be judged, among other things, by the interpretation's correspondence with the text of the work. Readers of this interpretation are likely to be fellow professionals or maybe students hoping to enter the critical community. In the typical situation, it is fair to assume, the reader of the interpretation is well acquainted with the work it interprets and expects a high degree of knowledge of and faithfulness to the text of the work as he or she knows it. Further, the work itself is probably ready to hand and can be consulted as the interpretation is considered. The purpose of the interpretation, ostensibly at any rate, is to contribute to the scholarship

on the text and to further the knowledge and understanding of the text and/or its relationship with other works, or of its relationship with the context in which it was produced.

As was pointed out in 'Theatrical and Readerly Interpretations of Literature' the reception situation as well as the expectations of the audience are normally different in the case of theatrical performances. A short sketch of the reception situation would include the rapid progression of the performance, leaving little or no time to make sense of it by forging connections with other elements of the work, the sense of occasion and the direct sense impressions. When it comes to the question of audience expectations one also has to remember that we are often dealing with people paying for a good night out. On this point the contrast with the an audience comprising professional critics is quite stark, which leads in turn to different expectations of the interpretation and different criteria of excellence.

One expectation an audience may have of a theatrical production which I did not discuss in the section on The Tempest, is the expectation of difference. It is a fair assumption that the majority of the theatre-goers in the developed part of the world are relatively frequent patrons of the performing arts, and thus we may speak of 'the theatre public' without straining credulity. In this discussion I shall use the British theatrical public as an example for reasons of clarity; to generalize over many

traditions and national canons of literature would work only by paying the price of numerous exceptions and over-long explanations.

The theatrical public is presented with a choice from a canon of relatively frequently performed plays, a few new ones and the occasional revival. In Britain a good number of the plays performed by the most renowned companies at any one time are the classics of Shakespeare, Johnson, Wilde and others. This leads to a situation where, in commercial parlance, product differentiation is required because the public may already have seen the play several times, and it becomes imperative to devise a new and innovative production. In the case of the classics, certainly, this is the case, and is an added reason, along with the public's expectation of relevance and topicalization, why productions differ to the degree they do.

The fact of the matter is, as we have seen in the section on The Tempest, that productions of this play have been exceedingly varied. Not only that, but they have been scant in their regard for the text of the play, with numerous rewritings. However, productions may be very free with the text indeed without rewriting the text, which is a point all too easy to forget in aesthetic discussions.[1]

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1. Possibly because literary aesthetics has been focusing almost exclusively on the text.

Since the circumstances of reception are very different for the two kinds of interpretation under consideration, the question of whether, and if so how far, the criteria of literary interpretation presented and discussed in the previous chapter are applicable to theatrical interpretations is a pertinent one.

Applying the pragmatic criterion to theatrical productions and performances is not problematic. Indeed, the required connection between the interpretation and its purpose is, if anything, closer in the case of theatrical interpretations than literary ones for reasons discussed in the section on The Tempest, such as commercial pressure and the very clear knowledge of what the interpretation is to be for: the performances of the play for a paying audience. The motivation for the interpretive process is clear throughout, and every element of the interpretation must be conceived of in a manner conducive to its purpose of reaching an audience watching what happens on stage. As the changing variable of the 'interpretive equation', the pragmatic criterion allows for different interests to apply to the case of the theatrical interpretation as against 'scriptural' literary interpretations. Indeed, it may be the very strength of the pragmatic considerations in the case of theatrical interpretations which causes seemingly less regard for the criterion of correspondence with the text of the play, as we shall see below.

The criterion of coherence does not seem to raise any problems either. It may be that the number of salient narrative facts a theatrical interpretation can accommodate[2] is more limited than that allowed in a full-scale literary interpretation for reasons relating to the reception situation; the theatre audience being able to attend to only a limited supply of subtlety as the performance proceeds. If so, this situation would itself further adherence to the coherence criterion since a performance demands economy of presentation, thus limiting the room for elements not contributing to the general design of the theatrical interpretation.[3] Therefore the theatrical situation may in itself further the requirement of 'mutual explanation', and the criterion of coherence is consequently applicable to theatrical interpretations.

As might be expected, it is the first criterion of literary interpretation, the correspondence criterion, which seems to cause the problems in the case of theatrical interpretations. The empirical evidence for this is evident in the section on The Tempest, ranging from wholesale rewritings of the play, to anachronistic additions and topicalizations upsetting any clear relationship between text and performed

2. See my definition, adopted from Cedric Watts, of the criterion of coherence in the previous chapter.

3. Therefore being per se a case of 'cutting' rather than 'neglect', as these terms were defined in the previous chapter.

play. Further, it is reasonable to assume that <u>The Tempest</u> is representative of that class of plays that we may call 'canonical', being produced frequently and accorded value as part of the cultural heritage. Davenant and Dryden rewrote a mass of other Renaissance plays to 'fit' the new taste of the Restoration, and in this century divergent and topical productions of major plays have been widespread throughout the world. The scope for divergent productions of the same play is in evidence on the stage, and the reasons for it in the nature of the theatrical performance have been discussed, though not exhaustively, in the chapter 'Theatrical and Readerly Interpretations of Literature' above. Therefore, what I argue in this chapter with particular reference to <u>The Tempest</u> has a bearing on the nature of theatrical interpretations, not just on a particular play.

In the previous chapter it was argued that an interpretation can be defeated by recourse to the text itself, and that it had to be true <u>of</u> the text and faithful to it. The correspondence criterion of an interpretation's acceptability was formulated thus:

> 'X' corresponds to 'y' given the subtraction of 'z', where 'x' is the interpretation, 'y' is the semantic-syntactic constituents of the literary work and 'z' is the creative work of the interpreter.

