Hans Robert Jauss

LIMITS AND TASKS

OF LITERARY HERMENEUTICS

I. The Present Situation of Literary Hermeneutics

The foundation of methodical development of *literary* hermeneutics represents an altogether new proposition.* There existed for centuries an old tradition of *philological* hermeneutics. It can glory in its venerable origins: the interpretation of ecclesiastical canonical writing, an art which ever since the period of Humanism has been erecting for itself a proud monument of re-edited and corrected texts and commentaries of ancient authors. It can also show just as impressive a result of historical interpretation of the texts of the world's literary past which had served the ideal of an "objective" and therefore *scholarly* knowledge. However we know that these achievements were not a monopoly of the traditional philological hermeneutics, but were shared with the theological, juridical, philosophical and distorical hermeneutics: in short, with all branches of study concerned with editing, critical study of sources and historical interpretation of the writings of

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the past. The merits of the traditional hermeneutics of literary texts are so unexceptional, its history so difficult to distinguish from other regional hermeneutics that the epistemologist can speak of a common philological basis and pose the following fundamental question: where does the independence of literary hermeneutics really begin? How has it operated and how does it operate today in order to render justice to the aesthetic character of its texts?

This is just the question which embarrasses the philologist even today. Traditionally it was referred to rhetoric as a problem of the influence of written speech or else as a search for the aesthetic value—considered the business of literary (in Germany non-academic) criticism. Since the beginning of this century it has been treated independently as a problem of the text's "literariness" and elevated to the premise necessary for every interpretation; therefore the hermeneutical reflections were mostly o-mitted. It happened with the newly risen Russian formalists as well as with Leo Spitzer's stylistics;[1] but even the more recent linguistic or semiotic poetics and the latest theories of *écriture, jeu textuel* and *intertextualité* hardly ever worried about the hermeneutical implications of the new descriptive methods; or else they often took on an anti-hermeneutical attitude in the name of the strictly formal scholarly ideals. Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation* (1966)[2] made a hit because her spirited attack on the objectivism of the traditional interpretation methods revealed the contradiction which appears between modern literature and traditional interpretation as soon as the latter tries to reduce the polysemy of the "open work" (*opera aperta*) to a seemingly established meaning, hidden in the text or behind it. On the other hand, if we consider the new theories on hermeneutics—especially those formed by related textbound sciences, particularly by theology and law since

[1] Leo Spitzer, in his introduction to *Linguistics and Literary History* (1948), has tried to explain his stylistical process by means of the hermeneutical circle; however the implicit theory of his interpretation praxis, as unsistematical as it is inimitable, surpasses greatly his marginal hermeneutic reflection, as is best demonstrated by the evaluation by J. Starobinski. *L'œil vivant II—La relation critique*, Paris 1970, p. 34-81.

[2] "The old style of interpretation was insistent, but respectful; it erected another meaning on top of the literal one. The modern style of interpretation excavates, destroys; it digs 'behind' the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one", in: *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York 1966, p. 6.

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they began crossing the borders of the common philological-historical interpretation and working out their own different basic hermeneutical experiences in comprehension, interpretation and application of texts—we must agree with Peter Szondi who, in 1970, deplored the role of the "poor relative" to which literary hermeneutics let itself be passively reduced in this discussion.[3]

Szondi demanded a revision of the "theory-blind" traditional philological methods and saw the task of the new literary hermeneutics in the development of a "science of interpretation not unphilological in itself, but one which combines philology with aesthetics."[4] It would have to differ from the traditional hermeneutics of classical philology, since "it will evaluate the text's aesthetic character not in an addition to its interpretation, but as a premise to the whole interpretation as such".[5] This would require—contrary to the popular tendency towards a comprehension theory which, since Bultmann, tends to abandon all regional hermeneutics—a return to materialistic hermeneutics, i.e. one which practises the literary interpretation and is built upon our present understanding of art for the development of such hermeneutics. Szondi laid a foundation on which we can easily build. He has tried out his method practically on the paradigm of hermetic lyrics, proving the interdependence of criticism and hermeneutics. However he also shed light on the hidden prehistory of literary hermeneutics by retrieving from the general tradition of hermeneutics those elements which allowed the scholars (beginning with Chladenius) to notice the aesthetic character of the text, to separate it from the theological or juridical premises and to apply to it, haltingly at first, a specific method of aesthetic interpretation.

