

THE RELATIONSHIP OF MORALITY TO
LITERARY CRITICISM

has been approved for the

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The Relationship of Morality to Literary Criticism

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Charles Nilon

This Thesis for the M.A. degree by

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Each of the above points of view can be identified as it appears in literary criticism, and each can be rejected from objective literary criticism as erroneous. There is, however, one objective sense in which morality can be used as an objective critical concept: that is, morality as it appears in relation to dramatic conflict. If a writer chooses to treat an incident concerning characters and their actions in regard to a choice between good and evil, a moral incident, his choice will impose

restrictions on his treatment of the incident. If he does not conscientiously follow the imposed restrictions,

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restrictions on his treatment of the incident. If he does not conscientiously follow the imposed restrictions, serious artistic errors will result.

An examination of the erroneous points of view to discover their faults, and an analysis of literary works which treat a moral incident comprehensively, indicate that the concept of morality is not only relevant to objective literary criticism but that it is a valuable and important concept.

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This abstract of about 244 words is approved as to form and content. I recommend its publication.

Signed Charles H. Dutton
Instructor in charge of dissertation

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because literature is autonomous and our conventional morality cannot apply to its isolated world. It will be the purpose of this paper to examine briefly each of these ways in which "morality" is used and to determine whether each is relevant to literary criticism. When the relevancy of each has been pointed out, I shall point out that there is at least one sense in which we may use "morality" as a valuable critical term: that is morality as it is concerned with dramatic conflict.

In order to determine the relationship of morality to literary criticism, it will be necessary to examine each sense in which the term is used in regard to what we feel

literary criticism, or the function of the critic, to be. I shall take the position that the critic's function is to help others to perceive the excellences of the work of literary art. In doing this, he determines whether a

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literary work is a work of art; and, if it is, he determines. In discussions of literary criticism the concept of morality creates a great deal of confusion; and the confusion results primarily from the use of the same term, after morality, to mean different things: one critic may see morality in literature as the didactic, and may subsequently condemn morality in literature on didactic grounds; another sees morality as the function of literature, for he feels that literature should provide an expression of morality which is cognitive but not didactic; and still another may insist that we cannot talk about morality in literature because literature is autonomous and our conventional morality cannot apply to its isolated world. It will be the purpose of this paper to examine briefly each of these ways in which "morality" is used and to determine whether each is relevant to literary criticism. When the relevancy of each has been pointed out, I shall point out that there is at least one sense in which we may use "morality" as a valuable critical term: that is morality as it is concerned with dramatic conflict.

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(New York, 1948), p. 15.

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¹Henry James, The Art of Fiction and Other Essays (New York, 1948), p. 15.

comprehensive point of view, I think I must take sides with Norman Foerster when he says: "The only completely scrupulous critic is the completely silent critic."² I shall not be silent; my examination of morality as a critical factor, to determine its relevancy or irrelevancy, will proceed on objective grounds.

The aspects of morality which bring about confusion and need clarification are the confusion of didacticism with other considerations of morality; the confusion of the function of literature in the world with literary criticism; and the moral attitude, which stems from the moral judgment of the artist and may emerge in the work as dramatic moral conflict.

The didactic is the moral as a message; it is a teaching device which offers instruction along a definite course. In its most obtrusive form, the didactic element appears as the platitude such as: "Kind hearts are more than coronets / And simple faith than Norman blood," or "Resolve to be thyself; and know that he / Who finds himself loses his misery!" The platitude offers an "easy" or final solution to the problems of life which the intelligent reader cannot accept. This form of the didactic is most offensive because it protrudes from the work; it is conspicuous, for it overrides the form which carries it.

²The Intent of the Critic, ed. Donald A. Stouffer (Princeton, 1941), p. 76.

In its more subtle form the didactic appears in tone, the attitude of the author. A novel of social protest such as The Grapes of Wrath, is didactic in tone; its purpose is to instruct. The critic ordinarily is concerned with the didactic only in a negative way since the didactic protrusion detracts from the work. In speaking of the total didactic, John Dewey points out that "Mr. Garrod, a problem follower of Matthew Arnold in more senses than one, has wittily said that what we resent in didactic poetry is not that it teaches, but that it does not teach, its incompetency."³ If the work in which the didactic appears as theme or conclusion is successful, it is usually successful in spite of its didactic elements. For example, may I say The second aspect of morality which causes confusion is the confusion of the function of literature in the world with literary criticism: for example, Tolstoy was concerned with the function of literature (and the other arts as well) as a uniting power which should bind man to man or man to God. Those works which did not obviously fall within either of these conditions he considered "immoral" and were therefore not admitted into his canon of art. This type of criticism imposes a false restriction on the art work: criticism becomes a problem of deciding whether the art work fits an imposed definition of function instead

³ See Etienne Gilson's Painting and Reality for a discussion of the particular physical qualities of painting.
³ John Dewey, Art as Experience (New York, 1958), p. 346.

of a question of the aesthetic excellence of the individual work. The literary critic is not concerned with how the art work does or should function in the world; that is a problem for the philosopher, the aesthetician. The philosopher has his own problems in determining a total world scheme, and the problem of placing aesthetics in that total scheme is compounded by the complexity of the total problem in such a way that the critic may become confounded when he tries to apply the arguments of the philosopher to the practice of criticism. Certainly Tolstoy's confusion led him to inaccurate judgment. Other problems are created by the confusion of aesthetics with criticism. The philosopher, for example, may lump all art (poetry, music, painting, and sculpture) under the title of aesthetics and proceed to talk about the function of art; but the critic's problem is different: the critic of painting, to whom vision is of primary importance, and the literary critic, to whom vision is negligible, surely understand that the criteria for the judgment of painting and poem as works of art are somewhat different.⁴ It is this kind of confusion, which exists in the disparity of the goals of the philosopher and the goals of the critic, that arises when the critic who would insist

⁴See Etienne Gilson's Painting and Reality for a discussion of the particular physical qualities of painting and sculpture which distinguish them from other arts.

ful to the literary critic, we can abstract a definition of

that morality has no place in critical discussion because art is autonomous, points to Croce's theory to support his autonomous position. It is true that for Croce art is autonomous and that morality has no place in the aesthetic experience. But the critic should understand that in Croce's Aesthetic, the "pure aesthetic" is contemplative and criticism itself has no place. We find that the philosopher is seldom helpful to the practicing critic.

The art work may, in fact, serve as a uniting power; it may function in any number of ways; it may be autonomous; but the critic must determine whether it is art, and must analyze the work to indicate its excellences. -- that is,

The critic is interested in morality as the didactic only in a negative way, and morality as a function of literature is detrimental to objective criticism because it imposes dogmatic restrictions on criticism. The critic who would throw out any consideration of morality as a critical term on the grounds that art is autonomous may also be confused about the goals of criticism: criticism must necessarily invade the autonomy of art in order to analyze it.

There is one aspect of morality which is useful to objective criticism, however, and that is the aspect that I shall call the moral attitude. In his article "The Moral Effect of Art," Sidney Zink is concerned with a functional aspect of art: that is, the moral effect of art on the individual. Although the thesis of the article is not useful to the literary critic, we can abstract a definition of

morality which is both useful and workable from his article. One part of the definition offers a morality which does not impose dogmatic standards: fiction. In such cases, the

Morality is not chiefly an affair of the affirmation of a belief, or the performance of a particular act, or movement by an emotional tendency; rather it is a conscientiousness of mind and will in the scrutiny and actualization of values. Neither belief nor action nor feeling possesses moral value until it is rationally developed and deliberately intended.

Another part of the definition offers a workable morality for the literary critic concerned with dramatic conflict:

The moral attitude is possible only in a moral experience, and the moral experience is possible only in a moral conflict--that is, in a conflict of values such that the human agent is forced into a questioning of his knowledge about, and behavior in pursuit of, the good. The moral attitude is that of conscientious pursuit of the right solution to a moral conflict.⁵

The moral attitude will not be useful in the criticism of all literary works: it is not helpful in an examination of the short poem. It is functional only in the extended dramatic context; that is, in the longer literary work concerned with characters and their actions. It is especially

⁵Zink assumes that there is an ideal good, about which we can learn, and therefore that there can be a moral situation. The moral situation does not arise from habitual action, however, for "Action undetermined by reflection may be 'good' in a utilitarian sense (bringing about pleasant consequences to one's self or to others); but it will have been without moral quality, for it will have been without moral effort." Sidney Zink, "The Moral Effect of Art," Ethics, LX (1950), 261-274.

neither do I intend a critique of the criticism of the

important in works such as King Lear, Moby Dick, and The Scarlet Letter. It emerges in classical tragedy and in what I would call serious fiction. In such cases, the moral attitude provides the frame structure for the entire work. If an author chooses an incident to write about which is essentially moral, an incident which is concerned with good and evil in the world, the choice of incident will demand a treatment in terms of the moral attitude in order to prevent serious artistic errors such as a split in thematic unity, inadequate character development, or a questioning of credibility. The moral attitude will not write the work for the artist, but it will dictate certain limits of treatment for the artist which cannot be violated without risking artistic error.

The critics for and against morality as a critical factor have offered only brief, vague or confusing comments concerning it. In my discussion I hope to approach the problem more directly by examining the aspects of morality which I have summarized above; and by this examination I hope to clarify the relation of morality to literary criticism and to offer some tenable support for morality as an objective critical factor.

In my discussion of the aspects of morality as they occur in literature and criticism, the treatment will be exclusive. I do not intend to give a chronological survey of the appearance of these aspects in literary criticism; neither do I intend a critique of the criticism of the

individual critics discussed. The examples used are used arbitrarily to indicate that problems exist, and they are specific and extended in order to avoid an amorphous essay.