We know that this is not, on the face of it, the case in a significant number of theatrical interpretations. The creative work of the interpreter, the 'z' of the equation, is very often employed to change, delete and add to the 'y' of the equation, or to ignore substantial elements of it. Thus it would appear that the phenomenon of theatrical interpretation will either have to be radically circumscribed to conform to the criterion, or we will have to say that theatrical interpretation is different from literary interpretation in this respect. The third possibility is that the criterion as it stands needs to be clarified further, for it is arguable that the 'y' of the definition, even in scriptural interpretation, is not identifiable independently of a 'z' which is the contribution of interpretation. Adequately to address the issue of which possibility is the more plausible, it would be helpful to consider a number of separable issues.

The first, but not necessarily the most important, is the question of the medium of the interpretation, which was raised in the introduction to this chapter. While the differences deriving from the medium explain why theatrical interpretations are more free with the text than are textual interpretations, we are no nearer an answer to the question of how theatrical interpretations fit the criteria of interpretation laid down in the previous chapter.

The concept of 'tradition' may be more illuminating. Different sets of criteria apply in the two traditions of scriptural interpretation and theatrical interpretation of literary texts. On this model the medium may or may not be the main reason for the development of two sets of criteria, but the important factor in this context is that the sets are part and parcel of their respective traditions. The important task becomes, once we grant this as a reasonable hypothesis, to determine how different these traditions are and whether they both belong to a common phenomenon of interpretation of literary works of art.

Both traditions are concerned with making sense of literary works. One tradition deals specifically, but not exclusively, with that class of literary work which are called plays, the other with novels, short-stories and poems as well as plays. It is therefore reasonable to assume that there must be something about the former class of literary utterances which accounts for the differences. This we have touched on twice already in this chapter, and dealt with more extensively in the section on The Tempest. However, in involving the notion of 'tradition' we take on a further problem; the problem of intention. The play is a genre of its own, and by writing a play a playwright intends that it should be produced and performed. If we assume, which I think we must, that the author is aware of the theatrical tradition and how it deals with plays in producing them for performances, he intends by writing a play that it should be

made sense of in the ways of the theatrical tradition.[4]

If this latter factor is taken into account, it becomes less clear that topicalization, cuts and additions are transgressions of the literary work as conceived by the author. However, the question remains whether they constitute violations of the correspondence criterion.

Reasons for the importance of correspondence were given in the previous chapter and will not be repeated here. The thrust of these arguments is that for anything to count as an interpretation a correspondence with the interpreted must obtain. This is a fundamental requirement and goes further than just scriptural interpretations in that it involves the definition of the concept 'interpretation'. It therefore blocks the possibility of the intention of the playwright in writing a play, conceived as contributing to a tradition in which texts can be altered, cut and added to for the purpose of performance, to override the requirement of correspondence.[5]

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4. There are a few exceptions to this. As an example, Ibsen hardly expected his <u>Emperor and Galilean</u> ever to be performed even though it is written as a play.

5. It is tempting to speculate that it was this kind of consideration that prompted Davenant and Dryden to rewrite <u>The Tempest</u> for the use of their own production, rather than doing what has become the norm in the modern theatre, which

However, we must not impose a stricter definition of correspondence on performance texts than for texts for scriptural interpretation. It was allowed, and indeed borne out by the interpretations considered in the section on Heart of Darkness, that scriptural interpretations add to the text in interpretation what is conceived of as the interpreter's creative input, the 'z' of the definition of correspondence in interpretation above. When subtracting this element, what we are left with should be the original text, or that of the original text conceived of as relevant to the interpretive hypothesis. Since we are dealing with different media in the cases of scriptural and performance interpretations, we must allow that the creative input takes different forms in the two cases. This is just what we have seen in the section on The Tempest. For an interpretation to work as a theatrical production, the significance an element of the work is given and its connections with the rest of the interpretation will in practice be communicated in ways very different from the words on the page the academic interpreter has to use.

One way is just to cut from the text what is not considered relevant to the interpretation, and thus not represent any of it on stage. This is very widespread in theatre productions, and often virtually inevitable, as with productions

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is to cut, add and alter without going to the trouble of producing a new text. However, I believe this is a temptation worth resisting.

of <u>Hamlet</u> which was cut in production even in Shakespeare's day. But this is just what the academic, or scriptural,⁶ interpretations do as well, as we have seen in the section on <u>Heart of Darkness</u>. It is just that in this case it is, literally, less visible. Indeed, as an interpretation the average theatrical production of <u>The Tempest</u> uses more of the text as relevant to itself than does the average literary interpretation of the same text. However, this is also due to the intermediate position of the theatrical performance; between the object for interpretation and the interpretation of the object. In the previous chapter a distinction between 'cutting' and 'neglect' was introduced. This distinction serves to highlight the fact that the most important aspect of the requirement of comprehensiveness is to ensure that an interpretation does not distort the text by ignoring parts of it which are in conflict with the interpretation presented. In any case, the presumed dis-crepancy between literary and performance interpretations when judged against the requirement of comprehensiveness has failed to materialize.

The issue of additions would appear to be a more serious matter. Certainly, a case such as the rewriting of Davenant and Dryden would, on the face of it, appear to be a clear violation of the correspondence criterion. Yet the literary

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6. The two categories of interpretation are not necessarily co-extensive, but are here assumed to be sufficiently comparable not to warrant separate treatment.

critic also adds to the text. Typically, a critic brings to the work a set of classificatory terms to assign significance to elements of the text. One of the examples we have discussed previously brought in terms like 'atavism' and 'The Savage God' to make a claim of what <u>Heart of Darkness</u> was about, and to provide a new perspective on the text. My own interpretation of the same text uses 'restraint' as the central term around which a perspective of both theme and the style of <u>Heart of Darkness</u> is built. For a director to bring in elements not specified by the text. of the play is not in principle different from operations like the ones just mentioned. The elements for the theatrical production may be of different kinds; the necessary ones are the actors, their voices and the personalities they bring to the roles they are playing. Further, very often the scenery and the stage props are not specified by the text of the play either. The list could be made much longer, but the central point to make is that additions to the text of the play are plainly necessary for its production, and it is not as obvious as it first appears that such additions cannot include verbal additions to the text. Further lines attributed to the characters may highlight some theme of the play which the director considers important, and a new character may be considered necessary to emphasize the importance of a relationship between two original characters. The further point, of even greater relevance in this discussion, is that these additions, be they text or material for the staging of the play, are not in principle

different from the terms and perspectives the literary critic brings to the interpretation of any literary text, for these too are in most cases external to the text. However, this is not to deny that some additions, in the cases of both theatrical and literary interpretations, are beyond what we would allow. We shall return below to the question of where to draw the line in such cases.