Hermeneutics includes three directions of study: comprehension, interpretation and application, or, substituting for those terms the old—originally pietist—triad, proved so useful in traditional teaching: the *subtilitas intelligendi, explicandi, applicandi*; now in the literary hermeneutics which Szondi bequeathed to us and which he, himself, would have considered incomplete,

[3] "*Bemerkungen zur Forschungslage der literarischen Hermeneutik*", in *Einführung in die literarische Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt 1975, p. 404.
[4] *Ibid*. p. 25.
[5] *Ibid*. p. 13.

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the second direction occupies the front of the stage. Therefore if his work is to be continued we have to answer the question whether we should not look for literary hermeneutics in the first hermeneutical act as well, i.e. in the *subtilitas intelligendi*; and also whether it has any part at all in the third hermeneutical act, the *subtilitas applicandi*, which crowns the theological as well as the juridical *subtilitas explicandi*. What right have we to apply to literary hermeneutics Hans Georg Gadamer's affirmation that "the application is just as much an integral component of the hermeneutical process as comprehension and interpretation"?[6] These questions remain controversial, while literary hermeneutics has already solved—to a certain extent—its own specific problems of constitution, efficacity and interpretation of the aesthetically structured texts.[7] Therefore, always considering the related hermeneutics, I am above all interested in trying to clarify first: how much we can learn about the primary process of comprehension from the aesthetic object of literary hermeneutics; secondly: given an aesthetic point of view, whether comprehension must not end up in pure enjoyment or in a reflexive exegesis of art—or might it possibly reach its own proper application, be it in aesthetic identification or in aesthetic judgement?

II. The Hermeneutical Process as Union of Comprehension, Interpretation and Application.

Hans Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics gave the methodology of the contemporary text study a definite direction towards the conception of the hermeneutical process as a union of the three instances: comprehension, interpretation and appli-

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[6] *Wahrheit und Methode ʻ Grundlagen einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen, 1960, p. 291.

[7] I quote as representatives W. Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, Munich, 1976; U. Japp. *Hermeneutik—Der theoretische Diskurs, die Literatur und die Konstruktion ihres Zusammenhangs in den philologischen Wissenschaften*, Munich, 1977; P. Ricoeur, *"Die Schrift als Problem der Literaturkritik und der philosophischen Hermeneutik"* in J. Zimmermann, ed. *Sprache und Welterfahrung*, Munich, 1978, p. 67-88; further (semiotically, not hermeneutically oriented) J. Lotman, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte*, Munich, 1973.

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cation; the realization of this union has been and should again become the common goal of all hermeneutical practice, notwithstanding the variety of subjects. Indeed, we could judge the evidence and the prehistory of the branches of hermeneutic studies according to the degree to which they recognized and realized, in their study and research, the unity of these three instances, or else forgot it altogether and raised one of the elements to be the only legitimate research subject, to the detriment of the other two. Literary hermeneutics has remained for the longest time under the influence of the paradigms of history and of the interpretation immanent in the text; and that explains its present laggardness. The scholars limited their work to exegesis, left their concept of comprehension inarticulate, and neglected the problem of application so completely that the turn to reception aesthetics, which in the sixties began to close the development gap, reached an unexpected success as a "change of paradigms".

Neither theological nor juridical hermeneutics ever entirely forgot to recognize the fact that comprehension already includes the beginnings of interpretation and indeed that interpretation is the explicit form of comprehension; that on the other hand "the process of comprehension always contains something like an application of the text studied to the contemporaneous situation of the interpreter."[8] The scholars were of course forced to consider it within the exigences of the sermon (as the up-to-date presentation of the Gospel) and of the verdict (as concretization of the law for the solution of a case). Therefore it seems right to follow Gadamer and to recognize as our present task "to give literary hermeneutics new definitions based on the juridical and theological ones."[9]

To fulfill this task we must needs inquire how that unity of comprehension, interpretation and application, which represents the only full concept of hermeneutics, manifested itself during the forgotten history of literary exegesis. Gadamer introduces the idea in the eighteent century in his endeavour to systematize the problems of hermeneutics: the pietists dis-

[8] H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 291.
[9] *Ibid.* p. 294.