CHAPTER ONE

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS OF MORALITY

IN LITERARY CRITICISM

I: The Didactic as the Moral

As we have suggested, some critics are especially concerned with morality as the didactic; and are therefore opposed to morality as a positive critical term. They use the didactic as one means of condemning the moral. John Crowe Ransom has placed himself in opposition to the idea that morality has a place in literary criticism; in The Intent of the Critic he writes:

Before I venture, with inadequate argument, to describe what I take to be the correct understanding of poetry, I would like to describe two other understandings which, though widely professed, seem to me misunderstandings. First, there is a smart and belletristic theory of poetry which may be called "psychologistic." Then there is also a staid and commonplace theory which is moralistic.¹

And in The New Criticism he writes further: "It is like according a moral dimension to poetry because there are some poems which not only present their own content but

¹The Intent of the Critic, ed. Donald A. Stauffer (Princeton, 1941), p. 94.

in addition moralize about this content."²

Ransom is against morality in literary criticism and he is preoccupied with the moral as the didactic; that is, the moral message, or the lesson to be learned. That Ransom sees the moral as didactic is more clear from a passage

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Ransom is against morality in literary criticism and he is preoccupied with the moral as the didactic; that is, the moral message, or the lesson to be learned. That Ransom sees the moral as didactic is more clear from a passage in The World's Body:

And all the poets famous in our tradition,
or very nearly all, have been of a powerful
moral cast.

So I shall try a preliminary definition of the poet's traditional function on behalf of our society: he proposed to make virtue delicious. He compounded a moral effect with an aesthetic effect. The total effect was not a pure one, but it was rich, and relished highly. The name of the moral effect was goodness; the name of the aesthetic effect was beauty. Perhaps these did not have to co-exist, but the planners of society saw to it that they should; they called upon the artist to reinforce morality with charm.³

We are aware that didacticism may be harmful to the work and the blunt didacticism which Ransom indicates is obvious to the reader: we are all familiar with the "pictureless books in which small boys, though warned with quotations not to, would skate on Farmer Giles' pond and did and drowned."⁴ But surely Ransom does not think that didactic may be useful. It has, in this poem, a specific

²John Crowe Ransom, The New Criticism (Norfolk, Conn., 1941), p. 283.

³John Crowe Ransom, The World's Body (New York, 1938), p. 57.

⁴Dylan Thomas, "A Child's Christmas in Wales," Quite Early One Morning (New York, 1955), p. 25.

anyone seriously interested in criticism wants to perpetuate that kind of moral as an element of critical doctrine. His desire to wipe out an offensive quality leads him too far: there are other considerations of morality in literature; and, I suspect, moreover, that he is not thinking of all the poets famous in our tradition, but primarily of the Victorian poets. Another quote from a later section of The World's Body supports my suspicion: As Ransom quotes these lines from Pippa Passes:

The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven--
All's right with world!

This, he says, "is a piece of transparent homiletics; for and at the end of her day, it is still not right. The body in it six pretty, coordinate images are marched, like six of Luca lies on the floor; the repentance of his murderers little lambs to the slaughter, to a colon and a powerful text."⁵ The Victorians are notorious for their didacticism for the lovers is a dubious good. The offerings given by and Ransom has definitely hit upon a case of it; that was the poor are being used by corrupt church officials to buy his intention. However, it seems to me that here a new abductions and murders, and the wickedness of Jules' school-possibility arises which we have not yet discussed: the fellows in the attempt to injure his soul is not non-didactic may be useful. It has, in this poem, a specific existent because the plot was a failure. Pippa's world is purpose which converts it from an offensive didacticism to a fairy's world and its stability is unreal--at best, a functional element of the poem. The lines which Ransom fragile. The easy answer of the platitude is questioned finds particularly offensive are the concluding ones: by the poet himself. And the question is one of justice

⁵The World's Body, p. 121.

"God's in his heaven-- / All's right with the world!" Out of context, they result in the platitude which we recognize as the moral lesson. But the song is part of a drama, and the dramatic situation exists in the juxtaposition of the naive, innocent girl from the silk mills with the worldly evils which she skips by. The whole drama is an exercise in dramatic irony. Superficially, it is a fairy tale: as Pippa skips through the town of Asolo singing, murderers repent, treachery is undone, and, having done her good deeds, Pippa skips home to her humble bed without knowing that she is an heiress. Pippa is a beautiful, romantic spirit whose world, about which she sings, is somewhat different from the world in which we live. It is clear that as Pippa sings, all is not right with the world; and at the end of her day, it is still not right. The body of Luca lies on the floor; the repentance of his murderers does not eradicate the crime; and the necessity of suicide for the lovers is a dubious good. The offerings given by the poor are being used by corrupt church officials to buy abductions and murders, and the wickedness of Jules' school-fellows in the attempt to injure his soul is not non-existent because the plot was a failure. Pippa's world is a fairy's world and its stability is unreal--at best, fragile. The easy answer of the platitude is questioned by the poet himself. And the question is one of justice in the world. Pippa's song enforces the irony of the situation; if it protrudes from the work, it protrudes in a

functional artistic sense not as a platitude for the sake of the platitude. as Ransom suggests. But it may also be

The didactic may often appear as a functional element in literature. In Browning's poem, it is functional as a device to enforce dramatic irony; but it has other functional uses. It is sometimes used as a device for character development: Shakespeare's Polonius is a classical example of its use in this manner. Ogden Nash uses the "plan of instruction" as a humorous device: many of his poems are poems with a "message" ludicrously presented. In the novel of social protest, the didactic appears in tone, a more subtle form of the didactic which is not so offensive as the platitude, for though it teaches, it teaches in a more comprehensive manner. It is significant that the success of the didactic element in these instances depends upon our recognizing the didactic as "didactic." If we recognize the didactic when we meet it, we should have no trouble in deciding when it is being used effectively and when it is offensive. If we do not recognize it, we are in danger of mistaking Polonius for a wise old man, and Nash's poem,

One would be in less danger
From the wiles of the stranger
If one's own kin and kith
Were more fun to be with⁶

as simply a wise and serious observation.

⁶Ogden Nash, "Family Court," Many Long Years Ago (Boston, 1945), p. 156.

The didactic may be negative in its effect on the literary art work as Ransom suggests. But it may also be a functional element, and it is a very slight moral consideration to be dealt with, among others.

be instructive in the virtues of the world by conventionally

II. Literary Criticism and the Function of Literature in the World

The didactic as a teaching device is closely related to our second consideration of morality in critical discussion: that is, the confusion of the function of literature in the world with literary criticism. In the last analysis we might say that any function imposed on literary criticism is didactic, but the functions imposed on criticism are so varied that they deserve a separate treatment. There are those who would insist on a functional art, art which is of some instrumental value to society. This position is confusing and dangerous to accurate critical opinion because the critic may be duped into a false evaluation through his dogmatic adherence to his presupposed function.

Phillip Sidney, in his Defence of Poesie, sees the function of literature as essentially didactic. He insists that the function of poetry is to instruct one in the virtues of the world. He indicates that it can serve this purpose more admirably and perform it more efficiently than history or philosophy because it provides the general truth which history does not provide (since history is

concerned with particular facts that have been recorded in the world), and, moreover, that it incorporates the general concepts of philosophy, so that one gets both history and philosophy at once.⁷ Presumably, that work which would not be instructive in the virtues of the world by conventionally accepted standards of virtue would not qualify as literary art. ⁸ This, of course, The didactic is but one supposed function of literature in the world; there are many others given by philosophers and critics from the age of Plato to the present time. Since many of us look to Plato for his comments on morality in art, it may be beneficial to begin with him. First, we must point out that Plato was primarily a philosopher not a critic; he was concerned with the nature of art in the world. From his conclusions about the nature of art, he (and many following him) determined what should be done with it. He concluded that art was three steps from the reality which he posited in his forms. The first form is the "idea" of an object, which is its ultimate reality (in The Republic, the object used for illustration is a bed). The second form is the physical object in the world which represents the "idea" (the bed made by the carpenter). The third form is the imitation of the physical object by the artist (a painter's representation of a bed). He extends

⁷ Phillip Sidney, A Defence of Poesie and Poems of (New York, The Cassell Publishing Co., n.d.).

the analogy of the painter's imitation to the poet, and concludes that poetry is illusory. The poet, he concludes, could lead one to the truth of the world, but his way would be a less sure way than the dialectic of philosophical discourse. Poetry was therefore banished from the Republic, or the perfect state, unless it were to be directed by those who had arrived at the truth by reason.⁸ This, of course, would give a canon of art which would be moral in terms of the Platonic doctrine, but it would exclude some works which would still be art in terms of the aesthetic experience. Leo Tolstoy, in his book What Is Art?, presents the classic confusion of the function of literature with literary criticism. Tolstoy conceived of literature (and all art) as a uniting power which would tie the bonds of brotherhood tighter. His faith in art to accomplish this end was magnificent and ambitious:

The task of art is enormous. Through the influence of real art, aided by science guided by religion, that peaceful co-operation of man which is now obtained by external means--by our law courts, police, charitable institutions, factory inspection, etc.--should be obtained by man's free and joyous activity. Art should cause violence to be set aside. . . . that same art can also evoke reverence for the dignity of every man and for the life of every animal; can make men ashamed of luxury, of violence, of revenge, or of using for their pleasure that of which others are in need; can

⁹ Leo Tolstoy, What Is Art?, trans. Aylmer Maud (New York, 1960), pp. 189-190.

⁸ Plato, "The Republic," Book X, The Dialogues of Plato, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York, 1937).

means of justifying the work of literary artists, including Uncle Tom's service of man.⁹

But as a result of judging art in regard to how well it fulfilled a presupposed function, Tolstoy condemned the works of Shakespeare, Raphael and Beethoven, among many others, whom we feel to be not only artists, but among the sublime. The inaccuracy is apparent; it results from making art conform to the party policy. He writes: Jean Paul Sartre, in an article entitled "The Case for Responsible Literature," has indicated that the function of the artist as it emerges in his art is that of leader in social and political affairs:

I hold Flaubert and Goncourt responsible for the repressions which followed the Commune, because they wrote not a single line to prevent them. It may be said that it was none of their business: but was the case of Calas the business of Voltaire? the sentence of Dreyfus the business of Zola? the administration of the Congo the business of Gide? Each of these writers, in some particular circumstance of his life, weighed up to his responsibility as a writer. The occupation has taught us ours. Since by our very existence we influence our time, we must decide that the influence must be deliberate. . . . it is our tasks as writers to cast light on the eternal values which are involved in these social and political disputes.¹⁰

Again, Sartre indicates a function of literature; but we should observe, I think, that if this were used as the final

⁹ Leo Tolstoy, What Is Art?, trans. Aylmer Maud (New York, 1960), pp. 189-190.

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Case for Responsible Literature," Horizon, XI (February, 1945), 307-312. (New York, 1947), p. 308.

