

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

For any pragmatic philosopher or critic, all concepts are only warrants for some kind of activity; all practical ideas, fitting only to some lived situation. The test of a general theory is the number of situations that theory may neatly characterize. For this reason, the author of a general aesthetic theory may be forgiven what might otherwise seem the repetition of an idea for the sake of the repetition. To show the relevance of a theory to more than one lived situation is necessarily to repeat oneself. In re-editing the enclosed chapters, I have attempted to limit the repetition to the circumstances in which the theory may take on further significance from the change of venue explained in the various chapters. The original essays or addresses themselves appeared over a period of some thirty years.

The theory described herein contained, although called "phenomenological structuralism," originally derives from my studies in contextualism, and was modified toward phenomenology following an introduction into the subtleties of existentialist aesthetic and literary theory, as found in the works of Ingarden, Heidegger, Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty, and others. One of the appendices to my *An Existentialist Aesthetic* (1962, 386–404) contains a comparative analysis of novels by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. But this phase is not repeated to any significant degree in these pages. That part of the theory which is repeated in various contexts is the phenomenological structuralism developed by relating the earlier studies to the work of Roman Ingarden both in general aesthetics and in literary theory. I then show the place of Ingarden's phenomenology in the development of contemporary criticism, and use it as modified to describe the act of reading as a way of living within a literary world. That move permits me to show the relationships between Ingarden's ontology of art and Heidegger's ontology of human existence (see Kaelin, 1988). The one serves as foundation for a philosophy of art; the other, for a philosophy of education.

Finally, I use the theory for the purposes of evaluating the concept of "truth in literature," which once again permits me to contrast intellectualist accounts of literature—such as those maintained by Ingarden, Heidegger, and Ricoeur—with my own more fully pragmatic account.

For all this "repetition" one should recognize the sameness of the theory and its source, and understand thereby the various uses to which it can be put. Ordinarily one would say that a virtue of the theory in question is its explanatory power or its multiple uses, depending upon whether one's interest is primarily theoretical or both theoretical and practical. One need not reflect too long to understand that the uses of a literary theory constitute a critical practice.

In these chapters, the general theory explained in my earlier work is assumed, and so is not argued for except as the special case of the literary arts calls for the support of a more general application. The case justifying the theory may be found as part of the supplied bibliography, and any readers interested in the matter may refer to the postulate system explained in Chapter Five of this volume. Using language for the purpose of controlling aesthetic responses is the unique

privilege of literary artists. So, when our aesthetic experiences are of literary objects—poems, novels, plays, and the like—the total frame of reference structuring the meaningfulness of discourse about the arts is linguistic. It was perhaps for this reason that the theory explained in my own *An Aesthetics for Art Educators* was first developed in an essay concerned with the possibility of educating students in the appreciation of literature (Kaelin, 1964). The argument presented in that article merely ramified into two directions: first, toward the general theory of art explained in my earlier work; and, second, into the theory of literary criticism presented herein.

For that reason, it is perhaps best to begin with an explanation of the argument presented in *Method and Methodology in Literary Criticism* (1964). I argued there that, in preference to a teacher's expecting a student to accept a personal reading of a given text, it would be better to provide students with a method for making their own readings of a text; and, that if the method provided is to be justified, then teachers themselves must engage in a meaningful inquiry into the principles of methodology—a traditionally defined philosophical enterprise. I merely asserted that the role of philosophy in aesthetics was to relate itself to art. The criticisms of methodological inquiry are required for the prescription of any method of instruction if our teachers are to avoid playing the role of experts whose opinions carry the weight of authority. In matters of personal taste, that is a burden too heavy to bear. Classrooms are better conceived as settings for two sets of interacting inquirers, between teachers testing their own methodological conclusions under active classroom conditions and students learning how to employ the method being taught. Not wishing to argue the point in the abstract, however, I took on the task of providing a general theory of literary expressiveness to present an example of methodological inquiry. That trick was performed by an analysis of words and their multiform meanings as constituting the medium of literary art. (See also Chapter Three, this volume.)

Readers of my educational volume (1989b) will recognize the eidetic description of artistic significance as stipulated in a series of four postulates—the same as those described here as part of Chapter Five; they may or may not be aware that these postulates were originally three (Kaelin, 1964), and that they were initially devised to explain the manner in which a reader's response is controlled by the tensions of a literary text. I owed their first publication to Professor Elliot W. Eisner, who was then editor of the University of Chicago's *School Review*.