Now that we have seen that literary interpretation and theatrical interpretations are not radically different when it comes to what they allow the creative input of the interpreter to do with the text of the work, and that therefore the phenomenon of theatrical interpretation does not have to be circumscribed to fit into a literary interpretation straight-jacket, as it were, we need to go back to an earlier suggestion to clarify the correspondence criterion on the relationship between creative interpretation and correspondence with the text of the work. I suggested then that the 'z' of the correspondence criterion, the interpreter's creative input, was a necessary constituent of the identification of what was to count as the textual counterpart of an element of the interpretation. The most clear example of this relationship comes in the form of irony, which changes nothing in the semantic-syntactic constituents of the text ('y'), but the support or otherwise it can afford an interpretive hypothesis ('x') changes dramatically.

This example shows that the text of the work is not 'a given' in a straight forward manner. In our discussion of the three interpretations of _Heart of Darkness_ we saw how two of them identified Marlow's journey up the river as an element of the work. Again, this element is virtually impossible to reduce to a set of semantic-syntactic constituents of the text, and therefore depends crucially on the interpreter's creativity for any match between the text and the interpretation. The correspondence criterion was introduced to ensure that the relation between interpretation and work was not haphazard or spurious, but except in quotation this is not a one-to-one relation because the creative contribution of the interpreter is needed in order to specify what in the text he or she takes to be an instance of the element. This means that the correspondence between 'x' and 'y' stipulated in the criterion cannot in practice be obtainable by the subtraction of 'z' since this latter element is necessary for the identification of what 'y' would count as an instance of 'x'. It was not promised that this process could be performed in practice when the criterion was introduced, for the criterion is an illustration of the underlying relationship between the factors identified in it. This clarification, nevertheless, explains why there is no difference in principle between the additions of theatrical interpretations and the introduction of interpretive concepts, such as 'atavism' in the case of one interpretation of _Heart of Darkness_, in literary critical interpretations. This certainly does not mean that

anything goes, but it does mean that the issues of creative addition cannot be resolved once and for all with an unproblematic check against the text.

The question of where to draw the line between warranted and unwarranted additions is a difficult one, posing a range of difficult areas in each case. Such a criterion is probably impossible to draw up, but some of the relevant considerations can be illustrated with a discussion of a work and its interpretations. Let us therefore, briefly, consider again the case of Davenant and Dryden's The Tempest, or, The Enchanted Island: A Comedy, though the discussion could just as well have been of a novel or a poem. Less than a third of the text is kept, but much is added. Additions include a wealth of characters who together with Ferdinand and Miranda more or less take over the action of the play and put Prospero firmly on the sidelines. The repercussions of all these new characters on the plot and internal structure of the play, as we know it from the Folio text, are substantial. In addition, the new text develops an aspect of the original plot which might be said to deal with the theme of innocent love. By any interpretation this theme is a very insignificant one in The Tempest, and by any quantitative measure of its importance, be it the number of lines devoted to it or prominence in the action of the play, it is very minor indeed. The upshot is that what is left of the original text of The Tempest is distorted by these, and other, additions. The additions do not help bring out a

central aspect of the original text, nor does it make any central aspect more relevant to the audience. Rather, a peripheral sub-plot is given more prominence by the addition of these characters and the actions they perform in the play to the extent that any reasonable balance between this sub-plot and the larger action of the play is not only upset: it is made to disappear altogether. Therefore, the rewriting is not so much a creative attempt to make The Tempest more relevant to its audience as a distortion of the play, in so far as it purports to represent The Tempest.

'Balance' is a notion closely related to 'correspondence' in that it requires of any creative development to preserve the textual equilibrium as far as elements such as plot, character and symbolism are concerned. 'Balance', therefore, is a notion which can be invoked to challenge an interpretation from the point of view of a different interpretation but needs close reference to the text. It would be impossible, however, to claim support for such a challenge with an uninterpreted reference to the text, since the significance of any segment of it is not available except by interpretive construal. On the other hand, without any reference to the text such a charge would be empty. Since any creative activity such as interpretation involves bringing to the text something which is not present in it, be it interpretive terminology or symbolic structures on the one hand, or characters, dress or delivery on the other, 'balance' has application both to scriptural and theatrical

interpretations. However, the balance can be upset just as easily by 'neglect', as defined in the previous chapter, as with additions. 'Distortion' is the result of disregarding the balance of the work, and this charge can also be applied to scriptural as well as theatrical interpretations. The terms 'neglect', 'balance' and 'distortion' are the conceptual tools for bringing a charge of flouting the correspondence criterion. In the absence of any uninterpreted, direct access to the text of the work these terms carry the normative weight not only of the notion of 'correspondence' but of that of 'coherence' too. We saw in the previous chapter that ignoring elements of the work which are highlighted or made conspicuous by other elements of the text, such as 'The horror! The horror!' in Heart of Darkness, makes it fail against both the correspondence and the coherence criteria.

The charge of distortion, therefore, more than the fact of additions, is the serious charge against Davenant and Dryden. The cutting is necessarily part of this picture too, since Shakespeare's text was pruned by two thirds to make room for the new focus of the play. A reduction of the original text on this scale is bound to be a serious threat to the comprehensiveness requirement of the correspondence criterion since it is likely to be a case of 'neglect'. Against this background it is tempting to agree with Hazlitt, who said that it was an abuse of language to call The Enchanted Isle a representation of Shakespeare's play.[7]

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7. Hazlitt, 1906, p. 89.