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tinguished the *subtilitas intelligendi* from a *subtilitas explicandi* and even added as the third link the *subtilitas applicandi* in the interest of religious edification. The scholars of Romanticism surpassed this division of hermeneutics into the three elements by recognizing the inner unity of *intelligere* and *explicare*; but they thus sacrificed the application to the new ideal of historical knowledge.[10] This epoch-making change of paradigms has many aspects: it starts a universal hermeneutics emancipated from every old tie which bound the traditional hermeneutics to canonical texts (The Bible, the *Corpus Juris*, the classics of antiquity).

With Schleiermacher, this change reaches the foundation point of general hermeneutics as the study of understanding based on oral speech instead of primarily on texts (*every act of comprehension is an inversion of an act of speech;*)[11] this inversion centers the problem of comprehension on the foreign interlocutor, in the individuality of the author; therefore it puts psychological (or technical) interpretation beside the grammatical one. As shown by Szondi—writing on Friedrich Ast's *Grundlinien der Hermeneutik und Kritik* (1808)—in the literary hermeneutics of classical philology this change of paradigms led to the passage from the study of text's various meanings to the various ways of interpretation: "the historical comprehension, concerning the contents; the grammatical one concerning the form, language and presentation, and the spiritual one concerning the spirit of the individual writer and that of his times".[12] The historic change which marks the real foundation of the hermeneutics' claims as a science has been sufficiently described.[13] I only wish to emphasize the fact that an implicit understanding of the unity of comprehension, interpretation and application has formed the basis of hermeneutics not only since the period of the Enlightenment, but since the very ancient practice of the *ars interpretandi*, and that the new pattern of various methods of interpretation did not simply substitute the old paradigm of various meanings of the

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[10] *Ibid.* p. 290 ff.
[11] Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik*, ed. H. Kimmerle, Heidelberg 1959, p. 80.
[12] *Introduction*, p. 143.
[13] Concerning Gadamer and Szondi see also G. Ebelin's article "*Hermeneutik*", in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Tübingen 1957, v. 3, p. 242-262, and W. Pannenberg (cf. footnote 39/40).

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text, but redefined and developed its functions.

Considering the lexicology it is interesting to notice that the Greek word *hermeneuein* has three meanings: to tell, to explain and to translate.[14] When we return to the original sacred use of the word, we see that the obscure language of the oracle required not only the explanation of the divine will in order to be understood, but also its translation, or better application, to the situation at hand since, given the ever-growing passage of time, it either isn't immediately understandable any more or could cause scandal in times with a different moral code. Here we find the origin of the distinction between the *sensus litteralis* and the *sensus allegoricus* which formed the basis of the two former schools of literary hermeneutics *avant la lettre*: of the grammatical interpretation (which reached its peak in the late Alexandrian philology) and the allegorical exegesis (developed by the stoics and by the Pergamum school). These methods attempted either to explain the ancient, hardly understandable language through transposal into a contemporary one, or to, so to speak, double it with an up-to-date, often moral, interpretation. They are easily undervalued if we do not consider the debate which they aroused and which is revived again and again, though under different colours, in the history of hermeneutics—two sides of *one* progressive process of reception. Szondi accosted the problem of application which promotes this process when he recognized that the more probing common intention of both the grammatical and the allegorical interpretation consisted in "transposition of the canonical text—such as, for example, Homer had been for the Athenians of the classical period or for the Alexandrians—out of its historical past and into the present time; rendering it not only understandable, but also, so to speak up-to-date; proving it to be of undiminished value in short: canonical."[15]

Thus Homer is not only the first poet to be included in the canons of world literature, but also—because of the increasing difficulties in the exegesis of his work—the first to pose the hermeneutical problem of comprehension which, as the difference between the text and its interpretation, determined the basic

[14] According to Ebeling, *loc cit.* p. 243.
[15] *Introduction* p. 16 f.

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situation of hermeneutics as a whole. The distinction between *sensus litteralis* and the *sensus allegoricus* established by the allegoresis of Homer has been greatly enriched by the Christian biblical exegesis, since its canonical text inaugurated a new, eschatological comprehension of history as history of salvation; therefore from then on the *sensus litteralis* had to be understood as a *sensus historicus*. To Saint Paul's typological exegesis corresponded the necessity to interpret the history of the Old Testament as the figure of the New which was revealed in Christ, the law in the light of faith, the present in the eschatological hope in the future kingdom of God. The Christian character of the process seems to consist in the fact that now the problem of application includes not only the importance of the past, but also that for the present situation of the future. The three time dimensions are repeated in another typically Christian method of patristic Bible exegesis: the doctrine of the triple meaning of the Holy Writ. Since Origen it had become customary to disstinguish a somatic (literary, historio-grammatical) meaning, a psychical (moral) one and a spiritual (allegorico-mystical) one; this distinction is based on anthropology and precisely on the unity of the human body, soul and spirit. The extension of the old double meaning of the text becomes here, as later in the medieval scholastic schematization (*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*) rachet a division of the *sensus spiritualis* into different directions of application: "to the Church and its dogmatic doctrine, to the behaviour of the single believer (also 'tropological) as well as to the metaphysical and eschatological mysteries."[16]

