**Reading “The Monster”:
The Interpretation of Authorial Intention
in the Criticism of Narrative Fiction**

by

José Angel García Landa

Ph.D. (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)

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George Monteiro
George Monteiro

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Philip J. Lee

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Authorial intention in literary hermeneutics.....	13
2.1. Intention and Intentionality.....	13
2.2. The intentional fallacy fallacy.....	18
2.3. Hermeneutics and criticism.....	33
2.4. Critical intentionalism and speech act theory.....	56
2.5. Some post-structuralist objections to classical hermeneutics.....	80
2.6. Conclusion.....	104
3. Narratology in a nutshell.....	106
4. The Action in "The Monster".....	118
5. Narrative and Narrator.....	132
6. Discourse: The Structure of the Unsaid.....	142
6.1. "Style".....	142
6.2. Symbolism.....	152
6.3. Parallelism.....	162
6.4. Intertextuality.....	166
6.5. Sources.....	179
6.6. Metafiction.....	183
6.7. Conclusion.....	186

7. Discourse: Textual Author and Literary Statement.....	192
7.1. Genre.....	192
7.2. Trescott and moral responsibility.....	198
7.2. Johnson and racial representation.....	215
8. Conclusion.....	242
Appendix: Some Hermeneutical Terms.....	246
Works Cited.....	250

1. Introduction

I

Literature remains, but its readers pass away. And the reading of a work (as opposed to the work itself) is even more ephemeral than the reader: it is a subjective experience which may soon disappear from memory. The fixation of a reading in a critical text is at the same time its externalization, its becoming available to be read in its turn. Criticism is reading before it is criticism. In speaking of the ways a work has been read in the past, we have to assume that the records which are left are in some way average or representative. If we meant the critical readings to be indicative of reading at large, this assumption would have an obvious shortcoming: until very recently, all reviewers and critics are representative only of the white bourgeoisie. Although that is, too, the class where most readers belong, many black readers of Stephen Crane's "The Monster" may have seen in this work things to which the average critic was not responsive.

However, my concern here is only with some aspects of the critical activity considered as a mode of reading which takes place in specific institutional circumstances. Presumably, studying the critical response to "The Monster" will tell us something not only about the story—by tracing its "life" and giving us a clearer insight into its specificity—but also about the institutional conventions in which the critical response has taken place. I will focus on the interpretation of authorial intention in "The Monster" as it relates to the various analytical levels of the work's

narrative structure. The main discussion will deal with the interpretation of the implied authorial attitude to the racial issues of the story, the way readers have constructed the textual presence of the author and his attitudes to racial issues. But, as we shall see, this is of a piece with the interpretation of other structural levels, such as the plot or the overall aim of the story. To show this will require a detailed examination of the critical readings of "The Monster." These fall under three main headings: quotations and testimonia, reviews and scholarly articles.

II

Let us now examine the quotations, testimonia, and reviews, to establish our first contact with "The Monster." These are especially significant for my purpose, since they represent the response of the author's contemporaries, and their institutional nature is also different from that of academic criticism.

The first reader of a work is the author himself. Stephen Crane's pride in his work is the first critical appraisal of "The Monster." Once, Crane went as far as to say that "The Monster" was the best thing he had ever written (Harriman 1900). But Crane's surviving comments on "The Monster" are scarce, and as a rule his letters are concerned only with the economic side of the story. There is no external evidence, for instance, that Crane saw the question of race as an important issue in his work.

The next readers usually are the author's friends who read the unpublished manuscript or listen to the author reading it aloud, as Crane did in the presence of Harold Frederic and Sanford Bennett. Here, "The Monster" met its first critics. Frederic advised his friend to discard the

manuscript, because of its disgusting subject matter. The author defended his work passionately, with the polite assent of Bennett. Crane held that fear was an irrelevant response to a story “with some sense in it” (Beer 1923, 164).

The editors follow, and they are possibly the most influential readers: “When Paul Reynolds offered it to The Century it was refused with speed, an editor explaining to the puzzled agent: ‘We couldn’t publish that thing with half of the expectant mothers in America on our subscription list.’”¹ M. Solomon (1956 b, 39) interprets this rejection as a sign that “The Monster” was felt to voice a complaint against the situation of American blacks: he notes that The Century was one of the publications most inclined to the diffusion of racially derogatory stereotypes. However, none of the early critics seems to interpret the story in this militant sense. In their age, racially derogatory stereotypes were the rule, rather than the exception.

Finally the story was published in a single issue of Harper’s Magazine.² Book illustrations may be considered to be testimonies of a reading. Peter Newell, the illustrator of the Harper’s Magazine edition³ depicted the “game of touching the monster” scene, with the children as the main subject in the foreground and a veiled Henry Johnson sitting in

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¹ Beer 1923, 164. Kahn notes the deepest irony of the whole thing: “Like Henry Johnson, the story had suffered rejection because of its surface horror” (1963, 45). And with much the same reasons being advanced: potential damage to women and children.

² Harper’s Magazine 97 (August 1898): 343-376. It was issued in book form the following year by Harper & Brothers as “The Monster” and Other Stories, with “The Blue Hotel” and another Whilomville story, “His New Mittens,” appended to it. All further references will be to this edition, abbreviated TM.

³ Bowers 1969, 3. The same illustrations were used for the book edition of 1899.

the background. In the rest of the illustrations (twelve in all), he stressed the picturesque aspects of the story rather than the potential horror. "The Monster" appears in these illustrations as a comedy of manners, not a tragedy or a horror story. For Newell, the subject of the story is clearly not Henry Johnson's looks, but the town's reaction to him.

From the first review on we can see that "The Monster" was not read in Crane's time merely as a horror story,¹ at least not by all readers. One reviewer in The Book Buyer (1900) does see "The Monster" as a potentially fine horror story spoiled by a realistic treatment, and the story was advertised in the dust jacket of the original edition as having "all the weirdness of Poe's most fantastic tales and yet is absolutely true to real life" (qtd. in Bowers 1969, 4). But the reviewer in The Literary Digest (1900) sees the story as "an interesting study in hysteria and sinister terror." The terror this reviewer refers to may be the reader's, but surely the hysteria is the townspeople's. Rupert Hughes praises the vividness of "The Monster" and sees in it a realistic incursion into the horrible: "Its sickening qualities are mitigated by the indirectness of their suggestion. Its trivialities are redeemed by the psychological dignity of the physician's problem" (1900; in Weatherford 1973, 252). Another reviewer, in The Critic (1900), sees "social odium" against the doctor as the main subject; a fourth one, in The Academy, sees in "The Monster" "an amazing story" and a worthwhile one, with deeper interest

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¹ Several critics have assumed that it was: Follett 1926, ix; Åhnebrink 1950, 381; Geismar 1953, 116; M. Solomon 1956b, 38; Vasil'evskaia 1967, 219; Cooley 1975, 14. This idea derives from a "seminal" comment in Beer 1923, 164. However, Cora Crane herself commented that Henry Johnson "was a hero only as he was a horror" (Academy 1901b, 177). Stallman (1968, 375) believes she is echoing Crane's own view.

than "The Blue Hotel," which he praises for its "knowledge of human nature" (1901; in Weatherford 1973, 264). The reviewer in The Daily News reads the story as a "study of the irony of fate" combined with psychological observation (1901, 6). A further anonymous reviewer considers the story somewhat unreal, "a study in abstract emotions" (Athenaeum 1901, in Weatherford 1973, 263). Its very first reviewer, Robert Bridges, sees in it a psychological story, with the psychology coming out of dramatization and montage rather than out of rendering of thoughts. "There is also unexpected elevation in the motive of the story" according to Bridges. "The quiet heroism of the Doctor is admirably indicated. He is the central figure of the drama, and yet he says least and seldom appears" (1898, 166). Of course it is *moral* heroism that Bridges is referring to. Most later readers seem to agree with him and to see in Trescott's moral conflict the center of the drama. A connection with Hawthorne's story "The Minister's Black Veil" seems to be hovering about in Bridges's mind when he praises Crane's "admirable Hawthornesque plan" of suggesting fear by showing its effects and hiding the object of horror itself under a veil.

Crane's style may have been Hawthornesque, but Hawthorne's son Julian did not appreciate it. His review is often quoted as an indictment of "The Monster": "I call this an outrage on art and humanity," etc.,¹ and it is indeed a rather superficial reading of the story. But the outrage is not the situation, or Crane's condemnation of the town's veneer of morals and manners (which Hawthorne finds only facile); the outrage is that Crane provides no *deus ex machina*: "And if you believe

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¹ Hawthorne 1900 (in Weatherford 1973, 260); cf. Gross 1975, 109; Morace 1981, 65.

it, Crane leaves the matter in that condition, without the faintest pretense of doing anything whatsoever to relieve it!" That is, Hawthorne is complaining that the subject of the story, a moral dilemma, is inadequately dealt with, or shirked. Hawthorne does not appreciate Crane's peculiar style, which he keeps trying to interpret as realism; for him there is no structure (or "construction") in "The Monster." The open ending of the story was not understood by everybody. One reviewer complained that the story was unfinished "possibly because it had become altogether too gruesome to go on with."

¹ None of these early readers seems to have seen the question of race as significant: at most, they are in tune with (what I take to be) the authorial attitude and they accept the comic role assigned to the blacks. Some of the early reviewers adopt a patronizing tone towards the blacks in the story (e.g. revs. in Daily News and Morning Post, 1901).

The more scholarly estimates that follow around 1920 see the story mainly as a social and moral critique. Curiously enough, they do not stress Trescott's role as a moral hero. Wyatt sees in the story "a chronicle of the cruelty of the people" in the town, a moral condemnation of "mob-meanness" (1915, 149). Starrett also places the theme of social morality foremost: "The ignorance, prejudice and cruelty of an entire community are sharply focussed. The realism is painful: one blushes for mankind" (1923, 79). For Van Doren the effect of "The Monster" is to "expose the stupidity of public opinion in a cramped province" ²; for Beer, "'The Monster' is a study of popular

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¹ Saturday Review (1901; qtd. in Weatherford 1973, 22).

² Van Doren 1924 (in Weatherford 1973, 330). Gross notes that there is no indication in the story that the condemnation is restricted to *provincial* stupidity (1975,

stupidity" (1923, 163). Follett sees in it "a piece of social irony, a miniature anticipation of Main Street" (1926, x).

The story is then apparently forgotten for twenty years and is revived once more only in the fifties. A brief mention by Quinn in this period of neglect (1936, 536) still describes it as "a powerful attack upon the stupidity and intolerance of a town that is ruled by the psychology of the herd."

The poet John Berryman's biography of Crane (1950) is much more attentive to literary analysis than the work of previous critics. Not surprisingly, Berryman read "The Monster" as a literary reworking of autobiographical elements. While many of the autobiographical sources he posited cannot in themselves account for the role that the element in question plays in the story, Berryman's study was the first close reading of "The Monster." It brought to light some useful parallelisms and hidden allusions, and was enormously influential. James Hafley's "'The Monster' and the Art of Stephen Crane" (1959) was apparently the first scholarly article devoted exclusively to the story. Many have followed since, although there is still no book-length study of "The Monster." From the fifties on, the story is seen (together with Maggie) as Crane's attempt at portraying a whole community, with a variety of distinct groups.¹ The interpretation of the story as social

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109). But there is no denying that Crane uses provincialism (as well as petty bourgeois ideals, or snobbery) as a vehicle for his critique.

¹ Hoffman 1957, 5; E. Solomon 1966, 30; D. Gibson 1968, 136. Cady mentions only "The Monster" and later work in this respect, and draws attention to the particularity of this story in contrast with "the almost abstracted characters of Maggie and The Red Badge" (1966, 159). Cazemajou notes that this is Crane's first attempt at dealing with "la banalité quotidienne de la société bourgeoise" (1969b, 421). For Colvert, Crane deals here with a broad social order rather than with inner subjective states of individuals (1984, 124).

criticism is of course maintained and developed,¹ but we may see the influence of the New Critics in the analysis of Crane's treatment of the subject. An increasing attention is devoted to questions of structure, language, and imagery, and there is a variety of new approaches to the story even if the interpretive core is still Crane's moral attitude.² In most critiques, however, the emphasis falls on Trescott's heroism and his role as a protagonist, rather than on the meanness of Whilomville. The condemnation of moral meanness remains, but most critics would say that the story's main subject is something like "the nature, conditions, quality, and fate of heroism" (Cady 1966, 158). Successive close readings have unveiled new aspects of the story and new symbolic relationships, while preserving a good measure of agreement with earlier criticism. But sometimes they propose radically different views of the implied authorial intention. The issue of racial representation and its significance is most salient and interesting in this respect.

III

A literary work has as many readings as it has readers. This can be a distressing fact for the critic who aims to reach the ultimate interpretation, if there is any such critic. The interpretation of interpretations is less fraught with difficulties, since the range of useful

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¹ Cf. Åhnebrink 1950, 378ff.; Knight 1951, 155; M. Solomon 1956b, 38ff.; Hafley 1959; Ellison 1960 (in Ellison 1964); Kahn 1963; G.W. Johnson 1963 (in Bassan 1967, 74); E. Solomon 1966; Cady 1966, 158 ff.; Bassan 1967, 7; Vasil'evskaia 1967, 217; Debouzy 1968, 247; D. Gibson 1968, 138; Katz 1969, xix; Cazemajou 1969b, 423; LaFrance 1971, 209; Gross 1975, 103ff.; Cooley 1975; 1983, 39; Foster 1976; Tenenbaum 1977; Colvert 1984, 123.

² Some other new approaches include psychoanalytic approaches, source studies, remarks on point of view and narrative voice, studies of various kinds of allusion, allegorical interpretations... and a revaluation of the question of race in the story.

undecidability in a critical text is much more limited than that of a literary text. The critical texts we study build in some way or other their version of the work; they give it shape and fix its meaning. This is not to say that a critical text is always transparent. Some readings are as indeterminate as the work itself. Charles Child Walcutt, for instance, first sums up the subject matter of "The Monster" as an exploration of "the consequences of an act of brotherhood which is forced by the nature of things to become involved with pride," and later holds that Trescott's pride is perfectly justifiable; first he describes Henry Johnson as a "faceless and witless monster," a kind of cosmic joke which causes Trescott's virtue to blunder, and then goes on to defend Trescott's position because of course Trescott knew that Henry was not really insane (1956, 83). Walcutt, then, is hesitating between two contradictory readings of the story, and he jumps at random from one to the other. This is a good demonstration of the fact that a story can have many readings. Different readers will read different facts in the story and different authorial attitudes to those facts. In some (maybe exceptional) cases, one reader need not stick to one reading. Of course this is disturbing, but the first victim will be the critic himself: internal coherence is in practice assumed to be the primary requirement of a critical reading. Fortunately for our purposes here, most interpretations are not so highly ambiguous.

When facing a variety of readers, we may be tempted to say that we are also facing a variety of texts, and a variety of authorial intentions, as they have been constructed by those readers. It is my assumption, however, that all these readings are not equally valid. Validity does not exist in the void: it presupposes an interpreter, and interpreters will always have a norm by which to measure other readings: their own

reading of the text, in their own situation (social, historical, academic, intellectual, moral). That is, when reading criticism as a means of approaching a literary text, an interpreter does not face a variety of literary texts: s/he faces a variety of readings. And the comparison of the various readings will not relieve the interpreter from the necessity of producing his or her own reading of the work. There is a core of meaning in a text which is linked both to the issues central to the historical circumstances of its writing and to those of its reading at a given moment by a given reader. Readers may adapt the text to their own interests to a certain point, but they cannot ignore its intended meaning without producing a deviant reading, one that stresses certain elements in the work while it ignores others which are equally central and perceptible to other contemporary readers. While agreement is desirable, disagreement is fascinating. Together with the question of validity, it is necessary to study the extent to which different interpretations pose a threat to the systematizing thrust of narratology and objectivist hermeneutics.

It is evident that in spite of the popularity of anti-intentionalist theories since the fifties, the practical interpretation of texts has always relied heavily on some version or other of authorial intention. In most critical writings the recognition of authorial intention is assumed to be relevant to the understanding of the text. In speaking of "authorial intention", I refer to the authorial intention assumed by the reader on the basis of the work and any other available materials, not to the noumenon in the author's mind. This assumed authorial intention is not necessarily the same as the (present-day) meaning of the text, although many readers either do not distinguish between the two or prefer to think of them as perfectly coterminous.

These differences between our hermeneutic assumptions and those of the critics we study are a liability on this enterprise. What are we to make, when interpreting authorial intention, of New Critical phrasings such as "the work says such and such"? Sadly enough, these interpretations must ultimately be laid on Procrustes' bed. My interpretive assumptions do not allow for "the work" to say anything which is not said by either the author, or the interpreter himself, or other critics or readers. The most I can do is not to reduce the claim that "the work means such and such" to "the authorial meaning of the work is such and such" and thus allow a margin of doubt for the critics who do not have a concept of authorial meaning. In some cases we must assume that it is simply "the work" who speaks, or a phantasmatic implied author whose connections with the real author are irrelevant to the critic in question. Whoever does not share my interpretive assumptions will probably feel that I misrepresent the interpretations of these critics. The alternative would be to introduce a double standard of interpretation. Most critics, however, do have a concept of authorial meaning, and jump without further notice from "the work says" to "Crane says." This move may have theoretical shortcomings, but it has the advantage of making our interpretation of the assumed authorial intention much more reliable.

The metacritical enterprise is justified by E. D. Hirsch as follows: "Judgements that are accurately made upon explicit criteria furnish the grounds of their own validation and therefore qualify as knowledge" (1976, 108). This is an interesting conceptual possibility, but it is rarely the case. I believe in the metacritical use of critical readings as objective data, but my conception of objectivity is different from Hirsch's. The criteria used by critics are rarely, if ever, explicit, and

they must be deduced from the actual evaluation and our knowledge of the work. They are not explicit because their specification would be far more laborious than their application—it would continually be found to be insufficient for the aims of another critic. Therefore, we will have to assume a translatability of other critics' assumptions into our concepts. Metacriticism cannot be more than criticism. At best, it is informed criticism. Indeed, the basic assumption of this study is that to in order to be possible and valid, criticism and theory do not need to escape to a fantastic realm of ideological neutrality.

2. Authorial Intention in Literary Hermeneutics

2.1. intention and Intentionality

It will be convenient, before we broach the issue of intention in the theory of literature, to contextualize the concept of intention. In the phenomenological tradition inaugurated by Brentano, intention is a specific manifestation, among others, of the more general phenomenon of Intentionality.¹ Intentionality is a relationship between a cognitive representation and a state of affairs, in which the cognitive representation can be said to be “about” the state of affairs. Intentional states include perception, belief, desire, memory, and intention, among others. Contemporary philosophical schools differ on the status of Intentionality. For some thinkers (Ryle, Skinner, Quine), it is a concept which has no place in a rigorous theory of knowledge; for others, there is no understanding human activity without it. Let me side with the latter without further explanation, and say that the differences within this second current, e.g. between John R. Searle’s mentalism and Daniel C. Dennett’s “intentional stance,” are largely irrelevant for the purposes of this work. As a rule, I will adopt Searle’s idiom, according to which meanings are actual representations in the brain, although I think that

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¹ I follow Dennett (1978) and Searle (1983a) in capitalizing the wider, specifically phenomenological sense of “Intentionality” (and “Intentional”).

Searle's theory could benefit from a greater degree of self-consciousness about its heuristic status. This choice has the advantage of setting in a larger frame the theory of speech acts which I think is an important meeting ground for hermeneutics, linguistics, philosophy, and literary theory.

For instance, both speech acts and Intentional states in general can be represented as a modalized propositional content.¹ My assertion "John loves Sally" (a speech act) can be paraphrased metalinguistically as "I assert that John loves Sally." Similarly, my belief that John loves Sally (an Intentional state) can be paraphrased as "I believe that John loves Sally." This paraphrase can be said to be Intentional, too. We must distinguish the *original Intentionality* of Intentional states themselves from the *derived Intentionality* of their semiotic representation (cf. Searle 1983a: 21). The Intentionality of a mental belief is original; that of language or literature is derived. Meaning is the relationship between primary and derived Intentionality, between an Intentional state and its semiotic representation. As we shall see, this definition allows for a variety of types of meaning.

Intention-with-a-lowercase-i is a kind of Intentionality. Therefore, my intention to love Sally, which itself is non-linguistic, can be represented linguistically and rather trivially as "I intend to love Sally." Searle sees some Intentional states as more central, simple or primordial

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¹ According to Searle, "Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in the same sense of 'represent' that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs" (Searle 1983a, 4). As it stands, this statement is false, due to Searle's (deliberate?) bracketing of his own theory. But I will assume throughout that this type of statements mean something like "the same metalinguistic apparatus can be used for the representation of speech acts and Intentional states." With this proviso, see Searle (1983a, 4-13) for a comparison of speech acts and Intentional acts, in terms of propositional content, direction of fit, conditions of satisfaction, etc.

than others. These basic Intentional states, such as perception or belief, can be a component part of several other more complex or secondary¹ Intentional phenomena. Searle hesitates about the status of intention in this respect. First, he presents intention as an elaborate instance of such secondary Intentionality, and isolates in it the components of belief and desire (“Bel” and “Des” in his notation):

If I intend to do A , I must believe it is possible for me to do A and I must in some sense want to do A . But we get only a very partial analysis of intention from the following:

Intend (I do A) $\rightarrow$ Bel ($\Diamond$ I do A) & Des (I do A)

The extra element derives from the special causal role of intention in producing our behavior. . . . (1983a, 34)

But Searle immediately reverses the priorities, and speaks of desire as an evolved or bleached-out intention (1983a, 36). Fortunately we do not have to solve this problem. What is more relevant to our purposes here is that intention-with-a-small-i is defined by Searle in its ordinary sense, preceding action as the aim before the shot. This is *prior intention*. There is another kind of intentionality: *intention in the action*. Even in those instances of human agency where there is not a distinct prior intention, we want to characterize the action as intentional-with-a-lowercase-i. In such cases, Searle argues, “the intention in action just is the Intentional content of the action; the action and the intention are inseparable . . .” (1983a, 84). Intention in action does not have to be present to the subject’s consciousness: “Sometimes one performs intentional actions without our conscious experience of doing so” (1983a, 91). This is often the case in complex actions which

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¹ Both secondary and original, not *derived* (in the above mentioned sense).

demand a variety of minor, instrumental actions. I may consciously intend to drive to work, though not explicitly intending to turn on the starter. This would still be an intentional action. In turning on the starter, I might set off a booby trap installed by some terrorist—this would count as an unintentional action. However, not every unforeseen consequence of our basic actions is adequately described as non-intentional; for instance, in driving to work I might suddenly become the person born on June 1, 1961 who is geographically closest to the tallest farmer in Rhode Island. If we bracket away the privileged virtual observer of this circumstance, it does not even count as an action. In Searle's words, "we count an action as unintentional under those aspects which, though not intended, are, so to speak, within the field of possibility of the intentional actions of the agent as seen from our point of view" (1983a, 102). Or, from another perspective, "an unintentional action is an intentional action, whether successful or not, which has aspects which were not intended in it" (1983a, 108).

When we speak of the intentionality of a literary work, we do not mean simply *prior intentionality*, but neither are we simply referring to the Intentional nature of the work insofar as it is a semiotic phenomenon. We mean *intention in action*, but in a sense which remains to be further elaborated, one which is specific to the structure of language.

The Intentionality of language is derived. This means that, even in the most simple of speech acts, there is a double layer of Intentionality: the Intentional state expressed, and the intention with which the utterance is made. Moreover, intention (and not only Intentionality) is inherent to semiotic phenomena. According to Searle, "the mind imposes Intentionality on entities that are not intrinsically Intentional by

intentionally conferring the conditions of satisfaction of the expressed psychological state upon the external physical activity" (1983a, 27). In the case of language, the intentional association between signifier and signified soon becomes automatic, an unconscious intention in the act. Searle defines Intentional causation as that causation in which one element is an Intentional state and the other is its condition of satisfaction or part of its conditions of satisfaction (1983a, 122). The peculiarity of the Intentional causation of semiotic communication is that an Intentional state is the condition of satisfaction of the Intentional state that causes it. The (highly conventionalized) Intentional causality of a red light is only satisfied if it causes in motorists a belief that they are required to stop. Therefore, the intention inherent in the red light is not properly speaking to produce the effect of stopping the motorists, but rather to communicate motorists that they must stop. As Searle has noted, it is a mistake to assume that "the intentions that matter for meaning are the intentions to produce *effects* on audiences" (1983a, 161).

Complex Intentional systems are thus constituted by superposing different orders of intentionality. With the example of the red light, we are in our third layer of Intentionality: the original Intentional state of the sender of a message, the intention intrinsic to the constitution of the sign, and the intention to communicate a meaning through that sign. In the case of language, the issue becomes considerably more complicated, as we shall see later: language is so conventionalized that our communicative intention is directed at the performance of speech acts. For the moment, it is sufficient to say that intentions are inherent in the structure of language, and not merely in the psychological phenomena which precede or attend its use.

2.2. The Intentional Fallacy Fallacy

Authorial intention is a central concept in the classical theory of hermeneutics developed in the Romantic age. The classical accounts by Schleiermacher and Boeckh conceive interpretation as the reconstruction of the author's original conception. Emilio Betti voices their contemporary heritage best: "interpretation becomes a collaboration that the addressee extends to the author of the statement, inasmuch as he is called upon to reawaken in his own mind the idea conceived and expressed by the mind of the author" (1988, 32). Interpretation includes the reconstruction of the author's intentions. However, it is not restricted to the reconstruction of the conscious intent or the communicative interest of the author: "Even a 'manifestation' devoid of such interest and a behavior not in itself directed toward making a thought recognizable to others may be the object of interpretation" (Betti 1988, 33). Unintentional, implicit or symptomatic meanings resulting from such manifestations can be the object of hermeneutics.

This conception has long been challenged, often in a misguided way. The modern discussion of the role of authorial intention in the activity of the critic is usually taken to start with the aestheticist reaction against romantic individualism, which had been an essentially intentionalist current. This reaction is linked to literary modernism and can be seen taking shape in various forms during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. It is seen, for instance, in the work of Roger Fry, who once said, "I'm certain that the only meanings that are

worth anything in a work of art, are those that the artist himself knows nothing about.”¹ The debate has assumed different shapes, such as a contention between “historicist” and “critical” theories of interpretation, or between advocates and opponents of psychoanalysis, structuralism or deconstruction.

The best known and most influential theoretical statement of the anti-intentionalist school is W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley’s article “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946; rpt. 1967).² The authors summarized their position in the statement that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (1967, 3). There has been considerable debate as to what was the precise scope of this critical axiom or doctrine, as well as its legitimacy. Other critics have found that it is just as easy to hold that “the design of the author is both available *and* desirable.”³ The extreme intentionalist position will have to be qualified, too. The meaning of a poem is not always the meaning the poet intended it to have; the poet is not always in control of everything which is at work in the poem (Redpath 1976, 17), and s/he is definitely not in control of an anti-intentionalist interpreter.

Let us note first that Wimsatt and Beardsley take “intention” to mean *prior intention*, the original intention of the author, previous to the actual composition of the work, or the personal intention of the author

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¹ In Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry, qtd. in Redpath 1976, 14. Cf. also Watson 1976, 163.

² There are other important statements of this position by Valéry (see Scholes 1989, 54), by Frye (1957, 86), Sontag (1966, 9), Barthes (1977a) and Derrida (1988).

³ Newton-De Molina 1976, xvi. See also the varying interpretations of the scope of the “intentional fallacy” by the other contributors to this volume.

in those cases in which it is different from any intention that may be inferred from the work itself.¹ Sources of information as to the author's intention which are external to the work itself are not relevant for the judgement of the work, according to Wimsatt and Beardsley. Rejection of intention is meant as a rejection of psychologism, in favour of formalism—of criticism based on the analysis of the text itself. Anti-intentionalism presents itself therefore as a favouring of public conventions over private ones.

This is not the main sense in which I hold authorial intention to be decisive to the critical enterprise. Alastair Fowler has noted that "intention means different things at different stages of composition."² It also means different things from the point of view of the author at work and the from the point of view of the interpreter. "Intention" understood as a working project of the author's need not concern the interpreter, except insofar as it may have some kind of bearing on the intention assumed to be present in the work. This first kind of intention may nevertheless be a concern of the scholar. Wimsatt and Beardsley's article is mainly concerned with "intention" seen from the author's pole, with intention understood as something "extrinsic" to the work. The response of intentionalist critics to "The Intentional Fallacy" has been to show that intention is, to use Wimsatt's own terms, *intrinsic* to the literary work, that the public sharability of language is not separable from a concept of intention, something which is neglected by anti-

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¹ It is also this kind of anti-intentionalism which is found in the aestheticians (such as Eliseo Vivas) who conceive of creation as an exploration or discovery which is not the result of a pre-existing intention.

² Fowler 1976, 242. Cf. Horton's view that intention is a complex concept that works differently at each level of the work's structure (1976, 104).

intentionalist critics.¹ In short, writing literature involves an intention in the action which is part of the communicative structure of the work. Intention is not merely something which precedes the work or exists apart from it; neither is intentionalism a blind submission to any meaning an author may claim for his work. It is a requirement to see the work in the right context.² For Hans-Georg Gadamer, the opposition between intentional meaning and unintended meaning is too simplistic, unsatisfactory (1988, 58). We shall see later how an extended speech act theory can help us conceive of an intentionalism which is not narrowly and exclusively psychological.

As for Wimsatt and Beardsley's denunciation of psychologism, it remains a mystery how they ever expected a historical psychic intention to be a threat at all for criticism if they believe that it is never available (cf. Peckham 156). It is also significant that Wimsatt and Beardsley assume that an unfulfilled intention is not recognizable without recourse to external evidence.³ Any of a range common phenomena, such as bad verse which tries hard to be good, can serve as an example that this is not the case.

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¹ In Wimsatt and Beardsley's article there is no suggestion of a relation between intention and the use of public conventions. Nor, for instance, in relatively recent work such as Horton's (1979, 106).

² Cf. Bateson 1953, 14; R. S. Crane 1953, 166, 169; Sparshott 1976, 108; Peckham 1976, 148; Watson 1976, 164f.; Close 1976, 182; Skinner 1976, 213; Hirsch, 1976, 87; Raval 1981, 46; de Man 1983, 25. While repeating some of the earlier injunctions, Wimsatt's revision of his position a quarter of a century later is somewhat more careful and, above all, it recognizes the legitimacy of interpretations based on an intention found "in the work itself" (1976, 128). Still, there is only moderate interest in the author's meaning—the doctrine is still essentially the same.

³ Redpath 1976, 15 f. Cf. Hirsch 1967, 233; Skinner 1976, 213.

Let us note, too, that Wimsatt and Beardsley are mainly concerned with evaluation. However, the intentional fallacy is soon applied quite naturally to the realm of interpretation, since evaluation is logically linked to interpretation (Peckham 1976, 141). And in his revision of the earlier doctrine, Wimsatt extended the application of the intentional fallacy to the realm of interpretation: "The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging either the meaning or the value of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt 1976, 136).

Wimsatt and Beardsley are, furthermore, concerned with the criticism of poetry, or more widely, with aesthetic criticism. In their account, poetry simply

is , in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. . . . In this respect poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention. They are more abstract than poetry.¹

Moreover, whatever personal thoughts or attitudes are inferred from the poem itself are to be attributed "to the dramatic speaker, and if to the author at all, only by an act of biographical inference" (1967, 5). The poem does not belong to the critic, but neither does it belong to the author. It rests on the publicly specifiable conventions of meaning.

By means of an unconscious sleight of hand, Wimsatt and Beardsley reduce the function of criticism to an inquiry about the value of a work

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¹ Wimsatt and Beardsley 1967, 5. That this is not the case is convincingly argued in Peckham 1976.

of art, disregarding the interpretive moment.¹ They reject as uninteresting one form of evaluation, the inquiry as to whether an artist realized his (original) intentions. In their view, criticism must evaluate the final result, the poem and not the (original, extrinsic) intention. "The evaluation of the work of art remains public; the work is measured against something outside the author" (1967, 10).

This valuation of public meaning is illegitimately identified with intrinsic criticism: in an even more amazing sleight of hand, "internal" is identified with "public"; "external" with "private" (1967, 10). E. D. Hirsch has noted that (in its main claim) Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument is not directed against verbal intentional meaning, but against irrelevant meanings. They contend "not that the inferred meanings are private, but that they are probably not the author's meanings" (Hirsch 1967, 16). Wimsatt and Beardsley, however, would reject the notion of "the author's" meanings, and would insist on the public nature of language. This public nature is what makes the notion of intrinsic criticism possible at all. The language of the poem has to be accepted as internal evidence; semi-private meanings of words are an intermediary case although ultimately they must be accepted as public (since we know them) and intrinsic: "The meaning of words is the history of words, and the biography of an author, his use of a word, and the associations which the word had for *him*, are part of the word's history and meaning" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1967, 10). The historical meaning of the word defined in this way is not "internal" to the text for Wimsatt and Beardsley's point of view. It is an intermediary type of evidence,

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¹ Wimsatt and Beardsley (1967, 6). Beardsley's Aesthetics reintroduced, nevertheless, the difference between interpretation and evaluation; and later Wimsatt recognizes the convenience of recognizing such a conceptual distinction (1976, 126).

not wholly external but then not wholly internal either, because Wimsatt and Beardsley are considering the word as such, as a piece of *langue*, instead of seeing it as an instance of use in a text, a contextually defined *parole*.¹ The author's meaning, that is, is only "a part" of the meaning of the word *even from the purely interpretive point of view*. Ahistoricism rears its head in this conception.

But what really gives the whole theory away is a note appended to the text just quoted: "And the history of words *after* a poem is written may contribute meanings which if relevant to the original pattern should not be ruled out by a scruple about intention" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1967, 281). Notes are always telling about the deep intention of an author. It is clear now that Wimsatt and Beardsley's concept of criticism sets aesthetic value foremost. The interpretation of the authorial meaning is secondary, even negligible if necessary. The critical act may evaluate the poem according to an accidental meaning or significance which it has acquired by virtue of the evolution of language. It is apparent that in the note "intention" no longer refers to the narrow sense they had started with, "whatever is or had been in the author's mind apart from the intentional acts publicly specified in the work itself." The note contradicts the apparent meaning of the text, if not its real thrust. The text gives a (qualified) historicist definition of meaning, a concern for the meaning of the word in the author's context.² It comes close to a dangerous point where Wimsatt and

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¹ On *langue* and *parole*, see Saussure (1949); but also Segre (1985, 190ff).

² This explains why Hirsch wrongly believes that "the intentional fallacy has no proper application whatever to verbal meaning" and that Wimsatt and Beardsley ultimately respect the author's meaning (Hirsch 1967, 12).

Beardsley would be hard pressed not to accept evidence external to the text: those cases where a biographical testimony or some other “extrinsic” datum throws light on the original context of composition and therefore on the meaning of the word.¹ The note wipes away this concern for the authorial meaning of the word. All meanings, whether historically justified or not, are legitimate.² Anti-intentionalism therefore results in anti-historicism.

This doctrine rests on a very specific conception of language, which has sometimes been called “semantic autonomism.” According to this conception, once it is detached from its speaker, discourse becomes autonomous; the author has no further rights over his utterance. This conception is shared by some structuralists critics. Roland Barthes speaks in this respect of “the death of the author.” Barthes sees the author’s enunciation, writing, as an empty process which needs no interlocutors. Conversely, the reader is free to make of the text whatever he wants. In this view, literature is not communication, and interpretation is a senseless activity: “Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile” (Barthes 1977a, 147). The critic’s meaning is as good as the author’s. For the New Critics, the best meaning overrides the authorial meaning, especially if the authorial

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¹ Cf. Fiedler 1952, 259, 273; Cioffi 1976, 60; Roma 1976, 77f. In Hirsch’s view, “it is unsound to insist on deriving all inferences from the text itself” (1967, 241); for her part, Horton notes that “knowledge of the conditions of composition alters interpretation” (1979, 95).

² This is also Peckham’s (1976, 141), Fowler’s (1976, 249) and Raval’s (1981, 59) interpretation of Wimsatt and Beardsley’s doctrine.

meaning has to be determined by means of information not readily accessible to the reader.¹

This might imply, as I have said, a disparagement of historicist considerations, but in fact it does not, or at least Wimsatt and Beardsley do not intend this result. They do not rule out the knowledge of the author's original culture as an essential asset for the interpreter—they presuppose it, they presuppose a competent reader. A great deal of historical and general contextual knowledge is to be taken for granted if this view is to make any sense. Even conceding the dictionary meaning of the words to be "intrinsic" to the poem (a major concession which is taken for granted by the New Critics) we still need far more than dictionary meaning would allow. An hypothetical dictionary-reader would fall short of Wimsatt and Beardsley's expectations. They need an encyclopedic reader, who knows, for instance, that the "trepidation of the spheares" in the Donne poem they comment on in their article refers at all to astronomy. The poem does not say so, but it is nevertheless an internal element of meaning to Wimsatt and Beardsley because they assume that the reader knows.² Wimsatt and Beardsley, therefore, do not erase the difference between authorial meaning and other kinds of meaning as far as interpretation is concerned. Neither do they, for that matter, stress it as a meaningful issue. They are not really concerned

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¹ This is still Wimsatt's view in his revision of his early doctrine. See his comments on Hirsch's analysis of Blake's "London" (Wimsatt 1976, 130ff.).

² Cioffi notes that Wimsatt and Beardsley's notion of what is "in" the text is deceitful, because "externals" of several kinds, often biographical, are always introduced to reach an acceptable interpretation (1976, 68). Cf. also Roma 1976, 81; Harris 1988, 30.

with interpretation.¹ And criticism, in its evaluative side, should in their view ignore this difference.

The critical act would therefore consist of:

- 1) Interpreting the text of the poem to determine the range of possible interpretations, whether of authorial meaning, meaning or significance.
- 2) An evaluation of these interpretations, without privileging the authorial meaning of the poem.

But, given the intrinsically intentional nature of language, the creation of a kind of virtual author is presupposed in this last move. The result is that the best meaning is regarded *as if* it were the authorial meaning of the poem. It is clear that with such assumptions about the aims of interpretation the difference between authorial meaning and other kinds of meaning need not be a basic critical concept. At best, as in Wimsatt and Beardsley, it is anecdotal; at worst, as in some of their followers, it is ignored, *not understood*. Interpretive anarchy is kept within bounds by presupposing competent readers, who will generally give a historically plausible interpretation—even if their aesthetic aims allow them to occasionally improve the poem with the complicity of history. This kind of interpretation is not very different from the adoption of an intentional stance towards mechanical artifacts whose structure we ignore (cf. Dennett 1987, 15ff.). The intentional stance allows us to make sense of the artifact's behaviour, but at the cost of endowing it with a greater degree of consciousness than we would want.

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¹ Some critics have taken the "intentional fallacy" to refer to interpretation, in spite of Wimsatt and Beardsley's stated definition (e.g. Cioffi 1976, 57). Of course, this theory's "indirect" connections with interpretation finally compromise its authors' claims to an objective standard of valuation. Sparshott (1976, 108) notes that this version of anti-intentionalism, in its exclusive aesthetic concern, forgets that the work of art is a human work, and not merely an aesthetic object.

Paradoxically, the New Critical "intentional fallacy" has as its concomitant phenomenon the overestimation of the authorial intention and deliberation which we shall observe in many interpretations of "The Monster."

It should be clear by now that the "intentional fallacy" is no such fallacy. It is a particular choice of what is to count as validity in interpretation. The New Critical anti-intentionalism is another choice, with a different kind of assumptions and aims, and which is not primarily concerned with hermeneutic validity. It is a perfectly legitimate enterprise if it is done in a self-conscious way and with a clear methodology and aims.¹ Wimsatt and Beardsley's doctrine in "The Intentional Fallacy," however, is itself a fallacy to the extent that the authors present their "seminal ukase"² as an objective critical principle and the universal rule for literary interpretation. Hermeden has noted that "the fundamental issues involved in a stand on intention are nonempirical: they concern normative questions."³ No new data will solve the problem; the status of intention in interpretation has to be decided by the interpreters, in view of the aims they set to the interpretive activity. In Hirsch's terms, readers need not try to realize the author's intended meaning. The question of whether they should or not is an ethical question, which is answered affirmatively by Hirsch: *"Unless there is a powerful overriding value in disregarding an author's*

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¹ Cf. R. S. Crane 33. This kind of criticism which deliberately ignores the author's meaning need not be just aesthetic play on the part of the critic; cf. Spivak 244-245.

² Newton-De Molina 1976, x. Cf. Peckham 1976, 140.

³ Gören Hermeden, "Intention and Interpretation in Literary Criticism." New Literary History 7 (1975): 81. Qtd. in Raval 1981, 265.

*intention (i.e. original meaning), we who interpret as a vocation should not disregard it ."*¹ Nevertheless, I would somewhat qualify this position. There are advances made on conceptual issues, too. Analyzing them is not a fruitless task. The issues are now much clearer than they were when Wimsatt and Beardsley denounced the intentional fallacy: a greater degree of shared assumptions has been discovered, and some extreme positions have been abandoned. And even if there are several correct modes of constructing or using intention, experience tells us that they are not all equally correct in all interpretive contexts.

It is an axiom of classical hermeneutics that interpretation logically precedes evaluation. But it has been noted by Newton-De Molina that "this logical condition of priority may tend to elide the full human importance of an awkward truth: that the relevant information upon which we base particular interpretations is not always prior *in time* to particular evaluations."² The consequence is that "unless evaluations are to be eternally postponed they must always be accepted, in some senses, as generically provisional" (1976, xi). However, it must be recognized that some evaluations are more provisional than others. The evaluation

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¹ Hirsch 1976, 90. According to Hirsch, it is the lack of a higher institutional authority in literary criticism that explains the relevance of authorial meaning. In religious or legal texts, special interpretive conventions ensure the control of authority over the meaning of the texts. But it is wrong to extend the principle of unlimited meaning to texts which do not have these institutional constraints (1967, 123). However, what is relevant in the institutional constraints of interpretation is not the structure of authority (which is after all a check) but the uses to which multiplicity of meaning is put. The institutional function of the academic study of literature as it stood in the New Critical conception was in this sense perfectly in keeping with their interpretive practice: a controlled proliferation of meaning and the aesthetic hypostatization of literature are related and mutually sympathetic conceptions.

² Newton-De Molina 1976, xi. Newton-De Molina draws this notion from W. W. Robson's Critical Essays (London, 1966). Cf. Hirsch 1967, 133, 140; Wimsatt 1976, 126; Fowler 1976, 252.

of a passage during the reading process may be highly provisional, and the psychological attitudes of any person towards a work may change a great deal at different moments of his or her life. But the considered evaluation given by a critic in a scholarly article after several careful readings is, I think, in a much more definite relationship to the critic's interpretation of the text. Ideally, it has gone through a process of suspension of judgement until an interpretation is established. But the decisive fact is that this evaluation is public and fixed, and is based on an interpretation of the work which is accessible to other critics. By definition (because of the logical priority of interpretation) Critic no. 2 assumes that Critic no. 1's evaluation is grounded on that particular concretization of the work—not on Critic no. 2's own concretization of the work.

Theodore Redpath notes that an author cannot be said to have intended everything a reader may find in his work—even if the author claimed so himself. The object of Redpath's criticism is John Dewey's aesthetic theory¹—no author is known to have claimed this. Perhaps the closest example was T.S. Eliot, who had a critical axe to grind and none the less saw fit to provide The Waste Land with notes. The concept of intention is in one sense inevitably linked to at least a potential consciousness and deliberation. For the sense in which it is not, I will speak of *deep intention*.² The two must not be confused.

Interpreting with evaluation in mind leads to a confusion of aesthetic and interpretive criteria. This is evident in Wimsatt and Beardsley, and

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¹ John Dewey, Art as Experience (New York, 1934); Redpath 1976, 19.

