

BELIEF EMOTION AND VALUE IN LITERATURE

PhD thesis

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Abstract of thesis

My subject is literary aesthetics. The guiding principle of the thesis as a whole is to set out and explore some of the central philosophical issues relating to the nature, conditions, and value of literary experience. The thesis consists of four chapters, each of which concentrates upon a specific problem. The chapters are:

Chapter 1: Literary Value

In this chapter I address the question of what it is to value something as a work of literary art. In the first part of the chapter I provide a definition, and in the second part I consider the problem of the subjectivity and objectivity of aesthetic judgement, and the nature of critical reasoning.

Chapter 2: The Problem of Belief

This chapter deals with the question of whether a reader's agreement or disagreement with an author's beliefs is a relevant consideration in determining the aesthetic merits of his work.

Chapter 3: Emotion in Fiction

The topic of this chapter is the nature, conditions and rationality of emotional responses to literary fiction. I examine a recent influential theory of the nature of these responses, present my own view, and go on to review the debate about the rationality and coherence of emotional response to fiction.

Chapter 4: The Tragic Emotions and the Value of Tragedy

The problem of this chapter originates in Aristotle's view that tragic art pleases via the arousal of painful emotions. This gives rise to a series of paradoxes: Why is there a pleasure related to the experience of painful emotions?; Why do we enjoy tragic art at all?; What role do the emotions play?; and so on. I try to answer these and other questions.

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Introduction

Poetry, Plato claims, 'sets up in the individual soul a vicious constitution by fashioning phantoms far removed from reality and by currying favour with the senseless element...' (Republic, Book 10 605c). It thereby fosters dispositions inimical to that of a good man and citizen. Later in the dialogue Socrates argues:

...[of] all the appetites and the pains and pleasures of the soul which we say accompany all our actions, the effect of poetic imitation is the same. For it waters and fosters these feelings when what we ought to do is to dry them up, and it establishes them as our rulers when they ought to be ruled, to the end that we may be better and happier men instead of worse and more miserable... [Therefore] we can admit no poetry into our city save only hymns to the gods and the praises of good men. For if you grant admission to the honeyed Muse in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law and that which shall from time to time have approved itself to the general reason as the best.(606d-607b).

Glaucon readily admits the justice of Socrates' conclusion: if poetry is to be admitted into the city she must prove to be not only delightful, but beneficial to orderly government and the life of man. Socrates wins Glaucon's agreement by persuading him that the goodness or value of a poem is to be decided by weighing the pleasures and instruction it affords against its harmful effects. The passage ends by Glaucon's acquiescence in valuing hymns to the gods and the praises of good men above Homer and the tragic poets. The 'goodness' of Homer and the tragic poets is to be doubted because the emotionalism of their poetry, and the lies it tells, renders it

morally and politically dangerous. But the merits of hymns to the gods are secure because they encourage a just disposition in the audience. Thus the dialogue on mimetic poetry closes with agreement that the proper judgement of the value of a poem is to be according to its instrumental value: it is in virtue of her role as a means to well-being that poetry is to be attributed a value or otherwise.

The dialogue raises a question central to literary aesthetics: what is the value of poetry? The answer Plato gives in the Republic is that poetry's value is its social value. But Plato's answer creates a problem: could not the Iliad or Oedipus Rex be valued above hymns to the gods because they possess a greater beauty or artistic merit than the poetry Plato recommends? The question of their respective merits as poetry cannot be settled by considering the degree of their utility. There is a difference between a judgement of a poem's literary or 'aesthetic' value, and the kinds of judgements Plato makes. What precisely is the difference?

One answer is provided by Aquinas: 'let us call that beautiful of which the apprehension itself pleases.'. The definition expresses a view which holds a central place in traditional aesthetic theory. Kant, for example, in his analysis of a 'judgement of taste' claims that in order to judge an object beautiful, the representation of the object in itself, 'independent of interest', must please. And in Hume a similar idea appears in the requirement that delicacy of taste, and the avoidance of prejudice, is necessary in order

for the sentiment of delight to properly determine attributions of beauty. It is Hume rather than Kant who directly addresses the issues as presented by literature, and it is with literature that I will be concerned. In the second part of chapter 1 I shall examine his views. But it is Kant who sees the nature of the question most clearly.

Kant believes the problem presented to the philosopher by the fact that we take pleasure in things simply in virtue of the nature of their 'representation' is, 'How are judgements of taste possible?'. Since the issue is one for the 'transcendental' philosopher the question is: What are the conditions of the possibility of aesthetic judgement? The conclusion of the investigation is to reveal that there are genuine judgements of taste; that what we claim when we claim something to be beautiful is legitimate. The part of Kant's analysis which is of particular interest is the elucidation of what he calls the 'determining grounds of a judgement of taste', an elucidation of those conditions which must be fulfilled in order for a particular judgement to count as an 'aesthetic judgement'. In his view a judgement is 'aesthetic' only if it is grounded in a first personal experience of a disinterested pleasure (or displeasure) on contemplation of the object judged. It is by those features that we distinguish aesthetic judgements from other kinds of judgements, and they constitute the criteria by which we decide if a judgement is genuinely aesthetic. Here, perhaps, there are certain affinities with what Wittgenstein calls a 'grammatical

investigation': by looking at what we say, at what we call something, we clarify the concept, and so what counts as an instance, of that thing. The result of a 'grammatical investigation' of, for example, aesthetic judgements, is that we achieve a clearer understanding of our conception of them.

A 'grammatical investigation' in Wittgenstein's sense is a fruitful way to approach some of the central problems in literary aesthetics. It assumes that the way to answer certain kinds of problem is to look at the concept of the thing in question. The concept I want to consider in the first chapter is that of valuing something as a work of literary art. The analysis of the concept of 'literary value' is to provide an account of what it is to value something as literature. What must be true of someone if he is to value a poem or a novel as a work of literature? What is the nature and ground of his estimation of a work's literary merit? How are we to distinguish between an 'aesthetic' interest in, or point of view upon, a poem's value - an interest in the value of the work as a work of literary art - and a non-aesthetic interest? These are some of the questions I answer in chapter 1.

In the following chapter I address 'the problem of belief', the problem of the 'aesthetic relevance' of a reader's attitude towards the beliefs and values an author expresses in his work. In chapter 3 I break off from consideration about aesthetic value, and examine emotional responses to literary fiction. In chapter 4 I return to questions of literary value, and to a problem familiar from the Republic and

Aristotle's reply to Plato in the Poetics, the paradox of tragedy's pleasure. The problems of chapter 2 and 4 both arise from an insufficiently clear notion of literary value. Before progress can be made on them the concept of literary value must be analysed. It is to that that I shall now turn.

Chapter 1

Literary Value

1.1. The concept of literary value

What is it to value something as a work of literary art? In a short but penetrating passage from his inaugural lecture 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake', A.C. Bradley offers the following account. Concerning the imaginative experience occasioned in reading a poem, he asks:

What then does the formula 'Poetry for poetry's sake tell us about this experience? It says, as I understand it, these things. First, this experience is an end in itself, is worth having on its own account, has an intrinsic value. Next its poetic value is this intrinsic worth alone. Poetry may have also an ulterior value as a means to culture or religion: because it conveys instruction, or softens the passions, or furthers a good cause; because it brings the poet fame or money or a quiet conscience. So much the better; let it be valued for these reasons too. But its ulterior worth neither is nor can directly determine its poetic worth as a satisfying imaginative experience; and this is to be judged entirely from within.¹

Bradley's formula claims the poetic merit or value of a poem is to be determined by the intrinsic worth of the experience it provides. The formula requires for its satisfaction that the judge is placed before the poem; that his judgement is grounded in the intrinsic reward or satisfaction the poem is felt to give; and that it is the value of the experience judged on intrinsic grounds which determines the literary value of the poem. I will deal with each in turn.

1. Oxford Lectures on Poetry (London, 2nd edn, November 1909), pp. 3-34.

1.11 Literary value is ascertained by acquaintance

A familiar idea in aesthetic theory is that aesthetic claims are to be grounded in an experience of the object judged. Aquinas, for example, requires an 'apprehensio' of the object. Kant specifies as one of the three distinguishing features of an 'aesthetic judgement' that it involves a 'representation' of the object. And Hume claims that merit is disclosed through a pleasing 'sentiment' caused by the object. Is it right to stress the role of acquaintance in judgements of beauty? It may be true that finding something beautiful, or discovering its beauty, requires that contemplating it provides a certain kind of experience - a sentiment of 'delight' or 'pleasure'. But is there a further condition of properly calling something beautiful, or claiming to know that it possesses literary value, that the person making the claim has himself experienced the work in that way?

People often do express reservation over claims about the beauty of objects they have not experienced. For example, suppose I have never read the Iliad but claim to know that it is a beautiful poem. I might express myself by saying that it is reputedly beautiful, or that though I am not personally acquainted with it I have it on good authority that it is. If someone disagrees, he may reply that unless I have read the poem I can't really know whether it is beautiful or not; I must go away and read it and discover for myself. Similarly, my claim to know of Alcibiades' beauty and Socrates' ugliness

may be couched in terms reflecting the fact that I have to rely upon the judgements of those who have experienced Socrates's ugliness and Alcibiades's beauty. Other claims to know do not usually contain the same hesitancy. For example, I can state without equivocation the perfectly legitimate and sure knowledge claim that Socrates lived and taught in Athens in the fifth century B.C., and that he was sentenced to die by drinking hemlock, though my knowledge of historical fact is necessarily secured on hearsay. Equally, if certain descriptions of Socrates are true, then I can know that his actions and character were morally valuable. But I may be unwilling to accept true descriptions alone or the authority of others as enough to be certain in knowing that an object is beautiful.

What the hesitancy reflects is that the optimum conditions and preferential grounds of aesthetic judgements and claims to know include first-hand experience of the object in question. It does not point to a conceptual requirement that aesthetic judgement and knowledge must be based in personal acquaintance. Rather, the paradigmatic grounds for judgement place the judger before the object judged. Since a second-hand aesthetic knowledge claim is ultimately derived from this best evidence situation and is only as reliable as the original, I might doubt whether aesthetic knowledge is in fact what I possess: any doubts about that are removed when I make the judgement through my own experience of the object. But there is no 'grammatical' requirement following from the

concept of aesthetic judgement that I restrict my knowledge claim to this best evidence situation.

If it is not a necessary condition of valuing something as a work of art that the attribution of value be grounded in acquaintance of the object valued, what explains the intuition of a difference between aesthetic knowledge and other kinds of knowledge? One answer is that it results from what grounds perceptions of literary value, namely, that the work provides pleasure or satisfaction, enjoyment or reward.

1.12 A judgement of literary value must be grounded in a pleasure or reward which the work is felt to give

Hume maintains that unlike matters of fact what determines that we 'affix the epithet beautiful or deformed' is the feeling of a sentiment of delight or uneasiness caused by the object. In other words, someone only finds a work valuable as a work of art if he finds it 'pleasing' to experience. As Kant puts it, a judgement is only 'aesthetic' if its 'representation' pleases. A passage from Middlemarch provides an admirable illustration:

...her husband's way of commenting on the strangely impressive objects around them had begun to affect her with a sort of mental shiver: he had perhaps the best intention of acquitting himself worthily, but only of acquitting himself. What was fresh to her mind was worn out to his; and such capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by the general life of mankind had long shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalment of knowledge.

When he said "Does this interest you, Dorothea? Shall we stay a little longer? I am ready to stay if you wish it", it seemed to her as if going or staying were alike dreary. Or "Should you like to go to the Farnesina, Dorothea? It contains celebrated frescoes designed or painted by Raphael, which most persons

think worth while a visit."

"But do you care about them?" was always Dorothea's question.

"They are, I believe, highly esteemed. Some of them represent the fable of Cupid and Psyche, which is probably the romantic invention of a literary period, and cannot I think be reckoned as a genuine mythical product. But if you like these wall-paintings, we can easily drive thither; and you will then, I think, have seen the chief work of Raphael, any of which it were a pity to omit in a visit to Rome. He is the painter who has been held to combine the most complete grace of form with sublimity of expression. Such at least I have gathered to be the opinion of cognoscenti."²

Casaubon's judgements about Raphael's works are not valid as 'judgements of taste' expressing his experience of their beauty. They are not about what he feels to be artistic merits of the paintings, but rather concern what others feel about them. The obviously second hand nature of his remarks is what provokes Dorothea's question, and the answer is clearly that he is untouched by the paintings. His is a 'lifeless embalment of knowledge', a knowledge which is not a means towards, but rather frustrates, the 'pleasure' which would provide its justification. So, however well Casaubon acquits himself, however many reasons he can give why the works are worthy of contemplation and are to be valued, he cannot claim to value them, because those reasons do not indicate why he finds them rewarding to contemplate. He has not discovered their value, and what he knows is not that they have an aesthetic value, but that they are valued by others. Appreciation conceptually requires affective response: Casaubon cannot claim to perceive the beauty of the pain-

2. Chapter 20. I was reminded of it by Peter Winch's use of it in another context. See 'Text and Context', chapter 3 of Trying To Make Sense (Blackwell, 1987).

tings because he is indifferent to them.³ The parallel requirement for valuing a work as a work of literature is, as Bradley puts it, that the work provides a 'satisfying imaginative experience'. Only if someone finds a literary work 'pleasurable' to read does he value it as a work of literature.

The common objection to accounts of aesthetic value which incorporate reference to pleasure is that works acknowledged to possess great literary value - tragedy is the stock example - cannot be said to afford pleasure. One might replace 'pleasure' by 'enjoyment', and claim that all valued works are enjoyed, but arguably tragedy is again a counter-example. The objection is best accommodated by substituting 'reward' for 'pleasure'.⁴ What is true of all valued works is that their experience is found to justify the attention paid in coming to appreciate the work, by giving an experience of a kind which is an end in itself. They hold the attention, are engaging, absorbing, interesting, they give satisfaction in themselves; they do not leave the reader indifferent, bored, untouched etc. 'Reward' serves as a general enough notion, whilst retaining reference to the hedonic tone of literary experience.

In Bradley's formula it is the satisfaction felt in the im-

3. The passage also illustrates the relation between the first and the present point: as knowledge about the opinions of others, about art history etc. Casaubon's claims are legitimate in the absence of pleasure and personal experience; but as knowledge of the paintings' aesthetic value they are rather hollow.

4. The term is Malcolm Budd's. See 'Belief and Sincerity in Poetry' in Pleasure, Preference, and Value: Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge, 1983).

imaginative experience the poem occasions, which determines the poetic value assigned to the poem. It would be a mistake to think that the satisfaction or reward provided by the poem is a blind affective response. Rather, it is conditioned by thoughts, beliefs etc. about the poem: aesthetic experience is 'intentional'. In particular the pleasure taken in the poem is cognitively mediated, taking the work as 'object'. It is important to note this feature in order to forestall one source of confusion over the the status of aesthetic claims: if aesthetic pleasures are blind how can they be justified or be open to question? As Hume puts it 'all sentiment is right', and there is little sense in the idea that one man's pleasure in a poem is more justifiable or reasonable than another's. However, if in general reasons can be given as to why pleasure is taken in something, by appeal to the thought-content determining the pleasure - the feature of intentionality - then the response can be the object of debate and justification. So when it comes to aesthetic pleasures and the attributions of literary merit, explanations and justifications will be available through indicating features of the work responsible for the reward experienced. Therefore, one objection against aesthetic claims having anything more than subjective validity is undermined, and the beginnings of an answer to the question of the 'subjectivity' or 'objectivity' of aesthetic valuing is available. That question will have to be considered once the other components of the account are in place.

1.13 It is the intrinsic reward of the poem which is to ground the judgement of literary value

One cannot judge a work to possess literary merit if it is found boring, irritating, repellent, and without enjoyment or reward. But clearly it is not just any pleasure or reward which is relevant to the work's literary merit. How are we to specify the appropriate pleasure? One answer might be that there is a specifically 'aesthetic pleasure' or emotion, a special kind of affect such that it is only caused by artworks. A claim to literary value would then be valid only if it is experienced. However, there seems no non-circular way of specifying the pleasure involved. A better answer is provided by Aquinas' and Kant's requirement that the representation is to be in itself, or independent of interest, a cause of pleasure.

Reading a poem can be found rewarding for many different reasons. It might, for example, please because I read it in its original language, or because it is a signed copy dedicated to my ancestors, or because I read it aloud at the Dante Appreciation Society, or because I've just acquired the original at an auction, or because it is on my syllabus and I'm cramming for my finals. If I am pleased by the thought that I, a mere novice, am reading one of the world's greatest poems in Italian, or that my ancestors were preferred by the author and that for generations my family has belonged to the more cultured circles, or that I have acquitted myself admirably before my fellow members, or that I have just made a very sound financial investment, or that I have completed the

arduous chore and am now in a good position to pass my exams, then it is obvious that my pleasure is no index of value in the poem.

The commonsense requirement is that the pleasure or reward be object-centred: the reward felt is to be fully explicable by reference to the nature of the work's 'representation' i.e. to the intrinsic character of the experience. So one test of the purity of an 'aesthetic pleasure' is that its source lies not in the satisfaction of some antecedent desire, or the achievement of some goal, or the thought of consequences etc. but in the particular features of the work's experience: the reason why the poem pleases must be for no other reason than the aspects of the experience itself. The experience is to please 'in itself', 'independent of interest', in short it is to be intrinsically rewarding. And it is the source of the pleasure, rather than some special kind of pleasure, which distinguishes it as the determining ground of aesthetic judgement. So the notion of 'reward' denotes an experience which is not different in kind from that occasioned by things other than objects of aesthetic contemplation. Rather the 'aesthetic pleasure' is delimited by appeal to its object i.e. the literary work.

It is typical of valuing a work as a work of literature that one accords it an irreplaceable value: one values just that experience of just that poem. Since it is plausible to suppose that a work seen as an 'aesthetic object' is unique, the reasons why it is valued will entail that nothing else

which yields a different experience can reward in the same way. A joint test of the purity of pleasure is therefore that it is work-centred, and that the reasons why the work pleases foreclose the possibility that other works could do just as well. The pleasures of vanity, and of financial gain, would clearly fail the test. Equally a pleasure which is grounded in aspects of the reading experience itself, but whose source lies in the recognition that the experience is an effective means to strengthening moral or emotional disposition, would fail. So too the case of exam preparation: if the thought 'this is doing me good' is responsible for the pleasure, then it is insufficient to ground literary judgement. Of course, there is room for error. One's pleasures are not always immediately perspicuous. Casaubon might have experienced reward on looking at the paintings which, in self-deception, he took to be the source of his pleasure. It might in fact have been caused by his belief that he was acquitting himself worthily before Dorothea, that she believed him to be one of the cognoscenti. Casaubon's pleasure was 'interested', and therefore was not a reliable index to the discovery of value in Raphael's paintings.

1.14 It is the intrinsic value of the experience which determines the literary value of a work

In Bradley's formulation it is the value of the experience 'judged entirely from within', the 'intrinsic worth alone', which determines poetic value. The further requirement that

the experience be not only intrinsically rewarding but also intrinsically valuable, acknowledges the distinction between avowing that a work gives pleasure, and affirming that it has literary value. There is no contradiction in supposing that a work may afford pleasure, yet is not judged to possess literary value. Pulp fiction may be highly entertaining but it is rarely accorded high marks for literary merit. In other cases works with pretension to literary merit might be impressive at first, but after re-reading be discovered to have no real literary value. For example, a reader might find Shelley's poetry intrinsically rewarding, but be aware that the reward it gives cannot stand up to close scrutiny: he recognises it is a sentimental indulgence, but he enjoys the escape into fantasy that he believes the poems to involve. He undoubtedly gets pleasure from the poetry, as he might from the works he recognises to be no more than good entertainment, but the nature of the pleasure and work are not of a kind that he thinks supports the claim that the work is valuable. A work cannot be discovered to possess literary value unless it is found to be intrinsically rewarding, but that it affords an intrinsically rewarding experience does not entail that the experience is intrinsically valuable. (Here is a contrast with the ethical: a good action's worth is not determined by the pleasure it gives the beholder). It is the quality of the rewards which is decisive: the degree and nature of the rewards evaluated intrinsically determine the intrinsic value assigned to the work.

A literary work can be valued for many different kinds of reasons. In the passage cited from the Republic Socrates persuades Glaucon that literary works are to be valued instrumentally as a means to order in the soul. The reader I imagined earlier might prize The Divine Comedy as a family treasure, or because of its financial worth. Those may be good reasons to devalue or value the works but they obviously do not concern their value as literature: it is the value of the experience judged in terms of whether it is worth having on its own account, 'as an end in itself' which determines literary value. For example, the Oresteia may provide a beneficial catharsis of emotion, as Aristotle argues, but its moral and psychological value - understood as its beneficial or harmful consequences - does not determine its literary value. If a reader is indifferent towards the experience of the play, finds it to be without reward or value, then whatever his attitude towards the plays effects upon him, he does not prize the play as a work of literary art.

Thus the proposed account of valuing something as a work of literature is that it is found to afford an experience of intrinsic reward, of a quality sufficient to assign to it an intrinsic value; someone values a work as a literary work only if his reason for valuing it is that he finds experiencing it to be intrinsically rewarding and valuable.

1.2 The status of aesthetic claims

A problem immediately presents itself if the concept of literary value is analysed in the way proposed: if the perception of literary value is to be understood as the finding of a work to provide the kind of experience described, what status do aesthetic evaluations have? If the perception is presented in the form of a statement, is the claim 'subjective' or 'objective', and in what sense? In other words, if I claim that a poem has literary value because I find it gives a pleasure which I take to be an index of value, but another finds the poem to be without merit, is there a sense in which one of our views might be more valid, justified, or correct? Don't we just prefer different things and there's no right and wrong, no disputing our likes and dislikes: all tastes are equally valid? Literary tastes are like culinary tastes: it makes no more sense to say one man's judgement of a poem is correct and another's incorrect (or that that one poem is better than another) than it does to say that someone who likes banana ice cream is making a mistake, is wrong (or that one flavour is better than another). The claim that the Iliad is a better poem than my child's first composition is merely a projection of personal preference, just as is the case in my son's claim that chocolate ice cream is the best.

If one thinks that a work's value is discovered, that perceptions of value are not the mere reflection and projection of feeling, how is the intuition to be justified? This is the problem Hume sets himself in an interesting and important

essay, 'Of the Standard of Taste'.⁵ He presents the problem in the form of two species of common sense.

1.21 Hume's two species of 'common sense'

Hume takes it as axiomatic that the perception of beauty is an affective response: 'the mind is not content with merely surveying its objects as they stand in themselves: it also feels a sentiment of delight or uneasiness...consequent to that survey; and this sentiment determines it to affix the epithet beautiful or deformed...' (p.124).⁶ For example:

The mathematician, who took no other pleasure in reading Virgil, but that of examining Aeneas's voyage by the map, might perfectly understand the meaning of every Latin word employed by that divine author; and consequently, might have a lively idea of the whole narration...He knew every thing in the poem; but he was ignorant of its beauty, because the beauty, properly speaking, lies not in the poem, but in the sentiment or taste of the reader. And where a man has no such delicacy of temper as to make him feel this sentiment, he must be ignorant of the beauty, though possessed of the science and understanding of an angel.(p.125)

The mathematician is ignorant of the poem's beauty because he does not feel a sentiment of 'delight' on reading it. A man of taste would feel such a sentiment, and it is the presence or absence of that sentiment which separates them. Is it right to say that the man of taste is aware of the poem's beauty, and the mathematician blind to it, thereby suggesting that there is a fact of the matter here, and that the mathematician is, if he pronounces on the poem's merits, wrong in

5. David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste' in 'Of the Standard of Taste' and Other Essays, Ed. C.W.Hendel (New York: ~~Bobs-Merill~~, Library of Liberal Arts, 1965), pp.3-24.

6. 'The Sceptic', printed in the same volume, pp.119-139. It is Hume of 'The Sceptic' who provided the philosophical backing for the first species of common sense referred to in 'Of the Standard of Taste'.

his judgement?⁷ The first species of common sense reasons that:

The difference...is very wide between judgement and sentiment. All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true: and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right; because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being. Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others. To seek the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an inquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or bitter. According to the disposition of the organs, the same object may be both sweet and bitter; and the proverb has justly determined it to be fruitless to dispute concerning tastes. It is very natural, and even quite necessary, to extend this axiom to mental, as well as bodily states...(p.6)

As Hume presents it, it seems this species of common sense believes 'all sentiment is right' - all literary tastes are on equal footing - because there is no fact of the matter concerning beauty and deformity. It is futile to dispute over whether a poem has beauty or literary merit, because what the

7. This is my paraphrase of the issue. Hume says 'It is natural for us to seek a Standard of Taste; a rule by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least a decision afforded confirming one sentiment and condemning another'. The central problem is not how tastes may be reconciled, but what the reconciliation amounts to e.g. convergence through discovery of the work's literary merits, and not by chance. The role of rules in securing agreement will be considered later.

dispute is over is not a quality 'in' the object. As Hume of 'The Sceptic' puts it: 'objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves. They derive their worth merely from the passion.'(p.126); 'beauty and worth are merely of a relative nature, and consist in an agreeable sentiment, produced by an object in a particular mind, according to the particular structure and constitution of that mind.'(p.123). Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and nothing is 'in itself' beautiful or deformed, therefore dispute is pointless. Thus, the hope Hume had expressed in the preceding paragraph - discovering 'a standard of taste; a rule by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; or at least a decision afforded confirming one sentiment, and condemning another' - turns out, according to this species of common sense, to be impossible. We are left with the fact that two people differ in taste, and that's the end of the matter.

It seems we are left without grounds for the second species of common sense:

Whoever would assert an equality between Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as Teneriffe, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons, who give the preference to the former authors; no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce, without scruple, the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous. The principle of the natural equality of tastes is then totally forgot, and while we admit it on some occasions, where the objects seem near an equality, it appears an extravagant paradox, or rather a palpable absurdity, where the objects so disproportioned are compared together.(p.7)

This species of common sense, in opposition to the former,

proposes 'that the taste of all individuals is not on equal footing'. It maintains that if a man's sentiment leads him to prefer Ogilby to Milton he is wrong, and wrong, it would seem, because the latter possesses a greater beauty than the former. There seems to be a fact of the matter here - the works are not near in quality, and to suppose they are would be as absurd as (and like) supposing a pond to be as big as the ocean - and one that can be demonstrated. As Kant puts it:

It would...be ridiculous if any one who plumed himself on his taste were to think of justifying himself by saying: this object (the building we see, the dress that person has on, the concert we hear, the poem submitted to our criticism) is beautiful for me... He judges not merely for himself, but for all men, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Thus he says the thing is beautiful... he demands this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently, and denies them taste...and to this extent it is not open to men to say: every one has his own taste. This would be equivalent to saying that there is no such thing at all as taste, i.e. no aesthetic judgement capable of making a rightful claim upon the assent of all men.⁸

Kant's man of taste, and the second view Hume imagines, share in the conviction that a judgement may be right, or be more valid than another, and that beauty is a property of things. Kant and Hume set themselves the task of examining this conviction.

1.22 The standard of taste

It is worthwhile pausing to consider what Hume has in mind when he refers to a 'standard of taste'. It is not immediat-

7. ^{8.} The Critique of Judgement, tr. J.C.Meredith (Oxford, 1952), section 7.

ely obvious what he imagines it to be, nor what role it is to play in settling disputes. In the course of the essay Hume mentions first rules of composition, and then the sentiments of qualified critics, and finally canonical work. Each is discussed with reference to a 'standard' by means of which disputes are to be adjudicated. It is reasonably clear what role 'general rules of art' might be imagined to play. They would specify general qualities which define what it is for a work to possess literary merit. The role of such a rule in settling disputes would be that by appeal to qualities mentioned in the rule a work could be proved to possess or lack merit depending upon its accordance with or conflict with the rule. A correct appraisal of a work's merits would then be one that is justifiable by reference to the relevant rule. Qualified critics would presumably provide a standard either directly by means of their judgements upon individual works, or indirectly by providing the materials for the formulation of rules. Disputes would be settled by appeal to the critic as judge, or as above. I shall say something later on about canonical works.

Are any of the alternatives attractive? A popular candidate for the relevant 'standard' is rules specifying good-making features. However, Hume seems to express reservations about them. He says Aristo pleases in virtue of features which the rules denominate as faults, but 'if they are found to please they cannot be faults'. Thus the 'rules of criticism which would establish such circumstances as faults' are not univer-

sally applicable. If a rule would condemn a particular work, but in fact it is found to please, then the rule is to be rejected. The ultimate test of a poem's worth is the sentiment, and not its accordance with a rule. If that is Hume's idea then he is right. Whether rules do figure in criticism in any significant way is an important question. The pertinent question here is, What role do they play in establishing a claim to literary value as correct? The question raises the issue of the nature of critical reasoning and justification which I discuss below. At this point we can rule out one possibility. If rules do play a role in establishing the truth of a critical claim, they do not do so deductively. The quality of a poem is judged by reference to the quality of the experience it provides, and the quality of the experience is determined by appeal to criteria of value, which, if they support the claim, do so by properly identifying the intrinsic value of the experience. It is the experience rather than accordance with a rule that settles the question. That is, the truth of a critical claim is established directly by appeal to the work's qualities where the features indicated are criteria of value for that particular work. In another work they may take on a different significance.

In fact, there are two separate issues here. Firstly, there is the question of general features common to literary works which act as criteria of value. Secondly, if there are criteria of value how do they figure in justifying a claim? In answer to the first question, there are good-making

features of literary works in the specific sense that characteristically they do count for or against the value of a work. An example I discuss below is immaturity. But the role they play in establishing a critical claim is, by discovering their application in the particular case, to elucidate the critic's view of the intrinsic value of the experience the work provides. The importance of disconnecting the idea that there are criteria of value from the view that they justify a claim by featuring in a major premiss will become clear as we proceed.

1.23 Criticism and the objectivity of tastes

To return to Hume's second species of common sense. We can begin by examining some typical critical claims. The task is to justify the intuition that a perception of literary value is not the mere reflection and projection of subjective predilection. We have to account for the fact that, for example, finding Shakespeare to possess literary merit is more defensible than finding doggerel beautiful.

F.R. Leavis makes the following comment upon D.H. Lawrence's Piano (a), and Tennyson's Tears, idle Tears (b):

Tackling the most dangerous theme, the irrevocable past, each "flows from the heart" in swelling and lapsing movements that suggest the poignant luxury of release - the loosing of the reservoirs. At first sight (a), with its banal phrases - "vista of years", "the insidious mastery of song", "the heart of me weeps", "the glamour of childish days", its invocation of music, and the explicit "I weep like a child for the past" with which it concludes, might seem, if either of the poems is to be discriminated against as sentimental, to be the one. But even at first reading through of the pair it should be plain that there is a difference of

movement between them, and that the movement of (a) is, by contrast, the subtler. Against the simply plangent flow of (b) we feel it as decidedly complex. The main immediate point...is that in all this particularity we have something quite other than banal romantic generality: this is not the common currency of sentimental evocation or anything of the kind. The actuality of the remembered situation is unbeglamouring...For all the swell of emotion the critical mind has its part in the whole...sensibility in the poem doesn't work in complete divorce from intelligence; feeling is not divorced from thinking... Complexity, we can see at once when we pass on, is not a marked characteristic of Tennyson's poem, which is what at the first reading its movement seemed to indicate. It moves simply forward with a sweetly plangent flow, without check, cross-tension or any qualifying element. To give it the reading it asks for is to flow with it, acquiescing in a complete and simple immersion: there is no attitude towards the experience except one of complaisance; we are to be wholly in it and of it.(p.58-59)⁹

And in critical comparison of Alexander Smith's Barbara, Emily Bronte's Cold in the Earth, and Hardy's After a Journey:

About which of these poems should come lowest in order of preference there will be ready agreement. Alexander Smith's Barbara has all the vices that are to be feared when his theme is proposed, the theme of irreparable loss. It doesn't merely surrender to temptation; it goes straight for a sentimental debauch, an emotional wallowing, the alleged situation being only the show of an excuse for the indulgence, which is, with a kind of innocent shamelessness, sought for its own sake. If one wants a justification for invoking the term "insincerity", one can point to the fact that the poem clearly enjoys its pangs: to put it more strictly, the poem offers a luxurious enjoyment that, to be enjoyed, must be taken for the suffering of an unbearable sorrow. The cheapness of the sentimentality appears so immediately in the movement, the cliches of phrase and attitude, and the vaguenesses and unrealities of the situation... (p.90)¹⁰

Leavis goes on to say that though Bronte's poem is better than Smith's, Hardy's possesses the greater literary merit

9. 'Thought and Emotional Quality' in Scrutiny, vol. 13 (1945).

10. 'Reality and Sincerity', Scrutiny vol. 19 (1952).

because it represents 'a profounder and completer sincerity'; there is 'no alchemy of idealization, no suggestion of the transcendental, no nobly imaginative self-deceiving'.

Leavis clearly thinks that his claim to the greater merit of Lawrence's and Hardy's poems is justified by features he sees as possessed by those poems. He thinks features such as the rhythm and cliché which appear in Smith's and Tennyson's poems manifest sentimentality, insincerity, and lack of intelligence etc. And he believes that the sentimentality, immaturity, banality etc. those poems show makes them bad poems. In contrast the sincerity, emotional and intellectual maturity of Lawrence's and Hardy's poems contributes towards the goodness of their poetry. With what justification can Leavis claim that in these poems sentimentality is a bad-making feature, and maturity a good-making feature? Earlier in the article Leavis makes a very interesting observation:

We can say that Wordsworth's poem is a securer kind of achievement...an emotional habit answering to the mode of Break, Break, Break would need to be regarded critically. The poet, we can say, whose habitual mode - whose emotional habit - was represented by that poem would not only be very limited; we should expect to find him noticeably given to certain weaknesses and vices. Further the reader who cannot see that Tennyson's poem, with all its distinction and refinement, yields a satisfaction inferior to that represented by Wordsworth, cannot securely appreciate the highest poetic achievement at its true worth and is not very likely to be at all strong or sure in the kind of judgment that distinguishes between Break, Break, Break and Heraclitus.

"Inferior in kind" - by what standards? Here we come to the point at which literary criticism, as it must, enters overtly into questions of emotional hygiene and moral value - more generally (there seems no other adequate phrase) of spiritual health.(p.55)

...it is plain that the habitual indulgence of the kind represented by Tears, idle Tears - indulgence not accompanied and virtually disowned by a critical plac-

ing - would be, on grounds of emotional and spiritual hygiene, something to deplore.(p.59.)

Leavis' thought is that we do not, in general, value such things as sentimental self-indulgence, banality etc. and so when they appear in poetry they affect negatively the intrinsic value of the imaginative experience the poem provides. If, as seems true, there is no intrinsic value in experiencing sentimentality, then sentimental poetry will in that respect lack literary merit. Leavis secures the connection between the identification of features in the poem's, and judgements of value, by observing that acquiescence in the reading a sentimental poem asks requires a similar quality in response (e.g. an abeyance of intelligence, an intellectual and emotional immaturity) on the reader's part. For example, a reader could only enjoy Smith's poetry if he took it at face value, if he failed to perceive that it is not the expression of the suffering of an unbearable sorrow, but rather a sentimental self-indulgence. To yield to poetry such as Smith's and Tennyson's would itself provoke questions about the reader's maturity in judgement. One would not expect such a reader to appreciate the finer things in poetry.

So Leavis claims that there are features of Smith's and Tennyson's poems in virtue of which they provide an experience of a quality which cannot support a claim to literary value. It is because the poems affords a kind of experience that on the grounds of 'spiritual hygiene' cannot be admired, that the poems lack literary value. To acquiesce further in

the experience rather than 'critically placing' it would betoken a lack of appreciation. Leavis is correct, and the point can be generalised. There are qualities of thought, emotion, outlook, attitude etc. which are not held to be of intrinsic value. Literature which manifests them will, other things being equal (e.g. it endorses rather than 'places' nostalgia), afford an imaginative experience lacking in intrinsic value. And it is the fact that it provides an experience of that kind which justifies the claim that to that extent the work lacks literary merit.

Leavis' point would be misunderstood if one imagined that he took himself to be merely expressing personal preference. The 'standard' Leavis invokes to justify his claim that Tennyson's poem is inferior to Wordsworth's poem - that of 'spiritual hygiene' - has not merely personal but general validity.¹¹ On the (intrinsic) grounds of emotional and spiritual hygiene the poem, Leavis believes, is to be deplored not just by him, but by anyone who appreciates the nature of the poem. There is nothing 'subjective' here; the poem itself, thinks Leavis, lacks literary merit. On the same grounds other critics have good reason to agree that the poem lacks literary merit. They do so because the features identified in Leavis' judgement as detrimental to the exper-

11. By a 'standard' Leavis clearly does not mean a rule by means of which a critical claim could be deductively justified. The 'standard' he refers to provides criteria of value of the experience the poem provides. On Leavis' view of the role of rules in the evaluative process see The Common Pursuit (Harmondsworth, 1962), p.213.

ience provided by the poem are possessed by the poem, and they do count against the poem's literary value. Therefore, those who differ in estimation of the work's value lack discrimination, are wrong.

The conviction Leavis expresses is that his claims about the respective merits of the poems are possessed of intersubjective validity. The conviction depends on the belief that there are features of the poems which do in fact count for or against their literary value, and that they are accessible to anyone who takes the trouble to come to know the poems. These are facts about the poem that determine that they have or do not have literary merit.

The conviction naturally provokes the question 'Is the value of a work of literary art therefore objective?'. There are at least two different ways in which the notion of 'objectivity' might be understood. On the first interpretation an 'objective property' is something for which an adequate conception of what it is for a thing to possess it can be achieved without reference to how it affects a subject. If the proper account of what it is for a work to possess literary value is that its features afford an experience of intrinsic reward and value, then on the first understanding of objectivity literary value is obviously not objective. On that account it is not possible to detach the idea of a work's literary value from the idea that we find certain kinds of things pleasing and valuable to contemplate. A work's literary value would then be 'subjective'

because the concept of literary value involves reference to a work being found to possess it.¹² That literary value is not objective in that sense is unsurprising and unilluminating.

On the second and weaker sense of objectivity it is contrasted with the merely subjective, where the subjective is understood as that which only belongs to or proceeds from the perceiver, and not to the nature of the object perceived. If there are facts about a poem which properly determine the value accorded to a poem, then, on this view, literary value is not merely subjective. This notion of objectivity has the advantage of allowing content to the idea of discovering the value in a work, as extreme subjectivism - talk of literary value is a mere reflection and projection of subjective responses - does not. Therefore it does not require us to accept that it is futile to dispute about tastes, nor to accept that all tastes are on an equal footing. If this notion of objectivity is to prove illuminating we need an analysis of the 'proper determination' of value, and of the nature of critical disagreement.

1.24 Conflict in tastes

I said of Leavis' critical claim that any description of the facts of the poem which did not mention its lack of intellectual and emotional maturity would be incomplete. And

12. When Hume claims that 'objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves' and that 'these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection' he is right that we might cease to be affected by and care about those features which lead us to attach a value to art objects, and so would no longer find value in them.

I said that since Leavis believes they detrimentally affect the value of the experience provided by the work, he believes that a critic who prized the poem would be wrong. The question is: In what sense do those features justify Leavis' claim that a work possessed of them is to that extent lacking in literary merit? As I suggested earlier, the reach of those reasons is not exhausted in explaining why he finds the poem to lack value; they have, or seem to have, inter-subjective validity. What room is there for disagreement here, and what does disagreement reveal about the nature of judgements of literary value?

Firstly, two people may disagree that the poem is in fact sentimental or banal. Literary works are complex and sophisticated things. They require careful and intelligent interpretation. Interpretation and evaluation often involve predicates which are themselves complex and liable to be rather vague. Joint consideration of the work may be the only way to establish their precise import. There is room for disagreement here. For example, if 'insincerity' and 'sentimentality' are to denote the kind of response Leavis describes - an emotional wallowing which the ostensible occasion for emotion does not justify or support - then what one man sees as sentimentality, perhaps another might see as a proper sensitivity. He might disagree that the proper analysis of the response is an emotional wallowing, and instead believe it to be a 'sincere' and justified reaction to the imagined situation.

A representative example is the debate over the value of Shelley's poetry. The debate is carried out in terms of whether in fact his poetry is immature (along with its relations, insincerity, sentimentality, lack of thought etc.), and if so in what sense this should count as a fault. What some see as adolescent romantic escapism, a dreaming about a world that could never be, to the depreciation and neglect of the actual world, others see as a noble expression of the hope and possibility of a better world, an unwillingness to settle for less than man's best potential. They disagree over the proper evaluative description of the work. But the reason for conflict here does not indicate anything peculiar about aesthetic judgement. In particular, it does not suggest that the kind of judgement involved must claim less than intersubjective validity.

If there is room for disagreement over the proper evaluative description of a poem, it is less clear that two people could see the same things in a poem and simply disagree over the value to be ascribed to the poem. In fact, the force and relevance of evaluative descriptions is typically a matter upon which critics agree. The disagreement lies not in conflict over criteria of value, but in the presence or absence of features which, if established, would lead to agreement in judgement. For example, critical conflict over the merits of Shelley's poetry is not about whether, given the proper application of the terms Leavis recommends, that will or will not count against the merits of his poetry, but whether his

poetry is to be characterised in that way.¹³

Though it might generally be the case that there is a consensus about facts and values, could not two people agree to the facts and disagree over the value of a poem? It is the intuition that they could, and that the real explanation of disagreement lies here, that encourages the idea that literary judgements are 'subjective': if facts do not entail value judgements, and it is always possible to accept the facts without agreeing to the value, that merely reflects the 'subjectivity' of value attribution. Judgements of literary value are 'subjective' in virtue of being the projection of individual preference upon a neutral subject-matter. As Hume says, there is only one right opinion concerning matters of fact but concerning values there is no fact of the matter.

But here, as elsewhere, the dichotomy of fact and value is unhelpful. First of all, the distinction itself is unclear. If it suggests that evaluation is a matter of attaching a sentiment or some pro-attitude to a value-neutral description of the facts, then it has little application to literary appreciation. Literary evaluation is an activity, involving

13. Another representative example is the debate over *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: it is not whether the truth or falsity of the thesis it propounds is relevant to the question of the novel's merits, but whether the view of life expressed is in fact coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience. Similarly critical disagreement over the value of Dickens' novels does not centre upon conflict over the significance of moral insight in determining the value of the novels, but upon its presence or absence. Likewise, cliché, blurred imagery, mere external decoration, a metre which obscures rather than enhances the thought and emotion expressed, lack of unity and coherence in plot etc. are often not in themselves the object of debate. There may be occasions when there is dispute over which criteria of evaluation are appropriate to the particular work, and over which are more important in reaching an overall decision about its merits. But in such cases the dispute is not whether the criteria have evaluative implications, but rather which ones are suitable. Once it has been agreed that a work should be assessed in certain terms, agreement over evaluation follows.

abilities the exercise of which constitute critical competence. It is neither necessary nor sufficient for the proper exercise of those abilities that it involve or is accompanied by a 'sentiment of approbation', a pleasure or some other feeling. To evaluate is not to feel a certain way, but to do certain things. It is true that valuing something as a work of literature involves finding it intrinsically rewarding, but that is not to be confused with the activity of establishing and justifying the claim that a work possesses literary value. If the idea is that a remark only becomes a true evaluative description when it expresses a sentiment felt towards the thing described, then it is wrong for the same kinds of reason. Whether a sentence is evaluative or not depends upon the use to which it is put, and the truth of an evaluative description is independent of any feeling which might accompany it.