If the history of Christian biblical exegesis put so far in the foreground the relationship between interpretation and application, the moment of comprehension again became a problem when the question of the criteria of the proper comprehension of the Scriptures ceased to be definitely decided by the Church on the basis of its possession of the *regula fidei* and of the hermeneutical role of the Catholic traditional principle as *gubernaculum interpretationis*.[17] Luther's doctrine of the clarity of the Scriptures,

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[16] Ebeling, p. 247.
[17] According to Ebeling, p. 248 f.

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i.e. of its *sensus litteralis*, imposed on every Christian, as a Bible reader, the task of grasping the meaning of the *verbum Dei scriptum* by means of his own *subtilitas intelligendi*, independently of any authority of a secular traditional interpretation. However, while renouncing the polysemy of the Bible and particularly refusing the allegoris, Luther by no means excluded the passage from the *explicatio* to the *applicatio*. Quite the contrary: he founded it on a new basis by emphasizing the historical priority of the *verbum Dei non scriptum* to the *verbum Dei scriptum*, of the living Gospel to the law petrified into Scripture:[18] "The past annunciation should become a present continuous annunciation. This transition from text to sermon is a transition from the Scriptures to the living Word."[19] The sermon as a message passed down through history and adapted to the present situation rather than the timeless meaning given once and for all to a holy writing will be the authentic text from now on; for the mature Christian this text will now be the corner stone of the hermeneutical process! After Luther the necessity to place the antique biblical text in relationship with the present posed, for Protestant hermeneutics, the problem of the unity and identity of the text; a problem which became more acute as the initial historical thought discovered the gulf between the literal meaning of the biblical sources and the actual course of events, which we can verify only indirectly.[20] Literary hermeneutics encountered such problems only when, following the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, there developed a historical comprehension of the classical text which questioned the perfection of the ancient writers and their imitability.[21]

Luther took the first step on the way leading from the doctrine of polysemy of the Scriptures—which maintains that all interpretation diversities are already substantially given or at least

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[18] "*Lex in tabulis scribebatur et erat scriptum mortua, limitibus tabulae clausa, ideo parum efficax. At Evangelium vivae et liberrimae voci in auras effusae committitur, ideo plus energiae habet ad convertendum*" quoted from G. Ebeling, "*Wort Gottes und Hermeneutik*", in *Wort und Glaube*, 1967, p. 327.

[19] *Ibid.* p. 345.

[20] According to W. Pannenberg, "*Hermeneutik und Universalgeschichte*", in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Göttingen 1971, p. 91.

[21] See *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, Frankfurt 1970, p. 29 ff.

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prefigured in the text—to hermeneutics of the differentc om-prehension methods which consider the meaning of the text as the blue print, as a condition of continually renewable applii-cations which permit treatment of the historical moment, with its ever changing connection with life, as a differential point of the various interpretations. Luther's idea was then developed in the eighteenth century—as mentioned above—by the hermeneutics of pietism, into a doctrine of the three *subtilitates*. The interpre-tation practice of the humanist scholars ever since the Renaissance philological studies developed independently and abandoned the allegorical interpretation of the great writers of antiquity as outdated. However even at the end of the eighteenth century the hermeneutics of classical philology, which rose thanks to the foundation of historical archeology, are still conditioned by the problems and solutions of the contemporary theological herme-neutics. Therefore Szondi could rightly prsent the hermeneutics of Friedrich Ast as a trial to transform the old dectrine of polysemy into a new theory of the multiple methods of inter-pretation: the historical one, the grammatical one and the "spirit-ual" one. Then Szondi placed Schleiermacher's hermeneutics in the same context: "Since Schleiermacher bases hermeneutics on the concept not of the meaning but of the comprehension of the text, he gives us the chance to distinguish the various ways of interpretation without their presupposing a multiplicity in the interpreter text itself." Even if we aèree fith Szondi and recog-nize in this turn of hermeneutics a "hidden" polemic intention of Schleiermacher and of his contemporary hermeneutics towards the doctrine of polysemy of the text we must still not forget that the doctrine of multiple ways of interpretation at the same time continues and formulates anew the old function of the theolo-gical exegesis of the Bible.