² Cf. Wimsatt 1976, 128; Watson 1976, 69.

also in some of their critics. In spite of his misgivings about the rejection of biographical evidence, Emilio Roma shares with Wimsatt and Beardsley the assumption that

there is at least *one* reason which counts for and against interpretations, namely, the reading fails because it does not account for certain significant passages of the poem, and hence does not bring out the *richness* of the poem. This reason is essentially evaluative, and at the same time it does not go "outside" of the poem.¹

But we might well ask for whom are those passages significant. The answer seems to be: for a critic with Roma's criteria of validity—which may or may not be "in" the poem, but which surely need not be in the author's creative intention. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the last analysis Roma endorses Wimsatt and Beardsley's concept of interpretation and their definition of meaning as something which is decided by the critic on the basis of criteria which are ultimately aesthetic: "the way a poet and his contemporaries understood a word or passage is relevant evidence for making *a decision about the meaning of* a poetic utterance. I do not say that this is always relevant evidence" (1976, 85-86). Translated into our own terms, this would read: "The significance of a work sometimes has more aesthetic relevance than its meaning." This is true if our notion of aesthetic value allows itself, as it does for Roma or Wimsatt and Beardsley, a measure of independence from historical and cognitive considerations. My own view is that the

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¹ Roma 1976, 82. For Beardsley and for Robert Graves, the richest meaning is the best (Fowler 1976, 252). Sparshott (1976, 111) also believes that the "best" and most comprehensive interpretation is the right one, while at the same time he defends the criterion of the authorial intention.

two notions of aesthetic relevance have to be kept apart. We may very well rewrite a poem in our imagination and then evaluate it, but a historicist aesthetics can hardly afford to do this. Its object is not so simple; it involves a determination of the conditions of artistic production and the assumptions about art in the original context of the work, an evaluation of the work in those terms, and then a study of the "life" of the work and its transformations in the uses to which it is put by different readers and critical projects.¹ The anti-intentionalist/aestheticist project is just one more of these historical attitudes to art, and it does not fare very well from an objectivist perspective. Aesthetic value is usually grounded on the coherence of the text, a coherence which usually is the product of the collaboration between writer and critic. Coherent interpretations are usually reached in this way, but, as Hirsch has noted, coherence is not a sufficiently objective criterion of validity—an interpretation may be both coherent and wrong (1967, 237). Hirsch believes, however, that it is very probable that the right interpretation is "the one which makes the most elements functional" (1967, 190). Susan R. Horton has criticised the assumption that an interpretation ought to take every element of the poem to be the result of a unified logic of composition, or that the best interpretation is the one that makes most elements active (1979, 4ff.. Cf. also Fowler 1976, 252). An interpretation, we may conclude, must strive towards coherence and completeness, but in doing so it must not build a perfect structure with the data internal to the work while it conflicts with historical, psychological or cultural assumptions that we wish to hold (cf. R. S. Crane 1953, 179). Its hypotheses must remain

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¹ On the "life" of a literary work, see Ingarden (1973, ch. 13).

translatable into other areas of knowledge, with the aim of increasing communication in culture at large.

2.3. Hermeneutics and Criticism

The best discipline to keep our own aesthetic or ideological concerns from giving an obvious bias to the interpretive activity (as far as this is possible) is to consider the phases of the critical activity as logically and chronologically sequential activities. In Hirsch's words, "Understanding (and therefore interpretation, in the strict sense of the word) is both logically and psychologically prior to what is generally called criticism" (1967, 209). It has been rightly said that there can be no pure interpretation, that description will always contain a measure of evaluation.¹ It is nonetheless the case that description as such is not evaluation as such. Refusing to concede the possibility of this conceptual distinction is the first step towards the collapse of the distinction between understanding and inventing—throw the thrust towards objective description away and communication is likely to follow suit (cf. Hirsch 1967, 26).

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¹ Hirsch (1976: 103) quotes Kant's Critique of Judgement, sect. XXI of the "Analytic."

Hirsch is the main theorizer of objective interpretation in the English-speaking academy.¹ Hirsch's basic interpretive rule is the distinction between "meaning" and significance. In the first version of his theory (1967), "meaning" is *meaning in the author's context*; significance is *meaning for us, today*. "Meaning" is the result of interpretation, which is logically prior to the inquiry for significance:

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning, and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable. (1967, 8)

Hirsch relates this distinction to similar differences established by other theorists: Boeckh's "interpretation" and "criticism," Frege's "sense" and "reference," and Husserl's "inner" and "outer horizons of meaning." It is one of Hirsch's main tenets that significance is variable while "meaning" is fixed. Significance changes as each critic relates the work to his own interests or to his own knowledge of the subject-matter the original writer was dealing with (cf. Hirsch 1967, 58f., 63); this accounts for concepts such as the life of a work of art, which is relative to the changing significance of the work. "Meaning", on the other hand, is a fixed historical fact: "an author's original meaning cannot change" (1967, 9. Cf. Fowler 1976, 252). Meaning does not change through the life of the text—for Hirsch, history is already written and cannot be

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¹ Hirsch's interpretive theory is not his own in an exclusive way. It is based on the practical assumptions of many critics, as well as on the theories of Schleiermacher, Boeckh, Dilthey, Frege, Husserl, Popper and Betti. Many other theorists, such as F. W. Bateson or M. H. Abrams, have defended positions similar to Hirsch's in the English-speaking academy.

unwritten.¹ In a later work, Hirsch enlarges the sense of the word “meaning” to include other meanings besides the authorial one. This comes nearer to the sense in which I use the terms. Meaning is now “that which a text is taken to represent” (1976, 79). However, the determinateness of the author’s meaning still plays a fundamental role in his theory. And Hirsch’s 1976-meaning is still a principle of fixity as opposed to a principle of change, significance, or “meaning-related-to-something-else” (1976, 80).

Hirsch takes great care to distinguish this relation between authorial meaning and the author from any psychologistic conception of intention or meaning: it is the difference defined by Husserl between an Intentional act and a psychical act (Hirsch 1967, 217-218). The authorial verbal meaning is, in Husserlian terms, an Intentional object; it is “that aspect of a speaker’s ‘intention’ which, under linguistic conventions may be shared by others” (Hirsch 1967, 218). This meaning is Intentional in the sense Husserl gives to the word. It may not have been wholly conscious for the author himself at any given moment, but it must belong to the author’s “horizon of expectations”: “The interpreter’s aim, then, is to posit the author’s horizon and carefully exclude his own accidental associations” (1967, 222). The author’s Intentionality does not necessarily warrant “consciousness of meaning”: “there are usually components of an author’s intended meaning that he is not conscious of” (1967, 21). Hirsch explains this apparent contradiction by means of the notion of *typification*. The author’s Intentional acts (in the Husserlian sense) by which he wills a

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¹ The first version of Hirsch’s terminology concerning the concepts of *meaning*, *significance*, *interpretation* and *criticism* is preserved by Harris (1988).

particular meaning into being are not directed towards each aspect of his intended [Intentional] meaning, but to a typical whole: "the acceptability of a submeaning depends upon the *author's* notion of the subsuming type whenever this notion is sharable in the particular linguistic circumstances" (1967, 49). Verbal meaning as such is nothing other than "a *willed type* which an author expresses by linguistic symbols and which can be understood by another through these symbols."¹ The author's use of this type must be learned, and this is possible because types are eminently sharable (1967, 66ff.). The consequence for the definition of "conscious intention" is that very often we cannot be sure whether a meaning was conscious or unconscious. In these cases, according to Hirsch, the distinction is irrelevant (1967, 51).

Moreover, the authorial meaning does not consist solely of representational elements: "Defined in Husserl's terms, 'meaning' embraces not only intentional objects but also the species of intentional acts which sponsor those intentional objects . . . . Subjective feeling, tone, mood, and value, are constitutive of meaning in its fullest sense" (1976, 8). We might relate this notion to Searle's analysis of intentional acts into a proposition and a modal element (1983a, 5ff.).

There is a difference between Hirsch's concern for the public specifiability of meaning and a similar concern as it was voiced by Wimsatt and Beardsley. For Hirsch, meaning is public, but never completely so. The text cannot be regarded as a piece of language, a system of possibilities or a verbal icon; it is tied to the author's original meaning (1967, 24). Wimsatt explicitly upholds the interpretation of a

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¹ Hirsch 1967, 49. Hirsch goes on to say that the actual words in a sentence are types. Peirce's notion of *token* (the particular instance or manifestation of a type) would be more accurate.

work as a piece of *langue*. Apparently, if we interpreted a work as an instance of *parole*, the words “would never . . . make sense to anybody but the author himself” (Wimsatt 1976, 138). The absurdity of this statement hardly needs to be pointed out after the development of discourse analysis during the past twenty years. For Hirsch, the text is not a segment of Saussurean *langue*, but an instance of *parole* (1967, 232), a historically limited phenomenon which must be understood in its context. The communal context as such is not a sufficient criterion:

It is therefore not only sound but necessary for the interpreter to inquire, “What in all probability did the author mean? Is the pattern of emphases I construe the author’s pattern?” But it is both incorrect and futile to inquire, “What does the language of the text say?” That question can have no determinate answer. (1967, 235)

Hirsch’s conception of a *historicized* meaning also makes irrelevant Raval’s contention that “Hirsch’s authorial intention does not entail a biographical person but rather a ‘speaking subject’” which is “not really distinguishable from the New Critical persona” (1981, 64). The New Critical persona is more or less freely constructed by the reader; Hirsch’s persona is the result of the author adopting discursive conventions which must be understood in the terms of the culture and context where they originated. The ethics of interpretation starts with the respect towards the author’s meaning and our efforts to grasp it objectively (cf. Scholes 1989, 50).

Unless we regard things in this way, Hirsch argues, there would be no criterion to determine a correct interpretation. This claim is the polar opposite of Barthes’s doctrine that “a text’s unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination” (1977a, 148). Focusing on the reader’s

activity without a reference to the author's meaning does not unify the text; rather, it disintegrates it completely. In a vein similar to Barthes', Horton (1979, x) argues that although meaning is ultimately context-bound, the boundlessness of the context prevents its determination in practice. Hirsch would accept this claim for meaning in general, but not for the concrete authorial meaning. Its historical typicality is what makes interpretation possible. For Hirsch, the text is only fixed at one point, the author's meaning. That is why the authorial meaning is an indispensable criterion for the validation of interpretations. We have seen, though, that there might be other criteria—an aesthetic criterion may determine that the "best interpretation" is the correct one. Hirsch simply has different assumptions as to the aims of criticism. The validity of a reading is not to be equated with its aesthetic excellence (1967, 5). Criticism must resist the temptation to mix evaluative and interpretive criteria. It must speak with the voice of reason, and distinguish the text as it is before the critical activity from the text as it is after the critical activity. Meaning cannot exist in a void. If a critic rejects the author's meaning, he will inevitably substitute his own (1967, 4). But doing this is indulging in a kind of vicarious authorship.¹ This would not be "interpretation" in Hirsch's sense, and so we can concede his point that there is a specific cognitive activity which consists in the identification of the authorial intention. Creative writing and criticism are two different enterprises, even if they share some common elements. In the last analysis, the interpretive theories of Wimsatt and Beardsley or Stanley Fish rest on a shared assumption: that there is no

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¹ Hirsch 1976, 49. This is also Peckham's argument (1976, 143). Peckham points out some fascinating analogies between the New Critical conception of semantic autonomy and the dogma of transubstantiation.

essential difference between interpretation and creation. Hirsch's is radically opposed: interpretation and creation are essentially different activities and they must be carefully distinguished from each other: "Interpretation is the construction of *another's* meaning" (1967, 244). This meaning cannot be constructed partially. It is either ours or the author's: for Hirsch, Gadamer's theory of *Horizontverschmelzung* is a logical contradiction, since it presupposes a contact with something—the author's perspective—which is at the same time declared to be inaccessible. We do not understand the meaning of others in our own terms, though we do value it in our own terms.¹

Some phenomenological critics have strongly stressed the notion that reading involves a contact with another mind. For Georges Poulet, reading is an activity with a peculiar ontology of its own—it is an immersion in a conscience different from our own, and it requires total submission to the author's consciousness as it emerges from the work. "I myself, although conscious of whatever [the consciousness inherent in the work] may be conscious of, play a much more humble role content to record passively all that is going on in me" (Poulet 1980, 47). A similar definition of interpretation is found in Maurice Blanchot.²

These conceptions sound sometimes nearly mystical. But not all theories of interpersonal communication are drawn along these lines. Few people would agree that the reading process itself involves such passivity on the part of the reader as Poulet would have it. Dennett's version of the way the gap to the other's meaning is bridged is more

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¹ Hirsch 1967, 254 ff.; 1976, 49, 81 ff. Cf. Sparshott 1976, 113.

² *L'espace littéraire* (Paris, 1955), 202; see de Man 1983, 63ff.

satisfactory. His theory is relativistic to a degree, and stresses the activity of the interpreter: "when we interpret others we do so not so much by *theorizing* about them as by *using ourselves as analog computers* that produce a result. Wanting to know more about your frame of mind, I put myself in it, or as close to being in it as I can muster, and see what I thereupon think (want, do...)" (1987, 100).

If interpreting the other in his or her own terms already requires a degree of activity, criticising the other is an eminently active and assertive activity. In Hirsch's model, the critical phase succeeds the interpretive one. Hirsch, I think, would not contest the claim that "conceding authorial privilege means giving the author the first word, not the last" (Fowler 1976, 250). The study of meaning is only a necessary preliminary to that part of the critic's activity which has direct public value, the application of meaning, *significance* (1976, 19). This is an essential, not merely legitimate, function of the critic. Only, the study of significance is for Hirsch an activity different from the interpretation of meaning, and must be carefully distinguished from it.¹

A last, important characteristic of Hirsch's theory is his probabilism. Authorial meaning is fixed and determinate, but we never know whether we have construed it in a correct way. On this matter there are only various degrees of probability (1967, 236. Cf. Sparshott 1976, 112; Fowler 1976, 255). Nevertheless, knowledge is possible: "It is a logical mistake to confuse the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the impossibility of understanding."²

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¹ Cf. also Skinner 1976, 219.

² Hirsch 1967, 17. Cf. Searle's argument against Derrida's deconstruction of speech act theory (1983b, 78).

Beardsley's attempt to refute Hirsch's theory of interpretation is in my view unsuccessful. He does not address the issues Hirsch is concerned with. His three arguments against Hirsch's thesis only prove that the reader of a text may construct verbal meanings which were not intended by the author—something which is self-evident to Hirsch, I think. The real difference lies in the fact that Beardsley counts these constructions as valid interpretations, whereas Hirsch does not. Just like in "The Intentional Fallacy," Beardsley is concerned with the aesthetic value of a reading, not with the successful retrieval of the authorial meaning. Again we find the same ahistorical aestheticism at work: in leaving the authorial will out of his consideration, Beardsley is in fact leaving out the historical context of the utterance. Let me show this through a re-cycling of one of Beardsley's examples:

An ambiguous text does not become any less ambiguous because its author *wills* one of the possible meanings. Will as he will, he cannot will away ambiguity. There is something odd about the notion of "willing" a meaning. It is as though we ordered someone, "Say 'cat' and mean dog." Can one do that? How does one do it? True I can say, "Vote for Senator Kennedy!" and think of Edward Kennedy. Do I thereby make the word "Kennedy" in that utterance mean *Edward Kennedy*? That is quite impossible. (1970, 29)

The perspective is all wrong. An ambiguous text does become less ambiguous *if we find out* that the author had willed one of the possible meanings. We do not usually need to will away ambiguity because our utterances are calculated to be unambiguous in the context in which they are used. Suppose a dog is barking, and someone observes, "The cat is barking." This is puzzling behavior, and a number of interpretations

could be offered. No doubt some of them would afford a great deal of aesthetic satisfaction. But if a moment before we had heard Beardsley order our man "Say 'cat' and mean dog," there would be nothing much left to interpret. In the Kennedy example, Beardsley is thinking of the ambiguous reference of the sentence at the time he wrote his essay—it could have meant Edward or Robert Kennedy. But by virtue of changing contexts, the phrase no longer has an ambiguous reference in a 1986 campaign. "Kennedy" does not indeed have the same dictionary meaning as "Edward Kennedy," but if we can discover the reference by identifying the context where the sentence was uttered, we will have interpreted its authorial meaning beyond the "textual meaning" defined in Beardsley's terms. Again, the phrase is ambiguous only if it is taken as an instance of *langue*.

Indeed, Beardsley admits that the discovery of the "textual meaning" and the discovery of the authorial meaning are two distinct inquiries. Only, "the proper task of the literary interpreter is to interpret textual meaning" (Beardsley 1970, 32). He opposes the aesthetic to the historical approach (1970, 34), instead of integrating them in a historicist aesthetics. And his conclusion is inevitably contradictory: on one hand, a *carte blanche* for the critic to draw the limits of a poem in an act which is aesthetically motivated¹; on the other, a claim for the complete autonomy of the poem and the passivity of the critic.²

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1 "Therefore whatever interest comes from without, but yet can be taken as an interesting extension of what is surely in, may be admissible. It merely makes a larger whole" (1970, 36).

2 "The literary text, in the final analysis, is the determiner of its meaning. It has a will, or at least a way, of its own. The sense it makes . . . is what it offers for our aesthetic contemplation" (1970, 37).

That literary discourse is highly conventionalized does not mean that it ceases to be a historical *parole*. Its contexts are standardized to a degree, but not just to *any* degree, as the New Critical aesthetics would have it. A historically conscious aesthetics is richer than one which ignores historical considerations. Indeed, it includes the latter as a particular historical attitude to art. It is significant that Beardsley cannot help assuming the historically and genetically conscious viewpoint when he tries to refute Hirsch's theory. His three theses against the identity of *meaning* and *authorial meaning* are, of course, correct, but they do not prove what they set out to prove, that any construction of meaning justified by "the text itself" is a valid interpretation. Argument number one runs thus: "Some texts that have been formed without the agency of an author, and hence without authorial meaning, nevertheless have a meaning and can be interpreted" (1970, 18). Misprints and poems composed by computers are examples of this. What Beardsley does not conclude is that if we learn that a verbal phenomenon is the result of a misprint or has been generated by a computer, we have gained an insight into the nature of that phenomenon and the kind of "language game" of which it is an instance. "When Hart Crane wrote 'Thy Nazarene and tender eyes', a printer's error transformed it into 'Thy Nazarene and tinder eyes', but Crane let the accidental version stand" (1970, 18). The difference between a willed meaning and a printer's error is not irrelevant, as Beardsley seems to suggest. Printer's errors are suppressed in revised editions, and what Hart Crane did in this case was to transform a printer's error into an authorial meaning by means of an act of will which is known and recognized.

The second of Beardsley's objections is that the meanings of words change historically, and therefore the authorial meaning becomes distinct from the textual meaning. In his example, Mark Akenside writes in 1744 of how God "rais'd his plastic arm." Beardsley comments that the line has acquired a new meaning in our century, but apparently he does not rule out the interpretations which ignore this fact because they are concerned with today's textual meaning. It is not clear to me in which context can a critic deliberately ignore this difference and still lay a claim to be interpreting Akenside's poem. Hirsch would call this activity "rewriting," and I agree with him.

The third objection is that a text can have meanings that its author is not aware of (Beardsley 1970, 20). So much the better for the interpreter. But this claim presupposes that we can tell apart what an author is aware of and what he is not aware of—that we can isolate the interpretation of the authorial meaning as a distinct phase of the critical activity. Hirsch, I think, does not ask for more. Once this is understood, it is only to be wished that an evaluation of the text does not ignore the conceptual difference we all recognize. I am afraid Beardsley is all too ready to do this.

Since my interpretive assumptions are up to now very close to Hirsch's, maybe it is the moment to make the differences between them more explicit. Some are terminological and some are conceptual. —Terminologically, I have tried to maintain the normal usage of the terms while carefully distinguishing the conceptual differences. My use of "meaning" and "significance" are closer to Hirsch's use in The Aims of Interpretation; whenever I wish to be more specific I will use "authorial meaning." Hirsch's "criticism" is concerned only with valuation and significance (1967, 9), and as such is opposed to

“interpretation,” which is concerned only with establishing (authorial?) meaning. Sometimes he draws a difference between “understanding” as the construction of meaning and “interpretation” as its explanation (1967, 136). In my usage, “criticism” is the sum of interpretation and valuation, and is concerned with both meaning and significance. Interpretation is not restricted to the determination of authorial meaning. I think that in the current usage of the word it is also concerned with meaning at large or with the significance of texts. Therefore I will speak of “interpretation of authorial meaning,” “interpretation of meaning” or “interpretation of significance” whenever I wish to be more specific.

—Conceptually: 1) I borrow Ingarden’s term “concretization” (1973, 322) to refer to the *whole* construction of meaning to which the interpretation is ultimately assumed to refer to, as opposed to those *aspects* of the construction it actually refers to. I think that this distinction draws a necessary wedge into the first term in the opposition drawn by Hirsch between “the construction of meaning to which the interpretation refers” and “the meaning of an interpretation” (1967, 129). Sometimes Hirsch does speak of “*the whole* meaning to which [different compatible interpretations] refer.”¹

2) I also think that Hirsch’s notion of the historical fixity of a text is linked to his theory in a deficient way. There is one sense in which the author’s meaning is not a desideratum—every critic reaches it, or measures his/her distance to it. To this extent, Hirsch’s rejection of the

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¹ Hirsch 1967, 132; my italics. The distinction between the construction of meaning to which an interpretation refers and the concretization of a work can also be compared with Beardsley’s opposition between “local” and “regional” meanings; the latter belong to “the work as a whole or some large part of it” (1970, 44).

concept of *Horizontverschmelzung* used in Gadamer's historicist hermeneutics is justified.¹ This concept cannot have more than a purely metatheoretical value, since in actual interpretation we cannot have an access to the author's pole to verify the extent of the difference between our horizon and his; and in one way or another we will have to posit our own conception of authorial meaning. This cannot be done with respect to an unknown pole, a noumenon outside our reach.

Hirsch is right in saying that ultimately the possibility of academic discussion rests on the conceptual difference between (authorial) meaning and significance. But every critic articulates in a different way the proportion allotted in his interpretation to (authorial) meaning and to significance. "If a Marxist critic construes a text differently from a formalist critic," Hirsch argues, "that is an irrelevant accident. No perspectival necessity requires him to do so. Marxist critics and formalist critics may be equally able to understand what a text means" (1976, 44). This is of course too optimistic. The most significant differences in interpretation do not derive from the critics drawing different significances from the same work, but from the fact that they can hardly said to be evaluating and interpreting the significance of "the same" work—their assumptions about the authorial meaning are widely divergent. Hirsch's argument seems to place the main critical contention in the determination of significance, which is variable, while authorial meaning, being historically fixed, could be approached objectively. This account ignores the fact that history is continually

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¹ The concept of *Horizontverschmelzung* is endorsed by many theorists, e.g. Palmer 1969, 120, Horton 1979, 123, René Wellek, "A Rejoinder to Gerald Graff" (*Critical Inquiry* 5 [1979]: 577; qtd. in Raval 1981, 265). An even more extreme relativist formulation is put forward in Michaels (1980).

being revised and rewritten, and that this rewriting is itself a matter of ideological contention—hardly a basis on which to ground a critical consensus. Preserving the conceptual difference between authorial meaning, meaning and significance is fundamental, but only as a methodological principle. This conceptual difference will never be, as such, a basis for critical unanimity. The author's meaning did exist as a historical fact, but this does not have the slightest theoretical importance unless it is recognized to be a relevant interpretive element in the theoretical assumptions of the readers and critics. (Authorial) meaning and significance are critical constructs, and the subject of critical debate. Interpretations do have elements in common, but different interpretations usually share just some assumptions about the work's total sum of (authorial) meaning and significance, not the whole of that sum. This does not mean that Hirsch's probabilistic notion of the historical existence of authorial meaning is not necessary. On the contrary, it is indispensable as a regulative concept.¹ But it does not work exactly the way he puts it, nor does it work the way radical historicism would put it. In the last analysis historical meaning is always determined with respect to the critic's own historical position; the object of interpretation is partly built for critics by their own age and culture. The result of the scholar's investigation of the author's meaning is not authorial meaning *in se*, which is a historical noumenon, but rather the way in which we must conceive of that meaning today, taking into account the ways in which we conceive of other aspects of the author's cultural context. That is, the scholar's function is to make our assumptions about the past (or areas of knowledge in general) fit

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¹ See Horton 1979, 5, and Derrida himself (section 2.5.1 below).

with each other, to insure that the past remains accessible as an object of knowledge. The critic's interpretation of authorial meaning is not a textual time machine, because we never relinquish a holistic conception about the past which is inevitably grounded in the present. What the critic's work seeks ultimately is not to uncover a noumenon, but to ensure the translatability between the concepts in his own area of knowledge and those of the larger cultural context of his own age. Our understanding of the relevant features of the past is constantly changing, and an author's activity must be reinterpreted in the light of this new understanding of the past.

However, Hirsch is right in observing that there is nothing intrinsically different about "the past" as an object of scholarly inquiry—another culture, another present-day conception require just the same kind of interpretive work. These objections against Hirsch's notion of objectivity, then, are not the radical historicist objections he seeks to refute (1967, 40ff., 245ff.; 1976, 38ff.). The meaning of the other must be understood in the other's own terms. But we are unlikely to agree with all of our fellow critics on the precise nature of those terms. My contention against Hirsch's notion of objectivism is that different critics may share Hirsch's interpretive assumptions, be perfectly right in doing so, and yet fail to reach agreement: the heterogeneity of present-day perspectives adduced by Hirsch as a support to his argument against radical historicism (1976, 41) can draw a line right across the middle of English departments. Two scholars may validate quite different interpretations of authorial meaning. This is possible because the objectively sharable interpretive assumptions are not an algorithm for interpretation. Hirsch knows this: "The notion that a reliable methodology of interpretation can be built upon a set of

canons is . . . a mirage" (1967, 203); or: "There can be no canons of *construction*, but only canons which help us to choose between alternative [authorial] meanings that have already been construed from the text" (1967, 204). And yet he fails to draw the implications, because of a misguided notion of what objectivity and knowledge are. Knowledge is not ideologically neutral—it is, willy-nilly, at the service of ideological positions which make it possible and relevant in the first place. An age's conception of the past is not a monolithic, neutral construct. There is no agreement about the past—it is used as a metaphor for the present. A *necessary* metaphor, not one which is deliberate or wilfully distorting. The past is one of the languages of the present, and very often the interpretation carries the marks of its origin, of the project that made it possible. For Horton, "interpretation will always be colored, or even determined, by present needs, and will always be as much re-creation as it is retrieval" (1979, 3). The post-structuralist enthusiasm of this affirmation needs to be toned down with another post-structuralist claim: the interpretation will only carry those marks of its origin if a further interpreter identifies them and points them out. This is not always the case, but it is always a conceptual possibility. Interpretation takes place in the space between. Hirsch claims that "ideology is far more likely to determine the results of inquiry when the inquirer assumes that it must do so" (1976, 149). It is useful to keep this in mind. Not merely as a good piece of advice (which it is, in a way) but also as a cautionary instance of the opposite danger: believing in the possibility of neutrality is already an ideological claim; it is, moreover, a naive one, one that may make us assume that only "the others" have an ideological axe to grind. Instead, objectivity must be used as a purely regulative concept. Hirsch's objectivity is not

purely regulative, since he believes in it as the final, effective result of the interpreter's activity.

Interpreting a text is an ethical question, but not in the way Hirsch would have it (cf. 1976, 90). There are ethical choices relevant to the interpretive activity which are previous to it and wider than a local compromise to be a faithful interpreter of the text. Interpretation is of a piece with the interpreter's overall ethical, political and generally cultural situation, the one which gives the interpreter his or her view of the text, which makes him/her capable of having an attitude towards it in the first place. The utmost respect for the text is necessary to all kinds of interpreters, if the interpretation aims at the strongest possible engagement with culture at large, including the interpreter's own project. But this will never result in a final agreement about the (authorial) meaning of the text. The past, as well as other cultures and attitudes, are the object of ideological contention just like the present and our own culture. That is why the idea of an objective value or validation is suspect. But there *is* something like objective knowledge. It is the basis of agreement which is indispensable for either further agreement or disagreement. We can always agree on what it is that we disagree about, which is already a significant degree of conceptual sharability.

Hirsch believes in the difference between validation and interpretation of meaning. Validation is always provisional and relative to the current state of knowledge, but it nevertheless aspires to a cognitive rank superior to that of interpretation: "A validation has to show not merely that an interpretation is plausible, but that it is the most plausible one available" (1967, 172). But a validation will also have to rely on a construction of the text as a measure for the different

interpretations. At one point or another, the scholar's own construction of the text must determine whether a phenomenon is relevant or not, whether it counts as evidence of authorial intention or not. And at this point, validation becomes interpretation again. Its epistemological privilege over interpretation is one of degree and circumstance. Just as there are no privileged criteria for the evaluation of literary works (Hirsch 1976, 122) there is no absolute criterion to judge the validity of an interpretation. The work must be read in order to privilege one criterion of validation against the others, and it cannot be read from a neutral stance. Hirsch himself recognizes that new evidence or an analysis of the critic's reasoning may lead to a revision of the validation. But Sparshott is far more direct when he says that "there are no critical courts of last appeal" (1976, 14). This conception of interpretation also makes allowance for a more flexible approach, one which does not completely exclude the hypothetical, the provisional and the tentative form the heuristic activity. As Dennett puts it, fiction and role-playing are a necessary element in interpretation: when I interpret, "the state I put myself in is not belief but make-believe belief" (1987, 100).

The ideal of a universally valid interpretation is then most seriously compromised by the partial relativity of the concept of authorial meaning and its dependence on ideological strife. Hirsch seems to sense this, and that is why he distinguishes between a theoretical aim of criticism (to achieve truth) and a practical aim, which is "agreement that truth has probably been reached" (1967, ix, 17f.). He believes that his noumenal criterion of truth does not impair its function in the system: "we can have the truth without being certain that we have it" (1967, 173). This is not very satisfactory, because it does not leave any room for a clear difference between truth and falsity. In fact, an objective

interpretation as understood by Hirsch is a *contradictio in adjecto*. But an objectivist definition of truth need not posit a correspondence between the intellect and the thing-in-itself. That is, the theoretical aim of criticism need not (and of course should not) be different from its practical aim—we need a criterion of objective truth which is different from Hirsch's, since his cannot be met. Humanistic disciplines do provide knowledge (it is Hirsch's main aim to maintain the idea that they do), but it is knowledge which does not need to be universally accepted.¹ Interpretations do not need to be "objective" either in the sense of being universally acceptable, or in the sense of being grounded in the nature of things, although they do need to have a thrust towards objectivity—to be objective in the only workable sense of the word. They need this in order to be convincing in the right context, since sadly enough what passes for universal truth is in fact the result of widespread agreement in an interpretive community. And widespread agreement in an interpretive community can only be reached by meeting that community's truth requirements: Aristotle noted that truth is a quite convincing rhetorical strategy. The academia needs, and has, criteria of validity and objectivity. They are not arbitrary, since they ensure that the functions of the institution be met—in fact, they rest on the very notion of agreement and communication.² I propose that the most widespread and effective criterion of objective truth is *the (increased) translatability of knowledge from one cognitive medium, discipline or*

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¹ In this it is not essentially different from scientific knowledge—only in the kind of use to which it is put. Knowledge of any kind does not need universal acceptance. It works in specific contexts and is irrelevant elsewhere.

² Cf. Hirsch's principle of the sharability of verbal meaning (1967, 31ff.).

context to another. Accordingly, interpretation is the breaking down of complex semiotic objects into others which are more at hand; showing how a new or complex code can be translated into other codes which are more fixed, more accessible, or better known. This is in essence nothing new: Aristotle already defined the process by which we acquire knowledge as the translation of the unknown into the known. In the Aristotelian view, interpretation consists the subsuming of particulars under universals (cf. Raval 1981, 43); that is, it is a form of translation. Of course, Aristotle's concept of interpretation is too abstractive and essentialist for us; the earlier view is more flexible. And it is further complicated by the fact that there is no universal proof that translatability between two areas of knowledge has been increased. The interpreters must agree not only on the data, but also on the rules for the validity of translation. These may be analyzed into data, but only according to further rules. Hermeneutic demonstration is always only partial, and has to rely ultimately on shared assumptions. Translatability is not increased in the void, but only in a particular institutional context.

Academic criticism is such a context—or group of contexts. The bulk of academic interpretation of literary texts—and certainly that of the interpretations of “The Monster”—follows these steps:

—A paraphrasis of the most important elements of the action. When this phase is missing, it is taken for granted that the critic and his reader share the current assumptions about which is the relevant action-scheme.¹ Although it is rarely acknowledged in an explicit way, this summary is already a part of the interpretation.

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¹ On the concepts of paraphrasis, action, and action scheme, see chapter 2.

—The establishment of semantic isotopies in the action, the narrative and the discourse levels.¹ Usually, an interpretation will call attention to details which the critic thinks may have been overlooked by the reader, and will show how they exhibit the same logic which organizes the main articulations of the action which have been foregrounded in its paraphrasis. Thus, we can see the history of the interpretations of “The Monster” as a gradual colonization of areas of resistance (see esp. chapter 6). The work of all the critics is not wholly compatible, but later critics benefit from the insight of the previous ones, and often borrow ideas from a rival interpretation for their own purposes. Practical interpretation, like savage thought (and like theory itself) is essentially *bricolage*.

—The author’s narrative is filtered through the critic’s text; or, to use another metaphor, the critic’s narrative is superimposed on the author’s. A clear pattern thus emerges. The initial ambiguity of the story has become tractable for the purposes of the critic, and the new coherence given the story by the isotopies traced across its structure gives authority to the interpretation. A price is paid, however (Horton 1979): the interpretation systematically excludes or leaves untouched those elements which do not fit into the critic’s grid. But this becomes simply a stimulus to devise a still more comprehensive interpretation, one that includes those elements which were left aside by previous interpreters.²

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¹ On the notion of isotopy, see Greimas 1966, 88ff. On the levels of narrative and discourse, see chapter 2.

² It is clear that beyond a certain point this activity is made possible only by a very specific set of assumptions about the nature of literature and the proper function of criticism. The extreme version I describe is historically localized in the Anglo-American New Critical tradition, to which practically all the interpretations of “The Monster” belong. The “intentional fallacy” doctrine should perhaps be considered as a

The critic's narrative is finally assumed to be the essence of the author's, to have uncovered or reinforced its central meaning. A scheme of the whole work has emerged which invariably looks more accurate and meaningful than the paraphrase of the action furnished by the critic at the beginning of his essay. The next heuristic maneuver is the substitution of this paraphrase for the author's work as the object of interpretation.

—Usually, an iconic or analogical relationship is established between the isotopical version of the work produced by the critic and a *literary statement* or series of statements which summarize an outlook, message or world-view present in the work. Depending on the interpretive school the critic adheres to, the producer of this literary statement is the author, the author's unconscious, the collective unconscious, the author's culture, social class, epoch, gender, etc., the language of the work, or even the critic himself (assuming that there is any difference between these two possibilities). The extent to which this statement is taken to be conscious or deliberate on the part of the author will vary accordingly. The critics of "The Monster" almost invariably point to "Crane" as the author of the literary statements they interpret in the story. This is not to assume that Crane is always supposed to have thought of the literary statement in as many words. The literary statement is made by playing on the conventions of literature; it is the function of the critic to translate this statement from the language of literature to its implications on morality, social life, or politics; to make explicit in the language of criticism the analogical or iconic significance of the story. The statements formulated by these critics can therefore be said to

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carte blanche to push this practice to its limits without any qualms about the limitations of the author or the historical status of the meanings thus "retrieved."

reflect the authorial intention of the work, even if that intention was not formulated linguistically. The semantic isotopies isolated by the critic constitute a provisional semiotic code of their own. Together with the more general conventions of literature, this code is the original language of the literary statement. Sometimes, a detailed equivalence is drawn between the action and some of the cultural myths shared by the interpreter and the author (in the case of "The Monster," mainly the Bible and American history). Although many critics hesitate to use the word "allegory," this kind of interpretation is far more common than we might suppose.

Coherence is desirable, and it will always be the aim of the interpreter. But the scope within which coherence is achieved may be wide or narrow. When concentrating on the fascinating task of producing coherence inside the text, we should be careful not to disrupt another kind of coherence which is just as essential: that which exists between the text and its author, or between the textual image of the author and our conception of the personality of the author, of his/her age and culture.

2.4. Critical Intentionalism and Speech Act Theory

2.4.1. Speech Acts: Locutions

In J. L. Austin's philosophy of language, "locution" is a loose term which includes all those aspects of utterances which were studied by traditional grammar: the phonetic, morphological, syntactic and

semantic characterization of an utterance. The study of illocutions and perlocutions, on the other hand, would be the competence of pragmatics, according to the conceptual divisions of Peirce and Morris (cf. Lyons 1977, 114ff.). Here we shall take for granted the physical and syntactic nature of the utterance, and concentrate on the *locutionary act* understood as the transmission of a series of meanings from the speaker to the hearer by means of that physical and syntactic enunciation (Bach and Harnish 1979, 1-10). It must be kept in mind that when we speak of communication as a transmission of meanings, we are referring to the locutionary level of communication.

We have already characterized meaning as an Intentional and intentional phenomenon which requires the assumption of shared semiotic types in both speaker and listener. Searle (1983, 167-168) distinguishes in the analysis of meaning an *intention to represent* and a *communication intention*. I understand the communication intention present in locutionary meaning to be distinct from the communicative intention involved in the performance of a speech act as a whole. The first is a constituent part of a locutionary act; the second pertains to an illocutionary act.

Just as the enunciation is instrumental to the production a locutionary act, the locutionary act is a means of producing an *illocutionary act*. This act consists in a socially codified act of communication (e.g. a statement, a promise, etc.) which takes place only if certain *felicity conditions* are satisfied: for instance, only future actions can be promised. These felicity conditions vary from one kind of act to another and serve to identify them. Illocutionary acts, unlike the propositions of locutionary acts, do not have a truth value: they have what Austin calls an *illocutionary force*. There is a certain relationship,

albeit a flexible one, between the forms of locutionary and illocutionary speech acts. According to Lyons, "There is no one-to-one relationship between grammatical structure . . . and illocutionary force; but we cannot employ just any kind of sentence in order to perform any kind of illocutionary act" (1978, 733). Or rather, we cannot use it in any circumstance with the same facility. A sentence carries along with it a built-in context which defines its meaning, and which interacts with the actual context in which the sentence is uttered. Alston (1964) says as much when he defines locutionary meaning with respect to illocutionary force. In his view, the meaning of a sentence is its "illocutionary-act potential." We can think of a sentence as being designed to perform one special kind of illocutionary act, even if this original force can be redirected in a context different from the potential context implied in the locution.

According to Harris (1988, 21), literal meaning goes beyond dictionary meaning. In the case of the word, literal meaning takes into account the associative possibilities of the word, the contexts where it is usually found. The notion of literal meaning at sentence-level is more difficult to define. It already depends on a context, which must be assumed (this is what Harris calls a "wonted context"). Only the equal probability of two or more wonted contexts brings about ambiguity in the literal meaning of the sentence. Accordingly, he defines the literal meaning of a sentence as "that which the native speaker of the language would be most likely to assign to it if assuming it to occur in the most usual context" (1988, 23). This may do in many cases as an interpretive instrument. We should not forget, however, that "the native speaker of the language" is an abstraction without age, sex, race or class. Different (types of) speakers may in some cases differ as to which is the most

usual context in which the sentence would appear, since they move in different contexts.

The relationship between literal meaning (or locutionary meaning) and illocutionary force creates a difference between direct and indirect speech acts. An illocutionary act is *direct* if its meaning is not in conflict with its illocutionary force (e.g., a question couched as a question). In an *indirect* illocutionary act there is a difference between the overt illocutionary force and the real illocutionary force (e.g. a polite request formulated as a question). Some indirect acts are highly standardized and may be used in any context; others rely on specific knowledge (often of a situational kind) shared by the speaker and the hearer.

When defined at the illocutionary level, communication is no longer a transmission of semantic meaning: it is an exchange of speech acts.¹ Illocutionary communication consists in a recognition of the kind of speech act which is being produced. Indeed, as Austin noted, “the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of *uptake* “ (1980, 117). The sender must make sure that the receiver identifies the speech act in question. This involves the recognition on the part of the hearer of the speaker’s intention to make him recognize the speech act he recognizes.² Therefore, the performance of a speech act is inherently tied to intentionality: a standardized intentionality which is communicated together with the locutionary content. It makes all the difference in the world to speech act theory if this brand of

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¹ Cf. Lozano, Peña-Marín and Abril 1982, 41.

² Cf. also Searle, 1980, 52; Lyons, 733; Lozano, Peña Marín and Abril, 194ff.

intentionality is involved in a speech act, because this allows us to tell an illocutionary from a perlocutionary speech act.

Those speech acts or those aspects of a speech act which fall outside this communicative intentionality are called by Austin *perlocutionary acts*. By means of his locutionary and his illocutionary speech act, the sender influences the receiver in some way; the sender causes in the receiver a *perlocutionary effect* or *perlocution*. This process may also involve intentionality on the part of the sender, but, unlike the intentionality present in illocutions, the *perlocutionary intent* of the speaker need not be recognized by the hearer in order for the perlocutionary act to take place. For instance, when we lie we have the perlocutionary intention of deceiving the hearer, and the lie is a lie whether this intention is recognized or not.¹

The locutionary element of a literary utterance has a more problematic status than the simple proposition which can be isolated in an isolated sentence. A sentence is an abstraction, while a text cannot help being somewhat more concrete: links appear between the sentences, an virtual communicative situation, with a speaker and a hearer, takes a more definite shape. Therefore, the study of locutions at text level cannot be isolated from the study of illocutions.

Whole areas of the textual structure, such as the fictional narrative in a story, may seem to be primarily locutionary in character: after all, the narrative is a series of related meanings communicated by the narrator to the narratee, a macro-locution which can be regarded as a means to accomplish the macro-illocutionary act of telling him a story. But the comprehension of this macro-locutionary act already presupposes many

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¹ On perlocutions, see Searle 1980, 51ff.

illocutionary maneuvers: for instance, the utterances of the characters must be understood in their full communicative value for the text to have a meaning at all. Still, it is useful to consider the different layers of the narrative structure as being the discourse-level counterparts of the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary phases of the basic speech acts described by Austin. The narrative, then, can be thought of as a locution, with big imaginary scare-quotes. Its transmission from the narrator to the narratee is a fictional illocution, and the composition of a novel or a story by the author is a real illocution. Most of the work on literature and speech acts is an attempt to determine the precise status of the illocutionary acts of the narrator and the author.

Hirsch's theory of interpretation is based on the sharability of verbal meaning. This view is in principle consonant with speech act theory. However, speech act theory further specifies the notions of sharability and of verbal meaning. According to Hirsch's definition, "verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs" (1967, 31). This is loose enough to include both locutions and illocutions, and maybe even perlocutions. More specifically, we saw that verbal meaning is "*a willed type* which the author expresses by linguistic symbols and which can be understood by another through these symbols" (1967, 49). From the point of view of speech act theory, this is on the right track, but still not specific enough. What characterizes locutions and illocutions and sets them apart from perlocutions is that the linguistic type in question is willed to be conventionally sharable—that intentions must be publicly specified. Hirsch gets close to defining something like that: "The willed type must be a shared type in order for communication to occur" (1967, 66); but

still the illocutionary level of analysis is not clearly defined in his theory; it occupies an indeterminate area between the locutionary meaning he is primarily thinking of when he defines verbal meaning, and the “intrinsic genre,” which is something like a macro-illocution.