¹² Ibid., pp. 28-29.

means of judgment as to whether or not a work was a work of literary art, we might find ourselves including Uncle Tom's Cabin and Hard Times and excluding Swann's Way from our canon.

Yvor Winters is a contemporary critic who is concerned with morality in literature as a critical factor. For Winters the final judgment of the literary work is a judgment in regard to the moral efficacy of the poem. He writes:

I believe, to be sure, that ethical interest is the only poetic interest, for the reason that all poetry deals with one kind or another of human experience and is valuable in proportion to the justice with which it evaluates that experience¹¹

In an earlier volume, Primitivism and Decadence, Winters had written:

Poetry, as a moral discipline, should not be regarded as one more means of escape. That is, moral responsibility should not be transferred from action to paper in the face of a particular situation. Poetry, if pursued either by the poet or reader, in the manner which I have suggested, should offer a means of enriching one's awareness of human experience and of so rendering greater the possibility of intelligence in the course of future action; and it should offer likewise a means of inducing certain more or less constant habits of feeling, which should render greater the possibility of one's actions, in a future situation, in accordance with the findings of one's improved intelligence. It should, in other words, increase the intelligence and strengthen the moral temper; these effects should naturally be carried over into action, if, through constant discipline, they are made permanent acquisitions.¹²

¹¹Yvor Winters, The Defense of Reason (New York, 1947), p. 505.

¹²Ibid., pp. 28-29.

Winters' plea for a moral effect on the reader, which he uses as a means of evaluation, and the plea for action in many literary works, of course, do not fulfill such a future situation, which is to be based on the aesthetic noble function. experience, are not the concern of the literary critic; they may be of interest to the sociologist, the psychologist or the aesthete. Winters too commits the error of confusing the function of literature with critical doctrine. His confusion accounts for his severe treatment of the romantic poets and in many cases for his sub-standard evaluations.¹³

There are other points of view, certainly, which will illustrate the confusion of function with literary criticism: Shelley saw art as a means of increasing one's sensitivity and thereby enlarging his sympathy for his fellow man;¹⁴ and William Faulkner, in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize awarded to him in 1950, made a comment about literature which might easily be converted into this confusion if applied to criticism, for his speech concerned the function of literature: "Believing that our civilization had gone wrong on first principles It is his [the writer's] privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride

¹³See Stanley Edgar Hyman's The Armed Vision for a discussion of Winters' critical judgments.

¹⁴Percy B. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," Shelley's Defence of Poetry; Browning's Essay on Shelley, ed. L. Winstanley (Boston, 1911).

and compassion and pity and sacrifice which also have been the glory of his past.¹⁵

Many literary works, of course, do not fulfill such a noble function.

Perhaps the greatest criticism of the humanistic doctrine of Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt is that they were not concerned so much with literature as art as they were with its effects on the world. Norman Foerster has pointed this error out in his essay in The Intent of the Critic:

More and Babbitt were general critics. They were convinced that there was nearly everything wrong with modern civilization. Living in a time of complacent naturalism, when the idea of progress promised a Utopia, and science a method for attaining it, they made themselves unpopular by asserting that such a deluded program could only lead to the destruction of our civilization. To others, such as the socialists, who saw something fundamentally wrong with our civilization but who sought a remedy in a new economic system, they replied that the higher issues must be faced before the lower, since "the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem and the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem." Believing that our civilization had gone wrong on first principles, they were not content to be literary critics; they were general critics, and finally religious critics.¹⁶

¹⁵William Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," The Faulkner Reader: Selections from the Works of William Faulkner (New York, 1954), p. 4.

¹⁶The Intent of the Critic, p. 78.

¹⁷William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York, 1959), p. 372.

Those who are in favor of an autonomous art are also concerned with the function of art in the world. They often become involved with the nature of beauty and in determining what beauty is they impose a function upon art--it should be beautiful. William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks in their book Literary Criticism: A Short History, have pointed out the fallacy of this point of view (as it concerns criticism) in their discussion of the Kantian doctrine of "purposiveness without purpose." The doctrine is inadequate for literary criticism for the upshot of it is:

Kant's idea of beauty was severe; it related (so far as human making was concerned) almost exclusively to the formal, decorative, and abstract; to Greek designs, foliation on wallpaper, arabesques (things which "mean nothing in themselves"), music without words. The "charms" of direct sensuous pleasure might fuse with beauty, and beauty might be combined with perfect natural forms and purposive human artifacts (the good, the ideal), but in neither of these cases was beauty pure. Beauty allied to the good was no "free beauty" (*pulchritudo vaga*) but dependent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The two might help us by being together, but strictly speaking neither helped the other. It is worth noting that here was a system which conceived Homer and Shakespeare as less aesthetically pure than wallpaper.¹⁷

Benedetto Croce is a philosopher who is also concerned with the function of art in the world. Croce does not impose function on criticism of the art work but his function prevents any analytical discussion. For Croce, the function of art is cognition; and it is the basic form

¹⁷William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York, 1959), p. 372.

of cognition which comes before any other form of knowledge--intuition. The "pure aesthetic" or intuition is, in Croce's terms, undefinable. Pure art is the internal expression of the artist (the intuition in the artist's mind).¹⁸ However, we as critics are concerned with the external art object, not with the philosophical definition of the aesthetic experience. Certainly it "is," but we live in the practical world as well as the contemplative or theoretical in which Croce's "pure aesthetic" exists; and if we are to assume the role of critics, we cannot escape criticism as a practical activity. The purity of Croce's art is not very helpful to the critic who must deal with the art object. It is obvious to all who have had any commerce with literature that a work is not to be equated to morality or any other abstraction from the work, any more than poetry is to be equated with meter. We realize that we cannot abstract from the work and hope to do it justice in terms of that one abstraction. The work of art is complete only in itself; it is a unique and unified whole which we recognize as such. But we have presupposed that criticism is a useful activity, that it can help us to perceive excellences in the work; and we agree that it is an analytical process in which we may abstract for the sake of utility in order of literature but with the literature itself. We must

¹⁸ Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic As Science of Expression and General Linguistic, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York, 1960).

to say something about the work. In the analytical process, criticism becomes a matter of determining what is relevant to analysis and not a matter of adamantly discouraging critical discussion as taboo. Once again, as when a function of literature is imposed on criticism, we find that the philosopher may not be helpful to the critic, for each has different goals. In addition to the functions of literature indicated above, T. S. Eliot, in "The Social Function of Poetry," and John Dewey, in Art As Experience, have indicated the functions of poetry and the other arts as elements of primitive religious rites. All of these functions may be possible for literature, for we know that art can reach the hearts of men of disparate religions, races, and ideologies where other means fail, and may, in that sense bring them closer together. We also feel that art is instructive in some sense (that it is cognitive), that it may offer spiritual strength to help man endure and that it may be influential socially. But we must be careful not to apply these functions to the process of criticism as a measuring device to determine art and non-art. To determine the value of art in terms of one particular function out of the many possible is unfair. We cannot insist that art conform to a particular function. The concern of the literary critic is not with the implications of literature but with the literature itself. We must exclude the functions of literature from literary criticism because there are numerous functions and because the

judgments of fulfillment must necessarily be subjective. Sidney Zink has indicated the fallacy of subjective judgment in his article on moral effect:

Art may serve to remove excess emotion and quell riotous desires, or it may arouse emotion and inflame desire. And there are records of both criminal and humanitarian actions which have--according to the "appreciators" confessions--resulted from the appreciation of a work of art. This puts the matter on the basis of fact; and if it were to be settled in this way we should need a corps of sociologists to conduct a survey and determine whether the vicious or the virtuous results predominate. The philosopher, however, can reject this method on the ground that the statistician cannot determine whether the contact with art (which is followed by virtue or vice) is an aesthetic contact.¹⁹

The arguments in criticism concerning form and content arise from the confusion of the function of art with literary criticism. The critic concerned with function will obviously be concerned with content; for him, the kind of content may determine the excellence of the work. But the objective critic insists that content cannot determine literary excellence. In his essay "The Frontiers of Criticism," T. S. Eliot has indicated that the literary critic must not go beyond certain limits if he wishes to keep his criticism strictly literary:

The difference, then, between the literary critic who has passed beyond the frontier of literary criticism, is not that the literary critic is 'purely' literary, or that he has no other interests. . . . The critic . . . is a

²⁰ T. S. Eliot, *The Frontiers of Criticism*, in *Poetry and Poets* (London, 1937), pp. 116-117.

¹⁹Zink.

literary critic if his primary interest, in writing criticism, is to help his readers to understand and enjoy. But he must have other interests, just as much as the poet himself; for the literary critic is not merely a technical expert, who has learned the rules to be observed by the writers he criticizes: the critic must be the whole man, a man with convictions and principles, and of knowledge and experience of life.

THE MORAL ATTITUDE AS A CRITICAL FACTOR

We can therefore ask, about any writing which is offered as literary criticism, is it aimed towards understanding and enjoyment? If it is not, it may still be a legitimate and useful activity; but it is to be judged as a contribution to psychology, or sociology, or logic, or pedagogy, or some other pursuit--and is to be judged by specialists, not by men of letters.²⁰

On its most offensive form, protrudes from the work. But if it is structurally functional, as it sometimes may be, it is no longer offensive as an instructional device. Its relation to morality is slight and it is chiefly useful as a negative critical term. There is also the aspect which we have designated "functional in the world": that is, art may function in a moral sense in so far as it has a moral effect on society or the individual; but the critic will not be concerned with that element of morality in literature if he wishes to keep criticism objective. There may be several functions of art in the world, but, as we have seen, the imposition of the function of art as a measuring device to determine art and non-art may lead to a dogmatism which

²⁰T. S. Eliot, "The Frontiers of Criticism," On Poetry and Poets (London, 1957), pp. 116-117. most dangerous and the most widespread of the two general errors which we

have discussed. So far, morality as it concerns the art work has been shown to be extra-aesthetic. It is external to the objective analysis of the art work. We have also indicated that the philosophical approach to art may not

CHAPTER TWO

be helpful to the critic and that morality may have a place THE MORAL ATTITUDE AS A CRITICAL FACTOR to the objective analysis of the work. There is an aspect of

We have identified two aspects of morality in morality which is not external and may be of use as a literary discussion, and have determined the relation of critical term and that is the moral attitude as it appears each to literary criticism. The first aspect, the didactic element, is one which, in its most offensive form, pro-

We know that dramatic context can be important to trudes from the work. But if it is structurally functional, as it sometimes may be, it is no longer offensive as the form of the literary art work. As Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have pointed out in their article "The an instructional device. Its relation to morality is Reading of Modern Poetry":

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The word never seems, to say the least, term. There is also the aspect which we have designated

five times in succession does not on logical "functional in the world": that is, art may function in

on psychological grounds, the repetition, when a moral sense in so far as it has a moral effect on society play, becomes extremely poetic. Obviously, or the individual; but the critic will not be concerned

context. with that element of morality in literature if he wishes

The context, in a sense, dictates the form. If the words to keep criticism objective. There may be several func-

of King Lear were placed in the mouth of Volpone when he tions of art in the world, but, as we have seen, the im-

discovers that all of his worldly possessions are lost, position of the function of art as a measuring device to

they would still be in dramatic context, they would still determine art and non-art may lead to a dogmatism which

be enriched by a psychological ground, and we might feel will be entirely unfair to the work. The error of im-

posing function on critical doctrine is the most dangerous

Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, "The Reading and the most widespread of the two general errors which we

have discussed. So far, morality as it concerns the art work has been shown to be extra-aesthetic. It is external to the objective analysis of the art work. We have also indicated that the philosophical approach to art may not be helpful to the critic and that morality may have a place in literary criticism if it is relevant to the objective analysis of the work. There is an aspect of context morality which is not external and may be of use as a critical term and that is the moral attitude as it appears in the dramatic conflict.