Secondly, criticism proceeds by building up what I have called evaluative descriptions,¹⁴ ones which indicates a 'fact' in the work which determines, or is at the same time, a value or good-making feature in the work. The descriptions name features which are criteria of value: the features (e.g. maturity in outlook) are the kinds of things which count as valuable features. They are what is meant by 'valuable feature', and to understand the concept in question involves appreciating their value. Therefore to come to see the work

14. The term is not intended to suggest that there are no non-evaluative descriptions of literary works, and that a large part of criticism is made up of descriptions that do not carry evaluative implications.

in a particular way is to come to see it as valuable or otherwise. A different classification of the 'facts' is constitutive of a different perception of value. Correspondingly, the dichotomy does not illuminate the nature of critical disagreement, for if critics could agree on the facts they would agree in the value to be ascribed. As I indicated above if one believes Shelley's poetry to be immature or insincere, then one will think any description of the facts of Shelley's poetry which does not mention it will be incomplete; but in identifying that fact one has not abstained from the issue of evaluation.

Is it always possible to agree on the 'facts' and not see that they are an index of value or a lack of value in the poem? It is true that the reasons given in evaluative descriptions do not deductively or inductively entail a critical conclusion. But a blank incapacity to see the connection between reasons and judgement is one indication that one does not fully understand the concepts in question. For example, if a critic is able to bring a reader to see Shelley's poetry as insincere, and through the building up of further evaluative descriptions, to connect that with emotional and intellectual immaturity, and so secure the reader's conviction that the facts of Shelley's poetry are as Leavis maintains, the reader may not see that that bears upon the question of value. But if he persists, without explanation, in maintaining that those 'facts' do not count against the value of the poems, the critic will naturally wonder whether he under-

stands him, whether he knows what immaturity etc. is.¹⁵ The reader may of course enjoy sentimental poetry, and even blatantly puerile or immoral poetry, but what is hard to imagine is that he could think it was good or valuable because it is sentimental or puerile. The difficulty is conceptual, and reflects the fact that puerility is an example of what is meant by an attribute which lacks intrinsic value. It is the conceptual relation between such things as puerility and lack of value which secures the inter-subjective validity of the claim that a literary work manifesting it is, in that regard, flawed.

Finally, disagreement in judgement may result from mis-identification of pleasures, and indiscriminating pleasures. It is possible to make a mistake in identifying the source of reward: pleasure is caused by extraneous factors but is mistakenly assumed to be object-centred. If the pleasure is partly caused by the work and partly by other non-aesthetic factors it may lead to the impression that the work is far more impressive than, if properly scrutinised, it really is. More interesting cases are where one is over-impressed, but the reason why the reward is not an index of value is because it results from a lack of discrimination of the work's actual quality. Here it is not mis-identification of causes, but rather the pleasure is not fully responsive to features which a more developed 'taste' would not accept as providing good

15. See John Casey's The Language of Criticism (London, 1966). Casey considers the consequences of refusing to draw evaluative conclusions from agreed facts, and the blank scepticism I mention below, in chapter 8.

reason to value the work. One may be too easily impressed with a novel because, being unfamiliar with literature, one becomes victim of the easy pleasures it provides. Later one comes properly to place the excitements of suspense and the frissons of pleasure given by 'thrillers'. Similarly, one's pleasures may centre upon the wrong thing: Gulliver's Travels is more than an adventure story, and Hamlet more than a ghost story. Thus one might want to discount an immature evaluation as a judgement determined by an insensitive interpretation of the work.¹⁶

1.25 Hume's solution to the problem of taste

The claim made earlier was that identifying features in a poem which detrimentally affect the reward and value of the experience the poem affords, provides justification for claiming the poem to lack literary value. It gives reason to

16. The history of Eliot's experience of Shelley's poetry that I discuss in the next chapter illustrates the second kind of situation. His coming to see the poems as anything but 'coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience' is accompanied by the realisation that the enjoyment he experienced in adolescence was an 'intoxication', a sentimental indulgence, and no sure indication of merit. Eliot's adolescent pleasure was indiscriminating, and only later did he reach a full consciousness of the quality of the work and reward. Eliot's case also illustrates the fact that maturity in judgement involves both the capacity to discriminate and properly place merit and de-merit conferring features, and adeptness in scrutinising pleasures. The related point is that one's 'aesthetic pleasures' are a result of education including much literary and non-literary experience. It is not only that we learn to place our pleasures, see them for what they are, but also the disposition to experience pleasure is itself influenced by education. I have not said much about the difference between aesthetic pleasures and what Kant calls pleasures of 'sense' such as culinary pleasures. Obvious differences include the value attached to aesthetic experience, the futility of dispute in the case of culinary preferences, the lack of reasons etc. One reason why it is possible to adduce reasons, and to question aesthetic pleasures, but not culinary likes, is the essentially cognitive nature of the former. Disputes over the best flavour of ice cream, do seem genuinely futile. See Eva Schaper's 'The Pleasures of Taste' and R.A. Sharpe's 'Solid joys and fading pleasures' in Eva Schaper (ed.) Pleasure, Preference, and Value: Studies in philosophical Aesthetics (Cambridge, 1983).

downgrade the work because what it is for a work to possess literary value is that it affords an intrinsically valuable experience. Examining the possibilities of conflict was to support the view that aesthetic judgements rightly claim inter-subjective validity. The threat I imagined to be posed was that the only sense in which a claim to a poem's possession of literary value can be true is that a reader does in fact find the experience to be of pleasure and of value to him. And I imagined that that would be assumed to lead to subjectivity: I find certain things to give an experience which I enjoy and value, and you do not. Literary value would then be relativised to the individual judger. Provided that the judgement cannot be ruled out as failing to qualify as an aesthetic judgement (it's interested etc.), and provided that it properly identifies the features of the work, then necessarily it is true: all genuine judgements are true judgements i.e. sincere judgements. If I delight in what you do not, our judgements are equally valid.

In the light of the preceding paragraphs the argument ought to look less attractive. I will return to the imagined sceptic, but first I want to review Hume's solution to the problem of taste. The solution has two parts. Firstly, an object's possession of beauty is to be compared to its possession of secondary qualities:

Though it be certain that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in the objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external it must be allowed that there are certain qualities in objects which are fitted by nature to produce these particular feelings.(p.11)

Hume goes on to say that just as a man in fever is not to be relied upon in deciding the flavour of something, and a man suffering from jaundice is no guide to the 'true and real color' of an object, there are conditions a perceiver of beauty must fulfil if his verdict is to be valid. They are a 'strong sense, united to a delicate sentiment, compounded by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice'. The situation is to be understood as paralleling that of the healthy man's perception of an object in clear daylight. His perception is taken to denominate the real colour of the object. It is from a judge who fulfils the conditions noted that the 'true standard of taste', 'the idea of perfect beauty' or the 'true and real' beauty is derived. The judgement of a man who does not fulfil these conditions is discounted. So the second species of common sense is justified in its view that 'the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing': 'many men have but a faint and dubious perception of beauty'.

The parallel with secondary qualities suggests that beauty is in the end something properly ascribed to literary works: the sentiment of beauty 'marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being'. Beautiful objects therefore do possess a property, namely, the dispositional one of affording creatures like us pleasure. So Hume is misleading when he says 'these qualities are not really in the object,

but belong entirely to the sentiment'. The point he wants to insist upon is that 'beauty', like 'sweet' and 'red', denotes a two-term relation: they are alike in that they depend upon the disposition of the perceiver as well as the object perceived. Therefore beauty is not 'in' the object in the sense that it cannot be located without the proper sentiment constitutive of the awareness of beauty or literary value. But beauty is 'in' the object in the sense that possessing the dispositional property is what it is for something to be beautiful. If that is Hume's view then it would seem it is either true or false that a work possesses literary merit i.e. it either does or does not possess the dispositional property. The parallel further suggests that that which is beautiful is what is found to be so by the ideal critic: 'the joint verdict of such [critics]...is the true standard of taste and beauty'. On either account we have good reason to deny the judgements of some people.

Is there a plausible parallel between 'beauty' or literary merit and secondary qualities? Yes and no. The perception of literary merit does, of course, depend upon the disposition of the perceiver. There are also degrees of sensitivity to literary merit, and the perception of value does require that the perceiver fulfil the kinds of conditions Hume describes. Further, in so far as the perception of value depends upon affective response, and the valuing of certain kinds of things, an account of what it is for an object to possess literary value will have to be relativised to creatures like

'us'. If what it is for a work to have literary value is that it has the dispositional property to afford creatures like us an experience of intrinsic reward and value, then again one might imagine a parallel with secondary qualities. Indeed, there is a further sense in which 'beauty' or 'literary value' is not a primary quality or 'objective property': it is the shared dispositional property to afford a certain kind of experience, rather than the presence of some common observable feature stable from case to case, which justifies the claim that the work is possessed of beauty or literary merit. The predicates 'beauty' and 'literary value' do not denote a common property except the dispositional one indicated: they do not refer to a 'Humeanly' recognisable objective property shared by different literary works.

But the parallel, as Hume conceives of it, breaks down at the point of the possibility of giving reasons and of justifying one's claim. The important difference lies in the feature of intentionality. Aesthetic pleasures are intentional, and though Hume says 'critics can reason and dispute more plausibly than cooks and perfumers' (P.122) the parallel with secondary qualities runs the risk of obscuring the fact that an aesthetic pleasure is justified by appeal to features of the work which are not properly described as secondary qualities. And it is because those facts about the work are cited in offering explanations of the value of the work, that aesthetic preferences cannot be assimilated to the tastes of sweet and bitter and the perception of colour. Of course,

Hume is talking not about features in virtue of which we support our claim that a work possesses beauty, but rather about the predicate 'beauty' itself. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between the cases. Perhaps the facts of a literary work can be taken as akin to the primary qualities responsible for colour and flavour. Beauty would then be supervenient upon the aesthetic properties specified in explanation of the cause of the sentiment. But there seems little point in pushing the parallel beyond the point where it ceases to illuminate.

The second point is more uncertain. After observing that the discovery of a standard of taste is not as difficult as it might seem, Hume goes on to talk of those works which have survived the test of time, as earlier (P.9) he had compared the lasting beauties of the Iliad with the fading beauties of works which at first strike us as impressive. He remarks that the 'beauties of eloquence and poetry' find their paradigm expression in Virgil, Homer, and Cicero, who 'maintain an universal, undisputed empire over the minds of men'. Their 'true and real' beauty continues to be acknowledged, while the enchantments of other works fade when examined closely and their 'faults appear in their true colors'. Since Hume has been talking of discovering true beauty, the passage implies that the canonical works themselves are to provide the standard. For example, the Iliad is a paradigm of what we call or count as a beautiful poem, a work exemplifying 'the beauties of eloquence and poetry' to the highest degree. It

therefore seems the second species of common sense is justified in both of its assumptions: all judgements are not equally valid, and some works do possess a greater literary merit.

In relation to the original problem, the idea that there are paradigm examples of literary merit suggests that the true worth of a literary work not discovered directly by the guidance of a qualified critic's judgement, but by comparison with canonical works. They set the standard by which the efforts of other authors are to be measured. Hume does not describe the precise role of these acknowledged beauties. He rightly points out that taste is educated through studying great works, and through comparisons. But if not the critic but rather the work itself is to adjudicate conflicts, Hume's thought can't be that they figure simply as means to the acquisition of taste. If we agree that a particular judgement can be condemned on the basis of critical incompetence, and that if a man finds the Iliad to be of little literary merit we will be suspicious of his judgements of other works, in what other way do paradigms of beauty provide a ground for settling disputes and for condemning and confirming tastes?

If canonical works are to serve as objects of comparison it might look as though the similarities and differences between it and the work under consideration offer a means to establishing the correctness or incorrectness of a judgement. As I mentioned earlier we might be able to formulate rules of beauty: if the Iliad possesses a set of features identified

as the 'good-making' features in literary works, then the disputed work's possession or lack of possession of them will settle the question of whether it is a 'true and real' beauty. However, it is not clear that that is Hume's point. He seems to equivocate over whether there are 'rules' of beauty. In any case, that line of thought doesn't seem very promising. As Hume observes, the rules will have to be rejected if the work does afford an experience of intrinsic value. He may instead have in mind the way in which objects of comparison illuminate the work compared, bringing out features unnoticed and not properly placed before. The canonical works would then play a role in settling disputes by enabling appreciation of the real quality of the text disputed.¹⁷

If the above analysis is correct, then Hume would be sympathetic towards the idea that questions of beauty can only be settled by joint consideration of the work in question. Since one cannot discover a work has literary value unless one finds it affords an experience of intrinsic value, and since one cannot know it has literary merit simply by enumerating a set of good-making features, the truth of a cr-

17. This is the answer which Mary Mothersill thinks Hume settles upon. She reads Hume as equivocating over the possibility of rules of literary merit (she calls them 'principles of taste'), in the end deciding, like herself, that they are innocuous, and adopting as his final position great works of art. However, she does not examine the way they are to set the standard. See *Beauty Restored* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), chapter 7. For an interesting examination of the role of works as objects of comparison see Frank Coiffi's 'Aesthetic Explanation and Aesthetic Perplexity', *Acta Philosophica Fennica* vol. 28 (1976). Ruby Meager defends the 'paradigm-case method' interpretation of evaluative criticism employing 'models' of successful works in 'The Uniqueness of a Work of Art', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* lxiv (1963-4), reprinted in C. Barrett (ed.) Collected Papers on Aesthetics (Blackwell, 1965).

itical claim can only be tested by re-experiencing the work in the way recommended. In literary appreciation one has to discover whether a work can support the interpretation of the work's quality as seen in the way the critic advocates. As Eliot puts it:

So the critic to whom I am most grateful is the one who can make me look at something I have never looked at before, or looked at only with eyes clouded by prejudice, set me face to face with it and then leave me alone with it. From that point, I must rely upon my own sensibility, intelligence, and capacity for wisdom.¹⁸

So one answer to the question I raised earlier - in what sense do the reasons indicating qualities of the work justify the claim that the work possesses literary value - is that the form the justification must take is a joint experience of value: the connection between reasons and claim is mediated and secured via re-experiencing the work and discovering that the work does or does not afford an experience of intrinsic value. Therefore, the way in which appeal to lack of emotional and intellectual maturity justifies the verdict on Tennyson's poem is that it indicates a feature of the poem which negatively affects the intrinsic value of the experience and work. Immaturity is in that sense not a valuable feature of the poem, a feature which can be located in the work, and which critics can agree detrimentally affects the quality of the poem. As I expressed it earlier, it is a fact of the work which is constitutive of its lack of literary merit. Agreement in value is thus guided by features of the

18. On Poetry and Poets (New York, 1964), p.131.

work discovered in coming to know the work. So literary value is, after all, 'objective' in the weaker sense: any explanation as to why agreement or disagreement in valuing occurs will be incomplete without reference to the way the work 'in itself' is.¹⁹

In conclusion, aesthetic discourse, like other kinds of discourse (e.g. historical or scientific), has patterns of support for its claims which receive their rationality and relevance from the goal of the activity. The force of the arguments depend upon a background of shared understanding of such things as fruitful ways to approach literary works, where to look for merit-conferring features, and a shared understanding of the kinds of things which count for or against literary merit. A central aim of criticism is to bring the reader to the point where he can confirm by his own experience that the critics point of view is correct or illuminating. Therefore, he must show, by means of description, comparison, recommendation of ways of looking etc. how the work before him does or does not exemplify merit-conferring features, and how they are to figure in an overall appraisal. But if, as I have claimed, agreement is secured through a

19. I have assumed there is such a thing as discovering what is the work, and have argued that it is valued in virtue of facts which are publicly available given the necessary standing conditions (extensive literary experience etc.). There are difficult questions here about the nature and status of interpretation. The idea of a publicly available text has been much disputed. If the claims of Derrida, De Mann, Stanley Fish etc. are to be admitted, then since the idea of discovering the features of a work is denied, the idea of a true interpretation is without application, so too finding the value in a work. The claims of Deconstruction seem to me to be wrong, though I cannot defend the claim here. See S.H.Olsen The Structure of Literary Understanding (Cambridge University Press, 1978) for a detailed discussion of interpretation, and Annette Barnes On Interpretation (Blackwell, 1988), in connection with Deconstruction.

joint experience of value, there is always the possibility of insoluble disagreement. If, after due consideration, a reader cannot find reward and value in the work's experience, he will disagree, and there may be no way to solve the conflict. Ultimately 'You have not even a single argument beyond your own taste, which you can employ on your own behalf: and to your antagonist his particular taste will always appear a more convincing argument to the contrary'(p.123). No amount of argument can make someone experience a work in the way the critic thinks it ought to be experienced. (This, it seems to me, is one of the main sources of the feeling of 'subjectivity' in aesthetic evaluations).

If, ultimately, agreement depends upon finding a work to be of value, it does not rob literary evaluations of intersubjective validity (or 'objectivity' in the weaker sense). The analysis of the nature of conflict and the role of reasons points to something rather different. It suggests, firstly, that there is real content to the idea of discrimination in taste. Secondly, that the content of aesthetic judgement is not exhausted in the sincere avowal that a work pleases me. Rather, a claim that a poem has literary value expresses the (true or false) belief that the work possesses features in virtue of which it gives an experience of intrinsic value, and as such the work itself has literary value. Thirdly, and relatedly, the reasons offered in defence of a claim either do or do not justify the claim that the work affords such an experience, and that it possesses fea-

tures in virtue of which it is to be valued. Fourthly - the point I've just been making - the only way to find out if in fact the reasons support the claim is to read the work.

There remains the blank scepticism 'whose to say'. Like all scepticism of this kind ('whose to say there's an external world or other minds') its reach is uncertain. The subjectivist I imagined argued that literary value must be relativised to the individual judger because the notion of true judgements must be taken as equivalent to sincere judgements, and it is a matter of personal predilection whether an experience and work have qualities in virtue of which they please and are valued. Anything else is the unwarranted projection of private feeling dressed up as a claim about the object. This form of scepticism need not deny that features such as sentimentality affect negatively the value of the experience, nor that one can truly claim a work to be sentimental. What it denies is that this gives any warrant for claiming the work to possess literary value. So ultimately it turns on the fact/value dichotomy: the agreed facts of a poem may or may not lead to a shared experience of value, and, whether it does or not, our prizing or otherwise certain kinds of experience does not entail that a work has a literary value. There are a number of responses one might try: 'that just is what we mean by a work's having literary value'; 'those are criteria of value'; 'puerility, banality, emotionalism just are defects in the poem'. But any response could be rejected. Eventually, if the the question is pushed past noting

features which do contribute to the value of the work, and asks why should those features be counted as establishing the value of the work, it seems the only answer is, as Wittgenstein puts it 'What has to be accepted, the given, is - one could say - forms of life'. That is, the question of value cannot be considered sub specie aeternitatis.

1.3 Morality and the sentiment of beauty

At the end of his essay Hume locates two further reasons why we may expect there to be diversity in judgement. The first is 'the different humours of particular men':

We chose our favorite authors as we do our friend, from a conformity of humour and disposition. Mirth or passion, sentiment or reflection; whichever of these predominates in our temper, it gives us a peculiar sympathy with the writers who resemble us...Comedy, tragedy, satire, odes, have each its partisans, who prefer that particular species of writing to all others.(p.20)

The second is 'the particular manners and opinions of our age and country'. That presents a more important issue which I shall come to in a minute.

Hume continues:

Where men vary in their judgements, some defect or perversion in the faculties may commonly be remarked; proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy: and there is just reason for approving one taste, and condemning another. But where there is such a diversity in the internal frame or external situation as is entirely blameless on both sides, and leaves no room to give one preference above the other; in that case a certain degree of diversity in judgement is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments.

Preferences based upon individual temperament, provided that they cannot be discounted as in one or other of the ways mentioned, 'can never reasonably be the object of dispute, because there is no standard by which they can be decided'. The second and more important claim is that the unacceptability of the moral or religious point of view is a legitimate ground for denying a work literary merit

...where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation, this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments; and however I may excuse the poet, on account of the manners of his age, I can never relish the composition. The want of humanity and of decency, so conspicuous in the characters drawn by several of the ancient poets, even sometimes by Homer and the Greek tragedians, diminishes considerably the merit of their noble performances, and gives modern authors an advantage over them. We are not interested in the fortunes and sentiments of such rough heroes; we are displeased to find the limits of vice and virtue so much confounded; and whatever indulgence we may give to the writer on account of his prejudices, we cannot prevail on ourselves to enter into his sentiments, or bear an affection to characters which we plainly discover to be blamable.(p.22)

And if an author displays bigotry or superstition in his religious belief:

Where that happens, they confound the sentiments of morality, and alter the natural boundaries of vice and virtue. They are therefore eternal blemishes, according to the principle above mentioned; nor are the prejudices and false opinions of the age sufficient to justify them.

What Hume insists upon is that provided that a judgement fulfils the requisite conditions to qualify as the right kind of judgement (i.e. it is a judgement of taste), the verdict upon a work's literary merits may be legitimately influenced

by disagreement with the author's beliefs.

Hume's view raises the question of whether a perceived inadequacy in the moral, religious, political etc. point of view of a literary work is relevant to the issue of the work's literary merits. We began with Plato's view that the value of poetry is to be identified with its instrumental value. He found reason to object to Homer and the tragic poets because the lies they tell about the gods and the praise they give to bad men lead to moral and political depravity. His objection to falsity in poetry is therefore not relevant to the question of the literary value of the Iliad or Oedipus Rex. We need not disagree with Plato's opinion about the effects of tragedy (though I think most of us would), nor need we disagree that considerations of instrumental value are to take precedence over the intrinsic value of poetry, but his attitude does not concern the work's literary merits. The question of whether the unacceptability of a work's viewpoint has any significance in relation to the work's literary value is independent of the question of its consequences. It is not to the point to take sides and weigh one value against another, but rather to distinguish values, and it is the intrinsic value of the experience a work gives which determines its literary value. As Hume rightly observes it is the way in which the opinions of the ancients affect the 'sentiment' which is pertinent to the beauty of the Iliad. The proper interpretation of the question is therefore restricted to the relation between a disagreement in belief

and the intrinsic value of the experience of the work. That question is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

The Problem of Belief

Hume believes that when a poet 'confounds the sentiments of morality', or in other ways departs from our own sentiments about the subject he treats, the unacceptability of his views 'must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity'. Is Hume right? Can a verdict upon a literary work's aesthetic merit be influenced by a disagreement with the author's beliefs and values? The question Hume's claim raises is one of the issues usually entitled 'The problem of belief'. In this chapter I shall be concerned with that problem. As the argument proceeds I shall provide reasons to agree with Hume's conclusion.

The question of the 'aesthetic relevance' of a conflict in belief to judgements of literary merit is not the only issue that might arise from such a clash. In fact a host of rather different problems are often classed together under the title of 'The problem of belief'. The following general question can be identified as falling within the rather broad category of problems associated with the role of a reader's attitude towards an author's beliefs: how does, or should, agreement or disagreement with the author's beliefs affect the reader's understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of his work? This question is assumed to invoke a further problem: is truth a criterion of literary value? Thus those who deny the

'aesthetic relevance' of belief typically see themselves as disputing one of two claims. They either reject the idea that the truth or falsity of the beliefs expressed in a work is relevant to 'aesthetic appreciation' of the work, or they deny that the truth of an author's point of view can influence 'aesthetic' judgements of his work.

Much of the literature on this topic is marred by a confusion between psychological and 'logical' or 'grammatical' questions. The water is further muddied by partisan recommendations about the best way to approach literature. Correspondingly, many of the arguments for and against the aesthetic relevance of belief are not always accompanied by a clear conception of the question at stake. I shall start out with what I believe to be the real and most important issue for the theory of literature, and from the critical point of view. It pertains to the literary value of a work. In the last chapter I maintained that the correct approach to the question of the value of a work as a work of literary art is in terms of the intrinsic value of the experience the work provides. The proper interpretation of the question, then, is this: if the truth or falsity of the beliefs endorsed in a literary work leads the reader to affirm or question the intrinsic value of the experience, is it not an admissible reason to value or devalue the work? In this chapter I shall concentrate upon that question. However, the problem of belief narrowly construed as the question of agreement in belief can be seen as an instance of a more general question:

what significance should be assigned to other aspects of the author's vision? The question is restricted neither to beliefs, nor to their truth, and considers such things as the depth, coherence, and maturity of the work's point of view. I shall conclude with some observations on the wider issue.

Most of the arguments against the relevance of belief have in one way or another centred upon concepts of the 'aesthetic object' or the 'art-work itself', and go hand in hand with ideas about the 'aesthetic experience' of, and point of view' upon it. They are often accompanied by assumptions about the 'purely literary qualities' of a work, and its uniquely 'literary' value. Historically they are associated with the theory and practice of poetry influenced by the 'Art for Art's Sake' movement, though they can be traced back at least as far as the early eighteenth century. The most important notion here is 'aesthetic autonomy'. I shall examine the set of ideas and assumptions implied by that notion in the second part of the chapter. Rather different ideas lead T.S.Eliot and I.A.Richards to question the significance of true and false beliefs in poetry. In the first part of this chapter I shall consider their arguments. The remainder of the chapter will be taken up with a discussion of a number of related issues which inevitably arise from the question of the literary value of the truth of an author's point of view. They include the nature of literary discourse, the author's place in the work, and reader-response.

2.1 T.S.Eliot: belief and the aesthetic enjoyment of poetry

The development of Eliot's view on the aesthetic relevance of belief is an interesting and instructive case. His earlier treatment of the problem occurs in his Dante essay.¹ In section 2 of that essay he declares that 'the question of what Dante "believed" is always relevant' in reading The Divine Comedy. But, Eliot suggests, we must distinguish between 'philosophical belief' and 'poetic assent'. 'Poetic assent' is the suspension of both belief and disbelief in what the poet believes. 'Philosophical belief' is (presumably) belief proper. The point of the distinction is to stress that the reader of The Divine Comedy as poetry is required to enter the world of thirteenth century Catholicism, philosophy and physics, but he is not required to believe in it. Rather he is to suspend both belief and disbelief in the truth of the poet's beliefs:

You cannot afford to ignore Dante's philosophical and theological beliefs, or skip the passages which express them most clearly;...on the other hand you are not called upon to believe them yourself...If you can read poetry as poetry you will "believe" in Dante's theology exactly as you believe in the physical reality of his journey; that is you suspend both belief and disbelief. (p.257-258)

Eliot also thinks that what is necessary in order to 'appreciate' the poem is not 'philosophical belief' but 'poetic assent'. So, contends Eliot, neither understanding nor appreciation depends upon sharing a poet's beliefs. Further, if we are to approach poetry as poetry we must suspend both belief

1. T.S.Eliot, 'Dante' in Selected Essays (London, 1934, 3rd edn, 1951), pp. 252-71.

and disbelief in the views the poem expresses.

In the note to Section 2. Eliot puts his view as follows: 'the reader can obtain the full "literary" or (if you will) "aesthetic" enjoyment without sharing the beliefs of the author. If there is "literature", if there is "poetry", then it must be possible to have full literary or poetic appreciation without sharing the beliefs of the poet.'. So when Eliot says that full 'appreciation' is possible without belief, he means that full enjoyment grounded in a proper understanding of a poem is possible without sharing the beliefs informing the work. For example, to 'understand' or 'appreciate' The Divine Comedy is to enjoy it for the right reasons, and that is available to someone who does not accept Dante's beliefs.

However, Eliot admits that his theory is still only embryonic, and he proceeds to offer a couple of qualifications, the second of which seems to be in direct contradiction to his central thesis.² It relates to an important respect in which his theory differs from I.A.Richards' - the view of poetic utterance as 'pseudo-statement'. Eliot contends that a poet means (or may mean) what he says: though different, 'beauty is truth, truth beauty', 'ripeness is all', and 'His will is our peace' are statements, and not 'pseudo-statements'. As statements one's attitude towards their truth is not separable from one's poetic appreciation of the poem

2. The first is that full understanding of a poet's point of view may not always be possible in the absence of full belief.

or play in which they occur. For example, Eliot thinks that Keat's statement is a serious blemish on an otherwise beautiful poem. He supposes that the reason must be either that he fails to understand it, or that it is a statement which is untrue. But Shakespeare's statement has 'profound emotional meaning' and is 'no literal fallacy', and Dante's is 'literally true'. As such neither of them mar the work in which they feature. Quite the reverse, they contribute to Eliot's enjoyment of them. Given that his attitude towards the truth of the statements in Ode on a Grecian Urn, King Lear, and The Divine Comedy is a significant dimension in the enjoyment he derives from those works, Eliot finds himself forced to accept that he cannot wholly separate his poetic appreciation from his beliefs. He concludes: '"literary appreciation" is an abstraction and pure poetry a phantom', for one derives more pleasure from a poem when one shares the beliefs expressed.

When he comes to consider the question again in connection with his difficulty in deriving enjoyment from Shelley's poetry the equivocations in his earlier discussion are transformed into a firmer view in favour of a connection between belief and the enjoyment of poetry (though here too Eliot is less than clear on what the relation is).³ Eliot still thinks his earlier view about the separation of belief and appreciation holds good for poetry of the quality of The Divine

3. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (Faber, 1964), Chapter 5.

Comedy and On the Nature of Things. But since he cannot enjoy Shelley's poetry, and since he thinks that this is a result of the nature of Shelley's views - views Eliot either positively dislikes or finds totally puerile - the problem now presents itself to him in a new aspect. The ideas of Shelley, it seems to Eliot, are an affair of adolescence, as is the enjoyment of, and enthusiasm for, his poetry. In maturity, the intoxication which allowed him to read Shelley with pleasure has passed, and that leaves him with poetry expressing ideas so repellent that he no longer turns to Shelley simply for the delight in reading poetry. How, asks Eliot, are we to account for this?

Eliot thinks I.A.Richards provides the explanation. Richards maintains that in 'reading well' the question of belief or disbelief in the 'intellectual sense' in the views a poet expresses does not arise. Eliot infers that it is not the presentation of beliefs he does not hold which creates the difficulty. Eliot believes the correct position is:

When the doctrine, theory, belief, or "view of life" presented in a poem is one which the mind of the reader can accept as coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience, it interposes no obstacle to the reader's enjoyment, whether it be one that he accept or deny, approve or deprecate. When it is one which the reader rejects as childish or feeble, it may, for a reader of well-developed mind, set up an almost complete check.(p.96)

Eliot concludes that his difficulty in enjoying Shelley's poetry as he formerly could is not to be explained by his then being under an illusion which led him to accept Shelley's ideas, and that he has since come to reject them.

Rather, the explanation lies in the supposition that then the question of belief in the 'intellectual sense' did not arise at all. It is because the question of belief and disbelief did not present itself to him then, that Eliot was in a much better position to enjoy Shelley's poetry. It now does, causing an almost complete check to his enjoyment.

I find Eliot's explanation rather puzzling. Isn't the explanation he rejects - that his enjoyment of Shelley's poetry (and poetry in general) is dependent upon belief or disbelief in the 'intellectual sense' in the poet's views - the most natural one? Surely it is his changing attitudes towards the intellectual acceptability of Shelley's views that accounts for the difference in enjoyment. In other words, it seems that the question of belief in the 'intellectual sense' is very much a factor in his appreciation. Why, then, doesn't he offer this explanation?

Part of the answer lies in I.A.Richards' presentation of the matter. But before we look at that we should take stock of Eliot's claims. First of all, there is the point about the possibility of understanding poems where one does not accept the beliefs and values that they are premised on. The second point is about the possibility of enjoying poetry expressing beliefs one does not share. Together they represent views about the aesthetic relevance of agreement in belief to the 'appreciation' of poetry. The third point concerns what we should expect from a 'good reader', and the fourth point relates to the psychological state of a reader when engaged

with a poem expressing beliefs which he may or may not accept.⁴

It is important to separate the different issues here. Whether or not it is possible to understand a poem which advocates an alien philosophy, religion, or cosmology, or any other scheme of beliefs and values unfamiliar to the reader, is a separate issue from the question of the appropriate evaluative attitude towards a poem that expresses a view which the reader finds unacceptable. Similarly the question of the degree to which a reader's beliefs about the world determine his enjoyment of the work is distinct from the question of what is appropriate to the 'aesthetic point of view' upon the value of the work. Obviously we must employ some beliefs if a poem is to be accessible to us and therefore if we are to enjoy it. The general dependence of aesthetic experience upon the possession and employment of beliefs and knowledge about a wide variety of subjects need not be disputed. However, the point concerns the accessibility of poetry to readers who do not share the author's point of view, and is not directly relevant to the issue of poetic merit. If we are to follow Eliot's use of the notion of 'aes-

4. Eliot's view is representative of a general tendency to consider the 'aesthetic relevance' of belief in terms of understanding and enjoyment. For example, Isenberg maintains that it is possible to understand the meaning of a literary work and to enjoy it without assenting to the truth of its views, whilst Aiken and Elliot hold that it is sometimes not. Likewise, there is a tendency (e.g. in Isenberg) to assess the 'aesthetic relevance' of belief according to the nature of a reader's psychological state when engaged by a 'fiction'. See R.K. Elliot 'Poetry and Truth', *Analysis*, 27 (1966-7), reprinted in F.A. Tillman and S.M. Cahn (eds.) *Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics: From Plato to Wittgenstein* (New York, 1969); A. Isenberg 'The Problem of Belief', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. xii (1954), reprinted in Barrett (ed) *Collected Papers on Aesthetics*; H.D. Aiken 'The Aesthetic Relevance of Belief', in M.C. Beardsley and H.M. Schueller (eds.), *Aesthetic Inquiry: Essays on Art Criticism and the Philosophy of Art* (Dickenson, 1967).

thetic appreciation' to refer to the ability both to understand poetry expressing views one does not share and to derive enjoyment from the experience, then we must be careful to distinguish between questions about the relation between belief and the accessibility of poetry, and between belief and the value of poetry.

The first substantial point is that Eliot's use of the notion of 'aesthetic appreciation' reveals a general inadequacy in views that approach the problem of belief in terms similar to Eliot's. In Eliot's view 'aesthetic appreciation' in the sense of enjoyment is perfectly possible where reader and writer do not agree, though sometimes it may depend upon agreement. However, Eliot's concentration upon a reader's ability to enjoy poetry expressing views he is not sympathetic towards is a mistake. First of all, whether or not a reader finds it possible to disconnect belief and disbelief from enjoyment is a matter of individual temperament, and will vary from reader to reader. The reasons for variation, and the psychological mechanisms involved are a topic for psychology, and are distinct from the issues pertinent to aesthetics. The question for aesthetics is, What importance is a reader to assign to his agreement or disagreement with the views expressed? Secondly, Eliot's emphasis upon enjoyment does not get to the heart of the matter. It may be that there is a kind of enjoyment which is available only to a believer, namely the enjoyment derived from the poetic expression of beliefs, outlooks, or senti-

ments, that the reader shares. But even if we conceded to Eliot that the degree and kind of enjoyment available to a reader depends upon shared points of view, the question of the poetic value still stands.

So Eliot's notion of 'appreciation' is incomplete: to 'appreciate' a poem requires not only that one enjoys it for the right reasons but also that one values it for the right reasons. The result is that he fails to answer the most important question.⁵ Supposing that a poem is enjoyed as a result of agreement in belief, it is still an open question whether the poem also possesses the features necessary to provide an experience of intrinsic value. For example, if Eliot still derived enjoyment from reading Shelley's poetry, as he does from Dante's, he could not answer the question as to which of the poems was of the greater literary merit until he had reached a decision as to the nature and quality of his enjoyment. Eliot might have delighted in the imaginative experience of what he now recognises to be childish and feeble views, as formerly he derived enjoyment from what previously struck him as a coherent and mature view. The difference would lie in his now seeing that the enjoyment he takes is no index of value in Shelley's poetry. Eliot would then 'appreciate' Shelley's poetry in the sense that he enjo-

5. Eliot is not the only one. Aiken, for example, ends his discussion of the belief-dependence of understanding and enjoyment with the following comment: 'the truth or validity of any artistic representation or aesthetically relevant belief has nothing to do with its [the work's] aesthetic quality or value'. One wants to know what reasons he has for this, and why observations about understanding and enjoyment should shed any light on the matter. See Malcolm Budd's article (op. cit. Chapter 1 note 4) for a similar criticism of Eliot's view.

yed it for the right reasons; for example, for its adolescent idealism. But Eliot is silent on the question of what value there was in his adolescent enjoyment, and on the question of what value there is in the poem he is no longer able to enjoy.

The question that remains is, What evaluational attitude should be taken towards both a poem and the enjoyment derived from it where the quality of the rewards is influenced by the beliefs and values expressed in the poem? How might Eliot answer this question? I think that he would have to accept that the estimation of a poem's worth can depend upon the question of belief in the 'intellectual' sense. Doesn't Eliot value Dante's poetry more than Shelley's, as well as deriving more enjoyment from The Divine Comedy? The reason is surely that he thinks the Catholicism informing The Divine Comedy is coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience; in short, true. So too his different estimations of the value of Keat's poem and King Lear. His opinion that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' is not founded on the facts of experience (is false), surely affects negatively Eliot's view of the literary merits of the Ode on a Grecian Urn. So the most natural place for the criteria of coherence, maturity, and accordance with the facts of experience, appears to be in the evaluation of the poem's merits. In other words 'literary appreciation is an abstraction and pure poetry a phantom' not only because one's enjoyment is affected by one's attitude towards the

claims a poem makes, but more importantly because one's estimation of its value is affected.

2.2 I.A.Richards: poetic value and 'intellectual' and 'emotional' belief

The two further points Eliot's makes concern what one should expect from a 'good reader', and the nature of his psychological state. Eliot draws both points from I.A. Richards' discussion of the problem. Much of Richards's Practical Criticism analysis is taken up with the difference between 'intellectual' and 'emotional' belief in the poetic propositions of doctrinal poetry.⁶ Richards relies upon the distinction in order to maintain that belief in the poet's view is not required in order to appreciate his poetry.

Richards begins by observing that doctrinal poetry is equally 'accessible' to 'good readers' in the sense that they are not disturbed by poems expressing beliefs they do not share and 'may respond in the same way to the poetry and arrive at similar judgements about it' regardless of their attitude towards the poet's doctrine. He goes on to question whether 'actual belief in the doctrine that appears in the poem is required for its full and perfect imaginative realisation'. In the following paragraph he comments that to suppose a 'full reading' (the full and perfect imaginative realisation?) of a poem is not available to a reader unless

6. I.A.Richards Practical Criticism (London, 1964), Chapter 7. By doctrinal poetry Richards means poems built upon a doctrine of firm and definite beliefs about the world, and generally any poem which seems to make a statement or depend upon an assumption a reader may dissent from.

he shares the doctrine expressed, presents severe problems. We would have to accept that a reader who differs in belief must either temporarily believe what the poet believes as he reads, or find the poem remains inaccessible. Both strike Richards as contrary to the facts. The way out of the impasse, suggests Richards, is to recognise that there are two distinct kinds of belief, 'intellectual' and 'emotional' belief.

Richards' account of these kinds of belief is far from clear. The basic intention is, it seems, to draw a distinction between the ways in which a poetic proposition may be entertained. He says that 'intellectual belief' is the entertaining of an idea in its 'logical context' (the systematic ordering of ideas in accordance with supporting evidence, consistency etc.). 'Emotional belief' is the entertaining of something in its emotional context (the prudent acceptance of ideas by our interests, desires, feelings, emotions, attitudes, tendencies to action etc.). We may both 'intellectually' and 'emotionally' believe an idea, or believe it in one way and not the other. Richards thinks that the distinction allows us to say that 'Neither belief nor disbelief arises in the intellectual sense unless the logical context of our ideas is in question'. Poetry, maintains Richards, is in this 'happy condition of real intellectual disconnection'. He says that 'here we are concerned very little with logical consequences and almost exclusively with emotional consequences. In the effect of the thought upon our

feelings and attitudes, all its [the proposition's] importance, for poetry lies'. His conclusion is this: since the 'problem of intellectual belief' only arises when the intellectual status of an idea is at issue, and since poetry is an 'extraordinarily successful device' for disengaging the intellectual acceptability of an idea from its emotional consequences, the experience of poetry does not involve the question of the acceptability of the poet's beliefs. Thus:

Coleridge, when he remarked that "a willing suspension of disbelief" accompanied much poetry, was noting an important fact, but not quite in the happiest terms, for we are neither aware of a disbelief nor voluntarily suspending it in these cases. It is better to say that the question of belief or disbelief, in the intellectual sense, never arises when we are reading well. If unfortunately it does arise, either through the poet's fault or our own, we have for the moment ceased to be reading poetry and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in a quite different type of activity.(p.277)

Richards' point seems to be that poetry either doesn't express things which invite 'intellectual belief', or if it does, a 'good reader' will simply ignore their 'intellectual' acceptability. His conclusion is that the proper experience of doctrinal poetry involves 'emotional' and not 'intellectual belief' in what the poet believes. For example, a 'good reader' of Donne's Holy Sonnets will be one for whom the 'fullest possible emotional belief in Donne's theological tenets is fitting and desirable', even if in fact he withholds 'intellectual belief' in the Resurrection, or, rather, will not allow the question of intellectual belief to arise while he reads. Richards' solution to the problem of belief is therefore that a good reader fully 'emotionally believes'

in the poet's views as he 'reads well', but for those less able to disconnect 'emotional belief' from 'intellectual belief' the value of Donne's poetry will be inaccessible to them.

Richards recommends us to turn to the fuller discussion of the matter in his Principles of Literary Criticism.⁷ When we do, it becomes clear that Richards' views on the problem of belief are grounded in a number of inter-related ideas about the nature and function of belief, language and poetry. The contrasts are drawn in terms of 'scientific' and 'emotive', rather than 'intellectual' and 'emotional', but seem to cover much of the same ground. The experience of poetry is said to involve 'emotive belief' rather than 'scientific belief':

The bulk of beliefs involved in the arts are of this kind, provisional acceptances, holding only in special circumstances (in the state of mind which is the poem or work of art) acceptances made for the sake of the "imaginative experience" which they make possible. The difference between these emotive beliefs and scientific beliefs is not one of degree but of kind.(p.220)

These distinct states or processes match Richards' two-fold division of language into its 'referential' and its 'emotive' functions:

A statement can be used for the sake of the reference, true or false, which it causes. This is the scientific use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude produced by the references it occasions...It matters not at all in such cases [of emotive use] whether the references are true or false.(p.211)

The reception of these language uses is governed either by a concern for 'scientific truth' (correspondence with empirical

7. I.A.Richards Principles of Literary Criticism (London, 1960), Chapters 34 and 35.

fact and internal consistency), or for the evolving emotion and attitude. Where the latter is the case, the scientific truth or falsity of the 'statements' is irrelevant.

Richards believes that poetry is distinguished from scientific discourse by the predominance of the 'emotive' use of language. Poetry therefore involves 'the subordination of reference to attitude' and emotion. This view involves the following claims. Firstly, in a proper response to poetic utterances 'the questioning, verificatory way of handling them is irrelevant, and in a competent reader it is not allowed to interfere'. Secondly, if in fact referential uses of language do occur in poetry, their poetic value lies in the arousal of emotion and attitude. Thirdly, truth and falsity of poetic propositions is irrelevant to poetic value: 'even when they are, on examination, frankly false, this is no defect...And equally...their truth, when they are true, is no merit' in the poem in which they feature. Their truth or falsity is unimportant because 'scientific belief' is inappropriate as a response to poetry. Fourthly, a competent reader will receive them for the sake of the emotions and attitudes they make available: they will be 'emotively believed' as 'provisional acceptances'. Thus:

The people who say "How True!" at intervals while reading Shakespeare are misusing his work, and, comparatively speaking, wasting their time. For all that matters in either case is acceptance, that is to say, the initiation and development of the further response. (p.216)

The context in which the Practical Criticism account is to be understood is therefore that of the theory of poetry as a

special use of language, and of the poetic response as a peculiar kind of reception of those uses: the emotive use of language is to be accorded 'emotive belief', and poetic value lies in the emotions and attitudes made available. The sub-proposition is that since poetry's nature and function is to express and evoke emotion, and not to correspond with empirical fact, it is therefore immune from the criteria of valid reference (i.e. truth and falsity), and from claims upon our belief. So it transpires that poetry is in 'the happy condition of real intellectual disconnection' because the pseudo-statements of poetry do not not assert truths; rather they express and organise feelings. As such, poetry does not address itself to the reader's beliefs by presenting propositions to the understanding for intellectual assent. It is only the statements of the 'referential' use of language which provoke that kind of response.⁸

What are we to make of Richards' view? The first thing to notice is that the Practical Criticism analysis runs together some very different claims. They include ideas about (i) the psychological disposition of the reader (ii) the use to which language is put in poetry (iii) the determinant of poetic value (iv) the evaluative attitude towards the experience of doctrinal poetry.