2.4.2. Illocutions

We have already met an opposition between the intrinsic and the extrinsic meaning of authorial intention in theories as opposed as Wimsatt's or Hirsch's. The development of an intrinsic theory of intention in literary analysis can benefit from the insights of speech act theory. Many of the early definitions of fiction, or literature, use a concept of intention which could be formulated in terms of speech act theory. Let us remember, for instance, Sir Philip Sidney's famous distinction between the poet and the liar:

The poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false. . . . But the poet (as I said before) never affirmeth. The poet never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writes. . . . And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not. (1973, 124)

In Speech Act Theory parlance, we would say that lying is not an illocutionary speech act, since a lie does not require the hearer's uptake of the speaker's intention of lying in order to count as a lie. But literary fiction is a kind of (derived) illocutionary act, since in order to count as fiction we must recognize it as such—we must recognize the

intentional design of the author, the genre to which a work belongs. As Jon-K. Adams puts it, "fiction is defined by its pragmatic structure, and, in turn, this structure is a necessary part of the interpretation of fiction" (1985, 2). Other classical accounts of the receiver's basic interpretive assumptions, such as Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" (1956, 168) follow much the same lines.¹

Even a critic like I. A. Richards, who usually blurs the difference between illocutions and perlocutions, preserves an implied version of the generic illocution when he differentiates scientific language from poetic language. Scientific language is characterized by a predominance of referential meaning, while in poetic language this meaning is conventionally neutralized, and feelings only remain significant:

When this happens, the statements which appear in the poetry are there for the sake of their effects upon feelings, and not for their own sake. Hence to challenge their truth or to question whether they deserve serious attention *as statements claiming truth*, is to mistake their function.²

Like Richards's theory of the literary "pseudo-statements," many modern accounts of literary fiction, presuppose such shared conventions. Among them are Ingarden's theory of the "quasi-judgmental" status of literary works (1973, 131), Northrop Frye's account of the hypothetical nature of literary works (1957, 79, 84f.), Félix Martínez Bonati's description of literary statements as "pseudo-

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¹ Cf. also Hegel 1985, 49; Mill 1971, 538.

² Richards 1973, 186. Of course, the notion that the referential meaning of the sentences is discarded or annulled is absurd; see Fish's criticism of Richards (Fish 1980b).

phrases" (1972, 216) and Carlos Castilla del Pino's conception of a presupposition of fictionality on the author's part which is subsequently inferred by the reader (1983, 321).

Hirsch's notion of "intrinsic genre" takes the quasi-illocutionary definition of discursive activities one step further. The philosophical basis of Hirsch's intrinsic genres is Wittgenstein's notion of "language game" (Wittgenstein 1958, § 7). An intrinsic genre is "that sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part in its determinacy" (Hirsch 1967, 83). "Correctly" must be understood in the light of Hirsch's notion of communication as sharability of types: intrinsic genres are not purely heuristic, because they are also constitutive of the author's activity. Hirsch correctly assumes that these genres have no permanent essence, that they may be created, be transformed or disappear (cf. Wittgenstein 1958, § 23), so that they must be understood historically.

Also, intrinsic genres cut across Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, and cannot be properly subsumed under either of these categories (Hirsch 1967, 111). The same is true of illocutionary acts. And yet, as we have noted, Hirsch's intrinsic genres are more vaguely defined than Austin's speech acts, and above all they have a macrostructural import. They are macro-illocutionary acts *avant la lettre*.

From the early seventies, there have been attempts to formulate these conceptions from a linguistic perspective, extending towards the realm of literature the analyses of oral communication done by Austin, Grice or Searle. These definitions are a continuation of the ones we have

mentioned, rather than a completely new outlook on the matter. They rely on the notion of the "hypothetical" or "fictive" speech act.¹

Some of the early definitions are defective because of a simplistic conception of the intentional moves required to perform an illocutionary act. Among these are Ohmann's (1986a) and Searle's (1975).

In spite of some useful insights, Ohmann's (1971) account of the illocutionary nature of narrative and fiction is blurred; above all, it does away with the notion of uptake (cf. Fish's criticism, 1976b). This same defect is found in the early attempts at synthesis by Close (1972), Skinner (1972), and Hough (1973). Close notes that "a major cause of confusion is to see intention as a 'mental objective,' connected with action contingently or causally but not logically" (1976, 176). In his view, there is another, more important sense in which authorial intention is internal to the work: illocutionary force.² Close favours a common basis for dealing with intention in both literature and ordinary language; literary utterances, just like the conversational utterances studied by Austin or Strawson, are speech acts (1976, 183). Close's conception, however, is still vague. It is not clear whether the literary speech acts he mentions ("allegorizing, parodying, using dialogue") are meant to be speech acts in the same sense, or at the same level, as Austin's directives or behavitives; in Close's view the varieties of speech acts are "so diffuse that one cannot envisage them all falling under descriptive identifiable levels . . . ; yet they display diverse family-

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¹ Cf. Ohmann 1971; 1987a; Searle 1975; Pratt 1977, 173; Lanser 1981, 280; Ruthrof 1981, 53.

² Cf. Skinner 1976, 216.

likenesses and are consequently capable of description by a process of analogy and contrast" (1976, 187). Hough's use of speech act theory is similar to Close's, and it shares its limitations. He distinguishes the approach which studies the illocutionary acts inside the work from that which considers the work as a whole as an illocution: "But can anything as complex as a whole poem constitute an illocutionary act in Austin's sense? If so, it ought to be possible to say what it is doing—asking questions, warning, admonishing, describing, or what not" (1976, 226).

What Hough and Close do not see is that *writing a poem* is the illocutionary act performed by the author in writing a poem. This failure to see literary genres as illocutionary types of activity is common to other early attempts to translate speech act theory into the realm of literary study, such as Ohmann's (1971; 1986a) and Searle's (1975). They define fictional discourse as a sum of "hypothetical" or "fictive" speech acts, rather than as a comprehensive speech act with its own characteristics. Ohmann's later versions of his theory are somewhat more satisfactory. Although he does not solve the problems set by his earlier defective definitions of the literary speech acts, he proposes the idea of "literature" as a specific type of illocutionary act (1987b, 47). But his account is still vitiated by his persistence in an uncritical identification of literature with fiction.

Searle's speech act theory of fiction also fails to see in it a specific kind of illocutionary act. According to Searle, the author of a work of fiction feigns that he is performing speech acts, within generic conventions which suspend the illocutionary rules which would normally link his speech acts to reality. In the case of first-person narration, the author feigns he is a character who performs (real) illocutionary speech acts (1975, 326). Searle holds that there are no

formal traces of this fictionality: the difference between fiction and non-fiction is purely intentional.

Searle's contention, however, is not valid. It relies on an angelic conception of literary form, one which ignores the actual contexts in which forms are recognized. The formal marks of fiction include such obvious and down-to-earth reminders as the words "story" or "novel" on the cover of the book, not to mention the conventions of subject matter and style, and the difference in the contexts (both physical and discursive) in which fiction and non-fiction are read. These "marks" provide us with the essentials of interpretation.

Searle's theory leaves unanswered the question of how, without any formal marks, the author manages to convey the idea that he is only feigning the performance of an illocutionary act. He does propose a solution, but an absurd one: the author conveys his meaning by means of performing a locutionary speech act. This does not explain the difference between real and feigned illocutionary acts, since the speaker must always perform a locutionary act in order to perform an illocutionary act, whether feigned or real. Moreover, in Searle's theory (as in the early Ohmann) the author is not performing any real speech act, apart from those which are performed in an implied way, by means of the fictive speech acts of which the work is made. The former (the moral, the message, etc) are, however, not specifically literary in nature. Searle's theory does not recognize that the very act of performing fictional speech acts is a real speech act generically defined—writing fiction; more specifically, writing a novel or a play.¹

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¹ The same shortcoming is also found in Beardsley's attempt at a speech act theory of literature (1970, 59), and in J-K. Adams's pragmatic theory of fiction (1985, 10).

The conclusion is therefore that an author can be said to be performing fictive speech acts at the level of the story or of the fictional narrative, but these are only the means to perform a real speech act at the level of the discursive interaction between the textual author and the textual reader.¹ In the unmarked case of literary communication that we are considering, this speech act is a conscious literary performance. Pratt (1977) has argued this point most forcefully, pointing out the similarities between conversational and literary narratives in their ultimate status as speech acts and in their constitutive elements.

Searle's rejection of the idea that "telling a story" or "writing a novel" are illocutionary speech acts is understandable, since his conception of illocution is too rigid and abstract to describe real discursive activity (in spite of its pretensions to do so). Searle's theory, like that of Austin, from which it derives, is based on a sentence grammar, and narrative or literature can only be understood in the terms of a text grammar. A sentence grammar is a highly abstract construct which in general ignores all contextual information save that which is inscribed in the locutionary meaning of the sentence. Therefore, Austin's and Searle's analyses of oral conversation, in spite of appearances, do not describe actual speech activity as such. They describe speech activity under highly standardized circumstances. Speech acts are always performed in a discursive situation; not by means of a sentence as such, but by means of a text uttered in specific circumstances. Therefore, Austin and Searle describe not speech acts as they are actually performed, but the Platonic models of speech acts—not real illocutions, but the atomic constituents of illocutions, the abstract

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¹ On the textual author and reader, see chapter 3.

illocutionary primitives which are instrumentalized to produce the concrete illocutions in actual discourse. Concrete illocutions differ from such primitive illocutions in two respects:

- 1) They must be defined at both a macrostructural and a microstructural level. An extended, discursive or macrostructural speech act can be analyzed into partial, instrumental, sometimes sentential micro-speech acts. A novel, insofar as it is a narrative (macro-speech act), consists of a multitude of questions, exclamations, and above all assertions (micro-speech acts).
- 2) They may be highly indirect. Austin and Searle only discuss those indirect speech acts which are so highly standardized as to be almost direct.¹ But a fictional assertion presupposes an analytical phase in which its hypothetical assertive nature is identified, just as the assertive nature of a real assertion is identified. That is, the uptake of the (virtually present) real-assertion-element is a previous condition for the uptake of the actual speech act, the fictional assertion.

A whole scale of priority could be developed in this way. A novel presupposes (and goes beyond) the conventions of factual narrative, just like factual narrative presupposes (and goes beyond) the conventions of the simple assertion. Under the simple illocutionary definition of literary genres there is a whole underlying structure of "fossilized," standardized or conventionalized intentional attitudes which make it possible and give each of these discourse activities its distinctive character.

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¹ In fact, Bach and Harnish (1979) describe this kind of indirect speech acts as those which no longer require an indirect interpretation on the part of the listener. "Can you pass me the salt?" is so highly standardized that usually its status as a question does not even enter the mind of the hearer.

Skinner (1976, 218) identifies the author's meaning of the work to the illocutionary intention of the writer. Given the conception of genre as illocutionary type which we intend to develop, Skinner's conception is too restrictive. That is, unless we understand that the illocution includes the earlier locutionary phases of interpretation—the locutionary meaning of the sentence, and not merely the identification of its illocutionary force. We need, moreover, a theory which has a place for the macro-illocutions of discourse as well as for the micro-illocutions inside the story.¹

It is clear that there is a gap between the identification of the bare illocutionary intention and the understanding of the work. This is pointed out by Close and Hough (1976, 228). And there is another gap between understanding and criticism which is often overlooked—Hirsch's concern with significance as a crucial part of criticism should be remembered when some of these theories identify criticism and hunting after illocutions. In Close's view, the essential aim of literary criticism is discovering the meaning of a work: "Here 'meaning' has a fuller sense than either Austin's concept of locutionary meaning or the notion of paraphrase. It is equivalent to 'illocutionary force' (with the comprehension of locutionary meaning being taken for granted) and to what Grice has recently called 'utterer's occasion-meaning.'"² This account does not include the determination of significance and, in spite of Close's precautions, establishes a rigid connection between the

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¹ For the concept of macro-speech acts or macro-illocutionary force, see Van Dijk 1980, 325ff.

² Close 1976, 187. For the notion of "utterer's occasion-meaning" see Grice 1989, 89-91.

recognition of intention and the response, between aesthetic response and communication. In his view,

literary art . . . comes under the general category of 'communication' and . . . the responses which literature seeks are securely anchored in utterer's intentions. By this I do not mean that we find farces, for example, funny just because their creators intend them to be so. Rather I mean that our finding them funny is normally dependent on our prior recognition that they are intended as such. (Close 1976, 193)

Close's account is only partially right. A reader may be in tune with the authorial intention and accept the role of the implied reader. For instance, a reviewer of "The Monster" finds that "the comedy of the Dutch barber shop and of the negro dandy's call upon his sweetheart is irresistible" (Bridges 1898: 166). Not many critics seem to have found these scenes funny enough to draw the readers' attention to them; some readers do not consider them to be funny at all, even though they recognize that the author intended to create a comic scene (e.g. M. Solomon, 1956b, 39). So far, so good. But the reverse case is also possible: I may find very funny a work (say, a D.H. Lawrence novel) in which I do not recognize an intention to be funny on the part of the author. Close's speech act theory of criticism ignores that response is not just interpretive response, that I may successfully identify the illocutionary intent of an artistic message and yet respond to it in a way the author did not intend. It neglects perlocutions, which are a vital part of the critical enterprise.

2.4.3. Perlocutions

Hough complains that the speech act analysis of literature does not account for all the elements of literary understanding. The intended meaning it is concerned with is easily recoverable, but this is only a diagram of what we need. A full interpretation cannot be accounted for in terms of intended illocutionary meaning. Recognizing that a convention is being used “can tell us nothing about the intention with which [the writer] employs [the convention]” (1976, 230). Hough seems close to Roger Fry when he affirms that the most important part of composition is not that which can be intentionally accounted for—it is a symptom, not a full deliberation: “mounted on that basic intentional structure is the whole inspectable surface of the poem in all its varied detail, much of which cannot properly be described as intentional” (1976, 232). The author’s intention is merely one more element in the intertextuality of the work. The analysis of unintended elements is just as significant and pertaining to the work as that of intentions. Unintended elements, as well as the indefinite area which shades off into the intentional structures of locution and illocution, may be related to the perlocutionary phase of speech acts.

Perlocution is left out of the conventional analysis of speech acts by both Austin and Searle: “Illocutionary acts are conventional acts: perlocutionary acts are *not* conventional” (Austin 1980, 121); “The perlocutionary effects of our utterances cannot be included in the conventions for the use of the device uttered, because an effect which is achieved by convention cannot include the subsequent responses and behavior of our audiences” (Searle 1983, 178).

What should be the status of perlocutions in critical theory? The notion might be usefully developed in various senses. First of all, one related to the macro-illocutionary status of literary communication. Skinner is too rash when he affirms that "a writer's perlocutionary intentions (what he may have intended to do *by* writing in a certain way) do not need to be further considered" (1976, 217). Criticism is often concerned with perlocutionary intentions. That is why we have a concept of literary hoax, for instance: many of the intentions which critics of Macpherson, Chatterton or Defoe find relevant are not communicative intentions, but rather the literary equivalent of a lie.

But these are nevertheless exceptional cases. We also need to identify the perlocutionary element in any kind of literary discourse. Close seems to deny the existence of such an element. Like Bateson (1953, 16) before him, Close identifies the task of the critic with the interpretation of authorial meaning. Interpretation of meaning at large, evaluation and the interpretation of significance are secondary (Close 1976, 188). It is not surprising that at a given moment of his account of literary communication, the effects of and reactions to literature, he divides his analysis from Austin's: "The favourable or unfavourable impact that art makes upon us is not, like Austin's 'perlocutionary' force, a set of causal effects conceptually separable from the identification of illocutionary force, but is part-and-parcel of it" (1976, 193). However, Austin's perlocution is subsequent to illocution, and is its consequence. The difference Close draws here between literature and ordinary communication results from an inadequate conception of the communicative role of illocutionary force. The effects literature has on us are not confined to the uptake of illocutions—and this is the

case for the aesthetic response Close is concerned with as well as for other kinds of response.

Perlocution, like illocution, is a notion devised at a highly abstract level in Austin's analysis of speech acts. Its neatness must be expected to be somewhat blurred when we transport it from a sentence grammar to discourse analysis. Literary analysis makes particularly clear a phenomenon which is present to some degree in any text by virtue of its rhetorical structure: that the purity of macro-illocutions is compromised at discourse level because of the elasticity of the conventions which must be posited at this level. The notion of uptake, then, becomes elastic as well. Far from being neatly codified, as it is at the idealized and normative level of primitive illocutions, the uptake of macro-illocutions is fuzzy-edged, probabilistic and approximative. Micro-illocutionary uptake is consciously regulated and only becomes subliminal by virtue of the automatism of habit; it can always be brought to consciousness and stated explicitly. The rules of macro-illocutionary uptake, on the contrary, remain unconscious for the subject who applies them. Even in critical theory, which aims at formulating conscious theories of literary response, they remain an object of debate.

Therefore, there is no sharp line between illocutions and perlocutions at discourse level; instead, their relationship is being constantly negotiated. A text, and most of all a literary text, is always redefining the codes that allow us to understand it, escaping automatism and convention, and therefore redefining the play of illocution and perlocution. Each phase of the sender's utterance has a corresponding activity on the part of the reader if communication or understanding is to take place. The author's speech act must be complemented by the reader's interpretive act (cf. Harris 1988, x). Through its work on the

cultural codes which constitute it, the text redefines the implied image of the reader, and stimulates readers to transform their own codes in order to make the most of the text. The superior cultural intuition of a good writer uses the socially codified modes of intention and takes them one step beyond, towards the unknown, playing them against each other so that a new significant relationship can be perceived between them. The activity of the writer is to a great extent one of hypercodification, of using already existing codes to create new codes, and of stimulating the same activity in the reader.¹

Such activity could be described at any level of analysis of the literary work. The most prominent instance in the criticism of "The Monster" is the transmission of implied authorial attitudes through the use of symbolism. Whenever two sets of elements of the work are seen to maintain a relationship of analogy to each other, a provisional semiotic code is constituted: meaning is constructed, and the semiotic density of the work is increased.

Of course, not every meaning effect has to be accounted for in terms of a more or less conscious perlocutionary intent. Perlocutionary effect is not always the result of perlocutionary intent. We may even recognize the perlocutionary intent of a writer (although this recognition supposes that his strategies have become conventional, and hence un-perlocutionary to some extent) and fail to respond to the work according to that intent. The critic is also a shifter of rules and a hyper-codifier—criticism is also creative writing, which is what makes it criticism, and not just interpretation. The creative element may be dominant, submitting the text to extrinsic codes and literally rewriting

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¹ On hypercodification, see Eco 1976, 239ff.

it. It may even overpower the interpretive moment, as we saw in our discussion of the "intentional fallacy." But it is also inevitably present at that level of objectivist interpretation which is concerned with the boundaries between illocution and perlocution. There is a "creative" element in interpretation when we decide what is to count as the shift in meaning operated by the text—whether an effect must be "institutionalized" as an illocution, or declared to be beyond the pale of convention. Criticism is a supplementation of literature because its aim is the further conventionalization of the creation of meaning achieved in literature. Of course, it is bound to achieve this only in the way supplements do¹—by subverting the conventionalization it strives to achieve, through ideological contention and the conflict of interpretations.

Horton (1979, 24) makes a difference between reading and interpreting. In her account, reading is a temporal, sequential activity, and as such is opposed to interpretation, which consists in building a "spatial" pattern of relationships out of the matter furnished by this activity. This is a useful distinction, because it accounts for the difference in levels of hypercodification in the semiotic structure of the text, and relates it in a very immediate way to the reader's experience. In our own terms, we will define the difference between reading and interpreting as two poles of the reader's activity. Semiotic phenomena have a structural nature, that is, they exist only within a system of related phenomena. A code is what permits us to relate a semiotic phenomenon to the system which gives it its identity, which is a code in its turn. That is, some semiotic phenomena are instrumental in allowing

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¹ On the logic of supplementation, see Derrida 1967.

an access to other semiotic phenomena. The structures of signs are variable and may be modified by their usage. This involves a necessary strategy: we must rely on certain codes which are (taken at this moment to be) relatively stable, using them as a fulcrum to exert a force on other codes. When an interpreter uses a semiotic system to retrieve meaning, without thereby modifying the system, we have an instance of wholly codified meaning. When an interpreter relies on a fixed code in order to modify another code through usage, I will speak of partially codified meaning. *Reading*, in a (conveniently abstract) technical sense will refer to the retrieval of codified meaning; *interpretation* is concerned with the retrieval of partially codified meaning. It will be observed that, since the process of retrieving partially codified meaning involves the transformation of existing codes, it is inherently open. That is, the line between the construction of those meanings intended by the author and its logical continuation by the activity of the reader is very fine, and is best conceived as a matter of critical convenience. Horton despairs of tracing this line: "How do we ever know if what we have is only an instance of form speaking and not content or intent?" (1979, 119). The answer is that there are some cases which are clearer, or less disputed, than others. There is no need of tracing the precise line of demarcation (although we will have to learn to live with a reasonable percentage of interpretive cruxes); what is fundamental is recognizing that there are two poles, that of the undisputably intentional and that of the undisputably unintentional, and an area for interpretive contention between them; and that this situation seems to be the right one for both literature and criticism to thrive on. The lack of a clear border between intentional and unintentional features will not invalidate

the relevance of the authorial intention to the creative or interpretive process (cf. Raval 1981, 52).

Speech act theory presents itself as a bridge between the extremes of individual creativity of use (the Saussurean *parole*) and the social givenness of language (*langue*). However, the gulf between the two main currents of speech act theory reproduces the original distance between *langue* and *parole*. Searle's version of speech act theory tends towards objectivism, Grice's and Strawson's towards intuitionism (cf. Hirsch 1976, 25f.). According to Hirsch, Strawson has had the last word in this debate, because Searle's version cannot account for the growth of the system through use (1976, 67ff). An initial guess is in this view always an essential part of interpretation.

Still, I would argue that a guess does not take place in a void. It occurs in a context which is already grasped through conventions. The guess itself will not be absolutely original; it will no doubt assume one form or another derived from a typology of possible kinds of guesses. Use of language in general, and interpretation in particular, is not possible apart from a complex system of varieties of discourse and relevant situational features. The final integration of both theories is possible only at a textual-discursive level, which watches the workings of the interpretive movements taking place in the specific uses of language in specific situations—such as academic literary criticism.

According to Foucault, all commentary serves a "principle of limitation": its function is not to reveal all the meanings of the text, but rather to restrict the possibility of meanings of the text.¹ Each

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¹ Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language, trans. A. M. Sheridan (New York: Harper and Row, 1976) 222. Qtd. in Horton 1979, 61.

interpretation tries in some way to arrest and determine the meaning of the work, but when it is confronted to the other interpretations it quickly becomes evident that criticism makes meaning proliferate, instead of arresting it; that the move of each interpretation towards a determinate meaning is in a way self-contradictory, since the interpretive activity by definition defeats its own purpose. But only in a way. We could apply Mallarme's line, "Jamais un coup de dés n'abolira le hasard," to the inevitable limitations of the objectivist critical act which tries to determine the meaning and significance of a work. But it is convenient to remember also Jan Kott's riposte, "Et le hasard n'abolira jamais le coup de dés." Criticism is not a post-lapsarian activity or an essential failure in the sense that it (often) fulfils its immediate goals and has its own institutional validity.

Moreover, interpretations are not simply divergent or contradictory. Later interpretations tend to reinforce some elements of earlier interpretations and discard others, and usually some clear patterns of agreement emerge. Some meanings are privileged, and together with them the modes of interpretation which have constructed them. Through this dialectical process of contention and accumulation, the status of the work in question as an instrument of communication or ideological sign, and the status of the interpretive practices which make it such, are constantly redefined and kept in touch with the transformation of the dominant social discourses. The process works both ways, of course, but the changes in the discourse of literary criticism are more a product than an agent of social transformations. To revert to our main example: if the interpretation of "The Monster" as a fable on racial relations became generalized in the sixties, it was only a symptom of a wider change in the ideology of American society.

2.5. Some post-structuralist objections to classical hermeneutics

Differences in interpretive assumptions are in part the result of ideological differences, and are not likely to be solved by rational debate. Both authorial meaning and significance are the object of theoretical debate—that is, their own status as interpretive concepts, and not just their application to specific texts, is the object of debate. In this they are not different from other critical concepts. Debate may take place in two main ways: through the practical criticism of texts or in theoretical works. The latter need not be more deliberate than the former, though it usually is so. The main opposition to the kind of interpretive assumptions represented by Hirsch's theory comes from the field of post-structuralist criticism. The objections that I find acceptable have already been integrated in my theory, at the point where I part company with Hirsch. I will now examine some post-structural theories of interpretation, and try to counter those objections which in my view are misguided and unacceptable.

2.5.1. Deconstruction and Interpretation: Jacques Derrida

Deconstruction has been under attack from a variety of perspectives, from Searle to Gerald Graff. The central issue of these polemics for our present purpose is whether deconstruction has any implications for the theory of interpretation we have outlined, and for the possibility of

communication. Attacking the conventions of interpretation has been denounced as a self-destructive enterprise, and a contradictory one. Michael Fischer, for instance, opposes J. Hillis Miller's concept of interpretation as an activity which reaches no truth or its representation as an endless wandering: "One wonders how Miller gets outside the prison house of language to see its walls" (1985, 53). In Fischer's view, there can be no such thing as a free play of the interpreter: interpretive conventions must necessarily be constraining, because that is what allows them to be enabling (1985, 118).

Wendell Harris also warns against the confusion of deconstruction and interpretation. In his view, deconstructionists conflate what may be said of a word insofar as it is an item of *langue* with what may be said of it insofar as it is an instance of *parole* (1988, 25). The Saussurean theory of language has often been misrepresented by deconstructive critics (sometimes starting with Derrida himself), together with its implications for literary studies. For instance, the differential definition of language as a structure of wholly arbitrary oppositions, of terms with a purely negative value, is presented by Derrida in his essay "Différance" (Derrida 1982) as the central conception of Saussure's theory of language. But Saussure stresses just as much the positive terms which result from the negativity of linguistic difference. Moreover, the negativistic definition of the terms is only applicable to language as *langue*, to the study of the linguistic system, and not to the study of speech. Saussure knows that in *parole* the role of the context is all-important (Harris 1988, 8), and that *parole* rests on the relatively stable conventions of *langue*. Interpretation is concerned with the meaning of instances of *parole*, not with *langue*.

The relationship of deconstruction to criticism at large has often been represented as doing away with the concept of authorial intention and celebrating the free activity of the critic, his creation without limits. An intellectual activity resulting from such assumptions is no doubt possible, but is not what I have defined as "criticism." Hirsch sees Derrida as "the most fashionable of the theologians of cognitive atheism in the domain of literary theory" (1976, 13). I suspect that Derrida would feel quite pleased with the sound of this qualification. But if Hirsch means that Derrida's theory does not make or cannot make any difference between conscious (intentional) and unconscious meanings, or even between the Intentionality of the author and that of the critic, then Hirsch is wrong. That mistake may or may not be made by some of Derrida's followers. In Derrida's own version of deconstruction we find somewhat different assumptions, even if they exhibit their own kind of duplicity.

Let us start with two statements on authorial intention by Derrida, found in works which are not concerned above all with a critique of hermeneutics. The first discusses the relationship of authorial intention to the critical commentary considered as a signifying structure:

Produire cette structure signifiante ne peut évidemment consister à reproduire, par le redoublement effacé et respectueux du commentaire, le rapport conscient, volontaire, intentionnel, que l'écrivain institue dans ses échanges avec l'histoire à laquelle il appartient grâce à l'élément de la langue. Sans doute ce moment du commentaire redoublant doit-il avoir sa place dans la lecture critique. Faute de la reconnaître et de respecter toutes ses exigences classiques, ce qui n'est pas facile et requiert tous les instruments de la critique traditionnelle, la production critique

risquerait de se faire dans n'importe quel sens et s'autoriser à dire à peu près n'importe quoi. Mais cet indispensable garde-fou n'a jamais fait que *protéger*, il n'a jamais *ouvert* une lecture. (1967, 227)

Let me only note that when Derrida speaks of the “garde-fou,” the parapet of authorial meaning as being “indispensable,” he means it. The second text is from Margins of Philosophy, and seems to be somewhat more adventurous in defining the role of authorial intention:

The text—Hegel’s for example—functions as a writing machine in which a certain number of *typed* and systematically enmeshed propositions (one has to be able to recognize and isolate them) represent the “conscious intention” of the author as a reader of his “own” text, in the sense we speak today of a mechanical reader. Here, the lesson of the finite reader called a philosophical author is but one piece, occasionally and incidentally interesting, of the machine.¹

It would be easy to turn Derrida’s method against himself and show that this “incidentally interesting” element, this margin of his theory, plays a hidden regulative role in the analyses of more central or fascinating parts of the textual machine. After all, does not a measure of their interest derive from the fact that they are not the conscious intention of the author? Does not this deconstructive project depend on the previous identification of the construction? I will leave those as (rhetorical) questions, but there are other implications in Derrida’s texts. They assume that the text has one (authorial, intentional) meaning, which is

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¹ Derrida 1982, xi. Barthes puts forward a comparable claim: “It is not that the Author may not ‘come back’ in the Text, in his text, but then he does so as a ‘guest’” (1977b, 161).

historically fixed. The textual machine would not be the same—maybe it would not work at all—without that component part. Derrida assumes that this meaning can be (must be?) identified, and that the analyst must be able to tell the difference between authorial meaning and other kinds of meaning or significance, between his own activity and the author's. These assumptions are quite close to Hirsch's own, although Derrida does not stress the need to keep authorial meaning constantly in mind—presumably because his main concern is with another phase of the critical activity. In his textual analyses, Derrida often uses the concept of authorial intention practically as well as theoretically, even as he subordinates this hermeneutic reading of the text to his own deconstructive reading.¹

However, Derrida has sometimes implied that deconstruction has implications for the interpretation of authorial meaning, and has cast doubt on the validity of the central concepts of hermeneutics. In "Signature Event Context" and "Limited Inc abc..." he "deconstructs" the principles of Austin's theory of speech acts. According to Derrida, the basic notions of this theory, the notions of literal meaning, context, communication, intention, etc., are "logocentric" constructs: they partake of a logic which rests on the notions of presence, being, speech, consciousness, purity, originality, authenticity and centrality. This logic works with binary oppositions, in which one term is privileged at the expense of the other. The deep links between the impure, the marginal, the derived, iterability, the pretended, writing, etc., cannot be understood on these terms: "logocentrism," Derrida argues, must be transcended. Derrida wants to belittle conceptual and logical

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¹ See, for instance, Derrida 1988b, 199.

("logocentric") thought , and to privilege instead an alternative logic without concepts, a logic whose terms are undecidable and do not exclude their polar Other.

Supposedly, such terms as "*différance*," "supplement," "pharmakon," "hymen," and several others as deployed by Derrida would accomplish this feat: Derrida claims that they are neither words nor concepts; they open the play of logic and signification, rather than being caught in it. Unfortunately, while their status as words and concepts is evident from their presence in a linguistic text, their mercurial quality as non-words and non-concepts is merely asserted by Derrida (cf. Rorty 1989, 124 n.6). Or rather, by means of a legerdemain, he transfers the pre-conceptual quality of the semiotic operations named by these terms to the name itself. If Derrida wanted to build an illogic—well, he has succeeded.

But this illogic will not dismantle logic in the way claimed by Derrida. It may dismantle the straw logocentrism he constructs to challenge it afterwards. Derrida's characterization of what a concept is and how it works is itself seriously monolithic and essentialist. It is bound to be, so that his non-concepts may look alluring in comparison. Let us hear what he has to say on the logic of conceptual thought:

To this oppositional logic, which is necessarily, legitimately, a logic of "all or nothing" and without which the distinction and the limits of a concept would have no chance, I oppose nothing, least of all a logic of *approximation* [*à peu près*], a simple empiricism of difference in degree; rather I add a supplementary complication that calls for other concepts, for other thoughts beyond the concept and another form of "general theory," or

rather another discourse, another “logic” that accounts for the impossibility of concluding such a “general theory.” (1988a, 117) Concepts, though, are not defined by a simple logic of all or nothing (cf. Searle 1983b, 78; Harris 1988, 161). Or rather, this distinction does not require an equally exhaustive definition of concepts in all contexts. Once they are contextually defined, concepts follow the logic of “enough or not enough, here and now,” rather than that of “all or nothing.” Derrida obscures the circumstance that logic is always contextualized—this, against his own claim that “context is always, and always has been, at work *within* the place, and not only *around* it” (1988a, 66).

The contextual nature of concepts affects Derrida’s attack on speech act theory in at least two ways:

—It invalidates his claim that a distinction can never be made pure, and is therefore questionable. A distinction (for instance, between seriousness and irony) need only be made as pure as necessary for the desired communicative effect to take place. If people interpret some utterances seriously and others ironically, it is sufficient proof that such distinctions are indeed made on *sufficient* (not exhaustive) reasons.

—It brings out the fact that in his attack Derrida has ignored the contextual space defined by the theory itself. This is apparent, for instance, in his readiness to drive the discussion to metaphysical grounds which are beyond the concern of speakers and theorizers of speech acts alike (cf. Rorty 1989, 132).

My concern here is not with the aim or validity of the whole project of deconstruction; only with its implications for the theory of interpretation I have discussed. If any—Derrida’s attitude is highly ambivalent in this respect. He seems to denounce the logocentric

concepts as if they were the product of bad faith and led us to narrowness of thought, as if their legitimacy was invalidated by their metaphysical assumptions. For instance, he says that if the absence which is said to characterize written communication was shown to be a condition of all signs, the traditional conception of writing “would appear to be noncritical, ill-formed, or destined, rather, to insure the authority and the force of a certain historical discourse” (1988a, 7). The second half of the sentence suggests the cultural critique of false consciousness: surely nobody wants to be caught insuring “the authority and the force of a certain historical discourse”! Derrida surreptitiously suggests that the essential normativity of language, the conventionality of iterable signs (or signatures), of contextual relevance, of speech acts, is sustained by means of institutionalized violence:

There is always a police and a tribunal ready to intervene each time that a rule . . . is invoked in a case involving signatures, events, or contexts. . . . If the police is always waiting in the wings, it is because conventions are by essence violable and precarious, *in themselves* and by the fictionality that constitutes them, even before there has been any overt transgression, in the “first sense” of *to pretend*. (1988a, 105)

Just as fiction is a convention, all institutions are conventions. This is a favourite deconstructivist claim, also made by Barbara Johnson and Stanley Fish. But the aim of this claim is not clear. Is it to assert that all institutions are fictional in the same sense that fiction is fictional? This would indeed be the ultimate consequence of Derrida’s critique of the legitimacy of hierarchies. This is hardly a description of the present state of affairs, since the logocentric concepts denounced by Derrida are well alive and at work everywhere, including Derrida’s own text. Is it,

then, an injunction to subvert the present state of affairs? How? There is no clear answer in Derrida's text, except the practice of deconstruction itself. Should we, then, always deconstruct, in lieu of interpreting?

The answer would seem to be "yes." However, we also find disclaimers like the following:

By no means do I draw the conclusion that there is no relative specificity of effects of consciousness, or of effects of speech (as opposed to writing in the traditional sense), that there is no performative effect, no effect of ordinary language, no effect of presence or of discursive event (speech act). It is simply that those effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them, term by term; on the contrary, they presuppose it, in an asymmetrical way, as the general space of their possibility. (1988a, 19)

This presupposition, however, is hardly a concern for the interpreter who tries to retrieve the authorial meaning of a text. It is a metaphysical observation on hermeneutics, and not some new kind of interpretive principle. In the interview which serves as an afterword for Limited Inc, Derrida is even more explicit:

I have never "put such concepts as truth, reference, and the stability of interpretive concepts radically into question" if "putting radically into question" means contesting that there *are* and that there *should be* truth, reference, and stable concepts of interpretation. I have—but this is something entirely different—posed questions that I hope are radical concerning the possibility of these things, of these values, of these norms, of this stability (which by essence is always provisional and finite). (1988a, 150)

But this provisional stability does its work, something which is ignored in this account. This duplicity is at work behind every definite statement in Limited Inc . Derrida's project is eminently ambiguous, since it both suggests and denies that it has implications for the theory of interpretation. He announces the break with the conception of communication as communication of consciousnesses, the disqualification ("or the limiting"!) of the concept of context, etc. (1988a, 8-9), only to let them in through the back door. Derrida constantly repeats the gesture of warning us against the police, only to tell us later that we need not worry: they are our friends, it was not a warning (1988a, 132). He was asking to be misunderstood or overemphasized, as he complains he has been, in creating the implied reader of his essays—and I do not think this escaped his attention, or that he is so clumsy a writer as not to be able to control the tone that will convey his meaning.

Derrida speaks of Austin's theory as if this theory conceived of people as obsessively self-conscious and hyper-legislatively-minded creatures: "In order for the context to be exhaustively determinable, in the sense required by Austin, conscious intention would at the very least have to be totally present and immediately transparent to itself and to others, since it is a determining center [*foyer*] of context" (1988a, 18). Austin never put forward such a preternatural concept of intention. As Derrida himself notes in "Limited Inc abc," consciousness does not imply self-consciousness. Furthermore, a context does not have to be exhaustively determined. On the contrary, it is assumed to be already determined unless an interlocutor asks for further specification, or behaves in a way that shows that his or her assumptions about the context are different.

In a characteristic gesture, Derrida accepts the notion of consciousness and normal circumstances, but giving them a *marginal* place in his theory: “those effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them . . .; on the contrary, they presuppose it, in an asymmetrical way, as the general space of their possibility” (1988a, 19). Again, “they presuppose it” in a metaphysical consideration of language—not in a description of language use, like speech act theory. This move also equivocates, by introducing in a theory of language use a set of considerations which are quite irrelevant to it. We live among these “effects,” and therefore we do not perceive them as effects, any more than we perceive our consciousness as an effect. They are inscribed in our mode of being as they are inscribed in our language.

Derrida’s centralization of the margin has the undesirable effect of marginalizing the center. From the structural possibility of infelicitous speech acts, Derrida concludes that “the opposition success / failure [*éche*c] in illocution and in perlocution thus seems quite insufficient and extremely secondary [*dérivée*]” (1988a, 15). It can only be said to be so by someone who can speak of “the teleological lure of consciousness” (1988a, 18) as if an account of communication were possible which did not use the concept of consciousness. Normal circumstances, serious or felicitous speech acts work as normative principles precisely in that they do not presuppose their “other”—they are the unmarked case.¹ Speakers assume that an utterance is literal unless they have some reason to think otherwise. A literal utterance is not interpreted through its

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¹ As to the debate on the status of fiction, Searle and Derrida speak at cross-purposes because neither one is willing to move into the reasonable middle-ground: that producing fiction (*i.e.* ‘non-serious’ speech acts) is itself a serious speech act. A theory along these lines is put forward by Pratt (1977).

contrary, or exhaustively compared to its context. The intrinsic, unmarked, normal context which is a part of the locutionary meaning of a sentence is enough to interpret it if it does not run against the extrinsic context of the utterance. On the contrary, in order to interpret a lie as a lie we cannot help but set it against its other, the true statement it purported to be.

To the extent that Derrida obscures this circumstance, he is not putting forward a theory of interpretation—he is noting the presence in theories of interpretation of the same logic of purity and impurity which is present in other semiotic areas, such as the construction of sexuality or the cultural notions of East and West. This analysis has not the same implications in all of these fields. I can wish for a theory of culture without chauvinist cultural hierarchies, but I do not see any sense in a theory of communication which renounces the notions of literal meaning or felicitous speech act as regulative elements used by the speakers. At least Derrida has not provided one. He wants to be both Fish and Hirsch. In ordinary speech, he allows the presence of intention or literal meaning as “derivative” effects; when he analyzes the source of the derivation, he can’t help using the notions of presence, center and consciousness. The blind spot which opens the visibility of the text is its (absent) center.¹ The principles of writing and supplementarity Derrida finds in Rousseau’s writing are, it seems, *central* in these texts. They represent the *mise en abyme* of that textuality: “Et nous verrons que l’abîme n’est pas ici un accident . . . ” (1967, 233). Moreover, this blind spot is a (present) center in Derrida’s

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¹ Derrida 1967, 234. Or is it the absent center of the text *as it is seen by the critic*? This view, which would seem to use a more critical version of presence, does not seem to be favored by Derrida.

critical commentary, since its identification is the organizing principle of his text. Deconstructive practice undermines deconstructive theory just as much as the theory undermines the practice.

Derrida continually uses the language of essence and presence. Is deconstruction yet another discovery of centers? What is the sense of “formulating,” “producing laws” or essays with an “axial purpose,” putting forward “ultimate justifications,” or constituting a “theory of structural necessity” as Derrida claims he is doing (1967, 233)? By preserving the “vulgar concepts” (of writing, intention, etc.) and setting them in a wider frame, Derrida’s theory preserves a thrust towards totalization.¹ To the extent that a theory is an intentional construct and its purpose is the conscious recognition or establishment of relationships, Derrida’s writing is a misguided experiment in *mise en abyme*—I suspect that his silence on this aspect of his writing is a wilful desire to have his text victimized by the same law it denounces, but his equivocations about the implications of the extended concept of writing make him play down the role of his own text as an intentional construct. The text is unnecessarily victimized. Its effectivity is therefore doubly impaired, conceptually and rhetorically.

As a conclusion, we may say that while Derrida’s project aims at transcending hermeneutics, it has to accept the “provisional” validity of the discipline in much the same lines as we have been describing—a circumstance from which he is at pains to draw attention. He accepts a

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¹ The counter-movement, which denounces the absurdity of this kind of enterprise, is fraught with false steps. For instance, in “Limited inc abc...” (1988a, 39) he speaks of “the *interminable* character” of speech act analysis, because the analysis itself must be a speech act. Derrida might equally well denounce the absurdity of a book on syntax on the basis that it must use syntactic constructions to describe syntax, or the absurdity of dictionaries because they have to explain words with other words.

similar role of intentionality in the interpretation of writing and of speech (1988a, 60), the conventional nature of linguistic intention in an account which is not so different from Searle's own (Derrida 1988a, 129), the importance of rigor and a knowledge of tradition (1988a, 130; cf. Scholes 1989), and the necessity of truth and fixed meaning as a regulative aim for the interpreter, one which is never wholly reachable for Derrida (1988a, 120, 129).

2.5.2. Some deconstruction in English

Other advocates of what Scholes calls "nihilist hermeneutics" are Paul de Man and Frank Kermode. According to de Man, the task of criticism is driven against the inherent duplicity of language, the impossibility of making the expression coincide with what is expressed: "The interpretation of everyday language is a Sisyphean task, a task without end and without progress, for the other is always free to make what he wants differ from what he says he wants" (1983, 11). Radical relativism is de Man's alternative to the fallacy of a finite and single interpretation (1983, 10). This is the most radically skeptic of de Man's misgivings about interpretation, because it bears on the use of language as a whole. However, this statement is made in the face of actual use of language. Interpretation is constantly taking place in a successful way (i.e., accomplishing its aims), and is not at all "unending" or Sisyphean—instead, it is most often immediate and unproblematic. As de Man pronounces the radical undecidability of language at large *ex cathedra*, without making any attempt at proving it, his statement can only be adequately met in a Dr. Johnson-like way. I take it to be self-

refuting, and therefore obviously false—or perhaps de Man has felt free to make what he means differ from what he says he means!

Kermode's view of interpretive validity is (though only at times) equally bleak: "World and book, it may be, are hopelessly plural, endlessly disappointing; we stand alone before them, aware of their arbitrariness and impenetrability, knowing that they may be narratives only because of our impudent intervention, and susceptible of interpretation only by our hermeneutic tricks."¹ Inasmuch as this statement bears on linguistic and literary interpretation, its strategy is to obscure the fact that our "impudent intervention" and "hermeneutic tricks" are to a great extent presupposed in the structure of the very intentional phenomena they analyze. These are therefore far from being arbitrary or impenetrable. An Urdu translation of Hamlet is impenetrable as far as I am concerned. I may find the English original ultimately impenetrable, but hardly in the same sense. Differences in degree are essential differences in hermeneutics.