By way of contrast, let us briefly reconsider the production of the same play by the company Cheek-by-Jowl. As was made clear in the chapter on the performance history of <u>The Tempest</u>, this production is also quite radical. However, one major difference is that very little is actually cut from the text, and the additions in terms of lines spoken are few and limited to the comical sub-plot. The departures are in the interpretation given to characters and their attitudes by way of make-up, gestures, dress and sheer inventive acting. Rather than changing the play, these additions constitute a creative interpretation of it, and do not crucially upset the balance between main plot and sub-plots. In short, the differences between these two productions with regard to the text they interpret are significant.

Any discussion of where to draw the line between warranted and unwarranted departures from the text of the work, in cutting or addition, is likely to involve the notions of 'balance', 'neglect', 'distortion' and 'creativity'.⁸ The discussion above is only an illustration of the issues involved and cannot be considered a full treatment of these

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8. In the case of theatrical interpretations, it may be that, as a rule of thumb, the distinction made in Cohn, pp. 3-4, and discussed in the chapter 'Theatrical and Readerly Interpretations of Literature', between adaptations and transformations can be used to distinguish between warranted (adaptations) and unwarranted (transformations) of the text.

cases, and the concepts involved will be discussed in a broader theoretical context in the next chapter. However, the important point in relation to the main problems discussed in this chapter is that once we consider the additions of literary critics to the works they interpret we see that the additions of theatrical interpreters, though different in content, are not different in principle. The differences with which we started this chapter have turned out not to be of a kind requiring special treatment for theatrical interpretations as regards criteria of inter-pretation, and we can apply the same criteria to performance interpretations as to scriptural interpretations.

Literary Interpretation as Reflective Equilibrium

This study first inquired into the nature and explanation of the diversity of literary interpretations, with particular reference to _The Tempest_ and _Heart of Darkness_, and then into the limits of this diversity, elaborating three criteria of literary interpretation. We found that these criteria could not be applied in any mechanistic way, and that the process of accommodating interpretive interests to textual evidence would involve various considerations, some of which could be classified under concepts such as 'balance', 'neglect', 'creativity' and 'distortion'. In this final chapter the discussion will be taken further, relating literary interpretation to other models of understanding, and showing how the required faithfulness to the work on the one hand, and the value of literature in its openness to accommodate application to various situations and concerns on the other, ultimately amounts to a case for the value of literature and the process of literary interpretation.

An interpretation of a literary work cannot be established by simple citation or by the application of clear-cut principles. Such procedures inevitably underdetermine anything we would count as an interpretation, which requires the support of a complex network of considerations.

The notion of 'balance' was introduced to capture the required interrelated weighting of the different elements of interpretation and interpreted. 'Balance' is the positive side of the dichotomy with 'distortion', which can be characterized as a situation where the interpretation lacks this relationship with the work interpreted. This situation can come about because of 'neglect', i.e. where significant aspects of the interpreted are not reflected or represented in the interpretation. The force of 'significant' here has to be sufficiently strong to enable a challenge to be mounted to the interpretation from an interpretation based on elements excluded from it.

'Creativity' covers considerations pulling in the other direction. Since no interpretation is entailed by the work, the absence of interpretive creativity results in citation or summary. 'Creativity' is essential to literary interpretation and stands in tension with concepts concerned with the controls on the relationship between the interpretation and the work interpreted.

Conflicts between differing requirements and the processes of accommodation it requires is not unique to literary interpretation. In the elaborate framework John Rawls erects in A Theory of Justice[1] the notion of 'reflective equilibrium' is introduced in the discussion of 'The Original

1. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972), p. 20.

Position'. In this chapter[2] Rawls considers the relative weight of principles and particular judgments in the hypothetical 'original position'; he wants to see 'if the principles which would be chosen match our considered convictions of justice or extend them in an acceptable way'.[3] He describes the process leading to 'reflective equilibrium' thus;

> We begin by describing it so that it represents generally shared and preferably weak conditions. We then see if these conditions are strong enough to yield a significant set of principles. If not, we look for further premises equally reasonable. ... But presumably there will be discrepancies. ... We can either modify the account of the initial situation or we can revise our existing judgments, for even the judgments we take provisionally as fixed points are liable to revision. By going back and forth, sometimes altering the conditions of the contractual circumstances, at others withdrawing our judgments and conforming them to principle, I assume that eventually we shall find a description of the

2. Rawls, 1972, pp. 17-22. An earlier account of some of the same principles can be found in his 'Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics', <u>Philosophical Review</u>, 60 (1951), 177-197.

3. Rawls, 1972, p. 19.

initial situation that both expresses reasonable conditions and yields principles which match our considered judgments duly pruned and adjusted. This state of affairs I refer to as reflective equilibrium. It is an equilibrium because at last our principles and judgments coincide; and it is reflective since we know to what principles our judgments conform. ... But this equilibrium is not necessarily stable. It is liable to be upset by ... particular cases which may lead us to revise our judgments.[4]

It may be useful to pick out some features of this process[5] in order to compare them with what we have discussed earlier in this study, and the first aspect to turn to is the pre-reflective stage.[6]

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4. Rawls, 1972, pp. 20-21.

5. Rawls believes that his account of reflective equilibrium can be traced back to Aristotle's procedure in the Nicomachean Ethics. See Rawls, 1972, p. 51, n. 26.

6. I am guided in this by the very clear exposition of the notion of 'reflective equilibrium' in Dagfinn Føllesdal, 'Husserl on Evidence and Justification', in Robert Sokolowski, editor, Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition: Essays in Phenomenology (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), pp. 107-129.

Rawls clearly implies that this stage is by no means free of relevant views or principles, and that they form a necessary and valuable part of the whole procedure. The counterpart in literary interpretation is clearly what we have discussed in previous chapters as what Gadamer would call our 'prejudices', which here incorporate what we know of the work before we approach it. However, it also incorporates our present concerns and what might, somewhat imprecisely, be called our cultural situatedness. It is against the sum total of these factors that the judgments of the reading pose a challenge,[7] and the resulting process of accommodation exhibits the characteristics of the process towards Rawls's 'reflective equilibrium'.