We know that dramatic context can be important to the form of the literary art work. As Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have pointed out in their article "The Reading of Modern Poetry":

The word never seems, to say the least, fairly colorless and negative. To repeat it five times in succession does not on logical grounds add to its poetic efficacy. However, on psychological grounds, the repetition, when placed in the mouth of Lear in Shakespeare's play, becomes extremely poetic. Obviously, the poetic force is derived from the dramatic context.¹

The context, in a sense, dictates the form. If the words of King Lear were placed in the mouth of Volpone when he discovers that all of his worldly possessions are lost, they would still be in dramatic context, they would still be enriched by a psychological ground, and we might feel

¹Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, "The Reading of Modern Poetry," American Review, VIII (1937), 435-449.

them to be pathetic; but the poetry would be lost. Or, if they were given to the Wife of Bath as her reply to a companion who had told her that she should never have another lover, we might feel them to be comic words; but the poetry would be lost. The words depend on the complex and particular context of King Lear for their poetic quality.

We are concerned not only with the dramatic context but with dramatic conflict as it arises in the context.

In their book Understanding Fiction, Brooks and Warren

write more specifically about conflict:

In its [conflict's] most obvious form it concerns a collision of interests in the external world. In a somewhat more subtle and sophisticated form conflict concerns a division of interests or obligations in the self. In an even more subtle and sophisticated form, it concerns the alignment of judgments and sympathies on the part of the author--the problem of his own self-division.

The dogmatist who is author paints a world of black and white, a world in which right and wrong, truth and falsehood, are clear with statutory distinctness, a world of villain and hero. The artist who is author paints a world in which there is, in the beginning, neither black nor white, neither right nor wrong, which can be defined with absolute certainty. The certainty can come only in terms of the process, and must be earned, as it were, through the process.²

Conflict does not, of course, necessarily mean moral conflict (which is our concern); there may be conflict in drama of King Lear as an example of the full realization of the moral conflict in literature.

²Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York, 1946), p. xvii. xvi.

Brooks and Warren realize the importance of the moral decision in terms of literary conflict. They have a special term for it--irony:

Most popular fiction aims at flattering the ethical sense of the public. That such fiction is often, in the last analysis, corrupt derives from the fact that the author does not understand the necessity of attempting to realize the idea fully in the experience of his characters and in the structure of his story. The villain bites the dust; the good heart triumphs over all. The author does not recognize the difficulty, let us say, in making a moral decision, and simply follows the idea as blueprint, as dogma. Situations which qualify an idea of virtue and emphasize the difficulty of moral decision . . . do not flourish in the fiction of our best family magazines. Such fiction is deficient in irony.³

In the above passages, Brooks and Warren indicate generally what Sidney Zink has called the moral attitude. The difference is that Zink's definition is more precise about the moral situation; he has defined it for us. Using his terminology in the above passage, we might just as well have said that corrupt fiction is deficient in morality; for Zink's moral attitude is conflict--conflict in which the human agent is forced into questioning his knowledge about the good. It is conflict which will "qualify an idea of virtue" through conscientious pursuit.

Using the two points of view, let us examine the drama of King Lear as an example of the full realization of the moral conflict in literature.

³Understanding Fiction, p. xvi.

That King Lear is a drama developed along moral grounds seems obvious. Many critics have agreed on this point, as Oscar J. Campbell has pointed out in his article entitled "The Salvation of Lear." Campbell says: "The Tragedy of King Lear moves to its catastrophe on a higher plane than any other of Shakespeare's tragedies. Most critics have sensed its wider moral range and its greater sublimity."⁴ The wider moral range of which Professor Campbell speaks is the comprehensive expression of the moral attitude. We are faced with numerous choices between good and evil in the drama and the choices and their implications constitute the moral attitude. We are introduced immediately to a moral situation as the play begins. The first scene opens with the Earl of Gloucester talking to the Earl of Kent. Edmund, the bastard son of Gloucester, is present. Gloucester displays at once a questionable moral judgment through his treatment of Edmund. That Edmund was conceived out of wedlock and in an adulterous situation is Gloucester's initial moral error by traditional moral standards. But in the conversation with Kent, the "fault" is compounded and Edmund must take the brunt of Gloucester's vulgar jest. Gloucester casts a slur upon Edmund's mother, and Edmund is introduced to Kent as "the whoreson" who "must be acknowledged" and whose only recommendations are that his ideal values. Moreover, one must not forget that the whole

⁴Oscar J. Campbell, "The Salvation of Lear," ELH, XV (1948), 93-109.

already divided his kingdom before the contest begins; and

mother was fair and that "there was good sport at his takes making" (I.i.23-25). There is no individual praise given, there is no dignity, there is no respect left for Edmund on after his father's little jest. Gloucester has his joke at Edmund's expense. The first conflict is set in progress (Gloucester's actions will have moral repercussions on Edmund). The second follows upon Lear's entrance and make Gloucester's exist. King Lear is to set the stage for his "darker purpose." Lear is going to play a little game, much as Gloucester has done; and, like Gloucester's game, Lear's will proceed at the expense of others and for the glorification of himself. Lear sets up a contest in which his daughters are to compete for the lands of England which are to be awarded as their dowries. Each daughter is to perform; and each is to receive her prize, ostensibly, as a result of her performance. The price to be paid for competition is humility toward the king and the public display of the voiced filial love. Lear has instigated a basically evil situation. Not only is he offending the legitimate pride of self-respect, but he is assuming that his daughters, whether they love him or not, will prostitute their integrity to obtain the prizes. In setting up the awards on a competitive basis, he is assuming that material goods can buy ideal values. Moreover, one must not forget that the whole plan is provoked under false pretenses, because Lear has already divided his kingdom before the contest begins; and

he has given Cordelia the "most opulent third." Lear takes pleasure in this diabolical scheme. perform, he drops the plural The immediate repercussions of this situation are on Goneril, Regan, Kent and Cordelia. If Goneril and Regan were to receive their awards according to the real love they bear their father, they would receive precious little; so the truth of their loves will not be voiced. They make their choices in favor of hypocrisy and deceit in order to obtain the lands. Lear is satisfied with their reactions; their choices are good because they satisfy his vanity. are Cordelia's answer, however, shakes the unstable structure of the evil situation which Lear has engendered. Kent's intercession on behalf of Cordelia only serves to annoy Lear. The structure of his game has collapsed, leaving him again with a basic ethical choice between good and evil. He must either admit the evil of his scheme by the recognition of the truth of Cordelia's words and thus cloak himself with the garment of shame publicly, or he must ignore the hypocrisy of Goneril and Regan and uphold his evil design, which will result in the banishment of Cordelia and Kent. He is the king, he is the image of authority and respect, and since he has stood behind evil in the inception of an evil situation, he must maintain his right to do so. He compounds his original error by backing up the evil precipitated by his design. The error is not only the result of his necessity of upholding his authority, however; it is Lear's human error. The conflict is a personal one and

Lear himself exposes its personal nature. In his rage at Cordelia following her refusal to perform, he drops the plural of majesty as he says, "Better thou / Hadst not been born than not t' have pleased me better" (I.i.37-38). Lear has accused Kent and Cordelia of pride, which is traditionally the greatest of sins. He has said of Cordelia, "Lette pride, which she calls plainness, marry her" (I.i.131), and to Kent: "Thou hast sought to make us break our vows, / hat Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride / To come betwixt our sentence and our power" (I.i.171-173). We are quick to espy Lear's folly and Shakespeare's irony, for Lear has been one of the finest of Pride's victims.

At this point in the drama, the moral conflict has been set up for the rest of the play. Lear has made his choice concerning his most loved daughter. His daughters have made their choices in regard to him, and the Gloucester subplot, of the actions of the father versus the actions of the children, has been set up to emphasize the Lear conflict. Complexity of situation and complexity of character begin to emerge. We begin to sense the irony which his Brooks and Warren have suggested. There is a collision of interests in the external world: Lear loves Cordelia but will not injure his own pride to save her; Cordelia loves her father but will not abandon her self-respect to flatter his vanity. Kent intercedes on Cordelia's behalf because he fears an injustice is being done and because he fears for the well being of the king and the kingdom if Lear goes

through with his plan, but Kent too loves Lear. Goneril and Regan deceive the king and turn upon their sister for their own personal gains. There is also a division of interests and obligations in the selves of Lear, Cordelia and Kent. And, as we continue in the drama, we shall see that even at this point there is no all black and all white division offered by the author. The conflict has been set up; its working out and its resolution will illustrate what Brooks and Warren mean by the realization of the idea fully in the experiences of the characters, and, more especially, what Zink means by the conscientious pursuit of the right solution to a moral problem.