The *sensus litteralis*, treated in the Christian exegesis more and more as *sensus historicus*, was superceded on one side by the *historical* comprehension concerned with the passed event (or the poetic fable), and on the other side by the *grammatical* interpretation which, according to Schleiermacher, must span the difference in levels in rapport with outdated language, using, as

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[22] *Introduction*, p. 190.

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an hermeneutical bridge, the type of text to be interpreted.[23] Ast substitutes for the *sensus spiritualis* the intellectual or psycho-logical-technical interpretation which converts the old spiritual meaning of the text according to the new requirement to under-stand a writer's work as a product of his own spirit and that of his times. This new formula, based on the spiritual concept of German idealism, is certainly the farthest from our idea of hermeneutics; as far as its intention is concerned, it does not devolve altogether on the intuitive comprehension of modern criticism (*Einfüblung*) either, considering that, according to Schlei-ermacher (contrary to Ast's spiritual interpretation,[24] the psycho-logical interpretation requires that *the reader reproduce the au-thor's production of live creative thought.* Schleiermacher also calls the psychological interpretation *technical*, evidently because for him it was based not on an intuitive harmonization with the foreign Thou but on the constructive principle of the *Poiesis* whose production of knowledge refers in the end to Vico's *verum et factum convertuntur.*[25] Both Ast's and Schleiermacher's hermeneutics lack the position of the *sensus moralis*, and therefore the function of the application in the strict sense of the word; the aesthetic judgement, which according to Kant requires the consent of others has been superseded by the contemplative ideal of autonomous art. As a counter-argument we can say *cum grano salis* that the *sensus analogicus* has an equivalent in the Schlegel brothers' literary criticism, and vaguely also in Schleiermacher's; the hermeneutical process is not accomplished through the intelli-gent interpretation of a single work or a single author but only through their inclusion in the canons of universal literature. This of course requires from the interpreter, in his function as literary

[23] Szondi has brought it to light again (*Introduction*, p. 190).
[24] See Szondi's *Kritik an der harmonisierenden Funktion*, attributed by Ast to the spiritual concept which according to him "serves not only for the definition of the fixed goal set by the hermenenutics of Goethe, but at the same time covers with his foggy aura all problems caused by the disparity of time beween the author and the reader or by the interdependence of text and context (*Introduc-tion* p. 139).
[25] Schleiermacher: *Hermeneutik*, p. 81 and 107 ff. (§ § 5-7, 41-44); Szondi has missed the constructivistic roles of Schleiermacher's psychological interpret-ation, which were made known particularly by D. Böhler in his essay: "Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutical Method". (See vol. 9 of the series: *Poetik und Hermeneutik*, quoted in the first footnote.)

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critic, aesthetical pudgement which would take into consideration the past as well as the future importance of the work.

I maintain that the genesis of the new hermeneutics of multiple interpretation can be deduced from and explained through conversion of the function of the old polyseny doctrine; if this theory can be proven valid from the historical point of view then it would definitely justify the idea that all three moments of the hermeneutical process are always present in any historical study of the canonical text. It does not matter whether the variability of a text's interpretation is based on the level of aa pre-established meaning or on the modalities of its reception; every concretization of a meaning presupposes an interplay of comprehension, interpretation and application, even when the importance of each of the three moments varies, or when a single one becomes the goal of the hermeneutical process, as, for example, the comprehension in the historical reconstruction or the explanation in the immanent interpretation of the work, e.g. the use of allegoresis. This last, nowadays seldom treated seriously and still exerting its influence unacknowledged,[26] was not an arbitrary or naïve interpretation any more than the contemporaneous reception aesthetics could be considered capable of producing only subjective projections and ideological prejudices. On the contrary, the latter tries to discover the various historical premises of comprehension for the main purposes of application which manifest themselves in the history of an interpretation. To do so, and to render justice to the objectives of hermeneutics as a whole, it must constantly keep an eye on the question of the established, transformed or even lost identity of the text, as well as on the particular constitution of its repertory.