In this accommodation no element is immune to correction or amendment. This makes it similar not only to Rawls's somewhat 'rationalist' position as outlined here, but also to Quine's holism. The empiricist Quine gives, in a famous

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7. Though Gadamer is primarily concerned with historical horizons and the notion of tradition, the encounter between our expectations and historical situatedness on the one hand and the literary work on the other is virtually identical with what Gadamer calls 'the fusion of horizons' (Horizont-verschmeltzung) in Truth and Method. Gadamer, 1979, p. 273.

passage at the end of 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism',[8] an account of his holism which describes the same kind of process as we have discussed above:

> Total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. ... Having reëvaluated one statement we must reëvaluate some others, which may be statements logically connected with the first, or may be the statements of logical connections themselves. But the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reëvaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole.[9]

Further to emphasise the notion of total corrigibility, Quine goes on to remark that revision of even the law of the

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8. Willard Van Orman Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', in From a Logical Point of View, second edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1961), pp. 20-46.

9. Quine, 1961, pp. 42-43.

excluded middle has been proposed as a means to simplifying quantum mechanics,[10] and it is precisely in this the possibly 'hardest' of philosophical disciplines, logic, that Nelson Goodman asks the question of how we can justify a deduction. Clearly, this is done by showing that it conforms to the rules of deductive inference, but this raises the question of how the rules are judged to be valid:

> Principles of deductive inference are justified by their conformity with accepted deductive practice. Their validity depends upon accordance with the particular deductive inferences we actually make and sanction. ... This looks flagrantly circular. ... But the circle is a virtuous one. The point is that rules and particular inferences alike are justified by being brought into agreement with each other. <u>A rule is amended if it yields an inference we are unwilling to accept; an inference is rejected if it violates a rule we are unwilling to amend.</u> The process of justification is the delicate one of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences; and in the agreement achieved lies the only justification needed for either.[11]

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10. Quine, 1961, p. 43.

11. Nelson Goodman, <u>Fact, Fiction, and Forecast</u>, second edition (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1965), pp. 63-64.

Even three distinguished American philosophers can be wrong, but the important point is that literary interpretation exhibits the same characteristics as these accounts of rational accommodation in fields as diverse as ethics, science and logic. The similarities between the process outlined in the quotations above and the process of literary interpretation are striking. Total corrigibility is clearly a feature of literary interpretation in that the relationship between text and interpretation, as we have seen earlier in this study,[12] is mediated by establishing what are to count as significant elements of the text and according them a role in the totality of the interpretation. The common ground of modern American analytic philosophy and the German tradition may be brought out by a comparison of this model with 'the hermeneutic circle'. If we correlate the 'part' and 'whole' of the hermeneutic circle with 'particular judgment' and 'principle' respectively on Rawls's account, we see that the two models are in broad agreement. In literary interpretation, we must assume, the continued encounter with the text of the work will challenge the provisional hypothesis of what the work is about, but it is by no means obvious that these encounters will change the provisional hypothesis in all cases, for it may be that a redescription of the relevant element of the text to fit the hypothesis is the preferable option, rather in the manner in

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12. Particularly in the chapter 'Heart of Darkness, Themes, and The Value of Unity'.

which Rawls talks of withdrawing our judgments and conforming them to principle.

That there is no element in the process of literary interpretation which is immune to revision implies that a challenge to an interpretation, or an evaluation of it, cannot take a vantage point outside literary interpretation. The process of evaluating a literary interpretation exhibits the same rational characteristics as the process of interpreting; the former cannot challenge an interpretation from fact but only from the position of another interpretation, be it of the whole or only a part of the work.

A challenge from an interpretation of a part of the work, however, has the problem of facing a third feature of the process of reaching reflective equilibrium: coherence. A literary interpretation reflects this feature as well. In chapter 10 we saw that 'mutual explanation' carries the main weight of the requirement of coherence in literary interpretation and that identified elements of the interpretation must support each other to justify their inclusion in the interpretation. It also has to be remembered that my main requirement of 'correspondence' was 'comprehensiveness', which in many accounts is seen as a part of the notion of 'coherence'. For literary interpretation, however, there are no facts of the matter beyond the words on the page, and 'comprehensiveness' was introduced to take care of the quantitative aspect of correspondence for that reason.

However, in chapter 11 these notions and criteria were supplemented by 'balance', 'neglect', 'creativity' and 'distortion', because the terms adopted and adapted from logic and epistemology did not address one crucial aspect of literary interpretation; what the interpreter brings to the encounter with the text.

We have established literary interpretation in a framework of rational enquiry. This, at least, implies that the same processes as those at work in literary interpretation can be discerned in diverse fields of human inquiry, even in ones as strictly theoretical as logic and science.[13] At least as significant, though, is the parallel discussed earlier in this study between the interpretation, or understanding, of people and that of arriving at coherent interpretations of literary works. Models of linguistic interpretation provide a useful framework for mediating between the poles of person interpretation and literary interpretation, and here we find both consolidation of the criteria so far sketched for establishing rationality, and indications of how specifically literary interpretation has distinctive features.

Donald Davidson's classic analysis of radical interpretation fits well into the 'reflective equilibrium' pattern. His

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13. Quine, it should be noted, appears to use the term 'science' to cover all of human enquiry into the natural world.

'principle of charity'[14] states that to understand a radically different language spoken by people we do not know the first thing about, we need to assume that they reveal 'a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards' in order to 'count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything';[15] this is a condition of the possibility of interpretation. In Davidson's view the norms of interpretation are the norms of rationality. This follows from the argument that if we are to have any hope of understanding another mind, this mind will have to work in ways similar to our own. For the actions, beliefs and desires of another person to be intelligible to us in a situation of radical interpretation, they have to be considered in a holistic manner,[16] and constituted according to norms which make them rational. Rational action is something we assume, not something we

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14. I shall consider Davidson here, though Quine uses something like this principle in Word and Object (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 58-60, where he discusses the radical translation of logical connectives, and states that 'one's interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation'. (p. 59).