Kent and Cordelia have chosen the system of honesty as the best policy and have therefore done the right thing in traditional terms. However, Cordelia too is somewhat at fault for the initial conflict. She upholds her integrity at Lear's expense. One cannot feel that Cordelia should have knelt at her father's knees in the obsequious and deceitful manner of Goneril and Regan. Nor does one feel that Cordelia should have humored her father because of his old age; but surely her answers appear too brutal. She could have declined to perform more graciously and with more humility than her speeches indicate. She says, "I love your majesty / According to my bond; no more nor less" (I.i.94-95). And further: "Haply, when I shall wed, / That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty. / Sure, I shall

never marry like my sisters / [To love my father all]"ation
(I.i.102-106). These speeches are clipped and cold; it
seems unnecessary that she should throw this kind of inform-
ation to an aged father to digest as he will. Such speeches
smack of Cordelia's pride; she would have done better had
she kept her resolution to "Love and be silent" (I.i.63).

speech One might also question Kent's right under any cir-
cumstances to repeatedly interrupt the king in public, to
tell him that he is mad, to call him a bower to flattery
and a rash and foolish old man. He too makes it harder
for the king to back down from his decision; the pressure
on Lear becomes intense. of delirium before he finally

comes The variations and complications of the moral choices
increase as the play continues. The minor characters com-
plicate the moral situation: the Fool, though sick at cer-
heart over the wrong done to Cordelia, is loyal to Lear;
the impertinent Oswald maintains a certain curious loyalty
to his evil mistress; Lear's knights are bought off by
those in power; and Cornwall's servant, offended by a gross-
ly evil action, makes a moral decision which costs him his
life. her dubious good. Why could we not have a happy ending

as was Throughout the rest of the play, Lear suffers great-
ly; he goes through a grueling process of self-examination
and evaluation. It would be absurd to attempt a thorough
explication of the play on moral grounds, for it is too
complex; the possibilities of choice become immense as the
play progresses. But we do see Lear attempting to cope

with the evil in the world and approaching the examination of himself in various ways. We see him first as a powerless king, arrogant, insisting upon his due regard from his former subjects and his daughters; we see him in impotent rage at the worldly elements and at his ungrateful daughters; we see him come to the existential question of man in his speech to "poor Tom" on the heath in which he asks:

Is man no more than this? Consider him well.
 Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide,
 First of all the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha!
 here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art
 the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more
 but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou
 art (III.iv.107-114).

And we see him in a state of delirium before he finally comes to terms with Cordelia and the world. All of this is the "pursuit" of the right solution; or as Brooks and Warren would say, it is the process through which the certainty of the solution must be earned.

But we have only given an indication of the pursuit; what kind of solution do we have in the play? And what is so good about earning it? After all, both Lear and Cordelia die; therefore we might naively assume that Lear has earned a rather dubious good. Why could we not have a happy ending as was given in an earlier version of the play? (The True Chronicle History of King Leir)? In that play, Lear regains his throne and Cordelia is taken back to his heart to be cherished. The implication in that case is that Cordelia's hard maintained virtue is rewarded. We would then have a pointedly didactic play in which, while the didactic would

not ruin the play entirely, we would feel that the stature of the play had been diminished greatly. We would consider the intrusion of the didactic a serious artistic error. But why are we so offended by the didactic? Certainly we feel that Lear has suffered enough and that he deserves some happiness at the end of the play; why then do we feel that it is "right" for him and Cordelia to die? The point is that the ending of the play is a "happy" one as it stands. First of all, we must remember that it is Lear's play and not Cordelia's. If we permit the didactic ending for the play, the emphasis will be on the actions of Cordelia and we do not want that. A network of moral conflict emerges from Lear's actions; it expands outwardly from Lear and in turn, Lear finds himself enmeshed and bound by the conflicts which he has engendered. The initial and subsidiary conflicts converge upon him; he is the focal point of the moral question and he must come to terms with it. Cordelia is Lear's means for coming to terms with his problem of evil in the world. Lear has made his choices, he has suffered, he has regained Cordelia and has come to some understanding of the world; ironically, he must lose her to gain complete happiness--to reach the "right" solution. The theme of King Lear is an ideal one: that is, it is concerned with the ideal values of good and evil--it is an examination of those values. If Lear's triumph over the factors of evil is to be valid, it must also be ideal. If the play is given the didactic ending, the ideal values will be sold out for

material gains, the material, earthly happiness of the course didactic version. We gravely feel the superficiality of that solution as a split in the thematic unity of the work. The conscientiousness of pursuit is thrown over for the ease of the immediate and tangible solution. Lear's gain must be greater and more lasting than that. It is through Cordelia's death that Lear realizes the reality of Cordelia's love which is immune to death; and with his heart full of love for her, Lear dies. Lear has come to an understanding of the values of good in the world which cannot be had cheap; and upon the realization of these values, he is ready to die—"ripeness is all."

demands the specific treatment of the Theme, of course, involves action. If the theme is completed with Lear's death and the death of Cordelia, there will be a clean finality of action in that resolution. The didactic ending will also provide a resolution for the drama, but the resolution will come through the deus ex machina. It would be an admission on the part of the author that he could not handle the theme which he had chosen, that the theme had somehow got away from him and that he needed help from outside of the drama. The action would be artificially ended and we would feel the rupture of this concession as we felt the concession in the case of theme. The credibility of the play would be strained; it would make a fairy tale of the drama which the confines of the theme will not permit. th-century romance, such as the Castle of Otranto, in which the choices of the protagonist

are only The characters of Cordelia and Lear would of course be greatly damaged; they would shrink beyond recognition of the Lear and Cordelia we know. Lear would become simply an impetuous old man who made a serious mistake, was punished rather severely, and, in turn, was rewarded for his repentance, instead of the gigantic and powerful figure that he is. Cordelia would become a sort of royal Cinderella rewarded for her virtue, instead of the noble self-sacrificing heroine who needs no reward. *concerned with morality in social*

The didactic is certainly inadequate for Shakespeare's play. We may say that the theme which Shakespeare has chosen is a moral one which demands the specific treatment of the moral attitude. The moral attitude will dictate the actions of the characters of the play to shape the form of the whole drama along the moral lines of Zink's definition. By looking at the results of the didactic ending for King Lear, we can see some of the faults which result when an incident which demands a moral treatment does not meet the demand. At the beginning of the novel, we see Carrie placed in a situation. We are all familiar with the corrupt fiction of which Brooks and Warren write, in which the hero triumphs and the villain bites the dust. It is true that such fiction appears in the family magazines, as it does in our western novels and "true romances." It is not a new corruption however; we can find it in immature English fiction--in Pamela or the eighteenth-century romance, such as the class Castle of Otranto, in which the choices of the protagonist

are only superficially difficult and in which we can depend on the protagonist to make the conventionally right choice to triumph over evil in the world. We recognize these novels as immature and the "Westerns" as corrupt. But some novels illustrate this corruption in a different way. Theodore Dreiser's novel Sister Carrie may help to illustrate the importance of the moral conflict to a fictional work although the theme which Dreiser has chosen is not a moral one. In his novel, Dreiser is concerned with morality in society; but it is his thesis that his heroine, Caroline Meeber, is not responsible for her actions because she is deliberately intend her actions; she acts by instinct and not capable of making a moral choice. Her actions, says Dreiser, are amoral. Carrie is very much like an animal; she has only biological drives--she has no control of her will. The only conflict for Carrie is one which concerns material goods. She is very much like the psychologist's rat looking for hidden cheese in a maze: only the possibility of material gains directs Carrie in her choices.

At the beginning of the novel, we see Carrie placed in a situation of conventional moral conflict: she must nevertheless, Hurstwood goes through the motions of defy conventional morality to live with Drouet, or she must suffer the physical discomforts of the world if she does not. She chooses to live with Drouet. From this point on in the novel, Carrie has several chances to make moral choices: she must choose whether she will betray Drouet

for the affections of Hurstwood and the higher social class which he represents, and later she must choose whether she

will betray the outcast Hurstwood for a chance for fame. In both cases she leaves her lover and in neither case does she show any loyalty or responsibility to the lover she has left. Her lovers become material burdens for her:

Her need of clothes--to say nothing of her desire for ornaments--grew rapidly as the fact developed that for all her work she was not to have them. The sympathy she felt for Hurstwood at the time he asked her to tide him over, vanished with these newer urgings of decency. He was not always renewing his request, but this love of good appearance was. It insisted, and Carrie wished to satisfy it, wished more and more that Hurstwood was not in the way.⁵

But Carrie's actions are without reflection; she does not deliberately intend her actions; she acts by instinct and her actions are therefore without moral quality.

The most interesting figure in the novel is Hurstwood. And he is interesting precisely because he gets involved in ethical conflict (if only slightly). Dreiser gives Hurstwood a bit more freedom than Carrie, but he tries to explain part of his actions in terms of naturalistic forces. He tries to explain his actions in terms of environment, circumstance, and biological "chemisms of the brain"; nevertheless, Hurstwood goes through the motions of conflict. Hurstwood's wife is a cold, jealous and selfish woman and his children are indifferent to him as long as he provides them with money; he has adequate motivation for his initial error, his affair with Carrie, and he is carried away by such a proposition as this, but his answer he put his hand slowly up and scratched the safe and put his hand on the knob. Then he took the money quite out. . . . He took the box and partly closed the door again. . . . He strolled to the safe again. He put his hand on the knob and would come from looking at it!

⁵Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie (New York, 1958), p. 310. Sister Carrie, pp. 210-211.

along by his fascination for a young girl until he comes to the point where he is about to steal the money from his employer. At that point, he becomes involved in conflict:

"The safe is open," said a voice. "There is just the least little crack in it. The lock has not been sprung."

The manager floundered among a jumble of thoughts. Now all the entanglement of the day came back. Also the thought that here was a solution. That money would do it. If he had that and Carrie. He rose up and stood stock-still looking at the floor.

"What about it?" his mind asked, and for answer he put his hand slowly up and scratched his head.