III. QUESTION AND ANSWER AS PREMISES OF COMPREHENSION.

What has comprehension, based on aesthetics, in common with the comprehension of theological, juridical or philosophi-

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[26] Its unconfessed influence could be demontrated for example in the Marxist interpretations which must allegorise the connection between the basis and the literary superstructure in order to make the mute production conditions speak as if they were active.

cal texts? And where, in the hermeneutical process, lie the limits of the specific comprehension problem of literary texts? According to philosophical hermeneutics the beginnings, and therefore also the common characteristic, of every comprehension are rooted in the relation between question and answer. According to the formula of Hans Georg Gadamer, to comprehend means "to understand something as an answer."[27] The text develops itself, as an answer, from the question—since its nature consists in "opening and holding open the door to many possibilities."[28] Gadamer refers here to Heidegger's introductive explanation of the search of Being (*das Sein*) or more precisely to his definition: "Every question is a search. Every search has its own direction proceeding from the object searched for. A question is a recognition search for a being in its existence and its essence (*Dass- und Sosein.*) The recognition search can become 'a research' that leads to the discovery and definition of an answer to the question."[29] Literary hermeneutics knows this relation between question and answer through its practice of interpretation—e. g. when it is a matter of comprehension of an ancient text's diversity—since it aims to rediscover the question to which the text originally formed the answer, and so to slowly reconstruct the living world of questions and expectations which the work represented in its own times and for its original readers. What we require for the explicit interpretation, as well as for the theoretical level, of the research, is not absolutely necessary for the primary level of aesthetic experience, for understanding enjoyment and enjoyable understanding. It is evident that the aesthetical character of a text must not necessarily have the status of an explicit or an implicit answer; a text like *The Amphitryon* or *Faust* can be properly understood first of all as an answer to a question of a person's identity or of happiness achieved by knowledge. However there are other poetical texts—for example in lyric poetry—which lack this character of answer; quite the contrary, their aesthetic charm consists simply in their ability to distract us from the serious necessity

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[27] In a still unpublished conference on literary hermeneutics, Dubrovnik 1978.
[28] "*Vom Zirkel des Verstehens*", in G. Neske, Ed. *Festschrift, Martin Heidegger zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, Pfullingen 1959, p. 34.
[29] *Sein und Zeit*, 2.

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to question. I shall return to this problem of the primary constitution and reception of aesthetical texts; but first I want to speak of the extension of Heidegger's ontological explanation of comprehension elaborated by Rudolph Bultmann, whose theological hermeneutics crosses again and again the border into aesthetics.

For Bultmann—and since then for all new hermeneutics—the *Problem of Hermeneutics* (1950) begins only with the first step leading out of the objectivity of historical knowledge. Comprehension is not a purely contemplative act during which the interpreter should renounce his subjectivity and forget his own historical time and environment in order to reach an objective knowledge of something. Comprehension always takes its direction from a certain question asked, a certain "final purpose of questioning" ("*Woraufhin der Befragung*"); therefore it is guided by a primary understading of the thing, founded on the interest of the person asking. Every understanding interpretation assumes "that this interest lives in some way in the text to be interpreted and brings about the communication between the text and the interpreter,"[30] If, so far, this common and living relationship with the subject seems to limit Bultmann's theory of comprehension to a historical tradition common to the text and the interpreter, later it will reach its "finality" in a last question, capable of encompassing all others: "What possibility does the text give me to understand my own being?" thus building a hermeneutical bridge to the understanding of the manifestations of other cultures. Bultmann's formula for this extensive purpose of all comprehension: "the possibilities of the human being as possibilities proper to the comprehending person" were not achieved by chance in reading "works of true literary value."[31] As a matter of fact it would have been more difficult to maintain the theory that such an interplay of the experience of *the other* through the experience of oneself—as an achievement of the questioning comprehension—can function just as well with the theological or juridical text. Does it depend on the fact that aesthetical texts allow the interpreter to find in them not only an understanding of himself (*Sich-Versteben*), but also

[30] In R. Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, v. 2, Tübingen 1961, p. 217.
[31] *Ibid.* p. 221.