15. Both quotations from Donald Davidson, Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 137.

16. For a full discussion of the premise that interpretation is holistic, see Donald Davidson, Essays on Actions and Events (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 229-239.

discover, for if we identify a whole set of beliefs as non-rational in a situation of radical interpretation,[17] we are more likely to conclude that we have been wrong with regard to identifying the beliefs than to posit irrationality in the object of interpretation. We see, then, clearly two operative elements in this account which are identical with those we identified in the discussion of 'reflective equilibrium' above; the emphasis on 'coherence' and 'total corrigibility'. Together, our previous identification of the same elements in literary interpretation and the analogy between understanding people and interpreting literature first discussed in the chapter '<u>Heart of Darkness</u>, Themes, and The Value of Unity' suggest that there may be a principle similar to the 'principle of charity' underlying literary interpretation.

Obviously, literary interpretation is different from radical interpretation in that it is usually done in the reader's own language, or in one known to him or her, so the radical aspect of the 'principle of charity' does not apply. Nevertheless, the point to make with respect to literary interpretation in this context is that it is unlikely to be

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17. Davidson clearly holds coherence to be a constitutive criterion of personhood, when he says that 'to the extent that we fail to discover a coherent and plausible pattern in the attitudes and actions of others we simply forego the chance of treating them as persons'. Davidson, 1980, pp. 221-222.

undertaken unless it is thought to be worthwhile. This is not a condition of the possibility of interpretation, and is therefore different from Davidson's 'principle of charity' in this respect. However, as in radical interpretation, the construal of a literary interpretation requires a great deal of effort, and the reward must therefore be thought to be sufficient compensation for the effort. The expectation of being rewarded is therefore as fundamental for the process of literary interpretation as are the assumptions of rationality for the process of radical interpretation. Both Davidson's 'principle of charity' and the expectation of reward in the case of literature are pre-reflective and necessary conditions for the two types of understanding involved. This aspect of both types of understanding, the pre-reflective stage, is one we identified above as one of the three characteristics of the process of 'reflective equilibrium'.[18] It appears that there is a disanalogy between literary interpretation and Davidson's 'principle of charity', however, when we note that it is possible to read literary works, or at least a significant proportion of those works usually classed as literary, as 'simple stories', thus without the effort required to bring out

18. What has been said above with regard to the two other aspects of 'reflective equilibrium', total corrigibility and coherence in the case of literary interpretation, also applies to radical interpretation, without that being important to the argument here.

qualities which could reward a greater involvement with the work.

Here, the analogy between understanding a person and literary interpretation is again instructive. I suggested[19] that understanding other people is a primary process of interpretation, on the basis of which we proceed to other kinds of interpretation. We know that there are degrees of understanding of other people, and that effort and involvement is required to reach a deeper understanding. With the expectation of reward for involvement explained as primary for the 'non-radical interpretation' of people, and by analogy literary works, we may have the underlying principle we sought. However, the analogy makes it clear that this principle cannot be distinctive for understanding literature, and that we have to look to the kind of involvement required to gain the reward expected in the case of literature. To approach the point where we can see the distinctive requirements of literary interpretation in a wider framework of rational enquiry and communication, it is worth turning to an influential study in Pragmatics which has used the notion of 'effort' to explain aspects of human communication. We shall see, though, that the requirements of standard implicature are significantly modified in the

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19. In the chapters 'Heart of Darkness, Themes, and The Value of Unity' and 'Three Criteria of Literary Interpretation'.

case of literature, which in turn brings us to the central
notion of 'creativity'.

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson argue that <u>relevance</u> is the
key to human communication.[20] The mechanism[21] of under-
standing involves inferring the communicator's assumptions
in order to identify the intention by the application of
'the principle of optimal relevance'.

Inference involves interpreting evidence. It starts from a
set of premises and results in a set of conclusions which
follow logically from, or are warranted by, the premises.
However, since the logical processes behind inference allow
many different conclusions to be derived from the same
premises, we need an account whereby the inference process
as applied to interpreting utterances arrives at one
particular conclusion.

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20. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, <u>Relevance: Communication
and Cognition</u> (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

21. A weakness of their theory is their uncritical use of
mechanistic and computational models to account for human
cognition; for a suggestion of how it might be integrated
into a more sophisticated model, see Martin Warner,
'Language, Interpretation and Worship-I', in <u>Religion and
Philosophy</u>, edited by Martin Warner (Cambridge: Cambridge
UP, 1992), pp. 91-108 (pp. 101-104).

This is supplied by the notion of contextual effects. Interpreting an utterance crucially involves working out the consequences of adding the assumption[22] it expresses to a set of assumptions that have themselves already been processed,[23] in other words assessing its contextual implications which result from a crucial interaction between new and old information as premises in a synthetic implication.[24]

A contextual implication Q cannot be demonstratively inferred from an assumption P that contextually implies it in a context {C}; but it can be demonstratively inferred from the union of P and {C}.

This relation, then, of contextual implication might be called 'dependent strengthening', since 'the strength of the conclusion depends not only on the added premises {P} but also on the context {C}: {P} affects, but does not fully determine, the strength of the contextual implication.' It will be noted that this notion is quite close to my requirement of 'mutual explanation', as a coherence criterion for interpretation. Having some contextual effect

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22. 'Assumptions' is defined by Sperber and Wilson as 'thoughts treated by the individual as representations of the actual world', Sperber and Wilson, 1986, p. 2.

23. Sperber and Wilson, 1986, p. 118.

24. Sperber and Wilson, 1986, p. 109.

is a necessary condition for an utterance's relevance; an assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context.[25] However, this definition of relevance does not capture the fact that relevance is a matter of degree. Sperber and Wilson 'compute' this problem by making the degree of relevance a function of effect and effort.

We are back with Sperber and Wilson's somewhat mechanistic/-computational explanatory tools, when they discuss 'processing effort'.[26] However, they avoid the worst effects of this jargon by introducing 'extent conditions' to capture the notion of degree.