Concerning the first issue, Richards makes the following

8. See M.H. Abrams The Mirror and the Lamp (Oxford, 1979), Chapter 10 and 11, for a very interesting account of the genesis of views resembling Richards' as reactions to the rise of empiricism and utilitarianism in the seventeenth century. A striking case is J.S. Mill. Mill also believes that poetic uses of language only express and evoke feelings and do not assert propositions, and hence that poetry does not impinge upon the reader's beliefs and is independent from judgements of truth.

points. Firstly, only 'emotional belief' or quasi-acceptances of the 'If this, then that' variety is required for the appreciation of poetry. The reference to Coleridge and to 'provisional acceptances' suggests that what Richards has in mind here is not properly called belief at all. 'Emotional belief' is in fact what Eliot names 'poetic assent': neither belief nor disbelief in a poetic proposition, but rather entertaining, without assent or dissent, the beliefs informing a poem as a ground of the imaginative realisation of it. So Richards' theory of the significance of doctrine in poetry contends that the full and perfect imaginative realisation of a doctrinal poem is available to us regardless of whether we share the poet's beliefs. Since 'emotional' and 'intellectual' belief are distinct, and since only the former is required for the 'appreciation' of poetry, 'intellectual belief' contributes little or nothing to the appreciation of poetry. The second point is that the result of allowing the cognitive frame of mind to interfere with one's aesthetic enjoyment and appreciation is that one's enjoyment will be put in jeopardy, as will the instrumental benefits upon one's emotions and attitudes. We must learn to disconnect emotional and intellectual assent if we are to get the most out of poetry.

The first inadequacy in Richards' account is that he confuses observations appropriate to the question of the nature and conditions of the experience of doctrinal poetry with questions about the evaluative attitude towards it. In

fact it is clear that both Eliot and Richards run together two different issues. The first is the question of the appropriate description of a reader's psychological state when engaged by a fiction, and the role of belief in making available the full and perfect imaginative realisation of the poet's world. The second is the question of the role of the reader's beliefs in evaluating the experience. Eliot's and Richards' remarks about 'emotional belief' and good readers belong to the first question, but the real issue is the second. Again the result is that they fail to address the question of what is appropriate in reaching a judgement of aesthetic value. For example, whether or not it is true that a good reader is one who is able to achieve a full and perfect imaginative realisation of a poem's viewpoint which he does not share, and to derive enjoyment from the experience, observations about his abilities do not provide an answer to the question of what evaluative attitude is admissible towards a poem expressing beliefs he cannot intellectually adopt. The same holds for Richards' fears about the risks to poetic value arising from questioning the intellectual acceptability of a poet's point of view. It may or may not be desirable that we train ourselves to disengage our sentiments towards an author's doctrinal position from other aspects of his work, but that is beside the point. The question that must be answered is whether a reader who faults Donne's poetry for the falsity of his views fails to approach the question of its merits in a suitable 'literary' or

'aesthetic' manner.

The related point is that Eliot and Richards indulge in irrelevant psychological speculation. This comes out most clearly in Eliot's equivocations about concluding that appreciation is influenced by 'intellectual belief'. The reason for Eliot's rather counter-intuitive explanation of his difficulty with Shelley's poetry lies in the confusions inherent in Richards' treatment of belief. Eliot's account appears to be that some of Shelley's views are so unacceptable that he cannot even in imagination adopt them for the sake of the potentially enjoyable imaginative experience this would make available. His reading is constantly interrupted by the question of the intellectual acceptability of Shelley's views, a question he is unable to suppress. So the claim that emerges is that though one may not actually agree with the views of a poet, so long as they are not without redeeming features one can get on with reading. But there is a psychological threshold beyond which the possibility of enjoyment is frustrated. Falsity, lack of coherence, maturity, basis in fact etc. is an irritating distraction which leaves one unable to derive the 'full poetic enjoyment' out of a poem through the imaginative adoption of beliefs one does not share. A similar idea is implicit in Richards' view. However, this is obviously irrelevant to the issue of evaluation, and the relation between belief and aesthetic value. The same is true of Richards' speculations about the abilities of a good reader.

It would be wrong to conclude that there is no substance to Richards's views on the problem of belief. His claim is that someone who did fault a poem for expressing unacceptable views would fail to approach the question of poetic value in the proper way. He says that once we raise the question of the 'intellectual' acceptability of a poet's beliefs we have 'ceased to be reading poetry and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in quite a different type of activity'. The problem is that Richards' general theory of poetry and poetic value commits him to too narrow a conception of the appropriate modes of assessing poetry. It results from the over-strict dichotomy of, on the one hand, referential uses of language, assessment according to truth and falsity (correspondence with empirically verifiable fact), and cognitive value (knowledge of empirical reality), and on the other, emotive uses, assessment according to 'emotional' quality, poetic value (organisation of emotion and attitude). The upshot is that Richards seems not to allow for the possibility of truth and falsity as criteria of aesthetic merit in some other sense than correspondence with 'scientific' fact. Nor does he acknowledge other possible criteria of evaluation of the 'intellectual' acceptability of a work's point of view. Further, the dichotomy creates the false impression that to raise the issue of intellectual belief in a poet's views is to turn one's attention away from aesthetic concerns.

Richards intends the 'emotivist' assumption to justify the

claim of the aesthetic irrelevance of agreement or disagreement in belief. The appropriate question to ask of Richards' view is therefore: What reason is there to accept the requirement to judge a poem's merits only according to its 'emotive' value? As we have seen, Richards' reasons are that the poetic use of language is essentially to express and evoke emotion; the truth or falsity of referential uses of language in poetry is to be ignored; and truth and falsity neither add nor detract from poetic value. However, since poetic uses of language are obviously not restricted to the expression and evocation of emotional attitudes, Richards is left without grounds for the assumption that poetic value must lie in emotional quality, and not in the truth or falsity of the doctrine expressed in a poem. What we require is an argument to show that if literature does express beliefs amenable to assessment in terms of truth their truth or falsity is irrelevant to the aesthetic merits of the work in which they occur. If that argument is to be sustained it must be grounded in something other than the inadequate theory of language and poetic value provided by Richards.

2.3 Aesthetic 'autonomy'

If Eliot and Richards fail to provide a satisfactory answer to the 'problem of belief' what other views have been held on the matter? In the lecture I reviewed earlier Bradley makes the following comment in connection with his doctrine of 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake':

[Poetry's] nature is to be not a part, nor a copy, of the real world (as we commonly understand that phrase), but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous; and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality...[Poetry and life] are parallel developments which nowhere meet, or,...they are analogues...they have different kinds of existence.(p.5-6)

In this passage Bradley introduces a number of assumptions associated with the idea of poetry's 'autonomy'. They reflect a set of conceptions which date back to the innovations in the theory and practice of poetry influenced by the 'Art for Art's Sake' movement. One of the keystones of the theory is that the beliefs and values adhered to in extra-poetic experience are to be ignored when we enter the autonomous world of poetry. For convenience I shall label this set of views the doctrine of 'aesthetic autonomy'.

The doctrine of 'aesthetic autonomy' rarely takes the form of a consistently argued theoretical position. Rather, it appears as an assorted collection of ideas gathered together under the general assumption that poetry is to be viewed as an end in itself. But the following positions are representative of the most important views. Firstly, there is a particular view of the nature of poetry: a poem is to be a self-enclosed and self-sufficient whole not in imitation of, or making claims upon, an extra-poetic reality; a poem is a sui generis, hermetic, autotelic world or 'object'. Secondly, there is a recommendation of the best approach to poetry: a poem is to be possessed by familiarisation with, and conformation to, the laws established within the confines of the

work; it is to be experienced in its own terms. Thirdly, limits are set upon what the proper interest in poetry as poetry is to be: poetry is to be considered as an end in itself and not as a means to some other end. Fourthly, there is a picture of the correct evaluative attitude towards a poem's literary value: the poem is to be valued (a) according to the 'purely literary qualities' of form, and (b) independently of whether it accords or conflicts with the reader's beliefs, and only by reference to its creation of a coherent, self-consistent and satisfying autonomous 'poetic reality'; the autotelic object is to be valued in its own terms.

Together with the idea that a literary work creates an autonomous poetic world to be experienced and valued in its own terms, the other most important aspect of the doctrine is the shift in meaning that truth and falsity undergo:

We have entered a universe that only answers to its own laws, supports itself, internally coheres, and has a new standard of truth. Information is true if it is accurate. A poem is true if it hangs together.⁹

Truth as 'fittingness', 'rightness' or 'internal consistency', within the confines of the poem replaces the ordinary notion of truth as the appropriate criterion or aesthetic value. An element in a work is 'true' if it is accepted by those who have fully responded to the rest of the work; it is 'false' if it does not complete or accord with the rest of the experience. A poem's truth is said to lie in its maximum internal coherence and self-consistency, and its 'falsity' in

9. E.M.Forster Anonymity (London, 1925). In fact this is only one of many shifts in meaning. Another is truth as authenticity or sincerity. See Abrams (op. cit. note 8) Ch. 11.

a lack of integration and inter-relatedness, or of organic unity and harmony.¹⁰ Since a poem is a world of its own and reference to an external reality is severed, it need only exhibit this kind of 'truth'. The parallel shift in the concepts of 'aesthetic experience' and evaluation leaves the reader free from a concern with the truth or falsity of the author's beliefs. Aesthetic experience becomes contemplation of the alternative poetic reality, and evaluation the assessment of how well the work succeeds according to its laws of poetic excellence.

It is not always clear why the doctrine of aesthetic autonomy should entail that the truth or falsity of an author's beliefs is irrelevant to the literary value of the work expressing them. There appear to be at least three different assumptions. The first maintains that the 'aesthetic object' as an autonomous and autotelic world does not state or imply beliefs offered for our assent: the actual nature of literary works renders the problem of belief redundant.¹¹ The second asserts that since poetry is not the thing said but the way of saying it, poetic or literary value

10. See John Hospers, Meaning and Truth in the Arts (Chapel Hill, 1946), Part 2. The view is a hallmark of New Criticism. Hospers defends the idea that literature is 'true-to' human nature, and 'true-to' what he calls 'essences' of experience i.e. ways of seeing and experiencing reality. Above I defend only the more limited application of truth to the beliefs and values expressed in a work, and leave open the question of in what other senses truth is an aesthetic merit.

11. In fact, there are a variety of reasons here. They include the view that literature creates a fictional or purely imaginary world, that literary discourse consists of pseudo-assertions, and the view that the aesthetic mode of commerce with beliefs is that of dramatic enactment, or the exploration and testing of belief (e.g. by use of persona or 'mask'). The common ground is in the denial that a literary work states the author's beliefs.

lies in the way of saying it: it is in those special 'literary' purposes that the uniquely literary value of the work lies.¹² The assumption here is that since what makes literary works literary works is what (potentially) makes them good of their kind, it is irrelevant to consider poetic value according to the truth of an author's beliefs. The third assumes that to concentrate upon the application of the author's assertions to an extra-poetic reality is to relinquish concern for literary value, and to take up the question of instrumental value: literary value is autonomous from instrumental value, and so from the requirement of truth (in the ordinary sense).¹³

2.31 The 'no truth' theory

Does the doctrine of aesthetic autonomy secure the conclusion that the truth of an author's beliefs is without significance when it comes to estimating literary worth? In assessing its claims I shall concentrate upon three recent views.

12. Oscar Wilde's view that 'There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written' is typical of the 'Art for Art's Sake' emphasis on formal qualities.

13. Two of the opposing views here are 'Autonomism' and 'Moralism' (the terms are taken from R.W. Beardsmore's *Art and Morality* (London, 1971)). The first maintains that there is no connection between literary merit and the ethical views expressed in a work. The second equates the value of art with its use as a means to social welfare (e.g. Tolstoy in his *What is Art?*). The third view is that 'cognitive' and 'aesthetic' value are distinct. It maintains that to take an interest in the truth of an author's point of view is to take an interest in what it can teach us about the world, and that such an (instrumental) interest is incompatible with an aesthetic concern with a work's literary value. See M. Hamburger *The Truth of Poetry* (Pelican, 1972), M.H. Abrams op. cit. note 8, and W.K. Wimsatt 'Poetry and Morals: A Relation Reargued' in his Verbal Icon (Lexington, 1954).

2.311 Imaginary worlds and pure structures of meaning

The first is provided by Arnold Isenberg.¹⁴ Isenberg starts with the assumption that 'the question of the place of belief in the appreciation of poetry leads over into the question of the role of truth as a criterion of aesthetic value'. The question is whether 'the criticism of a poem coincides with the verification of its statements and so, in the end whether beauty depends upon truth'. His answer is that it does not. Therefore, the truth or falsity of an author's point of view is without 'aesthetic' significance. Indeed, Isenberg thinks, the correct position is 'the extreme view that belief and aesthetic experience are mutually irrelevant'. What are his reasons?

In R.K.Elliot's reply to Isenberg, he summarises the position of the 'no truth' theory as follows:

Adoption of the aesthetic point of view involves a concern for meaning only, and therefore the relinquishment of any concern with truth. Verification, the method by which we criticise belief, plays no part in the criticism of poetry...once poetic content has been determined, we disregard the relation to observable fact...aesthetic experience is the contemplation of an imaginary world which is the meaning of a literary work. This imaginary world is the "aesthetic object", and only properties internal to it are relevant to aesthetic judgement. If attention is directed away from the aesthetic object in an attempt to discover its value in its correspondence with something external to it, the aesthetic point of view is thereby abandoned, experience ceases to be aesthetic experience, and any evaluative judgement grounded upon any discovered correspondence (or lack of correspondence) is not an aesthetic judgement.(p.632)¹⁵

14. Op cit. note 4,
15. Op. cit. note 4.

As the summary suggests it is the stipulation about the 'aesthetic experience' of the 'aesthetic object' that underlies Isenberg's view. If 'aesthetic experience' of the 'aesthetic object' is the understanding and contemplation of an autonomous imaginary world conceived of as a pure structure of meaning, then the requirement for truth is irrelevant to aesthetic experience. So 'verification' of an author's beliefs by reference to the reader's own, and aesthetic experience of the work become, by definition, mutually irrelevant. The reason is that contemplation of a structure of meaning or of an imaginary world seems not to involve any consideration of truth.

Isenberg does not say much to elucidate the nature of the 'aesthetic object' and 'aesthetic experience'. Nor does he offer a positive characterisation of the criteria of aesthetic value. But since Isenberg denies the relevance of 'correspondence' we are entitled to assume that they will evaluate how well the work achieves the end of creating an autonomous imaginary or fictional world. What he does explicitly say is that neither the understanding of poetic propositions, nor their evaluation, depends upon believing them to be true. Consequently, truth and falsity in a work figure (at most) as an irritating distraction: 'falsity is not a negative aesthetic value but an accident, like a noise in the theatre, the awareness of which may displace aesthetic values, good, bad, and indifferent.'(p.400)

2.312 Informative discourse

The second view is provided by Stein Haugom Olsen.¹⁶ Olsen's general claim is: 'it is a category mistake to let judgements about the truth of a piece of discourse interfere with one's aesthetic understanding or evaluation of it'. The restriction upon the employment of truth in evaluation includes the irrelevance of the truth or falsity of author's beliefs to the literary value of his work.

Olsen considers the question of truth in the context of the 'theory of literature as a source of knowledge':

a literary work is...a piece of discourse whose essential function is to inform the reader. The literary work must be interpreted as informative; the reader must see it as a piece of verbal action designed to change, reinforce, or supplement his beliefs or the intellectual tools he possesses to deal with the world...literature ultimately aims at knowledge. The theory [of literature as a source of knowledge] tries to establish that the main assumption a reader has to make to interpret an utterance as a literary work is intended to be judged with reference to some standard of truth or falsity. Therefore the set of standards one applies to an utterance considered as a literary work is, at least in part, analogous to those one applies to other fact-stating and informative discourse.(p.5-6)

Olsen takes the theory to offer a defence of the value of literature in terms of the knowledge it makes available. As such it is of the means-ends type: 'Informative discourse is aimed at bringing about certain changes in the world. Literature as informative discourse is the means to certain ends. It is instrumental: not to be valued for itself but for the results it produces.'(p.54). Olsen therefore interprets the idea that literature expresses truths as part of the more

16. Op. cit. Ch. 1 note 19. See esp. Chapter 3.

general idea that the purpose of a literary work is to influence the cognitive dispositions of the reader: the idea that truth is a criterion of aesthetic value and that literature possesses 'cognitive value' are, in Olsen's view, one and the same. The easiest way to understand that theory, suggests Olsen, is to take it as claiming literature to contain or imply true statements. Since truth and falsity are standardly attributed to utterances recognised as intended to inform, the question becomes: does the aesthetic point of view upon a work involve seeing it as 'informative discourse'?

Olsen believes that it does not. The illegitimacy of identifying literature discourse with 'informative discourse' means that it is inappropriate to introduce truth and falsity into one's aesthetic evaluation of a work. Indeed it is meaningless to do so. He says:

literary discourse cannot be interpreted as being intended to inform...judgements about the truth and falsity of literary works are therefore inappropriate and, indeed, meaningless. This thesis should not be taken as a theory about what the single author may intend or reader believe to be intended by a text. The thesis is the logical one that interpreting something as a literary work necessarily excludes a simultaneous interpretation of the same piece of discourse as informative. Literary discourse and informative discourse are two mutually exclusive classes...It is possible to change one's point of view from an aesthetic one to one where the piece of discourse is seen as informative...What is impossible is to see the informative function as being part of the literary function. It is a category mistake to let judgements about the truth of a piece of discourse interfere with one's aesthetic understanding or evaluation of it. (p.58)

His reasons are as follows. In the first place he believes

that the criteria necessary to establish the status of a piece of discourse as 'informative' are missing. I shall return to this argument later. The related argument is this: the only circumstances under which truth and falsity could be criteria of aesthetic value are if literary discourse can be taken, from the aesthetic point of view, to be 'informative'. Since literary discourse is not understood and aimed to influence the reader's cognitive dispositions we have, Olsen believes, established that truth and falsity are irrelevant to a work's literary merit. In other words we have shown, the argument contends, that agreement or disagreement with a work's vision is irrelevant to a non-instrumental interest in the work, (that is, an interest other than a means-end interest in cognitive value).

The second set of reasons centre upon the nature of the 'aesthetic object' and the 'aesthetic interest' in it. Part of the argument turns upon the alleged difficulty in identifying anything in literary discourse to which truth and falsity can (or should) be attributed. It concentrates upon the use of language in literature. The question Olsen asks here is: assuming the aesthetic point of view, how are literary uses of language understood to operate? In particular, does literature seen from the aesthetic point of view present the reader with true or false statements?

Olsen divides sentences in literature which ostensibly make statements into two classes, 'reports' and 'reflections'. 'Reports' are sentences referring to situations, events,

characters, and places. 'Reflections' make statements of a more general nature. They express reflections upon the things referred to by the 'reports', generalising the significance of the observed details or in some other way passing judgement upon them. If the reflections are expressed in sentences in the work they are 'direct'; if the reader is left to infer what claim the work implies about the world they are 'indirect'. Both 'reports' and 'reflections' would aim, if interpreted as informative, to say something true about the world.

Olsen immediately dismisses 'reports' saying that they are interpreted as fictional, and as such understood not to make truth-claims. That leaves us with 'reflections'. The question here is: does the aesthetic point of view upon literary 'reflections' see them as general statements, and does it consider their truth or falsity to be of significance in determining the literary merits of the work? Olsen thinks not. His evidence is that one does not find, either within the works or in critical commentary, 'discussion comments' arguing for or against the truth of the reflections. He says:

...reflections, if seen as general statements (i.e. as informative) would be controversial. But there is no controversy about the truth of reflections in literary debate. Therefore these reflections cannot be considered to be informative by the readers who interpret the text in which they occur as a literary work.(p.72)

Olsen concludes that the truth or falsity of the view, meaning, or vision of the work is unimportant to aesthetic evaluation: the correctness of poetic propositions is without

significance from the 'aesthetic point of view'.

The second argument aims to support this conclusion by showing that consideration of the truth or falsity of 'reports' and 'reflections' would lead to inappropriate judgements of literary merit. He cites Tom Jones and Hamlet as representative examples of works where he believes that the high esteem in which they are held is independent of the truth or falsity of any poetic proposition they may propound. He then goes on to say:

If one accepts that reports and direct and indirect reflections (or at least some of these) present truth claims, one would have on one's hands a series of consequences unacceptable for evaluation. The cosmology of Dante may be considered disastrously false by the reader, but though this may impair his actual enjoyment of the works and his ability to think clearly about them (just as traffic noise may prevent one from concentrating properly on a poem or in the theatre), it need not (and should not) influence his evaluation. Ptolemy's cosmological theory may date in the way that all real truths always do, but literary works do not date in this way.(p.75)

The moral to be drawn is that truth is never a criterion of aesthetic value. Olsen concludes:

As long as an interpretation reveals certain qualities like complexity, coherence, unity etc. in a work, it is possible to agree on its value while continuing to disagree about...what truth-claims it makes. This must not be taken to mean that the quality of the content is irrelevant to evaluation. The content must not be trivial but must involve 'central human concerns'...The presence of a non-trivial content and its treatment in a complex, coherent and unified way are all prerequisites for giving a work high marks. But this does not mean that considerations about truth enter into evaluation. The categories of the true and the non-trivial are not identical.(p.75)

To fully understand Olsen's reasons for rejecting the view that literary judgements may be influenced by a work's pres-

entation of a false point of view we need to look at what he believes to be the correct interpretation of the 'aesthetic point of view' upon the 'aesthetic object'. As we have seen Olsen defines informative discourse as the use of language to make claims upon the world entered with the intention to change, supplement or reinforce the reader's beliefs, and intellectual tools. In contrast literary discourse is defined as the use of language in the creation of an 'aesthetic object' with the 'aesthetic intention' to produce an 'aesthetic response' in the reader. The 'aesthetic response' and 'aesthetic object' are of a special kind. In Olsen's view a literary text, like other texts, is a 'linguistic fact', but becomes a work of art, an 'aesthetic object', in and through an 'interpretation' of the kind sanctioned by the literary institution. The interpretation assigns an artistic significance or purpose to the elements of the text. To interpret a text as a literary work is to assign to it a specific intention. Criteria of evaluation assess how well it achieves its intended goal.

Olsen believes that the aesthetic intention in producing an aesthetic object is to create a 'unit of inter-related and meaningful elements susceptible of interpretation'(p.188). His summary of the concept of a literary work is: a text seen as a literary work is 'a molecular structure of meaningful or artistically significant elements, constituted as such a unit by the reader's assumption that the producer's intention was that it should be so construed'(p.164). Since the aesthetic

intention is to secure that goal, in Olsen's view a literary work is good of its kind if it is amenable to interpretation. Evaluative terms, therefore, should characterise how far an element contributes towards or frustrates the possibility of giving an interpretation (pp.161,188). The appropriate criteria, Olsen suggests, are preciseness or vagueness (meaning or significance of elements), coherence or incoherence (connectedness or integration of elements), congruity or incongruity (clash between elements), relevance or irrelevance, complexity (richness of meaning), and interest or triviality. In other words a literary work secures aesthetic merit if it creates a precise, coherent, congruent, integrated, meaningful, interesting 'aesthetic object'.

So the effect of Olsen's theory of the nature of the 'aesthetic point of view' and of the 'aesthetic object' is that it proposes what are to be taken as aesthetic properties, and consequently delimits the location of aesthetic value. The criteria point to the 'good-making features' of literature - those properties making a text a molecular structure of meaningful or artistically significant elements. As noted, the theory entails that literature seen as literature cannot be true to reality (p.159). Literature is not 'serious' i.e. it is fiction and does not make claims to truth or in other ways enter into the goal-directed normal functions of language (p.165). Therefore, taking up the aesthetic attitude towards a text logically requires ignoring the truth or falsity of the author's beliefs. From the

aesthetic point of view, any 'informative' function the text serves is irrelevant. Where the text does in fact inform about life, just as it is no part of the artistic aim or intention to tell or inform, so it is no concern for the reader of literature, but only for historian, sociologist, or linguist (p.78).

2.313 Pretence and the aesthetic mode of commerce with propositions

The third view is similar in certain respects to Olsen's. It is provided by Monroe Beardsley. Beardsley ends his analysis with the following observation:

Of course literary works cannot be understood apart from their language, of course they have social roots and fruits; of course their enjoyment requires in the reader an elaborate set of previous adjustments in belief and feeling: of course the themes and theses of literary works are taken from, or contributed to, the whole life of man. But what makes literature literature, in part, must be some withdrawal from the world about it, an usual degree of self-containedness and self-sufficiency that makes it capable of being contemplated with satisfaction in itself. And the secret of this detachment seems to lie in its capacity to play with, and to swallow up in its designs, all the vast array of human experiences, including beliefs, without that personal allegiance and behavioural commitment that constitutes assertion in the fullest sense.(p.436-7)¹⁷

In Beardsley's view the criteria of literary value (as opposed to 'cognitive' and 'moral' value) are 'unity', 'comp-

17. Monroe.C.Beardsley Aesthetics. Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism (New York, 1958). He develops his theory of literature as pretence of assertion in The Possibility of Criticism (Detroit, 1970). He says 'The so-called poetic use of language is not a real use but a make-believe use...the writing of a fictional character performing a fictional illocutionary act'(p.59). John Searle in 'The Logical status of Fictional Discourse', New Literary History, Vol 6. also offers a version of the pretence view. Beardsley's view is well criticised by Colin Lyas 'The Relevance of the Author's Sincerity' in Philosophy and Fiction (ed.) Peter Lamarque (Aberdeed Universtiy Press, 1983). Olsen's view is similar

lexity', and 'intensity'. An author's 'thesis' (the general doctrine or view of the world incorporated into the work) is something which can be 'contained' in a literary work, can be true or false, may be believed by the author, and may be acceptable or unacceptable to a reader. However, in judging a thesis from 'the literary point of view', its presence is only relevant to the degree that it contributes towards or detracts from the work's 'unity', 'complexity', and 'intensity'. The truth or acceptability of a work's thesis cannot affect a work's literary value. Beardsley seems to rely upon two grounds to justify the exclusion of truth. The first is that the contribution a thesis makes towards a work's 'unity', 'complexity' and 'intensity' is (it seems) independent of its truth. The second is that the thesis is not asserted:

If we can allow a writer to pretend to be Dr. Watson or Porphyria's lover, then we can allow him to pretend to be a Roman Catholic or a Nietzschean or a Communist. Thus even the Reflective predications [i.e. the beliefs of the dramatic speaker making up the work's thesis] of a literary work are unasserted; they are part of the story, in a broad sense, or part of the act. (p.422)

I think Beardsley also wants to say that 'cognitive' and 'aesthetic' value are distinct, and that truth is restricted to the cognitive value of a work. He certainly implies this in a number of places (e.g. he associates the ideas that a thesis is asserted, a work conveys information and can teach us something, and that it can be true or false) and titles

to the New Criticism conception of the work as a 'well-wrought urn', or independent poetic structure, the literary merit of which lies not in truth or agreement with our beliefs and knowledge, but rather in well-wroughtness.

the view that does assert a connection between truth and literary value 'The Didactic Theory', saying that it confuses 'cognitive' and 'aesthetic' value.

A point of Isenberg's which I did not mention earlier summarises the view which I think both Olsen and Beardsley want to endorse. He says that 'the idea of an assertion is not the assertion of an idea; and it may well be that in poetry it is the idea - the bracketed, fictive "assertion" - that matters'(p.405). The tone of a 'literary assertion' does not necessarily imply that a real assertion is being made, and the genuine centre of interest, from the aesthetic point of view, does not lie in its truth. Rather, the ideas and doctrines of a literary work are to be 'enjoyed simply as contents'. What matters is not their truth or falsity but their inherent interest or triviality (p.402). The aesthetic point of view upon these things is therefore contemplative; the views are savoured rather than evaluated according to truth. This, Isenberg says, is the difference between the philosophical reception of, for example, the Protagoras, and the 'aesthetic mode of commerce' with the arguments of Settembrini and Naphta in The Magic Mountain. The philosophical reception of the propositions asserted in the Protagoras is a concern with their truth. However, only the 'aesthetic mode of commerce' with 'asserted' poetic propositions is fitting and proper.

2.32 Cognitive value and the aesthetic object

There are two aspects to views of this kind which are of particular significance for the problem of belief. The first is the assumed connection between an interest in the truth or falsity of a literary work's point of view, and the interpretation of a literary utterance as informative i.e. as intended to influence the cognitive dispositions of the reader by the truths it yields. The second is the related assumption about the nature of the aesthetic object - in Olsen's account 'a molecular structure of meaningful or artistically significant elements', in Beardsley's a unified, complex, and 'regionally intense' self-sufficient object, and in Isenberg 'a pure structure of meaning'. The significance of these definitions of the 'aesthetic object' is that they feature as a means of establishing the inappropriateness and irrelevance of truth and falsity as a criterion of aesthetic value. They all conceive of the 'aesthetic object' in such a way as to exclude 'aesthetic' reference to uses of language which imply or state the author's point of view upon the aspects of life or the world with which he is ostensibly concerned.

Before I deal with the assumption about cognitive value, there is a minor matter to be settled. Olsen argues that the criteria necessary to establish that a piece of discourse is 'informative' - and so amenable to assessment in terms of truth of beliefs - are missing. The criteria are, firstly, the existence of a dialectical process of debate consisting

of 'discussion comments' i.e. the offering of reasoned support in defence of the truth of a statement, or of a reasoned rejection of it. And secondly a background practice defining the relevance and nature of the concept of truth and method of verification for that type of discourse.

The argument is unconvincing. If there is a lack of 'discussion comments' in criticism that need not show that the truth or falsity of an author's point of view is irrelevant for the purposes of literary evaluation. It might well point to the fact that the purpose of literary criticism is primarily to offer a particular reading of a work which the reader can then test for himself. A lack of debate could equally well reflect a consensus that truth is (sometimes) a relevant consideration. Recall Eliot's testimony that he finds the truth of Dante's theology is a positive merit in the poem, and the falsity of Keat's line a defect. As we shall see below Leavis is another critic who thinks that the acceptability of an author's point of view is important.

Secondly, I see no reason why there must be some particular distinct practice providing a special notion of truth and verification for that discourse. It's clear Eliot intends to use the terms 'truth' and 'falsity' in a perfectly ordinary sense (e.g. the sense used to evaluate the views expressed in non-literary texts). And if verification is the appropriate notion here then it seems Eliot could verify his judgement in a straightforward manner, for example by testing Dante's views against his own convictions. Is it not only appropriate

but also meaningless, as Olsen contends, to let judgements of truth influence one's appreciation of a literary work? Surely not. If criticism existed in a vacuum, and if literature did not contain or imply views about the world then perhaps it might be. However, that is not the case. The further point which I shall develop shortly is that the issue of whether literature is informative discourse in Olsen's sense does not settle the issue at stake in the problem of belief.

To return to the main issue, does the distinction between cognitive and aesthetic value entail that the truth of an author's point of view is irrelevant to a work's aesthetic merit? Or, to express the question in Olsen's terms, is it a mistake to assess literary discourse in terms appropriate to informative discourse? In order for the question to have any bite we must first of all assume, as Olsen does, that an interest in a literary work's cognitive value is an interest in its instrumental value. And secondly we must take it that to estimate a literary work's merits in ways appropriate to informative discourse is to assess its instrumental rewards. Further we must assume that the only situations in which the truth of a discourse is felt to be important are where we have a 'means-end' type of interest in it. If each assumption is legitimate then it would follow that the truth or falsity of an author's point of view is not pertinent to the question of the literary value of his work. The reason is that the theory of literature as a source of knowledge cannot, as Olsen presents it, be an account of literary value. As I

argued in the last chapter a theory that locates the value of a text in the results it produces and not in the intrinsic value of the experience it provides is inadequate. So if the relevance of truth depends upon assessment of cognitive value, truth is not a criterion of aesthetic value.

The question to ask is therefore: is an interest in truth to be identified with a means-end type of interest? Are the only circumstances in which a reader could praise the truth or object to the falsity of an author's view of the world ones where he is interested in the instrumental value and not the intrinsic value of the experience of the work expressing it? I believe not. Rather, the intrinsic value of an experience can depend upon the truth or falsity of what is experienced. Therefore, a reader need not be committed to the view that the value of a literary text lies in its efficacy as a means to some valued end (e.g. the 'cognitive value' of having a positive effect upon his beliefs and 'intellectual tools'), in order to claim truth and falsity to be criteria of aesthetic value. That is, in doing so he need not be committing the category mistake of assigning a literary value on the grounds of instrumental benefit. He may instead be expressing an aesthetic or literary concern; and he will be if he thinks the truth or falsity of some aspect of a work affects the intrinsic value of the experience it provides. That is sufficient, other things being equal, to establish the 'aesthetic relevance' of truth. For example, if a reader faults The Divine Comedy for its false cosmology or theology

he need not be objecting to its falsity on the grounds that it renders the work useless as a means to discovering physical, moral, or religious realities or to improving his cognitive disposition. He may instead think that it detrimentally affects the intrinsic value of the experience and poem. He need not in principle be making a mistake about the literary value of the poem.

2.33 Literary and informative discourse

What about Olsen's contentions about literary and informative discourse, and the related ideas about the nature of the aesthetic point of view upon the aesthetic object? We recall that his main contention here is that literary and informative discourse are distinct. He says 'it is no part of the aesthetic intention to inform', and therefore the truth and falsity of an author's point of view is irrelevant from the aesthetic point of view.

The Divine Comedy is an example of a work which is intended to be informative in the fullest sense: Dante intended to assert truths (eternal ones and ones about his contemporary world), and, by informing his reader's about the truth, to bring about a change in their attitudes and the way they lived. He did not pretend to assert them, and he did not intend his readers to concern themselves with meaning only or with complexity, coherence, interest etc. alone but also with the truth of what he set forth. This presents the first difficulty in Olsen's view of literary and informative discourse.

Whether seeing and evaluating literary discourse as 'informative discourse' is incompatible with the 'aesthetic point of view' depends upon how one understands both notions. What we require is a defensible interpretation that can provide reasons why seeing literary uses of language as intended to 'inform' involves some violation of the 'aesthetic approach' to literature. Otherwise one simply begs the question about truth by assuming that an aesthetic interest is necessarily incompatible with an interest in truth. I have already rejected one ground, namely assimilation of interest in truth to an interest in cognitive value. A second and related reason is that the dichotomy of informative discourse and literary discourse is illegitimate on at least one level. It is incorrect to suppose: either language is used to express claims (beliefs) and so invoke a means-end type of consideration; or it serves some artistic purpose logically incompatible with making truth claims, and so is evaluated in terms of the autotelic end of creating an autonomous aesthetic object.¹⁸ Just as we must distinguish between a reader's int-

18. Both of the assumptions I have attributed to Olsen are shared by the equivocal doctrine of 'Automism'. They are expressed by Baudelaire (one of the first advocates of 'Art for Art's Sake') in the following remark: 'Death or deposition would be the penalty if poetry were to be assimilated to science and morality; the object of poetry is not Truth, the object of Poetry is poetry itself.' It is echoed in Wilde's preface to *The Picture of Dorian Grey*: 'The moral life of man forms part of the ~~subject-matter of the artist~~, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium. No artist desires to prove anything...No artist has ethical sympathies. All art is quite useless'. The associated idea is that literature creates its own reality and does not imitate a pre-existing world: literary language creates a world and does not make claims about extra-poetic reality. Historically the doctrine must be understood as a reaction against the intrusions upon the arts by the demand for truth and morality as a condition of art's utility. But philosophically it betrays a confusion between the nature and the function of literature. The denial that literature's function is to foster social well-being is assimilated to the denial that (as literature) its nature is to express the true and the good etc. Thus in rejecting the idea that literary value lies in didactic success, the aut-

erest in truth and a cognitive interest, we must distinguish between an author's didactic interest and success in setting forth truths and 'literary' intention and success.

The point is this. An author's avowed intention in making claims about the world beyond the work may be to influence his reader's beliefs and actions, and a reader may be aware that the use to which he puts language in his work is with this end in mind. However, it does not follow from the fact that literary success and didactic success are distinct that a reader must ignore the claims that he recognises the work to make about the world in determining the work's literary merit. Once he has given up the 'didactic point of view' and adopted the 'aesthetic point of view' he need not, as a result, deliberately ignore the acceptability of the author's viewpoint. There is no reason why the 'thesis' he was prepared to accept was endorsed in the work when seen as a 'didactic work' should now be seen as unasserted, as merely 'part of the act'.

Of course the reader must understand the conventions of literature employed in the particular work. One typical convention is that in literary works declarative sentences of the kind Olsen calls 'reports' do not make truth claims. Here a reader would be making a mistake if he objected to their

onomists also reject the view that evaluative terms (including truth) assessing the moral (and other) dimensions of a work's point of view can be criteria of literary merit. (Hence the debate over whether beauty depends upon truth and goodness). The point I have stressed above - though it is true that literary merit is independent of didactic success a work's falsity may still be a flaw - applies equally to the view of these 'Autonomists'.

falsity. Equally literature is obviously not written in the same way as philosophy, history, science and other types of 'informative discourse', and literary evaluation cannot be reduced to the evaluative considerations relevant to them. However, it would be wrong to conclude that literary discourse is in no sense informative. Nor, where there are claims made by the work, that the 'informative' function properly understood is not to be taken into account in considering the work's merits. Some uses of sentences in literary works do invite consideration in terms of truth, and their truth and falsity may be very important to the merits of the work.

The position we have reached is that conceptions of the 'aesthetic object' which exclude reference to uses of language implying or stating the author's point of view upon life or the aspects of the world with which he is concerned, cannot be justified by a distinction between the literary intention and point of view, and didactic intention and success. I have also questioned the distinction between literary and informative uses of language, and suggested that where a work is understood to make claims about the world the acceptability of those claims can be directly relevant to the question of literary value. Clearly, not all literary works are amenable to assessment in terms of truth. But there is no reason to suppose that a text seen as a literary work cannot logically be of that kind. And if it is, the idea that the aesthetic point of view cannot take into account the acceptability or otherwise of the work's 'vision' seems to have no

adequate foundation. Is there any other reason why the aesthetic point of view upon literary works should logically exclude reference to the beliefs and values expressed? Can we not conclude that falsity may handicap a work, and truth be a positive feature of a work's literary merit?

Isenberg argues that we must restrict attention to properties internal to the aesthetic object, and that to attempt to discover its value by verifying a correspondence with something external to it is to give up the aesthetic point of view upon the work's merits. But why is an evaluative judgement grounded in a discovered correspondence (or lack of it) not an aesthetic judgement? I have already rejected arguments against seeing the truth of the author's point of view as a 'property' internal to the aesthetic object. If that is so, I see no reason why verification by reference to an 'external correspondence' with one's own beliefs and values must involve giving up aesthetic considerations. And I see no reason why a judgement grounded in correspondence between author's and reader's beliefs and values cannot be a perfectly legitimate aesthetic judgement.

Beardsley and Olsen also rely upon the notion of properties internal to the aesthetic object, properties which, I have argued, exclude truth and falsity only by stipulation. They offer 'formalist' definitions of the aesthetic object in the sense that they see the main function of the content of a literary work, so far as aesthetic merit is concerned, to lie in its contribution to some other structural or quasi-

structural feature such as unity. What reason do they have for this? I think it has to do with the thought that what distinguishes literature from other kinds of text, when seen from the 'aesthetic point of view', is what makes it good of its kind. The idea would be that a historical work, say, can be good of its kind provided that it is accurate even though it may lack those features which make for literary merit: the 'goal' of a historical text seen as 'informative discourse' is largely independent of fulfilling the criteria of literary excellence. I shall return to this argument later. For now the point I would stress is that in order for the parallel argument to go through concerning literary works we need a definition of what it is that makes a text a literary text, or of the 'literary goal', which justifies excluding truth as one among the criteria of literary merit. So far I have not discovered any reason to accept the stipulation.

There remains the related ideas about criteria of literary success. The first was that taking up the aesthetic point of view requires assessing aesthetic merit only according to the creation of a perspicuous, coherent, internally consistent, interesting etc. autonomous aesthetic object. The second was that the 'aesthetic mode of commerce' with literature should concern itself with meaning and not truth. However, it is not obvious that criteria of evaluation must be restricted in this way. First of all the onus of proof lies with the theorists, since (as Olsen acknowledges) readers and critics do in fact think truth is relevant. Secondly, provided that a read-

er is concerned with intrinsic value, assessment according to truth need not involve a category mistake. Thirdly, I have claimed that literary uses of language may invoke the question of truth. Fourthly, the restriction seems to be arbitrary. If, as Olsen, Isenberg and Beardsley say, a thesis can inform the structure of a work, and can contribute to its aesthetic value by providing unity, coherence etc why can't its truth or acceptability do likewise? If the presence of a 'thesis' is pertinent to the question of literary merit then 'properties' of that thesis such as truth are. A fifth point is that it is perfectly possible to imagine that a work that would be judged successful according to the recommended criteria could lack literary value precisely because it either had nothing much to say or because it endorsed a childish, feeble, morally abhorrent, and intellectually indefensible view of life. To put the point another way, one might doubt whether the criteria could separate a competent thriller from a great work of literature. The missing criteria seem to be those that relate to the quality of the work's point of view. Together the points represent reasons to reject the idea that once one takes up the aesthetic point of view upon the aesthetic object one cannot construe a literary work as expressing beliefs the falsity of which provides legitimate grounds for devaluing the work.

2.4 The literary expression of beliefs and values

An important feature of views of the kind I have been considering is that they tend to obscure the many different ways in which language is used to make claims beyond the world established by the work. One or two types of literary utterance are taken to be paradigmatic and generalisations are made from that. If literary uses of language could be divided up in one or other of the ways proposed - as either only emotive uses of language (as Richards supposes), or as involving only the pretence of assertion (as Beardsley believes, and Olsen implies), or as functioning to create a pure structure of meaning, a purely fictional world, or autonomous 'poetic reality' (as Isenberg and advocates of 'Poetry of Poetry's Sake' tend to assume) - then the problem of belief might be rendered redundant. If literary uses of language are never used to express the author's beliefs and values - if his work neither explicitly nor implicitly endorses a particular scheme of beliefs or values - then it would be futile to pursue the question of literary value in the direction of the validity of an author's point of view. However, these accounts fail to do justice to the great diversity of literary uses of language. As a result they neglect the ways in which literature involves our beliefs and values, and so invokes the problem of belief. In the next section I hope to substantiate this claim, and to provide a clearer focus upon the problem as it actually features in literary experience.

What is required is a consideration of the further uses of language, and the interpretative and evaluative tasks they introduce. In order to secure a greater conviction in the conclusion of the last section - if an author intends to express certain beliefs and values, and if the intention is clearly revealed in his mode of handling language, then it is not wrong to take them into consideration in judging the work's literary merit - I shall now turn to the problem as it is presented by the individual work.