From the analogy of the relation between methods and methodology, the whole range of discourse on or about the creation of aesthetic value may be arranged in a series of inquiries. This arrangement was worked out in collaboration with Professor David W. Ecker, who was then seeking some kind of philosophical justification for anything that was to be counted as "content" for courses in art education. We reasoned (Ecker and Kaelin, 1972) that, where the most obvious content of such courses would be the aesthetic experiences controlled by art works, other contents would be found in ascending levels of discourse about these aesthetic experiences. For example, if the first level of content in courses

of literature is defined by the linguistic expressions of literary artists, then the second, ascending level of inquiry, is criticism (either descriptive or evaluative of the first level experiences). The third is metacriticism, critical of criticism, and, like criticism, either descriptive or evaluative. The fourth is the level of theory, by which metacriticism is justified or criticized. And the fifth, metatheory, prescribes a given strategy for theory construction.

The title of this volume refers to the placement of philosophical activity as reflection upon the creations of literary artists and their critics (texts and texts on texts), on the one hand, and the theoretical analyses of foundational philosophy, on the other. When they engage in metacriticism, philosophers produce texts on texts; when they engage in theory building, they produce texts on textuality. And when they ascend to the principles of metatheory, they lay down the conditions any theory must be adjusted to, in order to be an acceptable explanation of the facts of textuality on all the lower stages of linguistic expertise. If they are to be expected to serve as the measure of the degree to which our statements about art may be judged as making sense, then theories too must meet a set of formal demands—whence, my current concern for the competing claims of critical literary theory.

For starters, philosophers usually begin with the metatheoretical principles governing the construction of any theory: to be acceptable a theory must be applicable to the facts to be explained (that is, must be referentially adequate), must not contain contradictions (that is, be self-consistent), and, lastly, must permit anyone wishing to apply the theory to solve the range of problems envisaged within the scope of the theory itself (that is, it must “work”). The difficulty with beginning in this way is that the dominant school of British and American philosophy in the past half century was long in going through the agonizing question of whether any theory of art were possible. That is itself a metatheoretical question. The debate has lasted within aesthetics now for almost forty years, during which time frame we were confronted with such pieces as

- “The Task of Defining a Work of Art” (Ziff, 1953),
- “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics” (Weitz, 1956),
- “What Makes a Situation Aesthetic?” (Urmson, 1957),
- “Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?” (Kennick, 1958),
- “Family Resemblances and Generalizations Concerning the Arts”
(Mandelbaum, 1965),
- “On the De-definition of Art” (Rosenberg, 1972),
- Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Dickie, 1974), and
- “When Is Art?” (Goodman, 1978).

Where this concern for the definability of our concepts is not sheer neuroticism posing as conceptual analysis, auto-destructive self-consciousness, or an unwarranted fear of essentialism in a nominalistic culture, it has performed a much needed orientation toward works of art as individual contexts of embodied aesthetic value. But students will look long for any reference to phenomenological theory or practice in manuals of “analytical aesthetics” (see Beardsley,

1958, 1981), and in the attitudes of some members of this school it would seem that not knowing anything about a vibrant European tradition is an intellectual virtue.

Whatever our preference for a method happens to be, however, an explanation of how we come to know an individual has always presented problems to an essentialist epistemology, from Aristotle to the present day. But if that problem has not made psychoanalysis an impossible task—difficult, yes, but not impossible—then critics, faced with the same difficult task of knowing an individual, cannot plead the impossibility of their tasks. If they did, why should we read them? Both professions might follow the example of lovers who come to know each other as completely and as intimately as their differences permit. As far as critical theories go, they are concerned with the possibilities of aesthetic experiences. They can and must be devised by a study of the properties of the media in which individual artworks are executed. Those too can be described if only we can come to know them. And if we choose to begin our analyses with the nature of aesthetic experiences provided by an artwork, we could do worse than to examine how the word *aesthetic* is used in ordinary discourse. Like those of *logical* and *moral*, the term has both a descriptive and a normative use. Explaining the descriptive use is the task of aesthetic theory; the normative use, the task of meta-criticism.

My own *An Aesthetics for Art Educators* (1989b) proposes a single method—phenomenological description—for prescribing both an aesthetic and an educational practice. In that volume too the case is made for a general aesthetic theory I call “phenomenological structuralism.” Only time will tell whether the methodological prescriptions of phenomenology will eventuate in successful educational curricula. As of now perhaps too much has been made of our critical theorists’ having surpassed structuralism. I maintain that this case has not yet been convincingly argued.