Relevance to an individual (comparative)

Extent condition 1: an assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the contextual effects achieved when it is optimally processed are large. Extent condition 2: an assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the effort required to process it optimally is small.[27]

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25. All quotations since the previous reference are from Sperber and Wilson, 1986, p. 112.

26. Sperber and Wilson, 1986, p. 124.

27. Sperber and Wilson, 1986, p. 145.

Now, the question remains as to what bearing this model of communication centred around the notion of relevance has on literary interpretation.

If we begin with the maxims of minimal effort and maximum effect, it seems that literary interpretation fits uneasily into this picture. Anyone who has made an unobvious interpretation, thus scoring highly on the scale of effect, will know that it takes a considerable amount of effort. Indeed, some of the most highly thought of literary works require an extraordinary measure of effort to read, and certainly no less submit to an interpretive scrutiny. Few people in their right minds would bring, to pick an extreme example, Finnegan's Wake to the beach - certainly not to read - for the texture of Finnegan's Wake is such that great effort is required in order to 'process' it. Not all literature offers such a degree of resistance as this particular work, but a 'prejudice' one brings to a literary work, whether the work offers textual resistance or not, is that the effort required to process is commensurate with the reward.[28] It seems that some of the most rewarding interpretations of literary works make use of contexts that are not apparent. Making striking connections among the elements attributed to literary works, and also identifying unobvious

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28. This belongs to the prejudices we take to the encounter with the work, as discussed above in the context of my comparison of Rawls's account of 'reflective equilibrium' with Gadamer's notion of 'prejudice'.

elements, are indeed features which make literary interpretations interesting. The way of 'least effort', therefore, is not ready for adoption into the sub-phenomenon of _literary_ understanding. While literary interpretation requires the same rational processes of accommodation as inquiry into other areas of human existence, literary interpretation has particular features and a distinctive place in the totality of human understanding.

One aspect of literary interpretation as against every-day understanding and interpretation is that a greater effort is required to achieve a rewarding interpretation. It should be noted that this is also the case for a number of other 'types' of text. Understanding works in areas such as philosophy and physics, to name but two, often requires a high degree of 'effort' as well. However, except for works as difficult to read as _Finnegan's Wake_, the effort required in interpreting literature lies in the creative construction, against the requirements of coherence and correspondence, of what the work is 'about'. This activity involves the notion of a 'purpose', but the purpose does not have to be a reconstruction of the purpose of the creator of the object of interpretation, as we have seen earlier in this study.[29] Purpose, therefore, is the link to the concerns of the reader and the creativity of the reading process, and may be the key to how literary interpretation fits into the

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29. Particularly in the chapter 'The Purpose of Literary Interpretation'.

total picture of human understanding. Let us look at the
role of purpose in literary understanding in more depth.

I have discussed the role of historical situatedness and
individual concerns in the process of literary inter-
pretation in previous chapters. We will remember that the
central notions for Gadamer were 'prejudice' and 'applica-
tion', and I outlined the role of these notions in the
interpretation of literature. The main features of this
outline were that the reader or spectator of a literary work
actively uses his or her concerns and situation, broadly
conceived, to make sense of the work, and that this helps to
topicalize the work and make it relevant to the reader's
present concerns and situation. The role of 'purpose' in
this process can be said to be the illumination of the life
of the interpreter, since the way readers make sense of
literary works draws upon present concerns in order to
identify and inter-relate features of the work in order to
impute a 'purpose' to the work as a whole.

The chapter 'Heart of Darkness, Themes, and The Value of
Unity' analyzed the logic of attributing a purpose to the
work, through the identification of 'elements' and their
inter-relation to form the 'theme' of the work. The notion
of 'theme' may be said to be the imputation of 'purpose' to
the work as a whole, as identified by the interpreter
through having an over-all conception, or hypothesis to use
more scientific jargon, modified or otherwise by the

encounter with the work. We found, in the chapter 'The Purpose of Literary Interpretation', that it was legitimate for the interpreter of the work to identify the purpose of the work, in the way just outlined above. With regard to the role of 'relevance' in human communication, then, the character of literary interpretation outlined in this study suggests that an underlying principle in literary interpretation is 'relevance to the reader or spectator'. As we saw above, though, the involvement with the text required to make of it more than just a 'simple story' is optional. Therefore, this principle does not have the same fundamental, some would say 'transcendental', position in this account as has the 'principle of charity' in Davidson's theory of radical interpretation.

We have made good the claim that the processing of literary works is not governed by the principle of minimal effort, but that does not invalidate the role of relevance in literary interpretation when it comes to identifying the important elements of a text and optimising their contextual effect in the interpretation. The relationships between this account, the use I have suggested of the model of 'reflective equilibrium', and the three criteria of interpretation should now be evident. The pragmatic criterion was introduced to take account of the motivation for approaching the work and the expectation of what the encounter with it would be like, without specifying the nature of literary interpretation. In the light of the

discussion above we are now in a position to characterize some of the features of literary interpretation.

'Creativity' was posited at the beginning of the present chapter as standing in tension with loyalty to the text of the literary work. A major strand in this study has been concerned with an inquiry into how the situation and concerns of the reader influence the creative aspects of literary interpretation, and situating literary interpretation in the rational process toward reflective equilibrium highlights the rigours of the process of tempering 'creativity' and the pragmatic criterion with the correspondence and coherence criteria. Literary interpretation involves a movement towards 'balance', or 'reflective equilibrium', between these often conflicting demands, a process we have seen paralleled in diverse fields of intellectual inquiry.