2.41 Literary discourse and the 'implied author'

The glory of Him who moves all things
penetrates the universe, and shines back
in one part more and less elsewhere.
In the heaven that receives most of His high light
I have been, and seen things that, to tell again,
he that descends from there
neither knows how nor can.
The Paradiso, 1 (1-3).

These lines are uttered by the narrator of a journey, of which he has been the central protagonist. That journey has been through Hell and Purgatory, and concludes with the protagonist face to face with God in the Empyrean, the heaven at the centre of the universe. The author is Dante, the protagonist and narrator the 'Dante' whom Dante creates. The protagonist has not been literally on any such journey, but allegorically the author has. In The Divine Comedy Dante sets himself the task of expressing the truth revealed to him in his visionary journey: everything owes its existence to God as the creator of the universe, and the human being as crea-

ture of God reaches its true being in the unity of its will with the Will of God.

Taken literally the subject of The Divine Comedy is 'the state of the soul after death straightforwardly affirmed'. The story is literally true in representing the existence and various states of the soul after death, according to its acceptance or rejection of God in its earthly life. Allegorically, it symbolises, amongst other things, 'Man, as by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of his free choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing Justice'. The real environment allegorically represented is the human soul, and it is there that all the events take place. But The Divine Comedy is not the standard form of allegory. Whilst typical allegory is exhausted in the personification of inner states, and the provision of an exciting and colourful tale of adventure, the events and scenes of which are presented without pretence to fact, the setting of The Divine Comedy is not a purely fictitious 'reality', and its adventure involves many things which are to be taken as fact. Thus, whilst the reader must draw the kinds of inferences typically required of allegorical writing, he must also pay attention to presented fact.

The protagonist's guides are 'Virgil', 'Beatrice' and 'Saint Bernard'. During the journey 'Dante' meets other historical persons, characters and creatures from literature (e.g. Ulysses) and myth (Furies). He travels through a world partly of his own imaginative conception (e.g. the geography

of Hell, Purgatory and the Earthly Paradise), and partly of fact to Dante (e.g. the circles of the heavens). Though the geography is not intended as a bald statement of material fact, it is set in a real environment.

During the journey the guides and persons he meets (mostly historical and recognised 'experts') discourse upon various topics of physics, biology, philosophy, theology, politics (e.g. contemporary Florentine politics, the Church and Empire) etc. expounding philosophies which Dante believed to be true. The passages are didactic in form and content: they are versified statements of plain theological or scientific fact, expressed in direct speech without figure, with the intention to inform. Towards the end of the journey the protagonist declares in his own voice his conviction: 'I believe in one God/single and eternal, who moves the whole heaven-/himself not moved-with love and desire.'

The truths are not only expounded in dialogue but enacted in the setting (e.g. the levels of Hell and Purgatory, the earthly Paradise, heavenly bodies with its intellectual hierarchy and the Emporium), Christian symbol and pagan myth, symbolic scenes (e.g. the mystical procession), and the emblematic lives of historical individuals. In his emotional and intellectual responses the protagonist himself enacts various morals (e.g. the journey from lack of human understanding, through the limits of human understanding to the ultimate truth only available in divine revelation and incomprehensible to human reason). The truths are all received

through the protagonist's consciousness, which acts as a mediator between ourselves and the substance of the poem. 'Dante' here is, as it were, ourselves, experiencing the Universe in recognisably human terms.

In the lines quoted the narrator declares the truth of the Universe as Dante conceived it: a Neoplatonic Universe centred upon the Christian God who exists outside space and time, and who is, through the mediation of the angels, responsible for all that occurs in existence. This is followed by a declaration of a truth within the fiction (viz. that the protagonist has been on the journey) which, outside the fiction, is literally false (a living human being cannot take the physical journey related) but metaphorically true. The last lines express a repeated claim made in narrative voice about the limits inherent in language, and the inability to express the truth through reason's limits in comprehension. Here 'Dante' and Dante coincide, as they did in the opening lines. To understand the lines fully we are required to pay careful attention to the different logical status of each utterance, to appreciate what the poet intends in using the sentences (a sentence may serve a number of artistic purposes), and to place them in the wider context of the unfolding drama.

The guiding principle, then, determining the substance of The Divine Comedy is the examination of the relationship between God and His creation. In the poem Dante dramatically renders his beliefs about the reality of God. The difficulty in calling The Divine Comedy the creation of a purely

fictional world, a pure structure of meaning, or an autonomous poetic reality, cut off from and not in imitation of the actual world, is obvious. The poem is explicitly concerned to set forth the truth, and Dante is everywhere concerned with facts. The historical, political, moral, religious, psychological, cosmological etc. truths such as Dante conceived them form part of the substance of the poem itself. These facts are expressed in many different ways: by presenting directly in verse statements and abstract arguments making truth claims; by use of symbolic historical persons and events intended to 'show' or 'symbolise', rather than state claims about the things represented; by dramatic enactment in the experience of protagonist and character; by description of setting etc.

The first point emerging from the literary uses of language in The Divine Comedy is that in order for a work to express its author's beliefs and values, it need not directly state its message in some sort of propositional form. (Orwell's Animal Farm and Swift's Gullivers Travels are obvious examples). In The Divine Comedy one method employed is direct statement by character and protagonist, but the others may fairly be said to be representative of the other most important means used in literature. Here a minimum condition imposed upon a reader of 'fiction' is that he be able to plot the matrix of belief and value implied, but not necessarily stated, in the work. The related point is this. To approach the problem of belief as though the only way in which it

could arise is through finding and isolating a particular statement directly asserted in the work and readily assessable as true or false, reflects an impoverished conception of it. The main criticism of such a view is that it assimilates truth to the truth-value of an assertion, and reduces the problem of belief to the question of the correspondence between an overt assertion and the state of affairs asserted to obtain. As the experience of The Divine Comedy and many other works show this picture of the aesthetic relevance of truth hardly does justice to the way in which works of literature can contain truth and falsity, or to the ways in which our interaction with literary language leads us to experience it in those terms. If we are to do justice to the problem of belief we must dissociate truth from the domain of assertion and truth-functions.¹⁹

The second point is that the pertinent beliefs are, to use a phrase from Wayne Booth, those of the 'implied author'. Booth introduces the term to call attention to the fact that a literary work is:

the product of a choosing, evaluating person rather than as a self-existing thing. The "implied author" chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man...it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be his reader will invariably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner - and of course that

19. See R.W.Hepburn's 'Poetry and "Concrete Imagination": Problems of Truth and Illusion' in his "Wonder" and Other Essays (Edinburgh, 1984). Hepburn's essay is one of the best treatments of literary devices and the role of truth I know. Hepburn examines the interesting case of works of literature that make philosophical or metaphysical claims by means of images or imaginative descriptions ("concrete imagination") which point beyond themselves to general features of the world (e.g. Sartre's image of the 'viscous').

official scribe will never be neutral towards all values. Our reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work.(pp.71,74)²⁰

It is therefore part of the imaginative project in reading works of literature to discover 'the core of norms and choices' Booth calls the 'implied author': 'the reader needs to know where, in the world of values, he stands - that is, to know where the author wants him to stand', for 'all authors inevitably take sides'. Just as the author is not indifferent to making it clear where that is, he is not indifferent about the reader's attitude towards the position.

The 'implied author' is all that is revealed by the total form which is the work. He is, as Colin Lyas puts it, the 'controlling intelligence whose attitudes and judgements as revealed to us by the response to the world of the work just is the work'.²¹ Even in the novel, where the idea of pretence in creation of a fictional world is most fitting, the controlling intelligence is an integral part of the work. For example, what is imaginatively presented to us is the 'fictional world' (conveyed to us in a series of pseudo-assertions which are like imitations of real assertions), but there may be a valuational response to the pretended world, which is itself not a pretended response:

Although what is imitated is not real, imitation is a real act and as such open to the kinds of personalistic appraisals that all acts are open to. In particular imitation is often undertaken for a purpose. The artist wishes, through the creation of a fictionalised world,

20. Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961, 2nd edn, 1983). Booth provides an excellent treatment of the novelist's 'rhetoric' in securing acquiescence in the beliefs and values informing his novel.

21. op.cit. note 17.

presented to us in imitations of real assertions, to articulate a response to that world or to make a comment through it (as Orwell does in Animal Farm). To judge that response is to judge the author, and his response to the fiction is not a fictional response. (p.29)

All the features introduced with the presence of the author-in-the-work would require consideration in a complete evaluation of the work. In relation to beliefs and values, it is those informing the substance of the work which are relevant. Whether or not the author actually holds the beliefs endorsed as part of the implied author's point of view in the work, the beliefs manifested there are important for the question of the work's literary merit. There is no reason why the 'aesthetic point of view' upon the work's 'ideal self' must treat the beliefs and values he expresses as fictions.

Some works of literature do not involve an implied author who endorses a particular set of beliefs and values, and of those that do, a significant dimension of reaching an understanding of them is establishing if an utterance is qualified in some way by the immediate or overall context, or may be taken as indicative of the implied author's view. In order to establish the status the work assigns to an utterance the reader must take into account who utters the words, with what tone, and to whom, and with what they are to be juxtaposed. He must be sensitive to the differing logical status of the sentences in the kinds of ways indicated in the verse from The Divine Comedy. In narrative poetry and the novel he has to consider the matrix of character, narrator, and implied author; in non-narrative literature, character

and implied author; in first personal or lyric poetry, the dramatic speaker and implied author. The requirement is to discover whether character, narrator, or lyric 'I' speaks for the implied author, or whether there is a distance such that it is to be adjusted according to the work's view, and is not unqualifiedly endorsed as expressing the work's 'vision'. Character, narrator, and lyric 'I' may or may not be reliable indicators of what is put forward for the reader's assent. But once the point of view of the work has been isolated the question of how it affects the intrinsic value of the experience is very much part of the 'aesthetic' concern with the 'aesthetic object'.

2.42 Poetry, drama, and the novel

Eliot's examples provide a convenient illustration of the kinds of consideration relevant in evaluation. The line 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' is not an asserted proposition which the reader is offered with unqualified endorsement. Its logic is peculiar. The poem takes the form of a dramatic speaker's reflections upon a Grecian Urn, and the line expresses a thought which the speaker attributes to the urn. The line expresses what Keats imagines the urn has to say to him:

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The poem gives no indication that the reader is to take a critical attitude towards the complete reflection of the dramatic speaker. He may be identified with the implied author. But the reader is expected to be wary of the particular reflection 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', as the tone of this and earlier verses, together with the other reflections, make clear. The line is qualified by a context which shows that the proposition expressed is incomplete from the perspective of the speaker's fuller understanding. From the viewpoint of the poem, to accept it as an authoritative utterance of truth would be incorrect. To reach a decision over the poem's literary value the reader must consider that complete viewpoint. So it would be an evaluative error to object to the line as false - it is not presented as the truth. There may be other reasons to object to it, but as it occurs in the poem its falsity need not be.

In the narrower sense the poem does not raise the problem of belief: it does not expound a doctrinal position which the reader is asked to accept. The poem does address enduring themes of literature - love, mutability, art - but not in a manner which provokes the question of the acceptability of a doctrinal position. However, like many 'poetic propositions' it is part of a dramatically enacted experience on a particular occasion, and the particular experience is constitutive of a point of view. That point of view is reflective, though it does not state a philosophy. It is informed by beliefs and

perceptions concerning art and life expressing the speaker's attitude towards them, and it is figured by sentiment. I think that many people admire the poem because they find the point of view Keats develops in the poem to be credible. If it were not - if, for example, Keat's had created an implied author who expressed a view that was childish, puerile, incoherent, or in conflict with the facts of experience - the poem would not be counted the same success. So the quality of thought and sentiment are, it would seem, required to be of a kind which admits sympathy for or acquiescence in the attitude which the poem evolves. In that way it does raise the wider problem of belief: in determining a work's literary merit, what place is to be assigned to sympathy or antipathy towards the viewpoint expressed in the poem?

An example of a poem informed by a doctrinal position, though not one that states its doctrine in propositional form or argument, is Donne's 'Sonnet':

At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of soules, and to your scatterd bodies goe
All whom warre, dearth, age, argue, tyrannies,
Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes,
Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe.
But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,
For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,
When wee are there: here on this lowly ground,
Teach mee how to repent: for that's as good
As if thou' hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

The poem does not state, but is premissed upon, the existence of God and Resurrection; it does not offer us a proposition for our assent, and it does not attempt to secure conviction

in the truth of Donne's belief. However, this 'lyric' expression is informed by a view of the world conceived in religious terms. It is possible to realise fully in imagination the experience expressed without sharing the beliefs and attitudes. But in estimating the value of the imaginative experience the quality of the experience cannot be divorced from the religious point of view informing it; if the experience of the work itself is to be retained, it must be included. And clearly to a reader who regards religious belief as, say, superstition, though he may acknowledge the sincerity of the declaration and admire the quality of expression, it is hard to see how his estimation of the value of the poem could not be affected by what he sees as the falsity of the beliefs informing it. The question is should he disregard his attitude towards the beliefs, and those aspects of the poem which depend upon religious belief, in reaching a judgement of the poem's intrinsic value?

Though Donne's poem requires evaluation in the particular terms invited by its form, the problem it presents is not different in kind from that posed by any poem which expresses an experience whose conception takes as its determining ground a particular point of view, whether ethical, religious, metaphysical, political etc. Where that viewpoint informs the imaginative experience itself, the question of its acceptability to the reader may figure in his estimation of the intrinsic value of the experience. In the history of poetry there are innumerable examples of poems which do not state in

propositional form the poet's beliefs (e.g. Hopkins'), but are nevertheless composed from a particular perspective. The experience dramatically rendered in such poems provokes the question of its acceptability to the reader.

The second example Eliot cites is Edgar's words to Gloucester that 'Ripeness is all', when Gloucester is again contemplating suicide. As it occurs in the play, it is fitting in character and situation, and it may be experienced as having 'profound emotional meaning, with, at least, no literal fallacy'. But when it is placed within the full context of the play it cannot be taken as indicative of the play's 'vision'. It does not express the truth as Shakespeare wished us to see it. To treat the line as, for example, an expression of Shakespeare's Senecan Stoicism offered to us as the basic vision of the work, would be to neglect the place it is assigned within a wider 'philosophy of life' implied by King Lear. The same is true of, for example, Macbeth's 'Tomorrow, and to-morrow' speech, which can also be said to have profound emotional meaning, but must be seen in the total context of the action, which does not see the significance of Macbeth's fate as 'a tale of sound and fury...signifying nothing'. Macbeth's speech is not the last word and Shakespeare's 'philosophy' cannot be said to echo Macbeth's sentiments. Of course that does not mean that the question of the play's 'philosophy' is irrelevant to the value attributed to it. Shakespeare's plays do imply a set of beliefs and values which we must be at least sympathetic towards if we

are to value his plays without qualification. It is not that Shakespeare's beliefs are irrelevant to the value of his plays, but rather that, as Booth puts it, his plays rise above differences of speculative system and win readers of all camps:

...it is precisely this centrality, this lack of bias, this capacity to cut to the heart of problems which all philosophies attempt to deal with in conceptual terms, that makes his plays what we call universal. Great art can bring men of different convictions together by translating, as it were, their different vocabularies into a tangible experience that incorporates what they mean. It thus mediates among philosophies: Platonist and Aristotelian, Catholic and Protestant, liberal and conservative, can agree that these lives are comic and those tragic, that this behaviour is vicious and that admirable, that somehow, in fact, these plays express existentially, as the current fashion puts it, what life means.(p.141)

So although Shakespeare's plays are not doctrinal, their value does depend upon acquiescence in the beliefs and values making up the 'norms' of the plays. For example, a reader who believed that the ends justify the means would not get very far with Macbeth or King Lear. So the secret to their universality lies not in the aesthetic irrelevance of agreement in belief, but in the fact that readers with very different doctrinal positions can accept the beliefs and values implied.

There are plays - Brecht and Beckett offer contrasting examples - which are doctrinal, and sympathy or antipathy with the existential moral does play a part in awarding value. For example, a Catholic may find that the aesthetic value of those plays of Brecht or Beckett which suggest a view in conflict with his own to be seriously diminished.

Plays of this kind do raise the problem of belief in the narrow sense. Here, as with the novel, the work is the product of a choosing, evaluating person, and it is part of the imaginative project in response to establish where in the world of values the implied author wishes us to stand. The dramatist must employ different uses of language to express his evaluative stance, but the dramatic form does not render it impossible or inappropriate to consider those views of the implied author which are very much part of the 'aesthetic object'. It is also true that plays, like novels, establish a 'fictional world', but the act of creating such a world, and the implicit endorsement of beliefs and values expressive of a particular point of view, are not, as some (e.g. Isenberg) seem to suggest, mutually exclusive.

Eliot's third example returns us to The Divine Comedy, and the problem of belief in the narrow sense. The line that Eliot finds 'literally true' - 'His will is our peace' - is a statement uttered by one of the 'blessed', Piccarda, and we are intended to accept it as expressing one aspect of the truth that the poem sets out to explore. The poem presents the problem in an acute form: we may not be too concerned about occasional falsities in historical or geographical detail, but what are we to do with a literary work which is built around a God-centred Neoplatonic universe?²² The Divine Comedy can, of course, be read in different ways, with vary-

22. In fact the poem would seem to present a problem for the view that objection to a poem's doctrine is a legitimate reason to downgrade the work: the poem is highly valued despite the fact many readers do not share its doctrinal position. The explanation is evident: there is a

ing degrees of disengagement from the truths it offers for our assent. A reader may ignore the doctrinal passages of abstract reasoning, ignore the critique of Church and state, or divorce the cosmology from the ethical and religious ideas allegorised. He may read the poem as a work of fantasy, delighting only in the fictions, and paying no heed to literal or allegorical truth. In short it is possible to read the poem as a 'fiction' without concern for truth. The question is whether the world Dante offers to us as essentially fact is to be viewed as purely imaginary, if we are to value it in aesthetically relevant ways. Is there any reason why we should locate its value only in the 'purely literary qualities' of form, or in the satisfaction provided by an autonomous poetic reality cut off from the realities of this world?

Eliot makes an apposite observation about approaching all literary works in this manner: if all poetry is to be judged and enjoyed without reference to the poet's beliefs and convictions, we ought to wonder just how much remains to be valued in poetry. If we are to be neutral towards the beliefs informing a poem, then they become neutral elements in a work: just as they cannot be considered as blemishes, they cannot figure as reasons for valuing the work. But, Eliot asks, is it not necessary to consider Wordsworth's nature-philosophy if we are to appreciate the greatness of his poetry? He continues:

great deal more to the poem than the philosophical exposition of abstract doctrines. Equally, (arguably) *The Divine Comedy* exemplifies the kind of universality attributed to Shakespeare; it is a universal human drama with sufficient foundation in common experience to engage readers of different creeds.

Does 'culture' require that we make...a deliberate effort to put out of mind all our convictions and passionate beliefs about life when we sit down to read poetry? If so, so much the worse for culture. Nor, on the other hand, may we distinguish, as people sometimes do, between the occasions on which a particular poet is "being a poet" and the occasions on which he is "being a preacher". That is too facile. If you attempt to edit Shelley, or Wordsworth or Goethe in this way,...what you get in the end by this process is something which is not Shelley, or Wordsworth or Goethe at all, but a mere unrelated heap of charming stanzas, the debris of poetry rather than the poetry itself. And by using, or abusing this principle of isolation you are seeking from poetry some illusory pure enjoyment, of separating poetry from everything else in the world, and cheating yourself out of a good deal that poetry has to give to your development.²³

It is indeed true that the intrinsic value of some poetry is dependent upon engagement with the poet's concerns: if we are to receive anything more than the negligible values of form, we must include the implied author's beliefs and values. In a work such as The Divine Comedy to abstract from the beliefs and evaluations integral to it and seek its value in form, or in the excitements of a fantastic journey, is to restrict its potentiality as a source of literary value. It is Dante's view of life and his capacity to engage us with it, alongside the poetry itself, which distinguishes it from well-written 'thrillers'. Taking seriously the issues that Dante set out to explore and his views on them is surely a precondition of finding the work of the highest intrinsic value. Whether or not we ultimately agree with Dante, there seems little point, and no good reason, to ignore them. Once they are included, the acceptability or otherwise of his views will figure in

23. The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p.97-8.

our estimation of the intrinsic value of the experience which The Divine Comedy offers.

Though Dante's poem does invite special consideration it is not unique. Lucretius's On the Nature of Things shares in The Divine Comedy's concern to set out an account of the nature of the universe, and offers argued support on a number of topics. Pope's Essay on Man also expresses metaphysical reasoning and truth-claims directly in verse. Johnson's Vanity of Human Wishes offers general statement and illustration. And Eliot's Four Quartets 'renders dramatically' metaphysical speculation. These poems are not representative of poetry in general, but there are many other poems - The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Prometheus Unbound, Paradise Lost, - that are doctrinal in the sense of being explicitly concerned with expounding a system of beliefs which the reader is invited to accept. And many other poets and novelists have been very much concerned with setting forth what they saw as the truth.

The Brothers Karamazov provides an example of the problem as posed by the novel. Does Dostoyevsky's novel fit the description of an autonomous imaginary world conveyed to the reader in a series of pseudo-assertions, and therefore immune from the requirement to conform to a reader's beliefs? I think not. Leavis' description of Conrad's Nostromo better captures its form:

...to appreciate Conrad's 'form' is to take stock of a process of relative valuation conducted by him in the face of life: what do men live by? what can men live by? - these are the questions that animate his theme. His organisation is devoted to exhibiting in the

concrete a representative set of radical attitudes, so ordered as to bring out the significance of each in relation to a total sense of human life. The dramatic imagination at work is an intensely moral imagination, the vividness of which is inalienably a judging and a valuing. (p.43)²⁴

Dostoyevsky shares Tolstoy's view that 'The one thing necessary in art as in life is to tell the truth'. Dostoyevsky's answer to the question 'what can men live by?' is religious faith. And as Nostramo succeeds as a 'moralised fable', has justified itself as art in the realised concreteness that speaks for itself and enacts its moral significance', The Brothers Karamazov (at least in a large measure) shares in that success. Like The Divine Comedy, it is not simply the abstract statement and argument for a theological doctrine. But like that poem it has as a central animating theme, the existence of God and the state of the soul in the absence of God; and without doing too much violence to its inner complexity we may say that in form and content the novel is everywhere determined by the intention to reveal the truth of Christianity. That is to say the various uses of language are guided by the controlling intention to 'dramatically enact' and so render attractive the truth as the 'implied author' of this novel conceives it.

The characters and events are fictional. They are presented

24. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Peregrine, 1962), p.43. Of Hard Times Leavis says: 'It is hardly possible to question the justice of this vision of the tendency of James Mill's kind of Utilitarianism, so blind is its oneness, so unaware of its bent and its blindness' (p.31), and 'it is a triumph of ironic art. No logical analysis could dispose of the philosophy of fact and calculus with such neat finality' (p.272) as that achieved by Dickens' presentation of the confrontation of Utilitarianism by life. It is because Leavis believes Dickens' critique of Utilitarianism and industrialism to be true i.e. he sides with Dickens' beliefs and values, that (among other things) he thinks the novel is a great work of literature.

to us in uses of language not to document or report history, but to create character and situation (it is obviously that which chiefly differentiates the novelist's and non-novelist's use of language). But those 'fictions' are to be seen against a specific frame of reference, the religious point of view of the novel. The novel directly states the relevant theological views in the form of Father Zossima's teachings, and the reader is left in no doubt which beliefs and values the 'implied author' endorses and offers to the reader for his assent. The novel's 'truth' is also enacted in the lives of the principal characters, and arguments for and against the acceptance of God form part of the dialogue of the novel. The characters modes of being are diagnosed, understood, and evaluated in terms of the concepts of the religious viewpoint, and according to the basic premise of the novel - the choice between two opposing modes of existence: unconditional acceptance of God's existence, loving humility as the animating principle of faith from which flow the understanding and dispositions of 'active love'; denial of God, pride as the animating principle from which arises the various conditions of spiritual malaise. The inner lives themselves are presented as a critique of the ideas and modes of being opposed to the religious, and the novel's truth is tested against them.

In fact the novel has a kind of dialectical progression operating at the level of idea and mode of being (spiritual

and psychological), each interacting with the other. For example, the beliefs and values Ivan advocates (e.g. in the poem of the Grand Inquisitor) are critically examined by direct argument or juxtaposition (e.g. to Zossima's 'sermons') throughout the novel. The novel also presents Ivan's intellectual pride as the explanation of his vulnerability to, and motivation to act upon, the maxim that 'everything is permitted', a maxim which in the absence of 'material proof' of God's existence, Ivan claims intellectual honesty demands one to accept. But his intellectual pride and associated incapacity for 'active love', constitutes Ivan's failing from the novel's point of view: faith is the acceptance of God without material proof, and it is only in pride's defeat that one comes to understand fully one's relation to the world. The novel also sees Ivan's passions (pride, humiliation, resentment, rage, revenge self-punishment and despair) and his potentiality for evil (associated with the destructive passions) as a consequence of his ideas. The spiritual crisis Ivan eventually undergoes, and the concrete application of his ideas in Smyerdyakov, leading to the murder of Ivan's father, are intended to act as a rejection of his philosophy. The same dialectical progression is involved in the novel's critique of the false gods of science and socialism, gods that are seen to be 'nihilistic and 'negationist' through their failure to acknowledge man's spiritual condition, his relation to good and evil, and to God.

The rhetoric, then, of The Brothers Karamazov is 'devoted

to exhibiting in the concrete a representative set of radical attitudes, so ordered as to bring out the significance of each in relation to a total sense of life'. That total sense of life - Dostoyevsky's 'philosophy' - is affirmed through creation: Dostoyevsky expresses the truths he wishes us to acknowledge by creating and presenting a 'fictional world' of character and action. The problem presented by a novel such as The Brothers Karamazov is that what the 'implied author' affirms is a specific doctrine which is an integral part of the novel seen as an 'aesthetic object'. As such it provokes the question of the aesthetic relevance of conflict in belief.

2.43 The mock reader and the implied author's 'declaration'

One of the main points that these examples reveal about the theories introduced earlier receives a very clear expression in Elliot's reply to Isenberg's 'no truth' theory. He objects to the theory on account of its inability to accommodate 'an activity which critics unhesitatingly accept as poetic, that of stating neatly, economically and elegantly what is the case'. Elliot observes that in poetry where that is the intention 'we recognise that the poet has accepted truth as an additional norm'. Some poetry is of that kind, and therefore (according to the common understanding of poetry fostered by the tradition of criticism) 'considerations of truth and falsity are sometimes involved in...the evaluation of poetry'. Elliot's point is that if the intention to

communicate truth is accessible in the work, then it is appropriate to consider the question of truth. He rejects the idea of poetic production as only the creation of an 'imaginary world' or 'pure structure of meaning': a poet's efforts may be different in kind from those poets engaged in sheer imaginative creation. In short:

The 'no truth' theory does not allow a poet to declare himself in his own voice but insists that no matter what he conceives himself to be doing he shall be regarded as having made a merely possible world for "aesthetic" contemplation. Yet our ordinary standards of interpretation permit us to distinguish between deliberate attempts at direct self-revelation (e.g. by Wordsworth and Herbert) and the creation of imaginary worlds (e.g. certain poems of Spencer, Coleridge and Yeats). A theory which conceives a poem exclusively as an object, whether a pure structure of meaning or an imaginary world, ignores a tradition of criticism according to which it is permissible to conceive a poem as the utterance of a person, and which does not consider that because this utterance has regularity of form it cannot therefore be the direct utterance of the poet's...beliefs, or that this form prevents the poet from speaking about and being understood as speaking about the real world we all know. This tradition does not assume that a poem is more like the account of a dream than like a letter, a declaration or a prayer, but leaves it to the critic to decide how each poem is best to be understood and leaves him free to employ the criteria of evaluation which he considers most appropriate to the particular case.(p.639-640)

Elliot's view reflects two of my earlier conclusions, conclusions that I hope have been re-confirmed by examination of the particular case. The first relates to conceptions of the literary work or aesthetic object. I summarised the conception as follows: the act of literary production is necessarily the creation of an autonomous world (whether the 'aesthetic object' is described as a purely fictional world, a pure structure of meaning, or a unit of meaningful elem-

ents), and that it is therefore immune from assessment according to the truth or falsity of an author's beliefs and values. The examples cited illustrate that some literary works are to be understood as the 'declaration' of the implied author's beliefs and values. So the first point is that the view fails to allow that in the creation of the 'aesthetic object' the implied author may be 'declaring' his beliefs and values, and in so doing taking on the additional norm (and liability) of truth. The second and related point is that there is no reason to restrict the art-relevant properties of a literary work to 'well-wroughtness' (inner coherence, complexity, congruity, integration, meaningfulness, interest etc.). Examination of the actual nature of literary works - of literary uses of language - has revealed that the 'aesthetic object' possesses many features besides these. In other words, the problem set by the individual work bears out the assertion that the 'aesthetic point of view' upon the 'aesthetic object' does not render the problem of belief redundant.

The argument can be re-expressed in terms of Booth's notion of the 'mock reader'. The 'mock reader' is the reader the author asks us to become. It represents an ideal reader who shares his beliefs and values. Booth uses the notion to argue that if we are to admire an author's work we must be prepared to entertain the author's values at something like his own estimate: his views must strike us at least as among the intellectually and morally defensible views of life. However,

some works imply an author whose beliefs and values we cannot accept; we refuse to become the work's 'mock reader'.²⁵ Booth continues:

The question is whether the enjoyment of literature as literature, and not as propaganda, inevitably involves our beliefs, and I think the answer is inescapable...our convictions even about the most purely intellectual matters cannot help fundamentally affecting our literary responses...differences of belief are always to some extent relevant, often seriously hampering, and sometimes fatal.(p.140)

Booth encourages those who are inclined to think otherwise to reflect upon the hypothetical situation of a beautifully written tragedy with a convinced Nazi SS man as hero, his tragic error consisting of a temporary and fatal toying with bourgeois democratic ideals: 'is there any one of us...who could seriously claim that agreement with the author's ideas in such a work would have nothing to do with our accepting or rejecting his art?'. Booth concludes that 'as the facts are, even the greatest of literature is radically dependent on the concurrence of beliefs of authors and readers'.

Booth is right. But are there any arguments to support his view? My strategy has been to assume that the appropriate interpretation of the 'aesthetic point of view' upon a work's merits is that it involves a concern for the intrinsic value of the experience the work provides, and that we require a

25. For Booth Lady Chatterley's Lover is a work which he cannot admire. He says that though critics can agree over little else they agree that this work has an explicit doctrine, and that its acceptability is a fundamental aspect of the novel's merit: those who admire the work do so because they perceive it to be a courageous exposition of the truth; those who do not because they think it exaggerated or false. Booth falls into the latter camp. Booth confesses: 'it is impossible for me to conclude that incompatibility of beliefs is irrelevant to my judgement of Lawrence' (pp.79-81,137). The reasons for rejecting Lawrence's novel are clearly not reflected in the criteria of literary merit suggested by the theorists I have been criticising.

demonstration to show why such a point of view cannot take an interest in the acceptability or otherwise of an author's beliefs and values. The conceptions of the nature of the 'aesthetic object itself' that I have considered so far do not provide a successful demonstration of that. So in effect I have argued it is possible, and in the absence of good reason, appropriate, to consider an author's beliefs and values in determining the quality of the literary work. Further, it seems necessary if works are justifiably to be highly esteemed.

2.5 Uniquely literary value and the wider problem of belief

I identified one other argument against the aesthetic relevance of belief. It centred upon ideas about uniquely literary value. The tone of the argument is usually prescriptive. Its underlying assumption is that the reader should concentrate upon those things that make literary works literary works, because poetic or literary value lies there. The thought is that the features which distinguish literary works from other kinds of texts are the ones to concentrate upon as possible sources of a uniquely valuable experience; those features provide the reason to experience literature rather than another kind of text. If a reader centres his attention upon something shared or done better by other kinds of text he runs the risk of neglecting literature's special value, and so missing the principle value of literature as literature.

The significance of the idea for the problem of belief is that true beliefs and values are singled out as things that are set forth in other kinds of text. Those texts, the view maintains, make claims to truth with a clarity and rigour of support in argument and evidence which literature cannot match. But literature, with its very different aims, achieves excellences that they lack. The truth or falsity of the author's beliefs and values is therefore to be ignored, and attention focused upon uniquely literary values. There then follows a defence of literature's uniquely literary value according to the critics preferred terms. Typically, they are, firstly, the formal excellences or 'purely literary qualities': literary merit is to lie only in the author's working of language in rhythm, rhyme, imagery, diction etc and organic unity in creation of a well wrought urn. And, secondly, excellences of content: literary merit lies in the author's ability to make available a special kind of experience (often the intimate experience from within of possible forms of experience, or points of view). Taken together literature is claimed to excel in its capacity to handle language in a way which is itself rewarding to experience, but also conveys vividly, forcefully and beautifully what has been 'thought feelingly'. It is here the view contends, and not in the truth or acceptability of the author's beliefs, that the merits of a text as a work of literature are to be found.²⁶

26. I think Bradley has something like this in mind when he says of poetry that 'it, content and form in unity, embodies in its own irreplaceable way something which embodies itself also in other irreplaceable ways, such as philosophy and religion. And just as each of

Here are two representative examples. Brooks thinks that a uniquely valuable quality of literature is the dramatic enactment of a point of view. He offers the following as having general application:

...a poem does not state ideas but rather tests ideas. Or, to put the matter in other terms, a poem does not deal primarily with ideas and events but rather with the way in which a human being may come to terms with ideas and events. All poems, therefore, including the most objective poems, turn out on careful inspection to be poems really "about" man himself. A poem...is to be judged not by the truth or falsity as such of the ideas which it incorporates, but rather by its character as drama - by its coherence, sensitivity, depth, richness, and tough-mindedness.(p.229)²⁷

The 'principle of dramatic propriety' Brooks recommends is to assess the quality of the dramatically rendered experience: the primary question is, Is it unified, complete, etc., and not whether the beliefs expressed are true or false.

In a recent introductory book on aesthetics Ann Sheppard makes this observation:

...works of literature which present some general theory or view of the world do so successfully or effectively rather than truly...whether the tenets of Catholicism are true and whether Brideshead Revisited is a successful novel are separate questions...the language of truth is better not applied to literature...talk of showing how things might be and of presenting a view is indeed more appropriate and, when considering literature aesthetically, we are concerned with success and effectiveness in presentation rather than with truth, with the way in which showing is done rather than with what is shown.²⁸

these gives a satisfaction which the other cannot possibly give, so we find in poetry, which cannot satisfy the needs they meet, that which by their their natures they cannot afford us. But we shall not find it fully if we look for something else.' (p.25).

27. Cleanth Brooks The Well Wrought Urn (Rev.ed., London, 1968), Appendix 2.

28. Ann Sheppard Aesthetics (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 127, 132. T.S.Eliot is another critic who expresses the idea that literature makers available a special kind of experience. He says of Virgil's Georgics, The Divine Comedy, and On The Nature of Things, that they 'were

One of the unspoken assumptions here is that literature is to be judged by values and standards peculiar to it, and that these derive from what literature excels at i.e 'showing'.

The general idea that a reader of literature should look to what it excels at to find its uniquely 'literary' value is attractive. Equally, as a theory about how to approach literature it is likely to be fruitful. However, it cannot act as a justification for ignoring the issues of the problem of belief. The fault lies in the assumption that literary value lies in what makes literary works literary works. In the first place, reference to the allegedly distinctive features of 'form' or manner of presentation does not secure the conclusion that a reader must address his attention only to them. If the argument contends that only distinctive and not shared features are relevant then the features of 'form' singled out must be excluded as well, for other texts possess them also. So the principle of selection cannot be justified in that way. Equally, if formal features are 'foregrounded' to a higher degree in literary experience, as many theorists contend, it does not follow that it is only those features that make a literary work good of its kind, nor indeed that

not designed to persuade the reader to an intellectual assent, but to convey an emotional equivalent for the ideas. What Lucretius and Dante teach you, in fact, is what it feels like to hold certain beliefs; what Virgil teaches you is to feel yourself inside the agrarian life'. The argument relying upon the idea of unique imaginative experience might run as follows: to judge a poem by one's beliefs and values, allowing them to dominate the experience and appreciation of the work, is to forfeit the experience in which the special value of literature as literature lies viz the imaginative experience of what it is like to experience the world in terms other than one's own. See T.S.Eliot 'The Social Function of Poetry', Adelphi vol. 21 (1945).

shared features must be excluded. Therefore, the argument for the exclusion of the author's point of view receives no support from the idea that what makes a text a literary work is what distinguishes it from other kinds of text. If it contends that in assessing literary merit a necessary condition of determining a work's merit as a work of literature attention must be paid to formal features then it is harmless. One can happily accept that formal excellences are a significant determinant of literary merit, and yet maintain that the author's point of view is also important.

The other side of the argument - true and false beliefs are irrelevant because they are features possessed by other kinds of text - also fails. In order for the argument to succeed reasons are required for the contention that common features are necessarily irrelevant. There is no reason why we must accept that, and I have already suggested one reason to doubt it: most, if not all, of the formal features possessed by literary works can be found elsewhere. A second reason is that it is not true that literary merit lies in not what is said but the way of saying it. Only things worth saying are worth saying well: good writing in itself is of little value where what is said is of no value. Where two authors have an equally admirable style the one who expresses an admirable view of life writes the better work. It is perfectly possible that if one is a better writer in the sense of having a better 'style' (narrowly construed as that which relates to the 'purely literary qualities' of form) he may still produce

a work with less literary merit (widely construed as that which relates to the intrinsic value of the work's experience) than a less well-written work.

There is a temptation in the choice of expression 'better as literature' since one is likely to read 'as literature' as 'as writing' and so take it that the significant difference between two works of literature must lie in the degree to which they excel at the art of writing. However, the temptation should be resisted. As I have argued, to assimilate 'better as literature' or 'possessing greater literary merit' to 'more adept at the art of writing' involves the fallacy of assuming that formal features are the only important aspects of literary merit. What must be supplied is a counter-argument to show that they are, and that requires a specification of what it is for a literary work to have merit as a literary work. Appeal to those features alone cannot supply the justification. Independent argument must be provided for what are the art-relevant properties of a literary work. The 'formalist' argument does not do that.

So the first 'formalist' alternative fails. If the view includes reference to the thing said or expressed - the making available of a special kind of experience - we run into the wider problem of belief. The nature of the problem is well represented in M.H.Abrams' evaluation of Keats' poem.²⁹ He suggests that the lines of the poem are 'to be

29. M.H.Abrams, 'Belief and the Suspension of Disbelief', in *Literature and Belief* (English Institute Essays, 1957), (ed.) M.H.Abrams (New York, 1958), pp.149-169. The kind of critical vocabulary introduced (e.g. maturity, intelligence, sincerity, self-knowledge, perceptiveness,

apprehended as histrionic elements which are "in character" and "dramatically appropriate", for their inherent interest as stages in the evolution of an artistically ordered, hence all the more emotionally effective, experience of a credible human being'. But if we are to value Keats' ode highly:

We must take the lyric speaker's emotional problems seriously, as possessing dignity and importance according to the criteria of ordinary experience. By the same criteria, we must find the speaker himself credible and winning - sensitive, intelligent, warm, yet...able to meditate the woes of this life...with a philosophic lucidity and a very lively sense of the irony of the human situation...Above all, we must so recognise ourselves and our lot in him as to consent imaginatively to his experience until it is resolved, in both artistic and human terms, in a way that is formally complete, hence beautiful, and intellectually and emotionally satisfying.

Abrams goes on to say that it is the author's 'constant concern to persuade us to concur with the common-sense and moral propositions presupposed by the poem': the author invites us to acquiesce in, approve of, or be sympathetic towards the view of life or experiential point of view presented. So if one seeks to locate the uniquely literary value in the dramatically rendered experience, there is still the question of the reader's attitude towards that experience:

The poet must still win our imaginative consent to the aspects of human experience he presents, and to do so he cannot evade his responsibility to the beliefs and prepossessions of our common experience, common sense, and common moral consciousness.

sensitivity) is well represented throughout Leavis' criticism. Casey examines Leavis' use of it in op. cit. note 14. Lyas provides convincing arguments for the evaluative importance of what he calls 'personal qualities' in the article cited.

Though the majority of literature is not openly didactic in form and content, much does take the form of dramatically rendering a particular point of view upon some aspect of life. Once that is admitted to be part of the 'aesthetic object' there is no reason why sympathy or antipathy towards it should not be considered relevant to the reader's estimation of the work's value as a literary work. The arguments for the inclusion of a reader's attitude towards a work's doctrinal content apply equally well to the acceptability or otherwise of a work's experiential point of view.

The claim of this chapter has been that it is not wrong to take into account the acceptability or otherwise of a work's point of view in deciding upon its literary value. My argument has been that it is the combination of the consideration of the actual nature of a literary work together with the assessment of the intrinsic value of the experience it provides which sets the limits upon what is relevant in literary evaluation. Those limits do not exclude the author's point of view. The arguments I have reviewed do not provide sufficient grounds for doing so. Thus, if a reader faults a work for the unacceptability of its point of view because he believes it affects negatively the intrinsic value of the experience the work affords, his judgement is of the right kind to be an estimation of the work's literary value. In the next chapter I shall pursue a rather different topic, but in chapter 4 I return to issues of evaluation. The position I reach on the question of the value of tragedy will confirm

the view that a reader's attitude towards an author's beliefs and values plays the role I have been arguing for.

Chapter 3

Emotion in Fiction

In Book 2 of the Treatise Hume says:

A spectator of tragedy passes through a long train of grief, terror, indignation and other affectations which the poet represents in the person he introduces. As many tragedies end happily, and no excellent one can be compos'd without some reverse in fortune, the spectator must sympathise with all these changes and receive the fictitious joy as well as every other passion...they are first present in the mind of one person and afterwards appear in the mind of the other...¹

Hume believes that the experience of sympathetic emotions is to be explained in the following way: we form an impression of someone's expression of emotion, the impression becomes a lively idea of the emotion expressed, and the idea in turn causes us to undergo the emotion ourselves. He further explains that it is the resemblance between ourselves and the person we feel for which enables us to infer the emotion from its expression, and which leads us to 'enter into' and share the experiences of those who resemble ourselves.² The same 'principle', Hume thinks, can account for our affective responses to fictional characters: by forming a lively idea of the character's experience, rather than that of a real person, the spectator is led to experience the emotion the character is represented to undergo. Affective responses are therefore conceived by Hume to be analogous to the experience of emotion in response to real people and events.

1. David Hume Treatise, Bk 2, Pt 1, Sect. 11.

2. Treatise, Bk 2, Pt 1, Sect. 11.

There is, of course, a significant difference between the two cases: where the object of response is a real person, the lively idea involved is the belief that the fate evoking sympathy is real; where it is the artistic representation of fictional fates, the object of emotion is known to be a creation of the imagination. In the second type of situation Hume maintains that the idea of the 'fable' represented does not amount to a belief. But, according to Hume, 'belief is almost absolutely requisite to the exciting of our passions'. This leads Hume to the conclusion that the ostensibly emotional responses caused by literary fiction must differ from those caused by real people and events. The same 'principle of sympathy' is involved in our affective responses, but the absence of belief in the reality of the fictional fates affects the quality of the experience caused:

There is no passion of the human mind but what may arise from poetry, tho' at the same time the feelings of the passions are very different when excited by poetical fictions, from what they are when they arise from belief and reality.³

Hume finds the affective responses arising from 'fables' - 'fictional emotions' for short - puzzling. What troubles him is not so much that literary fictions should occasion emotion in the absence of existential belief, but rather the difference in feeling between fictional emotions and those caused by realities. The most striking difference, Hume believes, is that 'a feeling which is disagreeable in real life may afford the highest entertainment in a tragedy, or epic poem'. In the

3. Treatise, Appendix to Bk 3.

Treatise Hume is content to observe that the difference is to be explained by the absence of belief, and the task of explaining the phenomenon more fully is postponed until an essay entitled 'Of Tragedy'. Concerning the prior problem of explaining why we should be moved to emotion by fiction, Hume refers us to the natural propensity to share in the feelings of those who resemble ourselves, and to the role of imagination in feeling for others, whether they be characters in literary fiction or real people.