Theorists like Kermode or Thomas Kuhn often conflate the status of the explanatory models of science with that of fiction (Harris 1988, 15). But the first are tools for making sense of reality, while fiction is a particular discursive genre understood with its own conventions, which require that both author and reader know that it is not true. Unless these conventions are at work in writing and reading, the text is not being understood as a fiction. However, the role of scientific models does not require that their users recognize them as provisional. Their explanatory power is the same if they are believed to be truth itself. Likewise, the author's attitude towards this problem is indifferent for

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¹ Qtd. in Scholes 1979, 55.

practical purposes. It does not have to be recognized in order to use the model. Which means that scientific models are not, as far as their use is concerned, a form of fiction, but a form of factual discourse. In the context of scientific debate, they may be presented as hypothetical discourse, but still there is no identity with fiction. In the case of fiction, the author and the reader know that the fictive world they construct is possible only on the basis of the real world where they are. In scientific models, there is no such duplicity of worlds: it is the nature of the real world which is being debated. The hypothetical construct does not leave the world where the theory is being formulated unaffected. Instead, it coincides with this world, it constitutes it to some extent.

In spite of an occasional sweeping statement like the one quoted before, de Man is usually concerned with a level of interpretation which I think does not exclude the determinacy of authorial intention. Rather, it presupposes some degree of determinacy. At times, de Man is ready to recognize this relative determinacy, and also a regulative concept of objectivity; he affirms that a thrust towards totalization is necessary for criticism, even if it is endless (1983, 31-32). Like Derrida's, de Man's deconstruction presupposes the interpretation of authorial meaning as a preliminary step in the critical activity. "The reader is given the elements to decipher the real plot hidden behind the pseudo-plot, but the author himself remains deluded" (1970, 104). That the authorial meaning is seen to be insufficient or deceitful, a "pseudo-plot," does not alter the fact of its presence. De Man's "reader" is in a privileged position to judge of the author's or the critic's blindness, to see both the intended statement and the inadvertent pattern which emerges behind it and which is for de Man much more interesting. So far, this sounds pretty reasonable. But:

De Man shares with Derrida a puzzling tendency to erase the transformative power that his own critical activity exerts on the text, to ignore his own responsibility for the hidden patterns he finds behind the author's intention. After examining the critical work of Lukács, Poulet, Blanchot and others, he concludes: "Critics' moments of greatest blindness with regard to their own critical assumptions are also the moments at which they achieve their greatest insight" (1983, 109). This beautiful paradox is grounded on a fallacy: it presupposes that the author is in some way responsible for anything we may find in his text. He did not intend that meaning but then he somehow intended it. But the insights which the critics' blindness has made possible are de Man's own, and not theirs. Their own conscious insight counts as blindness for the critic. In the following passage on deconstructive reading, de Man's self-erasure is explicit and fully deliberate, although his account of intentionality is different:

The reading is not "our" reading, since it uses only the linguistic elements provided by the text itself. . . . The deconstruction is not something we have added to the text but it constituted the text in the first place. A literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode, and by reading the text as we did we were only trying to come closer to being as rigorous a reader as the author had to be in order to write the sentence in the first place. (1979, 17)

It seems that the author is no longer blind: he is a rigorous reader, and all works are deconstructive. Not for de Man: in themselves. There is an illegitimate step in de Man's reasoning. If a text appears to contain tensions within its structure, such as an undermining of the metaphors it rests on, it does not follow that these tensions are apparent for the

author or for just any reader. The interpreter who makes this claim has to invest an amount of comparison, logical reasoning and justification—critical work—in order to support it. Semiotic phenomena do not exist in themselves. They always exist for somebody, and it is fair to say that Paul de Man creates the deconstruction as much as he identifies it.

The same equivocation is at work at all critical moments where de Man uses the concept of intention. A third version runs thus: "The question as to whether the author himself is or is not blinded is to some extent irrelevant. It can only be asked heuristically, as a means to accede to the true question: whether his language is or is not blind to its own statement" (1983, 137). I own that the notion of how language can be blind or insightful *in itself* (as opposed to blind or insightful for a subject, an interpreter) completely escapes my understanding. If de Man's language is insightful in itself, that does not solve my present problem, and his insight will not fare the better in my interpretation, for I take it to be wrong.

It seems that de Man's New Critical beginnings linger on in his late work. This faith in the contents of "the text itself" is certainly related to Wimsatt and Beardsley's invocation of the work as an autonomous, self-sufficient object without any necessary links to human intentionality. It is not surprising that de Man makes explicit the conflation of creative writing and criticism which was impending or subliminal in the New Critics: "Poetic writing is the most advanced and refined mode of deconstruction; it may differ from critical or discursive writing in the economy of its articulation, but not in kind" (1979, 17).

Like Derrida's "absent center," de Man's conception of "blindness" or the self-deconstruction of texts is curiously essentialist: both seem to assume that a particular insight is in the text and constitutes its real

structure even if nobody had perceived it before themselves. The meaning of the text is always already in it for de Man (1983, 30). This claim does not apply merely to verbal meaning and the standardized illocutions: it includes the deconstructive reading of the text; for de Man, a text always deconstructs itself. In my view, it is Derrida's or de Man's perspective which creates the object they see. It does not exist "in the text" waiting for an interpreter to find it; rather, it is the shape assumed by the text for some interpreter at a given moment of its life and of the development of critical work. I do not think that the conclusions of these theorists of deconstruction are simply wrong—they are often fascinating and challenging. Nevertheless, they need to be set in a proper perspective where they do not set at naught their own basis and are no longer in conflict with a more moderate and general hermeneutics. They must be rethought on the basis of more relativist principles—I hope it does no longer sound puzzling that this increased relativism must also be an increased objectivism.

Following de Man's ideas, Barbara Johnson holds the theory that (some?) works of literature and criticism already contain their own deconstruction. She has used this conception, for instance, in her critiques of readings by Derrida or Barthes. These deconstructions of deconstructions are curiously prone to invoking the conception of authorial intention at the crucial moment: de Man finds that Rousseau had deconstructed himself before Derrida followed suit with a somewhat simplified and sloppy job in *Of Grammatology*¹; Johnson finds that Balzac is at least as subtle a deconstructor as the Barthes of *S/*

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¹ De Man 1983, 139. De Man makes the very undeconstructivist claim that "Rousseau's text has no blind spots"—I agree, with this qualification: there are no blind spots in a text until someone spots them.

Z (1980, 11), or that a text by Lacan seems to have anticipated Derrida's criticism of it.¹ In turn, the critics re-enact the false steps which they criticise in the authors they study. And when the self-deconstruction of a text forms a neat pattern, it is rewarded with the privilege of having been deliberate: "Whatever Derrida actually thinks he is doing here, his contradictory way of explaining it obeys the paradoxes of parergonal logic so perfectly that this self-subversion may have even been deliberate" (1980, 131). Johnson's concept of authorial intention is a misty one. Can the self-subversion be deliberate "whatever Derrida actually thinks"? I am afraid that the deconstructive critics, by paying an exclusive attention to the spaces between the lines, sometimes leave the more basic concepts unexamined. The text by Poe that Lacan, Derrida and Johnson are writing about opens with a Stoic epigraph: "*Nihil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio*" — "nothing is more disagreeable to wisdom than too much cunning."

2.5.3. Reader-Response Criticism and the Interpretation of Authorial Intention: Stanley Fish

Stanley Fish's position on most critical issues has gone through substantial variations. His original project of an "affective stylistics" was extremely anti-intentionalist:

The formal units are always a function of the interpretative model one brings to bear; they are not "in" the text, and I would make

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¹ B. Johnson 1980, 116. The texts in question are Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" and Derrida's "The Purveyor of Truth."

the same argument for intentions. That is, intention is no more embodied "in" the text than are formal units; rather an intention, like a formal unit, is made when perceptual or interpretive closure is hazarded. (1976a, 477)

Printed paper has no intentions; so far so good. But Fish draws the wrong conclusions from this premise. Since the author's intention is a construction of the reader, he concludes that it is a fiction. Therefore, all kinds of formal features (since they, too, are "fictional") can be freely attributed to the author's intention. To describe a reader's experience "is to describe his realization (in two senses) of an author's intention" (1976a, 475). This leads to the absurd conclusion of not making a difference between authorial attitude and the authorial attitude inferred by a reader. Fish disarmed his theory and declared that all inferences were equally valid and legitimate. The reader and the writer of the text become undistinguishable, and the reader's activity constitutes the text.¹ According to Fish, the formal features of the text do not have an objective reality: they are derived from the activity of the critic.² Our definition of "objective" does not however invoke a jump into the noumenal. The formal features do have an objective existence. They are not derived from the activity of the critic,³ but they are not brute facts either. Objectivity is the result of interpretation, not a device to foreclose it.

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¹ These views are echoed by many other critics, such as Horton (1979, viii) or Tompkins (1980, x).

² Fish 1976a, 476; cf. also Horton 1979, 22.

³ Sparshott 1976, 104; Fowler 1976, 254.

In a more general way, the whole of Fish's enterprise has been directed at obscuring the difference between the metalinguistic and other uses of language. What a sentence means for Fish is, quite simply, what a sentence does to the reader, the play of expectations and frustrations during the reading process (1980b, 72). *Langue*, locutions and illocutions disappear as concepts in his theory, and leave their place to a mass of undifferentiated *parole* and perlocutions. In the wake of Derrida, Fish has denied the legitimacy of basic concepts such as "direct speech act" (Fish 1976b) or "literal meaning" (Fish 1978). Consequently, he cannot analyze the semiotic structure of the work: he has no tools left.

This kind of enterprise has been sufficiently criticized.¹ The extent of its intended bearing on hermeneutics is not even clear. According to Fish, "One wonders what implications [this theory] has for the practice of literary criticism. The answer is, none whatsoever" (1980, 370). This theory is most useful in bringing out some aspects of the "naive" first reading of a casual reader. Not that it will explain the whole of the reader's activity, since that would require the use of the metalinguistic constructs that Fish has rejected, and which are a part of any reader's experience. As a theory of interpretation and criticism, it is obviously null. And since it does not lay claim to validity (Fish 1976c, 195), we may as well leave the matter there. In any case, Fish has reneged many of his earlier claims, and in his recent work (1987) he has introduced a timid (and idealistic) version of holism.

Reader-response critics are prone to indulging in naive anti-theoretical assumptions similar to Fish's. Horton, unlike Fish, attempts

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¹ Cf. for instance Regis 1976, Bagwell 1983, Scholes 1984, Reeves 1986.

to draw a clear line between reading and interpretation, but believes nevertheless that the process of reading as such is immediately relevant as an interpretive alternative (1979, 27). And, like Fish, she disregards the difference between the experiences of expectation or textual surprises which are ultimately rejected by the reader as accidents of the empirical reading process and those who contribute to the final interpretation of the text and are interpreted as constituent parts of an idealized reading process. Horton opposes the "fun" of the reading process to the boring structures unearthed by structuralist criticism, without seeming to realize that these are not different *interpretations* of a text, but simply different kinds of focus on one phase or another of the interpretive process. She has to use the concept of structure herself when she describes how a "spatial" pattern is built by the reader on the sequential activity of reading; moreover, she ignores the fact that the work's sequentiality (which she opposes to this structuration) is itself the result of several layers of structuration.

The major claim of reader-response critics is to have dissolved the work into a variety of readings, to have made meaning dependent on the reader as well as the author: "A literary work means one thing or another depending upon the ways in which we weave each particular detail into a coherent fabric of interpretation, and that, in turn, depends upon which other details of the text we choose to bring to the fore with it" (Horton 1979, 56). "Meaning is no longer a property of the text but a product of the reader's activity" (Tompkins 1980, xvii). This claim involves a deceptive sleight-of-hand: there are many different kinds of meaning in a text (f. i., graphic, locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary) and all are declared to be the product of the reader's activity. The difference in their degrees of sharability is ignored. "The

position Fish argues in [‘Literature in the Reader’],” Tompkins claims, “does not deny that words have meanings, nor does it assert that the reader’s response is untrammelled and free from textual constraints. The kinds of experience that literature affords are regulated by the linguistic and literary competence of the individual reader” (1980, xvii). Fish is more subtle than that, I agree. He avoids those blatantly nonsensical claims but leads us to draw the conclusion ourselves by obscuring a fundamental difference in the way a reader creates meaning, the difference between partially codified and wholly codified meaning. All semiotic maneuvers performed by the reader are then contemplated as equally creative and collaborative. It is not surprising that ignoring this difference leads Tompkins from asserting the total hegemony of the reader to the equally shocking claim of asserting the total hegemony of the author: “The reader reacts to the words on the page in one way rather than another because he operates according to the same set of rules that the author used to generate them. The reader’s experience, then, is the creation of the author; he enacts the author’s will” (1980, xvii). This inflated conception of the authorial intention, which would seem to be so inimical to the principles of reader-response criticism, is often found in Fish’s own early phase (1967; 1980). At times it is solved by going to the other extreme: the reader enacts the author’s will, but then the author is only a construct of the reader’s—and we have come back full circle to the noumenal conception of the text.

The theoretical thrust of Horton’s enterprise is paralyzed when she evades an answer to the question whether wrong interpretations are possible: “it makes more sense to acknowledge and maybe even to celebrate the meaning-making capability of readers than it does to try to

deny its existence or hope to defeat it by reaching toward single, univocal interpretations of our text" (1979, 125). The attempt to find an univocal meaning in texts is (and here Horton follows Fish) an instance of naive "positivism."

We may observe at this point a shift from the metacritical enterprise of reader-response criticism to an evaluative standpoint, and this under the pretense of preserving an enlightened perspective over the petty univocal interpretations of critics. The celebration of multiple meanings will only do in some interpretive contexts. Many academic activities do not admit this as a working principle. And a true metacritical theory should explain why disagreements do occur and why are they are thought to be important. This is submitting the activity of a psychoanalytic critic or a Marxist critic to a set of principles which are inimical to it, while pretending to accept it in its own terms. The kind of reader-response criticism favoured by Fish or Horton is not a privileged, comprehensive perspective which embraces all other possible critical approaches, but a very definite critical activity on a level with them, with its own assumptions about the nature of a text.

2.6. Conclusion

The theory of interpretation outlined above preserves a regulative distinction between the historical authorial meaning and other meanings of the text. As a result :

—It is more explanatory than those which do not recognise this kind of distinction, because it accounts for more decisions actually made by

critics. As we shall see, practical critics need to draw a line between the author's view of the text and their own.

—It is more inclusive and flexible: the hypotheses which do not recognise this distinction or the purely regulative role of objective authorial meaning cannot translate this theory into their own terms, while this hypothesis includes them and sets them in a wider context.

—It allows the integration (or increases the mutual translatability of) several disparate fields of theory, such as structuralist narratology, speech act theory, reader-response and reception theories, hermeneutics, Marxist literary theory and deconstruction.

It will be observed that, according to the notion of objectivity defined above, the truth value of the previous assertions is strategical and situational—that is, these advantages are true in 1989, in a specific context which I hope is not excessively narrow.

3. Narratology in a Nutshell

The description of the structure of a narrative work requires several levels of analysis. These levels are theoretical constructs, conceptual tools which allow a theorist to make sense of a text, of the reader's response to a text or of other theorists' constructs. The ideal description does not exist *in vacuo* : only in relationship to a particular theoretical project. In a study of this kind, in which actual responses to a text are examined as a way to test some concepts of hermeneutic theory, it will be convenient to steer a middle course between the concepts most commonly used in nontheoretical textual description and a semiological description of a text which would comprehend both narratology and hermeneutics.

I will posit three main levels for the description of narrative literary work: *action*, *narrative*, and *discourse*. These levels have an Aristotelian ancestry (*praxis*, *mythos* and *diégesis*, in Poetics 1450a, 1459b), and have been developed in various ways in contemporary theories of narrative. The model I propose is closest to those described by Cesare Segre (1976, 14) and Mieke Bal (1977).

1. "Action" is the equivalent of Aristotle's *praxis*, of Genette and Bal's *histoire* or of the Russian Formalists' *fabula*.¹ An action is the complex of *characters*, *settings*, and *events* (*acts* or *happenings*) which can be constructed from a *narrative text*, in a reconstructed

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¹ Aristotle 1450a; Genette 1972, 72; Bal 1977, 4; Tomashevski 1982, 182-188.

chronological order and in all its massive array of unselected detail. An action is not merely linear in its development, rather, it is four-dimensional: it can be conceived of (but in so doing we are already making use of abstraction) as a multiplicity of simultaneous *action lines*. When we speak of an action we have to reduce it to more manageable proportions. We substitute an *action scheme* for the action. The action scheme is a sign of the action, and its constitutive parts are selected from the action in view of the specific aims of the critic. Although our conception of actions, action lines and action schemes is mediated and influenced by language, they are not linguistic entities. Action schemes can, however, be represented linguistically in a text which will be a *paraphrase of the action* (cf. Segre 1985, 177). The term "plot" usually refers in an unspecified way to a scheme of the action or the narrative.

The construction of action lines or action schemes, as well as the very conception and identity of the action, presupposes certain principles of order. Actions may be massive and non-linguistic, but they are not brute facts. They are semiotic entities; only, they are codified at that semiotic level at which we make sense of the world. Many of their aspects are not conceptual if we understand a concept to be a conscious entity. Actions belong with the intuitive schemata which organize conceptual content according to phenomenologists.¹ The schemata of the actions in narrative texts are to a great extent the same we use in making sense of real life and actions. The ability to organize events into an action-story in the real world is a particular instance of

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¹ In this they resemble Goffman's (1974) and Minski's (1975) "frames," or Van Dijk's "pragmatic macrostructures" (1980). The structured whole of which these are a part can be related to Searle's "Network" (1983) or, in a more specific context, to Culler's "literary competence" (1975).

the more general ability to organize our concepts by means of frames of reference, according to a variety of formal, semantic or pragmatic criteria. This ability is also at the root of our ability to produce a scheme of the action. In understanding an action we draw upon our situational and generic knowledge of diverse action schemes, which function then as *projective macrostructures* of the text which is being processed: the text is understood within a set of generic expectations, a kind of context in advance based on our cultural competence.¹ Propp's account of the morphology of the Russian folk tale can be read as an analysis of one such frame of reference for the action of a particular genre. If the expectations concerning the projective macrostructures are fulfilled, the macrostructure is not corrected, and it becomes one of the organizing macrostructures of the text—but of course the reader may have recourse to the wrong frame, or the author may mislead him/her into doing so for the sake of reversing his/her expectations. Schemata function at all levels of the textual structure: just as there are action macrostructures and frames of reference, there are macrostructures and frames at the levels of the narrative and discourse.

The study of the action may be theoretical, abstract and formalized. This kind of approach to the action can be found in Propp (1968), Todorov (1969), Bremond (1968) or Prince (1982). But it can also be intuitive, practical and concrete: this is the case, for instance, when we discuss the characters' moral attitudes or the twists of the plot.

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¹ Cf. Van Dijk 1980; versions of the notion of projective macrostructure in literary theory are found in Ingarden (1973, 103) or Hirsch's notion of the "intrinsic genre" (1967, 78-100).

2. "Narrative" is the approximate equivalent of Aristotle's *mythos* (1450a), of Bal's *récit* (1977, 31ff.) and of Emil Volek's version of the Russian Formalists' *siuzhet* (1985, 150ff.). It is the action as it is presented through the narrative discourse. In order to make this presentation possible, the action is submitted to the processes of *selection* and *combination*. Action is four-dimensional and massive: a narrative is two-dimensional and linear. The difference between action and narrative can be conceived of as a reduction effected through the following devices:

—*Anachronies*, or chronological alterations (Genette 1972), which can but need not be motivated by other structural levels (narrative voice, point of view, action).

—*Perspective*, the introduction of a specific point of view, which amounts to a filtering of the action through a focus or *focalizer* (Bal 1977, 31ff.). The focalizer is in principle a conceptual entity, a role which in practice is assumed by a character or by the narrator. The character becomes what Henry James called a "reflector" (1986, 354); the narrator becomes what Bal calls a narrator-focalizer. Inasmuch as the reader is the receiver of the narrative, he shares the focalizer's perspective and performs the role of a *spectator*.

A narrative, like a narrated action, is an abstract entity, a theoretical construct. The same action and the same narrative can be embodied in different semiotic representations (e.g., a film, a novel). Therefore, a narrative is not any more linguistic than an action. It too has a schematic nature. However, narrative can also be signified by means of a reduced model, a *narrative scheme*, and this can be formulated linguistically in a linguistic text, a *paraphrase of the narrative*. Narrative schemes have

the same relationship to conceptual schemata we have pointed out above with reference to action schemes.

3. "Discourse" is the use of language for communicative purposes in specific contextual and generic situations, called *discourse situations*. These can be described at different levels of specificity: "reading written discourse" may be called a discourse situation, but so can "reading written *fictional* discourse." Further specification would be possible taking into account historical or generic considerations. Of the infinite discourse situations which could be defined in this way, we shall focus on a few: the writing of narrative discourse which is intended to be read as literature, the "naive" reading of the same, and the critical (mainly academic) discourse on literature.

Discourse involves the use of language (speech), the linguistic utterance of a sender. In the case of literary narrative, the sender is the *author* ; when we interpret a critical text, the sender is the *critic*). The sender's utterance requires the interpretation of a receiver (a *reader* or another critic). The product of a linguistic utterance is a text, not a sum of isolated sentences. The text cannot be reduced to its linguistic codification. There are many cultural codes, apart from the Saussurean *langue*, structuring the text. The author uses a multiplicity of codes in giving shape to the text (with various degrees of deliberateness or consciousness). Many of these must be recognized and used by the receiver in interpreting the text, if his interpretation is to be sharable and acceptable to other receivers. Again, this retrieval of the author's meaning can happen at various degrees of awareness. Presumably, there are many codes organizing the meaning of texts which have not yet been identified by theorists, although readers can be conceived to

use them intuitively. Not all the codes used by the author need to be identified or retrieved, not even in this intuitive way. A reasonable portion of the meaning of the text is usually sufficient for the purposes of most readers and critics. The reader or critic may, moreover, interpret the text according to codes which were not used by the author, and create in this way new meanings. The legitimacy of these meanings is defined in a specific discourse situation—it cannot be determined *a priori*.

The identity of the literary text is not established by defining it in terms of all the codes which constitute it. The text is defined linguistically, even if its interpretation is not merely linguistic. “The Monster” is in principle the sum of such and such words, printed in such and such order. The text as a linguistic construct is eminently sharable: this sharability is presupposed to a great extent even by critics who disagree as to the meaning or the significance of the text.

The literary text is conventionally designed as an autonomous entity. To interpret it we do not require a knowledge of the precise *context* in which it was written, because its generic conventions (the rules of the discourse situation or language game of which the text is an instance) demand that it be interpreted in its immanent context. The work defines its own context. Of course, this is only a way of speaking: *we* define the context of the work, but we do it to a great extent by relying on our knowledge of discursive conventions and the cultural assumptions we share with the author. “Immanent” cannot mean anything other than “extrinsic according to certain rules”; the point is that not just any kind of extrinsic assumption will count as playing the game that the text proposes.

The intrinsic context of the work is a communicative context. It can be conceived as a virtual communicative situation, in which a *textual author* communicates with a textual reader. The concepts of "textual author" and "textual reader" derive from Russian and German formalism,¹ and more directly from Walker Gibson's "mock reader" (1950) and Wayne Booth's "implied author" and "mock reader" (1961, 75, 138). Gibson and Booth do not make sufficiently clear the difference between the textual author / reader and the narrator / narratee. Genette (1972, 265) develops the latter pair but ignores the former. I prefer the term "textual" because in many cases the authorial voice is also in most respects the explicit narrative voice, and cannot be said to be "implied." I shall use either term whenever it is convenient.

The difference between the author and the textual author has the advantage, as far as this study's aims are concerned, of being shared both by intentionalist and anti-intentionalist critics. Hirsch notes that the speaking subject in a literary work is not author; like Booth, Hirsch defines the textual author as a small part of the author (1967, 242). Wimsatt, too, observes that relationship between the author and his persona is a complex one, and not a simple matter of identity or difference (Wimsatt 1976, 122).

Both the textual author and the textual reader are constructed by actual readers, who rely on their schemata of literary genres and discursive activities in general. From the perspective of the author, we get the mirror-image of the interpretive act. The author projects a virtual image of his/her attitudes (the textual author) and defines likewise a virtual receiver, the textual reader, in view of the actual

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¹ See, f.i., Eichenbaum 1965, 228; Kayser 1977, 72.

audience s/he presumes for the work. The textual reader need not coincide with the author's conception of the audience: this reader's image may be a rhetorical strategy, a role which the author wishes the audience to assume (or even to reject). Needless to say, the reader's textual author and the author's textual author need not coincide any more than the meaning of the work for author and reader. But if communication is to occur this figure must be shared to some extent.

The levels of analysis we have defined can be conceived as a series of semiotic strata, in which each level is the result of the application of a set of transformational rules to the previous level. The sharability of natural language may allow us to consider the text as a given, and to construct therefrom the other sub-levels of discourse analysis, as well as the narrative. In its turn, the action is constructed on the basis of the narrative, by "undoing" the transformations which gave rise to the latter.

This notion of a level "giving rise" to the next is a purely heuristic construct, which does not need any real counterpart in the actual composition of the narrative—an indication of the degree in which fictional narrative is a second-degree discourse activity, whose understanding presupposes the understanding of more primitive, or literal discourse situations from which it derives. In the early classifications of speech acts there is no place for fictional narrative. This is not surprising, since these classifications were not really concerned with actual speech acts, but with idealized or normative speech act types. That is why Austin or Searle could afford to posit a sentence-grammar as the basis of their studies of speech activity. The study of the real use of speech acts, however, will necessitate a textual

grammar, and will yield somewhat less clear-cut results. Writing a novel is surely some kind of speech act, but its specificity has to be captured by a theory of discourse which takes into account the real circumstances and contexts in which novels are written. Writing a novel, or writing fiction, is not a "statement," though it is a derived act of a kind which has statements as its remote ancestor in a structuralist/genetic conception of speech activity. For practical purposes of analysis, writing a novel is that kind of speech act called "writing a novel": linguistics at this point shades off into the literary theory of genres. Between the linguistic speech act called "statement" and the literary speech act "novel-writing" there could be distinguished several conceptual steps: two of them are the *fictional statement* as a derived or imaginative statement and the *narrative act* as an extended or articulated statement.

The complexity of this structure can be exploited for the aims of literature. A variety of displacements are possible. The subject required by the narrative act, the narrator, need not coincide with the subject of the fictional statement, the textual author. The narrator may be an entirely fictional figure, as in most first-person novels, or he may coincide formally though not ideologically with the textual author—an unreliable third-person narrator. Infinite combinations are possible, and the differences between the different textual subjects may be clear-cut or extremely shady. This is to be expected, since the textual author, like the narrator, is not a substance but a discursive role. Through the use of irony, a textual author creates a provisional, evanescent enunciator which does not coincide with him. More sustained irony will produce something like a hypothetical character, and by pushing this a bit further we shall create a fictional narrator, who can then speak in

the first or in the third person.¹ The narrator's utterance is addressed at a hearer located on the same structural level: the narratee.² Just like the kinds of fictional narrators merge gradually into the pole of the textual author, the various kinds of narratees shade off into the area of the textual reader. This means that in some tales the differences between the narratee and the implied reader are crucial and clear-cut, while in others (and "The Monster" falls in the main within this category) the difference is merely a methodological one.

We can represent the structure of fictional narrative diagrammatically (figure 1, p. 116). The non-coincidence of the author's and the reader's context should remind us that this diagram does not represent the process of interpretation on the part of the reader, but rather a bird's eye view of the structure of narrative communication. The reader has access only to the bottom part of the external squares in Figure 1—those that fall within his/her own context. In the upper half of the diagram, the greatest sharability occurs not in the "surface" or the most external box (which would be that part of the author's context which is irrelevant to the reader) but at the level of the text as a linguistic construct. Construction, therefore, takes place in two different directions. The text, at its utmost givenness, occupies somewhat of a middle place in the overall structure of narrative communication. From this surface level we must construct

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¹ The utterance of the narrator is not the narrative which we have defined above as a non-linguistic entity, but the narration or *narrativetext*. Non-technical language is fundamentally ambiguous here, so that it requires a theoretical effort to distinguish narrative (noun) from narrative (adjective) text—that is, a text which, among other characteristics, conveys a narrative.

² For early definitions of the narratee, see Genette 1972, 265; 1983, 90; Prince, 1973; 1982, 18ff.

two kinds of deep structures: the discursive deep structures (the fictional speech situation, the textual senders and receivers) and the narrative deep structures (the narrative and the action).

Figure 1

An interpreter will usually end by constructing some kind of literary statement, the meaning or significance of the story. Figure 2 represents in a schematical way this process of construction.

Figure 2

The vertical and slanting double arrows in Figure 2 indicate that the process of interpretation is not linear, it does not go neatly from one level of the textual structure to the next. Instead, there is a constant feedback between the interpretation of the action, of the narrative structure and of the textual subjects. That is why, in the interpretations of "The Monster," differences in construction of the implied authorial attitude often result in different constructions of the action. I have not used double arrows in the first step of the process to emphasize that the first substantial contact of the text is a linguistic one, although it should be clear that the verbal meaning of the text itself may be subject to revision once the construction of the deeper levels is under way. Nothing in the work is fully given from the start: everything is subject to revision and interpretation.

4. The Action of "The Monster"

There is a wide area of critical agreement as far as the interpretation of "The Monster" is concerned, at all the levels of analysis. For instance, the reaction of Whilomville folk to Henry's "resurrection" is given by all critics who mention it a similar interpretation, best voiced by Morace: the townspeople had constructed a fictional image of Henry to suit their taste, and they find real life "too unpredictable, too morally demanding, too monstrous. Having written their own version of Henry Johnson upon the blank page of his face, they now require him to play the part they have assigned to him: a memory" (1981, 71). This is an interpretation of an unstated authorial intention, a deep level of the textual meaning, and given the complex nature of the inferences involved, there is a remarkable consensus on this point.

Nevertheless, we may find some fundamental disagreements even at more superficial levels, such as the construction of the story. The proportion of critical agreement can be measured to some extent by taking a standard summary of "The Monster" and comparing it to the interpretive assumptions of other critics:

Henry Johnson, the black servant in "The Monster," is physically deformed and made imbecillic as a result of his heroic rescue of Jimmie Trescott from fire. But it is the townspeople who become the real monsters through their unreasoning fear of the disfigured but harmless Johnson and their ostracism of the town doctor, Jimmie's father, who has helped him. (Weatherford 1973, 21)

Some facts are present in all concretizations of the work, and are assumed to be indisputable. At least, they have not been disputed, and indeed any discussion of a fictional work must accept some portion of the story as given, as information which it would be nonsense to contest. For instance, nobody to my knowledge has disputed the fact that Henry becomes disfigured. The undisputed core of the story would read like this:

Henry Johnson, the black servant in "The Monster," is physically deformed as a result of his heroic rescue of Jimmie Trescott from fire. The townspeople ostracise Johnson and the town doctor, Jimmie's father, who has helped him.

Of course, such an outline leaves unresolved all the moral issues: it does not specify the authorial attitude to the story. Indeed all interpretations of the level of the textual author seem to involve a moral choice; this seems to be also true of some apparently "bare facts" at story level.

Maybe at this point the I should make explicit my own reading of the story, since my own interpretation will inevitably colour my attitude to those of other critics. Let me say, nevertheless, that I am interested above all not in defending my own reading, but in watching different reading strategies at play. This theoretical stance does not preclude a preference for a definite reading: Henry Johnson saves Jimmie Trescott from the fire and is physically deformed, his mind is affected to the extent that he loses touch with reality and other people's attitudes to him; Trescott has a sense of moral responsibility towards him and does the right thing in standing by him, but this choice leads to useless suffering. The author intends us to see a proof of the lack of a moral pattern in the universe; Trescott realizes this lack in the final scene, which is a stalemate with unforeseeable consequences. The story

reflects Crane's deep conviction that human action may be moral but in the last analysis it is not significant.

I will draw a working distinction between unacceptable readings and misreadings. One critic's reading may be unacceptable to another critic because of their different assumptions about the nature of interpretation, criticism, or literature. But a misreading is not perceived as the result of such a divergence, but rather as the result of carelessness. We assume that if we pointed his mistake to the critic he would recognize it. The reviewer of The Spectator, for instance, misreads "The Monster." In his summary of the story, Henry Johnson "saved the life of his master's little boy from a fire caused by his own carelessness" (1901, 244). The reviewer has been misled by one of the townspeople's unreliable comments (TM 38), and has failed to match it to the text's description of Henry Johnson running to the house on fire after his visit to the Farraguts. When I interpret this reading, that is, I do not assume that the reader's concretization accommodates these textual data and supplements them with additional facts which are deducted from them or assumed to be hidden in the text in some way. I do not believe that this reader thought that Henry Johnson caused the fire in Trescott's house after his evening walk, then went out for a second walk and ran back. The simpler explanation is that one reader's attention has skipped some facts whose level of sharability is otherwise undisputed. However, if several readers make the same deviant reading, the explanation through an accidental misreading ceases to be the simplest one. This is the case with a few significant issues in the story of "The Monster," such as Henry Johnson's madness or Trescott's attitude at the end of the narrative.

Most critics agree that Henry Johnson has become an idiot or a madman.¹ We can assume, moreover, that most of the readers who do not comment on this fact take for granted that we do not have to read between the lines. The average or “uncontroversial” reading of the story does not cast doubt into this issue.

However, some critics hold that Henry’s idiocy is a figment of the townspeople’s imagination. According to this reading, Henry is sane and harmless, but people believe him to be crazy and dangerous. Indeed, the reliable narrative voice of the story never passes judgement on Henry’s sanity; only witnesses whose reliability is dubious do so. Judge Hagenthorpe does so for the first time before Henry is recovered: “As near as I can understand, he will hereafter be a monster, a perfect monster, and probably with an affected brain” (TM 45). The next minute, as the judge grows incensed, this has become: “he will be a monster, and with no mind” (TM 45). Alek Williams, who is trying to emphasize the burden Henry represents to his family, says that “he’s crazier ’n er loon” (TM 56).

The idea that Henry is sane has interesting implications, especially as it would suggest that critics themselves may be the victims of the text’s strategies. Such is Hafley’s account (1959, 160); we have already met Walcutt’s opinion that Henry is sane and that Trescott knows it (1956, 83). Modlin and Byers (1973) need to ignore the fact that Henry has

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¹ Cf. Hawthorne 1900, 260; rev. in *Critic* 1900, 182; rev. in *Spectator* 1901, 244; rev. in *Daily News* 1901, 6; Beer 1923, 163; Van Doren 1924 (qtd. in M. Solomon 1956b, 38); Ahnebrink 1950, 378; Berryman 1951, 191; Geismar 1953, 116; M. Solomon 1956b, 41; Hoffman 1957, 173; Ellison 1960 (in Ellison 1964, 75); Gullason 1960, 663; Kahn 1963, 37; E. Solomon 1966, 181; D. Gibson 1960, 230; 1968, 137; Stallman 1968, 332; Ives 1969, 25; Levenson 1969, xx; Cazemajou 1969b, 423; Westbrook 1972, 89; Monteiro 1972, 103; Mayer 1973, 34; M. Holton 1972, 207; Linder, 1974, 156; Gross 1975, 102, Colvert 1984, 124.

become an idiot in order to turn him into a Christ-figure. Henry's own appearances have not been found to be conclusive proof of his lunacy by some critics. Cooley, too, ignores the issue of Henry's idiocy: he wants to see in him a hero unjustly neglected by his author. He nevertheless recognizes that in his last appearance, Henry seems to be submitting and relapsing into primitivism (1975, 13). Foster notes that Henry's speech and actions after his accident seem surprisingly rational, and that he just seems to be suffering from amnesia. He becomes mad only afterwards, by subsequent degradation and isolation (1976, 88). Petry (1983) makes a similar point, too. She considers that there is no evidence that Henry Johnson is mad, and argues that Trescott does not reveal his estimate of Henry's mind.¹ Morace (1981, 72) considers that Henry's brain has been affected, but that he has become something like a child, and not a maniac, as Judge Hagenthorpe implies. An anonymous reader of the Tales of Whilomville copy I have used writes a question mark on the margin of Levenson's introduction at the point where it affirms that Henry's mind has been destroyed. For most critics, as I have said, this is not an issue at all. Some of them do stoop to consider the possibility that Henry Johnson may be sane in the light of the scenes where he appears. But Kahn finds him idiotically insistent in the "Miss Fa'gut" scene of chapter XVII (1963, 40), and for E. Solomon Henry's amnesia and his madness go together: "Henry cannot master the situation, for his mind's clock is permanently stopped at the hour before the fire, and he considers himself only as he was, a handsome figure and an experienced hostler" (1966, 193). Trescott never denies that Henry's mind is

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¹ Petry seems to be driven by the main point of her paper, the analogy between Henry Johnson and his alleged model John Merrick, who was perfectly sane in spite of his deformity.

affected; many readers would presumably claim that if we were supposed to think that Henry is sane, we ought to have been given clearer signs.

Interestingly enough, no critic wishes to challenge the idea that Henry Johnson is harmless; most critics ignore or play down the fact that people do not seem to be able to control their reactions when they see him and that a girl, Sadie Winter, is almost scared to death (TM 70). According to Foster, she may have seen nothing at all; it is just that people want to believe she has seen Henry (1976, 90).¹ The interpretations of the story progress only in one direction: new interpretations suppose a more radical critique on Crane's part and a greater ironical complexity, a greater complexity of the relationships between the action and the narrative discourse. This circumstance seems to indicate that the value or the present-day relevance of a work are increased as its complexity increases. We shall see further instances of this move at other levels of the textual structure. For the moment, I will only note that the tendency to move towards the more complex interpretation is often a critical prejudice which leads to a neglect of the historical perspective on the work.

The average reading of the story is challenged only in the sense of an increased complicity with the assumed authorial intention. The ironical view on the beliefs of the Whilomville denizens favoured by the textual author provides some interpretations with an inertia which makes them defy the unmarked reading of the story at those points where this reading converges with and is supported by equivalent maneuvers which

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¹ Most critics would not deny that Henry does frighten the little girl. E.g. Gullason 1960, 666.

are requisite in constructing other moments of the story. Irony seems to call for more irony, and the text as read by Cooley or Foster is certainly more complex than the average reading would grant. Clearly enough, it is also more attractive to them. However, I can imagine most readers recognizing the superior irony of this reading and still not being able to enjoy or accept it because in their opinion it would not describe the story Crane wrote. Cooley's reading forsakes the pathetic advantage of having the hero of the story destroyed, as well as the powerful effect of Henry's idiocy as an intertextual deautomatization of the hero-figure. Part of the force of "The Monster" derives, no doubt, from the fact that we are unable to identify with Henry after his accident.

Agreement on the interpretation of the evaluative stance of the textual author and reader presupposes a more fundamental agreement at the action level. Cooley points out the "irony" that it is Trescott's laboratory which destroys Henry, as "Trescott is the only character in 'The Monster' who might have wisdom, humanity and strength of character sufficient to maintain integrity and achieve understanding from the tragic experience" (1975, 12). Cooley takes this irony as proof that Crane wants to test Trescott's moral strength. But there remains a problem. Must we suppose that Trescott knows about his responsibility in the laboratory accident? Even if he does know, is it (acknowledged to be) a responsibility at all?¹ Monteiro (1972, 103) suggests that Trescott's attitude to Henry is partly due to his own responsibility in the latter's accident. Morace (1981, 77), on the contrary, assumes that Trescott does not know about his own share of

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¹ In Linder (1974, 145) there is a suggestion that Trescott's laboratory alludes to his being guilty of hybris; he is then symbolically banished from Eden.

responsibility, and that his disinterestedness makes him appear the more admirable. It is not difficult to piece out an explanation if we feel the need for one: Trescott, being a medical man, surely knows the difference between the burns of acid and fire. It all depends on the kind of reading we want to deal with. The question of Trescott feeling guilty because of his own doings does not seem to arise for most readers.¹ Conclusions on such issues should be regarded as more peripheral than the basic core of interpretation of the story, which in turn may include both agreements and disagreements. The core issues are those which are taken into consideration, explicitly or implicitly, by a significant number of readers. Henry's madness is such an issue. The ending of the story is another.

The end of the story represents, according to Vasil'evskaia, a final moral defeat of the doctor and an indication that he is about to give in under the social pressure and betray his principles (1967, 220). Levenson (1969, xxi) also seems to favour this reading. E. Solomon (1966, 199) and D. Gibson (1968, 139) recognize a mood of irresolution at the end, but that is all; ² M. Holton explicitly rejects the possibility of a return to the community after the confrontation (1972, 212), and LaFrance (1971, 210), Stephenson (1972) and Mayer (1973, 37) see Trescott always firm in upholding his values against the pressure of the town. For Morace, the irony is blunted by pathos at the end: Trescott is defeated and tries to tally his losses (1981, 78); there is

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¹ According to Westbrook, there is no hint in the story that Trescott is responsible in any way for Henry's accident (1972, 94).

² In an earlier version of his study, Gibson had affirmed that "there is no suggestion at the end of the story that Dr. Trescott changes his course of action" (1962, 231).

however no suggestion in Morace's reading that Trescott is going to betray Henry. Wolford (1983, 90) sees at the end an anagnorisis, a recognition on Trescott's part that he has lost in trying to reconcile his private ethics and social demands, and that he must choose between Henry and his community. Foster has difficulties in making the end of the story fit his interpretation of the authorial attitude in "The Monster" as a condemnation of Trescott's actions. He reads the last chapter as signifying that Trescott weighs Henry Johnson against his wife and abandons him: "The novel ends in such an oozingly sentimental note that Crane can only have meant it to be ironic" (1976, 90).

Vasil'evskaia's and Foster's are therefore the most deviant interpretations of the end of the story. It is significant that both are prompted by a desire to foreground the racial implications of the story. In the case of Vasil'evskaia, this reading is of a piece with her emphasis on seeing Henry as the hero of the story and American white bourgeoisie as the villain. Trescott's heroism poses a problem for such an interpretation. Vasil'evskaia supports her reading assuming that we are to interpret the situation of the Trescotts in Crane's later story "The Carriage Lamps" as an indication that the doctor "signed a pact" with his conscience and got rid of Henry. In that tale, we learn that Dr. Trescott ultimately stayed in Whilomville and his medical practice was no longer boycotted. According to Vasil'evskaia, we can interpret the silence on Henry Johnson as an artistic way of portraying the tragic end of Henry's story (Vasil'evskaia 1967, 220-221). This raises the issue of whether it is legitimate to use the Whilomville Stories as an outright continuation of "The Monster."

It should be noted that in "The Monster" Peter Washington is a friend of Henry Johnson's (TM 11, 23), and that in "The Knife," where

Alek Williams and Peter Washington reappear as a main characters, there is a passing mention to "the late gallant Henry Johnson" and his conquests in Watermelon Alley. That is, Crane does seem to be stressing the fact that the Whilomville Stories and "The Monster" refer to the same fictional world, while refusing to deal explicitly with Henry's ultimate fate. Some other critics have addressed this question. Their interpretations, however, differ from Vasil'evskaia's. E. Solomon does not seem to draw the same conclusion from the Trescotts' having another hostler in the Whilomville Stories; he interprets the presence of Peter Washington simply as a different "version of the Trescott's domestic economy" (1967: 169). Westbrook would agree with Vasil'evskaia as far as the temporal relations between the stories involving the Trescotts are concerned; he does not deal, however, with the problem of what happened to Henry. Westbrook sets the action of the Whilomville Stories later than the one in "The Monster." Alek Williams' children were small in "The Monster," but in "The Knife" he has a daughter of seventeen. Moreover, Henry Johnson is referred to as "the late" Henry Johnson (Westbrook 1972, 100). Linder does not address this problem, although he insists that there is a continuity between "The Monster" and the other stories set in Whilomville:

The related works are compatible chronologically. In "The Monster," Jimmie is significantly younger, and the fictional time covered could be the spring through autumn of the year previous to the summertime setting of "The Angel Child," first of the Whilomville stories. Or an extra year or two may have elapsed. (1974, 140)

Linder observes that it is after the summer in "The Monster" that Jimmie first goes to school. He also notes that in the Whilomville

Stories Trescott has had some weaknesses added to him, to the extent that he becomes a different character in the Whilomville Stories (1974, 336). M. Holton, on the other hand, believes that "The Monster" is in some way explained by the other Whilomville stories, and "may be assumed to come later" (1972, 322 n. 35).