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a comprehension of the otherness of the text from the experience of its form? In Bultmann's work we find some rather important theories concerning the limitation of specifically aesthetical questioning. The aesthetical value seems ambivalent in his gamut of the principal kinds of preliminary understanding, leading from the naïve examination of the text to the philosophical quest for truth, from the interesting lessons of history or an amusing tale through psychological or historical interest (reconstruction of the past), or formal interest, to the problem of God's actions. At first "the wholehearted involvement in the destiny of the hero with whom the reader identifies himself" characterizes only the naïve reader; but later it becomes the general "mature and just comprehension for the works of true literary value", as far as it reveals to us "the human being and its possibilities, i.e. the particular possibilities of a person who understands."[32] In the end the texts of philosophy, religion and of literature are equally competent to answer the "quest for the essence of humanity as the reader's own way of being."[33] At this point it becomes evident that Bultmann defines comprehension primarily according to the purpose of the question, as if the text's diverse constitution played, if any, only a secondary role. "As a matter of principle... all text (as history in general) can be subjected" to the supreme problem of how the being of humanity may become our own."[34] But are the problems depending on this fundamental question indeed the only ones to diversify the hermeneutical approach to the text? Does not the religious, juridical or aesthetic character of the text influence the purpose of the question?

For Bultmann there is only *one* theory of comprehension based on the anthropological definition of man as a questioning creature. That does not necessarily mean that this common premise of all branches of hermeneutics could not and should not be followed by a textual pragmatism; this pragmatism ought to be applied to differentiation of comprehension according to the theological, juridical or literary character of the text, in order to work out the various purposes of the text's interpretation

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.* p. 228.
[34] *Ibid.*

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and application. Bultmann's new position, which freed theological hermeneutics from the obligation to attribute to God's Word a particular structure, was not of course enjoyed or approved by every theologian. On the other hand literary hermeneutics can thankfully and with impunity adopt the premise of Bultmann's comprehension theory which liberates it, so to speak, from an orthodox tradition. I have in mind the quasi-revealed, quasi-sacred character of classical literature, its supposedly timeless significance included practically in the process of questioning comprehension, and the correlate, immanently aesthetic consideration of a work of art. The formal analysis of an aesthetic text only prepares the "effective comprehension" but does not by any means complete it. Nowadays even literary hermeneutics must request that, in preparation for the comprehension of a text the interpreter test his own preliminary understanding, " try it out in a dress rehearsal", or in other words, "while questioning the text, let himself be questioned by the text—listen to its requirements."[35] At first sight it seems too much to ask of literary hermeneutics, to perceive "the claim of a text" (its "*Anspruch*"). The metaphor of the claim, meanwhile, generated specifically theological "hermeneutics of God's Word", according to which the claim of a text should consist in its religious character of vocation or address, whose perception already presupposes the faith of the listener. But according to Bultmann the perception of the claim found in the text presupposes the ability to make speechless text speak again through questioning: "Only the interpreter motivated by the problem of his own existence can hear the claim of the text."[36] For Bultmann even the claim of a religious text does not make an exception to this rule, so that he does not hesitate to state that even the comprehension of the accounts of the actions of God originate in the questioning of man. The boldest thesis of this theological hermeneutics states: "Man can learn to know very well who God is through a quest for Him. If his existence were not motivated (consciously or unconsciously) by the quest of God (...), he would not recognize God as God even in divine revelation."[37] This thesis

[35] *Ibid.* p. 228.
[36] *Ibid.* p. 230, and p. 233.
[37] *Ibid.* p. 232.

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has been contested on theological grounds. It has been said that the comprehension of a text as a *Verbum Dei* has its own premise: for a believer the text has a "character of address" and the understanding I is "always an I called by God" (E. Fuchs); to the Word of God defined as consent or promise (*"zuraje"*) corresponds the destiny of man to answer the call: "because it is his destiny to exist as an answer. God asks him what he has to say" (G. Ebeling).[38] However we cannot concede any priority which would render superfluous Bultmann's premises, to the comprehension of biblical text as the "revelation of the historical God, whose kingdom is still to come,"[39] even if we assume that the priority of the comprehension of God to the comprehension of oneself has a different theological foundation, and if we agree with W. Pannenberg that in the historical character of the life of Jesus can be seen the revealed meaning and beginning of all theological hermeneutics. Any theological hermeneutics which, in the name of the *Verbum Dei*, tries to reverse the interplay of question and answer in order to give priority to the text's question directed to the I (i.e. to his theological 'claim') with regard to the interpreter's question, can be contested by the irrefutable objection used by W. Pannenberg against Gadamer's conception of the classical text (it applies equally to his thesis of the priority of the comprehension of God): "that the talk of the 'question' posed by the text can only be a metaphor; only for the questioning man the text in itself becomes a question."[40]