In this and the following chapter I want to examine the issues Hume raises. The two puzzles - the nature of the 'tragic emotions', and of fictional emotions - present rather different problems. The first concerns the relation between the painful emotions caused by tragedy and the 'pleasure' which the experience of tragedy is claimed to involve. The problem is specific to tragic writing, and is part of the wider issue of why we value tragedy. It will be treated separately in the next chapter. In this chapter I shall concentrate upon the second problem, the problem of the general nature of affective responses to fictions.

The difficulty Hume shows himself to be aware of here relates to the reader's or spectator's awareness that what is responded to is a creation of the imagination. The basic problem is that we seem to be moved to emotion by what we do not believe to exist. This creates the difficulty of accounting for the affective responses we feel towards fictional characters and events. The perplexity arises as follows: It

is plausible to suppose that the occurrence and rationality of emotion depends upon the belief that there exists something deserving of emotion. For example, it is the belief that someone suffers that provides the reason and justification for feeling pity, and it is the belief that a threat is posed which explains and justifies feeling fear. It seems that without those beliefs pity and fear lack adequate foundation. Where the occasion for emotion is a work of literary fiction the knowledge that the represented characters and events are entirely fictitious entails believing that they do not exist. Further where they do have historical counterparts (e.g. Richard III) it seems we respond to the characters and events represented, rather than the historical counterparts. In each case we lack the belief which provides the grounds for experiencing emotion. How, then, can we be moved to emotion by what we know to be fictional?

This conundrum of aesthetic psychology has received much philosophical attention recently. Two distinct issues have figured prominently in the literature. The first originates in Colin Radford's well-known paper 'How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina?', and concerns the question of the coherence, consistency, and rationality of being moved by fiction. The second issue concerns the sense in which it is possible to feel emotion towards a fictional character or event. I shall begin by dealing with the second issue, and then consider the rationality of fictional emotions.

3.1 Belief and imagination

What we require is an account of the psychological state of a spectator or reader who (so it seems) reacts with emotion to the representational content of a work of fiction. A satisfactory account of a reader's or spectator's 'emotional involvement' with a work of fiction will deliver answers to three questions. Firstly, does he experience emotion? Secondly, what is the object of his experience? And thirdly, under what conditions will he react with emotion (if that is what it is)?

We can begin with two much quoted but rarely examined passages. The first is from Samuel Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare:

It is false any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramatic fable in its materiality was ever credible, or for a single moment was ever credited...The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know from the first act to the last that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players...It will be asked how the drama moves if it is not credited. It is credited with all the credit due to drama. It is credited, whenever it moves, as a just picture of a real original.⁴

There are two points of interest in this passage. The first is Johnson's rejection of the assumption that the 'force' and 'delight' of drama depend upon the audience's suffering the delusion that the stage-action is real. The second is the explanation of how drama moves. I will return to the second point below. Johnson claims that a spectator is fully aware that he is watching a play acted out by actors upon a theatre

⁴ Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. H.R. Woudhuysen (Penguin, 1989) pp. 132-137.

stage: he knows 'the drama exhibits successive imitations of successive actions'. In Johnson's view what is required if fiction is to have an impact is neither belief nor half belief, but rather an act of imagination: we must imagine that the events the stage-action represent possess 'materiality'.

The second passage is from Coleridge's Biographia Literaria:

...a human semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith...On this propensity, so deeply rooted in our nature, a specific dramatic probability may be raised by a true poet...a dramatic probability, sufficient for dramatic pleasure, even when the component characters and incidents border on impossibility. The poet does require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this too with our eyes open, and with our judgement perdue (hidden away) behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first motion of our will: and meantime, only not to disbelieve.⁵

'Poetic faith' is the attitude Coleridge believes we must adopt if we are to be properly engaged by literary fiction, and derive enjoyment from the experience. I believe the best way to understand Coleridge's notion is to take it as referring to the capacity and willingness to imagine that the states of affairs a poet represents exist.

Coleridge describes 'poetic faith' as a matter of willingly 'suspending disbelief'. There are two matters over which Coleridge believes we must 'suspend disbelief'. The first relates to the knowledge that we are presented with the artistic representation of characters and events. For examp-

5. Biographia Literaria, ed. H.J.Jackson (Oxford,1985) Ch. 14, Ch. 23.

le, we must set aside our awareness that we are not now witnessing Othello murdering Desdemona, or Lear holding court in the middle of a storm. The second concern things which we do not believe to exist in any extra-poetic reality. For example, we may not believe that ghosts, monsters or magicians exist. Coleridge thinks that we are to 'suspend' disbelief, and imagine that the murder occurs, Caliban exists, and that Prospero has the powers Shakespeare represents him to possess.

When Coleridge says that 'poetic faith' requires us to 'suspend' disbelief he seems to be making two different points. The first is that to 'suspend' disbelief is to imagine, or is essentially involved in the act of imagining: to suspend disbelief in the reality of the events represented is, in this case, what imagining that the represented events occur amounts to.⁶ So it is a description, and perhaps a rather misleading one, of the nature of imagination, and Coleridge uses it to make a similar point to Johnson's. The second point is that the proper manner of approach to the re-

6. In Chapter 22 he talks of 'That illusion, contradistinguished from delusion, that negative faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without denial or affirmation of their real existence, by the judgement'. The distinction between 'illusion' and 'delusion' strongly implies that we set aside our disbelief in as much as to imagine is to suspend both belief and disbelief. Coleridge's account is not without difficulty. In particular, the infelicities in Coleridge's choice of expression encourage a reading which renders his view incoherent: suspension of disbelief is in order when we have reason to doubt our original scepticism, but we have no reason to doubt that the stage-action is not real, and we do not suspend our conviction that we are watching a play. Equally we do not, as a result of suspending disbelief, imagine that the stage-action exists (we know it does), but rather imagine what it imitates to exist. Part of the confusion results from Coleridge's not clearly distinguishing which things we are to suspend our disbelief over. But, I think, his basic intention is as noted above: we are to suspend our disbelief in ghosts and imagine that the ghost of Hamlet's father visits him. See M.H. Abrams *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford, 1976) p.324; and Eva Schaper's 'Fiction and the Suspension of Disbelief', British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 28 (1978).

presentational content of a fictional work is to suspend disbelief and to imagine. 'Poetic faith' is a kind of contract which audience and author enter into. The poet asks that we set aside or ignore our 'better knowledge' and the lack of belief it entails, and that we be interested and engaged by the 'world' in which things departing from 'the ordinary rules of probability' are represented as existing. Disbelief is suspended or set aside in this sense in that it is one of the conventions of fiction that we should treat plays, poems etc. in that way.⁷

The importance of imagination, and of beliefs about the conventions of fiction, have been the object of relative neglect in accounts of fictional emotions.⁸ The point that Coleridge and Johnson call our attention to is that the essential difference in psychological states between the experience of fiction and reality, is that the experience of fiction necessarily requires an act of imagination or, to use a term I will analyse later, 'making-believe'. In Coleridge's account imagination involves specifically the suspension of the disbelief entailed by knowing that the play or poem is fiction. One way to understand Coleridge's point is to read it as saying that the imagination takes up the psychological slack left in the absence of existential belief: we imagine

7. Coleridge's main concern is, in fact, the practical one of how far a poet can stray from 'the rules of ordinary probability' and depart from 'our better knowledge' and still ensure his work will provide 'dramatic pleasure'. The relevant conventions here have to do with poetic subject matter, and need not concern us.

8. There are three notable exceptions. The first is Bijoy H. Boruah's book *Fiction and Emotion*, (Oxford, 1988) though I don't think his account is correct. The second is an article by David Novitz 'Fiction, Imagination and Emotion', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol 38 (1980), and the third is Kendall Walton. I discuss them below.

what we do not believe to exist. As we shall see, a full response to the representational content of fictional works typically involves complex imaginative acts, acts which involve the spectator or reader as active participator in the fictional world of the work.

In fact, Coleridge's notions of 'poetic faith' and the 'suspension of disbelief' express both a conceptual and a psychological truth. The psychological truth is that responding in the appropriate manner to fiction requires 'suspending disbelief' in the sense that the fictionality of what is experienced must be 'bracketed out' i.e. must not dominate the reader's or spectator's consciousness. For example, if a reader is to become 'emotionally involved' in a character's fate he must get 'drawn into' the work's world, and the latter involves responding imaginatively to what the work represents. Reminding oneself of a work's fictionality is one way of breaking the circuit, of distancing oneself by substituting imaginative engagement with awareness of the fictional status of the characters and events.

The conceptual point is that understanding the conventions of fiction involves understanding that we are not asked to believe or disbelieve but rather to make-believe that the characters and events represented exist. The imagination comes into play as a result of the realisation that the object of attention is an artistic representation. To appreciate the nature of fiction is to know that disbelief is as inappropriate as belief in so far as it is part of the

'language-game' of fiction that the characters and events the work sets forth are the product of the author's imaginings. To disbelieve is, as it were, to break the contract. So engagement with literary fiction is made possible because of the natural propensity to imagine, but at the same time it is conventionally determined.

The related point is that being moved by literary fiction depends upon imaginative engagement with the characters and events. When we are moved by fictional fates we imaginatively represent to ourselves, or 'construct in imagination', the characters and situations represented. For example, when we react with horror to Gloucester's blinding, we imaginatively entertain that Gloucester is in the situation represented in King Lear. It is obviously because we imaginatively entertain the fictional states of affairs narrated in novels, 'imitated' in plays etc. that they have the power to move us. If, for example, attention is focused upon the actors 'imitation' of the event or upon some other dimension of the manner of representation (the poetry etc.), rather than what is represented, we will not be horrified by Gloucester's blinding. Getting 'drawn into the characters' world' and getting 'caught up in' their fates requires that we use our imagination and do not actively deny the 'materiality' of the characters and events represented: incredulity is an obvious psychological barrier to emotional involvement.

Is there a similar convention or requirement in relation to fictional emotions and the lack of 'materiality' of the obje-

cts of emotion? Is it part of the 'language-game' of fiction that the fictionality of the object of emotion does not, in this context, count as a reason for not responding? Are fictional emotions criteria of the proper appreciation of the nature and quality of a work? These are the questions which should be placed next to Radford's claim that it is irrational and incoherent to be moved by fiction. The answers to them must await the analysis of fictional emotions themselves.

We are now in position to make the following points about the conditions determining a spectator's affective responses to literary fiction. First of all, the beliefs determining fictional emotions do not include the existential belief that the states of affairs represented do in fact exist. However, a point I shall develop later is that the content of what we imagine is the same as the content of what we believe when we react with emotion to what is real. It is this intentional isomorphism which, in part, lends credibility to the idea that fictional emotions are of a kind with standard episodes of emotion. Further, it is the act of imagining or making-believe that a certain state of affairs obtains - namely the state of affairs represented in the work that reflects the intentional isomorphism - that is essential to the occurrence and explanation of fictional emotions. I shall say more about conventions or 'principles' of fiction below. The important, if obvious, point is that a spectator or reader must understand certain very basic conventions of theatrical or literary production if he is to respond appropriately.

There is a further set of beliefs that Coleridge and Johnson do not discuss which must be included in an account of the structure of fictional emotions. They concern the representational content of the work. For example, it is the true belief that Gloucester is represented as being blinded 'within the world of the play', and the true belief that the fate Anna Karenina undergoes is tragic, which determine the nature of our responses. The beliefs are about what is true within the 'fictional world' of the work, and they occur without existential commitment. Clearly, holding the belief that the work represents P to be the case, and imagining that P is the case, are not incompatible.

These points suggest the following answers to the question, 'What are the conditions requisite for the experience of fictional emotions?'. Knowledge of the conventions of art, the capacity to imagine, and beliefs about the work's representational content are all conditions for the proper affective response to literary fiction. Before I explain how they figure in the logical structure of fictional emotions another matter requires attention.

3.2 Emotion

The first question I raised about fictional emotions was whether they are to be counted as episodes of emotion proper, or whether they are some distinct kind of affective response. The lack of belief in the existence of the object of emotion and the role of the imagination might be taken to suggest

that what we feel when we respond to fiction cannot be on all fours with the feelings occasioned by things we believe to exist. The idea would be that there are either two distinct classes of emotion, say 'fictive' and 'factive' emotion, or one class of emotion to which the responses caused by fiction do not belong. However, it is not clear what these quasi-emotional responses are supposed to be, nor that there are legitimate grounds for denying them the status of emotion proper.

The problem is to unfold the structure of fictional emotions, and to specify the conditions which they are required to fulfil in order to count as episodes of emotion. Therefore we need an answer to a prior question: what establishes that an experience is the experience of emotion, and what must be true of a subject if his experience is to count as an episode of a particular emotion? The analysis will give the necessary conditions for emotion proper, and so enable us to answer the first question, the question of whether a spectator or reader is in an emotional state. It will also reveal the logical and intentional structure of emotions, and so provide the means to elucidating the sense in which emotion is directed towards characters and events in fiction, our second question.

3.21 'Real-life' emotion

I propose to use the following general definition of what it is to undergo an episode of emotion: to experience an emotion E is to experience the hedonic tone T on account of

the thought of P. Hedonic tones are 'mental' affective states (e.g. pleasure, delight, satisfaction, pain, distress, dissatisfaction, discomfort, and uneasiness). P is the state of affairs that is the object of the emotion, the 'target' of the constituent thought (i.e. what it is about). The concepts of a particular thought and of a particular hedonic tone are internal to the concept of the individual emotions. So to experience emotion is to experience the hedonic tone internal to the concept of the emotion on account of the thought internal to the concept. The particular emotion is to be defined in terms of the constituent combination of thought and hedonic tone, and is distinguished from the other emotions by the specific combination of thought and hedonic tone.⁹ The three important features of this style of definition are hedonic tones, constituent thoughts, and particular states of affairs as objects of emotion. I shall say a little about each before turning to the problem of fictional emotions. The points I make are not new, but a clear view of the nature of emotional experience is necessary if we are to make progress on the more difficult issue of fictional emotions.

(i) Hedonic tones.

Bodily feelings are neither necessary nor sufficient for an experience to count as an episode of emotion. Characteristic bodily feelings associated with physiological events (adrenalin flow, cardiac disturbances, muscular tension/reflexes, galvanic skin responses etc.) accompany episodes of

⁹ See Malcolm Budd's Music and the Emotions, (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1985), Ch. 1.

emotion, but are not intrinsic to and not dictated by the concept of the emotion.¹⁰ They are contingent upon the particular bodily constitution of the experiencer, and may vary while the same emotion is undergone, or be present in episodes of different kinds of emotion. For example, I might experience the same sensations when I experience a frisson of pleasure on being excited by the apprehension of an impending danger, as I do when I'm distressed by that apprehension i.e. when I experience fear. Clearly, what is required is that I be distressed, and only then can I be said to undergo fear. It is the absence or presence of the controlling thought and hedonic tone, regardless of the absence or presence of characteristic bodily feelings, which determines whether an experience counts as the undergoing of an emotion.

(ii) Constituent thoughts.

There are three important features here. The first is the one already noted: the concept of a particular thought is internal to the concept of the particular emotion. For example, I cannot feel fear towards something I do not think of as posing a threat, and I cannot be envious of what I do not covet. The second feature is that the 'intentionality' or object-directedness of emotion is a function of the constituent thoughts. Emotional experience is intentional in the sense that it is cognitively mediated in such a way that a complete description of the experience cannot be given with-

10. See Wittgenstein's Zettel, ed. G.E. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (Blackwell, 1981), 488; and Anthony Kenny's Action, Emotion and Will (London, 1963).

out mentioning the thoughts, beliefs etc. making up the experiencer's point of view. If an experience is intentional the thoughts, beliefs etc. are determinative and constitutive of the experience. The object of emotion is thus the object of an intentional experience, and the 'target' towards which the emotion is directed is identified and determined by the thought-content of the emotion. For example, what secures the object-directedness of an experience of fear is the thought of the threat posed by a particular object, and what makes the object the 'target' of the fear is the thought that it is that object which poses the threat.

The third feature is that since emotions are intelligent responses, they can be assessed as reasonable or unreasonable, 'true' or 'false', rational or irrational depending upon their cognitive foundation. For example, if my anger is based upon a hastily adopted false belief about a wrong done to me, or my embarrassment upon an attitude towards the opinion of others which has no justification, then my anger and embarrassment may be criticised as both irrational and 'false'. Emotions are also open to reasoned persuasion, and possession of the concept of an emotion involves understanding the kinds of reasons for and against responding with emotion in a particular situation. When we come to Radford's charge of irrationality we will have to consider how these dimensions of emotional experience figure in responses to fiction.

(iii) Objects of emotion.

The object towards which an emotion is directed is typical-

ly an 'object' in the everyday sense of some material state of affairs. It is the person, creature, or physical object which the constituent thought is about. However, it is not always true that an emotion has as its 'object' some existing thing. To take an example from Elisabeth Anscombe's paper 'Intention':

A child saw a bit of red stuff on a turn in a stairway and asked what it was. He thought his nurse told him it was a bit of Satan and felt dreadful fear of it. (No doubt she said it was a bit of satin.) What he was frightened of was the bit of stuff; the cause of his fright was his nurse's remark.¹¹

What made the child afraid was his mistaken belief that he was in the presence of something of imminent danger to him, namely Satan. If asked what had frightened him the child would reply the bit of Satan which, it turns out, did not exist. Nevertheless the child was genuinely afraid, and there is a sense in which he was afraid of something viz. he was afraid of what he imagined to be a bit of Satan. The object of his fear resides, as the saying goes, within the child's intentionality. Satan is the 'intentional object' of his fear, as the new cricket bat which does not materialise would be the intentional object of his desire.

In an earlier article¹² Anscombe introduces a specific notion of the 'intentional' and 'material' objects' of intentional states: 'an intentional object is given by a word or

11. Reprinted in vol. 2. of her collected papers, Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind (Blackwell, 1981).

12. 'The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature', reprinted in the same collection. Anscombe does not discuss emotions, but her analysis can be readily applied to them.

phrase which gives the description under which' someone Os; the material object is given by a suitably related description which indicates something which 'materially' exists in the situation. The intentional object of an emotion is given by the description following the 'of' in a standard emotion sentence; for example, a bit of Satan in 'he was afraid of a bit of Satan'. The material object of the child's fear is given by 'a bit of red stuff' because the child mistakenly took it for a bit of Satan. In what follows I shall employ Anscombe's interpretation.

3.3 Fictional emotions

I believe that it is necessary and sufficient for an experience of mine to count as an episode of one of the emotions that it involves the experience of a hedonic tone on account of the thought of particular states of affairs.¹³ However, a common view is that there is a further requirement. The usual and most obvious candidate is that I be prepared to assent to the truth of the constituent thought i.e. the thought should take the form of a belief. Now there is no doubt that on many occasions I do believe that the object of my emotion exists. The question is, Must I be prepared to assent to the truth of the constituent thought in order for my experience to count as an episode of emotion? Is

13. The analysis may not be universally applicable. However, the qualification is unimportant for present concerns, because those emotions which literary fiction occasion typically fall within the class of emotions for which the analysis is valid.

it enough that the thought occurs unasserted, say, in an act of imagination, or must I be committed to the existence of the state of affairs referred to in the thought-content of the emotion?

I mentioned earlier that it was the absence of existential belief which encouraged the idea that responses to fictions cannot be episodes of emotion proper. For example, Kendall Walton believes that we experience at most 'quasi-emotion' when we respond to fiction. He asks us to imagine a situation in which a spectator's (Charles's) 'fear' results from watching a horror movie, during which it appears that a terrible green slime is heading directly towards him. He then makes the following observation:

Charles knows perfectly well that the slime is not real and that he is in no danger. Is he afraid even so?...he is in a state which is undeniably similar, in some respects, to that of a person who is frightened. His muscles are tensed, he clutches his chair, his pulse quickens, his adrenalin flows. Let us call this physiological/psychological state 'quasi-fear'. Whether it is actual fear (or a component of actual fear) is the question at issue.

The fact that Charles is fully aware that the slime is fictional is, I think, good reason to deny that what he feels is fear...fear must be accompanied by, or must involve, a belief that one is in danger. Charles does not believe that he is in danger; so he is not afraid.¹⁴

Charles' situation is taken to be representative of the general problem of whether we should construe our 'emotional

14. Kendall Walton 'Fearing Fictions', *Journal of Philosophy*, January 1978, pp.5-27. In his recent book *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundation of the Representational Arts* (Harvard University Press, 1990), Walton re-examines the issue. His account of Charles and the slime remains essentially the same. I shall concentrate upon his view as he presents it in the earlier article. Walton's view is only one amongst a host of views on the problem of fictional emotions. I shall restrict my examination to his view alone in this section, and say something about alternative accounts when I deal with Radford.

involvement' with fictions as consisting in emotional attitudes directed towards fictional entities. Walton believes that just as Charles isn't afraid of the slime, we do not in general react with emotion towards fictional things.

Is Walton right to say that Charles is not afraid? Certainly, there is no slime to be afraid of; but does that mean Charles cannot be afraid, or that there is no sense in which Charles can be said to be afraid? I shall examine Walton's view in some detail and then go on to provide what I believe to be the correct analysis of the nature, object, and intentionality of fictional emotions.

3.31 'Make-believe' and fictional emotions

Expressed in general terms, Walton's account of what it is to undergo an episode of emotion is to experience 'quasi-E' caused by the belief that P. 'Quasi-E' is the physiological/psychological state characteristic of E, and the belief that P is the belief that is partly constitutive of E. In Walton's view an affective response can only be an emotion if it has the right causal ancestry, if, that is, 'quasi-E' is caused by the belief that the state of affairs P obtains. When we respond to fiction we do not hold the requisite belief. Therefore, whatever we experience in response to fiction cannot, in Walton's view, be an experience of emotion proper. Rather, we experience 'make-believe' emotion. For example, Charles 'make-believedly' feels fear for himself when his making-believe that he is in danger causes him to feel

'quasi-fear'. Walton names this experience 'make-believe fear'. The general proposal is this: an emotion E is experienced make-believedly if quasi-E is caused by the belief that make-believedly P, where P is the state of affairs which must be believed to obtain in order actually to experience E.¹⁵ The object-directedness and intentional content of 'make-believe' emotion is provided by beliefs about what is make-believedly the case within the relevant fictional world. The same beliefs make it 'make-believe' that the object of emotion is the fictional state of affairs. The fictional state of affairs is not really the object of emotion - it does not exist - but make-believedly the emotion is directed towards it.

What happens when we respond with 'make-believe' emotion is that we make-believe or imagine something's being the case, and as a result of our awareness of what the 'prop' - the art-work - and relevant 'principle' determine to be make-believedly the case, we react in a certain way. Principles of make-believe guide our participation in the 'game of make-believe' we play with the 'props' and establish make-believe truths (propositions 'true' in the game of make-believe), the set of make-believe truths making up distinct fictional worl-

15. Walton is more hesitant in *Mimesis as Make-believe*. He seems to favour the view that emotions involve beliefs, and beliefs which cause quasi-E, though he is not prepared to stipulate that they do. He also equivocates over whether emotions always involve quasi-E understood as occurrent sensations (or, indeed, whether they must involve a phenomenological experience of any kind). He leaves the matter in a rather unsatisfactory form, saying that, whatever it is that combines with belief (if belief is involved) - he doesn't know what it is - quasi-E is, in part, responsible for the fictional truth that emotion is experienced. Fictional emotions are still denied the status of emotions proper, and the analysis of Charles' 'fear' is unaltered. See Section 5.2; 7.1; 7.2.

ds. The props may include the spectator himself, and they, together with the relevant principle, can generate make-believe truths. For example, Walton pictures Charles as recognising a principle of make-believe whereby fear-behaviour (quasi-fear, staring wide-eyed, clutching one's seat etc.) generates the make-believe truth that fear is experienced. It is on the basis of Charles' making-believe or imagining that he is involved in the events represented, and that he is under threat from the terrible green slime, that he reacts with fear-behaviour, and his response, together with the relevant principle, generates the make-believe truth that he is afraid of the slime. So the complete picture of the wider psychological and conventional grounds that make it make-believe that some fictional entity is the object of emotion, and which make it make-believe that one reacts with emotion to it, include prop, principle and psychological/physiological states.

3.32 Fictional objects and emotions

What are we to make of Walton's account? Firstly, his answer to the question of whether we experience emotion proper is inadequate. Walton appears to consider quasi-E as necessary to E, and, if caused by the belief that P, as sufficient for E. But neither proposition is true. For example, if Charles were to experience the sensations accompanying the physiological processes - quasi-fear - that underlie an experience of fear in response to a non-fictional

state of affairs, and yet was not distressed by the thought (or belief) of danger to himself, his experience would not count as an episode of fear. Further, Charles's experience of quasi-fear is compatible with his experiencing something other than fear. He may be pleasurablely excited, rather than afraid. So the issue of whether a spectator or reader experiences emotion proper cannot be settled by the presence or otherwise of quasi-E. It is what I called the hedonic tone which settles the matter.¹⁶

In fact Walton's positive account of how we respond to fiction is also unsatisfactory. It is surely very counter-intuitive to suggest that when we react with 'emotion' to a fictional state of affairs we imagine an actual disturbance partly constitutive of real emotion - 'quasi-E' - to be an episode of that emotion, and make-believable identify it with the emotion through the guidance of a principle of make-believe. For example, does a reader or spectator of King Lear really implicitly or explicitly recognise a principle of make-believe to the effect that when he is in a certain state partly constitutive of horror, say, that it is a make-believe

16. The criticism holds good for the Mimesis as Make-believe account of fictional fear. Since Walton leaves the question of what constitutes the feeling in the case of other emotions unanswered, his more recent account is incomplete rather than strictly incorrect. In places Walton also relies upon the absence of any inclination on Charles' part to escape the fictional danger to argue that he cannot really be afraid. If the proposed account of emotion is accepted the argument is ineffective: episodes of emotion are not to be defined as belief/desire complexes, and there is no conceptual connection between an emotion and a particular kind of accompanying action. Therefore, the absence of any motivational force that fear might have in other contexts does not, in this context, lend weight to the idea that Charles cannot be genuinely afraid. The explanation of why Charles doesn't act is, of course, obvious. Since the motivational force fear has in real-life depends upon the belief that there exists something that actually places one in danger (together with other beliefs about what measures can be taken), and since that belief is absent in fictional contexts, Charles is, unsurprisingly, not motivated to act.

truth that he is? And is someone who experiences quasi-E (or rather the relevant hedonic tone) likely to imagine that he experiences emotion and recognise it to be a make-believe truth that he does, rather than believing that he really is stirred to emotion? Rather, he will either believe (truly) that he is actually horrified, or imagine that he is without resort to the kind of prop (quasi-E) and principle that Walton believes to be involved. In other words, he will not attempt the recognitional act that Walton maintains is necessary in affective responses to fiction. Certainly we can make-believe or imagine that we have a particular emotion when responding to fiction. But there is no good there is no good reason to suppose that we must do so, or that it could happen in the way Walton proposes.

There is no doubt that Charles cannot be afraid of the slime, for it doesn't exist. Nor can he be afraid that the slime is threatening him or that it is about to swallow him up. But that says nothing about whether he is genuinely afraid or not. Does Walton infer from the truth that Charles doesn't fear that he will be engulfed, the falsity that he cannot be afraid? The only thing that I can think of as seeming to legitimize the inference would be some (causal?) hypothesis to the effect that making-believe, or beliefs about what is only make-believedly the case, can only generate 'make-believe' emotion.¹⁷ But I see no reason why

17. Walton says that 'what he [Charles] actually experiences, his quasi-fear feelings, are not feelings of fear. But it is true of them that make-believedly they are feelings of fear'. The reason why they

such a hypothesis should be accepted. The real question is whether the criteria for an episode of emotion are fulfilled. Provided that the hedonic tone and thought-content is present, as surely they can be, then the affective responses count as episodes of emotion proper.

In effect I am saying that Walton's belief-condition about an emotion's causal ancestry does not hold. There is nothing conceptually or psychologically odd in the idea that we can be stirred to emotion by something which we believe to be less than real. Can I not imagine a certain scenario, and on the basis of my imaginative conception experience sadness though I do not believe that what I imagine exists? Such an act of unaided imagination need not involve any belief as a constituent of my affective response; I simply entertain the thought of a certain state of affairs. Ultimately the issue of whether we are to count affective responses not grounded in existential belief as episodes of emotion proper is to be settled by the 'grammar' of emotion concepts, and there is ample evidence for their use to characterise our involvement with novels, poems etc. (Of course, not much turns on what we call the experience provided that the structure of 'fictional emotions' is correctly understood and their similarity to 'real-life' emotions is recognised).

My suggestion is that reference to quasi-E should be replaced by (or redefined so as to include) hedonic tones. Hedonic tones are actually experienced and so the correct aren't feelings of fear is that they don't have the right causal ancestry.

analysis is not that we make-believablely experience fictional emotions as a result of the awareness that make-believablely P, but rather we experience fictional emotions as a result of the awareness that make-believablely P. The hedonic tone and the thought-content involved in the awareness of the relevant fictional state of affairs must be the ones internal to the concept of the emotion. For example, to experience pity at Willy Loman is to experience distress on account of the belief that he is represented as suffering unjustifiably. In Charles's case what justifies calling his experience an episode of fear is that he is distressed as a result of his belief that make-believablely he is in danger. So fictional emotions involve the experience partly constitutive of an everyday episode of emotion, and on account of beliefs about a work's representational content. The scope of the belief concerns what is represented as obtaining and not what actually obtains: it occurs unasserted. We entertain the thought of something's being the case as part of what Walton calls a game of make-believe in which we make-believe or imagine that the state of affairs obtains.

How do Walton's answers to the second and third question fare? Walton's account of the intentionality of fictional emotions is straightforward and, I believe, correct (once, that is, it is amended by hedonic tones): the intentionality of fictional emotions is determined by the constituent thought concerning the fictional state of affairs responded to. It follows from the proposed analysis that fictional emot-

ions, like their real-life counterparts, have intentional objects. The intentional object is given by the constituent thought about the representational content of the work. It is fixed by 'prop' and 'principle'. The intentional object of my sorrow is Desdemona, or of Charles's fear the slime, in the sense in which Satan was the intentional object of the child's fear I mentioned earlier.

There is, of course, no material object of the emotion itself, and so the spectator or reader is, in this respect, in the same boat as the child and the bit of satin. Neither of them is moved by a 'material object' of emotion. So fictional emotions are only make-believedly directed towards some fictional entity or event. The difference between the child's fear and fictional emotions lies in the fact that prop and principle generate, and are understood to generate, fictional truths, and the nature of the ensuing emotion is controlled by them. So when it comes to characterising the intentional content of fictional emotions, reference to the characters and events represented by the work must be included.

3.33 'Making-believe' and fictional emotions

Walton's answer to the third question returns us to the issues I introduced in connection with Coleridge's idea of poetic faith. One might find talk of the experience of representational works of art as participation in a game of make-believe involving prop and principle rather indigestible. However, I think that Walton's analysis brings out some sali-

ent points. First of all, it accounts for the fact that it cannot be literally true that fictional emotions are directed towards things which are merely represented to exist. Secondly, it recognises that our emotional involvement with fiction is grounded in certain conventions about how to approach and appreciate fiction, conventions which make up our concept of fictionality. The third point is that explanation of fictional emotions depends upon understanding the role of 'prop' in generating the 'objects' of fictional emotions, and that an important component of this explanation is making-believe or imagining.

The point that most interests me is Walton's picture of our active participation in the 'game' as involving our making-believe that we are involved in the events represented. We dramatise ourselves as characters within the fictional world, 'become fictional', and 'end up on the same level' as the other characters and events. Walton doesn't give a detailed analysis of the various ways in which acts of imagination or 'making-believe' can determine affective responses to fiction. I believe that there are two main ways in which this happens. The first arises from experiencing the represented events 'from without', that is, from imaginatively entertaining the represented states of affairs in an external way. We imagine that such and such events occur and that such and such a character behaves in the way represented, and experience emotion as a result. The second arises from experiencing the represented situations 'from within': we place ourselves,

in imagination, in the situation represented, and respond as a result of placing ourselves in imagination at some point 'within the world' of the work. The form this imaginative projection typically takes is that we imaginatively conceive the character's psychological perspective upon the situation, imagining from the inside his experience of the situation, viewing the situation 'through his eyes'. Correspondingly, where the object of imagination is the character's affective response to the situation represented, we may respond either to our imagining from without the expression of emotion, or to our imagining from within the character's response to the situation. In the second instance we proceed in a way akin to Hume's account of empathetic emotions: we respond affectively as a result of the imaginative conception we form of the character's experience of the situation.¹⁸

Charles' experience of fear is, as Walton pictures it, best conceived as an experience from within. The difference is that the psychological perspective Charles adopts is not represented as belonging to a character within the work. It is one of his own creation. What Charles does is to imagine himself to be afraid of the slime. Part of what he has to imagine is that he is under threat. It therefore involves the adoption of a particular psychological perspective, the perspective of an endangered self looking out upon a threatening world. The upshot is that this now 'frightened' self stares wide-eyed at the slime he 'fears'. As we have seen, in Wal-

18. See R.K.Elliot's 'Aesthetic Theory and the Experience of Art', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Vol.LXVII (1966-7).

ton's view Charles does not actually experience fear. Rather, he imagines himself to be afraid (albeit spontaneously, and on the basis of what he actually feels). His position is thus, on Walton's account, to be compared with my imagining myself to be the subject of the thoughts and feelings represented as belonging to a character.¹⁹

As my earlier remarks suggest, I believe that Walton's account is incomplete. He does not allow that we not only imagine ourselves to experience emotion on the basis of our imaginative projections, but actually experience emotion. Indeed, though we may in the particular case only imagine the character's emotion, or imagine the emotions we might experience in such a situation, typically we respond with emotion to our imaginative projections: we experience the hedonic tone internal to the concept of the emotion as a result of imagining that the thought-content of the emotion is true. For example, we may be pained as a result of forming an imaginative conception from within of a character's inner and outer fate. We may 'feel for' the character's plight. The proper analysis of such a response is that the hedonic tone internal to the concept of sympathy, say, is experienced as a result of imaginatively representing to oneself P, where P is

19. In *Mimesis as Make-Believe* Walton has more to say about this, mainly under the heading of 'imagining from the inside'. 'Imagining from the inside' is imagining doing or experiencing something, or being a certain way, rather than merely imagining that such and such a proposition is true. Charles, for example, is said not to merely imagine that he is afraid, but to imagine being afraid, to imagine experiencing fear 'from the inside'. (See 1.4 and 7.1) However, Walton's account still suffers from the inadequacy stated. The correct view is best formulated in terms of experiencing fictional emotions 'from within' and 'from without', and not (or not solely) in terms of 'imagining from the inside'.

what is necessary for us to believe or have the thought of if we are to experience sympathy. In cases like this it is inaccurate to say we only imagine but do not experience emotion, and it is misleading to call the experience 'make-believe'. Whilst it is only make-believedly true that we are involved in the fictional events, and that our responses are directed towards them, it is not make-believedly true that we may be upset, horrified, or harrowed by the imaginative experience of those characters and events.

Thus the sense in which it is true that we become 'fictional' need not entail that what we experience as a result of our imaginative descent into the fictional world is 'fictional' or 'make-believe'. However, Walton is right that we are actively and imaginatively engaged with fictional works, and that this helps to explain their emotional power. For example, it is an obvious fact of human psychology that the 'force' a fiction has upon us depends upon the content and vividness of the imaginative conceptions we realise as we read or watch. An imaginative conception from within of Gloucester's blinding or of Lear's fate is likely to have a greater emotional impact upon us than the mere unasserted thought that Gloucester is blinded or that Lear suffers such and such a fate. In fact, some emotions, for example, empathetic emotions, depend upon imaginatively representing to oneself the thoughts, feelings, and situation of the character we feel for. It is also true that if we are to appreciate the emotional significance of fictional predicam-

ents we must perform the kinds of imaginative acts I have just outlined. For example, it is only when I construct in imagination what it is like in a character's 'world' that I acquire the thoughts and beliefs which enable me to feel the urgency, turbulence, horror etc. of their situation. Further, a point that I shall develop in the next chapter is that the emotional responses achieved through these kinds of imaginative representation are important in understanding the nature of the intrinsic value of literary fiction.

3.4 The rationality and coherence of fictional emotions

If the structure of fictional emotions can be made intelligible in the way described, there remains the question of the 'rationality' of responding to literary fiction with emotion. This is the question Colin Radford raises in 'How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina?'. After canvassing various unacceptable solutions, he finds himself forced to conclude that 'our being moved in certain ways by works of art, though very "natural" to us and in that way only too intelligible, involves us in inconsistency and incoherence' (p.78). Radford believes that there is no rationally satisfactory answer to the following question: 'How can we feel genuinely and involuntarily sad, and weep, as we do, knowing as we do that no one has suffered and died?' (p.77).²⁰ And

²⁰. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 49 (1975), pp.67-81.

his central contention is that we are irrational when we allow ourselves to be moved by what we do not believe to exist. Radford does not believe that we should withhold our emotional responses - he says 'Of course, I am not silly to be moved by what happens to Anna, her situation is tragic and the novel is a great one, so I do not have to excuse my responses, and I do not usually want to dissipate them'²¹ - rather he thinks there is no way of avoiding the conclusion that we are puzzlingly, irrationally and incoherently moved.

Three questions immediately arise about Radford's position: What precisely does the claim amount to? What light does it shed upon the nature of our emotional responses? What role do emotional responses to literary fiction play in the value we ascribe to the experience of literature? The basic problem is that in non-fictional contexts the belief that there exists, or potentially exists, something deserving of emotion provides the reason and rational explanation for experiencing emotion towards that thing. In fictional contexts we do not believe that there exists anything to be emotional over. Since we do not believe the object of emotion exists, it seems that there is no reason or rational justification for experiencing emotion, and no rational explanation of why we do react with emotion. It is this absence of existential belief which, Radford believes, entails that our being moved by fiction involves us in inconsistency, incoherence, and irrationality.

²¹. 'Stuffed Tigers: A Reply to H.O.Mounce', Philosophy 57 (1982), pp. 529-532.

It is important to note that Radford is quite clear that it is specifically the absence of the belief that the characters and events exist which creates the problem. Why the absence of existential belief should necessarily render fictional emotions irrational is less clear. Radford repeatedly says that it is because we do not believe there to be anything to be emotional over and yet respond with emotion, that we are therefore irrational in allowing ourselves to be stirred to emotion. So it seems Radford's claim is in the nature of an inference: the reason why our responses are irrational is that we do not believe the ostensible object of emotion to exist. The absence of existential belief entitles us to infer that our responses must be irrational, incoherent, and inconsistent. On the other hand it is clear that Radford is not prepared to count any affective response as rational unless it is grounded in an existential belief. Here Radford's claim is in the nature of a stipulation: existential belief is a necessary condition not for being moved - he thinks that we are genuinely moved to emotion by fiction - but for being moved in a rational way. The two claims appear to be slightly different: the first is an argument for the irrationality of fictional emotions; the second is a definition, or part of one.

Perhaps a sketch of the concept of rationality will help us to see why it might appear that fictional emotions are necessarily irrational. The concept applies to a particular class of things, and something can only be irrational if it belongs

to that class i.e. is potentially rational. A plausible way to understand the concept is to take it to qualify the structure of intentional states or actions. A potentially rational or irrational state or action is one which involves thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, desires etc. Unless the state or action possesses intentionality it is non-rational. The rationality of a state or action depends upon the nature of the constituent intentional state, upon its well-foundedness or reasonableness given the person's situation. The criteria by which something is assessed as rational or irrational depend upon certain standards of good reasons and reasoning, of supporting evidence etc. Irrational states or actions are the sub-class of potentially rational states or actions gone wrong.

There are two ways in which the irrationality of some state or act might be characterised. According to the first, an act or state fails in rationality when it is grounded in a belief or attitude which is without sufficient foundation or is unreasonable to hold. According to the second, it fails when there is a breakdown in the internal structure of beliefs, desires etc. and the response is not of the kind that the beliefs and desires involved rationally dictate. Since emotions involve intentional states they may fail in rationality. They may do so in either or both of the ways described. An example of the first type is where I fear for my life as a result of the unfounded and unreasonable belief that an earthquake might strike at any moment. An example of the

second is where I fully know flying to be safe and yet I am still terrified by the thought of flying.

Which description does Radford think fits the case of fictional emotions? He cannot have the first kind of analysis in mind. A fictional emotion would be irrational in this sense if it was founded upon a belief which, in the circumstances, it is unreasonable to hold. But in Radford's view it is the absence of the requisite existential belief, and not the presence of a belief without adequate foundation, which justifies calling fictional emotions irrational. If fictional emotions were grounded in the unwarranted and unreasonable belief that the fictitious characters and events are real, then clearly they would be irrational in this sense. But, as Radford notes, they are not. In fact, Radford could not easily accept that fictional emotions are irrational in this first sense. The candidate beliefs justifying a claim that an emotional response to a literary work is irrational concern the work's representational content. But if fictional emotions can be irrational for this kind of reason, they can also be rational. A fictional emotion will be rational if it is based upon true beliefs about the work's content e.g. that Anna's fate is tragic. Since it is obviously reasonable to hold true beliefs about the work, the emotions they occasion will be rationally defensible, and that is something Radford wishes to deny.

So Radford must have something like the second kind of reason in mind. His claim is not that we are irrational if we

respond to a play or novel in consequence of some ill-founded belief about the nature of the work, but rather that our knowledge of the work's fictionality removes the rational foundation for emotion. We therefore lack good reason to respond, and involve ourselves in irrationality because in despite of our knowledge that the things depicted do not exist we are still stirred to emotion. Our knowledge and beliefs do not have the influence rationality demands. This is the inferential justification I think Radford wants to invoke. The underlying assumption must be that the existential belief-based real-life emotions are to be taken as the paradigm of rational emotions. So the idea that rationality dictates that fictions should not cause emotion receives its support from that idea. It is when fictional emotions are viewed from the perspective of what provides the coherence and rationality of everyday emotions that they appear to be inconsistent, incoherent and irrational.

Another important point is that Radford does not see our emotional responses as internally inconsistent and incoherent. They do not involve holding conflicting beliefs about what is responded to: we do not both believe and disbelieve in the reality of the object of emotion. Rather, the kind of inconsistency involved is that 'while knowing that something is or is not so, we spontaneously behave, or even are unable to stop ourselves behaving, as if we believed the contrary' (p.78). We are inconsistent because we know the fictitious characters and events do not exist, and yet we are moved to

emotion, and so behave as if we believed them to exist. Again, the reason why being moved in the absence of existential belief counts as an inconsistency is that in non-fictional contexts our emotional responses involve existential belief. Thus we are inconsistent in the conditions we impose upon what we allow to move us. If we were consistent we would require reality, and therefore be untouched by fictitious fates.

The alleged incoherence has a similar source: the conditions required for a coherent response to real-life situations are not fulfilled and yet we behave as if they were. Thus our affective responses do not cohere with our better knowledge: there is a cognitive dissonance underlying fictional emotions. So the puzzlement lies in seeing how our emotional responses to fiction can be consistent with our awareness that the object of emotion does not exist and how they can be coherent in the light of that awareness: if the coherence and consistency of 'real-life' emotions depends upon awareness of the 'reality' of the object of emotion, how can it be coherent and consistent to feel emotion when there is no 'real' object of emotion?