Not all these readings are equally convincing. M. Holton is the only critic who seems to think that "The Monster" is, chronologically speaking, a continuation of the Whilomville Stories, and he does not seem to have noticed the details to which Linder and the other critics draw attention. Their reading is more adequate in this respect. But it still has not proved what Vasil'evskaia wants to prove: that the Whilomville stories cast light on the action of "The Monster." The story is open-ended, and nothing in the later stories closes it. Even if we admit as evidence that all the stories of Whilomville are set in the same fictional world, still many options remain open to explain Henry Johnson's absence. He may have died accidentally, or as a delayed result of his injuries, etc. There is no clear inference to be drawn about Trescott's ultimate decision in "The Monster."

There is, therefore, no unproblematic relationship between the two works. Crane himself seems to have seen "The Monster" as being aesthetically related with the rest of the Whilomville stories: he speaks of the "series" constituted by "Lynx Hunting," "The Monster," "His New Mittens" and other stories (presumably those set in Whilomville). The same idea appears when he comments on the publishing rights of the stories: "Harper's, in one sense has the bookrights to this series but this right is mainly based upon an artistic reason—the fact that I do not think it correct to separate the stories (Harper's have the rights to the

Monster.)”¹ In Levenson’s opinion, “as the stories began to accumulate, Crane saw them as constituting a single group” (1969, xi). But still, the relation between them remains undefined. It would have been easy for Crane to write a clear sequel to “The Monster” if he had wished, but he did not do it. He left unresolved the fate of Henry Johnson, and this is precisely the link which would be needed to posit the Whilomville stories as a continuation of “The Monster.” The relations between the two works are close enough for some critics to invoke them in support of their interpretations, but not close enough to have authoritative value. Vasil’evskaia’s reading involves, therefore, a measure of circularity—the evidence offered by the Whilomville stories does not count as evidence for most critics.

Foster’s interpretation of the ending of “The Monster” is instructive, too, by virtue of its appeal to irony. Horton (1979) has observed that irony is frequently used as a trump card to smooth out undesirable objections to the interpretation being advanced. The whole enterprise of hermeneutics is seen as a circle by some theorists. Whether or not this is an adequate representation of interpretation at large, circularity certainly becomes especially noticeable in the case of deviant interpretations; the circle usually becomes much narrower. Foster needs a textual author who will condemn Trescott. The textual voice seems to suggest precisely the contrary. Therefore, it must be ironical: the major premise is that Crane could not have been “oozingly sentimental.” This premise, in its turn, is extracted from the story itself. Usually, the construction of the plot and that of the authorial attitude reinforce each other (that is the sense of the vertical arrows in

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¹ “To James B. Pinker,” 1 Feb. 1899. Letter 266 in Stallman and Gilkes 1960.

our diagram on page 99). Vasil'evskaia's and Foster's deviant interpretations of the authorial attitude sustain and are sustained by deviant interpretations of other elements in the story.

Also, it is not surprising that the deviant interpretations all concern those elements of the action which do not belong to the narrative—which are not pictured, or dramatized. In Ruthrof's phrasing, when two interpretations differ "it is not the schematically signified, but the concretized worlds which are in conflict" (1981, 38). We may assume that Henry's mind is in such or such a state, and we can adduce different kinds of textual evidence, but we cannot show a portion of the text which describes Henry's mind in an explicit and reliable way. Vasil'evskaia and Foster speculate about that portion of the action which falls beyond the end of the narrative; this discussion cannot be expected to yield clear-cut results either.

Is there any sense, then, in trying to interpret what actually happens in the action of "The Monster"? This question cannot be answered here without additional specifications. An interpreter who is trying to interpret the authorial attitude in the story will have to posit an interpretation of the action, because the authorial attitude must be an attitude towards something. However, different interpretations of the action may be compatible with a general description of the authorial attitude, provide that they agree on some basic points. It is to be expected that the critics who want to reach agreement on the implied authorial attitude will tend to agree on an action-scheme which is the basis for their interpretations. If a critic's aim is to reinforce an existing interpretation with additional data, he may further specify the assumed contents of the action in a way which illuminates both other events and the authorial attitude. This is the case, for instance, with the

speculations on Trescott's responsibility in the articles by Monteiro and Morace. Their concretizations often run against each other, but this does not prevent their agreement on the more basic issues of the story. The critic who examines previous interpretations with the aim of validating one of them must also make a choice—in this respect his/her position is not essentially different from that of the critic who is concerned solely with the story.

If a critic wishes to challenge an existing interpretation, the scope of the challenge will depend on the centrality of the issue on which s/he differs from other critics. Therefore, the question is really one about which issues are important. But this problem is not specific to the analysis of the action. Indeed, the deviant interpretations of the action can be most usefully discussed in their relation to the question of the implied authorial attitude. It is not surprising that the main divergences in the interpretation of the action are directly related to such controversial issues as the racial message of the story or Crane's judgement on the ultimate sense of personal ethics.

5. Narrative and Narrator

The narrative and the narrator of "The Monster" have not been not a favourite object of critical commentary. These textual levels are overshadowed by the study of symbolism and, above all, by the moral issues of the story. This chapter will therefore be only a transition before we deal with the textual author and the modes of his presence in to story, the issues at the core of most interpretations of "The Monster."

To several early critics, the narrative structure of the story appeared to be loose and careless. The fragmentation of point of view, the seemingly whimsical and episodic juxtaposition of scenes was felt by many early readers to be merely irritating, a naturalistic "camera eye" mannerism which did not contribute in any special way to the progress of the action. The reviewers complained that Crane "had very little idea of construction,"¹ that "at times the action drags,"² or that "[Crane] has weakened its force by realistic by-play, or, rather, by the attention to irrelevant detail that is so often mistaken for realism."³ Beer finds lots of irrelevant scenes in the book, and compares it in this respect with... Joyce's *Portrait!* (1923, 163-164). Even in the period when the story was read as social satire, the satiric import of many scenes was left unrecognized or unexploited by critics. Some more recent readings also

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¹ Rev. in *Morning Post* 1901, 6; cf. Hawthorne 1900, in Weatherford 1973, 261.

² Rev. in *Critic* 1900, in Weatherford 1973, 261; cf. also *Morning Post* 1901, 6.

³ Rev. in *Book Buyer* 1900, in Weatherford 1973, 262.

charge "The Monster" with deficient narrativity. Will C. Jumper complains that "there is little sense of progress" in the second half¹; Stallman, too, believes that the story "is artistically flawed because the ending drags on and on" (1968, 334).

The close readings of the text from Berryman to Morace show the thematic links which connect even such an apparently irrelevant scene as the contest between fire companies (chapter IX) to the social satire central to the book (E. Solomon 1966, 190-191). The story has been systematically submitted to the critical "colonization" we mentioned earlier, to the extent that a recent critic may praise the story as an organic structure: "the episodes are ... neatly woven together to form a cohesive whole" (B.L. Knapp 1987, 175). Aristotle himself would be able to enjoy a reading of "The Monster" in 1989. The colonization has been effected above all by means of symbolic interpretations of the motifs, but there has also been some comment on the narrative structure. In what direction has this reworking taken place?

In one of the first articles devoted to the story, Gullason seeks to prove that "The Monster" is a structurally unified story, "a 'problem' story—a cause and effect story—one of the best of its kind in American fiction. The story is skilfully told; it is unified; it succeeds in achieving its intention" (1960, 663). Ives follows Gullason in detecting a structuration in "The Monster" which is similar to that of the novels Maggie, The Red Badge of Courage, and George's Mother:

In all four stories, Crane has put his most significant incident or turning point at the mathematical center and has contrasted the first half with the second. The halves of two of the stories are

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¹ Jumper 1958, 244-245; qtd. in LaFrance 208.

divided at their centers by lesser turning points; and all the tales are organized in coherent groupings of chapters, two being made up of groups of four chapters, the other two having groups of three. These groupings are almost always so coherent that headings may easily be assigned to them.¹

In "The Monster", Ives argues, "The first twelve chapters have to do with the making of the monster, the last twelve with the effect of the monster on the people of Whilomville." Gullason had set the division after chapter X, and he also notes minor climaxes during the story.² An atmospheric sense of ostracism keeps growing and peaks at the end of the story (Gullason 1960, 664). LaFrance (1971, 207) notes that the first half of the 24 sections deal with "appearance," and the second with "reality"; there are minor climaxes, e.g. in sections 11-12. According to LaFrance, the protracted ending of the story is deliberate and effective; "the author is deliberately constructing a stasis" and proceeding to the "progressive revelation of the monster" (that is, of the townspeople; 1971, 209).

Most of the critical observations on the narrative structure refer to the question of perspective. Only E. Solomon describes the temporal structure of the story, noting the use of flashbacks and duration. He notes that the same moments in the fire scene are narrated again and again from different points of view (1966, 185-189), that the first half of the story takes twenty-four hours of action time,³ and that the second

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¹ Ives 1969, 18. Nagel (1980, 110) also follows Gullason and Ives here.

² Gullason 1960: 663-4. Morace (1981, 79) proposes the same division.

³ My term and Solomon's meaning.

half stretches though a longer period in order to portray town's reaction to Henry (1966, 193). It is clear that the temporal structure as analyzed by Solomon is seen as subservient to Crane's interest in point of view, in contrasting different attitudes to the same phenomenon—and this, ultimately, in order to uphold some of the attitudes and condemn others. The logic which guides the structure is ultimately the implied moral attitude of the work.

The first reference to the use of point of view in "The Monster" is found in an unsigned review (Book Buyer 1900, in Weatherford 1973: 262). The reviewer complains that Crane does not envisage the story adequately: "His tale is not 'focussed' on the main figure, as it ought to be; it covers too much ground, attempts too much." The reviewer does not specify who is the "main figure." Perhaps (s)he means that the problem is that there is no clear main figure in the story.

Gullason observes the rhythm of the focus in the story, at times on one individual (Henry, Trescott, Alek Williams, Martha Goodwin) or a variety of minor individuals who represent "the community's spirit." This technique creates the atmosphere of increasing tension through the ironic contrast of points of view.¹ E. Solomon notes the use of a reliable narrative voice guiding the reader through these shifts in point of view (1966a, 180ff.). Levenson describes the narrative as adopting first Jimmie's point of view, then the collective viewpoint of the town, then successively Henry's and Trescott's perspectives. This fragmented point of view poses the problem of who is the hero of the story, to the extent that E. Solomon can affirm that this is a novel with no protagonist (1966, 200). Cazemajou, too, observes that Henry Johnson is

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¹ 1960, 664-665. Cf. also Cazemajou 1969b, 425.

not the center of the novel: "A aucun moment on ne demande au lecteur de se placer au point de vue du 'monstre': ce dernier existe simplement comme le support psychologique de la conscience de Whilomville" (1969b, 423).

Other critics have spoken of a collective protagonist. For Gullason, the protagonist of "The Monster" is society, as anti-hero (Gullason 1960, 663). LaFrance pushes this kind of interpretation one step further. Several other critics have noted the importance of communal reactions in "The Monster." LaFrance describes the role of the community in the story as an instance of collective protagonist:¹ "The people of Whilomville assume the normal position of the protagonist in Crane's psychological pattern. In "The Monster," the town is self-deluded like Henry Fleming in The Red Badge of Courage—Trescott, "one of Crane's greatest heroes," is not one of the typical deluded protagonists of other Crane novels (1971, 206). Linder believes that three readings are possible, seeing Trescott, Henry or the town as protagonists (1974, 135).

The opposition between the parties in "The Monster" can be seen as a difference in their degree of knowledge of the facts, and therefore as a question of perspective. Levenson describes the ostracization of Trescott and Henry as their lying outside the perceptual range of the townspeople (1969, xxiii). According to M. Holton, Crane studies in "The Monster" (and in the Whilomville Stories) "the origins of limitation upon the eye and the understanding" (1972, 278)—the novel deals with what is essentially a question of perception, of point of view.

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¹ Crane had already tried his hand at this in "A Ghoul's Accountant" (LaFrance 1971, 180)

Trescott's isolation is a consequence of his apprehension, of correct vision (M. Holton 1972, 213). Crane directs our attention to seeing, to spectacles, to curious observation (1972, 210-211). Paradoxically, M. Holton also argues that the question of point of view is not so important as in other works; "The Monster" relies mainly on a more carefully dramatic arrangement of scenes (M. Holton 1972, 205).

Losing sight of Henry's humanity is, therefore, the perspectival sin committed by the people of Whilomville. Cooley's reading is original in that he blames Crane for having fallen into the same fault he is deploring in the citizens. Cooley points out what he considers the most important perspectival trait of the story: the narrative point of view abandons Henry in the latter part of the novel, indeed from the moment of his accident (see above). Cooley wonders if this is some kind of trap for the reader, to test his ability to side with Henry in spite of the sudden distance of the viewpoint shift, which he seems to suggest is structurally equivalent to the change of mind of the citizens to the deformed Henry. This sounds too elaborate, more post-modern than modernist. In fact, Cooley's final interpretation is that Crane failed to side with his original protagonist, that he lost sight of him, and that the effect is not an intentional device. Henry Johnson, Cooley notes, has relapsed from the heroic into the pathetic, and there is not even pity enough available for him: Trescott gets everything (1975, 14). The real test of the racial attitude of "The Monster" was to be "Crane's own integrity to the character of Henry Johnson" (Cooley 1982, 40), and in this test he fails. Cooley notes that in Ellison or Wright, who work along similar lines, the perspective never abandons the protagonist. He concludes that Crane's Monster got away from him: "he had lost the critical distinction he started with—between the monster and the man

behind the mask" (1975, 14). Cooley believes that Henry is sane, but that he no longer interests Crane.

Cooley's move towards casting suspicion on the reliability of the perspective offered the reader is a significant one for several reasons about which more will follow. In my own view, however, it is misguided to some extent—"the man behind the mask" has never been an issue in Crane's tale. Cooley's construction of a sane Henry Johnson is an illusion derived from the irony of the title, "The Monster." Kahn shows how the descriptions in "The Monster" are affected by the state of mind of the perceiver (1963, 36). This affects many other aspects of the work, including the title "The Monster," by means of a displaced or transposed use of the characters' perception in the narrator's discourse. Henry Johnson is not a Gothic novel monster, as the town believes, but this need not imply that he has all his wits.

Crane's use of focalization, as shown in the example of the title, is not literal. As a rule, his imagery does not render in an objective way the point of view of the character; instead, he amplifies it with an ironic note. Westbrook has spoken in this respect of Crane's "radical language" or "dualistic imagery": "an ironic and authorial implementation of a meaning implied but not felt" by the character (1972, 92). Yet I would prefer to use the word "*narratorial* implementation" in this last sentence—as a rhetoric device, irony or "radical imagery" are the responsibility of the narrator before they are the textual author's.

This leads us to the question of the narrative voice. E. Solomon notes the presence in "The Monster" of a reliable narrator who guides the reader through the shifts in point of view (1966a, 180ff.). Solomon borrows the concept of reliable narrative from Booth's Rhetoric of

Fiction. We have just said that irony pervades the story, but of course this is not an obstacle in order to speak of a reliable narrative voice. The narrator is reliable to the extent that his irony is overt and is firmly grounded in the implied moral stance of the textual author. There is no distance between the narrator and the textual author—no narrative persona created whose values differ from those of the textual author and who therefore has to be read through. Their difference is the difference between two narrative roles of the same subject.

Only one critic has contested the reliability of the narrative voice in "The Monster." Nagel (1980, 62) affirms that the narrator may present erroneous interpretations, and goes on to quote this phrase: "As for the negro Henry Johnson, he could not live," an obviously unreliable opinion since Henry does survive his accident. But if we look at the phrase in its context we will not be tempted to see it as an instance of unreliable narrative:

Six of the ten doctors in Whilomville attended at Judge Hagenthorpe's house.

Almost at once they were able to know that Trescott's burns were not vitally important. The child would possibly be scarred badly, but his life was undoubtedly safe. As for the negro Henry Johnson, he could not live. His body was frightfully seared, but more than that, he now had no face. His face had simply been burned away. (TM 40-41).

It is clear that the unreliable opinion is the doctors', and not the narrator's. The narrator is not expressing his views; he is simply using free indirect discourse.

There is one more trait which separates the narrator from the implied author (as respects their narrative functions, since they are one

and the same moral subject): the narrator's silence. This is especially noticeable when he does not counter unreliable opinions like the one just quoted. This reticence is one of the features of Crane's style that set him apart as a modernist stranded in the nineteenth century. But Crane's textual author belongs to his century insofar as his (implied) judgement is not absent—it rings loud and clear behind the sober narrative voice.

If we accept the reliability and transparency of the narrator, we feel secure with the knowledge provided us in our role as spectators. The reader's point of view is taken for granted, since it is not submitted to a limited perspective that would require that knowledge be negotiated. LaFrance, for instance, observes that the reader knows, like Trescott, that Henry is harmless (1972, 207). It will be noted that, according to Cooley and some of the other readers who believe that Henry is sane (see above, chapter 4), the narrative voice would not be so reliable as E. Solomon has it. The spectator would be presented a false or at least insufficient image of the story, an unreliable version which he would have to interpret.

It is clear from this as well as the previous examples that the readers' construction of the narrative structure is in constant feed-back with their construction of the action and that of the textual subjects. The information the reader receives on the action is not self-sufficient or merely accumulative; it is destined to be measured against a standard which has to be inferred from his concretization of the whole text, and not merely of the phrases which refer us directly to the action. Our conceptions of the textual author and of the narrator's reliability, apart from being closely connected, co-determine our interpretation of the adequacy of the perspective used in constructing the narrative, and

therefore our interpretation of what happens in the action. Our construction of what remains unsaid in the story can completely change the meaning of what is said.

The interpretive moves by Nagel or Cooley are significant. There is a uniform tendency in critical commentary: to make the work more significant, increasing the proportion of the unsaid as opposed to the said. The critics questions that which is taken for granted, and tend to make the work more complex than has generally been acknowledged. Reliable narrative or transparence of point of view, the unmarked cases assumed by earlier critics, tend to be qualified or put into question by their heirs. The closer examination of the story cannot but bring out more significant relationships between its elements. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the discovery of consciously intended elements should follow this pace.

6. Discourse: The Structure of the Unsaid

6.1. "Style"

An early reviewer saw the main originality of "The Monster" in its style, "curiously detached and almost inhuman" (rev. in Daily News, 1901, 6). The lack of an explicit moral attitude on the part of Crane is the occasion of Hawthorne's (1900) and Beer's (1923, 329) complaints. Follett praises the power Crane achieved through an impersonal style, and lamented an occasional emotional involvement for the worse in the figure of Martha Goodwin (1926, xi). Several critics note Crane's laconism in dealing with Henry Johnson's deformity. Apparently, the readers' expectations have often been disappointed when they find that "the monster" is described only in one phrase, and then in a negative way, as having no face. Some critics point out the dignity or restraint¹ of this procedure, while others stress its suggestive effectiveness.² In a more general way, this is Crane's technique throughout the story. Ellison (1960, in Ellison 1964, 75) sees Crane's style in "The Monster" as an anticipation of Hemingway's, presumably because of the use of understatement. For E. Solomon, "The Monster" is a novel which

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¹ Bridges 1900; rev. in Critic 1900; Joseph B. Gilder, "Stephen Crane," Harper's Weekly 44 (16 Jun. 1900): 560, qtd. in Stallman 1972, 280; Vasil'evskaia 1967, 219.

² Rev. in Public Opinion 1899; Beer 1923, 164, quoting Sanford Bennett; Knight 1951, 155; Gross 1975, 107.

raises many questions and answers none, which makes it a work of art instead of a tract (1966, 200). Its style is simple and denuded.¹

But in spite of this narratorial laconism, Crane's novel has been interpreted (not least by E. Solomon) as effectively answering some of the questions it raises. There is a voice to be heard behind that silence—and some readers have seen the use of understatement in "The Monster" as the mere prop of a fairly direct, even oppressive, authorial irony. When Westbrook analyzes the use of a double point of view simultaneously in Crane's imagery, he argues that, contrary to a widespread opinion, the authorial attitude in Crane's novels is not ambiguous: "Crane's fiction is remarkably clear, perhaps too clear" (1972, 94).

It is interesting to compare the definitions of Crane's style in the different critics. We shall find them praising (or criticizing) this story for a wide range of qualities that not many of them would be prepared to accept as equally present in the work. Let us begin with "simplicity." For Berryman (1950, 284) the style of "The Monster" is Crane's "third norm," as contrasted to (1) the colorful impressionism of The Red Badge of Courage (the laboratory scene is for Berryman the only instance of this first style in "The Monster") and (2) the denuded style of "The Open Boat." This division is accepted by Bergon (1975, 4). The style is more "'normal,' less colorful, and less color-charged than in the earlier works" for M. Holton (1972, 205). John W. Shroeder sees "The Monster" (together with "The Open Boat" and "Death and the Child") as the summit of Stephen Crane's naturalism (1950; qtd. in

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¹ E. Solomon 1966, 159. However, Solomon had pointed out earlier (1964, 111) that irony and symbolism are the basis of "The Monster," as of The Red Badge of Courage.

Stallman 1972, 379). The reviewer of "The Monster" in The Daily News praises Crane for a power of accurate and detached observation of human nature and its environment "which is more usually the possession of scientific men than of novelists"; his style is "direct and powerful, though hardly elegant" (1901, 6). This amounts to defining the story as naturalist. Locke sees in the story an instance of realism in literature (1952, 28). Levenson wishes to qualify the "realism" of the story, particularly in view of its alleged autobiographical inspiration. "The Monster" is for him far away from its alleged sources in Crane's memories: "whatever else it may be, his realism is not simply a matter of direct rendering of an observed object" (1969, xiii). The realism of the story, he notes, is abstracted, lacking in local color and concrete detail. Crane's own aesthetic consciousness seems to have favoured the notion of realism. We find him saying that "the true artist is the man who leaves pictures of his own time as they appear to him." This is realism with an attitude, less close to Howells than to the George Eliot of Adam Bede, chapter XIII. The insistence is as much on "external" reality as on the "personal vision" of the artist. Another aesthetic statement by Crane develops this principle: "I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision—he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition."¹ Impressionism?

The adjective which describes Crane's style is, by acclamation, "impressionistic"—Crane often looks as if he were the only member of

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¹ Letter to John Northern Hilliard (Jan. 1896?). No. 137 in Stallman and Gilkes 1960. The editors note that "the very same dictum forms part of Crane's aesthetic credo" (1960, 110 n.).

this nineteenth-century school of fiction. Still, the critics of "The Monster" have been loth to describe it as an "impressionist" story, and this adjective is rarely found in their essays. Are we reaching something like a consensus on the story? To moderate excessive optimism, let us note Hoffman speaks of "the baroque prose of The Monster" (1957, 255).

Other critics have sought analogues in another (post-impressionist) pictorial avant-garde movement: Expressionism, which is more definitely twentieth-century. Perosa (1964, in Bassan 1966: 94) sees in this work Crane's transition from Impressionism to Expressionism. S. W. Holton also thinks that "'The Monster' is a radically expressionistic and strikingly modern story" (1984, 90).

Sometimes these qualifications seem to be used without any connection to specific techniques used by Crane. Nagel, for instance, sees Crane as an impressionist writer, meaning that he is not purely realist even though he rejects symbolic significance [!?] and allegorical plots and characters (1980, 151). Now, it is clear that for most readers many images and scenes in "The Monster" have a suggestive value. We may read the glowing embers in Trescott's hearth as an indication of the subsiding conflict (Kahn 1963) or of Trescott's subsiding moral strength. Any of these readings is symbolic. The same might be argued for almost any other element in the story singled out by a critic: Henry's facelessness, the judge's cane, etc. And there is, too, a good crop of outright allegorical readings such as the one by Modlin and Byers.

It could be argued that critics have been calling Crane a realist or an impressionist while they read him as a symbolist, even an allegorist. Mayer provides an example of such an ambivalence when, in explaining the symbolic value of the initial scenes, he comments that "attributing a

strict analogical value to these scenes would be out of keeping with Crane's method generally and certainly with the almost Howellsian realism of "The Monster" (1973, 30). In those cases in which a reading constructs an allegory, it should be clear that Crane is not writing the kind of allegory that we can find, for instance, in Spenser's Faerie Queene. As a rule, Crane's allegories do not involve personified abstractions, and are not self-explanatory. Anyway, few critics have been willing to attach the label "allegorist" to Crane. This holds even for those critics who find allegories in his work. Foster is an exception, when he describes Crane's style as symbolic and allegorical, and "The Monster" as "an allegory of the black man in America in the nineteenth century" (1976, 87).

The adjective "symbolist" refers yet to another pictorial and poetic school of the late nineteenth century in France. "Symbol" is a fairly frequent word in the critiques of "The Monster." Is Crane (or this particular Crane), then, a "symbolist"? At least, the writing in "The Monster" is, for some critics. E. Solomon (1964) says as much, and so does Debouzy (1968, 247). For Cazemajou (1969b, 421), "The Monster" is "l'œuvre la plus hardiment symbolique" by Crane. Colvert describes Crane's style in "The Monster" as being closer to realism but highly symbolic at the same time (1984, 124). According to LaFrance, while Crane does use symbols, his fiction is not essentially symbolic, since its basic structure is a plot. The symbols arise during the writing process and remain subordinate to the plot (1971, 101). Not all critics will agree, however, on the line separating a symbolist from a non-symbolist who uses symbols. Of course the terms "realism" and "symbolism" need not be necessarily exclusive or contradictory. If we understand "symbolist" as referring simply to the use of a particular

technique, and “realist” as the production of a particular impression or effect of reality on the reader,¹ they may be even complementary.

A measure of this divergence in the accounts of “The Monster” may be explained by the differences in style which divide the parts of the work. Westbrook claims that there is in Crane’s stories a sudden shift of style from a double point of view, an ironic attitude or “radical language” to a flat and powerful style once the moral issue of the story is clearly set and is being debated (1972, 88). This happens in “The Monster” as social pressure is brought to bear on Trescott (1972, 99). As to myself, I do not see here so much a shift in style from one part of the work to another as a double standard followed by the narrative voice in dealing with the characters. Most of them are subject to the biting irony of the narrator *throughout the novel*. Others, the most noticeable being Trescott, are completely exempt from this persecution. The shift noted by Westbrook is due to Trescott’s prominence in the later chapters.

One case of stylistic shift, however, has been widely commented on. It occurs in the fire scene focalized by Henry Johnson. I will follow what by now has become a tradition among critics writing on “The Monster,” and quote at large from this scene. Johnson is trying to get out of the house carrying the unconscious Jimmie Trescott:

When Johnson came to the top of the stairs with his burden, he took a quick step backward. Through the smoke that rolled to him he could see that the lower hall was all ablaze. He cried out then in a howl that resembled Jimmie’s former achievement. His legs gained a frightful faculty of bending sideways. Swinging about

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¹ Cf. Jakobson 1965; Barthes 1982.

precariously on these reedy legs, he made all his way back slowly, back along the upper hall. From the way of him then, he had given up almost all idea of escaping from the burning house, and with it the desire. He was submitting, submitting because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to the conflagration.

He now clutched Jimmie as unconsciously as when, running toward the house, he had clutched the hat with the bright silk band.

Suddenly he remembered a little private staircase which led from a bedroom to an apartment which the doctor had fitted up as a laboratory and work-house, where he used some of his leisure, and also hours when he might have been sleeping, in devoting himself to experiments which came in the way of his study and interest.

When Johnson recalled this stairway the submission to the blaze departed instantly. He had been perfectly familiar with it, but his confusion had destroyed the memory of it.

In his sudden momentary apathy there had been little that resembled fear, but now, as a way of safety came to him, the old frantic terror caught him. He was no longer creature to the flames, and he was afraid of the battle with them. It was a singular and swift set of alternations in which he feared twice without submission, and submitted once without fear.

"Jimmie!" he wailed, as he staggered on his way. He wished this little inanimate body at his breast to participate in his tremblings. But the child had lain limp and still during these

headlong charges and countercharges, and no sign came from him.

Johnson passed through two rooms and came to the head of the stairs. As he opened the door, great billows of smoke poured out, but gripping Jimmie closer, he plunged down through them. All manner of odors assailed him during this flight. They seemed to be alive with envy, hatred, and malice. At the entrance to the laboratory he confronted a strange spectacle. The room was like a garden in the region where might be burning flowers. Flames of violet, crimson, green, blue, orange and purple were blooming everywhere. There was one blaze that was precisely the hue of a delicate coral. In another place was a mass that lay merely in phosphorescent inaction like a pile of emeralds. But all these marvels were to be seen dimly through clouds of heaving, turning, deadly smoke.

Johnson halted for a moment on the threshold. He cried out again in the negro wail that had in it the sadness of the swamps. Then he rushed across the room. An orange-colored flame leaped like a panther at the lavender trousers. This animal bit deeply into Johnson. There was an explosion at one side, and suddenly before him there reared a delicate, trembling sapphire shape like a fairy lady. With a quiet smile she blocked his path and doomed him and Jimmie. Johnson shrieked, and then ducked in the manner of his race in fights. He aimed to pass under the left guard of the sapphire lady. But she was swifter than eagles, and her talons caught in him as he plunged past her. Bowing his head as if his neck had been struck, Johnson lurched forward, twisting this way and that way. He fell on his back. The still

form in the blanket flung from his arms, rolled to the edge of the floor and beneath the window.

Johnson had fallen with his head at the base of an old fashioned desk. There was a row of jars upon the top of this desk. For the most part, they were silent amid this rioting, but there was one which seemed to hold a scintillant and writhing serpent.

Suddenly the glass splintered, and a ruby-red snakelike thing poured its thick length out upon the top of the old desk. It coiled and hesitated, and then began to swim in a langorous way down the mahogany slant. At the angle it waved its sizzling molten head to and fro over the closed eyes of the man beneath it. Then, in a moment, with a mystic impulse, it moved again, and the red snake flowed directly into Johnson's upturned face.

Afterwards the trail of this creature seemed to reek, and amid flames and low explosions drops like red-hot jewels pattered softly down it at leisurely intervals.

This writing is noticeably different from the average in the story, and the critics seem to have found this contrast fascinating. For instance, E. Solomon points out the analogy of the writing in this scene and the kind of writing which is found in Crane's war fiction. In the laboratory scene he finds an Edenic intertext (we find images of a snake, a garden, etc.) and excuses Crane's indulgence in overwriting with the necessity of stressing the dramatic high point (1966, 187, 189; cf. Cooley 1975, 12). Neither E. Solomon nor Cooley seem to make much sense of this Edenic intertext in relationship to the moral issues of the novel as a whole. This chapter is noted by several other critics as a break with the stylistic

norm of the novel,¹ as a climax with symbolic touches² or simply as a noteworthy piece of writing.³ It is "a most gorgeous study in high colors, that ought to be quoted for its high beauty" (Hughes 1900; in Weatherford 252). The colors in this scene are also praised as Crane at his most characteristic by Frank W. Noxon.⁴ The passage is cited by Quinn as going "to the limit of art in its realism of horror" (1936, 536). O'Faolain finds the "carefully incised English of this scene nearly oppressive in its accumulation of stylistic effects (1948, 221-222). Geismar sees in the symbolism of the fire scene a sign "that the fire in Crane's mind was equated with sexuality" (1953, 119), and a climax which breaks the story in two. Kahn (1963, 37) emphasizes the fire scenes when he wants to speak of Crane as an impressionist using striking imagery, and M. Holton sees the description of the fire as "ironically naive," "ironic horror"—a proof of Crane's verbal development and stylistic maturity (1972, 155,156).

The intensity of this moment must be thought of together with Crane's obsession with fire scenes, which is apparent in many of his works. It is difficult not to feel that this episode is highly significant, but in a way which seems to escape the author's conscious control. A

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¹ Rev. in Morning Post 1901, 6; Vasil'evskaia 1967, 219; Levenson 1969, xxii; M. Holton 1972, 205-206, 320 n. 16. The "fire lady" is linked by M. Holton to Crane's "paradoxically sexual sense of sin and protection which Crane seemed to derive from sometimes rather shadowy (in both senses) women who were somewhat older than himself" (1972, 220 n.).

² Cazemajou 1969a, 30; 1969b, 492; LaFrance 1971, 101; Bergon 1975, 38; Cooley 1975, 11; Colvert 1984, 124.

³ Rev. in Spectator 1901, 244; rev. in Daily News 1901, 6; Stallman 1968, 333.

⁴ "Frank W. Noxon to Max J. Herzberg," 7 Dec. 1926. Letter 24 in the Appendix to Stallman and Gilkes 1960.

kind of drama is taking place in this scene—we have here the climax that the anticlimactic ending of the story refrains from providing. Let us note the obsessive insistence of the imagery presenting Henry Johnson as black man in whom dormant ancestral instincts surface again. I take the connection of this imagery with the scene where the monster is created to be deeply significant. Later we shall return to this track. For the moment, suffice it to say that the scene seems to have got hold of the critics as much as it got hold of the author. Its chaotic profusion of color and image stands in sharp contrast to the wry restraint with which the narrator presents the drabness of Whilomville. One wonders if the logic of the critics' response is not the same which led the author to create this scene.

We have already examined the comments on the narrative structure of the story, and its gradual construction by the critics. In this chapter we shall concentrate on the construction of symbolic and allegorical meanings.

6.2. Symbolism

The construction of symbols is an instance of semiotic hypercodification. It involves the construction of a local semiotic code which transmits a meaning peculiar to the work. This activity may be carried about by the author or by the reader. The proliferation of these codes complicates the textual structure and in general increases the value of the work. Hough notes that, while it is clear that the plain sense of a text has been intended by the author, there is always the doubt as to

whether more particular meanings are also the product of his/her intention; he proposes therefore an eighth type of Empsonian ambiguity: "ambiguity between intended and achieved meaning" (1976, 223). This ambiguity is especially evident in the kind of interpretive moves that we analyze in this section. As we shall observe, there is no clear line to be drawn between the author's and the interpreter's creation of symbols, because the former serves as a model for the latter. Moreover, a symbol can be interpreted (in a varying degree) by the readers and affect their concretization of the work even if it is not consciously recognized as one.¹ The interpreters of "The Monster" have constructed or made explicit a number of symbols, some of which must have been at work in a subliminal way in many readers. Here follow some examples.

6.2.1. Peony

Berryman is the first to note the presence of several symbols in the story, some of which have been elaborated on by later critics. One of the most successful among later critics is the analogy of the peony broken by Jimmy (TM 3) and Henry Johnson's mutilation.² Wolford (1983, 89) sees in the peony a symbol of fragile civilization being destroyed and modifies somewhat the earlier reading of this symbol: "Like the ruined peony, Johnson comes to represent the intrusion of reality into the illusions of the community." It is clear that both

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¹ This is also the case for parallelisms, but not for allegory.

² This symbolic meaning is also pointed out by Gullason (1969, 664); E. Solomon (1966, 183); Mayer (1973, 30); Tenenbaum (1977, 404); Morace (1981, 67).

readings have a common core. The initial garden scenes are usually read as a symbol of man imposing order over nature—an ironic symbol, since this authority will prove futile (Mayer 1973, 30). Hafley fits the peony scene into his religious interpretation of “The Monster”: the peony was named for the god of healing.¹ He interprets it as symbolic of both Henry’s and Trescott’s fate (1959, 163-164). Mayer suggests that it may also be seen as representative of the community, “which, like Jimmie, is unable to face reality and eventually destroys its own conscience through intolerance and persecution” (1973, 30). Gullason notes that Henry is associated with the peony incident when his destiny is immediately linked to Jimmie’s in the following scene.

Westbrook rejects this symbolic interpretation of the initial scene, arguing that while the destruction of the peony is the responsibility of an agent, Jimmie, Johnson’s disfiguration is the result of an accident. For him, the peony incident has no relationship to the central subject of the story, “moral duty undergoing trial by the indifferent event” (Westbrook 1972, 94). M. Holton believes that the peony scene shows that destructiveness is inherent in Jimmie (1972, 141). Linder denies this: Jimmie’s attitude to the incident, his confusion and confession, prove on the contrary that he is still uncorrupted and honest, in sharp contrast with the scene in which he dares his friends to touch Henry (1974, 146). This is a reading of the attitudes of the characters at the literal story level, and need not prevent us from interpreting the destruction of the peony as a symbol of Johnson’s mutilation, and

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¹ For Stephenson, too, “peony” is, etymologically, “physician of the gods” (1972, 26); Linder (1972, 144) thinks this can’t have been intended by Crane.

Jimmie's confusion as a prefiguration of the reaction of Whilomville (cf. Linder 1974, 142).

6.2.2. Priest's chin

The image of Trescott "shaving his lawn as if it were a priest's chin" is undoubtedly a picturesque one, and is often quoted by the critics (e.g. Westbrook 1972, 94; Cooley 1975, 10), most often without trying to explain its function. For Stephenson, the image foreshadows the religious meaning of the story. Trescott is a priest's servant, therefore a servant's servant and Henry Johnson's servant (1972, 27). It seems to me that this is the kind of circular analogy which will only occur to us if we have already pre-determined the meaning of the story. Gross has supplied what I think is the most convincing reading of this image, in a context which is more generally recognized to be central to the story. The image it is one more element in the characterization of Whilomville as "a thoroughly middle-class place" (1975, 102); it conveys a feeling of man being in control, of opportunities for progress being manifest. In my view, it also adds a subdued note of oppressive decorum and fastidiousness to this bourgeois atmosphere. Wolford (1983, 89) also interprets gardening and mowing the lawn in chapter I as symbols of Trescott's social standing and of a civilization being built.

6.2.3. Facelessness and the black veil

Henry's facelessness is first associated by Berryman to Crane's unconscious feelings of shame in facing American society (1950, 194). Hafley discovers an analogy between Johnson's facelessness and several public attitudes in the story: Johnson's own "saving face" in rescuing

Jimmie, the various reactions of the townspeople who “lose face” in several ways, and their use of Johnson to make their neighbours “lose face” and “save face” themselves.¹ It is significant that Hafley does not see that Trescott himself is forced to play this game. In standing by Johnson, he makes his neighbours lose face in front of himself, of their ideal selves, of God (?) and of the implied author and reader. The motif of “face” can be related to other central issues in the story, such as identity, role-playing, and race.

“The Monster” can be read as an analysis of identity: “Henry cannot be known by the town because his roles are not fixed and because the real Henry does not yet exist” (Mayer 1973, 32). Kahn (1963, 37) links the scene of town gossip about Henry Johnson dressed as a dandy, where Henry’s identity is put in question, to the further scenes of gossip about his alleged death: the citizens are concerned with appearances, not with essence. Several critics note that this non-identity of Henry is due to the fact that he is a black. For Mayer, Henry becomes a social man through sacrifice: “As he runs toward the fire, Henry’s straw hat, the emblem of his social identity, is already half crumpled in his hand” (Mayer 1973, 32). But Henry does not succeed in affirming an identity which escapes the town’s oppressive social determinism. Henry’s veil can be seen as yet another symbol of facelessness and social identity. Why cover Henry with a *black* veil (TM 83)? On one hand, it may be seen as an allusion to Hawthorne’s story, “The Minister’s Black Veil” (there is a suggestion of this in Katz 1969, xix); on the other, it is a way of marking Henry: he has got no face, but he is still a black; in fact, he has become

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¹ Hafley 1959, 160. E. Solomon (1966, 192) relates Henry’s loss of his face to the community’s loss of its superficial civilization. Cf. Morace 1981, 79, Wolford 1983, 90.

quintessentially black for the imagination of white Whilomville. E. Solomon relates to this the motif of the black veil: "The town cannot bear the sight of reality" (1966, 196). Smirnov sees in both "The Monster" and The Red Badge of Courage a study of the loss of spontaneity of bourgeois society, its need of appearance and of purely formal tokens, and its refusal to come into a direct contact with the world.¹ Katz (1969b, xix) relates the story to Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil" in this respect: "Excellent people read onto a vacant black surface their own evil and are repelled by it." Not many symbols of race are found by the critics, apart from those related to the issues of the black characters' identity. Foster sees in Johnson's "crooning a weird line of negro melody" (TM 84) Johnson's own funeral dirge and his symbolic death, as well as an old hymn of slavery (1976, 90).

6.2.4. Role-playing and imaginary activity

Several critics have stressed the thematic importance of appearances and role-playing in the novel. The relationship of this motif to the question of identity is obvious: role-playing is the creation of an identity summoning the help of fiction. Mayer notes that in the story the subject of racism is linked to a wider analysis of the impossibility of social brotherhood, due to "the immense power of fear in sustaining a protective, imitative society dependent on theatricality and spectacle,

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¹ Smirnov 1962, 16-17; qtd. in Vasil'evskaia 1967, 221.

sterile rituals and dead forms.”¹ “All that is free and uninhibited has given way to studied attitudes and stilted manners” (Mayer 1973, 31). Westbrook (1972, 89) and Morace see in the game of “touching the monster” a symbol of central significance in the novel. The citizens play roles, instead of acting out of personal honesty; Trescott is the exception (Westbrook 1972, 99). They are also onlookers, gapers. There is in “The Monster” “a complex of metaphoric games, entertainments, and play-like behavior that underlies the meaning of the story and serves to unify its various parts” (Morace 1981, 66). The games they list include acting and changing identity (Henry Johnson, both in the Jimmie and the dandy scenes, or the Farraguts). Mayer also notes that “Henry Johnson is the consummate player of roles” (1973, 32). Imitativeness and a love of spectacle pervade such scenes as Henry’s cakewalking, the intervention of the fire brigades, the figure of the band conductor, the children’s games, the town playing a mob scene with Johnson. A spirit of rivalry is at the heart of the town’s attitudes. “Part of the townspeople’s problem is that they mistake their relationship to Whilomville’s various games. They are participants, and not, as they believe, merely observers” (Morace 1981, 70). For instance, none of the four citizens in chapter XXIII admits or even realizes their own complicity in Trescott’s being cast out. Whenever a distorted moral code is brought to bear on reality, Morace notes, there is an evasion towards an imaginative world which is created ad hoc (1981, 74). “The Monster” opposes such evasions, and affirms a realistic point of view while acknowledging its terrible price (Morace 1981, 78). Morace concludes that “Crane’s use of the game metaphor in ‘The Monster’

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¹ Mayer 1973, 29. Cf. also LaFrance 1971, 208.

serves to connect the story's main themes of moral complicity, communal and personal responsibility, and individual awareness" (1981, 77).

The wider theme of an imaginary projection of order as a flight from chaos or complexity can be found in other critics. Wolford sees in the stove in Alek Williams's cabin (TM 67-68) a symbol of immobility, and of order against chaos, like the one in "The Blue Hotel." But for Crane, Wolford argues, such objects "present false pictures in the very fact of their organizing power" (1983, 35). Bergon reads "the first three paragraphs of section 11 of 'The Monster' . . . as a confrontation between Judge Hagenthorpe's ivory-topped cane and Henry Johnson's unbandaged eye" (1975, 35-36; cf. Mayer 1973, 34). It is for Bergon a confrontation between rationality, respectability, and social stability on one hand, and irrationality, nonconformity and individuality on the other. Bergon notes the restraining force of both eye and cane on the judge, and seems to assume that due to the latter we are to understand that Hagenthorpe hides his real views from Trescott. From the indications in the text he concludes that "the judge does not express his true thoughts or feelings unless he has mislaid his cane" (1975, 36). This is true to some extent (cf. TM 42-43) but not in that extreme and perverse way: Crane describes the cane as "a kind of narcotic" (TM 42) and while I think that in the main we ought to accept the judge's position as he explains it to Trescott, there is a suggestion that the judge's advice to let Johnson die would have been much more forthright had he not feared to wound Trescott. Morace reads the text differently: according to him, the judge protects himself from the truth with his cane (1981, 71). The ceremony of the teacups at the end of the

story is a likewise a veil from starker metaphysical realities, a stay against chaos (Bergon 1975, 124).