We have earlier discussed the primacy of understanding people for other types of interpretation, in particular literary interpretation. We can now see how the interpretation of literature can influence how we understand, not only ourselves and our concerns through the interplay between Gadamerian prejudice and the interpretation of the work, facilitating a meeting between the life of the reader and the world of the work, but also how literary interpretation can improve the understanding of other people. Not only does narrative literature characteristically deal with

people and how they interact with their world, and thereby provide the reader or spectator with a way out of his or her finiteness, but the link between literary interpretation and the understanding of people, together with the creative nature of literary interpretation, enables us to see that through literary interpretation the powers of discrimination and sensitivity may be enhanced.[30]

Understanding other people closely resembles this process in that it also involves the tempering of preconceptions by evidence and the identification of relevant elements guided by the relevance they may have for the task of understanding the other person. Not surprisingly, the process of understanding other people in this way mirrors the process to reflective equilibrium, as we have seen the process of literary interpretation also does. Deep understanding of other people requires both the deep empathy[31] some works of literature invite, and the degree of effort and imagination required by literary interpretation. In literary interpretation one is discerning the salient features of the

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30. Though lyrical poetry does not represent characters acting in the fictional world, as a genre it is certainly no less demanding and rewarding with respect to the process of literary interpretation.

31. Though not a focus for this study, it is clear that the involvement with the work through the emotional (in whatever form this takes) engagement with characters and events in it is an important feature of literary interpretation.

literary work as an individual embedded in one's own life, guided by expectations of the work and understanding it through one's own situation, but one also has to represent the work accurately and responsibly. The openness of literary works facilitates a process whereby, in responding to the work one has to respond to its relevant features, and identify and gauge the relative importance of its elements.

Understanding other people is perhaps the most central process of interpretation in people's daily lives. However, human beings can legitimately be said to be 'interpretive animals' in that virtually every phenomenon that comes in our way is related to our concerns. Literary interpretation, because of the effort required and the nature of narratives, dealing with characters and action in a form presented for readerly involvement, represents a particularly heightened form of understanding. Because of literary works' capacity to be interpreted as relating to our on-going concerns through the identification of a theme, we may also make literary works interact with our lives through the process of interpretation.

An analogy to this process, though an imprecise one, can be seen in the use of make-believe in children's play, where children get into imaginary situations and identities and

generate fictions about themselves.[32] It is probable that the games of make-believe contribute to the cognitive development of the child by the trying out of different ways the world could be. Similarly, by interpreting literary works as addressing their own concerns the interpreters of literature may add to the understanding of their world, and the various ways it could be. Some psychologists and biologists believe that we humans owe our superior intelligence to a protracted childhood with an attendant mental flexibility which, though it diminishes with age, never leaves us. Perhaps the process of literary interpretation, as analyzed in this study, may draw on and contribute to this continued mental flexibility?

Though recognizing that there are problems with narrativist conceptions of human understanding, one can therefore still see some force Peter Brooks's claim that:

> Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with
> narratives, with the stories that we tell and hear
> told ... all of which are reworked in that story
> of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves ...
> We live immersed in narrative, recounting and

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32. For a discussion of children's games of make-believe and the appreciation of art, see Kendall L. Walton, _Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts_ (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1990), pp. 209-213, and at several other points in his study.

reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed.[33]

In these terms, to make a travesty of Gadamerian terminology, one might formulate one thesis of this study as the claim that literary interpretation is a fusion of narratives. Whether or not it is dressed up in the terminology of narrative, an underlying question of this study has been of how literature and literary interpretation matter to living our lives.

This last question has been addressed by other studies, and one way of focusing the contribution of my study is by contrast with two recent studies. The philosophers Richard Eldridge and Martha Nussbaum have called for us to pay greater attention to literary fictions in the discussion of and deliberation on ethical questions. In On Moral Personhood[34] Eldridge defends a broadly Kantian conception of

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33. Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), p. 3.

34. Richard Eldridge, On Moral Personhood: Philosophy, Literature, Criticism and Self-Understanding (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

morality, and Martha Nussbaum's <u>Love's Knowledge</u>[35] argues an Aristotelian one. Nussbaum argues that the novel is uniquely involved in representing human conflicts with attention to the ethical relevance of circumstances[36] and that it therefore can improve the self-understanding of ethical theory[37] 'by promoting individual clarification and self-understanding, and by moving individuals towards communal attunement'.[38] Eldridge is careful not to overstate his case, but counter-arguments are nevertheless not forthcoming when he suggests that literary characters can 'make progress on our behalf, reflecting to us our own capacities for understanding our personhood and fitly expressing it in activity in the world'.[39]

No necessary connections can be established, so a high standard of caution and restraint should be observed in making claims on behalf of the benefits of literary interpretation.[40] Though the purpose of this study is to

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35. Martha C. Nussbaum, <u>Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature</u> (New York: Oxford UP, 1990).

36. Nussbaum, p. 37.

37. Nussbaum, p. 191.

38. Nussbaum, p. 173.

39. Eldridge, p. 185.

40. Among others, Robert Nozick in <u>Philosophical Explanations</u> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), p. 532, warns that there is 'no automatic spillover from artistic sensitivity to moral

contribute to the understanding of 'literature and the value of interpretation', it would be <u>hubris</u> to believe that the whole story has been told. It would be more accurate to say that the study has identified and analyzed an important aspect of the value of literary interpretation in <u>the dynamics</u> of literary interpretation, and how engaging in this process can help readers make progress in understanding their situation and their relationships with others, to name but two central areas of understanding. Among the ways discussed in this study in which literary interpretation may facilitate this, is through the exercise of imagination and intelligence[41] against the background of our circumstances and our concerns on the one hand, and the constraints of the correspondence and coherence with the work on the other. This process of reflection, no matter how much or little of it is conscious, constitutes an imaginative yet rational 'discussion', where not only the intellectual capacities of

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sensitivity and responsiveness'. This means neither that this does not happen, nor that it happens very rarely, only that it is not automatic.

41. Cedric Watts, however, may be putting the case for the IQ-improving capacity of literary interpretation rather too strongly when he says that: 'If intelligence is the art of seeing or creating connections between apparently unconnected things, then literary texts manifest and teach this art, for they solicit and reward their searchers'. <u>The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots</u> (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), p. 1.

the reader/spectator are challenged and possibly improved in the process, but where the reader in being forced to reflect on his or her own concerns and situation in the different context of the imaginative world of the work also gains a perspective on the perennial and never fully answered question: 'How should I live my life?'.

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