The manager was no fool to be led blindly away by such a proposition as this, but his situation was peculiar.... He went back to the safe and put his hand on the knob. Then he pulled the door open and took the drawer with the money quite out. . . . He took the box and the money and put it back in the safe. Then he partly closed the door again. . . . He strolled up to his little room, then to the door, then to the safe again. He put his hand on the knob and opened it. There was the money! Surely no harm could come from looking at it!⁶

Hurstwood wavers back and forth several times before he takes the money. Later, after he and Carrie have fled to Canada, the pressure of being a thief becomes too much for him, and he sends most of the money back to his employer. Hurstwood and Carrie leave Canada and go to New York and he tries to rebuild his life but he has no money and he has lost all of his former connections. He buys a small business but is forced to sell it; he does not have enough money

⁶Sister Carrie, pp. 268-269.
Sister Carrie, pp. 210-211.

to begin again. As Hurstwood's fortune declines, he begins to look at the world around him. He is struck by the hardships of the people in the city:

Winter was coming, the papers were announcing hardships, and there was a general feeling of hard times in the air, or, at least, he thought so. In his worry, other people's worries became apparent. No item about a firm failing, a family starving, or a man dying upon the streets, supposedly of starvation, but arrested his eye as he scanned the morning papers. Once the "World" came out with a flaring announcement about "80,000 people out of employment in New York this winter," which struck as a knife at his heart.⁷

He becomes concerned about his being a burden to Carrie: "He had worked so hard to make expenses seem light. He had been 'doing' butcher and baker in order not to call on her. He had eaten very little--almost nothing" (p. 324). Hurstwood's situation becomes steadily worse. He tries to get a job as a trolley driver during the strike but his job is brought to an end as someone in the mob fires a shot which cuts his shoulder. He gets a job as a janitor but comes down with pneumonia. He is finally reduced to begging for a living but he is not satisfied to beg just to exist: he commits suicide. Perhaps Hurstwood's moral conflicts are slight, since Dreiser attempts to explain his actions on naturalistic grounds, but they are nevertheless conflicts and his resulting actions are conscious ones. He is not entirely moved by the wills of the gods as Carrie is.

⁷Sister Carrie, pp. 268-269. Vision of Tragedy (New Haven, Conn., 1939), p. 88.

As a result of his conflicts, he begins to emerge as a fully developed character. It is his ethical conflict which makes Hurstwood stand out, just as it accounts for the grand old character of Lear and the excellence of Cordelia and the Fool as literary characters. Slight as his conflict is, it puts him above the flat dull character of Carrie. One might also contrast the weakness of Carrie's character to the dynamic character of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter to indicate the difference between the character involved in moral conflict and the character who remains unable to make an ethical choice. Hester's initial moral error is very much like Carrie's but as Richard B. Sewall has pointed out in his Vision of Tragedy:

The essence of Hester's seven-year course is conflict--of Hester with her self, her society, and her God. The conflict throughout is fraught with ambiguity, with goods and bads inextricably mixed, and constantly and bitterly recognized as such by Hester.⁸

We cannot accuse Dreiser of a failure to use the apart from the works which we have been discussing. Bergson and Zink have supplied us with a useful distinction: because the theme he has chosen is not a moral one; his attempt is to present an amoral situation. But it is curious that his most interesting character is interesting because he is involved in moral conflict.

We have examined King Lear as a work which represents a comprehensive view of the moral conflict and the

⁸Richard B. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven, Conn., 1959), p. 88.

moral attitude; we have suggested that the didactic version of Lear, as well as much of our modern fiction, would represent a corrupt or inadequate fiction because it would not realize the importance of the moral conflict to a dramatic situation; and in Sister Carrie we have indicated the effect of moral conflict on character development. Although Dreiser's novel does not treat a moral theme as we have defined it, Hurstwood goes beyond the naturalistic limits of the novel. But obviously all fiction and drama does not deal with moral themes or moral conflict; we do have excellent literary works which appear to be moral in theme and yet do not illustrate the "conscientious pursuit of the right solution," as we have said they must. What can we say of such works as Jonson's Volpone, or The Alchemist, or Joyce's Ulysses? Do not these works present a moral theme also? These are works which we call comedies, and as comedies they have certain characteristics which set them apart from the works which we have been discussing. Bergson and Zink have supplied us with a useful distinction:

In the course of Comedy, dealing (as Bergson has shown) with the type rather than the individual, exposes character instead of analyzing it, and, conformably to its more superficial treatment, has an effect more momentary and faint. It presents human foibles, not human crimes: it discloses conflicts which are social and remediable rather than psychical and universal. Thus its affinities are to sociology more than to morality, and it is more capable of generating a social consciousness than a moral conscience.⁹

(parallax in particular); that his son died shortly after birth; ⁹Zink. that he is preoccupied with thoughts of his

In King Lear, we are involved with a drama of individual struggle and individual triumph and defeat. We deal with particular characters and particular struggles, but the implications are universal. Volpone is a general indictment of society for its avarice and greed. Volpone feeds on the weaknesses of society, avarice, greed and lechery, which are typified by Corbaccio, Corvino and Voltore. The implications are social not individual. On a more modern level, we might examine James Joyce's Ulysses as an indictment of society for its weaknesses. There is no particular or individual moral conflict in Ulysses; and, for those reasons, I call it comedy. We are faced with the general foibles of man in his society. We are not concerned with the individual and his struggle in the world. But let us look briefly at Ulysses (and the protagonist of the novel, Leopold Bloom) to determine its characteristics. The information compiled and presented to the reader about Leopold Bloom, the hero of Ulysses, is astounding. There is an elaborate dialectical approach to his character. In the course of Bloomsday, we learn that Mr. Bloom has a particular liking for the finely scented taste of urine in a mutton kidney; that he likes to read while making his morning call to the toilet; that he has a certain amount of compassion for prostitutes, the blind, women in labor, and sea gulls; that he is interested in the notions of science (parallax in particular); that his son died shortly after birth; and that he is preoccupied with thoughts of his

wife's infidelity. These are but a few of the varied and innumerable facts given to the reader about Leopold Bloom, but he It would seem, from the sheer weight of the facts given, that Bloom is the most completely drawn character in literary history; perhaps he is. In spite of this completeness of characterization, Bloom seems a failure as an individual character. To study Bloom in terms of the individual character proves disappointing and fruitless. Bloom, the individual, with his passive attitude and his emphasis on equanimity turns into a complicated but gutless worm. Neither God nor man can afford an attitude of complete tolerance. Bloom, in fact, does not remain always tolerant: he cannot turn the other cheek in his argument with the citizen in the bar; neither is he above an attempt at moral correction in regard to Stephen's riotous living. But he would have us believe that his acceptance of Molly's conduct results from his magnanimity and not from his contrived rationalization. For Leopold Bloom there is pathos, but no aspect of the moral conflict. The probing of the individual will is the material for the moral conflict and Bloom is not built to stand the cross-fire of an examination of the will. Procedure of examination from a moral point of view will reduce Bloom to an insignificant, weak little Irishman who cannot escape the tag of Jew.

The insular nature of comedy provides a world in which individual moral questions have no place; we must be able to look at Bloom without subjecting him to moral

judgment, for he cannot withstand it. He is closer to the type than to the individual character. He is not everyman, but he is an average man; and as an average man, he becomes a symbol of what seems to me an indictment of society. Joyce has created his Poldy and put him on display. He seems to be saying: I don't know how much of this character fits any one of you, but some of him is true of most.

The reader travels with Bloom through a pretty common day. By the time he arrives home with Bloom, he is as worn out as the traveller himself, and he finds that Bloom is going through a process which D. H. Lawrence would have called "death in life." There is no struggle of the soul for Bloom; his life is spiritually static. He does have some little remorse of conscience: he is plagued by his memories of past petty crimes, and he has hallucinations in which he is rebuked for his behavior by his dead parents; but in the final analysis, Bloom's life struggle is summed up in the passage:

What were habitually his final meditations?

Of some one sole unique advertisement to cause passers to stop in wonder, a poster novelty, with all extraneous accretions excluded, reduced to its simplest and most efficient terms not exceeding the span of causal vision and congruous with the velocity of modern life.¹⁰

Bloom's position is an acceptance of the defeat and futility of life, not one of conflict and struggle. He is a social

¹⁰James Joyce, Ulysses (New York, 1946), p. 705.

character, not an individual one. And, as Zink's definition of comedy would indicate, Bloom's character is exposed; his will is not examined.

Up to this point in the discussion, we have dealt with literature concerned with characters and their conflicts; that is, with dramatic literature. It is only in dramatic literature that the moral attitude may be realized. There are two reasons for this: first, we must have character to have conflict; and second, dramatic literature is long enough to permit the conscientiousness of pursuit which is necessary to the moral attitude. Several critics have been aware of the fact that the moral attitude emerges from the dramatic situation. As I have already indicated, Brooks and Warren have suggested the relationship of the moral to conflict and fiction. Aristotle, long ago in the Poetics, recognized the impact of the moral on character. He wrote: "Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kinds of things a man chooses to avoid."¹¹ Norman Foerster also points directly to the dramatic situation as that which reveals conflict between thought and action:

In literature, reason and the ethical imagination, contemplating man and the grounds of his happiness and unhappiness, speak to us with an incomparable fullness and clarity; and they do this with maximum facility in the drama,

¹¹Aristotle, Poetics, trans. S. H. Butcher, The Great Critics, James H. Smith and Edd W. Parks, eds. (New York, 1951), p. 35.

confuse us because the essence of drama, as of human life, is action, external action in relation to the concerned. inner springs of action.¹²

And Sidney Zink too is aware of the importance of the dramatic situation for the expression of the moral attitude:

I think the moral potentialities of art are greatest in tragedy and are in fact limited to literature--and, specifically, to dramatic literature (meaning by this, however, the creative presentation of character, whatever the specific literary devices--that is, whether the method be chiefly dialogue, narrative, or stream-of-consciousness description; whether it be staged, read, or heard; and whether it be in prose or verse).¹³

But none of the critics has come so close as Brooks and Warren to pointing out that there are some situations which demand a moral treatment, and that if those demands are not met, a corrupt literature will result.

We must not be confused by the term dramatic; there are those who see the writing of a poem as a dramatic situation in which the poet "meets" the incident which he is to express (Winters would fit this category). But it is my contention that there can be no moral conflict, as we have defined it, developed in the short poem, though it may be dramatic in this subtle sense. There is a certain class of poems such as Carl Sandburg's poem "Fog," or Tennyson's "The Eagle," or Herrick's "Upon Julia's Clothes" which we might classify as descriptive and which would not

¹²The Intent, p. 73.

¹³Zink.

confuse us as far as the drama and the moral conflict are concerned. But we do not have to wander very far in the fields of literature to stumble into short poetry which offers an apparent dramatic situation and moral conflict. Is there not some drama as well as conflict in such poems as Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress," and Robert Frost's "Stopping by the Woods"?