6.2.5. Fire scene

Crane was obsessed by fire, at least as far as we can judge from his works. "The Monster" is one of the purest examples in this respect. To the fire scene already quoted we might relate many motifs in Crane's work, starting with Jimmie's admiration towards the firemen in Maggie, and the fires in other stories by Crane (see below, section 6.4.1.1). There is a strong intuitive investment in Crane's fire scenes: "Apparently the event of fire was associated in Crane's mind with some threatening and chaotic principle of the universe" (M. Holton 1972, 207). The fire gives rise to the main conflict in "The Monster"—it is the high point of the story, and at the same time remains far removed from Trescott's own conflict. Mayer interprets the fire as nature's claims against the illusions of man, represented by the "make-believe state of order" of everyday life in Whilomville (1973, 30). Like many other issues in the story, the fire scene has recently been related to the issue of racial relations: "The literal fire and disfigurement are to stand for the real though often disguised injuries suffered particularly by black Americans" (Cooley 1975, 13); "The 'writhing serpent' represents the sin of racial prejudice, or more generally, all acts that debase character and subvert honest relations" (Cooley 1982, 42). We shall return to this question in section 7.3, where the issue of race will serve as a bridge between issues which are close together in the story and yet separated.

The fire scene contains another favourite symbol: the fall of the picture of "Signing the Declaration." Geismar associates the fall of the

picture and Crane's own revolt against American standards (1953, 117). M. Solomon (1956b, 42) sees in the falling picture a proof of the story's concern with the problem of social brotherhood and the oppression of American blacks, as does Vasil'evskaia (1967, 219). E. Solomon reads this scene as social pressure putting an end to the American dream of independence and thought and action, and as a foreshadowing of Trescott's downfall (1966, 182; cf. Wolford 1983, 88). Some of these interpretations show a tendency towards historical allegory which is fully developed in Forster (1976).

6.2.6. Minor symbols

Berryman and Geismar indulged in a kind of Freudian reading which has been generally decried by later critics. Geismar finds oedipal symbols in Jimmie's rescue by the expedient of seeing Henry Johnson as mother-figure (1953, 117). Father-symbols shift roles as sources of protection and of destruction; Trescott is an idealized father-protector (Geismar 1953, 118). Geismar seems to suggest that Henry's deformation is to be read as the result of Crane's own Oedipal fears and castration complex (1953, 119). Other minor uses of symbolism noted by the critics are:

—Visual symbols: The traditional hierarchy of light and darkness in imagery is inverted in this story, according to Morace: "light blinds, darkness illuminates." Darkness is associated with the beneficial "monster" Henry Johnson. However, there does not seem to be any racial significance in this symbolism for Morace. Stone, commenting on Crane's colour symbolism, notes that blue is used to describe Alek Williams's depression (Stone 1969, 57).

—Animal imagery: The citizens are compared with “domestic animals asserting illusionary power when all domesticity has been threatened” (Mayer 1973, 34). Kahn (1963) observes the use of animal imagery in describing the savagery of the citizens. According to Gross, society is identified with the jungle (1975, 106).

—Artistic symbols: The neat architecture of Trescott’s house is suggestive of the superior order of his life (Mayer 1973, 31).

6.3. Parallelism

Parallelisms which tighten the structure of the story are pointed out by most critics since Berryman. A scene usually symbolizes or prefigures another scene, and the significance of the latter is increased when seen in conjunction with the former. The intentional status of the parallelisms is usually assumed by the critics. I believe, however, that most critics would not object to seeing most cases as the result of an unconscious intention, an intuitive patterning of the story with symmetries, contrasts and balances. I will merely list the main instances of parallelism observed by the critics.

—M. Solomon sees an analogy between the fire which destroys Trescott’s house and maims Henry and the hysteria of the town (1956b, 41).

—Gullason notes the similarity of the issues debated in chapters XI and XIV, the scenes between the judge and the doctor and the barbershop debate on Johnson’s deformity (1960, 666; cf. also Stephenson 1972, 36). Morace (1981, 74) sees in the second scene and

in the Williams-Hagenthorpe conversation in the previous chapter a crude simplification of Johnson's plight, rather than a serious parallelism.

—The insanity of community during the fire prefigures later reactions to Henry (Mayer 1973, 31). Some critics note the use of the children's attitudes to Henry Johnson as a reflection of the hysteria and superstition of the adults.¹ Most of these critics observe that these attitudes are forgivable in the children, but not in the adults. Linder, however, thinks that the corruption goes both ways: adults are corrupted because children are already vicious and cruel (1974, 135). The children do not form a parallel society of their own; instead, they are integrated into the social and moral life of Whilomville at large (1974, 134). The children use Henry as a social weapon to impose on their peers. Jimmie, like the little liar at Teresa Page's tea party, soon learns to exploit Henry in order to gain social prestige. In doing so, he is merely applying the rules of social intercourse as they are presented to him (1974, 138, 161f.).

—Kahn sees an association of the townspeople's hysteria with the noise of bells and the sirens in the fire scenes. He also links the flames in the house fire to the embers in Trescott's hearth (TM 106) as a symbol of Trescott's subsiding moral conflict. He also compares Trescott's role as a doctor who subdues illness like a wild animal (TM 33) and his inability to master the disease which makes a monster of the town (Kahn 1963, 41; cf. Mayer 1973, 33; Morace 1981, 77).

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¹ Kahn 1963, 44. A similar view is to be found in Mayer 1973, 350, Westbrook 1972, 90, Linder 1974, 123 and Morace 1981, 80 n. 23.

—E. Solomon notes that Johnson is a popular figure among the blacks just as Trescott is respectable among the whites, and the scenes in Watermelon Alley are used as a parody of the values of white Whilomville. Trescott's having a laboratory is proof of the independence of mind he is going to show later on. The attitude of the people as spectators of the fire is already oppressive and morally irresponsible. Trescott upbraids Jimmie's games twice, in a way that reinforces the garden scene in chapter I as an icon of the whole novel (cf. Mayer 1973, 35). Trescott's end in defeat and irresolution is underlined by the station change from summer to winter by the end of the novel. (E. Solomon 1966, 183 ff., 198).

—Linder brings out a further parallelism between the figures of Henry and Trescott. Both attempt a rescue, but neither can carry it out completely (1974, 137).

—Levenson observes in the fire scene a "surrealist inversion of the peaceful domestic garden" of the initial scene, an "otherworld where violence weirdly triumphs over order" and the rescuer Henry Johnson collapses (1969, xx).

—M. Holton relates the children's song ("Nigger, nigger, never die, / Black face and shiny eye") to the scene where the judge avoids the stare of Henry's eye into his conscience (1972, 208).

—Westbrook sees an analogy between the moral attitudes in the game of "touching the monster" and those in such scenes as the opening peony scene (?) or the debate between the three gossips (1972, 94).

—Stephenson (1972, 27), believes that Trescott's slowness in understanding Jimmie in chapter I on the subject of the peony foreshadows the town's inability to understand Henry's plight.

—For Cazemajou (1969b, 423), the children's party is analogous to other scenes where adults try to impose on each other, like the scene between Martha Goodwin and Carrie Dungen in chapter XXII. Linder says it prefigures the terror of the blacks and the mob reaction of the whites, and parallels both Henry's visits to the Farraguts and the boycotted tea-party at the end of the book in its suggestion of feminine oppressiveness (1974, 159). Gross (1975, 106) notes a prefiguration of the doctor's ostracization in the children's behaviour at Theresa Page's party (TM 70).

—Gullason sees an omen of Henry's future in the phrase which portrays him turning from "the scene of his victories" in the public light into Watermelon Alley, where we see "a row of tumble-down houses leaning together like paralytics" (1960, 664; TM 14-15).

—Morace points out the contrast between power to act and helplessness in Trescott: he is regarded as a nearly divine being by Alek Williams, who shouts his name into the sky (TM 68) but he is unable to help Henry or to master the madness of the town (Morace 1981, 77).

—Cooley (1975, 13) points out that there is no hint that Jimmie remembers his old friendship with Henry, when they are seen together again towards the end of the novel.

As we see, the creation or supplementation of meaning by identifying parallelisms in the story is much less specific (and therefore less deviant) than the symbolic or allegorical readings. However, parallelisms are also a resource to refashion the story in the sense desired by the critic, bringing forward certain elements and throwing others into the background.

6.4. Intertextuality

6.4.1. Analogies and Allusions

6.4.1.1. *Other Works by Crane*

Comparison with other works by Crane can aim at tracing the world-view throughout his production, or to point out obsessive motifs—which are an indirect key to the same.

—Hafley relates the work to the rest of the Crane canon: “The Monster” “is like these works concerned with an examination of American values conducted largely in terms of a paradoxical handling of the appearance-reality motif” (1959, 159).

—Crane’s “fire stories” are an obvious intertextual choice: E. Solomon points out Crane’s fascination with fire scenes, evident in stories such as “Manacled” and “The Veteran.”¹ The shock of the contrast between role-playing and the intrusion of a real catastrophe is noted in both “Manacled” and “The Monster” by Mayer (1972, 32). Bergon notes another home-burning scene in the *Sullivan County Sketches*, viii, and Levenson draws attention to Crane’s sketch “When Every One Is Panic Stricken” (1969, xxi).

—Crane’s stories of childish cruelty: We find scenes of ostracization against Jimmie in “Shame” (Åhnebrink 1950, 378) and against Horace in

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¹ “The Veteran” is also mentioned by Stallman (1968, 335); Levenson (1969, xxii); Cazemajou (1969b, 427); Linder (1974, 149); M. Holton sees a further similarity in the phrase “his face ceased instantly to be a face” (M. Holton 1972, 116 n.). “Manacled” is mentioned by the reviewer in *Morning Post* (1901, 6) and M. Holton (1972, 202).

"His New Mittens" (Westbrook 1972, 100); in "The Trial . . . of Homer Phelps," there is a similar view of cruelty in children (Westbrook 1972, 100).

—In "Showin' off," "Lynx-Hunting," "A Mystery of Heroism" and "The Five White Mice," there are dare-scenes which recall that of chapter XX of "The Monster" (Linder 1974, 303).

—In The Red Badge of Courage, "An Upturned Face," "An Episode of War," "Death and the Child," and "The Blue Hotel" there appear similar tension between individual ideals and social forms (Mayer 1972, 36).

—Maggie and The Red Badge of Courage exhibit an use of point of view similar to that of "The Monster"—adopting a point of view contrary to that of the heroic figure (Cazemajou 1969b, 427)—and a similar view of action as a purification and the way to heroism (Cazemajou 1969b, 494).

—In "The Blue Hotel," there is a similar refusal of the characters to act for each other's benefit (Gross 1975; Morace 1981, 78). In one of his rare non-financial comments on the story, Crane said that "'The Blue Hotel' goes in neatly with 'The Monster.'"¹ This is noted by Foster (1976, 87). The two stories (and "His New Mittens") were published together. Still, Crane soon goes on to consider the *size* of the two stories with a view to publication in book form.

—The cosmic pessimism of poem no. 6 in The Black Riders, which features God bungling his creation and presents a chaotic universe, has also been discerned in "The Monster" (Linder 1974, 156).

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¹ "To Paul Revere Reynolds," 7 Feb. 1898. Letter no. 224 in Stallman and Gilkes 1960.

6.4.1.2. *Works by Other Writers*

Here is, in roughly chronological and thematic order, a list of the works which have been found to bear an analogy to "The Monster":

—Sophocles' Antigone has a cognate theme: "it is a tragedy of what happens when private ethics conflict with public order" (Wolford 1983, 89).

—Blake's poem "Black Boy," like Crane's story, uses irony against the hypocrisy of racial reconciliations which involve the death of the black (Cooley 1982, 43).

—Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: a doctor "creates" a monster and meets unexpected moral demands.¹

—The horror tales by Poe and Bierce (Cazemajou 1969b, 421); Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" is singled out by Morace because of a motif similar to Henry's unwinking eye (1981, 71).

—Hawthorne's The Minister's Black Veil (Katz 1969b, xix).

—Trescott's laboratory recalls Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll (Linder 1974, 157).

—Ibsen's An Enemy of the People is a favourite intertext. Critics find here the model for Trescott and the motif of an opposition between the man of moral integrity and the gregarious stupidity and meanness of those he wants to help.²

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¹ Levenson 1969, xx; Cazemajou 1969, 426; Weatherford 1973, 22; Linder 1974, 157. Weatherford misreads Hawthorne 1900 (in Weatherford 259) when he puts in his mouth the following parallelism between Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and "The Monster": "Her Frankenstein was also supposed by most to be the monster; instead, he became an innocent victim of the townspeople's irrational fear." The analogy is a good one, but it is Weatherford's own; Hawthorne only meant that "Frankenstein" is the doctor's name, and not the monster's, as many readers believe.

² Åhnebrink 1950, 378; Berenson 1960, 19; Gullason 1960, 663; E Solomon 1966, 199; Cazemajou 1969b, 421; M. Holton 1972, 205.

—Sinclair Lewis's Main Street is another attack on narrowness and provincial stupidity.¹ More generally, "The Monster" recalls the social criticism of Howe, Anderson and Lewis (Frohock 1972, 225).

—E. Solomon's reads Crane's "anti-idyl" as a reaction against the "American neighbourhood" fiction of writers such as Sarah Orne Jewett and May E. Wilkins Freeman (1966, 172ff.). This tradition is also mentioned by Vasil'evskaia (1967, 222) as an intertext, and by Frohock (1972, 225) as a stereotype Crane is attacking.

—Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (Cooley 1975). In this book we find an early denunciation of racism and a heroic action performed by a black man. Cora Crane rejected the suggestion that Crane's inspiration for "The Monster" was indebted to this work.²

—The subject of racism and the theme of friendship between a white child and a black adult also appear in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn (Levenson 1969, xxiv; Cooley 1975). Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson also deals with racial issues, but in a less successful way than "The Monster" (Mayer 1972, 29).

—The story has been read as a prefiguration of Richard Wright's Native Son, in its concern with racism and the collective identity of black Americans.³

—Ellison's The Invisible Man is another favourite. Besides the issues in Wright's novel, Crane's tale prefigures The Invisible Man in its use

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¹ Follett 1926, x; Åhnebrink 1950, 381; M. Solomon 1956b, 39; Cazemajou 1969b, 423.

² Qtd. in Academy 1901a, 177.

³ D. Gibson 1968, 138; Mayer 1972, 29; Cooley 1982.

of a physical metaphor of non-identity to describe the situation of American blacks.¹

—Conrad's Heart of Darkness features a similar suggestion of an unnamed horror (Wolford 1983, 92). It is significant that "the horror" is also associated to blackness.

—Hemingway's "The Light of the World" is considered to have a similar religious outlook by Stephenson (1972, 39).

—The standard tradition of American (male) heroes as a whole is also an intertext of "The Monster" for M. Holton: "in Crane's Dr. Trescott we approach Fitzgerald's Dick Diver, Ellison's Invisible man, even Salinger's Seymour Glass." All because of their heroic isolation, in the line of typical American protagonists like Natty Bumppo, Hawthorne's Robin, Ethan Brand and Ahab (M. Holton 1972, 213).

All these analogies are not proposed by the critics not as deliberate allusions on the part of Crane (some, of course, could hardly be). The Crane stories are put forward as other examples of the same concerns, personal obsessions or artistic techniques. Of the others, some are suggested as sources (especially Ibsen, Poe, or Bierce), and others as useful analogues for the structure or the concerns of the story. The main aim of these remarks is, of course, to note a parallel between two works. But this is not done without some further or indirect aim in mind. It can easily be seen that invoking an intertextual parallel is the exact counterpart of the drawing of parallelisms or of symbolic isotopies, but this time outside the text itself. It is not a matter of chance that works like Huckleberry Finn or the works of black

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¹ Stallman 1968, 334; Mayer 1972, 29; Linder 1974, 136; Cooley 1975; 1982; Wolford 1983, 153 n.12.

American novelists concerned with black identity are not invoked as a parallel until the late sixties: some issues were not perceived to be issues at all by earlier critics. A certain tradition is created by drawing a line between "The Monster" and these works. This is an example of a shift in reading attitudes. In other cases the secondary aim of the intertextual parallel may be to "rescue" "The Monster" as a major Crane story, or to reinforce a particular reading of Crane's moral emphasis and direct it towards individualist or collective values.

The following works are assumed to have a somewhat more intimate relationship to "The Monster": they are supposed to be the object of Crane's conscious and intentional allusion.

—East Lynne, a play by Ellen Price Wood (Boston, 1896) is the only literary work included in the action of "The Monster." An implication of this intertext is that the setting of The Monster is contemporary with the time of writing (and of intended contemporary readers). It is probably presented as an instance of the provincial literary taste of Whilomville's respectable society. Mayer suggests an additional symbolic value of the play, allusive to the unnatural role-playing of the townspeople: this sentimental drama "focuses on the heroine's unnatural, disguised role as governess of her own children" (1973, 30).

—The story of Lazarus in the Gospels (John, 12) is an intertext of Henry Johnson's "resurrection." This is a special instance of implied intertextuality, because several critics have pointed out the possibility of a deliberate allusion to this episode in the name of one minor character, John Twelve.¹

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¹ TM 101; cf. D. Gibson 1962, 232; 1968, 137; D. Knapp 1969; Stephenson 1972, 38; Anderson 1976; Morace 1981, 70

—Tolstoy's What to Do? may also be alluded to. Judge Hagenthorpe hypocritically says on the subject of euthanasia, "It is hard for a man to know what to do" (TM 47). This is suggested as a possible ironic allusion by Pizer (1983)—Tolstoy's work calls for a reawakening of Christian charity.

—The American "small town novel" tradition is an ironic intertext of "The Monster" for E. Solomon (1966) and Cazemajou (1969b, 494). These critics see Crane's tale as a deliberate reaction against this tradition and its idealization of the American neighbourhood.

6.4.2. Allegory

This section is a logical continuation of the previous one. If a symbol may be the product of the unconscious intuition of the writer, an allegory is more of an intertextual phenomenon, a premeditated fashioning of a fiction on the model of an abstract correspondence with the allegorical intertext. An allegorical interpretation involves the assumption that the author was fully conscious of the meaning the interpreter finds—or else, that the interpreter has devised the correspondences himself, and is rewriting the text by adding an additional layer of signification. Those interpreters of "The Monster" who find allegorical meanings in the story lay a claim to the former case.

6.4.2.1. *Historical allegory*

Foster (1976, 88) sees an allegory of the Civil War in the fire scene. It is described in terms of conspiracy and war, and chief Shipley's figure

(TM 37) is reminiscent of General Grant. This is an intertext closely related to what Foster takes to be the main subject of the story, the situation of the blacks in America. In the rumours that accuse Henry of having set the house on fire (TM 38) he sees an allusion to the New York draft riots, in which blacks were murdered because of their supposed responsibility in starting the war. In Trescott's answer to Hagenthorpe on the subject of Henry's fate, "He will be what you like, judge" Foster sees an allusion to the verdict of the U.S. Supreme Court on the Plessy vs. Fergusson case (1896), which he sees as a decisive step in perpetuating the subordination of the Blacks after the Civil War.

In this interpretation I see major signals of *a posteriori* allegorization. The specificity of the retrieved intertext does not keep a reasonable proportion with the range of possible meanings of the literal sense and the deductive steps which lead from one to the other. Let us note, moreover, that if Crane went in for this kind of writing all the readers of the text, except Foster, would be radical misreaders. Or else, the meaning and value of the story are quite independent of this allegorical meaning.

6.4.2.2. *Religious allegory*

Christian allegories and symbols have often been found in "The Monster." The problem with many such Christian interpretations is that they leaved untouched the central question: the relevance of the symbolism to the world-view of the story. Does this symbolism work in such a way that it fosters Christian views, or is Crane just using a mythology familiar to him and his readers, as Faulkner or Beckett have acknowledged with respect to their own practice? Or is this use unconscious? Anderson (1976, 24) affirms that Crane turns his back to

Christianity but nevertheless uses Christian imagery; for Stephenson, "Crane is not concerned with the ultimate validity of Christianity here; he is concerned with the everyday viability of the Christian story in the here and now" (1972, 24). And Linder advocates the reading of these christian symbols taking into account that Crane's own creed was an "agnostic stoic humanism" (1974, 148).

Hafley is the first to put forward an interpretation of "The Monster" in which religious symbolism is a central issue. He discovers a whole pattern of religious imagery surrounding Henry Johnson: "Henry, as a perfectly good man, is equated with God rather than with any possibility for strictly human conduct: he is like God totally different from man, veiled from the eyes of man..." (1959, 162). Henry is described in religious terms: he is "divine" for Bella, and for a short time he becomes a "saint" for the townspeople; he is treated like an Old Testament God at Alek Williams's house, he appears to the judge as an unwinking eye,¹ and finally he hums a religious chant.² Hafley goes as far as to say that "Henry appears both monstrous and insane for his godlike virtues" (1959: 160), which is not the case unless we completely ignore the face value of the story: the townspeople appreciate Johnson's "godlike" virtues (though not *Trescott's*) but are terrified by something as simple as his ugliness, not by those virtues. This is taken for granted in the most matter-of-fact readings of the story (e.g. Quinn 1936, 536), and should not be lightly dismissed. Hafley's reading, of course, intends to be an "allegorical" reading; but no allegorical reading which works

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¹ The religious allusion of this motif is also noted by Kahn 1963, 40.

² Hafley 1959, 163. Hafley's views are echoed by Stephenson (1972, 28). This interpretation is thought to be a limited one by Westbrook (1972, 86).

against the literal sense will do, at least as far as the interpretation of authorial meaning is concerned. And if we want to go beyond interpretation in the direction of significance, it is clear that the plausibility of our reading will be increased by taking into account an (unconsciously) symbolic value of Henry's ugliness, instead of ignoring it. As I will suggest later, this may be usefully related to the question of Henry's race.

D. Gibson adds an important insight (already mentioned) to the religious interpretation of "The Monster." He finds in the name of John Twelve an explicit allusion to the story of Lazarus's resurrection in the story of chapter twelve of John's Gospel. This is for Gibson a sign that Crane deliberately intended to characterize Trescott as a Christ-figure. Gibson considers, though, that it is a deficient way of articulating an allusion inside a tale; it is extrinsic and footnote-like (1962, 232).

Other uses of a religious intertext are pointed out by E. Solomon (1966, 183, 192): Trescott himself is presented as a derivative God-figure through the use of situation and imagery, not the least through Johnson's Lazarus-like "resurrection."¹ The use of the Biblical intertext is usually paradoxical. Kahn (1963, 36) observes that ironic understatement always punctures the Biblical diction of Crane's characters.

Stephenson interprets "The Monster" as "an experiment in Christian mythology" (1972, 24). He notes, like other critics, the intertextual reference to the story of Lazarus in the Gospel of John, and suggests that there are references to the story of the other Lazarus in the Gospels, the parable in Luke 16. The theme of resurrection and its

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¹ The same view is found in Stephenson (1972, 28).

moral impact on the faith of people are an issue in this parable, too: it states, like "The Monster," that people will not be converted by direct contact with a living Christian myth. Stephenson develops from there an allegorical reading of the story, presupposing an elaborate system of relationships between "The Monster" and the Biblical texts. In addition to the interpretations suggested by Hafley or E. Solomon, Stephenson sees the role of both Trescott and Henry as derivative. They are God-figures only in the indirect sense in which men must be a God-figures by accepting the godly role of being real Christians (1972, 35). That Trescott is "the moon" (TM 7) is an allusion to this reflected nature of his light; he and Henry are priestly or Christ-like figures, both victims and saviors (Stephenson 1972, 28). The judge, on the other hand, performs the role of Caiphas and the Pharisees in John 12 (1972, 34). Henry's purple trousers are the ironic counterpart of the purple clothes of the rich man in Luke's Lazarus parable; Henry is indeed an ironic version of the rich man in the tale: he is poor and charitable, but he experiences hell nevertheless like his counterpart both in the real fire and the symbolic flames of malicious gossip. For Stephenson, his facelessness is the symbol of his being an unrecognized prophet; it is like the whiteness of the whale in *Moby Dick*, it signals Henry as a living myth. It is also a sign of the inability of the people in Whilomville to see themselves in Henry's face—it is a symbol of their own nothingness, and as such it becomes horrible to them (Stephenson 1972, 29, 34). Henry's veil is an allusion to Lazarus's shroud in John 12 (1972, 29). The acid which falls from the table onto Henry's face is an ironic counterpart of the crumbs from the rich man's table that Lazarus longs for in Luke 16, etc (1972, 32). The faint illumination of the last scene of the story is suggestive that in spite of everything,

Henry is alive and Trescott remains committed to him: there is still some light left in the world (1972, 39).

Modlin and Byers follow Hafley, E. Solomon D. Gibson or Stephenson in discovering religious motifs in the work. They add some Biblical parallels towards identifying Trescott as a God figure and Henry Johnson as a Christ figure. Jim's breaking the peony is related to the original sin in the Garden of Eden, and Trescott plays there the role of a godly father figure (cf. also Linder 1974, 143); Henry Johnson is man's (Jimmie's) ally in the face of God's wrath (TM 7); the fall of the picture "Signing the Declaration" marks the end of the Old Covenant with the sacrifice of Jesus-Henry; the "saffron" Miss Farragut is Judas Iscariot betraying the Son of Man; Jimmie betrays him too, like the Disciples; the citizens are the chief priests in John 12; Grace, Trescott's wife, is rejected by the world (already noted by Stephenson 1972, 39); Henry Johnson makes "dramatic" apparitions just like the resurrected Christ.

The allegorical interpretations of "The Monster" usually disregard the degree in which literary works and religious myths are based on a collective unconscious and draw on a common ground of cultural archetypes. We do not need to go to the Bible to find the archetype of the garden, the father-figure ("God-figure") or the scapegoat ("Christ-figure"). It is to be expected that the Bible should be a main influence on any Western writer—not least on Stephen Crane, the son of a minister. But it is also to be expected that the critics will supplement this presumed influence with a web of references which draw the connections tighter and make them more specific and deliberate. Moreover, most of the allegorical interpretations do not posit a systematic homology between the literal and the allegorical narratives:

instead, they construct the allegorical narrative by disrupting the meaning of the literal narrative and drawing isolated elements out of their context. For instance, when Modlin and Byers explain the association of Trescott and the moon, they have to ignore the obvious function of the image in its context, which has nothing to do with reflected light: rather, it serves to reinforce the sense of intimate companionship and accessibility between Jimmie and Henry, as opposed to the inscrutable aloofness and severity of Trescott, and to provide a humorous image: "These two were pals . . . . On all points of conduct as related to the doctor, who was the moon, they were in complete but unexpressed understanding. Whenever Jimmie became the victim of an eclipse he went to the stable to solace himself with Henry's crimes" (TM 7).

Another problem is, even if these references are recognized as being intentional, can they be read in a literal, non-ironic way? Hafley does not seem to think that this symbolism is in any way ironic. Neither do Modlin and Byers. They go further to unveil a full religious pattern as a shaping principle to the whole of the work: "The twenty-four sections of 'The Monster' move, as in the Gospel according to St. John, form the state of man's condition under Old Testament Law to the state of his condition under New Testament Grace, but an impossible Grace in a totally naturalistic environment."¹ An impossible Grace, we might argue, is not a Christian Grace. It is Grace seen with a sarcastic eye. And both Henry Johnson and Trescott are, as Linder has said, heretical Christ-figures, since neither has complete success in his rescue (1974,

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¹ Modlin and Byers 1973, 110. Cf. D. Knapp's (1969) claim that the narrative structure of "The Monster" is modelled after that of the Gospel of John.

154). Modlin and Byers conclude that “‘The Monster’, unified and constant religious allegory, reflects Crane’s view that man lives in a naturalistic world which has dispelled the myths of Old Testament Law and New Testament Grace,” and that materialism is the last condition of man. However, Modlin and Byers seem to imply that this is something of a second fall of man that is deplored by Crane. It should be clear that Crane should not be read as advocating an unqualified return of man to the ways prescribed by the Christian god. But this interpretation requires an ironic, and not a literal, reading of any religious allegories we may identify.

6.5. Sources

Sources are another intertextual element in the functioning of the story, even if they are only active as such in a restricted scholarly circle. They follow to some extent the same interpretive logic of intertextuality: they foreground certain elements of the text and in so doing they offer a representation of it and favour a determinate interpretation. The determination of sources is not as completely independent from the interpretation of the work as the New Critical school would assume. Many historical sources proposed in Beer, Berryman and Stallman for “The Monster” and the Whilomville Stories “remain unsupported and conjectural” according to M. Holton (1972, 204). For our present purposes, this is not important. Here we are concerned with source identification as an interpretive activity. Even more: if a source is not so probable or reliable, perhaps the fact that it is presented as one is more significant.

Berryman (1950) interprets the story as a reworking of autobiographical elements. First, he sees in Trescott an homage paid by Crane to the memory of his father (cf. Gilkes 1974, 132). Linder's view is more qualified: "all Trescott's lessons appear to be ones Crane particularly felt his own father never learned" (1974, 156). Crane seems to have regarded his father as a lovable and honest person, but hopelessly ignorant about humanity (Berryman 1950, 8). Positing this source also posits an interpretation—a widespread one: that "The Monster" is centrally concerned with the maturing of Trescott's heroism.

Berryman points out the origin of "Henry Johnson" as an everyman name, with an implicit allusion to Henry Fleming in The Red Badge of Courage and to Crane's own intended pseudonym "Johnson Smith" in the first edition of Maggie. All this is also noted by M. Holton (1972, 207) and Levenson (1969, xxii), who also notes Crane's preference for the name "Jim" or "Jimmie." It is known that the final pseudonym Crane used in Maggie, due to some mistake, was "Johnston Smith" ("Johnston," by the way, is the Scots equivalent of the English "Johnson"). Making Johnson an everyman also transforms the story into a moral fable; the critics of the fifties and the sixties will follow Berryman in this respect.

Berryman discerns autobiographical elements in Henry Johnson's premature obituaries (Crane had read reports of his own death in the London Academy, the Philistine and other journals following the *Commodore* incident). There is an element of satire against the press here which may also have some biographical justification. Crane was often portrayed unfavourably and even viciously by the press, above all in his relationships with women and his supposed drinking habits.

According to Weinstein, after the Dora Clark affair Crane would take any opportunity "to snipe at sensation hungry newspapermen. In Active Service and 'The Monster' these men distort truth and pander to the reader's morbid curiosity and taste for sensation" (1972, 9).

As to the setting, "Whilomville is any obscene little village one may happen to think of" (Starrett 1923, 79). But more direct sources have been put forward. For Berryman, Whilomville is "former-town," an allusion to the Port Jervis of Crane's childhood.¹ The citizens of Port Jervis themselves seem to have recognized the source for the setting, as noted by Levenson:

when his brother William let him know that "The Monster" had prompted a certain amount of local gossip, Stephen cannily replied, "I suppose that Port Jervis entered my head while I was writing it but I particularly dont [sic] wish them to think so because people get very sensitive and I would not scold away freely if I thought the eye of your glorious public was upon me."²

Linder notes that in "The Knife" Crane tried to deflect attention from the identification with Port Jervis, by suggesting that Whilomville is near Oswego (1974, 301).

Some sources have been suggested for the motif of disfiguration and the character of Henry Johnson. Cora Crane is quoted as saying that "Out of the crepe-bound face of a Negro whom Mr. Crane saw came the

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¹ Berryman 1950, 143. Cf. also Geismar 1953, 119; Kahn 1963, 38; Stallman 1968, 477; Levenson 1969, xii; Cazemajou 1969b, 138; LaFrance 1971, 206; M. Holton 1972, 278.

² Letter to William Crane, 2 Mar. 1899. Not included in Stallman and Gilkes 1960. ALS in University of Virginia Library (Levenson 1969, xii). Qtd. in full in White 1961, 636. Cf. also Stallman 1968, 334.

story of The Monster.”¹ One of Crane’s nieces saw the source for Henry Johnson’s facelessness in a black refuse collector in Port Jervis during Crane’s childhood.² She gives no name for the alleged source: the name “Levi Hume” given by some critics could not be confirmed by Beer (1922; qtd. in Levenson 1969, xiii). Stallman amplifies this to the following: “In after years he recalled in ‘The Monster’ the social ostracism of a Port Jervis negro who horrified the townsfolk by his ugly disfigured face” (1968, 13). This source is significant to the extent that it suggests that blackness and facelessness were already associated in Crane’s experience. We must not of course conclude that the interpretations which rely on the association of these motifs as a central symbol are therefore invalidated. But in my view, the existence of a direct source in Crane’s experience suggests that his choice of that symbol did not need much conscious deliberation. This has obvious implications for the status of authorial intention in the interpretation of the symbol of black facelessness.

Other sources for Henry Johnson have been proposed. Cazemajou’s source relates facelessness and care: “Nous serions enclin à penser qu’il en trouva la source dans un fait divers dont le New York Tribune avait fait état le 3 juillet 1892 [p. 12]: un cocher avait été ‘brûlé jusqu’au point de ne plus avoir figure humaine,’ et le docteur qui lui apporta ses soins s’appelait Wescott” (1969b, 422). A source like this will emphasize Trescott’s benevolence; a source like Dr. Jekyll (Linder

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¹ Rev. in Academy 1901a, 177.

² Edna Crane 1926, 248. This source is also proposed by Berryman 1950, 193; E. Solomon 1966, 181; Stallman 1968, 332; Gilkes 1974, 132.

1974) stresses instead the element of culpability and responsibility in Trescott.

Petry (1983) suggests an additional source for Henry Johnson: John Merrick, the "Elephant Man," "whose appearance, personality, and situation both resurrected Crane's memories of Hume and enabled him to flesh Hume into one of the most pathetic characters of American literature." Both Merrick and Henry Johnson are rescued by doctors, both are grotesque dandies, and both are thought to be injurious to women. Merrick also used a veil when outdoors. This source supports (and is supported by) Petry's construction of the action: according to her, Henry is sane. This, in turn, brings along a set of assumptions about the authorial attitude, the degree of irony and the role of the reader, and the whole significance of the story.

6.6. Metafiction

An early reviewer praised the effectiveness of "The Monster": "It is full of pity and terror, and leaves an indelible impression on the reader" (rev. in Spectator 1901, 244). How is this effect achieved? Some critics have argued that the story actually involves the reader in its workings in a more or less deliberate way. Maybe Wilson Follett is the first to suggest this: "'The Monster' does not leave you where you were. It does things to you" (1926, x). Katz (1969b, xix) sees the book, like Henry himself, as an empty surface where the contemporary readers

and reviewers read their own moral limitations. He does not seem to interpret this, however, as a deliberate experiment on Crane's part.

Cooley is more daring. For him, "Crane's metaphor of facelessness is analogous to Ralph Ellison's metaphor of invisibility. The former Henry Johnson is no longer, and in his stead society places its desired substitutes."¹ Cooley wonders whether the reader does not do so too in accepting the current ideas about Henry being a monster and an idiot. Is this a conscious artifact designed by Crane to test the reader? "Perhaps he intended 'The Monster' to read *us*, to see whether we sided emotionally with Whilomville even if intellectually with Dr. Trescott" (1975, 13). The idea sounds tantalizing. If that is the case, most readers have fallen into the trap. But then most readers might contend that to argue against the evidence in the text which suggests that Henry is horribly deformed and feeble-minded amounts to a rewriting of the story, and that this is a question not of emotional reaction, but of understanding the words on the page. Making Crane write post-modern texts ahead of the crowd can only result in producing a host of radical misreaders. There may be milder versions of this metafictional reading of the work. As we shall see in section 7.2, the issues of blackness and facelessness are related by several interpreters. An interpretation of the work might be developed in which the effacement of Henry Johnson's features parallels his effacement as a hero from the narrative, and points *en abyme* to the textuality of the work. "The Monster" would then declare its own inability to deal with a representation of blackness unmediated by the more readable stereotypes which are used to present

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¹ Cooley 1975, 12. Cf. Morace 1981, 71. Of course, The Invisible Man could not be an intertext as respects Crane's writing of the text; rather the other way round. But it may well be an intertext in the experience of many modern readers.

Henry Johnson before his accident, as well as the other black characters. The unreadability of the new Henry Johnson can then be related to the unreadability of the work itself—it is unreadable for both the textual author and the textual reader. Probably future interpretations of “The Monster” will develop along these lines, emphasizing the motif of deformity and relating it to textuality. After all, “the monster” is both a character inside the story and the story itself.

“The Monster” can therefore be read as a metafictional challenge to the reading habits of nineteenth-century white Americans—to make them reflect on the ways they read blacks both in life and in literature. This reading, however, will result in a fetishization of the work unless we recognize our own share in its genesis. It is a reading which is only possible from a present-day perspective, and which should not assume too much deliberation on the part of the author. It would be misleading to attribute this kind of writing to “Crane” without further qualifications. The intention which makes Henry’s facelessness a symbol for identity and the failure of interpretation is not a masterful design by Stephen Crane. It is rather the deep intention of the work when it is read in a particular historical context: the present-day debate on racial identity and the constructedness of representations. The textual material which makes possible the reading of this deep intention of the work is the result of a whole complex of disparate discourses and social attitudes dealing with racial representation which were synthesized through Crane’s personal experience and his intuitive creativity. Under these circumstances, the fact that Crane’s contemporaries failed to interpret the work along these lines is not so surprising.

6.7. Conclusion

When we consider this proliferation of hidden meanings, we seem to be not so far away from Dante's theory of the levels of signification of the Divine Comedy¹ or the Christian tradition of Biblical hermeneutics. And we recall Augustine's advice to the interpreters: if the literal sense of a passage in the Holy Writ does not seem to be edifying or moral, it is the duty of the interpreter to produce a reading which shows that the passage in question also contributes to the salvation of man. The sacred writings of our own age (the works of the literary canon) have also been given this hermeneutic privilege. In both cases, the historical meaning is overridden by the more valuable meaning—only, Augustine could point to God as the author of the spiritual meanings he discovered.

The moral sense of this story is that the word "interpretation" refers to a wide variety of activities. All of them have a central element in common, but their different circumstances make all the difference. It is one thing, for instance, to interpret the meaning of a sentence for a very definite practical purpose in an unequivocal circumstance, when it is understood that there are no other codes bearing upon that circumstance than the language in which the sentence is formulated and the particular social codes that the meaning of the sentence refers to. This is a simple

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¹ Dante develops this theory in his letter to Can Grande della Scala. It is not impossible to find contemporary interpreters who apply Dante's method of interpretation in an explicit way—see Joost 1957.

case of interpretation, even if the “timeless meaning” of the sentence¹ happens to be ambiguous. For instance, in Stanley Fish’s example of a sign which reads “PRIVATE MEMBERS ONLY” on the door of a faculty club,² the interpreter requires a knowledge of English and a knowledge of the institutional conventions of faculty clubs, together with the disambiguating knowledge that no references to genitalia are to be expected on the doors of faculty clubs, and that in any case the unit to measure admittance is the whole person, rather than separate organs.

It is quite another thing to interpret a literary text. A multiplicity of codes is required, and an element may function according to several codes at once. Any of the symbols that the interpreters unearth in “The Monster” might serve as an example. At the action level, where the symbolic meaning does not exist; the peony scene is already full with meaning for the characters; they use it to reinforce their respective subject-positions and social identities as father and son. At the narrative level, the scene is given the structural significance of a beginning (which it was not at the story level), and so on. Many of these meanings are based on cultural knowledge so widespread as to be not worth mentioning or consciously noticing in a spontaneous approach to the story: that the scene is not set in the Middle Ages, or that Dr. Trescott is white.

Any scene is of such complexity that interpretations will differ even if the critics agree on most of the central points of the scene. Let us imagine an critic who sees in the peony scene a replay of the Little

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¹ Grice’s expression (1989, 89).

² Fish 1978. Fish, of course, tries to draw a different lesson from this example.

George Washington and the Cherry Tree story, and does not admit that the scene contains an allusion to the Garden of Eden, as maintained by Modlin and Byers. To say that Modlin and Byers and my critic interpret the scene differently means that they differ in the phase of interpretation more specific of the academic activity in which they are engaged. But that disagreement presupposes an enormous area of agreement which is unnoticed because it is taken for granted. This area, however, is still the result of interpretation—of interpretation in the purest sense of reconstructing the intentional meanings of an author. An understanding of the basic locutionary and illocutionary conventions invoked by the author, the retrieval of the authorial verbal meaning, will not be even mentioned. And yet it is where it is not raised as an issue that the authorial intention is most crucially involved with the meaning of the text. This is because it is assumed to be so widely shared that there is no obvious gain in considering it the author's intention: this is the famous words-on-the-page theory. And indeed practical critics can do very well with this conception of verbal meaning, if only this does not lead them to an inadequate conception of other levels of authorial intention.

Does it make a difference whether there is an intentional allusion to the garden of Eden, or to the myth of the cherry tree? Modlin and Byers, like the other critics who discover the use of religious imagery in "The Monster," assume that the use of this imagery is deliberate. Let us suppose that our straw critic thinks that the "allusion" to George Washington's cherry tree was not conscious for Crane, but was nevertheless real, an instance of subliminal inspiration drawn from a story he associated with childhood and with father-son relationships. He might argue that because it is unconscious, the allusion is deficiently tied

to the treatment of plot and character, that the scene does not prefigure any scene which deals with Jimmie Trescott's sincerity either to enhance it or to deflate it. Since it is not a conscious allusion, he might say, it is not a part of the intended meaning of the story, and can be safely ignored. This critic would be playing the game of literary commentary rather deficiently. A psychological accident in Crane's mind is of little interest if it cannot be used to understand other elements of the story. The deficiency of the author's text would also be the deficiency of the critic's narrative: a failure to establish an isotopy. In the case of the "Garden of Eden" interpretation of the initial scene, we cannot complain that the interpreter has not fulfilled his task: there is a whole swarm of religious symbols to go with this allusion. Would it make any difference if these symbols were assumed to be the result of a deep or unconscious intentionality? The critics usually affirm that the isotopies are designed by the author. Still, in this case, ninety-nine per cent of the readers would not have noticed the religious symbolism if it were not pointed out to them—something which they could hardly afford to do with the codes that determine verbal meaning. Two solutions are open to the critic at this point:

—To claim that nobody had noticed this aspect of the story before, and that therefore his or her interpretation is a genuine unearthing, an improvement on existing readings. This has one disadvantage: it establishes a relationship of inverse proportionality between the originality of the critic's contribution and its centrality to the meaning of the story. If the author intended the readers to recognize the pattern and no one did, either all previous readers are radical misreaders, or the author is a deficient communicator, or the pattern is of anecdotal

importance, dispensable. In any case, the author emerges as a deviser of riddles (substantial or insubstantial).

— Another solution is to claim that the pattern is made explicit for the first time, but that it accomplished its function nevertheless, because it operated subliminally in previous readers. If we emphasize the conscious intentionality of the isotopy while adhering to this claim, we may end up with a notion of the author as brainworm or puppet master.