3.41 The rationality of fictional emotions: replies to Radford

Should we accept Radford's view? If not, what responses are open to us? The following possibilities appear to be the main candidates:

- (i) Reject the necessary condition, and attempt to establish coherence and rationality on the basis of some other feature of the intentional state underlying fictional emotions.
- (ii) Reject outright the evaluative categories 'rationality' and 'irrationality'.
- (iii) Attempt to show Radford's thesis lacks point and content.
- (iv) Attempt to establish that fictional emotions are appropriate, and also required, if the the work to which they are a response is to be appreciated properly.

Option (ii) might be thought to be plausible as a result of the following reasoning: responding with compassion, say, to the tragic suffering of an innocent victim, whether it be a character's or a real person's, is simply a universal fact about human beings; as such it is not something that can be rationally defended, and is no more nor less rational in either case.²² This option can be ruled out immediately. The fact that it is human nature to react with emotion to fictional or real events is, of course, not something that can be rationally defended, any more than the fact that human beings think. All the same we can ask of the individual response to a specific circumstance whether it is rationally grounded both in fictional and 'real-life' contexts. As I

22. R.W.Beardsmore, for example, says that feeling for fictions is irrational 'only in the (dubious) sense in which the pity we feel for human beings is irrational. In neither case can the feelings we have be justified, but they are nevertheless an almost universal feature of human life'. See 'Literary Examples and Philosophical Confusion', Philosophy and Literature, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures 1981-2 (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

said earlier, emotional responses reside within the categories 'rational' and 'irrational'.

The most likely recourse of those who propose option (i) is to identify some other belief that can be taken to provide the coherence and rational foundation of fictional emotions. Can it be successful? In a suitable form I think that it can. However, a number of the proposals are unsatisfactory. The reason is that they offer inadequate accounts of fictional emotions themselves.

3.411 Fates, possibilities, and conceptions of life

Don Mannison argues that 'We are moved by the fate of Anna Karenina; but...not by her. Consequently, coherence and consistency are retained because potentialities...lie within the actual; that is, within our world'.²³ Mannison believes that when we are moved by fiction what moves us is the fate that we 'acknowledge' to be a 'potentiality' of the human situation, and that it is perfectly coherent and consistent to be moved by that. The reason is, it seems, that being moved by real-life fates is itself grounded in acknowledgement of their 'reality'. Since that is so, when we are moved by fictional fates through acknowledging them to be potentialities or possible realities they are consistent with, and

23. Don Mannison 'On Being Moved by Fiction', *Philosophy* 60 (1985). In places Mannison seems to imply a more radical thesis: it is coherent to be moved by something acknowledged as a human potentiality because acknowledgement is required if one is to appreciate and understand the work: any other response is 'philistine'. But this more radical thesis suffers from the same defect: it doesn't help us to account for the particular individual emotional responses involved.

coherent and rational in the light of, everyday cases of being moved. So, in effect, rationality and coherence are secured by realising that 'acknowledged' fates are the proper object of response.

The problem with this suggestion is that it seems to invoke another kind of incoherence, the incoherence of being moved to emotion by a fate rather than by the character who suffers it. The typical range of emotions involved in responses to fiction, including those Radford is concerned with, conceptually require persons or characters as object, and not fates or potentialities. For example, pity and sympathy can only take sentient beings as object since they are grounded in the thought of the sufferer's suffering. It would be incoherent to feel pity or sympathy for the fate itself: fates are suffered but do not suffer. It is true that one's admiration for a literary work and one's willingness to respond with emotion to it may be influenced by the belief that it is 'true to life' or represents the universal human condition, just as one may refuse a response because of a lack of credibility, escapism, or sentimentality etc. But to suppose that what one is moved to a particular emotion by is a fate acknowledged to symbolise Everyman, rather than the character who is represented to suffer it, is to confuse what is a condition of response with what is the proper object of response. It is also true that one can be moved in some general way by the thought that such and such is a tragic fact of the human situation. But that one can be moved by the

thought of the tragedy of human existence cannot establish the rationality and coherence of being moved to pity by what happens to Cordelia.

Essentially the same criticism applies to attempts to establish rationality and coherence via beliefs about the meaning or sense of the work as a whole or the conception of life it implies. For example, Weston says that 'Our response to the death [of the Duchess of Malfi] is part...of our response to the thematic structure of the play, and hence to the conception of life expressed by it. We are moved, if you like, by the thought that men can be placed in situations in which the pursuit of what they perceive to be good brings destruction on both themselves and the ones they love'.²⁴ I will deal with the suggestion that coherence and rationality can be established by appeal to thoughts in a moment. The point here is that it is not the thought of the thematic structure of the play that generates emotion. Clearly, the significance one sees in an event in a work can be influenced by the interpretation the work places on it, and our response to 'thematic suffering' may depend upon appreciating that. But, again, it is the particular history of the character in the work that moves us to sorrow.

The fact that the work represents what a reader may believe to be a possibility will not save this suggestion. There are two possible versions of the idea. The first is similar to the idea that one must acknowledge a fate to be a potential-

24. Michael Weston 'How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina?' Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, supplementary volume 49 (1975).

ity. For example, Boruah says:

...when the unasserted thought about a fictional object is entertained in a frame of mind which primarily embraces the appropriate evaluative belief, what is otherwise counted as merely fictional is then deemed to be a possibility, or, in Aristotle's words, 'what is capable of happening according to the rule of probability or necessity'...it is this recognition of kinship with, or relevance to, real life that triggers off the disposition to respond emotionally to the fictional situation...²⁵

But even if this were true it would do nothing to show that the ensuing emotions are rational or coherent. The reason is that the thought that what the work represents is possible may be a condition of response, but what moves one to emotion is not the thought or belief that it is a possibility, but rather the beliefs about the possibility as it is actualised in the work i.e. about the characters and events represented. I may not have any view about whether what the work represents is possible when I experience emotion at what it represents, and the absence of any such belief is not in itself a reason to question my response. If fictional emotions are independent of such beliefs, and are appropriate without them, then the coherence and rationality of responding cannot be established via them.

The second version of this idea is that it is the envisagement of a certain possibility itself which provides the coherence and rationality of fictional emotions. But, again, it is the possibility as it is actualised that moves us to

25. Bijoy.H.Boruah *Fiction and Emotion* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p.103. Harold Sulsky's 'On Being Moved by Fiction', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 39 (1980) offers a 'modal belief' about 'possible worlds' version of the idea that fictional emotions are grounded in beliefs about (logical) possibilities.

emotion and not the thought of or beliefs about a certain possibility. It might be correct to characterise my entertaining a certain scenario in some general and hypothetical manner as the thought of a certain possibility, but the experience of the representational content of a work of fiction cannot be characterised in the same way. Therefore, coherence and rationality cannot be argued for on that basis.

3.412 Real-life counterparts

Instead of supposing that beliefs about a work's truth to life or about its representing a certain possibility can secure the rationality and coherence of fictional emotions, one might think that what one responds to are real-life counterparts of what the work represents. This is Johnson's solution to the question of how drama moves if it is not credited. The passage following the one quoted earlier says:

The reflection that strikes the heart is not that the evils before us are real evils, but that they are evils to which we ourselves may be exposed...Imitations produce pain and pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind.

So in Johnson's view the belief that determines our responses concerns not the stage-action or what it represents, but rather the 'original' it imitates i.e. some reality or possible reality represented or brought to mind by the play. One might then argue that if fictional emotions are really directed to historical counterparts, then they too can be coherent and rational.

This is the line Barry Paskins takes.²⁶ He says that 'our emotions towards fictional characters are directed towards those real people, if any, who are in essentially the same situation'. For example, our pity towards the 'inessentially' fictional character Anna Karenina 'is, or can without forcing be construed as, pity for those people if any who are in essentially the same situation'. However, fictional emotions cannot without forcing be construed as directed towards some historical counterpart to the character or event. They are directed towards the character, and not to any actual or potential correlate in our own experience. I may not know of any historical counterpart nor believe that any such event has ever happened, but that does not preclude me from responding. And I obviously need not have any such thought in mind when I respond to the fate of the character in the work. For example, it is Gloucester's blinding that horrifies me, and the thought or belief about a historical counterpart to the fictional episode plays no part (or need not) when I am horrified by it. My knowledge of some historical counterpart may increase the poignancy the scene has for me, but that does not make the counterpart the object of my emotion. Equally, if I am to respond fully to and appreciate Gloucester's fate then my response must be determined by and

26. Barry Paskins 'On being moved by Anna Karenina and Anna Karenina', *Philosophy*, 52 (1977). Peter McCormick in 'Feelings and fictions', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. XLIII (1985), seems to advocate a similar view: 'part of what moves us in Kundera's novel is what Tereza's sufferings refer to. And this may well be the real sufferings of our families, our friends, and ourselves...In responding imaginatively to fictions we judge Tomas and ourselves, we feel for Tereza and ourselves'.

centre upon the particular and individual fate outlined in Shakespeare's play. Turning my attention away from that to thoughts of events elsewhere involves giving up the proper object of emotion. So if the beliefs determining my response are about the character, the rationality and coherence of responding can hardly be established by appeal to beliefs about something else.

3.413 Thoughts

Peter Lamarque believes that we can show the rationality and coherence of fictional emotions by recognising that it is thoughts that are what he calls the 'real objects' of fictional emotions: 'simply put, the fear and pity we feel for fictions are in fact directed at thoughts in our minds'.²⁷ Lamarque defines the 'real object' of emotion as the existing thing which actually causes us to experience the emotion: it is, for example, what we are frightened by, and what is picked out is the thing that is responsible for the emotion. What we are frightened of is the 'intentional object', a 'representation' or 'thought-content'. So, Lamarque claims, 'when we respond emotionally to fictional characters we respond to mental representations or thought-contents'. Lamarque gives the following analysis of what exists in 'our world' when we are moved by a fictional character: 'when Desdemona enters our world she enters not as a person, not as

²⁷. Peter Lamarque 'How can we Fear and Pity Fictions?' British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 21 (1981).

an individual, not even as an imaginary being, but as a complex set of descriptions with their customary sense'. Once we realise that 'thoughts as representations can be the proper object of emotion' the solution to the problem is 'simple': thought and belief are independent and one can rationally and coherently be moved to emotion by a thought (suitably derived from fictional descriptions etc.) without believing that anything real corresponds to the content of the thought:

we can be frightened by a thought without believing that there is anything real corresponding to the content of the thought. At most we must simply believe that the thought is frightening...I can be frightened by a thought or thought-cluster at a time when I am in no actual danger and do not believe myself to be in danger. I am in no danger at the moment of being mauled by a lion. This is no doubt good reason for saying that it would be absurd and irrational for me at this moment to be afraid of being mauled by a lion. But it is not absurd or irrational, but natural and likely, that I might be frightened here and now by the thought of being mauled, should I bring to mind snarling teeth, thrashing of claws, searing pain, and so on.(p.294-5)

I am not entirely sure how Lamarque thinks we should picture this fear arising from the thought of a fictional lion. Does he think that belief is part of the response? If he does, is it that when I am frightened by the thought of a fictional lion my response is determined by a belief not about some fictional entity - Lamarque denies that - but rather about the thought itself, namely that it is a frightening thought? And is it because of this belief that my being frightened by a thought is not absurd and irrational? Since the 'proper object' of emotion is a thought, and since Lamarque thinks it is wrong to think that a character enters

our world in any other way (e.g. as an individual character), if there is a belief involved presumably it does relate to the thought. If so I would have to believe that the thought itself possesses the relevant emotion-evoking property, viz of being dangerous to me.

This lacks plausibility. It might be rational and coherent to be frightened by a thought if I believe that it genuinely threatens my well-being (e.g. I believe that the occurrence of a particularly painful thought is likely to precipitate a heart attack). But when I experience fear at the representation of a lion, my fear is not a result of the belief that the thought of the lion endangers me (though I might find it gives rise to frightening thoughts). Rather, it is my belief that make-believedly I'm under threat from the lion represented in the movie, say, which leads me to experience fear. Now it is true that I might find that the thought of being savaged by a lion is a frightening thought i.e. a thought of a certain situation which, if real, would frighten me. And I might find that envisaging that possibility causes me fear. But when it comes to fictional works, that which the thought is about troubles me, and it is beliefs about that which underlie my fear.

Further, it is obvious that if there is a 'real object' of fear in Lamarque's sense it is not the thought, but the representation. For example, it is the depiction of the lion and not the thought itself or alone, that causes me to feel fear; I am frightened by the representation of a ferocious

lion on the screen. Therefore, it isn't very plausible to say that when we respond emotionally to fictional characters and events the 'real object' of our emotion, what we are responding to, is a 'mental representation' or 'thought-content'. If I want to stop being afraid I should stop watching the movie. I should not (or not only) stop thinking certain thoughts. The coherence and rationality of feeling the emotion depends upon the nature of the beliefs I hold about what is represented - unless, of course, I happen to be afraid as a result of the thoughts themselves and have the appropriate beliefs to justify my fear.

So appeal to thoughts as the 'real object' of fictional emotions cannot establish their coherence and rationality, for the pertinent beliefs are not about the properties of thoughts at all. It is what the thought is about - the fictional characters and events represented - that I hold beliefs about, and it is those beliefs that determine my emotion. Indeed it is not clear that it would be coherent and rational to respond to a representational work of art if the beliefs determining the responses do not contain essential reference to the work itself, to what it represents to be the case, but only to the thoughts arising from reading or seeing it. The moral is, I think, that the notion of the 'object' of emotion should not be applied to thoughts.

The inadequacy in Lamarque's proposal reveals itself in another way. Lamarque's positive account of the intentional content of fictional emotions, of what we are 'emotional

over', includes no reference to beliefs about what is make-believedly the case within some fictional world, or about the doings and sufferings of individual persons. Rather, we are emotional over a complex set of descriptions with their customary senses, and it is wrong, Lamarque believes, to characterise the attentive process involved in fictional emotions as including an imaginary person presented by the work as the intentional object of emotion.

But this merely compounds the problems already hinted at in his contrast between 'real' and 'intentional' objects. The correct characterisation of the intentionality or experiential content of fictional emotions is in terms of beliefs about what make-believedly happens to people, beliefs which determine that emotions are make-believedly directed towards those people. That is, a character and his fate appear in the intentionality of emotional experience as an individual personal history, and it is that person who is the focus of our emotional state. So characters do not 'enter our intentional world' as complex thoughts, and fictional emotions are not directed towards the sense of a set of descriptions. We are moved by our awareness of fictional persons and events, not thought-contents. In short, fictional characters and events appear in our intentional world not as senses of descriptions, but as things that are make-believedly the case. What we need is awareness of the doings and sufferings of fictional characters themselves.

So it is what is delineated through the sense of fictional

sentences that stirs us to emotion, and it is our beliefs about what the work establishes as a 'make-believe truth' rather than about thought-contents, or the senses of descriptions, that gives the intentional content of the experience. If the correct characterisation of the intentionality of fictional emotions must include reference to beliefs about fictional persons and events, then the rationality and coherence of fictional emotions cannot be secured by appeal to thoughts alone. Thus, if it is our awareness that make-believable a person named Cordelia suffers a tragic fate that leads us to be moved by her fate, and if it is what we make-believe or imagine to be the case in the world of Tolstoy's novel that moves us, we cannot hope to establish the rationality or coherence of feeling compassion for her in the way Lamarque describes.

3.414 Evaluative beliefs

If we are moved not by thoughts but by things that are make-believable the case, then the beliefs underlying fictional emotions concern fictional things and not the sense of descriptions or thoughts. So we are left with beliefs about the doings and sufferings of characters. Can they secure the rationality and coherence of fictional emotions? One version of this claim is provided by Boruah.²⁸ He believes that the coherence and 'E-rationality' of fictional emotions depends

28. op. cit. note 25.

upon the presence of a (true) 'evaluative belief' applied to an unasserted thought about what the work represents. Emotions are 'S-rational' in virtue of possessing 'structural' rationality (inner coherence), and are 'E-rational' or 'E-irrational' depending upon whether the beliefs grounding them are true, justified etc. An everyday emotion involves both an 'existential' belief that the thing in question exists, and an 'evaluative' belief that it possesses the relevant emotion-evoking property. The 'E-rationality' of an episode of everyday emotion depends upon the presence of both kinds of belief. In the case of fictional emotions only the 'evaluative' belief is present. Boruah's idea is that though the rationality of everyday emotions requires an 'existential belief', where the object is known to be fictional an emotional response can be coherent and rational provided that it is grounded in a true 'evaluative belief' and unasserted thought about a fictional state of affairs.

Boruah believes that it is the 'evaluative belief' that does the work in providing fictional emotions with rationality. But his presentation of this notion is rather confusing. He says that an 'evaluative belief' has no existential import and is an 'estimative conceptualisation' that involves a 'regulative conception' or 'evaluative paradigm' that turns an ordinary 'cognitive, descriptive or factual belief' into a 'specific way of viewing the object'. The 'evaluative belief' involved in a certain emotion consists of an evaluative judg-

ement about the nature of the object...a belief that the object possesses such-and-such emotion-evoking property'. The common factor in fictional and 'real-life' emotions is the 'evaluative' belief that such and such an emotion-evoking property is possessed by the object of emotion.

Boruah asserts that when someone is afraid of a real lion he holds the existential belief that there is a lion before him and the evaluative belief that it is a dangerous object. So long as his beliefs are warranted his fear is coherent and rational. If the lion is only depicted in a painting or represented in a film the spectator does not hold the existential belief. Rather, he imagines or entertains in thought the existence of a lion standing before him. Boruah claims:

...in 'creating' the fictional existence of the enraged lion the imagination also acts in conformity with an evaluative paradigm that is conceptually tied to his understanding of some salient aspect of an enraged lion. In other words, it is on the basis of his knowledge about the strength of such an animal and its likely behaviour towards human beings in certain circumstances that he perceives the lion as a 'dangerous' object'. He does believe it to be a threat to his life..that this lion is very likely to cause irreparable harm to him.(p.100-1)

Boruah believes that this is perfectly coherent and rational.

But surely it isn't. How can it be coherent and rational to experience fear as a result of the 'evaluative belief' that a depicted lion is a dangerous object or possesses the fear-evoking property of posing a threat to one's life? And how could I believe that without also believing that the lion exists? If I evaluate something as a threat to my life, judging it to possess the emotion-evoking property of danger-

ousness, surely I can't remain neutral about whether it exists. And since I don't believe that the lion exists, how can I coherently and rationally believe that it possesses the relevant emotion-evoking property? Equally, is it plausible to characterise fear at a fictional lion, or pity at Anna Karenina's fate, as consisting of the evaluative belief that the lion possesses the property of being dangerous to me, and Anna the emotion-evoking property of suffering, together with the unasserted thought about the lion's presence and Anna's existence? Is it really true that the same true 'evaluative belief' is involved in being afraid of a fictional lion as would be present if I was in the presence of a raging bull, that both are 'seen as threatening objects which can injure or kill me'? And do I 'evaluatively believe' the same thing when I experience pity at Anna as when I do at a real person?

Boruah's mistake lies in the distinction between evaluative and existential belief. Fictional emotions are not grounded in the combination of an evaluative belief and an unasserted thought. For example, I clearly do not believe that a depicted lion possesses the property of being dangerous to me. Rather, I make-believe or imagine it, along with imagining that there is a lion before me. Similarly, I imagine that Anna suffers when I imagine the occurrence of the events Tolstoy's novel narrates. I do not believe that Anna possesses the emotion-evoking property of suffering tragically, but rather believe that make-believedly she suffers tragically. I don't 'evaluatively' believe that the fictional lion possess-

es the property being-a-threat-to-my-safety or the fictional Anna being-a-person-who-suffers-tragically. Rather, I believe that the fictional lion and person cause me to feel such and such emotions.

Boruah's distinction comes in the wrong place. On one side there is the evaluative-cum-existential belief that there's someone called Sarah, say, who dies tragically by throwing herself under a train, and on the other side the belief or imaginative awareness that make-believely there's someone called Anna... Boruah's view requires a belief, one that is formed in response to fiction and which is conceptually of the right kind to stir emotion. But that requirement cannot be satisfied by the distinction between 'evaluative' and 'existential' belief. So the paradox about the coherence and rationality of fictional emotions does not 'disappear when it is realised that we can form an evaluative belief about a character or event without at the same time having an existential belief about the character or event'(p.125).

3.415 Second-order beliefs

Eva Schaper offers a different account. She attempts to secure the rationality and coherence of fictional emotions on the basis of 'second-order' beliefs about characters and events.³⁰ These beliefs are brought into operation as a result of 'first-order beliefs' entailed by the knowledge

30. Eva Schaper 'Fiction and the Suspension of Disbelief' British Journal of Aesthetics vol. 18 (1978).

that we are dealing with fiction. For example, it is on the basis of my first-order belief that I am watching a play in which Sir John Guilgud is playing the part of Richard III that I form the second-order belief that Richard III is plotting murder. It is the second-order beliefs that determine the way I am moved. My second-order beliefs occur without existential commitment and can be true or false in virtue of what goes on within the fiction. Schaper goes on to claim that 'to have true [second-order] beliefs about characters and events in fiction...removes our responses from the sphere of irrational and unintelligible behaviour'.

I take it that there are two reasons why it is rational and intelligible to be moved to emotion on the basis of second-order beliefs. The first is that in the light of the doings and sufferings of fictional characters it is perfectly reasonable to hold certain beliefs about them, and the reasonableness of the beliefs provides the emotions with a rational and intelligible foundation. The second is that it is perfectly intelligible and rational to hold beliefs that result from and are not in contradiction with the knowledge that the object of emotion is fictional. For example, we do not both disbelieve and believe that there exists someone called Anna who suffers such and such a fate. Rather, our knowledge about the nature and conventions of fiction entails that we form appropriate existentially uncommitted beliefs (second-order beliefs) rationally and intelligibly called into being by, and not in contradiction with, our first-order

belief that Anna Karenina does not exist. There is no cognitive dissonance involved, and first-order beliefs are actually required if we are to respond in a rational and intelligible way to a work's representational content.

Schaper's explanation is not entirely happy, for her description of the beliefs about a work's representational content is not quite right. She holds that it is 'first-order beliefs' that express our awareness or acknowledgement of a work's fictionality. Second-order beliefs, whilst existentially uncommitted, do not include awareness of the fictional status of objects of emotion. The problem is that this division in 'orders' of belief involves the contention that the beliefs determining emotional responses contain no reference to the fictionality of the object of emotion. For example, it is my second-order belief that Gloucester is blinded that occasions my horror, and my awareness that this is only fictionally so is relegated to the level of first-order beliefs.

Certainly, there is no problem with the idea of an existentially uncommitted belief, and the rationality and coherence of fictional emotions depends upon forming such beliefs. Moreover, what Schaper calls 'first-order' beliefs must be part of the story. But it is the belief or awareness that make-believely X that underlies the response. For example, it is my awareness that make-believely Cordelia suffers a tragic fate that causes me sorrow. There is a difference between the nature of the mental state determining my sorrow when a friend of mine suffers a tragic fate and when Cordelia

does - in the latter case my belief not only occurs existentially uncommitted, but also registers the fictionality of the object of response. In other words, it is my awareness that make-believable Cordelia suffers tragically that determines my sorrow, and reference to the fictionality of the object cannot be dropped when arguing for the rationality and coherence of that response. So if, in Schaper's view, 'first-order' beliefs drop out of the picture when it comes to characterising the intentional content of emotion, Schaper's view must be incomplete.³¹

So what we need is either beliefs about what the work represents, or awareness that make-believable X; and these things are what we require if we are to establish coherence and rationality. An emotional response to the characters and events represented in a work of fiction is rational and coherent provided that it is grounded in some belief which it is perfectly reasonable to hold given the nature of the work in question. I also believe that it is by no means necessarily irrational to respond with emotion on the basis of the kind of imaginative acts I described earlier. But before I attempt to substantiate this claim I want to examine options (iii) and (iv).

31. A better account is given by Novitz in 'Fiction, Imagination, and emotion' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 38 (1980). His view is that ~~it is through imaginatively involving ourselves with the work that we form beliefs about what happens within the imaginary world of the work, and it is those beliefs that underlie and rationally justify our emotion.~~

3.42 Radford's claim reconsidered.

So far I have assumed that there is real point and content to Radford's charge. But is this really so? Why exactly, or in what sense, is it inconsistent, incoherent, and irrational to respond with emotion in the absence of existential belief? To get a grip on this question we must consider once more what counts as an inconsistency, incoherence, or irrationality. I take it that a response is normally counted as inconsistent if it contains contradictory elements, or if it is in contradiction with, lacks harmony with, some other related element. Now the only content to Radford's charge of inconsistency is that our behaviour in response to fictions is not in harmony with our behaviour elsewhere: knowledge of fictionality and emotional response count as contradictory elements because elsewhere existential belief is involved. Incoherence is slightly different. Something is normally counted as incoherent if it is incapable of being articulated or elucidated in such a way as to render it intelligible, if it displays no order, sense or clarity, or cannot be fitted into some logical or natural pattern of connections etc. The only reason why fictional emotions strike Radford as incoherent is that he cannot see any sense or coherence in an emotion grounded in anything less than existential belief. Similarly, the only reason why he finds fictional emotions irrational is that he cannot see a rational pattern or justification in being moved by a merely fictional thing.

So, on reflection, the real content (and sole ground) of

his charge is only that the conditions that determine fictional and real-life emotions are different. The reason his claim amounts to no more than this is that there is a clear sense in which fictional emotions can be said to possess consistency, coherence, and rationality. Fictional emotions can be consistent with beliefs about what is the case with fictional characters and events. Fictional emotions can also be coherent in the light of beliefs about the work. For example, if I find the scene in which Lear enters with the dead Cordelia in his arms deeply harrowing I can articulate, explain, render perspicuous, and display the order in my response. I can answer questions about it, make others understand it, and get others to share it. My emotional response is not meaningless and without reason or logic. If I found the event something to laugh at or celebrate over my response would be incoherent unless I could elucidate my response in such a way as to locate features in the play which support it (or am able to offer some other intelligible explanation), and which enable others to see how someone might arrive at a similar response to it. Similarly, the rationality of fictional emotions can be shown by appeal to justified true beliefs about the doings and sufferings of fictional characters.

Since sense can be given to the idea of a coherent, consistent and rational fictional emotion, and there are criteria for assessing whether this is so, Radford's charge reduces to the proposition that fictional emotions are not

grounded in existential belief. So we are left with the idea that fictional emotions are inconsistent, incoherent, and irrational because elsewhere existential belief is involved. Now it is equally unclear how this claim could be refuted. Of course, it is easy to see that since we don't believe that Gloucester exists, we don't believe that he suffers and so know that there is no existing thing to be emotional over. But the question that remains is: Is there any real content to the idea that we must therefore be irrational, incoherent, and inconsistent if we are horrified by his blinding?

In fact, if we look at Radford's claim closely the real issue for him is not so much about the rational explanation of fictional emotions as the rational justification or rational defensibility of being moved by fiction. So it will not do to supply a rational explanation rendering fictional emotions intelligible or rationally explicable by elucidating their intentional and causal nexus. Radford wants a proof of the reasonableness or rational justification of our responding at all. But he has foreclosed the possibility of such a justification by denying that anything other than appeal to existential belief could provide it. So Radford will not accept that a rational explanation of fictional emotions by appeal to, say, beliefs about a work's representational content provides a rational defence for being moved by fiction: this, he believes, is just unreasonable and irrational. But I believe that it is beside the point to complain that the objects of fictional emotions do not exist: fictional emo-

ions are acknowledged to count as rational by those who 'play the language-game' of fiction and they can be proved to be so. We have, it seems, reached an impasse.

The reply I have given includes the contention that it is beside the point to raise the issue of the non-existence of fictional characters and events. I could have said that it betokens misunderstanding rather than admirable caution over one's rationality to refuse to be moved by the representational content of a work of fiction. Imagine someone who refused to be moved by the scene in which Lear enters with the dead Cordelia in his arms, giving as his reason the fact that neither the king nor his daughter exist and its all only make-believe. Does such a person really display a greater coherence and rationality than someone who finds the scene almost unbearable to watch? Don't we feel that the man who remains unmoved seems to miss the point about works of fiction? The reason is that the fictionality of the events is understood not to count against their emotional power. Given the context of the response, the fictionality of the object of emotion just doesn't function as a reason to refuse a response, and given the context the lack of existential belief just isn't a valid reason for assessing any emotional response as incoherent and irrational. Understanding the conventions of fiction involves knowing that it may be appropriate to respond with emotion, and that an emotional response is, or can be, required as part of one's understanding and appreciating the nature and quality of the work. It

also involves knowing that it is confused and inappropriate to raise the question of the non-existence of the object of emotion as though it is potentially an objection to the claims it makes upon one's sentiments.

Now Radford must disagree with this. Part of his claim must be that the proper force of the knowledge that the character's doings and sufferings do not exist is that it frees us from any requirement to be affected by the character's fate: the fictionality of the object of emotion counts against its having any legitimate claim upon our emotions. But against this stands the fact that it is part of what is involved in 'poetic faith' or the 'language-game of fiction' that the fictionality of the object of emotion doesn't feature in this way. At least, this is true in so far as the response is a response to the work as an 'aesthetic object'.

So it turns out that the purported gap between knowledge and behaviour that Radford exploits to justify his charge is not one that renders fictional emotions inconsistent, irrational, and incoherent. For the knowledge or awareness in question (awareness of fictionality) is not knowledge which, in this context, could determine the nature and appropriateness of the individual emotional response: the proper force of the knowledge in relation to responding or not responding is that it has no force.³² To respond intelligibly to a work of fiction as a work of fiction I must form beliefs about

32. Stanley Cavell makes a similar point about the force of considerations about non-existence in 'The Avoidance of Love: A reading of King Lear' in his Must we mean what we say? (Cambridge University Press, 1976).

what is represented, and it is those beliefs that determine the appropriateness or otherwise of a response. So if my emotional response is to be a rational and intelligible response to a work as a work of fiction it must be determined by beliefs about what is make-believedly the case. The operational knowledge or awareness actually shows the rationality, coherence, and consistency of responding in the light of it.

The point can be put another way: given the context of the issue it is not clear that the non-existence of the object can play the role of an intelligible reason for impugning a response as incoherent and irrational. In order for some observation to act as a reason for questioning the rationality, coherence, and consistency of a response it must itself be a competent, intelligible, and pertinent observation, an observation which must, as it were, have room to operate and have a purchase in that particular context. If not, then it will be questionable whether the observation can throw doubt upon the rationality, intelligibility and coherence of the response. If a certain consideration is out of place then the absence or presence of the conditions (here existential belief) specified in connection with it can be no part of responding in an appropriate and 'rational' manner. So the important question is whether it is coherent, intelligible, and rational to offer non-existence as a reason for not responding with emotion when the concept and conventions of fiction are fully appreciated.

I think that there is at the very least some doubt over whether non-existence can feature in the way Radford requires. For it is not as though the existence or non-existence of a fictional character is an open question and in saying that the object of emotion doesn't exist a discovery has been made - a discovery that offers new and relevant information about whether we should respond. It is to the point to offer non-existence as a reason for not responding in real-life situations because it makes sense to harbour doubts over the matter, and because settling the question has a clear and obvious purchase there. So it can provoke the question of rationality and coherence in real-life because it is a pertinent consideration. But there is no such possibility in the case of fiction. There isn't any doubt about whether a work understood as fiction might in fact document real events. In short, a lack of belief in existence cannot act as a reason for not responding because the context in which such a consideration plays a part is missing.

Given that there is no room for doubting whether the suffering represented as belonging to Gloucester actually occurs, and given that the context does not allow the question of non-existence to impugn being horrified by it, the non-existence of Gloucester's suffering cannot really act as a reason for not responding with sympathy. So if it is a failure of aesthetic understanding to think that the fictionality of the object of emotion features as a relevant reason for remaining untouched by the work, and if this is a truth

about our concept of fiction rather than a psychological or empirical fact, then Radford's charge lacks any force.

3.43 Review

I have argued that Radford's charge amounts only to the claim that the belief that justifies describing an emotion as consistent, coherent and rational is missing. I have also argued that there is a sense in which fictional emotions are consistent and coherent. Fictional emotions do have their own kind of logic: they are internally consistent with the beliefs and imaginative projections involved in our experience of fiction and are coherent in the light of those beliefs and projections. The third claim I made was that it is not a necessary condition of being moved in a rational way that the affective response be grounded in an existential belief. And I have suggested a number of reasons for this. My contention is that we can show that fictional emotions possess the only kind of rationality that, in the nature of things, we expect and require. But how exactly can this be done?

The strategy I have adopted can be divided into two parts. First of all the descriptive and evaluative categories employed in assessing emotions in non-fictional contexts are taken over and applied to affective responses to fiction. Fictional emotions, like their real-life counterparts, may be reasonable or unreasonable, warranted or unwarranted, sensitive or insensitive, sentimental, mature, intelligent, etc. They are evaluated by reference to the constituent intention-

al states, and according to their fittingness or appropriateness to the nature of the work responded to. What counts as a good reason here is one which can be supported by the work, and what rationally justifies a response is its appropriateness to the quality of the work. An emotional response is without justification in this sense where it cannot be rationally defended in the light of the quality of the work.

For example, what rationally justifies being saddened by Anna Karenina or King Lear is the fact that the fates of Anna and Cordelia are tragic. The response is justified because the works are of a different order from the more mawkish novels of Eliot and Dickens, say, where the portrayed fates of Maggie Tulliver or Little Nell are not deserving of the kind of response appropriate to Anna and Cordelia. The reasoned support and rejection of emotional responses such as these forms part of the practice of literary criticism and appreciation. The categories of being rationally justified or unjustified therefore operate within the realm of literary experience. The mere fact that the object of emotion is fictional does not render it irrational. Rather, this is so only when the emotion is based on a false and unwarranted belief about what is represented to be the case. Thus fictional emotions do not require an apology simply because the object of response is some fictional state of affairs, and they are not in need of rectification or cure in the way that a genuinely irrational emotional response is.

The second part of my strategy is to call attention to the

fact that not only may fictional emotions be appropriate to the nature of the work, they may also be called for as part of the proper appreciation of the work's quality. Emotional responses are often required if we are to understand and appreciate the work. The absence of an emotional response may therefore constitute a failure to appreciate a work: not being moved by Anna's fate gives reason for affirming that the reader fails to appreciate the quality of Tolstoy's novel. Indeed, fictional emotions act as criteria of success on the part of the author - he has embodied the affective quality he set out to achieve - and on the part of the reader - he has fully responded to the work. Affective responses are therefore a kind of acknowledgement of the author's success: he has justified his claim upon our emotions and we acknowledge that the emotions are rightly called forth in the proper response to the work. Likewise, a refusal to acquiesce in the quality or response sought forms part of the evaluative stance towards the work: a better novel would have a more justified claim upon our emotions. It is part of our 'aesthetic understanding' that a literary fiction may properly succeed or fail in eliciting an emotional response and its successes or failures here contribute towards the merits or demerits of the work. The fact that we do understand affective responses to literary fiction in this way is reflected in our judgement that those who do not share our responses fail to appreciate the quality of the work in question.

So fictional emotions belong to the class of rationally

defensible responses and the criteria by which we judge that someone has understood the work include his being moved by it. The way in which we describe and evaluate fictional emotion therefore suggests that we do not recognise existential belief to be a necessary condition of being moved in a rational way. These observations do not, of course, prove fictional emotions to be rational in the way Radford requires. His requirement stems from the true claim that existential belief is not the grounds upon which we respond. However, they do show that the requirement is in need of defence. So far as I can see Radford does not provide one.

I maintained that Radford's claims should be reviewed in the context of the role fictional emotions play in the value we ascribe to the experience of literature. As the observations of the last paragraphs suggest, there is a connection between the emotional quality of a work and the value it possesses as a work of literary fiction. The works of literature we most admire do not sponsor cheap emotionality, and a work which appeals to the baser emotions is, to that extent, lacking in intrinsic value. In the next chapter I shall examine the positive correlation between the intrinsic reward and value ascribed to literature and the emotional quality of the experience it affords. I shall claim that, as Radford acknowledges, it is a 'happy fact' that we are moved to emotion by literary fiction, for much of the intrinsic (and instrumental) reward and value of literature would be unavai-

lable to us if we remained emotionally indifferent to the characters and situations represented.

Chapter 4

The Tragic Emotions and the Value of Tragedy

At the beginning of the last chapter I introduced two problems. I have dealt with the second. In this chapter I shall consider the first, the problem of the pleasure and pain of tragic drama. In the Treatise Hume claims that the same passions that are 'disagreeable' when felt in response to a real tragedy, afford the 'highest entertainment' when caused by the 'imitation' of such events in tragic art. In 'Of Tragedy' he presents the problem in the following way:

It seems an unaccountable pleasure which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy. The more they are touched and affected, the more are they delighted with the spectacle... The whole art of the poet is employed in rousing and supporting the compassion and indignation, the anxiety and resentment of his audience. They are pleased in proportion as they are afflicted, and never are so happy as when they employ tears, sobs, and cries, to give vent to their sorrow, and relieve their heart, swoln with the tenderest sympathy and compassion.¹

Thus, as Hume sees it, the task is to explain how it is that tragic art's capacity to stir painful emotions causes the spectator to be pleased by the spectacle, rather than pained, as one might expect. Hume goes on to explain how he believes that the pleasures of imitation are responsible for this peculiar effect.

1. 'Of tragedy' printed in 'Of the Standard of Taste' and Other Essays. Ed. C.W.Hendel (New York: Bobs-Merill, Library of Liberal Arts, 1965), pp.29-38.

The problem of Hume's essay is the inheritance of a neo-Aristotelian aesthetics. The three traditional concerns of that aesthetics are the nature of the 'tragic pleasure', the 'tragic emotions', and the catharsis of emotion. They originate in two passages from the Poetics. The first is Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy:

Tragedy, then is a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude - in language which is garnished in various forms in its various parts - in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative - and through the arousal of pity and fear affecting the catharsis of such emotions.(Ch. 6).²

The second is:

The effect of fear and pity can arise from theatrical spectacle, but it can also arise from the intrinsic structure of events...To produce this effect through spectacle is no part of the poet's art, and calls for material resources; while those who use spectacle to produce an effect not of the fearful but only of the sensational fall quite outside the sphere of tragedy: for it is not every pleasure, but the appropriate one, which should be sought from tragedy. And since the poet ought to provide the pleasure which derives from pity and fear by means of mimesis, it is evident that this ought to be embodied in the events of the plot.(Ch 14).

It is notoriously difficult to establish what Aristotle's picture of the 'tragic pleasure' and 'catharsis' is. But, for better or for worse, almost every philosopher who has considered tragic drama has approached it from one or other of these notions.

In fact the Poetics has bequeathed a series of problems for the aesthetics of tragedy. The first set results from Aristotle's dual assumption that tragedy's effect is to cause pleasure, and that the pleasure 'appropriate' to tragic art

2. The Poetics, translated by Stephen Halliwell (Duckworth, 1987).

arises from pity and fear. This leaves us with three paradoxes. The first is tied closely to the experience of emotion: if (as Aristotle himself thinks) pity and fear are forms of pain how is it that they are, when caused by a tragedy, the occasion for pleasure? The second perplexity also relates to the role of the emotions: assuming that 'the pleasure proper to tragedy' that arises from the experience of painful emotions is an aesthetic pleasure - a pleasure expressing admiration or aesthetic enjoyment of the work - how is it that a work's capacity to stir painful emotions is at least part of the reason why the work is found rewarding and admired? The third perplexity is implicit in the second: why do we take pleasure in tragic art at all?

In each case the perplexity arises from the peculiar nature of the 'tragic effect' caused by the artistic representation of painful events. The problem in the first case is to explain why the 'mimesis' of painful events should cause us to take pleasure in the experience of painful emotions, or (as Hume supposes) cause the emotions to become forms of pleasure themselves. The puzzle in the second case has at least two sources. Firstly, a real tragedy's capacity to stir painful emotion has no connection with pleasure or admiration. Secondly, it is not clear why an event's capacity to pain us should, when presented in a literary work of art, actually contribute to the 'aesthetic pleasure' taken in it. The problem is to account for the difference between the two cases, and to elucidate the connection between the pain and

'aesthetic pleasure' of the experience. The third problem is this: if, as Aristotle supposes, it is precisely the painful 'imitation' of great suffering, death, and other awful events that gives rise to pleasure, and if, as seems undeniable, the actual confrontation with the kinds of events represented in tragic art gives most of us no pleasure at all, how are we to explain this?

The second set of problems concerns the catharsis of emotion. They include the following issues: What happens when the emotions undergo a catharsis? Is the subject of catharsis the emotions, or something else (e.g. the tragic figure or the events themselves)? What are its results? What, if any, connection does it have with 'the pleasure proper to tragedy'? How does it fit into the explanation of the literary merits of tragic writing?

I take it that the two sets of questions (or something like them) are the principal issues for an aesthetics of tragic art. In this chapter I shall attempt to provide an answer to them. But first something must be said about the content of the questions.

The first requirement is to delimit the scope of the problems. The traditional assumption is that puzzles about the experience of tragic art are to be answered by specifying the nature of the 'tragic effect'. The 'tragic effect' is assumed to be a distinctive affective quality common to tragic writing. However, the term itself is usually left undefined. It is, in fact, rather vague. It may refer to one (or all) of

the following things: the complex experience contemporaneous with watching, or reading, a play; the general and lasting impression of the play (or group of plays) as a whole; the short or long-term effect of the experience upon the moral, intellectual, or emotional dispositions of the spectator or reader. Correspondingly, traditional theories can be divided into those that see the questions as part of the problem of accounting for the pleasures of tragedy as an art form, and those that see them as part of the more general problem of accounting for the instrumental value of tragedy. Both present genuine problems. I am interested in the aesthetic value of tragic art, and shall concern myself only with that. Therefore, the pleasures with which I shall be concerned are those that arise from aspects or qualities of the experience itself. Whatever pleasures may arise from the benefits of the experience will fall outside the object of inquiry, as will the instrumental value of tragic art.

The issue of the tragic catharsis is an instance of the ambiguity in the notion of the 'tragic effect'. There is a variety of ways in which catharsis has been thought to be an important concept. In the Poetics it seems Aristotle intended catharsis as an explanation of the instrumental value of tragic literature. In other accounts (most notably I.A. Richards') it is employed to explain the peculiar quality of the experience, and to explain why it is felt to be intrinsically satisfying. I believe that if the concept is to prove useful it will have to fulfil both functions. But I shall

restrict myself to the question of the role of catharsis in the intrinsic rewards and value of tragedy. The issue we have to address here is whether the notion of catharsis helps us to understand why there is (if there is) an intimate connection between the enjoyment of tragic writing and the emotions its appreciation involves.

The second requirement relates to the nature of the 'tragic effect' itself. So far as the first two problems are concerned it is immaterial whether there are, as Aristotle supposes, a set of emotions - the 'tragic emotions' - definitive of tragedy. The paradox depends only upon the assumption that there are some painful emotions involved in the experience of tragedy, and that they give rise to pleasure. Similarly, the third problem only requires us to assume we do not enjoy seeing real tragedy, but do enjoy tragic art. It does not require us to fix upon any particular interpretation of tragic effect. I shall begin with these assumptions alone. However, a positive account of the issues presupposes a view of the experience afforded by typical works of tragic drama. I will offer what I hope is a rather obvious and uncontroversial account of tragedy's effect.