In regard to the first, we might say that a certain dramatic situation is set up by the artist: that of the lover pleading for the favors and affections of his lady. But we must also see that if we apply our criterion for the moral conflict, we will not get very far with this poem. The poem is the expression of a whim on the part of a lover--it is a rationalization which intends to confirm what the lover already wants to believe. There is no rational development, no conscientiousness of pursuit of the right moral answer, and no action of deliberate intention, which we have determined we must have in order to have a moral conflict. The situation remains only potentially dramatic, for there is no action involved; it remains only an incident. Whether or not the poem is moral by conventional standards is not the concern of the critic. Its intention is to express the fancy of a lover and the only conflict involved is whether the lady will or will not grant the favor to her lover, after his elaborate attempt at seduction. And we are, alas, kept ever in darkness as to the outcome of that conflict. There is no intention of a moral theme;

there is nothing in the poem to demand treatment through the moral attitude; and therefore we can say nothing about the poem critically in terms of morality.

In Frost's poem, a slightly different situation is developed. Again, we have the treatment of dramatic incident, and an apparent conflict exists in the poem; but in this case, the "I" of the poem is offered a decision and that decision is resolved. The driver of the sleigh makes a decision in favor of the responsibility which the world imposes on its inhabitants: he forgoes the desire to linger and enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the natural scene--for he has "promises to keep." The dramatic situation is somewhat more complete here, for it leads to action. But in this case also, we have only the treatment of immediate incident. The driver's decision is conclusive. We do not have, as we do in Lear, an examination of the implications of the choice. The driver makes his choice and that is an end of it; there is no extension of the moral theme; there is no process through which the solution must be "earned," and therefore there is no reason for us to believe that the poet has chosen a theme which demands the conscientious treatment of the moral attitude. We can say nothing about the poem critically in terms of morality.

In each poem, the main reason we cannot use the moral attitude as a critical factor to determine the adequacy of the treatment of conflict is that the length of the poems will not allow the comprehensive development of conflict

that the moral attitude requires. The short poem is confined to incident and the moral attitude as a critical factor is not relevant. There is much fine poetry in King Lear which, if taken out of context, will remain fine poetry though it is brief. Lear's speech to the elements which begins:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage!
Blow!

You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd
the cocks! (III.ii.1-3)!

if taken out of context, would provide a magnificent incident of rage and defiance against the world on the part of the protagonist; but though the moral attitude provides the structure for the whole drama, we could not apply it critically to that speech if that were all we knew of Lear.

In the same way, we might be confused by an apparent moral conflict in a poem such as Browning's "My Last Duchess." For we might say, surely, here is the presentation of evil; here is Browning's Iago, or his Roger Chillingworth. And there may be some cause for those analogies; but we must remember that Iago or Roger Chillingworth, out of their contexts, present no moral conflict. It is only through the association of the characters with their total dramatic situations that we recognize the presence of the moral conflict and the moral attitude. There is no larger context for the Browning poem; it, as all short poems, remains only incident to which the moral attitude does not apply.

Any of these poems might possibly be extended to develop a situation of moral conflict which would demand the conscientious pursuit of the moral attitude. We might compare Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress" to Hemingway's novel A Farewell to Arms to indicate the extension of incident in Marvell's poem to the moral conflict of Hemingway's characters.

Hemingway's novel does not represent so comprehensive a treatment of the moral conflict as Shakespeare's King Lear. Few literary works do. But A Farewell to Arms, as a serious novel, does represent a comprehensive treatment of a moral theme. It is concerned with ideal values of good and evil in the world. In his introduction to Hemingway's novel, Robert Penn Warren writes: "The book, even if it does not end with a solution that is generally acceptable, still embodies a moral effort and is another document of the human effort to achieve ideal values."¹⁴ The attempt to achieve ideal values is indicated in the novel through the moral conflict of the hero, Frederick Henry; and Hemingway attempts a solution through what is essentially an extension of the theme of Marvell's poem. At one point in the novel, he uses some verses from it; Frederick and Catherine are in a hotel room on the night on which Frederick must leave to go to the front lines again. Frederick relates:

¹⁵Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York, 1949), 14 Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction," A Farewell to Arms (New York, 1949), p. xxxiii.

The waiter came and took away the things. After a while we were very still and we could hear the rain. Down on the street a motor car honked.

"But at my back I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near," I said.

"I know that poem," Catherine said. "It's by Marvell. But it's about a girl who wouldn't live with a man."¹⁵

Catherine and Frederick have been living together although they are unmarried and Hemingway is to use this conventionally immoral situation to get at the larger moral concern of ideal good. Catherine's comment is significant; it looks back to the beginning of the novel in which Hemingway begins the moral conflict of the novel by indicating Catherine's conventional moral conflict. When Catherine first meets Frederick in the hospital, we find that she has apparently been in the situation of Marvell's lady in "To His Coy Mistress." She, like the lady in the poem, had refused the advances of her lover and she has found that the poet's attitude may very well have been right. She and her lover had courted for eight years and Catherine tells Frederick that she was a fool not to marry him. Frederick, who is grossly intent upon seduction, comments that she has beautiful hair and Catherine responds:

"I'm so sorry," she said. I felt I had a certain advantage.

¹⁵ Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York, 1949), p. 161.

¹⁶ A Farewell to Arms, p. 19.

"I was going to cut it all off when he died."

"No." "dreadfully sorry," she said. "I just

"I wanted to do something for him. You see I didn't care about the other thing and he could have had it all. He could have had anything he wanted if I would have known. I would have married him or anything. I know all about it now. But then he wanted to go to war and I didn't know."¹⁶

Catherine is concerned with conventional moral conflict at this point, but Frederick is not in conflict regarding his had done the virtuous and right thing, and we assume that relationship to Catherine. He is simply planning a seduction. Catherine thought so at the time; but she cannot see the good of conventional morality so clearly now that her lover moves in a chess game. He is confused by Catherine's attitude, but his plan is clear. He says: she would not refuse anything to her lover; she would not wait eight years to determine whether she was in love. There is neither world enough nor time. Catherine's action in terms of her attitude toward conventional morality will involve Frederick, and it will be the purpose of the novel to examine the results of the actions of the lovers in terms of the total conflict in which they are involved.

The initial conflict is not solved entirely for Catherine changes; he begins to feel a responsibility toward her. When he goes to see her at their next appointed meeting, he finds that she is not feeling well and will not prematurely, she is offended and slaps his face:

Her hand hit my nose and eyes, and tears came in my eyes from the reflex.

"I'm so sorry," she said. I felt I had a certain advantage. p. 26.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁶ A Farewell to Arms, p. 19.

"You were quite right." suddenly I felt lonely and empty. I had treated Catherine very lightly. "I'm dreadfully sorry," she said. "I just couldn't stand the nurse's-evening-off aspect of it. I didn't mean to hurt you. I did hurt you, didn't I?"

Catherine becomes more than just a "batter deal" than the club for officers. She was looking at me in the dark. I was angry and yet certain, seeing it all ahead like the moves in a chess game.¹⁷

which adds to his spiritual turmoil. Robert Penn Warren Catherine is concerned with conventional moral conflict at this point, but Frederick is not in conflict regarding his about the meaninglessness and the slaughter of the war, the relationship to Catherine. He is simply planning a seduction, and his plan is very clear and standard--like the disparity between his life and that of the priest who speaks moves in a chess game. He is confused by Catherine's attitude, but his plan is clear. He says:

I thought she was probably a little crazy. It was all right if she was. I did not care what I was getting into. This was better than going every evening to the house for officers where the girls climbed all over you and put your cap on backward as a sign of affection between their trips upstairs with brother officers. I knew I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her. This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards.¹⁸

But it is not long before his attitude toward Catherine changes; he begins to feel a responsibility toward her. When he goes to see her at their next appointed meeting, he finds that she is not feeling well and will not see him:

That night at the mess I sat next to the priest and he was disappointed and suddenly hurt that I had not gone to the Abruzzi. He had written to his father that I was coming and they had made preparations. I myself felt badly as he did and

¹⁷A Farewell to Arms, p. 26.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 31. Arms, p. 43.

²⁰Ibid., p. xxviii.

I went out the door and suddenly I felt it was lonely and empty. I had treated Catherine very lightly, I had gotten somewhat drunk and had nearly forgotten to come but when I could not see her there I was feeling lonely and hollow.¹⁹

Catherine becomes more than just a "better deal" than the club for officers, and Frederick is beset with a conflict which adds to his spiritual turmoil. Robert Penn Warren has defined him as the "sleepless man." He is concerned about the meaninglessness and the slaughter of the war, the debauchery of his nights in bars and brothels, and the disparity between his life and that of the priest who speaks of the cold, clear, dry country of Abruzzi. The priest's country represents an ideal world apart from the weary activity of war.²⁰ Frederick's world of war is analogous to Lear's world of turmoil on the heath. Lear too has questions about good and evil in the world. Frederick faces much the same conflict which Sewall indicates Hester Prynne faces. He is in conflict with himself, his society and his God. The conflict with himself is shown in his discussion with the priest when he admits to the priest that he did not go to the Abruzzi on his leave, but spent his nights and days in debauchery. The priest says:

That night at the mess I sat next to the priest and he was disappointed and suddenly hurt that I had not gone to the Abruzzi. He had written to his father that I was coming and they had made preparations. I myself felt badly as he did and He looked at me and smiled.

¹⁹ A Farewell to Arms, p. 43.

²⁰ A Farewell to Arms, p. 13.

Ibid., p. xxviii.

Ibid., p. 191.

could not understand why I had not gone. It was what I had wanted to do and I tried to explain how one thing had led to another and finally he saw it and understood that I had really wanted to go and it was almost all right. I had drunk much wine and afterward coffee and Strega and I explained, winefully, how we did not do the things we wanted to do; we never did such things.²¹

His conflict with his society is indicated in his conversation with the patriot Gino. Gino mouths the words of his society; he is filled with the concepts of the patriot and he tells Frederick that they cannot talk about losing the war. "What has been done this summer cannot have been done in vain," he tells Frederick. Frederick says:

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over the other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it.²²

His conflict with his God is suggested in the conversation with the priest when the priest comes to see him in the hospital after he has been wounded. The priest says:

"There in my country it is understood that a man may love God. It is not a dirty joke."