None of these seems to satisfactory. Deliberateness is often used in criticism to account for the isotopies established by critics—due, perhaps, to the inevitable humanism of the humanities, which stimulates most critical commentary. Horton observes how four “necessary fictions” seem to rule the (academic) interpretation of literary works: 1) That the best interpretation can manage not to leave anything out. 2) That everything can or ought to be forced into meaning. 3) That a true interpretation of the (wholesale) meaning of the work is reachable in theory. 4) That all facts of the text are facts of the same order or kind (1979, 5). It can be readily seen that all four fictions are different formulations of the same basic principle: interpretation as discovering a hidden meaning which has not been noticed before (Horton 1979, 9). She also notes an abuse of two trump cards in interpretation: “irony” is always used to rescue those elements which do not fit into the interpreter’s pre-determined scheme (1979, 34); “symbol” is the means to reduce all the work to a single logic (Horton 1979, 37). The tendency of interpreters to smooth out contradictions and make a clear pattern emerge is also criticised by de Man (1983, 113).

The claim to have unearthed a secret design gives the interpretation a claim to greater authority. It also serves to limit the responsibilities of the critic while maximizing those of the author, and to exorcise the

notion that the interpretation may be after all the product of the interpreter's activity. This attitude is tenable with difficulty at the end of the twentieth century, after the insights of psychoanalysis, Marxism, Gestalt psychology and structuralism have thrown light on how much of our activity is patterned and governed by unconscious forces. The unsaid precedes the text and the interpretation, and permeates both of them.

The interpretive aims of academic criticism go far beyond a working reconstruction of the authorial meaning. They involve a supplementation of this meaning, a partial rewriting of the work. "The interpreter, without actually erasing or rewriting the text, *is* altering it. But he can't admit to doing this. He claims to be only making it intelligible, by disclosing its true meaning" (Sontag 1966, 6). Through this activity, the work becomes what it was already assumed to be: a masterpiece in which nothing is accidental.

"Crane" therefore does not mean the same in these interpretations and in a biography of Stephen Crane—here it tends to become a synonymous with "the work," with all the overtones this word has in New Criticism. That this kind of interpretive activity should cease is not clear—indeed, it is not clear that it can cease as long as there are students of literature. But a more self-conscious attitude towards the interpretive activity, in view of the work of other critics, would be desirable. Also, an interpretation which aims at historical accuracy should not lay excessively ambitious claims on the determinacy of the authorial meaning it wishes to retrieve.

7. Discourse: Textual Author and Literary Statement

7.1. Genre

We have already discussed the status of literary genres as macro-illocutions. They fulfil a communicative role as conventionalized (and therefore recognizable) sets of formal or thematic traits. Genres are, of course, in constant transformation; every work of genius modifies to some extent the genres it relies on, the discursive conventions it starts from. This is frequently done through the combination of traits of two separate genres or discourse activities. Genres are not pigeon holes to place works in; they are both the way our knowledge of literature is organized and the strategies we follow to make sense of a work. As Harris has pointed out, works do not "belong to" a genre; rather they are "assigned to" one or more genres when we interpret them (1988, 94).

We have seen that Hirsch's conception of genre is amenable to the perspective of discourse analysis. The identification of genre helps to posit the author's horizon of expectations (Hirsch 1967, 222). The context of an utterance is not sufficient to account for communication. The language-game, type of meaning, or genre, must be identified.¹

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¹ Hirsch 1967, 70. Cf. Close 1976, 183f.; Skinner 1976, 220.

This allows Hirsch to challenge Heidegger's claims about the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger's account of the circular reference from part to whole in the interpretive act is flawed, because we already approach interpretation with some expectations about the whole. The confirmation of a genre or set of expectations allows further expectations to be made (Hirsch 1967, 72-76). A genre is not a purely heuristic construct, since in this conception ("intrinsic genre") it is shared by both the speaker or author and the hearer or reader—it is an element of speech activity, not only of interpretation (1967, 78). Therefore, "every disagreement about an interpretation is usually a disagreement about genre" (1967, 96). Genres, like verbal meaning, are shared types; and they are organized not around formal characteristics, but around purpose (1967, 91, 100). They are historically variable. Indeed, Hirsch would prefer to use the term "generic conventions and structures" rather than "genres", because they are cognitive schemata which may evolve, rather than Aristotle's or Frye's fixed species (1967, 107-109).

We need now to be somewhat more specific in the definition of genres as macro-illocutions. When we speak of the genre of a literary work, we may be referring to quite different things. Once a work has been recognized as an instance of narrative literary discourse, one direction of generic specification concerns the scope of the work: we have sketches, short stories, novels, etc. This generic distinction is not too relevant as far as the activation of thematic interpretive macrostructures is concerned. There may be, nevertheless, expectations concerning the type of structure which is to be expected in a work of a given length. As far as length is concerned, "The Monster" is typical of Crane's work and untypical of the main tradition of Western literature.

Like The Red Badge of Courage or Maggie, the work combines the characteristics of the novel and the short story. Unlike a short story, it is divided into chapters, but these are too short to create the impression that we are reading a novel. "The Monster" has been called almost anything between a short story and a novel by its readers. Crane himself referred to "The Monster" as "a novelette of 20,000 words."¹ Harriman also chose to define it in numerical terms as "a tale of some twenty-five thousand words" (1900, 255). For other critics it is a story,² a tale,³ a narrative (Knight 1951, 154), a short story,⁴ a long story,⁵ "a 'long' short story,"⁶ a "novelette,"⁷ a small novel (Bridges 1898, 258), a short novel,⁸ a novel,⁹ or simply a book (Quinn 1936, 536). I remember myself being slightly puzzled by the un-average length of the "thing" when I first read it. "The Monster" is a challenge to the ingenuity of

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¹ Letter to Edmund Crane, 9 Sept. 1897; qtd. in Stallman and Gilkes 1960, 144 n. 102. Cf. also Kahn 1963, 37; Weatherford 1973, 258.

² Rev. in Literary Digest (1899); rev. in Critic (1900); rev. in Spectator (1901, 244); rev. in Academy (1901a, 177); rev. in Academy (1901b; rpt. in Weatherford 1973, 264); rev. in Daily News (1901, 6); Beer 1923, 163; Ahnebrink 1950, 101; Berryman 1950, 193; Gullason 1960, 663; E. Solomon 1966, 182; Ives 1969, 25; Stephenson 1972, 33; Cooley 1975, 14; Morace 1981, 76.

³ Rev. in Public Opinion (1899); rev. in Athenaeum (1901); Vasil'evskaia (*paccka3*) 1967, 214.

⁴ William Dean Howells, qtd. by Cora Crane in Academy 1901b, 177.

⁵ M. Solomon 1956b, 38; Poenicke 1982 ("längere Erzählung").

⁶ Dust jacket of the original edition (qtd. in Bowers 1969, 4).

⁷ And not a short story, as emphasized by Wagenknecht (1952, 216). Cf. also Westbrook 1962, 595; Colvert 1984, 123; Cazemajou 1969b, 138 ("nouvelle").

⁸ Gibson 1962, 228; Levenson 1969, xi.

⁹ E. Solomon 1966a, 200; Foster 1976, 90.

the critic who will be able to find the right description: "a story that is short, instead of the short story it was meant to be" (rev. in Book Buyer, 1900) is a picturesque description, but perhaps it is more adequate to describe "The Monster" as both "one of the major inventions in its form, that of the elongated short-story or novella" (Follett 1926, xi) and "a very brief novel rather than a short story in its form" (Hafley 1959, 160).

In this respect, the structure of the story is a peculiar one. Perhaps Crane has not received enough credit for the extent of his reaction against the standard narratives of his time. It is significant that most novels of the twentieth century are significantly shorter than the nineteenth-century ones. If Crane contributed to this change, this also counts as practical work done on the literary conventions and discursive practices of his age.

In another sense of the word "genre," a work might be classified according to the traditional Aristotelian criterion (tragedy, comedy, epic, comic epic) or a variety of later classifications, the most systematic of which is perhaps Frye's archetypal circle of four *mythoi*:: romance, tragedy, satire or irony, comedy (1957, 167ff). These are to some extent sets of macrostructures of themes and actions to which a work can be referred, both for its final interpretation and for its progressive concretization during the reading process.

Critics have often described "The Monster" as a "tragedy."¹ A tragic fate is suggested: the hero brings about his own downfall. Levenson has called attention in this respect to a note on "imprudent commitment" written by Crane at the time of the Dora Clark trial: "There is such a

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¹ E.g. Starrett 1923,79; Wyatt 1915; LaFrance 1971, 210.

thing as a moral obligation arriving inopportune. The inopportune arrival of a moral obligation can bring just as much personal humiliation as can a sudden impulse to steal or any of the other mental suggestions which we account calamitous."¹ But Crane does not really sound here like he is lamenting these sudden feelings or considering them imprudent; rather he is blushing about having to actually accept responsibility for the heroic role in a tragic approach to life.

"The Monster" is "a tragedy with epic significance" according to Wolford (1983, xiii). More specifically, Wolford argues, "'The Monster' would have been defined or catalogued by Aristotle as one of the four types of epic: ethical. In fact, it is what someone called an 'epic of democracy,' in which an honest, ethical, and upright man discovers that the group cannot be defeated by one who would live within it" (1983, 20). It is both tragedy and epic by the feature of Trescott's heroism.²

However, E. Solomon (1966, 190) argues that in the final analysis the novel is not tragic; no work of Crane's can be defined as a straightforward tragedy, and the story turns towards comedy and parody. It is probably the same realization of the importance of an implied authorial irony and of the social satire that leads Cazemajou to describe the story as a tragi-comedy (1969b, 422).

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¹ "Adventures of a Novelist. By Stephen Crane. The Distinguished Author's Narrative of How He Sought 'Material' in Real Life in the 'Tenderloin' and Found More than He Bargained For." New York Journal 20 sept. 1896; qtd. in Levenson 1969, xviii.

² Wolford 1983, 78. Wolford is less convincing when he attempts to find in the story some direct formal suggestions of the epic: "Like The Red Badge, The Monster is divided into twenty-four sections, has a two-part structure, includes flashbacks and contains at least one epic simile—the fire was already roaring like a winter wind among the pines' [TM 25]" (Wolford 1983, 87).

As I have said before, in my view the story is deeply pessimistic. The moral action of the hero is valuable in itself, but is overpowered by the apathy of the stars (to borrow a Joycean phrase) and the meanness of men and women. Moral heroism is not offered as a solution; the hero is defeated and does not bring along the wished-for resolution; no comic society is built at the end; instead, there is an almost unbearable sense of alienation. Therefore, the description of the work as a comedy or epic is wholly out of the question, whatever its "comic" (satiric, ironic, funny) ingredients. It seems clear to me that if we attempted a classification of "The Monster" borrowing Frye's archetypal system, we might describe it as a combination of the first and the fifth phases of the ironic mythos (cf. Frye 1957, 230ff.). Frye describes the first phase as that in which there is no displacement of the humorous society (here Frye uses "humor" in a Jonsonian sense, as the caricaturesque adversary of the hero). Moral decorum rises to a terrifying climax, and the author adopts the role of the plain dealer, who discourages heroism in view of its dire consequences and encourages conventional behaviour. The fifth phase of irony is the typical fatalistic tragedy, in which the attitude is less moral and more metaphysical; the emphasis is not on meliorism but on stoical endurance. All of these elements have been identified in "The Monster" by the critics, but not always in their right proportion. The question of genre is most clearly related to the authorial attitude towards the protagonists of the story. The above comments are concerned mainly with Trescott. Crane's attitude towards his hero is not easy to identify, and the work does not fall neatly into any of the more conventional schemes of tragedy or irony; as a result, the generic nature of "The Monster" is the object of critical contention.

But "The Monster" can be assumed to belong to an entirely different genre if we shift our attention from white Whilomville to Henry Johnson, or to the relationship between Trescott and Johnson. Here we may glimpse something like a comic society being built. The emphasis at the level of the action falls on exclusion and persecution, but some critics feel that at the level of the implied authorial attitude a certain sense of community is articulated (see section 7.3). The work therefore combines in an unprecedented way the comic and the tragic strands, and the originality of this combination is not unrelated to the conflict which is staged, the choice of an allegiance to the white community or to the black individual. As a result, it is hard to get a unified picture of the textual authorial attitude in the work; interpreters will frequently differ on this point. The relative importance of each of these generic components will depend to some extent on the attention devoted to the role of Henry Johnson. "The Monster" is a grim work, but it may lean somewhat towards the comic pole if certain issues are privileged. The story assumes a different air depending on the emphasis the interpreter places on each of the heroes, Trescott and Johnson. The difference in genre is to some extent in the eye of the interpreter, and his/her intentions in engaging with the work.

7.2. Trescott and Moral Responsibility

Among the literary statements which critics have read in "The Monster," there is one which, if defined with a margin of tolerance, is

close to achieving the unanimity of all the critics: the story is a social satire; it attacks the moral hypocrisy of the inhabitants of a small village. In the Introduction I showed that for Crane's contemporaries the social critique was on the whole a secondary theme, and the interest of "The Monster" was thought to lie in the author's powers of observation and in the psychology of the characters. But very soon, in the early decades of this century, the story became primarily a social satire of narrow social conventions. There is no doubt that this subject was a dear one to Crane's heart. His words on the subject have been read as a paraphrase of the statement dramatized in "The Monster": "Usually social form as practiced by the stupid is not a law. It is a vital sensation. It is not temporary, emotional; it is fixed and, very likely, the power that makes the rain, the sunshine, the wind, now recognizes social form as an important element in the curious fashioning of the world."¹ Berryman sees the story as a vent for Crane's own feelings of ostracization from the official side of American society, with particular reference to his relationships with "fallen women."²

From the fifties on, this interpretation again recedes to a secondary place, and the story is read as a statement on heroism and individual morality—the social background serves merely as an adversary to the hero. There was a clear shift of critical emphasis from the condemnation of society to an interest in individual morals, or

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¹ Stephen Crane, "In the Tenderloin," qtd. by E. Solomon 1966, 198.

² Berryman 1950, 193; cf. this same explanation in Geismar 1953, 116; Kahn 1963, 37-38; Gilkes 1960, 134; E. Solomon 1966, 182; Levenson 1969, xv; Cazemajou 1969b, 422; Monteiro 1972, 100-102; M. Holton 1972, 204; Linder 1974, 129; Colvert 1984, 124. Trescott is usually seen as the Crane-figure in the story; Gilkes and Cazemajou (1969b, 427) also draw a parallel between Crane and Henry Johnson.

individual psychology under social pressure. Modern critics tend to see in the story a greater measure of disgust and pessimism than the critics of the first half of the century. They read it as a castigation of American bourgeois society,¹ of American society at large (Sieglén 1968; qtd. in Linder 1974, 134) or of society at large (Linder 1974, 134). In E. Solomon's view, "Crane rejects society in 'The Monster'" (1964, 87); the tale is a "horrifying social satire" (1964, 114). Crane's work reveals the underlying cruelty of society (Gullason 1960, 668); it puts forward a pessimistic social outlook, denouncing collective blindness and cruelty (Cazemajou 1969b, 427). Holton speaks of Crane's darkened social vision: this is a story of confrontation that leads to madness, and knowledge that leads to isolation (1972, 204-205). Other confrontations apart from Trescott's (e.g. those of Martha Goodwin or Jimmie with their peers) are always for the wrong reasons. There can be no return of Trescott to the community after the confrontation (M. Holton 1972, 212). Trescott's ostracisation is considered a maturing and isolating experience by Levenson: "Crane never let his readers forget that crossing into the otherworld changed a man forever, if he lived. From the beginning he shaped his fiction to the theme of you-can't-go-home-again" (1969, XVI). Hafley sees in "The Monster" a staging of the conflict "between social and individual value" (1959, 161); it is the story of Henry Johnson's and Trescott's individual fulfilment outside the pharisaic conventions of the town,² a disgusted, traditionally American and Romantic vision of society.

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¹ Smirnov 1962, 16-17, qtd. in Vasil'evskaia 1967, 221; Vasil'evskaia 1967, 222.

² Cf. Ellison 1960 (in Ellison 1964, 65); D. Gibson 1968; 136.

However, it has often been noted that in "The Monster" there is a move in Crane's creativity towards a depiction of social articulations, which are conspicuously absent from much of his early work. Cady (1966, 158) sees in "The Monster" and in such stories as "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and the best of the Whilomville Stories a move on Crane's part towards the perception and problems of his maturity; for the first time he deals with a whole, complicated society. For Wolford, the story is "a product of Crane's maturity, to the extent that he had one" (1983, xiii).

Other critics have stressed other aspects of Crane's individualism and have thereby led their interpretations of "The Monster" in different directions, perhaps less traditionally American and Romantic ones. In M. Solomon's Marxist reading, Crane is not an individualist in the bourgeois tradition (1956a, 25). He was a radical who was appalled by the American social scene of the 1890s. But he despaired of ever finding a social solution which he could offer. He could not bring himself to accept any kind of blueprint for society or any political project; all he could offer was an ethical program (1956b, 33-34). In any case, M. Solomon considers that Crane's mere opposition to many things is a link between him and the social reformers of his age.

Some critics use the social as a metaphor for the metaphysical. It is at this deeper level of interpretation that some critics hear "The Monster" voice its bleakest insights. They may draw from the moral confrontation a deeper statement on a necessary battle against cosmic pressure, on life seen as a battle of the individual against universal malevolence, a battle in which "only the scarred can hope to offer a tentative interpretation of man's dilemmas" (Kahn 1963, 37). For Wolford, Crane is "a barbarian" who rejects all human institutions. In

"The Monster" it is the turn of culture (1983, 143-144). "Crane was always a nihilist. There is nothing to hold on at the end of his most important works; the difference is generally one of quality or perhaps quality of expression. The nihilism of *Maggie* is angry, muddled, overtly insistent when compared with 'The Open Boat', whose nihilism is ice-clear, pristine, cold, hard, beautiful" (Wolford 1983, 21). Walcutt reads "The Monster" as the account of a cosmic joke which corners the moral individual and leaves him with no decent issue. A proof, therefore, that there is no cosmic order or purpose. Whenever Crane's outlook seems less bleak, as in "The Open Boat," it is not because the universe is more benevolent; maybe his heroes are better, or just luckier men (Walcutt 1956, 84). In "The Monster" and "The Open Boat," M. Holton sees Crane thematising "the exile from reality as an inevitable condition of humanity" (1972, 13-14).

Usually, the critics view the natural forces in Crane's novels as the blind enemy of the hero, the embodiment of the blindness of the universe. Such is the role of the fire in "The Monster," like that of the sea in "The Open Boat," for most critics who mention this theme. Mayer suggests, however, that the fire is an agent of honesty, as opposed to the petrified social conventions of Whilomville. Through his action in the fire, Henry has shifted the accepted roles of the community, and "his defacement is but the honest proof of nature's power" (1972, 33). Mayer goes on to suggest the positive side of Crane's statement on the man's condition; the possibility to assert human brotherhood in the fight against an hostile nature (1972, 33).

This view is fairly representative of a majority. Nihilism is too strong a word for most critics, who see Crane's concern as ultimately moral. Indeed, these critics are right to the extent that, as noted by

Westbrook, Crane is never a determinist in the sense of sidestepping the issue of personal choice and moral responsibility. Although the environment is given its due, Crane always insists that there is a margin of freedom of choice where a person must exercise his personal honesty.¹ Westbrook notes that this is especially clear in "The Monster," who has therefore troubled many critics who expect to find a standard naturalist outlook in the story (1962, 595). Linder believes that Crane is pleading, like Matthew Arnold, for man's duty to establish little spaces of beauty, goodness, and order in the midst of universal chaos—the battles fought in "The Monster" are moral, and are won or lost in the hero's inner self (1974, 176). Monteiro has argued that in spite of Crane's criticism of christianity, his work retains an ideal of an essential christianity as charity, as a barrier to "the predatory instincts of mankind" (1972, 92; cf. Morace 1981, 78). This charity has nothing to do with distributive justice or with philanthropy. Monteiro notes that Crane sees philanthropy as a parody of true charity. The moral issues in "The Monster" become even clearer if we keep this consideration in mind. Trescott's attitude towards Henry starts as a feeling of duty (Gross 1975, 107), and goes through a stage of philanthropy, the Alek Williams episode, until it is forced to define itself as charity in the face of the town's opposition.

Monteiro defines Crane's view of charity as being a matter not of finances but rather an attitude, "an expression of grace" (1972, 96). Only Trescott is capable of charity in the story. Gross (1975, 107) points out that Crane is careful in showing that the town is not evil, that

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¹ Westbrook 1962, 577-580; 1972, 94. This same point is made by LaFrance (1971, 151) and Linder (1974, 137).

it goes as far as to offer help (though not kindly care). When Christian charity is put to the test in Whilomville, Monteiro notes, only paradoxes arise. In this respect, Cooley (1975, 13) links Crane's point in the story to that of The Red Badge of Courage: survival with integrity is almost impossible. Pizer (1983, 129) sees in "The Monster" a comment on the futility of Trescott's Christian model of sacrifice.

This is a far cry from the critics who draw a more explicit and positive religious statement from the work (cf. section 6.4.2.2). Katz, for instance, sees in "The Monster" and "The Blue Hotel" a similar ethical view: "God does not share the blame for sin committed by respectable people, as he did in Maggie" (1969b, xix). I would argue not merely for the innocence of God in "The Monster," but rather for his complete absence from the story: Crane's vision of the world is not at all the Christian one. Nagel (1980, 168) notes that the climax in Stephen Crane's novels coincides with the realization of the blindness of nature. In this, he says, Crane's work is concerned with man's isolation and instability, and looks forward to the literature of the twentieth century. And in the twentieth century, we might add, God is dead. The universe is a boat of fools, without a captain or a rudder (cf. poem no. 6 in The Black Riders). However, as we have said, Crane's vision is anything but amoral.

The work is thus led to a paralyzed conclusion. It is hard to see the possibility of coherent moral action in the world of "The Monster," and this may be Crane's deepest intention in the work, rather than a staging of the polar opposition between virtue and moral blindness. Trescott cannot act morally without inflicting additional suffering, while it is not out of the question that the morally wrong solution might be the best for everyone, including Henry himself. These readings would relieve "The

Monster” of the kind of reforming moralism that seemed to puzzle Åhnebrink (1950, 219) when comparing this story to other works of Crane, where he sees the artist prevailing over the moralist.

The artist may transcend the moralist, but the moral attitudes are an integral part of the structure of the story. Recognising them supposes constructing the figure of the textual author, who gives a silent judgement on the attitudes and the characters. In the main, the readers have interpreted the story in ways which preserve many common elements even at this highly abstract and inferential level of the structure. There is, as we shall see, a widespread agreement on the authorial attitude towards the main characters. There are some significant disagreements on the evaluation of that attitude, and there are some disagreements on less central issues which may also be telling.

The most spectacular case of disagreement is the response to the figure of Martha Goodwin. Most critics agree that the figure of Martha Goodwin is an adversary of Trescott and is condemned by the authorial attitude, often without qualifying their assertion in the new light of chapter XXII. She is a “cynical old spinster” (Hughes 1900, 252); she is “ridden hard” by Crane (Berryman 1950, 192); a hypocritical puritan for Vasil’evsakaia (1967, 217); a ferocious, mean, narrow-minded woman.¹ Some critics, however, have seen in Martha an ally of Trescott’s. Quinn sees in her an enemy of the small-town mentality in her refusal to “follow the herd,” and deplores the fact that “by a curious critical stupidity she has been celebrated by [Crane’s] adulators as a study of starved sexual instincts” (1936, 536). Modlin and Byers (1973, 113) also seem to see in her a positive character while ignoring that

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¹ Gross 1975, 106; cf. also Cazemajou 1969b, 423; Wolford 1983, 2.

there has been a change in the authorial attitude towards her. For them, the Martha of chapter XXII is simply rising to her full stature. Her name means "Good-one," and is also suggestive of the Martha in the Gospel of John.¹ Stephenson also draws this Biblical parallel. At first he suggests that it has a completely different sense: in John 12 Martha says that Lazarus (Henry) stinks. But without further notice Stephenson then declares that Martha fulfils the role of a moral standard in the story (Stephenson 1972, 37). Westbrook, for his part, speaks of "the strange in-law and mother-earth role of Martha" (1972, 99). Finally, after being the hero, the villain, and Westbrook's puzzling mythical figure, Martha assumes the role of the victim. Gross notes that Martha Goodwin's power comes paradoxically from her being a social outcast herself, a spinster who has to purchase her lodgings from her sister. She does not question her own subjugation; instead, she accumulates an unconscious ferocity (Gross 1975, 105). However, Gross does not suggest that Crane wished to convey this meaning deliberately.

In one of his letters Crane describes with obvious irritation what has been taken to be the prototype of Martha Goodwin.² Follett believes that Crane's personal resentment towards his model interferes with the dramatic function of the character: "Martha Goodwin is drawn with a

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¹ Pseudo-etymologies are always created to support pre-determined interpretations. Morace proposes an ironical interpretation of Martha's name, because "good does not win."

² "To an unknown recipient," after December 15, 1894. Letter no. 49 in Stallman and Gilkes 1960. The letter is cited as a source for Martha Goodwin by Follett 1926, xv, Stallman and Gilkes 1960, 42 n.; Kahn 1963, 40; Stallman 1968, 114; M. Holton 1972, 320 n. 21. Figures similar to Martha can be found in The Third Violet and The O'Ruddy (Stallman 1968, 114). M. Holton finds a Martha-like figure (besides the one in The Third Violet) in the Rose Goldege of "The Lover and the Tell-Tale" (M. Holton 1972, 212, 218).

fury out of all proportion to any part she is given to play" (Follett 1926, xvii). The problem, however, is not only that. Gullason is the first to note the apparent incongruity of having Martha change sides and stand by Trescott in the face of her fellow gossips (TM 97). This certainly creates a sense of confusion in some readers.¹ Kahn's view is similar: in the latter scene, Martha "seems to speak for Crane, a rational voice among the hysterical harridans." But Gullason and Kahn do not see a serious difficulty here: "Martha displays her hypocrisy by contradicting her earlier hostility toward Trescott" (Gullason 1960, 667); "her pleasure is not in justice but in defeating her cronies" (Kahn 1963, 42-43). Mayer, too, finds that "Martha fails like the others to break out of the egocentric role which she has prescribed for herself" (1972, 36). For Gross (1975, 106) her change of sides "seems to serve only to add fickleness to her other liabilities." Westbrook (1972, 93) and M. Holton interpret the passage in a similar way: "ironically, it is Martha Goodwin, who, in her perverse effort to belittle her companions, on one occasion defends Dr. Trescott" (M. Holton 1972, 212). In this view, Crane's irony is looping the loop in the figure of Martha. D. Gibson does not see an easy solution to Martha's (or Crane's) changing horses in midstream. He notes how her change of heart contributes to cast doubt on Trescott's reliability: "I suspect that the presentation of Martha's character suggests Crane's reservations about the doctor's decision to follow the dictates of his conscience rather than to act pragmatically" (1968, 139).

Martha's role is a minor one, and the judgement passed on her is only instrumental to the main issues of the story, which are dealt with in

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¹ E. Solomon 1966, 196; D. Gibson 1968, 139; Gross 1975, 106; and myself.

Crane's attitudes to Trescott and Henry Johnson. The implied authorial attitude towards Johnson will be dealt with in the next chapter. For the moment, let us watch some responses to the figure of Trescott.

A seemingly undisputable fact about the authorial intention of the story is that Trescott is proposed as a moral example.¹ As Cooley notes, the imagery often shows him checking wild nature, whether it be his lawn or a patient's illness, while the townsfolk are associated with wild animals or savage nature (1975, 10).² Some critics nevertheless suggest a reservation on Crane's part to have us side fully with the doctor.³ For Beer, the story is a "sermon on useless pity" (1923, 163). This seems to imply that Trescott's attitude is flawed, and that the judge is Crane's

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¹ Bridges 1898; rev. in *Spectator* 1901, 144; Wyatt 1915, 149; Åhnebrink 1950, 378; Berryman 1950, 192; M. Solomon 1956b, 38; Hafley 1959, 165; Berenson 1960, 19; Ellison 1960 (in Ellison 1964, 65); Gullason 1960, 665; Westbrook 1962, 596; 1972, 90; Kahn 1963, 40; G. W. Johnson 1963, 73; E. Solomon 1966, 12; Cady 1966, 160; Vasil'evskaia 1967, 219; D. Gibson 1968, 137; Debouzy 1968, 247; Levenson 1969, xxi; Cazemajou 1969b, 427; Stephenson 1972, 35; Mayer 1972, 33; M. Holton 1972, 209; Linder 1974, 136; Gross 1975, 103; Cooley 1975, 10; 1982, 33 (with some reservations); Anderson 1976, 24; Morace 1981, 77; Pizer 1983, 129; Wolford 1983, 20; Colvert 1984, 124.

² Morace (1981, 80 n. 27) finds that the effective phrase of the judge, that Trescott's attitude may be "one of the blunders of virtue," is intended by Crane to turn against the judge's position. Morace sees in it an allusion to these lines by Charles Churchill: "Ne'er blush'd unless, in spreading Vice's snares, / She blunder'd on some virtue unawares." Of course, the meaning of "blunder" is here precisely the opposite, and Morace says that this demonstrates Crane's view that Trescott is being given a chance to act virtuously. Morace notes that the text stresses that the judge has not invented the phrase; this is, presumably, an indication that it is an echo. But the argument is circular: if the quotation works, it is because it inverts the sense of the judge's phrase in the story; but we can relate it to the story only on the grounds of its sense, and this is the opposite. As a result, many readers may not find here a deliberate allusion on the part of Crane to this poem, but rather to the literal sense of the phrase, which is self-explanatory enough.

³ Wagenknecht 1952, 216; D. Gibson 1968, 139; Monteiro 1972, 103. Åhnebrink (1950, 381) praises Crane's objectivity in showing both views of the problem, Trescott's and the townsfolk's. Åhnebrink refers to the barbershop scenes, rather than to the conversation between the judge and Trescott. He sees in this objectivity one more sign of the clear influence of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* on "The Monster."

spokesman. Other readings in this direction do not want to go that far. Monteiro speaks in this respect of the "antinomies of Christian charity" in Crane. One side of the antinomy is clear enough: Christian charity in a Christian community leads to social damnation. In the words of Levenson, "Dr. Trescott, firmly set in the established order and prompted only by motives of which his society approved, acted to bring on himself a relentless process of exclusion and alienation" (1969, xv; cf. also Stephenson 1972, 38). Another side of the antinomy is more disturbing: in "The Monster," Crane almost forces us to side with Trescott, but then Trescott's charitable attitude may turn out to be inhuman, and ignorant of all the feelings involved in the issue.¹ Monteiro sees here a disillusion on Crane's part with the ideal purity of primitive Christianity. As I have suggested, this disillusion, dramatized in the stalemate at the end of "The Monster," may also be suggestive of Crane's deep conviction of the ultimate absurdity of human existence and the impasse of a moral solution to man's cosmic dilemma.

Foster takes the most radical stand on the subject of this debate: he takes the authorial condemnation to extend to Trescott, as a "weak-willed meliorist." (1976, 87). "Trescott has not defied Hagenthorpe; he has relegated Johnson to a limbo between life and death, and in some ways worse than death, to demonstrate his 'gratitude'" (1976, 89). Earlier (1976, 88), Foster recognizes that Crane is reducing Henry to comic stereotypes; it is difficult to know what he takes Crane to be about: we can hardly expect the same writer to reduce blacks to comic stereotypes and to condemn the racism allegedly lurking in a figure such as Trescott's. One can also wonder which would be the morally right

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¹ Cf. also Gullason 1960, 667; Cooley 1982, 43.

solution to Henry's problem in Foster's view; after all, the worse-than-death limbo to which Henry has been relegated is Trescott's own home. Anyway, it is clear in Foster's paper that the moral standpoint he reads in the text is to be interpreted as Crane's own, a cold indictment of American society (1976, 90). Morace supports Trescott's claims to the status of hero, but he notes that "he is unsure whether his leaving Henry in Alek Williams's care is a way of fulfilling or of avoiding his responsibility" (1981, 77). For Wolford, the Alek Williams episode is Trescott's "ethical low point."¹

There is something that no critic has dared to suggest: that Crane does propose Trescott's attitude as a moral example and that this proposal is itself a limited or flawed attitude to the question. E. Solomon gets closest to this. While conceding that there is a failure of imagination and charity on the part of the townsfolk, he remarks that "Henry *is* in appearance a monster and Trescott *did* make him" (1966, 195). Geismar, too, seems quite prone to justifying the terrors of the town, and dismisses the moral issue of the story repeating Hagenthorpe's question and observing that "Crane was not essentially a philosophic or speculative writer in the sense that a Dreiser was; he was not even, perhaps, very bright in this area" (1953, 119).

There is also a wide critical agreement on the issue of euthanasia as it relates to "The Monster": Trescott does the right thing in refusing to let Henry Johnson die, contrary to Hagenthorpe's advice. Most critics who bother to consider the debate between the doctor and the judge assume

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¹ Wolford 1983, 90. Cf. also Stephenson 1972, 36; Linder 1974, 159.

that this is the authorial attitude and that it is the right one.¹ This view ranges from the critics who see Hagenthorpe as an honest man who is a prisoner of conformity (Cazemajou 1969b, 423) to those who describe his attitude as "monstrous" (Gullason 1960, 665) or see him as Caiphas as opposed to the Christ-like Trescott (Stephenson 1972, 34). B.L. Knapp's brief allusions to the story (1987, 175) are peculiar in that they completely ignore the question of heroism, social criticism or racism and go on to posit the contemporary relevance of the debate on euthanasia. She considers that this issue is especially relevant to our age, which has to face such medical cruxes as transplants, mercy killings or "cloaning" [sic], and to settle the value of life in either its quality or its length.

But the solution offered by "The Monster" does not seem to be self-evident to everybody. E. Solomon sees a paradox in the "old and cynical judge" being able to predict better than Trescott the outcome of the latter's action in saving Henry Johnson and thus usurping the role of God. The judge understands that there is a feeling of guilt in the doctor that makes Trescott ignore Henry Johnson's own human dignity: that is why, according to E. Solomon, "the judge seems to have the better of the debate" (1966, 193). He concedes, however, that the question is hard to decide.² Mayer recognizes an element of wisdom in the judge, but

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¹ Gullason 1960, 665; Kahn 1966, 40; Spofford 1967, 5; Levenson 1969, xix-xx; Cazemajou 1969b, 423; LaFrance 1971, 208; Westbrook 1972, 97; Mayer 1972, 34; M. Holton 1972, 211; Gross 1975, 103; Morace 1981, 72. This seems to be assumed, too, by those critics who do not mention the debate.

² Cooley (1975, 12; 1982, 43) advances a similar suggestion. Spofford discards Solomon's views on the grounds that Crane uses the word "oratory" to describe the judge's performance (TM 44). "Oratory," Spofford argues, always suggests insincerity or unreliability in Crane's use of the word.

believes nevertheless that his suggestion is vitiated because it derives from moral inertia and his loyalty to established social forms (1972, 34).

Foster (1976, 88) interprets Trescott's answer, "He will be what you like, judge" as noncommittal on the part of Trescott, as an acceptance of the judge's terms. Of course the sentence means that if it is taken in isolation, but in its context (TM 45) it has a very definite meaning, which is precisely the contrary: Trescott refuses to accept the judge's proposal. The answer can be read out of its situation: we may then see in its primary meaning, not intended by Trescott, Crane's irony on the way the town constructs its own image of Henry. Morace (1981, 73) seems to read the sentence in this way. But this should not lead us to interpret that Trescott is submitting in a simple way to the judge. Mayer interprets Trescott's answer as "refusing to accept an a priori definition of Henry and submitting to the conscience of the town a share of the responsibility for recognizing, however difficult, the humanity of a fellow human being" (1972, 34). The judge is aware of Trescott's moral dilemma and the duplicity of the town's values, but he will persist "in finding simplistic solutions to complex moral problems" (Morace 1981, 73). The interpretation offered by Foster is obviously designed to fit (or is concomitant with) his deviant interpretations of the textual author's judgement of the situation and of the issue of Henry's sanity. Deviance, it seems, calls for more deviance.

If we find that Trescott's attitude towards Henry is flawed in any way, then we can read that beneath his resistance, Trescott is unconsciously an ally of the judge. But, as we have already seen, it is difficult to construct a credible authorial intention that damns Trescott. Pizer (1983) notes an allusion to Tolstoy's What to Do? in the judge's

last remark in chapter XI, "It is hard for a man to know what to do." Pizer argues that this turns the words of the judge against himself: it is easy to know what to do if you profess to be a Christian, as Tolstoy points out. Pizer reads this allusion as a conscious intention on Crane's part to refer to the work of Tolstoy, an author he knew and appreciated. If we admit this it is clear that we must charge the judge with hypocrisy. Tolstoy's work itself had a similar aim: "the startly abrupt question, reinforced by its New Testament overtones, demanded of otherwise complacent audiences that they respond to the moral imperatives of their Christian faith" (Pizer 1983, 127). Mayer notes the irony that "the one person whose role calls for judgment is unable to judge" (1972, 34).

The same could be said about Trescott's rejection of the four prominent citizens' proposal in chapter xxiii. Trescott is generally acknowledged to act rightly, according to both the critics and the implied authorial attitude assumed by them; the citizens are hypocrites or morally blind (e.g. Gullason 1960, 667; Cooley 1975, 12).

Is Trescott, then, the protagonist of "The Monster"? Most critics would say that he is the main protagonist, in spite of Henry Johnson's claims. Trescott, no doubt, has the textual author standing behind him; Crane, like Trescott, aspired to a "quality of personal honesty."¹ All critics speak in admiration of Trescott's heroism.² Only Gibson (a black critic) complains that Trescott is too monolithic and single-minded a character; we do not see him falter or suffer, or try to make up his mind. Trescott knows all the time what he must do, and he does it. Not

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¹ Letter to John Northern Hilliard (Jan. 1896?); no. 137 in Stallman and Gilkes 1960.

² One exception: Foster.

until the end do we see that he, too, will pay a prize for his resolution (Gibson 1962, 231, 235). LaFrance also speaks of Trescott as if he were an unmoveable rock against the hysteria of the town (1971, 206). Linder, on the contrary, emphasizes the evolution of Trescott's character, in such scenes as his second scolding of Jimmie. Trescott changes in the direction of a greater awareness, and emerges a wiser and sadder man (1974, 144).

Stephenson puts forward the theory of a double protagonist: "'The Monster' is not Dr. Trescott's story alone. It is as much Henry Johnson's story. Or rather, Henry and Trescott so reflect each other as to blend in a single central character" (1972, 27). Cazemajou sees in Henry Johnson a characteristically contemporary hero, a hero who is at the same time a victim (1969b, 423). According to Charles W. Mayer, "Trescott's moral act is the counterpart of Henry's physical heroism" (1972, 33). Some critics point out the limits of the kind of heroism embodied by Henry Johnson. It is a blind, emotional and desperate heroism, and not the kind of calm, resolute heroism Crane admired. Henry's heroism associates him with the deluded protagonists of other tales, such as Henry Fleming in The Red Badge of Courage or the Swede in "The Blue Hotel" (Beaver 1985, 125), or with the emotional reactions of the Whilomville townsfolks (Westbrook 1972, 87-88). Is it an accident that the white man is given the more elaborate, "psychological" role, while the black man's heroism is "physical" and instinctive? This does not seem to be an issue for most readers, but, as we shall see in the following chapter, Henry Johnson's status as a protagonist and the story's hesitation between him and Trescott is considered to be significant by some black critics.

7.2. Johnson and Racial Representation

Many contemporary readers do not mention racism as an issue in "The Monster." One of the heroes of the story, Henry Johnson, "the monster," is a black man. The question is, to what extent is this fact relevant to the work? What difference would it make if Henry were white? In criticism of the story written up to 1950, the answer seems to be: none. This is also the case for many recent critics. Most critics make nothing of Henry's race; they simply mention it in their description of the story.¹ Of course, the significant factor is that they do mention it. From the fifties on, this aspect of the story has become more and more prominent. In the age of the Civil Rights movement the racial significance of the story is emphasized by Marxist critics (M. Solomon, Vasil'evskaia) as well as by black critics (Locke, Ellison, Gibson). In the later sixties and the seventies, the racial message of The Monster becomes an issue outside the circles of Marxism and black criticism. Still, many critics do not seem to feel that it is the fundamental theme of the story, while others (even in the eighties) do not mention it as an issue. There is a debate, therefore, as to the centrality, and not merely the presence, of a racial message.

Berryman sees in black men "the object of Crane's own (fantasied) horror, envy, fascination and inquiry" (1950, 307). At twelve, Crane

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¹ E.g., rev. in Public Opinion 1899; Wyatt 1915; Quinn 1936; Debouzy 1968, 247; Ives 1969; Colvert 1984, 123, etc.

had seen a white girl stabbed by her black lover (Beer 1923, 48; Berryman 1950, 306); Berryman shows how in other stories¹ Crane used black men “as a symbol—a natural one—for darkness, sex and sin” (!?! 306). He sees an association of blacks with sex in the title of The Black Riders and in the name of a “sinner” in Active Service, Nora Black. These are helpful hints to interpret the unconscious authorial attitude towards the blacks in “The Monster,” although this is evidently not in the least the image of black men that we get from the surface of this tale; nor does Berryman refer to “The Monster” in this respect. Except for two details: Berryman suggests that Reifsnyder, the Whilomville barber, sympathizes with Henry because he is a barber and uses a razor, and Crane unconsciously associates blacks with knives and stabbing. Henry is also unconsciously “punished” for a symbolic rape of Jimmie in rescuing him!

Geismar characterizes Crane’s attitude towards blacks as one of condescending sympathy. He notes that the attraction of black characters for Crane “resided obviously in the fact that they were, in his view, so childlike—so much in ‘slavery,’ as he had said, to their fathers, white and black, good or bad alike” (1953, 120). He also sees the possibility of an unconscious hatred of blacks revealed by the central episode involving Henry, “the *black* hero, too, who though childlike and servile, in Crane’s fantasy, was perhaps condemned obscurely by his evil, sinful nature. (And one rememebers the sexuality of Nora Black in Active Service)” (1953, 120).

Leslie A. Fiedler also seems to believe that Henry’s monstrosity and his race are somehow related when he holds that in no other story in

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¹ “The King’s Favour” and the lost “Vashti in the Dark.”

American literature "is the Negro more brutally portrayed at the limits of mindlessness and nauseating horror."¹

The first readings which stress the importance of the racial element in "The Monster" are Locke's and M. Solomon's. Locke sees the story as landmark in the artistic portrayal of American blacks, which became possible "only as American literature itself crossed over into the domain of realism" (1952, 28). He finds in "The Monster" a document of the social and psychological truth of black men in a small Midwest town. It is not, however, "a pleasant characterization" in Locke's view (1952, 28).

M. Solomon's reading is more optimistic. This Marxist critic is not satisfied with the interpretation of "The Monster" as a social satire against bourgeois provincialism. "Nor can we merely discuss it in terms of the ethic of loyalty. . . . Central to 'The Monster' is its appeal for brotherhood between all races" (M. Solomon 1956b, 39). This claim is echoed by several later critics.² M. Solomon rejects Berryman's sole reference, and what he describes as his general attempt (and Geismar's) to turn Crane into "a reviler of Negroes" using a Freudian "pseudo-science." There is a suggestion in M. Solomon that Reifsnnyder sympathizes with Henry because he is a foreigner (and thus a marginalized character). Although M. Solomon points out some limitations of Crane's racial consciousness, his conclusion is that "we

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¹ Fiedler 1960, 367; qtd. in Stallman 1972, 446. Fiedler may have changed his mind about the story, since this comment is suppressed in the revised editions of his work (1966-).

² Vasil'evskaia 1967; Stallman 1968, 334; Cazemajou 1969b.

cannot fail to admire this young writer who was intuitively far in advance of his contemporaries" (1956b, 40).

Ellison also mentions the importance of the racial element in "The Monster"; he seems to read the divided attitudes of the town on the subject of Henry Johnson as symbolically suggestive of the attitudes towards black Americans after the Civil War, but he is ready to recognize "that the issues go much deeper than the question of race" (1960, in Ellison 1964, 75). He locates Crane (presumably with respect to the literary handling of racism) somewhere between Twain and Faulkner.