The third point relates to the terms of the questions. Unlike hedonistic theories of aesthetic value, the account I presented in the first chapter does not force us to assume that tragic art must give us pleasure. This naturally gives rise to doubts about whether the best way to approach problems associated with tragedy's aesthetic value is in terms of

pleasure. Indeed, it has led some to believe that there are no genuine puzzles presented by our desiring to see, and prizing the experience of, tragic drama. I believe that there are, and in a later section I will introduce some of them. But for the moment I shall stick to the traditional assumption that the important questions concern the pleasure of the experience.

4.1 Hume's paradox

Hume's paradox touches on all three of the puzzles noted above. The general question he tries to answer is 'why does tragedy please?'. However, he is very specific in what he perceives to be perplexing about the pleasures and pains involved. He accepts the common eighteenth century assumption that to experience tragic drama is purely pleasurable, or as he puts it, the audience experiences 'one uniform and strong enjoyment'. He also accepts the view that there is a connection between the disagreeable emotions and the pleasure of the spectator's experience. The connection is, in Hume's view, that the audience are 'pleased in proportion as they are afflicted'. This leaves Hume with a twofold problem. First, he must explain how a normally painful emotion loses its painful aspect and becomes a form of pleasure. And second, he must explain how it not only loses its painful aspect, but also increases or 'swells' the pleasure derived by the spectator from watching the play. As Hume puts it: 'What is it then which...raises a pleasure from the bosom of uneasiness,

so to speak, and a pleasure which still retains all the features and outward symptoms of distress and sorrow?'(p.32).

The object of Hume's concern is a 'well-written tragedy'. For Hume that means a work of aesthetic merit i.e. one that properly 'delights' in virtue of its aesthetic properties. In particular, it is an 'imitation' written in such a way as to cause pleasure in virtue of the manner of representation: 'the forms of imagination, the energies of expression, the power of numbers, the charms of imitation: all these are naturally, of themselves, delightful to the mind'(p.35). It is also a work that does not allow the pain to predominate. It ensures this by exemplifying the appropriate balance between the pleasures of artistry and the pains of the subject-matter. Hume does not employ a specific notion of the tragic effect, and the problem applies to painful emotions of any kind so long as the pleasure predominates, resulting in 'one uniform and strong enjoyment' without taint of pain.

Hume's sense of the problem is rather unusual. For example, he does not share the common assumption (e.g. held by Addison and Burke) that we need only explain why we should take pleasure in beholding great suffering and catastrophe. Hume believes the problem arises from a pleasure which is specifically associated with the painful emotions undergone: he believes that the experience is purely pleasurable, and intensely so because of the play's capacity to arouse painful emotions. Therefore, for Hume, it will not do to attempt the following things: to explain why an experience involving

painful emotions should nevertheless be marked by a distinct pleasure associated with some other aspect of the work; to explain the nature of the mixed pains and pleasures of tragic art; to explain why tragic art should cause painful emotions to be the object of pleasure. The third alternative is ruled out by Hume's assumption that painful emotions are themselves experienced as forms of pleasure. So, for Hume, what must be explained is why painful emotions should actually become forms, and not simply objects, of pleasure.

Hume also shows himself aware of the paradox implicit in the assumption that a well-written tragedy is the object of a purely and intensely pleasurable experience. He remarks 'it is certain that the same objects of distress, which please in a tragedy, were they really set before us, would give the most unfeigned uneasiness'(p.30). His solution to the paradox of emotion suggests an explanation of this phenomenon. Arguably, Hume is also sensitive to a difference bound up with our second puzzle: there is a difference in logic between the 'pleasures' of tragic art and life.³ The 'pleasures' of the former are (in some sense) appropriate given the nature of their object; it would be inappropriate to be only pained by 'well-written' tragic art. But it would at the very least be inappropriate to take pleasure in witnessing a real tragedy, and fully appropriate to be pained and repelled by it. Hume's explanation should help us to understand the difference in quality of response in the two cases.

3. See Margaret Paton's 'Hume on Tragedy', British Journal of Aesthetics 13 (1973).

4.11 Hume's solution: The principle of conversion

Hume's solution exploits the two features of a 'well-written tragedy' - the pleasures of the manner of representation and the power of what is represented to evoke painful emotions. The solution turns upon the hypothesis of a particular causal mechanics. The causal hypothesis is:

When two passions are already produced by their separate causes, and both are present in the mind, they readily mingle and unite...The predominant passion swallows up the inferior, and converts it into itself. The spirits, when once excited, easily receive a change in their direction; and 'tis natural to imagine this change will come from the prevailing affection.⁴[and] give additional force to the prevailing passion.⁴

The hypothesis requires a specific causal condition: there must be two passions, one of which is predominant in 'force', 'vehemence', or strength. The initial condition in the case of tragedy is provided by an independent 'delight' in the manner of representation, and the painful passions caused by what is represented. The 'delightful movements' excited by 'imitation' (which Hume believes is always in itself agreeable) and 'the genius required to paint objects in a lively manner, the art employed in collecting all the pathetic circumstances, the judgement employed in disposing them' (p.32), are predominant. The uneasiness of the melancholy passions caused by the events is subordinate. What happens then, Hume claims, is that:

The uneasiness of the melancholy passions is not only overpowered and effaced by something stronger of the opposite kind, but the whole impulse of the passions is converted into pleasure, and swells the delight which the eloquence raises in us...the predominant emotion

4. Treatise, Bk 2, Pt 3, Sect. 4. Hume sets out the causal principle in some detail in the Treatise.

[i.e. the pleasure] seizes the whole mind and converts the former [i.e. the painful emotions] into itself ... (p.32)

The result is that the spectator feels 'a strong movement, which is altogether delightful'. In other words, Hume's thesis is that we thoroughly enjoy the artistic representation of tragic events because the artistry delights us in such a manner as to negate the painful aspect of the experience and to receive additional intensity through the play's 'imitation' of painful events.

Hume's hypothesis explains why the ostensibly painful experience of tragic art is in fact purely pleasurable, and it explains why the audience is pleased in proportion to the 'affliction' experienced. Further, we have the means to explain the paradoxical phenomenon of the pleasure caused by tragic art, as opposed to the pain on account of the real thing. In the latter case, Hume believes, the pain is increased by the pleasures of artistry. In Hume's view the difference results from the greater strength of the pleasures of artistry in the case of tragic art, in contrast to the greater strength of the pain in the case of witnessing a real tragedy. The difference in proportional strengths causes opposite effects to occur: the delight caused by the manner of expression of woes is overpowered, converted into, and then swells, the uneasiness caused by the woes themselves. To illustrate the point Hume contrasts our experience of Cicero's eloquent speech against Verres with that of Verres himself: we may be thoroughly delighted by Cicero's speech in

condemnation of Verres' butchery, being pleased in proportion as we are moved to tears. However, the pain and uneasiness of the shame and terror experienced by Verres is increased in proportion to the pleasure taken in the beauties of Cicero's elocution. In a like manner, if we had been present at the massacre we would not have delighted in the experience at all: any aesthetic pleasure would have increased, rather than diminished, the pain of the experience.

4.12 Criticism: the unmixed pleasures and pains of tragedy

Hume's solution to the paradox of tragic pleasure turns upon the acceptability of the causal hypothesis. Before I consider its application to aesthetic experience, I want to examine the causal mechanism itself.

Hume's presentation of the hypothesis is less than clear. He seems to be claiming that there are two dimensions to a passion, one physiological, and the other psychological (the hedonic tone). If this is correct then the strength of an emotion is determined by the manner and magnitude of the bodily 'movements', the 'spirits', and by its manifestation in the intensity of hedonic tone. So Hume's picture of what happens when a predominant passion swallows up a subordinate passion is (presumably) as follows: the manner, or as Hume puts it the 'direction', of movement of the stronger passion imposes its own movement upon the lesser passion and channels its 'vehemence' in its own direction. It thereby increases its own 'vehemence', and with that the intensity of the

passion's hedonic tone.

This picture is rather obscure. Indeed, it is fraught with difficulty. If, as Hume's account requires, the subordinate movement fully exists, are we to suppose that the pain is experienced, if only momentarily? Or is the passion merely incipient and, before it has a chance to manifest itself in a negative hedonic tone, redirected immediately? Whichever it is, in what sense does the subordinate passion retain all its features and outward symptoms? If it does, why does it not cause us pain? Whatever the answers to these questions may be the question arises, Is there any reason to believe such a process occurs? I think not.

In the first place, it is not impossible to experience co-present emotions with different hedonic tones. Hume seems to assume that this is impossible, and that on every occasion of the occurrence of two emotions one will be predominant and one must give way. However, joy and anxiety, say, can be experienced together. Likewise, I can experience both pleasure at a poet's artistry and pain at what he expresses. What is problematic is the suggestion that joy might become a form of pain, and anxiety be experienced as a form of pleasure. The same holds for painful emotions caused by tragedy. (I can, of course, be pained at my joy or at my aesthetic pleasures, or enjoy my anxiety. But that is not Hume's claim). Secondly, there is no reason to suppose that when emotions differing in degree of intensity occur, the weaker must lose its hedonic tone and increase that of the stronger. I can,

for example, be both happy and sad, but be more happy than sad, and I may continue in both feelings without my sadness dissipating and lending its strength to my happiness. The emotions need not mix and unite.

One of the fundamental problems with Hume's idea is that it requires us to conceive painful emotions to be forms of pleasure (and pleasant emotions to be forms of pain). Indeed, if we stick to the letter of Hume's explanation of the nature of the experience caused by tragic art, it is incoherent. The account is intended to explain how it is that an experience involving such emotions as sorrow, terror and anxiety is purely pleasurable. As I argued in the last chapter, it is part of the concept of those kinds of emotion that undergoing an episode of them involves experiencing pain or distress. We are therefore asked to imagine that emotions whose concept dictates that they involve a negative hedonic tone are experienced as forms of pleasure. But if it is part of the concept of these emotions that they are not forms of pleasure, the explanation either makes no sense, or it cannot be an explanation of an affective response which includes episodes of those emotions. In short: one cannot both claim that we experience painful emotions in response to a 'well-written tragedy' and that it is a purely pleasurable experience.

When we come to the application of the principle to the experience of tragic art a number of further problems arise. Both the initial condition and the outcome are questionable. There are three dimensions to the causal claim: there is an

independent pleasure in the artistry; the pleasure has a greater strength than the incipient painful emotions; and the pleasure converts the incipient emotions into itself. The outcome is that in the very act of stirring negative emotions the artistic representation of harrowing events causes a purely and intensely pleasurable experience. Therefore, if Hume's account is to succeed the correct answer to these questions must be affirmative: Is there an independent pleasure? Does it have a greater strength than the negative emotions? Does it convert and receive strength from the painful emotions? Is the experience afforded by tragic art purely and intensely pleasurable?

Everything hinges on the last question. The correct answer is that tragic art does not provide a purely pleasurable experience. If we take King Lear as a paradigmatically well-written tragedy, it is no more accurate to say that we feel no pain when watching the closing scenes of the play as it is to say that we must feel only pleasure as we walk out of the theatre. Clearly, then, the causal mechanism does not operate in the way Hume imagines: if the experience is not purely pleasurable, then the poet's artistry obviously does not act upon us in such a way as to cause us not to be pained by the suffering etc. It does not convert the pain of the emotions into itself. Therefore it cannot be true that the play is all the more pleasurable on account of the play's disturbing aspect. And since the experience is tainted by pain whatever the role artistry plays, it cannot be the one Hume envisages.

Even if we ignore the fact that the painful emotions do not lose their painful aspect, is it plausible to suppose that their presence contributes towards the pleasure taken in the artistry? First of all, we should note that the greater the author's artistic abilities, the more likely it is that his work will cause pain. The reason is that the greater felicity in language, characterisation, incident etc., the more vivid and powerful the realisation of the nature and magnitude of the suffering represented; the more vivid and powerful the realisation, the more painful and harrowing the experience. This, of course, is the inverse of what Hume supposes. He maintains that the better written the play the less (not the more) harrowing the experience. Secondly, if there is a positive correlation between the pleasure taken in the artistry, and the pain of what it represents, it runs in the opposite direction to that suggested by Hume. It is not so much that we enjoy the work's emotional quality because of the pleasure we take in the author's artistry. Rather, the pleasure in the artistry arises from our recognition of its effectiveness as a means to realising the 'world' of the work, and of giving it emotional force. Since our appreciation of the manner of representation stems from our admiration of the way in which it makes the play's world available to us, the pleasure is conditional upon the capacity of the work to stir us to emotion.

This provokes the question whether there is an independent pleasure taken in the artistry, as Hume's explanation requir-

es. Hume's account requires the pleasure to be independent for two reasons. Firstly, the causal hypothesis requires it. Secondly, if the pleasure is not independent, but rather conditional upon our finding the affective quality of what it represents rewarding and valuable in itself, we are faced with a circular explanation: we admire the artistry in virtue of its role in securing an emotional quality; we take pleasure in the emotional quality because of the artistry. However, I do not think that we must take an independent pleasure in the way Hume's account requires: if I don't take a distinct delight in the literary qualities of the work, need I have failed to have appreciated the play properly as a whole? I don't think so. One may, of course, be pleased by a writer's artistic skills without referring those skills to their place within the wider context of the dramatic whole. But it is not likely to be a very common response, and it is not central to our appreciation of tragic art.

The final question is whether the pleasure caused by the artistry is greater in degree of intensity than the (incipient) pain of the negative emotions. If it is not, the conversion of pain into pleasure will not take place. We can concede to Hume that fictional emotions may be less intense than their real life counterparts - after all, its only a make-believe truth that I'm witnessing suffering, there is nothing I can do about it, I'm not personally involved etc. However, that does not mean the painful emotions must be less intense than the pleasure. It seems to me that if we can

compare the two, the horror at seeing Gloucester blinded, or the pain in seeing Lear with the dead Cordelia in his arms, will be more intense than the pleasure of the manner in which these events are represented. Therefore, even supposing that Hume's principle of the association of the passions were true, it would not help to explain why the experience is a thoroughly pleasurable one.

So we must give a negative answer to the four questions. The result is that Hume's causal hypothesis about the pleasures of tragedy is redundant. There remains the issue of why we take pleasure in the artistic representation of kinds of events which would give us no pleasure if we were to come across them in reality. Hume's view is that the same causal mechanism is at work, but the initial conditions differ. Hume's basic thought is that the stronger aesthetic delight in the theatre counter-acts and harnesses the strength of the pain, but aggravates it when presented with reality.

Before assessing Hume's explanation, these four points should be noted. Firstly, Hume must maintain that one significant contrast between the two cases is that in one we actually witness the occurrence of the events, in the other we do not. The reason is that he thinks the same effect occurs in aesthetic contexts regardless of whether the events are historical actualities. He also says that if we have experienced a personal loss, or if a play deals with near contemporaries, eloquence will merely aggravate rather than remove the pain. So the real contrast seems to be that aesth-

etic experience must involve a certain 'distance' or lack of immediacy of a personal (or quasi-personal) involvement. Secondly, fictional emotions are likely to be less intense. These two points are obviously related. When we actually witness tragic events the impact upon our emotions is bound to be greater than that of a theatrical representation. In the theatre we know we do not witness the loss of life, and the 'imitation' of the death of historical individuals (rightly or wrongly) doesn't seem to disturb us as much as seeing the death for ourselves. Thirdly, there are not similar opportunities for aesthetic delight. A Shakespearian tragedy is an 'aesthetic object' exemplifying poetic excellences which are not manifest in the tragic events of life. Fourthly, Hume clearly thinks that the painful events of a well-written tragedy are displayed in such a manner as to avoid degenerating into a merely painful and repellent representation: too much dwelling upon gruesome detail, or the mere representation of brutality and atrocity, will not secure the right effect.

One might think that Hume would want to make use of these points. He could then argue that in the theatre the naturally less intense fictional emotions will be overpowered by the greater aesthetic delight. In reality the inverse will hold. Without them, or some other explanation of why the aesthetic pleasure predominates, we are left with a lacuna in Hume's explanation.⁵ We want to know why it must be the case that in

5. In fact it seems Hume must offer some explanation along these lines since he says in the Treatise that painful emotions are naturally

the theatre the pleasure dominates, but in reality the pain. However, Hume does not offer this explanation. I think the reason is that he sees it will not explain why the experience is purely pleasurable. Therefore, he invokes the causal hypothesis.

In fact the lacuna extends not only to the explanation of why the pleasure predominates, but also to the more general question of what it is about 'well-written' tragedies that accounts for the paradoxical phenomenon he seeks to explain. On Hume's own account, it is not going to be sufficient to appeal simply to the pleasures of artistry, together with the operations of the causal hypothesis. After all, it seems that some subject matter which would seem to be tragic is, by Hume's admission, incompatible with the pleasurable effect under examination regardless of how much artistry is employed. Equally, Hume himself thinks that of those works falling within the category of painful imitations we can (and should) distinguish between those works that do and those that do not give rise to the paradoxical pleasure. Some other factor must be involved.

Part of the problem is that Hume is very vague in what he means to include under the heading of artistry, and is equally wanting in the provision of concrete details in his analysis of the tragic effect and of the nature of tragic art. We are left wondering what precisely it is about tragic

'violent' passions, and the sentiment of beauty or aesthetic pleasure a 'calm' passion. If that is so, one would expect the more 'violent' passion to predominate.

art that accounts for the 'unaccountable pleasure', and with the suspicion that the real explanation lies in areas other than those that Hume explores. An indication of this inadequacy lies in the fact that as it stands Hume's account would apply equally well to melodrama, horror movies, and to the worst kind of pulp fiction and thrillers. Each causes painful emotions and each delights 'in proportion' to the pain involved (though no doubt it has less to do with artistry). I submit that any acceptable account of the 'tragic pleasure' must be able to distinguish it from the dubious pleasures of melodrama etc. which are of an entirely different order. The most obvious way to do that is to examine the object and nature of the pleasure involved. Hume's essay fails to do this.

In any case, Hume's application of the hypothesis to explain the difference between the experience of real tragedy and its artistic representation fails, because it requires an asymmetry that does not exist. We must, on Hume's view, take a subordinate aesthetic delight in the expression of real woes, and a predominant pleasure in tragic art's representation of woes. But it is extremely unlikely that we should experience an aesthetic delight when confronted with the real thing. Hume's own example points to the implausibility of his account: would we have taken a delight in the way the victims of Verres butchery expressed themselves? And would we have delighted in Cicero's eloquence if he had been reporting back to us in the immediate aftermath of the slaughter? I think not. Indeed, we are much more likely to be aggravated than

pleased by the eloquent expression or report of real suffering: when real woes are poetically expressed we naturally suspect insincerity; the eloquence of a report is simply an irritating distraction. So again, Hume's explanation is rendered redundant: no conversion of pleasure into pain can take place. Therefore, we are left without an explanation of the difference in affective response between the two cases.⁶

4.2 Tragic pleasure and emotion

The basic point which has emerged from the discussion of Hume is that it is a mistake to think that the experience afforded by tragic drama is purely pleasurable. It is, of course, true that the great tragedies may provide a pleasure through the way in which they represent the tragic events of their plays. But it is also true that being disturbed, horrified, or in other ways pained by tragic art is criterial of a proper response to, and appreciation of, its content. Therefore, Hume's formulation of the problem is fundamentally misconceived. He not only sets out to explain a response that is not typical of an appreciative spectator, but his view of the problem also excludes from consideration the very people whose responses we need to understand.

Can we salvage anything from Hume's account? Hume set out to explain two things: why we find it pleasurable to watch

⁶. My analysis of Hume's view owes a good deal to an unpublished paper by Malcolm Budd.

tragic drama, and why a tragedy's capacity to evoke painful emotions raises it in our esteem. As we have seen, his answer employs the idea that the aesthetic pleasure in the manner of representation transmutes what would otherwise be a raw and painful emotional experience into something very different. The two points on which Hume is correct are, firstly, that there is a connection between a tragedy's capacity to pain us and the value we find the work to possess; and, secondly, that the explanation of this has something to do with the way in which the painful events are 'imitated'. Where he fails is in his account of the significance of the manner of representation. Hume is also responding to something genuinely paradoxical in our response to tragic art. However, the phenomenon to be explained is not that we find it purely and intensely pleasurable to watch the imitation of harrowing events, but rather that we should seek out and 'enjoy' a work which evokes painful emotions. Therefore, the immediate heir to Hume's problem is this: Why do we enjoy the mixed pains and pleasures of tragic art, when we do not enjoy the real thing?

4.21 Catharsis

Perhaps Hume looked in the wrong place. In this, and the next section, I shall look at some of the alternatives. We can begin with Aristotle. Hume assumes that the pleasure derives from the influence of aesthetic delight in artistry upon a general class of emotions. However, Aristotle believes

that the pleasure derives specifically from the 'imitation' of events that stir pity and fear. What we need is an account of this pleasure.

Aristotle makes one other relevant observation on the topic in the Poetics. In Chapter 4 he says that we all take pleasure in mimetic objects, and that the pleasure derives from exercising our understanding upon them. For Aristotle, the mimesis involved in tragic poetry is an 'imitation' of a particular kind: it is the presentation of a coherent action, made transparent and intelligible through artistic formulation. The action involves the mimesis of events evoking pity and fear, the emotions that undergo a catharsis. If we are to make sense of these various hints we must answer the following questions: Is there a connection between the idea that the pleasure in the mimesis of tragic events is of cognitive origin, and that the 'proper pleasure' of tragic drama arises from the pity and fear? And how do these ideas relate to the claim that tragedy's proper effect is to provide a catharsis of emotion? If there is a connection, does it help us to understand why we should enjoy the painful experience tragedy affords?

Aristotle claims that 'the poet ought to provide the pleasure which derives from pity and fear by means of mimesis', and that the emotions caused by the mimesis of tragic events should undergo a catharsis. If we assume that there is a connection between catharsis and tragic pleasure the most obvious interpretation is that the catharsis of pity and fear

is itself pleasurable.⁷ Assuming this, we must then connect the pleasures of catharsis with a cognitive pleasure. However, it is unclear how one might do this: if it is pleasurable to have pity and fear purged of excess, or cleansed of impurities (the standard medical or quasi-medical interpretations of 'catharsis'), what has that got to do with a pleasure derived from exercising one's understanding in working out what the play imitates or perspicuously presents? The problem is that we do not know what Aristotle meant by catharsis.

Martha Nussbaum⁸ has argued that catharsis has a strong connection with concepts of learning, and that in its epistemological use it means not 'purification' or 'purging' but 'clarification' or 'clearing up': catharsis is involved in reaching a clear understanding or cognitive clarification of something. Nussbaum therefore believes that we should interpret Aristotle in the following way: 'the function of tragedy is to accomplish, through pity and fear a clarification (or illumination) of experiences of the pitiful and fearful kind'. Tragedy affords us a clear (cognitive and emotional) understanding produced by the influence of pity and fear. Nussbaum argues that there are two kinds of illumination achieved through our affective responses to tragic art. The

7. The only other place in which Aristotle mentions catharsis, in Book 8 of the *Politics*, explicitly connects pleasure and the catharsis of emotion. However, I think it is dangerous to rely too heavily upon the *Politics*, and not least because he refers us to the *Poetics* for a fuller account of the concept (which, unfortunately, as we have it it does not provide).

8. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge University Press 1986), Interlude 2.

first is that our responses lead to a clarification of our own value commitments. We learn (or are reminded of) what matters to us in life, what we care about, and the vulnerability of our situation. Secondly, the cognitive and emotional dispositions involved in the correct response to the play are (or may be) refined by the experience. We learn to perceive and respond to the states of affairs we confront with a greater sensitivity and discrimination.

This interpretation of the tragic catharsis has the decided advantage of enabling us to make plain why Aristotle should think that pity and fear are of central importance. The first reason is that they require the judgement of similarity between the characters and ourselves. Aristotle believes that pity involves fellow feeling for the undeserved suffering of those judged to be like ourselves, and fear the recognition that we are vulnerable to their misfortunes. Therefore, our responses involve recognition of the connection between the care, commitments, vulnerabilities and misfortunes of the characters and our own. The second, and related, reason is that pity and fear are vital to the learning process. They feature in two ways. Firstly, attending to our responses enables us to develop a richer self-understanding concerning the attachments and values that support those responses: investigation of our emotional geography teaches us about our own situation and about the human situation in general. Secondly, the most important role is often not played by the intellectual investigation, but rather by the very emotional

reaction itself: our emotional responses, as it were, shock us out of our self-defensive avoidance of our cares and values and give us a renewed access to a truer and deeper level of ourselves (e.g. Creon in the Antigone learns through the grief at his son's death what his real cares and values are).

My suggestion is that we can employ this interpretation of catharsis to make the following claim on Aristotle's behalf: the cognitive origin of the tragic pleasure lies in reaching a clear understanding of the nature, and implication, of tragic events. The 'pleasure proper to tragedy' arises when the emotional impact of pitiful and fearful events is made in a work which makes the events and experience transparent and intelligible through artistic representation. The connection between pleasure, catharsis, and emotion, is this: the pleasure arises from reaching a clear understanding of tragic events; the understanding is (in part) a result of the pity and fear caused by the 'mimesis' or perspicuous representation of tragic events.⁹ We therefore have the beginnings of an answer to why an experience involving episodes of negative emotion should be a source of pleasure: the negative emotions are a condition of reaching an appreciation of the characters' fates and their implications. The pleasure is therefore not in the characters' sufferings and catastrophe, nor in the painful emotions themselves, but rather in the insights they afford us through the emotions they cause.

9. Eva Schaper argues for a similar interpretation in 'Aristotle's Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure' Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 18 (April 1968), printed as Chapter 3 section 6 of Eva Schaper's Prelude To Aesthetics (London, 1968).

This account of tragic pleasure and catharsis is a good deal more attractive than others. The usual interpretation of 'catharsis' as a quasi-medical notion takes it to refer to the spending of excess emotion.¹⁰ On this view the connection with pleasure may be understood in one of two ways: either the process of catharsis is in itself something which is pleasurable to undergo; or the pleasure arises from the thought of the benefit accrued. On either reading the main source of pleasure is not directly the play itself, but rather the catharsis of emotion. If discharge of emotion is what is at stake, once the play is over we must cease to be troubled by the characters' fates. Further, if the pleasurable catharsis consists in the discharge of emotion, and is the cumulative effect of the play as a whole, pleasure is, one might think, experienced only after the curtain goes down.

This explanation of tragic pleasure is unacceptable. First a minor point. If all Aristotle intended by catharsis was the pleasurable release from troublesome emotion, it remains totally unexplained why he should want to call this effect the 'tragic' pleasure or the 'pleasure proper to tragedy'. In itself this idea of catharsis has no intrinsic connection with the fact that it is tragic poetry and not something else that causes it. Secondly, it is not clear that we are purged of excess emotion. We may, instead, be left in a state of emotional turmoil. Thirdly, is it really plausible to suppose

10. See J. Bernays 'Aristotle on the Effect of Tragedy', in Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield and Richard Sorabji (eds) Article on Aristotle, 4: Psychology and Aesthetics (Duckworth, London, 1979).

that what pleases a spectator about his experience of Oedipus Rex is that it provides a pleasurable purgation of his emotions? The enjoyment of tragedy seems to be independent of any discharge of emotion that may occur. Fourthly, the pleasure is independent of the thought of beneficial effects, and is work-centred. It is exceedingly improbable that the reason why a spectator 'enjoys' Oedipus Rex is that he looks forward to the state of emotional health it will leave him in. Fifthly, the play 'pleases' and pains us as it unfolds; the pleasure does not await completion of the drama (this is why there is a paradox in the first place).

A sixth point is that if it is true that the witnessing of real tragedy is cathartic, it is not true that it gives pleasure. If there is no connection between pleasure and catharsis there, why assume catharsis is responsible for the pleasures of tragedy? If there is a real connection wouldn't it reveal itself in responses to the real thing? After all, real tragedy has a greater emotional impact, and therefore potentially a greater pleasure through its greater power for purging emotion. Is there something special about the aesthetic context which explains why it, unlike life, provides a pleasurable purgation? If so, this is left unspecified. And finally, the pleasure seems incidental to the recognition of the merit-conferring features of tragic art. It would seem that any number of art and non-art objects could do just as well, and one might be completely indifferent to the work itself, or even think it very bad as a work of art. In short,

this interpretation of catharsis makes our experience of tragic art too much like taking unpalatable medicine.

The main advantage of the first interpretation is that it makes plain why we should value tragic art highly in virtue of features intrinsic to the nature of the work itself, and precisely because of its power to disturb us. The pleasure is the result of a perception of value intimately related to (and perhaps unavailable without) the experience of painful emotions. The value of the experience has to do with the way in which the work presents these painful events. We can paraphrase the claim in this way: appreciation of the nature and import of the characters' fates depends upon emotional engagement with them; the value of the experience lies in the revelation or perspicuous presentation of fates recognised to have universal import. Further, there is no suggestion that the experience is not deeply disturbing. It is also significant that the experience which causes the pleasure is clearly intrinsically valuable. I shall return to the importance of this point below.

However, in this version, appeal to pleasure arising from catharsis cannot serve as an explanation of why we seek out and value tragedy for its aesthetic value. If the pleasure were divorced from the thought of instrumental reward, it might provide the explanation. Indeed, the revelatory character of the passional response is a likely candidate for the solution of our problems. But the proposed explanation ties the pleasure to the instrumental value of the work: what we

value is the self-knowledge, and knowledge of the world, the affective response makes available. It is therefore unavailable as a solution to the questions raised.

In fact, I think any explanation of the tragic pleasure that locates the pleasure in the thought of instrumental benefits is bound to strike us as counter-intuitive: why don't we cease to take pleasure in tragic art once we think we have learned all that it can teach us? And why don't we take pleasure in real tragedy for the same reasons? Surely the 'tragic pleasure' is not conditional in this way. For example, our admiration for a play such as King Lear is normally secured without thought of its educational value. But I shall later argue that the reconstructed Poetics account does express some valuable insights into the nature of the intrinsic value of tragic art.

4.22 The tragic pleasure

In this section I shall review some of the other solutions which have been proposed to the three problems. I also want to consider a question I raised earlier: Is pleasure the best concept in terms of which to understand the tragic effect?

As I suggested in my introduction, the notion of the 'tragic effect' is ambiguous: it may refer either to the final and lasting impression of the play as a whole, or to the effect contemporaneous with watching or reading a work of tragedy. The issue becomes pressing when we come to the question of the tragic pleasure. First, it is certainly very misleading

to picture our experience as being accompanied throughout by a glow of pleasure. Large tracks of our response involve no pleasure at all (e.g. seeing Gloucester blinded or Lear emerging with the dead Cordelia in his arms). Second, there is no problem in supposing that some aspect of the experience is pleasurable, but we must be clear over what its source is and how it fits into the wider experience of the work. We must be careful to distinguish between intentionality, causality and mere co-presence, for the pleasures and pains of an experience may be merely co-present, and neither intentionally nor causally related. Third, there is reason to doubt that the vision implied by many works of tragedy gives cause for pleasure. If we take the cue of many interpretations of the 'tragic vision' - the necessity of conflict, great suffering and defeat is a result not only of the precariousness of the world in which we live, but also of fundamental characteristics of human nature (including the commitment to ethical values) - the moral of tragic art is unlikely to cause much pleasure. The importance of these points will become apparent as I review the theories.

4.221 Moral pleasures

There has been no shortage of suggestions as to why an experience involving pain at tragic events should nevertheless give rise to pleasure. I will briefly consider two sets of explanations. The first set conceives the pleasure to have a moral origin.

Perhaps the most famous example is Hegel's theory. A rather crude summary of his view of the effect of (Greek) tragedy is as follows: the pain caused by the warring of ethical powers is superseded by a pleasure in the experience of reconciliation, tranquillity and satisfaction at the restored unity of the ethical universe. This is what he says: 'Above mere fear and tragic sympathy there stands that sense of reconciliation which [Greek] tragedy affords by the glimpse of eternal justice'. Hegel interprets the tragic denouement in the following way: the 'ethical substance' has been in conflict with itself in the form of the characters' one-sided commitment to one value in neglect of the others; in the characters' downfall the unity of the ethical substance is restored. He concludes:

Only in that case does finality lie not in the misfortune and suffering but in the satisfaction of the spirit, because only with such a conclusion can the necessity of what happens to the individuals appear in absolute rationality, and only then can the heart be morally at peace: shattered by the fate of the heroes but reconciled fundamentally.¹¹

Hegel has a rather unusual view of the role of the tragic emotions. He believes that pity and fear are actually directed towards the 'ethical substance' (i.e. the set of ethical and other value commitments recognised by spectator and tragic poet). He claims that fear is inspired in us at the might of the ethical order itself, a might we perceive when we see the consequences brought about through the hero's transgressions. And he says that pity or 'sympathy is acclaimed above

11. See Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, trans. T.M.Knox (Oxford, 1975), Vol. 2, pp. 212 ff.

all not for these particular and personal matters but simply for the battle between the essential powers that rule human life'. Since it is the ethical substance itself that occasions our pity and fear, when unity is restored pity and fear cease, and a moral pleasure, and tranquillity, take over.

Another major theme, expressed in Schiller and others, is that the pleasure arises out of the compassion and other sympathetic emotions felt towards the characters. Its origin is claimed to be the enhanced consciousness of free-will as a moral force. There are numerous other examples of pleasures located in a moral (or quasi-moral) consciousness, running from Medieval and Renaissance views of poetic justice, through to modern theories of existential man creating value out of a meaningless universe. It would be tedious to run through them all. Instead I will take one recent example. It is Susan Feagin's article entitled 'The Pleasures of Tragedy'.¹² Feagin makes the following claim:

But whence the pleasure [in tragedy]? It is, I suggest, a meta-response, arising from our awareness of, and in response to, the fact that we do have unpleasant direct responses to unpleasant events as they occur in the performing and literary arts. We find ourselves to be the kind of people who respond negatively to villainy, treachery, and injustice. This discovery, or reminder, is something which quite justly yields satisfaction.

By a 'meta-response' Feagin means a response to a 'direct response'. A 'direct response' is a response to the states of affairs represented in the work. A 'meta-response' is what one thinks or feels about one's responses to a work's qualit-

¹². 'The Pleasures of Tragedy', American Philosophical Quarterly, vol. 20 (January 1983).

ies and content. Feagin believes that the pleasure we take in the experience of tragic art is a meta-response: we take pleasure in the thought that in our response of painful sympathetic emotions towards the characters, we exemplify a moral consciousness. She further connects the pleasure with the recognition of the 'shareability' of one's direct response to a work of art. We are reminded that 'there can be a unity of feeling among members of humanity', and this sense of shared humanity gives us pleasure. It does so, says Feagin, because 'it reduces one's sense of aloneness in the world, and soothes, psychologically, the pain of solipsism'.

Feagin goes on to say it is appropriate to feel pleasure at our sympathetic responses to a work of art, but not elsewhere: a meta-pleasure in feeling sympathy at the sufferings of real people reveals a 'smugness, self-satisfaction, and complacency on our part', but when the same meta-pleasure is a response to fiction it does not. In both cases the meta-pleasure is grounded in satisfaction at the thought that our responses are those of morally sensitive people, but only such meta-pleasures as arise in the context of fiction are legitimate. Feagin claims that the difference is a consequence of the fact that in tragic art we are not presented with real suffering. For when we are responding to real suffering it should occupy the centre of our attention (even if only in memory): our concerns should lie with the suffering before us, and not with the admirability of our own direct responses. But in art the suffering responded to is

fictitious, and so we can dwell upon our own responses without neglecting what would otherwise be the proper object of attention. Therefore, the pleasure in sympathy can legitimately hold our attention and predominate.

4.222 Moral pleasures reviewed

Do explanations that assign a moral origin to the satisfaction tragedy gives enable us to formulate an answer to the paradox of tragic pleasure? We can divide the explanations into two kinds: those that see the tragic vision as expressing a moral message of a kind which it is pleasurable to behold; and those that see our responses to the events as giving rise to a pleasure. The division corresponds with our two questions, the question why the events should give us pleasure, and the question why the emotions they cause should do so. Hegel's explanation is of the first kind and Feagin's of the second.

I myself believe that the deepest and most troubling aspect of the experience of tragic art transcends the moral dimension, and concerns the fact and universal significance of tragedy itself. If there is a real paradox here, it concerns the rewards and value derived from the painful contemplation of that. This is not to deny that the experience of tragic art engages our moral sensibilities. Rather, my point is twofold. Firstly, at the heart of every great tragedy is the representation of great calamity, and it is that and not any moral feeling or scheme which occupies the centre of our

concerns. (This is true for at least the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripedes, and Shakespeare). Secondly, it is not true, either for ancient or modern tragedy, that there is a predominant moral pleasure or enjoyment.

The standard criticism of Hegel is that his account of the 'tragic vision' possesses an optimism which is not reflected in the great works of tragic drama. If he is wrong about this, then his account of tragic pleasure will suffer correspondingly. The criticism has some justification, although I shall not argue the case here. Instead I shall concentrate upon Hegel's picture of the passions.

His picture is in fact extremely implausible. Firstly, the ethical powers ruling human existence are not the objects of pity and fear. Our pity and fear express concern for the fates of the characters, and not any ethical values which they may adhere to or neglect. Secondly, tragic drama does not evoke painful emotions in such a way as to lead to a predominant moral pleasure. This is because we are not reconciled to the characters' fates through a perception of the nature of the ethical universe. Their fates continue to trouble us. Thirdly, even on Hegel's own terms it is unclear that we have any reason to be pleased by the tragic denouement. A theme of at least a good many of the Greek tragic poets is that circumstances may conspire in such a way as to render it impossible to avoid violating at least one of the ethical values we are committed to (this seems to me to be the case in Hegel's favourite example, the Antigone). Hegel

claims pity is stirred in us by the battle between ethical powers, and fear by the might of the ethical order. But if our perception of the significance of the events is that contingent circumstances pose an ever present threat to our ethical convictions, through imposing competing claims upon our ethical obligations, tragic collision will therefore be viewed as unavoidable (or at least an ongoing possibility). And if that is true, it seems pity and fear will not be superseded: tragedy of the kind that Hegel believes stirs our emotions is always a possibility. In sum: the impact of tragedy's representation of the terrible side of life is not enervated by a pleasure or satisfaction in the perception of the harmonious role of ethical values in human life. (I believe that a similar criticism is valid for a good many of the theories which tie the pleasure of tragedy specifically to some moral realisation). Therefore, Hegel's view fails to explain why the representation of tragic catastrophe should cause us pleasure. And it fails to explain the role played by the tragic emotions in the experience.

The criticism of Feagin's view is rather different. Her thesis is that the tragic pleasure centres upon the morality of our responses, rather than directly upon the moral quality of the work itself. I think this is a mistake. First, is Feagin right in her view about the significance of the fictionality of the object of emotion? Feagin claims that the reason why pleasure in our responses is appropriate in the case of art, and not in the case of reality, is that in the

former we are only dealing with fictions. Now since it is only make-believe that we are in the presence of tragic events, we can do nothing to prevent them, and we are not open to criticism for the way in which our responses affect the sufferer etc. In a limited sense, then, we are free of charges which could be levelled against us when we are responding to a real situation. The question, Does the make-believe character of our experience of the presence of suffering allow for and legitimise a meta-pleasure in our responses?

I believe that Feagin is incorrect in her description of the difference in attitude towards the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic pleasure. She says that we would be accused of smugness, self-satisfaction and complacency if we took pleasure in feeling in a morally praiseworthy way towards real suffering, but not so when it is the artistic representation of suffering. Is that so? The accusation would perhaps not have the seriousness when we are only dealing with responses towards Antigone, Hecuba, Cordelia, or Desdemona. Nevertheless, wouldn't we think it at least a little inappropriate if we took pleasure in our sensitivity, and felt good about ourselves because we were pained by their misfortunes? I don't think it would be absurd to say that such a pleasure is complacent and out of place. Evaluational attitudes towards the aesthetic and non-aesthetic pleasure are more similar than Feagin supposes. Although there are significant differences between the two contexts, the primary and proper

object of attention is the characters' tragic fates.

A related point is that the aesthetic value of tragic art is independent of its capacity to afford readers or spectators a pleasure in the thought that their direct responses show them to possess moral feelings. If one were not to experience a meta-pleasure in responding with empathetic emotions, one would not thereby fail fully to respond to the work. To do so does not constitute a significant factor in the rewards and value the experience of tragic art affords. Clearly, then, Feagin's meta-pleasures are accidental to the proper engagement with, and appreciation of, tragic art. The same point holds for the other sources of the pleasure Feagin indicates: one might be pleased by the thought of a community of sentiment, or that one is not alone, but both responses seem accidental both to the experience provided by the work and to the reasons for valuing the work.

In fact, Feagin doesn't really explain why the work itself should give pleasure or why the experience it provides supports the judgement that the work possesses aesthetic value. The source of the meta-pleasure is what is suggested by responses to the work (i.e. possession of a moral sensibility), and not the work itself. Therefore, some other non-tragic and perhaps sentimental or melodramatic work - a work lacking any intrinsic aesthetic merit - could equally well provide a meta-pleasure of the kind Feagin postulates. So there seems to be no connection (or at most an indirect one) between the fact that the work in question is an aesthetica-

lly valuable work of tragic art, and the pleasures supposed to explain the paradox of the pleasures of tragedy. Indeed, there is no intrinsic connection between the pains of tragedy and the meta-pleasures the experience is supposed to provide. Since the pleasure is really at the thought of moral sensitivity, if the work merely pained us without suggesting to us that we are morally sensitive, the experience would give us no pleasure at all.

Finally, I believe an acceptable explanation of the tragic pleasure will have to locate the pleasure in the qualities of the work itself. The pleasure is a response to, or part of the perception of, the work's aesthetic value. Therefore, an explanation of the pleasure associated with a work's emotional quality will take a particular form. It must account for the role of the emotions in making available an experience of intrinsic value, and an experience which is dictated by the nature of the 'world' of the work. That is, a pleasure in a work's capacity to stir emotion must be internal to a perception of the work's merits. An example would be a pleasure grounded in recognition of the importance of the experience of sympathetic emotions to an appreciation of the nature of the fates represented. However, Feagin's meta-pleasure does not fit the bill. It is at most an indirect response to the work's aesthetic value. In short: the pleasure in tragic art's capacity to cause painful emotions will not be a meta-pleasure in Feagin's sense. Therefore, Feagin has not provi-

ded an answer to our first problem, why painful emotions should cause us pleasure, or to our second problem, why a work's capacity to stir painful emotion should feature as a reason for finding the work valuable.

4.223 Aesthetic distance, and sadistic, masochistic, and melodramatic pleasures

The second set of theories of tragedy's pleasure I want to consider is the assorted collection of views which locate its source not in some moral features of the experience of tragedy, but rather in the experience of emotion itself.

The first example is provided by Edmund Burke. Burke begins by noting the 'common observation' that objects which in reality would shock are in tragic art the source of a 'very high species of pleasure'. Burke thinks this observation is mistaken, but not, as one might expect, because the events of tragic drama do not give us pleasure. Instead, he makes the following claim: 'I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortune and pain of others'.¹³ Burke says that the pleasure we feel is 'mixed' with the 'uneasiness' of terror and sympathy, but is nevertheless a marked feature of the experience. He believes that the same delight (together with pleasures of 'imitation') is experienced in watching the artistic representation of tragic events. The delight, Burke believes, is in fact less when we watch the play than when we see the reality. This, he claims,

13. A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1747), ed. by J.T. Boulton (London, 1958), pp. 44-48.

is illustrated by the fact that the audience of a great tragedy would flock to see a public hanging in preference to the play.

Burke doesn't say much to explain the source of the pleasure. It seems that he thinks painful emotions are naturally accompanied by pleasure, but only so long as the matter distressing us does not press too close. For example, he says that 'terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close'. So it seems that the pleasure of painful situations has something to do with the 'distance' involved. This is how Marcia Eaton¹⁴ interprets Burke. Out of the various hints she finds in his essay Eaton develops her own view. 'Distance' is to be understood as, or substituted by, 'control', and control is a necessary condition of experiencing pleasure in painful situations. Without control we are merely pained by them. For example, we can't enjoy a roller coaster ride unless we retain a reasonable degree of equanimity, or the ability to cope with it, remain in command of the situation etc. In the case of fiction the fact that the events are not happening (normally) allows us to feel in control.