"I understand."

Frederick's desertion from the army is also a violation of conventional moral standards. But under the

²¹A Farewell to Arms, p. 13.

²²A Farewell to Arms, pp. 74-75.

²²Ibid., p. 191.

circumstances "You understand but you do not love God."²¹

responsibility "No." the army is over:

"You do not love him at all?" he asked.

"I am afraid of him in the night sometimes."²³

All of these conflicts gather about the love affair of Catherine and Frederick. It is that love affair which is to attempt a solution of the conflicts for the lovers through ideal love, just as Cordelia's love presents an ideal solution for Lear. The matter of conventional morality regarding the love affair becomes insignificant in comparison with the larger conflicts of good and evil with which the lovers must deal. We feel that Catherine may be quite right when she insists that they are married: "What good would it do to marry now? We're really married. I couldn't be any more married" (p. 119). The marriage ceremony becomes only a formality; we cannot feel that there is anything viciously evil in their actions. And their love may provide a solution for the greater moral conflicts. The example, the loss of intensity which would result if Shakespeare had lingered on the happiness of Cordelia and Lear lovers creates an urgency which overshadows the rules of conventional morality; the lovers' pursuit of a solution for their greater moral conflicts will indicate something about ideal good.

Frederick's desertion from the army is also a violation of conventional moral standards. But under the

²³ A Farewell to Arms, p. 241.
A Farewell to Arms, pp. 74-75.

circumstances "honor" becomes insane. Frederick's moral responsibility to the army is over:

Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation. Although that ceased when the carabinieri put his hands on my collar. I would like to have had the uniform off although I did not care much about the outward forms. I had taken off the stars, but that was for convenience. It was no point of honor. I was not against them. I was through.²⁴

The remainder of the novel is a presentation of the happy life which Catherine and Frederick enjoy while they are together. The conflicts are largely put behind; they are temporarily solved by the pleasure they take in their love. Conflict in the novel becomes largely physical--the physical problems of Frederick's evading the police. The moral conflict breaks down at this point and that is partly why we can say that the treatment of the moral problem is less comprehensive than that of King Lear. The emphasis shifts from the moral conflict to temporal happiness, and the conflict loses its poignancy. We might consider, for example, the loss of intensity which would result if Shakespeare had lingered on the happiness of Cordelia and Lear at their reunion and had gone on to tell us about the subsequent joy they might have had through several months following the reunion, before they enter the violence of the fifth act. Neither can we say that Frederick's hardships after he escapes from the battle police are focused

²⁴ A Farewell to Arms, p. 241.

on the moral conflict, as Lear's hardships on the heath are. The process of Frederick's getting to Catherine (and, after, their escape to Switzerland) is largely a matter of narrative device used to get at the conflict again at the end of the novel. The physical conflict is dramatic, but it is distinct from the moral. . . .²⁵

As a result of the lapse in intensity of moral conflict, Hemingway's conclusion represents a less certain moral solution than that of King Lear. The moral conflict in the novel appears in the initial pursuit of the "right solution"; the certainty of solution is less fully realized. In Lear we feel the solution to be certain and final; for Frederick Henry the solution is not final and it may be unstable. We feel I think that Frederick has determined at least one ideal good in the world through his love for Catherine. We may say that his effort to tell the story as narrator suggests the meaningfulness of love to him, and we may look back to his comment on the priest early in the novel to support the idea that after his experience with Catherine he has something in common with the priest and his ideal values. He says of the priest: "He had always known what I did not know and what, when I learned it, I was always able to forget. But I did not know that then, although I learned it later" (p. 14). He has determined an ideal good in the world, although his solution is not final as it is in the case of Lear. Robert Penn Warren has this to say about the solution of the novel:

In the end, with the death of Catherine, Frederick discovers that the attempt to find a substitute for universal meaning in the limited meaning of the personal relationship is doomed to failure. It is doomed because it is liable to all the accidents of a world in which human beings are like ants running back and forth on a log burning in a campfire and in which death is, as Catherine says just before her own death, "just a dirty trick." But this does not deny the value of the effort.²⁵

Frederick's ideal does not offer the final solution which Lear's does; it does not transcend the cruelties of the world. But the effort is valuable and the moral attitude is a shaping factor which presents the moral conflict in the novel. Ordinarily we use it only to indicate a flaw in the literary work. Marvell's poem only presents an incident: the plea of a lover for his lady's affections. Hemingway's novel expands that incident through the moral conflict to explore its moral implications, not in terms of conventional morality, but in terms of the ideal moral attitude. Attitudinal advice. The didactic, however, represents only one connotation of morality in criticism. It is the easiest aspect of morality to recognize and may be easily dealt with: if it protrudes from the work, we consider it a fault; but if it is functional in the work, we consider it an asset.

The second connotation of morality in criticism, the imposition of a presupposed function of literature as a critical device, provides the most pervasive problem of the three general connotations. The function of literature, what literature does or should do in the world, is a philosophical problem. Literature may have a social function,

²⁵A Farewell to Arms, p. xxxi.

a cognitive function, or an instructional function in the world, but we cannot judge its literary merit by any of its functions. The imposition of function on critical doctrine may lead to a dogmatism which would be disastrous to

CONCLUSION

literary judgment. Tolstoy's judgment of art works has

given Morality may appear in literary criticism with three

general connotations: as the didactic; as an extension of

the didactic, the function of literature in the world; and

as moral conflict, representing the moral attitude. conflict

as it The didactic is useful chiefly as a negative critical

term: ordinarily we use it only to indicate a flaw in the

literary work. Seldom is the didactic praised, although we

should not forget that it is sometimes a functional element

that deserves praise. Shakespeare's Polonius is an excel-

lent literary creation, and his success is partially a result

of his presentation as one who gives platitudinous

advice. The didactic, however, represents only one conno-

tation of morality in criticism. It is the easiest aspect

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three general connotations. The function of literature, what

literature does or should do in the world, is a phil-

osophical problem. Literature may have a social function,

a cognitive function, or an instructional function in the world, but we cannot judge its literary merit by any of its functions. The imposition of function on critical doctrine may lead to a dogmatism which would be disastrous to literary judgment. Tolstoy's judgment of art works has given us an example of the results of dogmatic judgment. The function of literature in the world is not only irrelevant, but dangerous to literary criticism.

The third connotation of morality, the moral conflict as it represents the moral attitude, can be an important critical device. When it is comprehensively employed by the artist, it may result in powerful expression, as it does in King Lear. In its least use, it can add greatly to character development as it does to Dreiser's Hurstwood. But if its restrictions are not recognized in the treatment of the moral theme, it will result in a corrupt fiction.

It is not useful in the criticism of all literary works; as we have seen, the work must be dramatic and extended. Comedy meets both demands but it has its own goals and is not concerned with the individual conflict. The short poem is inadequate because of its length; it remains only incident. Even the short poem which seemingly treats a moral issue must be expanded, as we have shown by comparing Hemingway's novel, A Farewell to Arms, to Marvell's poem, "To His Coy Mistress," to express the conscientious moral pursuit.

Ransom The confusions of the connotations of morality as it is used in critical discussions have created a misleading idea of the relation of morality to literary criticism. The formalist critics were partly right in their objections to the imposition of the function of literature on critical doctrine (it seems to me that their objection to morality

was a matter of function, though they have not called it that). But they objected so strongly that they overlooked the possibility of morality being useful in another way.

Recent articles by formalist critics indicate that the critics are beginning to recognize the severity of their initial judgment on morality. In an article in The Kenyon Review of 1952, Ransom indicates that he realizes that

literary criticism is not merely a matter of the examination of words and that the critic of fiction needs more tools with which to work:

So in an age of unusual critical achievement we have managed to arrive rather quickly at an excruciating impasse: with cold-blooded critics of poetry working away at what sometimes appear to be the merest exercises with words; and warm-blooded critics of the critics of poetry reproaching their exercises and perhaps about to reproach their poetry too.

How confidently, twenty years or so past, we were some of us offering a new "understanding of poetry"! I will not say, How brashly; for the innovation was real, it was momentous; but it was not complete, and now it has bogged down at a most embarrassing point.¹

¹John Crowe Ransom, "Poets and Flatworms," Kenyon Review, XIV (Winter, 1952), 157-162.

²Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Poetry (New York, 1950), p. xxiv.

Ransom indicates that a problem exists but he does not offer a solution. In the second edition of Understanding Poetry in a postscript to their "Letter To The Teacher," Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren also indicate that they are aware of the problems created by the moral attitude:

It may always be said that a study of poetry that starts from the notion of the poem as a little drama can scarcely be said to ignore the human materials that enter into poetry, for the dramatic situation is dramatic only because it urgently involves human impulses. As the poem starts from an urgent situation, so it ends by making, directly or indirectly, a comment on human conduct and human values. And no good poem makes a merely trivial comment. . . . What the relation is between this intrinsic value and other values is a most vexed and delicate question, one that can scarcely be settled here. Perhaps it can never be settled.²

What the authors are suggesting here is that the implications of literature (that is, the effects of literature on the individual or on society--what we have called the function of literature in the world) are problems which cannot be taken up in literary discussion. They are not distinctly literary problems and their solutions must necessarily be conjectured. We have suggested that the implications of literature in the world are more properly taken up by the philosopher, the sociologist or the psychologist. But Brooks and Warren are aware that the moral poses problems for the critic and, as I have indicated in an earlier section

²Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Poetry (New York, 1950), p. xxiv.

of this paper, they have come close to a solution in their discussion of the dramatic conflict. They do not concentrate on the distinctly moral conflict, but with the help of Zink's definition and the extended analyses I have given of individual works which deal with a moral situation, the importance of the distinctly moral conflict should be clear.

It may be true that in his heart the critic will always exercise his personal judgment to determine his favorite works. And history only, perhaps, can determine the greatness of literary works according to both their technical excellence and their function. But to avoid mistaken judgment, we should keep criticism objective. T. S. Eliot has reminded us: "The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards."³

My investigation of the ways in which the concept of morality appears mistakenly in literary discussions, and the analyses given of the distinctly moral conflict in literary works will, I hope, clarify some of the problems related to morality in literary criticism and will indicate that the concept of morality as it concerns the moral conflict has a definite place in literary criticism as an objective critical factor.

³T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature," Selected Essays (New York, 1950), p. 343.

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