E. Solomon sees Crane's handling of the black society in Watermelon Alley as a parody and analogy of white society (much as the children in the Whilomville Stories reflect the attitudes of the adults). He remarks that we see the fire scene in chapter VII through Henry Johnson's consciousness. E. Solomon praises the narrator's commentary that the desperate Johnson was submitting to the fire "because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to the conflagration" (TM 28) as containing "a measure of psychological (and political) insight" (1966, 187). M. Solomon had also quoted this passage for its psychological credibility (1956b, 40). However, E. Solomon complains against the naturalistic image of Johnson being reduced to a bellowing animal or to a Negro in the swamp.¹ He sees an element of racism (condemned by Crane) in the townspeople's attitude toward the "resurrected" Johnson: "The only good saint is a dead saint; the same

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¹ E. Solomon 1966, 188; TM 30. See also Mayer's interpretation of these images as something Henry rejects by not submitting to the fire (1973, 32). I think that these critics are too generous with Crane in their interpretations of both passages, and fail to see that both rest on gross racial (even racist) stereotypes.

holds true for a Negro" (1966, 192). E. Solomon sees Crane's handling of the town's reactions to Johnson as a social panorama which moves from the lower to the higher social classes in both black and white societies. Alek Williams, who as a rural black man is at the bottom of the social scale, is a "ridiculous Uncle Tom figure."¹ But Williams' situation becomes pathetic when the judge dismisses as irrelevant his claim that he has a right to a normal social life. E. Solomon sees here an element of paternalism in Trescott's attitude toward Williams, and an ironic prefiguration of Trescott's own isolation at the end of the story. Ostracization, E. Solomon implies, is not considered a serious problem if the victim is a black man, but becomes a tragedy if the victim is a respectable white doctor (1966, 193-194). However, we may well wonder if this is not an instance of reading in. The parallel between Williams and Trescott is probably a part of Crane's intentions. But they are clearly set to a very different key. Williams's plight is seen ironically throughout; Trescott's is not. There is some difficulty in pinning down the authorial attitude here because there is another issue which, together with the question of race, overdetermines our reaction: Trescott's attitude toward Henry Johnson is more adequate than Williams', and we tend, like Crane, to lump Williams together with the townspeople into the bag of provincial ignoramuses. Is it only people with a heroic moral stance who deserve our sympathy, or is it white men? Are blacks intrinsically comic?

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¹ Cooley also dismisses the figure of Alek Williams as an inexcusable and unnecessary cliché (1975, 13). Geismar (1953, 119) appreciates the "rather gruesome comedy" of the conversation between the judge and Alek; Gullason accepts the authorial stance when he speaks of Williams's "monstrous hypocrisy" (1960, 666).

Few critics have followed M. Solomon in stressing Crane's attitude to racism as the main theme of the story. Vasil'evskaia's reading seems to derive directly from M. Solomon's. According to her, "The story 'The Monster' is a sincere and profound condemnation of racism" ; "Crane steps out to defend the blacks and boldly speaks his sympathy."¹ Vasil'evskaia's reading of "The Monster" as a *roman à thèse* about a good black persecuted by a town of racist hypocrites raises obvious problems. However, there may be something in her claim that the horror and hate which Johnson inspires is the expression of "that gregarious racist instinct which has long been so assiduously inculcated in the American citizen" (1967, 218).

D. Gibson makes a similar point: Henry incarnates the townspeople's unconscious attitudes to black men, because they believe he is now free from the social constraints of Whilomville:

He becomes like some frightful and terrifying apparition embodying the deepest fears of the community. Henry *seems* to Whilomville to be what Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's Native Son actually is: a monster created by the condition of the Negro in America. (1962, 233; 1968, 138).

There is also a suggestion of this in Cooley, when he observes that Henry's facelessness brings into focus "that virtual facelessness he quietly tolerated in the white community before the fire" (1975, 12). Mayer interprets the terror of the community a symbol of their dread of a roleless man, of seeing blackness as no longer signifying a

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¹ Vasil'evskaia 1967, 214, 218 (translation mine).

customary role.¹ D. Gibson sees a racial element in the community's insistence on driving Henry out; it is the desire to feel no responsibility for him and for blacks as a whole: only Trescott recognizes his share of responsibility (cf. also Cazemajou 1969b, 427; M. Holton 1972, 209). However, D. Gibson does not wish to stress the question of race overmuch: "Despite the racial theme, which may strike us as especially significant today, 'The Monster' is finally a story about human responsibility" (1962, 233; 1968, 138). The blacks are also afraid of Henry, "because they too fear this man unconstrained by the rigid system of manners which Crane shows Henry participating in prior to his derangement and disfiguration" (D. Gibson 1962, 233).

Stallman also interprets Henry's facelessness symbolically:

The Negro Henry Johnson is disfigured literally but also allegorically: physically by the literal fire and then by the allegoric fire which consumes the moral face of the community. Crane's social irony is that the white man's face is also disfigured—by white society's cruelty to the Negro. (1968, 334)

In Stallman's view, Ralph Ellison's The Invisible Man "is a variant on Crane's theme that the American Negro has 'no face.'"² Stallman also believes that "no white American author had pictured a Negro performing a truly heroic act before Crane did it in 'The Monster.'" Here Stallman overlooks characters such as Stowe's Uncle Tom and Melville's Daggoo (Cooley 1975, 14).

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¹ Mayer 1973, 33. Vasil'evskaia, D. Gibson, Mayer and Cooley, as well as M. Holton (1972, 207) assume that this is the product of Crane's authorial intention; I would not go that far myself.

² 1968, 334; Cf. also Linder 1974, 136; Cooley 1975.

Levenson notes that before being rejected for being a monster Henry was ignored for being a black (1969, xxiii), and that "at its widest reach of suggestion, ['The Monster'] is a fable of relations between the races, which begins in utopian pleasantness with little Jimmie's visit to his friend at the stable and ends with Dr. Trescott facing a characteristically American dilemma" (1969, xxiv).

In the story, Henry Johnson is accused of being a public menace and is persecuted by an angry mob. Nothing explicitly links the mob-scene to Henry's race, but it is no doubt a close cousin of other lynching scenes in American literature, where the issue of race is more explicit (e.g. Light in August, To Kill a Mockingbird, Dreiser's Nigger Jeff or the novels of Charles W. Chestnutt). Cazemajou's source study may throw some additional light on this issue, when he notes "un drame sans précédent dont Port Jervis avait été le cadre le 2 juin 1892: un Noir, accusé d'avoir violé une Blanche, fut lynché par une foule surexcitée, malgré l'intervention du juge William Crane" (1969b, 422). Cazemajou points out the limits of Crane's racial consciousness and the stereotypical rendition of black characters: "'The Monster' porte en lui le poids de tout un legs de conceptions traditionnelles sur la place des Noirs dans la société. . . . Henry Johnson lui-même, bellâtre conquérant au début de la nouvelle, ne prend des dimensions tragiques qu'en devenant un 'monstre' que le docteur Trescott crée" (1969b, 423). Nevertheless, Cazemajou believes, "on peut lire dans ces pages un plaidoyer discret mais sincère en faveur de la fraternité raciale, et l'inflexible gratitude du docteur Trescott, qui se refuse à se séparer de Henry, montre que l'auteur plaçait au-dessus du concept de race le respect de la personne

humaine" (1969b, 424); the story is, in the last analysis, "un hymne à la fraternité raciale et une stygmatisation de l'indifférence" (1969b, 427).¹

Mayer sees in "The Monster" "the chief work of American fiction before Native Son (1940) and Invisible Man (1952) to treat the themes of black identity and white blindness" (1973, 29). M. Holton reads Henry's facelessness as a metaphor for Henry's condition as a black, a "tribute to the disorder which [the townspeople] have refused to acknowledge in their universe. The center of the horror is what it would disclose to the observer about himself" (1972, 208).

Foster's reading differs from these (and from all others) in that he takes Crane's condemnation of racism and hypocrisy to extend to Trescott and the whole of white America, not just to the petty bourgeois mentality. "The Monster" is "an allegory of the black man in America in the nineteenth century, and an angry condemnation of white America—Whilomville—including such weak-willed and compromising meliorists such as Trescott" (1976, 87). Henry's isolation after his accident is the real evil, and is an allegory of the ambiguous status of blacks after 1866: neither slaves nor treated as humans (1976, 88). However, there is a survivor in Foster's sweeping condemnation: the author. Foster's deviant interpretation of the action (see above) is ultimately subordinated to his interpretation of Crane's conscious authorial intention. In this he is no different from other critics who analyze the racial significance of "The Monster." In Vasil'evskaia's interpretation, the literary statement is equally conscious and deliberate

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¹ I would argue that even in this moderate claim there is an overestimation of Crane's racial concern. The townspeople's rejection of Henry is not overtly formulated in terms of race, and Trescott's loyalty towards him is not therefore presented as a fight against racism.

on Crane's part. Cooley intends to study "Crane's racial attitudes and his intention in creating the character of his black figure, Henry Johnson" (1975, 10).

It is difficult to read "The Monster" as a straightforward instance of civil rights literature. This poses some problems for a reader of M. Solomon's interpretation of the story: Solomon's view of the story as a plea for racial fraternity is not easily reconciled with his acknowledgement that elsewhere in his life or his writings Crane does not show any special concern for the oppression of the blacks, and is not known to have had any black person among his friends or acquaintances. "In Crane's newspaper account of 'The Wreck of the Commodore' he shows a callous lack of regard for the lives of the Negro seamen who perished. There are only single, stereotyped references to Negroes in The Red Badge, Maggie and The Third Violet, and none of consequence in Active Service, George's Mother or any of the major short stories" (M. Solomon 1956b, 40). Gross, too, observes that generally speaking Crane notes without comment the servile position of blacks,¹ but he makes the best of it: Crane was "free enough of the Jim Crow attitude which dominated the Nineties to make a black his hero for a purpose" (1975, 108). He also notes in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" the presence of a sophisticated black waiter who bullies the naive Jack Potter without Potter's noticing. Gross assumes that here and in "The Monster" blacks are elevated "for the purpose of comparison" (?).² In short, Gross holds that Crane, while not a racist, is not in the

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¹ F.i. in "Stephen Crane in Minetta Lane" or "Seen at Hot Spring" (Gross 1975, 115).

² But the Pullman car porter as a negro dude is just another comic stereotype. Cf. "The Knife" (in Crane 1963, 694).

least concerned with political writing, with a literature of engagement if favour of the blacks. M. Solomon takes Crane's destruction of his supposedly racist story "Vashti in the Dark" to be significant of his attitude towards the problem. Cooley considers that Crane usually draws on what he calls the "savage" mode in which white literature often presents blacks. The assumption behind this mode is that "blacks are inherently savage people" (1982, 39). Anyway, Cooley considers Henry Johnson to be "a far cry from the blatantly racist portraits of writers such as Thomas Dixon and Charles Carroll" (1982, 39). Cooley sees in "The Monster" the contrast between the savagery of the "civilized" whites and the unsavage and unmonsterlike reality. It is Crane's most critical portrait of society. Cooley suggests the presence of racism in the town's reaction to the news of Henry's "death": if the townspeople accept him as a hero it is not only because he is dead (as other critics have argued) but also because whites like the idea of black willingly sacrificing themselves for whites. Cooley assumes, however, that Crane's authorial attitude is free from this prejudice; this assumption seems more questionable to me.

Let us organize a critical forum on some issues relevant to racial attitude. The critics I do not mention do not challenge the adequacy of the "unmarked," or literally stated, authorial attitude. I comment mainly on the deviant critics.

1) The narrator approves of Jimmie and Henry being pals. This fact has not been debated, and its adequacy has rarely been contested. M. Solomon, though, describes chapter II as an "idyll" with "more than one touch of condescension" (1956b, 39); he specifically objects to Crane's comment that "in regard to almost everything in life [Henry and Jimmie] seemed to have minds exactly alike" (TM 6). Vasil'evskaia

(1967, 214) does not object to this scene, nor does Cooley; the latter points out similarities between chapter II of "The Monster" and works such as Uncle Tom's Cabin and Huckleberry Finn, where white children also retire from white society to find companionship in a black character. Cooley quotes Crane's narrator on the comparison between Henry and Jimmie's minds. "The insertion of 'seemed'", Cooley argues, "saves the description from racist assumptions" (1982, 40). We may concede this, but still it was a close call: there is no observer at hand, other than the narrator, to justify the workings of this verb. In Linder's view, "seemed" must be interpreted from Jimmie's point of view; this scene is ultimately free from racial prejudice, and it only shows Henry's affectionate attachment to Jimmie and his family:

Crane's general lack of admiring illusions about the human race did incline him to accept various prejudices about Negroes, but the inner meanings of "The Monster" work hard in opposition to bigotry and all failures of brotherhood. The fact that Henry and Jimmie seem to have minds "precisely alike" is a deliberate pretense on Henry's part. He is "puttin' on young Massa," just as black people must always play roles with whites in his culture. (Linder 1974, 146)

Henry collaborates in the education of Jimmie and reinforces the doctor's discipline in a more comradelike way (Linder 1974, 147).

2) Henry's loyalty to the Trescotts seems to be approved of by the author, and this is not contested by the critics (e.g. Linder 1974, 146). M. Solomon stresses that Henry's devotion to Jimmie is not "in the servile, stereotyped manner which the Plantation Tradition novelists insist upon" (1956b, 40). Vasil'evskaia (1967, 214) also notes it without reproach.

3) The blacks in the story also reject Henry (Stallman 1968, 334). In my view, this is a serious liability for the interpretation of Johnson as a simple allegory of black people in general.

4) The black characters in "The Monster" are stereotypes. This is noted even by critics which do not see a problem in the racial attitudes of the story, like Geismar: "These Negro characters were rather conventional in outline, but done very well" (1953, 120). The language they use is the most salient feature of this conventional characterization. According to Sylvia Wallace Holton, Crane's abilities flounder when he deals with black characters. The speech of Henry Johnson or Alek Williams in "The Monster" and the Whilomville Stories is not merely a device to diminish the characters and make them laughable: it is also a linguistic hoax, since its features do not correspond to those of any black American English dialect. "It is strange to see how this progressive, realistic, modernist writer, when undertaking to represent the dialect of black characters, reverts to stereotypical, almost 'minstrel show' speech and language" (S. W. Holton 1984, 90). This view is a far cry from Alfred Kazin's praise of "the charming little-boy stories in Whilomville Stories and the extraordinary transcriptions of Negro speech in The Monster" (1942, 50).

From the perspective of discourse analysis, a stereotype is a conceptual construct which can be related to other phenomena of semiotic typification already discussed, such as word types, plot structures or macro-illocutions. Like all types, stereotypes are intentional phenomena: all of their aspects may not be intentionally articulated by the user of the stereotype, but the very structure of this phenomenon is intentional. A stereotype, like a speech act type, is a cluster of congealed communal intentionality. But in this case there is a

clear relation of exclusion inscribed in the intention. Stereotypes are often used to reinforce the communal identity of a group against the "other" which is caricatured. The user of a disparaging stereotype is willy-nilly participating in the social practices which have constituted the stereotype in the first place, and endorsing the world-view which it transmits.¹ In the case of racial representation, the social practices which underlie the use of stereotypes in "The Monster" need not be closely analyzed here. The more direct ones are the social and racial stratification of the American society, and its historical roots in slavery. In a more indirect way, the role of blacks in the Western imagination since Plato on (as the saying goes) could be put forward as an intertext of the story.

Some critics do not feel that the blacks are presented stereotypically. According to Debouzy, "dans 'The Monster,' le noir n'est plus seulement le grand enfant idiot qu'il faut rudoyer, comme dans certaines des Whilomville Stories: il devient l'allié de l'homme blanc pour faire face au pharisaïsme universel" (1968, 247-248). Linder (1974, 300) makes substantially the same observation, although she has got right the sequence of the works. Even if we conceded that Henry Johnson is not stereotypical, this ignores the presence of other blacks in the story.

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¹ Apart from the issue of race, Crane also relies heavily on conventional stereotypes in his representations of women, to the point of misogyny. This has been observed by some critics (although it is not seen as a shortcoming). According to Cazemajou, the society of "The Monster" is dominated by women (1969b, 423). He notes the devilish female images of the fire scene, and relates them to the gossip of the town incarnated in Martha Goodwin and Carrie Dungen (1969, 426). Linder observes how Crane links the various forms of oppression and rigidity of manners in "The Monster" to female dominance in the society of Whilomville, and reminds us of Crane's own personal resentment against malicious gossip (1974, 128). Hysteria and ineffectuality (such as is displayed by Mrs. Trescott or Hannigan) are associated in the story world with the female-centered system of manners which paralyzes Whilomville (Linder 1974, 150-151).

Vasil'evskaia, too, completely ignores the Alek Williams scenes, and sees in the "Miss Fa'gut" scene only a particular instance of a girl's "spiritual poverty" (1967, 219). Cooley is angered by this scene, and he does not consider that it is effective at all: "Instead of suffering from shock we see that Henry has been reduced by Crane to something approaching the comic stereotype of Sambo" (1975, 13). None of these readings is adequate. Vasil'evskaia ignores that the scene not only tells us about Bella's limitations, but also about Henry's own. Cooley seems to read this scene as if it were Henry's first visit in chapter III, where he is indeed presented as Sambo (though Cooley chooses not to see this). In the meantime, he has lost his face, and this makes the previous scene acquire a new significance. M. Holton reads these scenes more adequately: Henry grotesquely and unconsciously parodies "the hypocritical social relationships dramatized in his earlier evening walk" (1972, 209). Cooley himself has noted that Henry's injury is the injury of black Americans as a whole. There is something in this scene of the collective, unconscious pain of a people who have no other choice than to accept integration in the society which destroyed their identity. The first scene was comic from Crane's point of view: this one is pathetically absurd. Of course Bella and her mother are terrified because of Henry's appearance, but at another level of interpretation they are terrified because they are now facing their inescapable condition as American blacks. Henry's second visit thus brings out the hidden pathos of the first. This is a possible reading in 1989. Yet I think that Crane's overall handling of black stereotypes prevents us from seeing this as an intended effect. As in many other cases, here the work is greater than the author.

This is connected to the more general fact that the black community as a whole is seen as an imitation of the white community. Some critics consider that this is (an effective?) part of Crane's portrayal of reality. Blacks exist on the margin, "imitant de leur mieux les formes de la comédie humaine qu'ils observent chez leurs maîtres" (Cazemajou 1969b, 423); "The response of the Negro community is consistently violent and physical because it is doubly insulated from reality, being a thorough imitation of an already imitative white society" (Mayer 1973, 34).

But this derivative character need not be seen solely as a fact in the story—the attitudes of blacks and whites towards manners and social conventions. It may also be related to a wider interpretive context, as the result of Crane's own view of blacks as marked human beings, as exceptional whites.

5) Crane's attitude to Henry's dandyism has been more debated. The reviewer in The Spectator described Henry Johnson as "a good-natured, childishly vain coloured groom" (1901, 244). The early readers seem to have taken for granted that the portrait of Henry is intended as a stereotypical comic figure, "a sort of Eugene Stratton 'coon.'"¹

M. Solomon sees in Henry's characterization one of the weak points of "The Monster." He compares Henry's portrait to the racial caricatures of other Crane stories like "The Knife": "Crane unwittingly helped perpetuate" the literary stereotypes of blacks (1956b, 39). Foster agrees: "Crane initially makes Johnson fit two stereotypes: the benign and almost childlike Nigger Jim or Uncle Remus, and the cake-

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¹ Rev. in Morning Post 1901, 6; cf. rev. in Daily News 1901, 6.

walking minstrel-show comic dandy" (1976, 88). Moreover, these stereotypes are juxtaposed rather than integrated. Henry sheds his servant's garments and actually becomes a "different" person when he dresses as a dandy.

Some readers do not seem to see here a racial issue at all. Crane's ironic praise of Henry may be taken to mask the real authorial attitude of appreciation. This seems to be Linder's reading: "Crane begins with the story of a brave Negro, whose worth as a man no one in Whilomville comprehends" (1974, 136). For Ives, "Chapter III shows Henry admired—a bit humourously" (1969, 25). The narrator's attitude is only one of "friendly irony" for Vasil'evskaia, who systematically ignores M. Solomon's reservations on the adequacy of Crane's racial attitudes. For Vasil'evskaia's narrator, Henry may be vain, but he is a hero (1967, 214-215); her Crane is so at home with blacks that he can afford not to idealize them, and have a little non-racist laugh now and then. Linder thinks that the really important matter is that "beneath his minstrel-show ludicrousness," Henry is a real moral standard (1974, 148).

But we can hardly dismiss as irrelevant the fact that in writing about a black character Crane has chosen to present him from the start as falling squarely in the facile cliché which was sure to be recognized and appreciated by his (white) readers.¹ Cooley deplores this fact but only in the most evident instances: "It is regrettable that Crane mixes these

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¹ Crane was not in the least above the use of hasty ethnic generalizations. In another instance he makes a sweeping characterization of the Mediterraneans as "liars and men of delay" (cf. Gross 1975, 132-133). By the way, "Watermelon Alley" is still another stereotype Crane is drawing on without challenging it; in "The Knife" the blacks' taste for watermelons celebrated by the popular mythology is pictured as an irrational, instinctive animal drive; Crane uses it as a comic device while recognizing that it is a common stereotype: stereotypes, he seems to say, actually *work*.

racial generalizations ("the elasticity of his race") with a portrait which, in its totality, skirts the easy generalizations of black character to create the individualized portrait we see of Henry before he is maimed in the fire" (1975, 10). Surprisingly enough, Cooley does not find that such scenes as the Jimmie-Henry *tete-à-tete* in chapter II or Henry's dressing up and cake-walking in chapter III are instances of such racial generalizations. According to Cooley, Crane's literary dealing with racism presents "the savagism of a white society and, in ironic contrast, the more enlightened perspective of a narrative voice, or the first-hand experience of a black character" (1982, 38). Cooley takes Crane's satire to fall on the whites who laugh at him, while Henry good-humouredly is already appearing to the reader as being morally superior (1975, 11). It seems to me, though, that Henry Johnson does get a good share of the authorial irony, to the extent that he is characterized as a comic figure, the black who tries to dress as a white man but only succeeds in being ridiculous. There follows the scene of Henry and the Farraguts going through the motions of a highbred visit: this is of course an indirect satire of the sham manners of Whilomville, but only through a *direct* satire of black people trying to act like whites. The depiction of Henry's visit to the Farraguts as a monkey tea-party is found to be adequate satire by some critics (Mayer 1973, 35; Linder 1974, 149). It is so only in the narrowest of interpretive contexts: the author's own intention.

For instance, the attitudes of the following passage are expected to be contemplated ironically: "The change was somewhere far in the interior of Henry. But there was no cake-walk hyperbole in it. He was simply a quiet, well-bred gentleman of position, wealth, and other necessary achievements out for an evening stroll, and he had never washed a

wagon in his life" (TM 10). Cooley reads this passage as follows: "To his author, Henry is not a comic or ludicrous figure. Forced by society to an inferior position, he can at best imitate white society and pretend he is a gentleman" (Cooley 1982, 40). Johnson is like an actor who shifts roles to make the best of his situation in every moment. Mayer also notes that Johnson "comes from a long line of actors whose very life sometimes depended upon playing the proper parts" (1973, 32). This seems clearly to be the case. These critics do not find that this passage is making fun of Johnson's false idea of what he can pass for. But Johnson is shown as someone who is acting as a gentleman of position and wealth without acknowledging to himself that it will necessarily show because blacks are not gentlemen of position and wealth, and there *is* a "cake-walk hyperbole" in Johnson's manners which soon has all the town gaping at him:

"Ain't he smooth?"

"Why, you've got that cake right in your pocket, Henry!"

"Throw out your chest a little more!"

Henry was not ruffled in any way by these quiet admonitions and compliments. In reply he laughed a supremely good-natured chuckling laugh, which nevertheless expressed an underground complacency of superior metal. (TM 12)

Cooley finds that the authorial attitude in this passage does not become clear until Crane satirizes the citizens later on (1984, 41). But I think that their condemnation does not necessarily imply a retrospective plea for Johnson. Morace (1981, 68) apparently sees in this scene only an instance of Crane's objectivity: his satire falls on blacks and whites alike. He seems to read in the narrator's attitude toward Henry a note of admiration beneath the mockery, reflected on the comment on

Henry's "superior metal." But in the context Crane is using Henry's own idea of himself, and presenting it to the reader's olympic irony. I take the passage to be completely ironical, and even doubly ironical. The citizens address Henry ironically, but in turn they reveal themselves to the reader as oppressively provincial. The first phrase by the narrator is also ironical in the use of the words "quiet admonitions and compliments" to describe the crowd's jeering at Henry. But Henry is not ruffled for two reasons. First, because of his good nature (not unrelated to his position of inferiority), second, because he interprets the violently mocking reactions of the white men as a sign that he is sufficiently convincing as a gentleman of position to disturb their sense of propriety and excite their reaction. That is why he can laugh with a secret feeling of superiority. The words of the white men are complimentary for Johnson, though not in the way in which they believe he takes them to be. But this secret contentment of Johnson's is at the same time the prey of the narrator's irony. For the narrator, Henry is being ridiculous not (only) because he is the standard comic figure the citizens recognize, but because of his snobbery and his self-conscious ignorance of his false position. However, we may now feel that the narrator's irony is too close to the crowd's: people like Henry have had to ignore their false positions constantly in order to make them true. In a situation of inequality the notion of an "impartial satire" is a *contradictio in adjecto*. In short, Crane's attack on snobbery is misplaced insofar as he picks on the blacks. Or, Crane's character knew better than his author.

It seems clear to me that Crane saw in the unacknowledged self-consciousness of the blacks in chapter III a rich matter for comedy. Cooley deplores this fact but he insists that Henry Johnson is an

exception, at least before he is "debased." Despite his good intentions, Crane gives proof of a sadly limited racial consciousness (Cooley 1975, 14). I agree; indeed, I would argue that Johnson is not at all exceptional: he is a thoroughly formulaic type, who becomes a hero because the story needs one. Crane is interested above all in Trescott's moral dilemma, and his decision to cast a black rather than a white servant is subordinate to the theme of Trescott's heroism. A black was more adequate than a white due to a complex of reasons, all of them springing from the servile position of American blacks. The tragedy requires that Johnson should be to some extent an appendage of Trescott: his fate must hang on Trescott's will. A "slave" makes the issues neater than a servant would. Household slaves are often presented as a part of the family: they are linked to it by an admiring fidelity. Crane held that after the war things were "'bout the same" for black servants.¹ Because of his subhuman status the black slave is forced into the role of a grown child. Henry must be both an adult and Jimmie's pal, in order to make all the more poignant the latter's attitude towards Henry in chapter XX. This kind of emotional fidelity suits Crane best for the purposes of the story, as a parallel of Trescott's own feeling of personal obligation. But his scheme does not aim at making a statement on the question of racism. Rather, he makes it unconsciously, because of the explosive nature of the material he was dealing with. Crane could handle a black character only as a type, but he needed a hero, and *presto*, Henry Johnson runs to the rescue. The narrator's ironic view of

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¹ See his story "The Ideal and the Real" (in Linder 1978). Stallman (1968, 480) reads this story as a proof of Crane's sympathy towards the blacks. The sympathy is there all right, but it is the wrong kind of sympathy.

Henry stops at the moment he rushes into the house to save Jimmie (Cooley 1975, 11).

6) Henry's role as a hero is an ambiguous one. For Cazemajou, Crane has, "by the very choice of his protagonist, indicated that true heroism is not the privilege of the white alone" (1969a, 30). This does not strike me at all as being the substance of the book's racial attitude. But it may be the substance of Crane's intended racial message, as far as there is one. Henry is a black hero, and he does perform a heroic action. M. Solomon notes that in the nineties the production of the white writers who had championed black characters in one way or another in their early works (G.W. Cable, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells) did not respond adequately to a wave of lynchings of blacks unprecedented since the war, and that after Henry Johnson there are no more heroic blacks in white literature for some decades (1956b, 40). Gross (1975, 108) notes that there are no black protagonists for quite a few years. M. Solomon praises Crane's adequate handling of Johnson's heroism, showing his fear and his confused psychological reactions: "This is no knight-on-horseback portrayal" (1956b, 41). Vasil'evskaia (1967, 215) also points out that Henry is not idealized by Crane in a way that would isolate him from the black community as a whole. This is so much the case that other critics will be able to speak of Henry's "pathetic limitations" (Nagel 1980, 62). The story needs something more solid to hold on to. The fact that Henry becomes a hero is more than tempered by the fact that he also becomes an idiot and is safely out of the way; Henry Johnson may become a hero but not a hero of tragedy: that role is reserved for Trescott.

Gullason had noted that there is a transference of the sense of ostracization from Henry to the Trescotts towards the end of the story

(1960, 665). According to Cooley, the narrative point of view abandons Henry in the later part of the novel, indeed from the moment of his accident: "From this point on, even Crane begins to refer to Henry as 'it', as 'a thing'" (1975, 12).¹ This is for him a defect of the story, the main defect. Crane develops his idea of brotherhood between white and black at the expense of the development and handling of black character (1975, 13). In the second part of the story, Crane abandons Henry and focuses on Trescott: Henry is an "invisible man" for his townsfolks, Cooley argues, but also for the reader, who cannot match with the actual Henry the image he receives from the distorted vision of the town, and he wonders whether this is a kind of trap for the reader, making him choose between two visions (1975, 13). The story requires that we side with Trescott and forget about Henry: Cooley would like to have the real Henry rescued for the reader to identify with him. There is some truth in Cooley's observations, but it also sounds like the frustration of a reader who has had his happy ending snatched away from him. After all, Cooley does not consider the possibility of the reader's being unable to identify with Henry if he were presented to him: he believes that in fact Henry is sane. What we do see of Henry after his accident is not especially attractive. And to dispute Crane's right to destroy Henry as a potentially lovable character is to ask him to write a different story altogether. The point of *this* story requires that Henry Johnson should be both a (comic) black, a hero, and a pathetic, dim-witted monster. What does this combination bring about?

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¹ M. Holton (1972: 209) reads this use of "it" as a deliberate irony on Crane's part, a mirroring of Bella Farragut's point of view.

The conventions of Crane's age and society created the twin stereotypes of the entirely comic and the entirely tragic black man (cf. Locke 1952, 21). Both stereotypes coalesce in Henry Johnson: he is alternately comic and pathetic (rather than tragic), and sometimes both at once. But he is never a "round" character. Henry's crude leap from comic stereotype to hero happens to be an interesting experiment in genre, but not an entirely deliberate one on Crane's part. Crane's racial consciousness is probably even more limited than Cooley is willing to admit, but his unconsciousness, his intuitive poetic ability, goes far beyond these limits. Because the juxtaposition of blackness and monstrosity does produce something new. There is a suggestion in Katz that the stereotypical characterization of Henry is broken by Crane: Henry is presented as a comic figure but then breaks his image through his conscious heroism.¹ But the stereotype breaks *twice*: first, as Henry becomes a hero, then, as he becomes a monster. And in being a monster he is acquiring a universality and a symbolic significance which do not require his being a successful "round" character; this signification makes up for the deficiencies in Crane's characterization and even benefits from them.

D. Gibson's reading (1968, 38) seems to me to relate in an adequate way the breaking of the stereotype and Henry's deformation: the townspeople fear Henry because they feel he is free from the rigid system of manners which he established before through his complying in the social comedy. This is especially clear in the contrast between the two Farragut scenes.

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¹ Katz 1969, xix; cf. also the review in Daily News 1901, 6.

Westbrook does not mention the issue of race, but he opposes the two polar aspects of Henry, a dandy and a monster, as the submission to role conventions or the terrible aspect of the reality that role-playing attempts to hide (1972, 97). The facelessness of the monster short-circuits the townspeople's reliance on identities and roles (1972, 98). Wolford (1983, 92) also seems to read the story in this way. The faceless Henry becomes a symbol of man stripped of civilized rationality; and the community can't allow such a reminder to walk its streets (1983, 93). Linder's reading is close to these. When Henry runs to the rescue, he is shown as emerging from his social mask, from the signifiers of his class (the straw hat, the purple trousers) which insured his invisibility in a white society (1974, 152)—Linder notices that Jimmie, like his rescuer, is described by means of stereotypes which are then punctured. Earlier still, G. W. Johnson had noted Henry Johnson's role as "the reference by which we see both the necessity and the duplicity of decorum" (1963, 74). Henry is accepted in the "dandy" scene, as a parody of white decorum, and when he is rejected later, the social decorum is revealed "not only as the restraint on blackness but as its agent" (1963, 74).

If we accept this reading, it would seem that to present a compliant and Uncle Tom-like Henry Johnson before his accident is almost a structural requirement. Crane's story can then be read as a powerful deconstruction of the white man's representation of black men in a post-slave society. But if we had to relinquish what we recognize as the authorial intention in order to achieve this reading, the nature of Crane's achievement, the structure of his literary act, is radically different. And there are good reasons to reject this as a plausible interpretation of the authorial meaning of "The Monster." Of the critics

just mentioned, only D. Gibson and G. W. Johnson are assuming that the story is intended to refer specifically to the problem of black Americans. Westbrook and Wolford do not present the issue of role-playing as having any intrinsic connection with Henry's race. What did Crane think? Probably he did not plan either meaning, at least not in those terms. The intentional meaning of "The Monster" is much more limited. Elsewhere Crane used the stereotyped image of the black man without destroying it. The literary project we just described—the use of stereotypes to consciously subvert them—seems to assume that the author can think beyond the stereotypes, that he uses them only as a tool which he dominates at will. This is not the case in Crane's portrayals of blacks. The age when nonstereotypical portrayals (and even self-representations) of blacks would be available was still decades ahead (cf. Locke 1952, 20).

Cazemajou also posits a connection between the issues of blackness and facelessness, but one which I think is more adequate, because it does not present the connection as a deliberate one. For Cazemajou, Henry Johnson as a black man is derivative in Crane's imagination; he can be a protagonist only by becoming a monster created by Trescott. "Après avoir vu s'effacer à la suite de son accident les caractéristiques superficielles que la tradition attribue à sa race, il trouve son identité en la perdant" (1969b, 423). Cazemajou explicitly rejects the attempts to see in "The Monster" the kind of deliberateness we find in The Invisible Man.

In what I take to be Crane's intentions, Henry's blackness and his deformation are related only accidentally: nothing is more accidental than Johnson's being burned by *acid* in the midst of a fire. But in what I take to be Crane's unconscious motivations, Henry's blackness and his

facelessness are divergent aspects of the same logic, rather than the product of an accidental convergence. Henry is a monster because he is a black man. This fact underlies the story and is only indicated in a paradoxical way. The citizens of Whilomville do not identify the element of racism in their fear of Henry, but nor does Crane see it in his own fascination with the subject. In writing "The Monster," Crane wrote both his sympathy to blacks and his racist nightmare. He was not much interested in the former, and he was not aware of the latter. "The Monster" is still usable in a reflection on racism and literature, but we have to sacrifice Crane's position as a neutral moral subject, and acknowledge this story as what it is historically: a monster in its peculiar mixture of blindness and insight. Crane was the product of his age and class in his superficial racial attitudes, but as an artist he created a work that delves far beneath that surface to the hard truths it concealed, and destroys itself in the process.

8. Conclusion

Criticism on "The Monster" is not abundant. We have seen that it nevertheless displays a fairly wide range of interpretations. We are not concerned here with the evaluative part of the critical activity which follows this interpretive moment. Suffice it to say that given the conflation of author and textual author that occurs in many critics, it is inevitable that a corresponding conflation will ensue between the evaluation of the work and the evaluation of the critic's own interpretation. The quality judgements on "The Monster" also display the complete gamut: the work is found to be excellent,¹ good,²

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¹ By Crane himself (Harriman 1900); William Dean Howells (qtd. by Cora Crane in Academy 1901b, 177); Joseph Conrad (letter to Stephen Crane, 16 Jan. 1898; no. 220 in Stallman and Gilkes 1960); Harriman (1900, in Weatherford 1973: 255); rev. in Independent (1900, 324); rev. in Spectator (1901, 244), Wyatt (1915, 149); Starrett (1923, 79); Van Doren (1924, in Weatherford 1973, 330); Berryman 1950, 191; Hafley 1959, 159; Berenson 1960, 19; Westbrook 1962, 595; Kahn 1963, 37; E. Solomon 1966, 177; Vasil'evskaia 1967, 214; Cazemajou 1969b, 519; LaFrance 1972, 180; Wolford 1983, xiii; B.S. Knapp 1987.

² Bridges 1898; rev. in Public Opinion (1899); rev. in Literary Digest (1899); Hughes (1900, in Weatherford 1973); Gilder (1900, qtd. in Stallman 1972, 280); rev. in Athenaeum (1901, in Weatherford 1973, 263); rev. in Academy (1901, in Weatherford 1973, 264); rev. in Daily News (1901, 6); Follett 1926, ix; D. Gibson 1968.

middling,¹ or bad.² The story is frequently anthologized with the best of Crane's work; the most typical anthologies would include (in order of acknowledged relevance) The Red Badge of Courage, "The Open Boat," Maggie, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky", "The Blue Hotel" and "The Monster." Not many critics would follow Ford Madox Ford (1927; qtd. in Stallman 1972, 324) in setting "The Monster" below The Third Violet, or John W. Shroeder in preferring it to The Red Badge of Courage (1950, qtd. in Stallman 1972, 379). The place of the work in the Crane canon or in the American literary canon seems unlikely to undergo many changes in the near future, in spite of the attempts at resuscitation related to the issue of race. It will probably remain an interesting minor work. However, it is not out of the question that it may receive a greater degree of critical attention. I am suggesting that a more balanced reaction to the story in the future should not overestimate the racial message of the work.

Perhaps now would be the moment to discuss the validity of the interpretations of the story when the body of criticism is seen as a whole. I have spoken of deviant interpretations. I certainly think that in most cases these interpretations will prove to be questionable to most readers. But some of them, for instance, those related to the supposed racial message of the story, have accomplished a useful role, bringing forward certain relevant issues which more orthodox interpretations overlook—some readers, that is, may have found them valid to some extent even if they ultimately rejected them. It is obvious that I am

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¹ Rev. in Critic (1900); rev. in Morning Post (1901, 6); Beer 1923, 164.

² Harold Frederic (in Beer 1923, 164); Hawthorne (1900, in Weatherford 1973); rev. in Book Buyer (1900, in Weatherford 1973).

speaking for myself here. As I have said before, validity does not exist in the void; the issue is always one of validity for whom and for what purpose. Insofar as this approach has been a metatheoretical one, all interpretations have been equally valid and useful, as objective readings of the work in the sole sense in which readings can be objective: when they are taken as objects of an inquiry and as ideological production. Insofar as my approach is also an interpretation of "The Monster," my validation of other interpretations is obviously a function of the interpretation I favour.

Other readers, other projects, may validate interpretations according to different parameters, depending on their own projects. This does not mean that some aims, such as the interpretation of the historical meaning of the work, are more widespread, central or usable than others, and that as long as the object of any critical project is to influence the views of other readers, general agreement will remain a criterion of validity.

We have observed interpretation at work as the supplement of the literary work and its partial rewriting. This rewriting follows ideological fields of force that are often beyond the critic's conscious deliberation. The very institution of criticism insures that it will fulfil its communal aim, beyond the personal motifs of a critic but related to his or her situation (in the Sartrean sense)—a relation which is insured by the conventionality of established critical practices. Most interpreters of "The Monster" belong to a tradition of humanist and liberal criticism, and are deeply influenced by the New Critical outlook. In this tradition, criticism, like literature, is an aesthetic/moral meditation which involves a creative activity on its material. These critical assumptions show a conspicuous tendency to de-historicize the

author and identify him or her with the implied textual voice as interpreted according to the current conventions. All this is most conspicuous in the critics' attitudes toward a major ideological watershed of American society, the issue of race.

The tendency toward de-historization and the conflation of the writer's and the critic's activity has institutional and ideological roots which it is not my purpose to discuss here. It is not merely the result of an inadequate conception of authorial intention. But an awareness that the interpretation of the author's meaning should be isolated as a distinct phase in the overall interpretation of a work cannot but have positive effects on the conceptual rigor of the critical activity.

Appendix: Some Hermeneutical Terms

The terms marked with an asterisk are defined in this glossary. Some additional definitions may be found in chapters 2 and 3.

Author: The producer of a *text.

Authorial meaning: Author's locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary *intentions, defined in the terms of his own culture, as interpreted by the *reader or *critic. As a regulative concept, the *authorial meaning* is the unique objective historical intention of the author, which ideally could be retrieved by the critic.

Best significance, best meaning: The ones most highly valued by the *critic.

Codification. Semiotic phenomena are codified, that is, they are describable only as relationships between sign structures. A given semiotic phenomenon may be interpreted according to a code (it will be a wholly codified sign) or may be used by the interpreter to constitute a new code by modifying an existing one (hypercodification, which results in a partially codified sign).

Concretization: Complex of *meaning or *significance an *interpretation refers to.

Critic: The subject of the critical activity, of *criticism.

Criticism: *Interpretation and/or *evaluation of *discourse and/or *text by means of the production of a critical text.

Deep intention: The subliminal pattern of action which unifies several disparate *intentions. Adj. *deeply intentional*.

Discourse: 1) In general, complex of *meaning and/or *significance; object of *interpretation and/or *criticism.

2) More specifically, the linguistic activity whereby such a complex of meaning is transmitted.

Evaluation: Ethical, aesthetic or political attitude of *critic to *discourse; act of making such attitude known.

Hypercodification: The process of codification which uses already existing codes to create a new one.

intention: An *Intentional state, the choice of a pattern of action directed to an aim. Not equivalent to *deep intention. Adj. *intentional*.. The conscious choice of a pattern of action does not imply consciousness of all the elements which contribute to it. The subject is conscious of the scenario or frame of action, but not of each individual concept which may contribute to fill in this frame is conscious at one given moment, although it is potentially accessible to consciousness. This is the usual notion of intention. The words "intention," "intentional" (with a lowercase i) in the text are to be understood in this sense.

Intentionality, Intentional: In the domain of phenomenology (Brentano, Husserl, etc.), Intentionality is a specific relation between an

act of awareness and its object—the ability consciousness has to constitute and conceive object apart from the specific psychological acts which constitute it. There is a variety of Intentional (uppercase I) phenomena, such as belief, desire, memory... as well as intention (lowercase i).

Interpretation: 1. Interpretive act. Act which consists in the determination of partially codified *meaning (see *codification*) and/or *significance. More specific terms will be: interpretation of meaning, interpretation of authorial meaning, interpretation of significance. If interpretation of meaning has recourse to conceptions and categories which are not those of the original, these are bracketed as metalanguage.

2. (Partial) complex of *authorial meaning, *meaning and/or *significance which results from such a determination (and is subject to the same metalinguistic bracketing).

Interpreter: The subject of the interpretive activity, of *interpretation.

Meaning: The relationship between the semiotic manifestation (text) of the work and a variety of deeper levels of analysis: presented world, story, narrative, discourse, and the semiotic structure constituted by these levels. Meaning may include (but need not be restricted to) authorial meaning.

Reader: 1) In a general sense, *reader (2) and / or *interpreter of a text.

2) In a technical sense, subject of the activity of *reading (2).

Reading: 1) In general, constructing the *meaning of a text.

2) As opposed to *interpreting, the technical sense of *reading* refers to the retrieval of wholly codified *meaning, of meaning which is at hand (see *codification*).

Significance: Any semiotic links established by the *interpreter inside the work, or between the work and any other instance of *social discourse, which are believed by the interpreter to be foreign to the *intentional *authorial *meaning.

Social Discourse: A field of ideological activity isolated for analysis.

Text: Linguistic (or, more widely, semiotic) manifestation of *discourse.

Truth: Perhaps better reformulated as “truth-effect”, the mutual translatability of the output of different cognitive strategies.

Understanding: Construction of *meaning.

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