The purpose of this volume is to make the first step toward permitting teachers and students at various levels of sophistication to evaluate the claims made by phenomenologists that their method indeed works in the subdomain of the literary arts. To do this for American readers, of course, I shall have to accept the challenge to express the essentials of the method in clear contemporary prose. Although Ingarden supplemented his native Polish with Husserl’s German to develop his phenomenology of aesthetic experience (1962), I shall do my best to make them both speak demotic American English. The preservice teachers of our public schools should not have too much trouble with the translation, since they already know the method as “show and tell.” My own children learned to use the method from in-service teachers who explained to them that the purpose of the telling was to make clear what they were showing. If a person can see an object, or even only imagine one, then that person can describe what is seen or imagined. If, when reading, a person can understand a reference and imagine it as described or otherwise represented, then that person can describe what is understood or imagined. And that is the only requirement of the method. Phenomenological “bracketing” means only that nothing irrelevant to the experience must be in-

cluded in the critical description. Since no reading can guarantee universality of reference, readers need not fret about giving the only valid interpretation of a text, and should be asked to concentrate on what occurs to them as they read. Describing that is authentic literary criticism. As long as such readings are controlled by the texture and structure of the texts being read, there is reason to believe that another person can appreciate the criticism.

This volume is divided into two parts. The first, explaining phenomenological critical theory, moves from an explanation of a reader's activity as being in a literary world (living with metaphor) in Chapter One, through Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the relationship between literary narratives and time (Chapter Two), to a general consideration of language as the medium of literary works (Chapter Three). Following an account of the recent debates over stratification within literary artworks engaged in by Roman Ingarden and Nikolai Hartmann (Chapter Four), I place my own phenomenological structuralism in the context of the debates between the structuralists and our own home-grown contextualists. Then I close the discussion by giving a contextualistic account of literary expressiveness and an evaluation of the notion that literary works express some kind of truth in terms of the theory previously adumbrated (Chapter Five). The closing of the circle seems obvious: we move from the merely implicit truths of writers and readers who are led to see their worlds as they are to the explicit statement of the kinds of truth available to aesthetic analysis—particularly the ontological truths of writers and readers as they exist in their literary worlds. With this demonstration, the tradition of Platonic and Aristotelian mimesis is portrayed as having outlived its usefulness.

Part II permits me to play a more complete role in the philosophy of literature. What was before a critical theory derived from a particular philosophical methodology must now become reinforced by critical practice. What was before an application of an eidetic reduction of our literary experiences must now become a simpler phenomenological reduction practiced on particular works of art. Indeed, if this last aim is not a real possibility, it becomes impossible to have achieved the first. The indicated change begins, of course, in Part I, but intensifies with a discussion of the "philosophical" structure of a literary text in the most obvious cases of classical tragedy, and its inversion in recent existentialist drama—cases where the philosopher must function as a dramatic critic to complete his or her own self-assigned task. If the classical tragic drama, as tied to a theory of artistic mimesis, can be inverted in the contemporary, can the genre be expanded beyond the realm of drama? And if the genre assumes a certain worldview, does a contemporary worldview admit of a tragic interpretation? Such were the questions motivating my second treatment of "tragedy" in modern times. Chapters Six and Seven state my case.

Generalizing upon tragedy as a "metaphysical" property of literary artworks, in Chapter Eight I move on to a definition of a new genre, "philosophical literature." Next, although the subgenres of philosophical literature seem inexhaustible—in that they all depend upon an author's power of imagination to produce different ways of ordering the events of his or her fictional universe, two philo-

sophically defined literary techniques are then examined in Chapter Nine. The one is unsuccessful, by a man; the other, successful, by a woman. I include a criticism of a successful female author along with another of an unsuccessful male author not to avoid the usual feminist charge of sexism in the choice of matters to be discussed, but only to show how naturalistic and humanistic novels both illustrate the concept of a “philosophical literature.” Should philosophers expend their energy writing literary criticism? They should, if they can. Within a certain range of recognizable possibilities they may act as they choose.

Finally, Part II is brought to a close as I return to the theme of metacriticism and the place of “phenomenological structuralism” in the current debates on the “proper” foundation for a literary criticism, this time within the current American academic scene.

Tallahassee, Florida
1998