Eaton is unsure about what 'control' amounts to and unclear about the precise cause of pleasure in the case of fictions that cause painful emotion. At one point she says that 'we seek out tragedies (and other art forms) in the belief that a

14. Marcia Eaton 'A Strange Kind of Sadness', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41 (1982). Both the interpretation of Burke and the view Eaton attributes to him are very implausible, and I shall not consider them.

controlled experience will excite, enrich, purge, and/or sensitize us in certain ways, and we take genuine pleasure in this experience'. At another that 'aesthetic delight results from attending to formal or abstract intellectual properties of objects or situations to which we would be unable to attend if we did not feel in control of those objects or situations'. Elsewhere she implies that the control of emotion is itself pleasurable, and in other places that pleasure is actually taken in the experience of emotion. Her final remark on the paradox she began with - enjoying a good cry at the movie Soldier in the Rain - is: 'I can claim that (appearances perhaps to the contrary) I am sufficiently in control of myself to pay attention to properties which I identify as aesthetic, and that this attention yields delight'. So we are left in some confusion over whether there is a causal relation between pleasure and emotion, an intentional one, or mere co-existence (pleasure being taken in aesthetic properties and not in emotion nor being caused by the experience of emotion).

Morreall¹⁵ employs similar ideas but presents a much clearer account of what control involves and how it connects with pleasure. He claims that 'the most basic pleasure we take in tragedy, horror films, and the like [is] the direct pleasure of feeling fear, pity, and similar emotions'. If we are to understand this, Morreall says, we must appeal to the general principle 'that we can enjoy negative emotions only

15. John Morreall, 'Enjoying Negative Emotions in Fictions', Philosophy and Literature 9 (1985).

when we retain overall control of our situation'. 'Control' is a function of being able to fulfil our desires, and in aesthetic contexts is a matter 'of attending to something which has no practical consequences for us, and being able to start, stop, and direct this attending'. He continues that in 'maintaining this control, we are able to enjoy these negative emotions, as we are frequently not able to enjoy negative emotions towards real life situations'. Control is assured by a lack of practical orientation towards, or consequence of, what pains us (i.e. by the fictional nature of what causes emotion). It is also a function of the artist's tact in making sure that we do not respond too intensely. If he did not exercise this tact and we became overwhelmed with emotion, we would lose hold of the rational faculties required to enjoy the emotions. When we retain control, and can start, stop and direct the painful experience at will, we can enjoy it.

But how does the control arising from 'aesthetic distance' help to explain the pleasure of the experience? Morreall gives the following accounts of the pleasures of painful emotions. The pleasure of anger lies in focussing on ourselves and telling the world who we are, in asserting and expressing ourselves, and (on occasion) in the satisfaction of having our self-image as martyr reinforced. Sadness too involves the pleasures of focussing upon ourselves, together with the pleasures of cultivating melancholy and the bitter-sweet thoughts that go with it, and of defining and expressing our self-image. There is also the mostly physical pleasure of

having a good cry. The pleasures of fear are largely physical, the excitement or 'thrill' caused by physiological reactions being inherently enjoyable, especially to those who lead a relatively dull life.

The connection between the pleasures of emotion and the control provided by the aesthetic context is that only if control is maintained are we able to attend to and focus upon ourselves, reflect upon our situation, savour our bitter-sweet thoughts etc. and so experience the pleasures which attend the pain of the experience. Fictional emotions are not so intense as to lead to a complete suspension of our mental faculties. Morrell admits that we are less likely to focus upon ourselves when experiencing fictional emotions such as anger or sadness (though we might through the character's plight reminding us of situations from our own lives). However, pleasure is still available because:

we identify with them and feel what they are feeling in their situation. And to the extent that we can "enter into" the characters, we can vicariously feel their pleasure in focussing on themselves when they feel emotions like anger and sadness...

Besides the artist's ability to make sure we remain in control the other advantage he has over life in assuring that we enjoy our painful emotions, is that he can give a pleasurable organisation and coherence to our feelings through manipulation of their object.

4.224 Intrinsic value and tragedy's 'pleasure'

None of these explanations will do. They suffer from a com-

mon defect. It is the same defect that is involved in explanations (e.g. psychoanalytic explanations) of the paradox of pleasure that claim the pleasure to be of a sadistic, or sado-masochistic, origin. Such accounts, if true, would completely undermine our belief that tragic art is of highest aesthetic value. For the tragic pleasure is internal to a perception of the value of the experience. This connection between emotion, pleasure and value, rules out certain kinds of experiences as incompatible with assigning tragedy an intrinsic value. The sadistic pleasure in seeing the artistic representation of great suffering, or the masochistic pleasure in being pained by it, are obviously not responses which we find admirable, or of value in themselves. Therefore, pleasures of this kind cannot act as a justification for valuing tragic art as art. The same holds for less extreme varieties of pleasing pain such as the sentimental self-indulgence in the sweets of sorrow etc.

So if the pleasures that Burke and Morreall describe, and some of those that Eaton seems to have in mind, fall within the class of experiences that are not in themselves of value they cannot provide the solution to our puzzles. Burke's mixed pain and pleasure is the most obvious example. Burke seems to think of these pleasures as akin to the frissons of pleasure and 'cheap thrills' associated with gruesome horrors - as the comparison with the pleasures of seeing someone hanged suggests. There are, of course, works of fiction (e.g. films of extreme and gratuitous violence) which encourage us

to be pleurably excited in this way. They belong to the class of works which afford 'low' pleasures, or what Aristotle calls pleasures of the 'sensational' kind. But works of tragic art are obviously not of this class. In any case, we must surely be suspicious of any view that claims the 'delight' or rewards of witnessing the real thing are greater than that of its artistic representation.

The experience of tragic art is also different in kind from the type of literature that might afford the pleasures Morrell describes. Genuinely tragic works of art do not represent the hero or heroine as enjoying the pleasures of anger or sadness in focussing on himself or herself, or of expressing, reinforcing and asserting his or her self-image etc. Correspondingly, they do not provide us with pleasure through entering into and sharing these kinds of experiences. Such things are normally restricted to melodrama. Now I think that it is true that a large degree of the pleasures of melodrama does stem from enjoying feeling passionately about the characters, or from identifying with them and sharing their pleasures when they dramatise themselves as nobly suffering victims or 'tragic' heroes, indulge in self-righteous anger etc. Morrell's account does fit the pleasures of this kind of literature well. But these pleasures are most often self-deceptive, sentimental, insincere, and are typical of immature and self-obsessed people (though no doubt everyone on occasion succumbs to them). When passion qua passion is indulged in, and when a literary work invites us to relish

the pleasures of doing so, neither the experience nor the work are intrinsically valuable. The object and cause of the pleasure is not of a kind that could feature in an explanation of the value of tragedy as a work of literary art. One might even say that one of the criteria by which we distinguish tragedy from melodrama is that tragedy (unlike melodrama) does not licence the kind of emotional debauch that Morreall describes.

The assorted ideas about 'distance' and 'control' also seem misconceived.¹⁶ It is obviously true that retaining the 'control' that Eaton and Morreall describe is a necessary condition of finding the painful experience of tragedy rewarding, because it is a necessary condition of being in a position to have any kind of aesthetic experience at all. If I lose control to the degree that I can no longer focus upon the object before me and am unable to register, reflect upon, and assess its aesthetic properties, then I will be in no position to appreciate its value at all. But, of course, that gets us no closer to explaining why the painful experience is enjoyed. We want to know why focussing upon those 'aesthetic

16. The other roles attributed to 'aesthetic distance' and 'control' fare no better. For example, Addison interprets 'distancing' in terms of the thought of safety from the calamities represented: the pleasure arises from the thought of our own relative good fortune, or from the feeling of safety as we look upon the terrible events in the knowledge that they are fictional. Tragedy's pleasure is similar to that caused by looking at a precipice from a distance, or by contemplating a dead monster. - We seem to be back with frissons of pleasure that lack intrinsic value, or with an experience accidental to the merits of tragic art. Hume mentions the view that consciousness of fiction softens the pain of the experience and causes pleasure. But even if we assume the pain is considerably reduced through consciousness of fictionality the obvious question is, Why should that lead to pleasure? See Joseph Addison 'The Pleasing Pain of Tragedy', *The Spectator* No. 418 (30 June 1712) reprinted in R.P. Draper (ed.) Tragedy: Developments in Criticism (Macmillan, 1980).

properties' that pain us should lead us to take pleasure in the experience the work provides. As we have seen, Morreall's and Burke's account of the source of the pleasure will not do. Neither will Eaton's. We have already ruled out appeals to catharsis and enjoyment of emotion in itself. One will hardly want to dispute that delight in aesthetic properties is (or can be) involved, but then what does that have to do with a pleasure derived from the painful emotions experienced - Eaton's original puzzle? So if control is a necessary condition, but not the object or cause, of pleasure it does not help us, and the explanations employing the notion must fail. If the feeling of control of emotion is itself supposed to be pleasurable - as both Morreall and Eaton hint at - this is left totally unexplained. I see no reason why we should believe that the aesthetic arousal of a controlled emotional response to tragic art should be pleasurable in itself (as, perhaps, the sentimental pleasure of other literature is).

4.3 The value of tragedy

I think it is safe to conclude that we do not take pleasure in undergoing the painful experience of tragic art: we neither take pleasure in the painful emotions, nor take pleasure in seeing the tragic fates unfold. The moral to be learnt is that in discussions of tragic art we would do well to drop, or at least severely restrict the use of, pleasure.¹⁷ But how

17. Many of the problems and confusions in the theory of tragedy stem from the attempt to accommodate Aristotle's tragic pleasure. The considerations of the last section provide abundant evidence of this.

does that leave our original problems? The position we have reached is that they are not the genuine perplexities with which an aesthetics of tragedy must come to terms. The proper response is therefore that the questions we began with must be reformulated. How?

From our discussion of the conditions of an acceptable account of tragic art it has emerged that the real issue concerns the intrinsic value we assign to the painful experience of tragic art. This is the phenomenon we need to make sense of. For example, I think we need to understand why the sympathetic and other painful emotions are found intrinsically rewarding in such a manner as to lead us to accord the experience of tragic art an intrinsic value. It is that, and not a pleasure taken in the painful emotion, which requires explanation. Similarly, it is the intrinsic value assigned to the 'imitation' of great suffering which requires elucidation. Therefore, the suggested reformulation of our first problem is: Why should a spectator find it intrinsically rewarding to undergo an experience which involves episodes of painful emotion? Since the reasons for the reward are criteria of value, I believe the most important question is: Why should an experience involving episodes of painful emotion in response to the artistic representation of tragic fates give grounds for assigning an intrinsic value to the experience and work?

Does it matter whether we use the notion of intrinsic reward or pleasure here? I think that it does. Firstly, the

concept of intrinsic reward does not denote any particular felt quality present throughout the experience. Therefore, we avoid the misleading idea that there is some undercurrent or overtone of hedonic tone. We are only required to assume that, all told, we find the experience worthwhile. Secondly, it has an appropriately wide scope. For example, finding a certain dimension of the work (e.g. the artistry) pleasurable may feature as one amongst a host of factors that explain why the experience is intrinsically rewarding. But someone who does not find the experience to involve pleasure, and who is deeply disturbed by it, may still find the experience intrinsically rewarding and valuable.

The other advantages of the notion of intrinsic reward over pleasure are obvious. Firstly, we are no longer forced to accept the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of painful emotions being experienced as forms of pleasure. Secondly, we do not have to accept that pleasure is experienced at the very moment in which pain is experienced, or that pleasure is taken in the experience of painful emotions. Rather, we now face the problem of explaining why a wider experience involving painful emotion should be found intrinsically rewarding. And thirdly, we avoid the suggestion that our responses are of a kind with the gratuitous pursuit of sado-masochistic or sentimental pleasures. To find the experience intrinsically rewarding need involve no indulgence in emotionality, and no frissons of pleasure.

However, substituting the notions of reward and value does

not leave us without difficulties. We must explain why it is found intrinsically valuable to undergo the painful experience of tragic events. (In a way this only exasperates the sense of paradox: if we don't enjoy or take pleasure in tragic art why do we subject ourselves to it at all?). And a prima facie paradox still lurks in our finding the artistic representation of the terrible side of life intrinsically valuable: if we would not find it intrinsically valuable to behold a course of tragic events in life, why is it that we experience the artistic representation of tragic events in those terms? Note that it is not simply a matter of finding the fiction, but not the reality, valuable. There is the further dimension I mentioned in connection with Hume's analysis of the problem: finding intrinsic value in tragic art's representation of suffering and other distressing states is criterial of a proper appreciation of the work; but it would be inappropriate and unappreciative to find value in witnessing real suffering. We will need to explain why this is so. We also need to account for the role of the painful aspects in the value of the experience. To be sure it now appears to be a mistake to assume that the difference between art and life is that in art, unlike life, painful emotion is enjoyed. So the problem is not to explain why we take pleasure in pain here, but not in life. Nevertheless, we still want to know why the pain of the experience is part and parcel of the value of the experience, as it is not in life, and we still want to know why we subject ourselves to an experience which

will not supply us with the pleasures of emotionalism. Further, we value the experience as an end in itself, and above the pleasures of less painful art: if the pain of the experience were somehow removed we would feel that the work had lost some of its value as a work of art. How are we to explain this?

In fact the two questions - why is it intrinsically rewarding to undergo painful emotions in response to tragic art, and why is the experience valued - are not really distinct. The Aristotelian tradition's assumption that an answer to the first question will form part of the answer to the second is correct. It also seems correct that out of the gamut of emotions the important ones are empathetic emotions (understood widely as those emotions which involve our identification with the characters and their fates). Whether it be pity and fear, compassion and terror, or some other set of emotions, the important thing is that at the heart of every great tragedy is suffering and other extreme states, represented in such a manner as not to disengage altogether our sympathetic understanding.

That said, I shall leave it open whether we should expect a single answer to both questions. It is quite possible that an anatomy of the passions, and the nature of the rewards and value involved, would reveal that there is no single reason common to the class of appreciative spectators for assigning tragic art a high aesthetic value. (This is particularly true of the second question: Can we really expect one answer to

the question why tragic art has been, and is, held in the highest esteem?). I will not pursue those questions directly. Instead, I shall concentrate upon the paradox of value attribution. It is not unreasonable to expect a general answer to this question. I will touch upon the other issues only in so far as is required to illuminate the latter problem.

4.31 The aesthetic expression of tragedy

'Tragic' events are, minimally, happenings which induce shock, horror, distress and sympathy. If I were to come across the kinds of events represented in the Trojan Women or King Lear the experience they afford would be deeply harrowing. I would not find it intrinsically rewarding and valuable to witness them. But that is how I experience the plays. Why? The answer obviously has something to do with the fact that in one case I witness real events, and in the other the artistic representation of (real or fictitious) events. But what is it about the aesthetic context which makes the difference?

4.311 Nietzsche's Apollo and Dionysius

When we turn to the tradition there is surprisingly little emphasis upon the peculiarities of the aesthetic context. Most theories simply reiterate the Aristotelian notion that 'imitation' in itself pleases, and fail to answer the question of why the 'imitation' of tragedy pleases when the reality does not. The one theory which assigns a central imp-

ortance to the aesthetic is Nietzsche's.

Put very simply, Nietzsche's view is that the peculiar combination of the 'Dionysiac' and 'Apolline' exemplified in the great tragedies affords a uniquely valuable experience. The experience can be summarised as follows: a deeply affective experience of the ultimate nature of metaphysical reality, revealed in a way which enables us lucidly and safely to behold it, and at the same time embrace and affirm it. This experience is, for Nietzsche, both a source of 'joy' in itself and unrivalled in its value.

Nietzsche describes the experience in the following terms. First of all, there is the 'Dionysiac wisdom' which lies at the heart of every great tragedy: the world of 'phenomena', or everyday individual existence, consists of unchanging contradiction, pain, excess, struggle and destruction. We are, he says, 'forced to recognise that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end: we are forced to look into the terrors of individual existence'(7). This is symbolised in the form of the tragic myth of suffering and destruction of the hero. The contemplation of this symbolic suffering is painful to behold. Secondly, pleasure or joy results from the 'metaphysical consolation that beneath the whirl of phenomena eternal life flows on indestructibly' (18); we experience pleasure at the realisation that 'life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable'(7). This eternally self-perpetuating blind life force or 'universal will' is some-

thing to which we belong, and momentarily participate in when the ego is transcended in 'aesthetic' experience. Thus one might put it that tragic drama reveals to us the metaphysical Everyman: by means of the tragic hero's destruction it symbolises a principle of existence of which we are all individual manifestations.

This is the Dionysiac input. The 'Apolline' dimension concerns the qualities of 'form' or manner of representation, broadly conceived i.e. individuation and articulation by means of theme, plot, character, chorus, poetry etc. The Apolline artifice serves a number of different functions. Firstly, it shields us from the full impact of the Dionysiac revelation. Secondly, the manner in which the characters' fates are represented focuses, and articulates in a concentrated image, the Dionysiac wisdom it symbolises. And thirdly, by means of this vivid representation of the very soul of the hero's suffering and destruction, the Apolline 'illusion' prepares us for the affective experience of the ultimate nature of reality. Thus without the Apolline artistry the metaphysical consolation which is the ultimate effect of tragic art would be impossible. But through it we experience a symbolic action with an unrivalled intimacy and vividness. Here is one of Nietzsche's more memorable descriptions of the effect upon the 'aesthetic' spectator:

he felt himself exalted to a kind of omniscience, as if his visual faculty were no longer merely a surface faculty but capable of penetrating into the interior, and as if he now saw before him...the waves of the will, the conflict of motives, and the swelling flood of the passions, sensuously visible, as it were, like a multitude of vividly moving lines and figures; and he felt

he could dip into the most delicate secrets of unconscious emotions. While he thus becomes conscious of the highest exaltations of the instinct for clarity and transfiguration, he nevertheless feels just as definitely that this long series of Apolline artistic effects still does not generate that blessed continuance in will-less contemplation which...the strictly Apolline artists evoke in him...He shudders at the suffering which will befall the hero, and yet anticipates in them a higher, much more overpowering joy.(22)¹⁸

Nietzsche's book is difficult and ambiguous. I will not attempt to unravel the text any further than the sketch I have offered. Its application to tragic art as we would recognise it is also uncertain. For example, I don't think many of us would be prepared to accept that the ultimate effect of tragic art is a joy in the destruction of the hero, seen as an image of the underlying power and impressiveness of some supra-personal life force. I shall restrict myself to three general points which may be made on Nietzsche's behalf (though admittedly with a certain amount of reading between the lines).

The first is that the reason why tragic drama is felt to be of great value is that it is a symbolic representation of dimensions of human existence which are of universal import and weight. As a symbol it is revelatory, and what it reveals is the truth. The second point is that the impact of the drama depends upon the intimate and vivid experience of the symbolic suffering it represents. The reward and value in the experience is in part a result of this, and in part a result

18. Nietzsche also makes a good deal of the importance of music in Greek tragic drama. See M.S.Silk and J.P.Stern Nietzsche on Tragedy (Cambridge, 1981) for a very clear presentation and analysis of Nietzsche's views.

Greek tragic drama. See M.S.Silk and J.P.Stern Nietzsche on Tragedy (Cambridge, 1981) for a very clear presentation and analysis of Nietzsche's views.

of the underlying truth it symbolises. The third point is that the manner of representation is, as one might expect, vital, and accounts for the difference in value assigned to the aesthetic experience versus the experience of reality. It is vital because it enables us to experience the symbolic action, both affectively and intellectually, first from within the perspective of the suffering hero, and then from within our own point of view. That is, the experience made available through the poet's manner of handling tragic material involves two things: the intimate experience from within of a character's fate, and the affective experience of that symbolic fate in its cosmic setting - man's 'existential predicament'.

Nietzsche is right that no tragic work is the unmediated expression of pain and suffering. It is the artistic representation and articulation of suffering within a meaningful context. The context interprets the suffering, and assigns a significance to it in relation to human life. When suffering is represented in a work of art the work is about that suffering, and the suffering has a meaning and point as part of the thematic structure of the work. And the work as a whole is about life. It is a reflection upon the nature of human life, and symbolises, or is representative of, those aspects of life which make up the implied author's vision of life.¹⁹ Thus one might call the suffering represented in tragic art

19. See M.Packer 'Dissolving the Paradox of Tragedy', The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism Vol. 47 (Summer 1989).

'thematic suffering'. I shall return to the importance of this notion .

4.312 'Symbolic Action'

In Tragedy and Philosophy Walter Kaufmann defines tragedy as a 'symbolic action' that presents immense human suffering in such a way that it brings to our minds our own forgotten and repressed sorrows, and releases us with some sense that suffering is universal and that fates worse than our own can be experienced as exhilarating.²⁰ This is how he describes the effect of the Trojan Women:

Repressed sorrows flood to my mind - my own grief and the suffering of those close to me, past and present. I recall specific incidents and persons and the wretched lot of man. What I see is not an imitation but an overpowering symbolic action that evokes a host of painful images...it makes us see how countless agonies belong to one great pattern; our lives gain form; and the pattern transcends us. We are not singled out; we suddenly belong to a great fraternity that includes some of mankind's greatest heroes...The suffering we feel in seeing or reading a tragedy is thus not mainly Hecuba's but pain of which we had some previous knowledge.(p.94) ...in great tragedies mea res agitur: I am involved, and part of the pleasure is the joy of recognition as I see my sorrows on the stage or printed page.(p.339)

Commenting on Aristotle's catharsis he adds: 'Moreover, when suffering is voiced in magnificent poetry, we feel a sense of liberation as our own hopelessly tangled and mute grief is given words and takes on wings.'(p.58). Further, just as my sorrows are articulated 'the triumph of language, poetry, of

20. Walter Kaufmann Tragedy and Philosophy (Anchor, 1969), p.98. Kaufmann also believes that a tragic symbolic action must cause ruth and terror. He does not say much about the nature of a symbolic action except that it is something which is 'make-believe', highly stylized, and classed according to its effect.

nobility is also mine': the representation of the terrible side of life is enjoyable because it persuades us that our own life is not hopeless'(p.347-8). Finally, through its manner of representing suffering, tragic art suggests that despite all the suffering, cruelty and terror of existence life and the world are beautiful, and that suffering is not an insuperable objection to life. Kaufmann does not explicitly say so, but it is presumably because tragedy is a 'symbolic action' that it has this valued effect.

The effect which Kaufmann believes great tragic art affords is obviously very different from the effect of witnessing real suffering. His picture of it suggests the following solution to our paradox: because tragic art is a 'symbolic action', it, unlike actual tragedy, provides an experience of intrinsic reward and value though bringing to mind and articulating our own sorrows in such a way as to release and fortify us. The experience is unavailable, and inappropriate, as a response to the tragedy we come across in real life. Thus, if this view is correct, we have an explanation of why we seek out and value the painful experience of tragic art, as we do not the non-aesthetic experience of tragedy.

Kaufmann's view can be divided up into three sub-propositions. The first is that the rewards and value of tragic art are a consequence of its being a 'symbolic action'. The second is that the importance of the symbol lies in the way in which it articulates our own sorrows and 'releases' them. The third is that the interpretation tragic art

gives to suffering is itself an object of intrinsic reward. I believe that the first point, rightly understood, is correct, but the second and third points are not. The first point relates to my claim that tragic art deals with 'thematic suffering', and I shall return to it when I review Nietzsche's ideas.

The second sub-proposition is Kaufmann's explanation of why a work's representative or 'symbolic' quality affords a valuable experience. I believe this explanation is mistaken, for two reasons. The first is that our own grief and sorrows would seem to usurp the place of the character's sufferings. Surely the reason why we find the experience valuable has more to do with the poet's articulation of the characters' grief and sorrow than with our own. The second is that the proposition has the unfortunate consequence that it seems to restrict the rewards and value of tragic art to those who have a prior need and disposition to react in the way Kaufmann proposes. The restriction is entirely arbitrary: I can clearly find the Trojan Women or King Lear of the greatest value without finding myself bringing to mind the tragedy of my own life or the lives of my acquaintances, and without it affording me an emotional release.

It is important to distinguish between two different claims here. The first is that the fates represented in tragic drama are recognised to be 'universal'. The second is that tragic art provides an emotional release (partly) because it represents the universal human condition. Kaufmann's view requires

the second claim to be true. It is certainly possible to respond in this way to tragic art, but it cannot be the norm. It strikes me as inherently implausible to suppose that the reason why tragic art is highly esteemed is that the tragedy of most people's lives leaves them in need of the kind of experience Kaufmann says tragic art offers. Thus I don't think Kaufmann has satisfactorily explained why tragic art should afford a painful, yet intrinsically valuable, experience.

The third proposition is that we are exhilarated and fortified by the manner in which tragedy represents its heroes. This is a toned-down version of Nietzsche's point about the impressiveness not of the life of any particular individual, but of life itself. Now it is true that tragic heroes are impressive (though by no means always good) figures. They exemplify the full, or at least unusual, realisation of the powers and tendencies peculiar to man. They seem to scale the heights, and plummet the depths, of human experience, and their states seem to be the purest form of things we might experience ourselves in a mixed and muddled way. They are extra-ordinary in their speech, actions and suffering - anything but mediocre. So they do amaze us and inspire 'awe'. Clearly this is one reason why we might find reward and value in tragic art. The question is whether Kaufmann is correct in the view that the reason why the dramatist's manner of representing tragic heroes contributes towards the value found in tragic art, is that it convinces us of the beauty of life and

strengthens our resolve. (Note, the context of the question is specifically the paradox of value attribution). If not, the third sub-proposition will have to be rejected, and with it, Kaufmann's solution to the paradox.

I believe that Kaufmann is wrong. To make good this claim I must give a very rough sketch of the effect of at least some of the major works of tragic art. And I must provide an alternative account of the importance of the quality of characterisation. I shall provide an alternative account below. Concerning the 'tragic effect', I believe that if one can isolate a central experience provided by a work of tragic art as a whole, something like the following might not be uncommon: we are left in a state of disorientation and tension; the experience is accompanied by a (perhaps rather vague) feeling that 'this is how things are', or can be, for human beings, or that this is what life might come to, and that it is unclear how it might be avoided, and how it is to be faced. Whether the description is accepted or not, I think that if there is a sense in which tragedy fortifies it is also deeply disturbing and disquieting. It does not lead to Schopenhauerian 'resignation',²¹ and it does not lead to a Nietzschean exalted joy in the vitality of some supra-personal life force (or Kaufmann's toned-down version of this) but rather to something in between. What we need to un-

21. Schopenhauer attributes the pleasure of tragedy to an exalted state of will-less aesthetic contemplation of the represented events, from whose perspective we relinquish concern for the things of this world. See Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, 1969), vol. 2, ch. 37.

derstand is why a painful experience of that kind is found valuable, as the experience of real tragedy is not.

4.313 Make-believe and real tragedy

Before I offer my own solution, there is a very obvious point which I have considered only briefly so far. This is that when we are presented with what I called 'thematic suffering' we are not actually in the presence of real suffering. This clearly makes a difference. But it is not immediately obvious how it should fit into our explanation of the paradox.

The following line of reasoning encourages the idea that it is the lack of actual presence that matters in explaining why a tragic character's fate can be experienced as an object of intrinsic value. When in the presence of real tragedy, the requirement is to do something about it, and if nothing can be done to alleviate the suffering, its reality should at least be fully acknowledged. Consciousness should be fully taken up with the fact of the suffering, and the possibilities of action. Anything else would indicate blindness to the 'reality' of the suffering (e.g. callousness). The case of art is obviously different. A spectator or reader does not share the same spatio-temporal domain as the character, and he is not actually in the presence of human beings faced with catastrophe and death. Therefore, he is free to reflect upon the nature of human suffering and the lot of man, and to muse over the aesthetic qualities etc, and in so doing, to find

the experience valuable. On this view the difference is not a matter of 'aesthetic distance' or 'control' in the sense reviewed above, but rather of the capacity for action, and of the moral and psychological requirements imposed upon the spectator or reader.

The different nature of our involvement in the two cases does, in part, account for the different attitudes towards our responses to them. To find value in contemplating real suffering is morally and psychologically dubious; when contemplating its aesthetic representation it is not. So the suggestion is that for most of us the price (both morally and psychologically) of 'aesthetically' contemplating real tragedy, and finding intrinsic reward and value in experiencing it, is too high. But this doesn't really get to the root of the matter. All that has been explained is why doing nothing when reading or watching, or why turning one's thoughts to the lot of man, or why taking pleasure in the artistry, is not necessarily morally reprehensible - though, of course, our musings must not be substitutes for being deeply moved, and pained, by the characters' fates. What is left unexplained is why we find it intrinsically rewarding to contemplate the aesthetic representation of tragic fates. It cannot simply be because the fates are not ones unfolding before us in reality. At this point it is instructive to turn to Flint Schier's view.

4.314 Tragic knowledge

Schier's starting point is the fact that we seek out and value the experience of watching in the theatre representations of what we would elsewhere avoid like the plague. The question he raises is: 'Why should we find the theatrical experiences valuable when we should normally think it irrational, sentimental, masochistic or sadistic to seek out experiences of this disturbing kind?'.²² Schier believes the answer lies in the kind of knowledge tragic art makes available to us. The knowledge in question is an understanding of what it is like to suffer: 'tragedy makes possible something which is not possible outside of imaginative experience: the vivid, powerful realisation of what it is like to suffer'. The value we attach to the experience (and the reason we seek it out) resides in the intimacy with which we experience what it is like to feel, see, and live in a certain way. Tragic art allows us to 'experience from within the subjective reality of their states': 'we do not witness the suffering from without, but from within the very soul of the sufferer'. Schier goes on to say that the experience provided by tragic writing is emphatically not like that of actual suffering. Firstly, it differs in intimacy, and secondly 'it is an experience in which we realise that when the character speaks of his experience, he is speaking with the "universal voice"'.

22. 'Tragedy and the Community of Sentiment', in *Philosophy and Fiction* (Aberdeen University Press, 1983), ed. P.Lamarque, pp. 73-92. And 'The Claims of Tragedy: An essay in Moral Psychology and Aesthetic Theory', in *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 18 (1989), No. 1, pp.7-26. Quotations are taken from the first essay unless otherwise stated.

Schier believes that this knowledge (or imaginative sense) of what it is like to suffer the evils of human existence is unavailable outside of art. Firstly, someone in the throws of extreme states of passion, suffering etc. lacks the necessary control to make his experience available to us in such a fashion as to provide us with an intimate understanding of his situation. Secondly, when we are confronted by real suffering the pleasure principle intervenes. We inevitably avoid or block out a full awareness of this painful and unpleasant reality, or if we do not fully block it out, we at least tincture it so as to lessen its impact. In consequence, we sacrifice a clear perception of it. At the same time the emotional turmoil we experience makes it impossible for us to achieve the objectivity and detachment necessary for understanding. Both these problems are overcome in the theatre. The first is overcome because it is a poet who fashions the expressions of the characters' experiences. He, unlike the victims of a real tragedy, has the objectivity and detachment (and artistic ability) to articulate the nature and conditions of their sorrows in a perspicuous and powerful manner. Further, the sensitivity and intelligence of great tragic artists enables them to reach the kind of clear understanding of causes, nature, and consequences which is unavailable to most of us outside aesthetic experience. The second problem is overcome because we know that it is only make-believe that we are in the presence of suffering. This enables us to achieve the necessary objectivity and distance so as to be

receptive to the revelation of the suffering, and thereby achieve an understanding and appreciation of it.

Schier goes on to argue that the knowledge tragic drama makes available is of a peculiar kind. First of all, it is valued as an end in itself. Tragic art fulfils our natural desire to know how things stand. This knowledge strikes us as a good in itself. Since tragic art deals with this, what it reveals about the nature of the human predicament is valued independently of any cognitive end it may serve. Secondly, and relatedly, the knowledge is not cumulative. We never get the feeling we now know all there is about the nature of human suffering, and can therefore dispense with tragic art. Thirdly, we assign different values to knowledge: some knowledge is more important to us than other knowledge. We value very highly knowledge of the human situation, and this leads us to value tragic art highly. (And it is because of this that pleasant and superficial art is not held in such high esteem.) And fourthly, it is because tragic art represents how things are that we feel justified in witnessing it; in fact, we feel commanded to do so.

The final feature relates to the importance of the experience of painful emotions. If the value of tragedy lies in its capacity to convey a vivid sense of what it is like to undergo various human fates, isn't its power to arouse painful emotion an incidental and unfortunate by-product? And are we not therefore sentimental or masochistic? Schier believes not. His reason is that it is precisely the experience of

painful empathetic emotions which enables us to reach a sympathetic understanding of what it is like to undergo the fates represented (e.g. Lear's rage, madness, and ultimate collapse). In order to appreciate fully the fates represented one must be pained by them. Therefore, the pain of the experience is a vital component of its value. Further, it is clear that the value assigned to the emotions has nothing to do with an alcoholic indulgence in emotionality or a delight in pain.

I think the points Schier makes are largely correct. There are three points in particular that I think are worth highlighting. The first is that, as Schier suggests, we must understand the reasons for intrinsically valuing the artistic representation of tragic events within the wider context of some primitive facts about human nature. They include the fact that human beings have a conception of the meaning and significance of life, and that certain aspects of human existence are of fundamental importance. Those aspects are of the deepest concern to human beings, and acknowledging them is, we believe, an end in itself. Tragic drama deals with them, and it is because of that, that it is valued highly. Further, the artistic expression of such things is valued for no other reason than the nature and content of the representation itself. Thus, though we may come to tragic drama with a concern to make sense of our own life, or life in general, the value assigned to the work is typically independent of any concern of that kind. However plausible cathartic and

psychoanalytic explanations of why tragic art is sought out may be, this fact should not be neglected.

The second point concerns the role of painful emotions. When I discussed Aristotle's catharsis I said that it did point to an important truth. Schier's observations help to reveal it. One important reason why empathetic emotions cause us to value intrinsically works of tragic art, is that they feature in the experience 'from within' of the characters' situations, and so enable us to reach a sympathetic understanding of the nature of their experiences of the situations which confront them. The emotional responses are therefore not accidental, but rather intrinsic to the value of the experience. This provides us with an explanation of why spectators should be 'pleased in proportion as they are afflicted': proper appreciation of the nature of the events depends upon emotional involvement with them, and tragic art provides us with the valued emotional understanding of them. In the absence of emotional engagement we would not find the value in the experience that is present when we are moved in experiencing from within their inner and outer fates. The heightened emotional understanding of what the events 'add up to' is intrinsically rewarding and valuable. I believe that this is a much more plausible explanation than those (such as Kaufmann's) that locate the pleasure and value in the cathartic release and articulation of our sorrows.

The third point concerns the intimacy of the experience. There are a number of factors to consider here. The first

relates to the nature of our experience of the character's situation. In the last chapter I discussed the way in which empathetic emotions involve an imaginative conception of a character's psychological perspective upon the situation he or she is confronted with. The intrinsic value of the experience of tragic art depends upon these kinds of imaginative acts. Nietzsche's ideas about the manner of characterisation are important here. We recall that the significance of the 'Apolline' lay in the way in which it made the inner lives of the heroes 'sensuously visible'. A natural way to interpret Nietzsche's claim is to take it as maintaining that tragic drama is peculiarly effective at getting us to imaginatively represent to ourselves the thoughts, feelings, and situations of the characters, and making them vividly present to us. The claim is true, and particularly of Shakespeare.

A second claim I made for Nietzsche was that the 'Apolline' effect included both experiencing the characters' fates from within our own perspective and from within theirs. Our perspective included a view of man's cosmic setting. And I said that the impact of the symbolic suffering depended upon this dual perspective. I think these points are correct. A not unfamiliar experience is the oscillation between evaluating the events qua spectator and qua protagonist, and the impact of the drama has a good deal to do with this. The second point is also important. We experience the characters' fates both from within, and from the wider perspective of the play as a whole. That wider context is the implied author's vision

of the characters' fate. In tragic drama the wider context generalises the significance of the events (typically by giving them a universal application). This, I think, is a good way of elucidating the feeling that the characters speak with the 'universal voice'.

There are two final points of less importance. The first is that Schier's observations also help to clarify the intuition about the importance of the tragic hero. As Schier says it is the clarity with which the implied author presents his characters inner and outer fates which is important. The intrinsic value of the experience results from the implied author's laying bare the human potentialities he represents, in such a way as to make available an intimate experience from within of their fates. It is when suffering is presented as part of a mimesis in Aristotle's sense - the presentation of a coherent action made transparent and intelligible through artistic formulation - that the work provides an experience of intrinsic value. The second point is that Schier provides a much better explanation of the notions of 'aesthetic distance' and 'control' than those we have considered so far. There are two dimensions to 'distance' and 'control', the reader's and author's. It is the reader's end which is normally considered significant, but the author's end is equally so. The way in which 'distance' and 'control' feature is not that they enable the reader to experience painful emotions in a pleasurable way, or to delight in the events from a position of safety etc. Rather, they allow the spectator to

experience from within the characters' fates and reach a sympathetic understanding of them.

I have one minor reservation about Schier's views. It concerns the contrasting possibilities of knowledge. Schier says that the knowledge provided by tragic art is unavailable elsewhere. This is not strictly true (except in the trivial sense that the only place to learn about the particular fates of the characters is the work). It is not impossible that I might come to an intimate knowledge of what it is like to suffer a tragic fate (though as a matter of fact I may not be receptive to it, or it may not be forthcoming, for the kinds of reasons Schier cites). The objection might be accommodated by observing that rarely (if ever) in life are we presented with a complete history in which everything of relevance is known. In art all the facts are already selected for us, and their significance indicated. An art work, unlike a human life, is an autonomous and complete whole. Nevertheless, the objection is worth making because, on its own, appeal to the knowledge made available cannot explain the difference in value assigned to the experience of the reality, versus the artistic representation. After all, if we were to gain the kind of knowledge Schier is talking of through our experience of reality the experience would not be of intrinsic value. The answer is not to emphasise unique possibilities of knowledge (as Schier tends to), but rather the other dimensions of the aesthetic context which Schier mentions.

This brings me to a more important point. I think Schier's

account must be amended so as to include the value assigned to 'thematic suffering'. In Nietzsche's view (or my interpretation of it), tragic art possesses a value as what Kaufmann calls a 'symbolic action'. We may not agree with Nietzsche over what it symbolises, but it does possess a value in virtue of being a 'symbolic action'. I think it is clear that we value tragic art because it is an 'imitation' or representation of certain dimensions of human existence. For tragic art is about these things, and expresses the poet's 'vision of life' - his reflections upon the nature of the human situation. Therefore, it can be intrinsically valued because of its truth, its profound insights etc. Real suffering is not about anything in this sense, and, obviously, it is not a poetic conception of the reasons, cause, consequences, and significance of human tragedy. It is neither true nor false, and does not possess an intrinsic value as an image of life. Further, the events of tragic art are part of a created aesthetic 'object', and we may admire the author's manner of handling subject-matter, themes, language etc. So the artistic representation of tragic events offers possibilities of value necessarily absent in reality.

These points provide the final pieces to the puzzle; and we should now be able to recognise this as the solution of our paradox:

Tragedy...is a representation of human unhappiness which pleases us notwithstanding, by the truth with which it is seen and the fineness with which it is communicated...The world of everyday seems often purposeless chaos, a mangy tiger without even fearful symmetry of Blake's vision; but the world of tragedy we can face, for we feel a mind behind it and the symmetry

is there. Tragedy, in fine, is man's answer to the universe that crushes him so pitilessly. Destiny scowls upon him: his answer is to sit down and paint her where she stands.²³

It is because tragic art possesses these qualities, as the tragic events of life do not, that it is intrinsically rewarding and valuable.

23. F.L.Lucas, Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics 2nd edn. (London, 1957), p.78.

Conclusion

I have now reviewed some of the principal topics in literary aesthetics. I have argued for a particular view of what it is to value something as a work of literature, and gone on to develop answers to a set of problems about the experience and value of literature. My claim is that it is the intrinsic value of the experience a work provides that determines its value as a work of literary art. Once this 'grammatical' observation is in place solutions to the status of aesthetic claims and the problem of belief become possible: the value of a work's experience determines the 'objectivity' of claims about its aesthetic merit; the same condition of aesthetic valuing establishes the aesthetic relevance of an author's beliefs. The proposed analysis of literary valuing also supplies the materials for clarifying the role of the tragic emotions, and the paradoxical 'pleasure' of the artistic representation of tragic events.

One of the themes that runs throughout the thesis is that the value of an experience can depend upon its depth, profundity, truth and so on. In chapter 2 I concentrated upon the relation between a work's intrinsic value and the quality of an author's point of view. The features of the experience and value of tragedy that account for the paradoxical 'tragic pleasure' - 'tragic knowledge' and tragedy as a 'symbolic action' - reflect the same connection between belief and aes-

thetic value that I argue for in chapter 2. A second theme that unites the various topics is that a work's emotional quality is also important in determining the value of an experience and the literary merits of a work. I touch upon some examples in chapter 1. The tragic emotions provide another example. The chapter 3 analysis of fictional emotions supplies further evidence of the way in which emotional experience is significant.

A third theme relates to the manner of approach to problems in literary aesthetics. Literary works are complex and heterogeneous things, and their experience and appreciation has many dimensions. I have found that the best way to deal with many of the issues and theories I discuss is by the use of a series of concrete examples, taking works case by case, or at least kind by kind. The 'grammatical investigation' of literary experience is itself something that can only be carried out against the background of a shared sense of the nature of literary works and literary experience, and shared conventions about how literature is to be approached. By avoiding generalisation and by sticking to the particular I hope to have been true to that sense.

In order to do justice to the topics I have chosen I have been forced to neglect issues which I might otherwise have discussed. One topic in particular I would have liked to have incorporated is literature's education of the emotions. Had I had more space I would have used the features of emotional experience and of the emotional quality of literature that I

examine - for example, the intentionality and object-directedness of fictional emotions, and experiencing a work's emotion from within - to elucidate the manner in which literature can achieve this. I would also have argued that the products of poets, novelists, and dramatists are peculiarly well-suited to fight against such things as the inability to feel in a sincere and unsentimental fashion, and against the restriction of the range of available emotions to the emotion-cliche of the lowest common denominator of responses, to stock and impoverished perceptions of emotional significance. Instead Coleridge's words from the Biographia Literaria about the intellectual and emotional quality of the best literature will have to suffice:

the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops...And therefore is it the prime merit of genius and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation, so to represent familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others kindred feeling concerning them and that freshness of sensation which is the constant accompaniment of mental, no less than of bodily, convalescence...In poems...genius produces the strongest impression of novelty, while it rescues the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission. (Ch.4)

Whilst my attention has been focused upon literature as a source of value in itself, where literature is of the order Coleridge describes it can offer us more than the fruits of a purely aesthetic experience. When, as Shelley says, literature expresses 'the best and happiest moments of the happiest

and best minds' it provides us not only with an experience of intrinsic value, but also the occasion to develop more sensitive barometers of ourselves and our environment. Further, such developments have a natural correlate in a richer moral and intellectual life. When Schiller asks:

How can we, however laudable our precepts, be just, kindly and human towards others, if we lack the power of receiving into ourselves, faithfully and truly, natures unlike ours, of feeling our way into the situations of others, of making other people's feelings our own?¹

he is right that one answer to how we can achieve this is through literary experience. If that is true, was Plato wise to banish the poet from his ideal city?

1. On the Aesthetic Education of Man, eds. E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford University press, 1966), letter 13.

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