When theological hermeneutics cannot renounce the priority of the "text question to the I," it may seem that Bultmann's theory of the understanding questioning is hermeneutics built on an unknown aesthetic basis. On the other hand literary hermeneutics—which define classical literature as a "superiority and freedom of origin" of the "eminent texts", which in themselves give their own significance and their own interpretation—could be suspected of a close relation to the authoritative text of

[38] E. Fuchs, *Hermeneutik* 1958, p. 133; G. Ebeling, "*Wort Gottes und Hermeneutik*", in *Wort und Glaube* 1967, p. 343.

[39] W. Pannenberg, "*Über historische und theologische Hermeneutik*, in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Göttingen 1971, p. 139.

[40] "*Hermeneutik und Universalgeschichte*", in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Göttingen 1971, p. 111.

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theological hermeneutics.[41] Theological hermeneutics gives priority to the question the text asks of me ("Adam, where are you?"), that is to say of my own understanding of myself; on the other hand aesthetic hermeneutics give priority to the question directed at the interpreter and revealing to him the answer of the text in constant renewal; in view of this division, the literary historian is tempted to speak of the latest phase of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. In that case there is a chance of reconciliation. Theological hermeneutics could ask for its literary neighbour's help at least in the case where a religious text or a work of religious art—which in its *intentio recta* once expressed the faith of the viewer, but became foreign to us in the same way as a witness of a remote world of faith—could be rendered accessible again through the *intentio obliqua* of its artistic character by means of a comprehensive questioning.[42] The relationship of men to God as a premise of theological hermeneutics does not necessarily build a bridge of comprehension to the diversity of a world of faith long since past. The religious texts of the Christian persecution of heretics or of the Inquisition can, at a pinch, be explained historically, but never 'understood.' However there are literary texts and works of art which reveal, through comprehensive questioning, something of the conflict of the people who acted and suffered in the name of God—by means of the intervening continuity of aesthetic experience. The particular achievement of this experience in discovering the horizons of far away worlds, in transcending and blending them with present horizons, forms the premise of literary hermeneutics as well as its privilege.

IV. The Poetical Text and the Change of Horizon in the Multiple Reading

I think that, in order to understand what kind of comprehension, interpretation and application characterizes an aesthetical text, we

[41] H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen 1960, *op. cit.* p. 274, and in the epilogue to the 3rd Edition.

[42] Cf. Bultmann's example on the reception of religious art. *Glauben und Verstehen*, p. 224.

have to differentiate between the three elements of interpretation and consider them methodically one by one, a process generally missing from the philological interpretation practice. This practice looks for the basis of comprehension in the reconstruction of the historical context—of the original intention of the work's author—and introduces this into the interpretation. However, if the aesthetic constitution of the text has to be worked out as a premise of its reception—enabling our comprehension to cross the time lag—it becomes obligatory to separate the horizons of the first, aesthetically perceptive, reading from a second, retrospectively exegetic, one. Indeed we have to add a third, historical, reading in order to demonstrate *the otherness* and diversity of the text with regard to our own experience. This historical reading can start from the reconstruction of the horizon of expectation into which the text entered when it first presented itself to its contemporary readers. But this reading renders full justice to the required unity of the hermeneutical triad only when the historical distance between the text and the present time is completely worked out and when full light is shed on the tradition of the readings which prepared the way for the latest application, i.e. my own.[43]

The simplest method of separating the three interpretation horizons in the hermeneutical process consists in a phenomenological conception and description of the three hermeneutical acts as successive readings of the same text; the preceding reading becomes the horizon of preliminary understanding for the succeeding one. Literary hermeneutics benefits here from the phenomenological theory that all comprehension presupposes an experience of a world divided into horizons. The separation and distinction of the horizons involved in the act of comprehension appears clearest in the reception of a poetical text. The attempt to disregard it is the weakness of structural poetics mostly concerned with the question of the constitution of aesthetical texts. Everything that can be recognized as an im-

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[43] As a practical demonstration of these four hermeneutical processes, I have chosen Baudelaire's poem: *Spleen II* (*J'ai plus des souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans*); the reader will find the elaboration of successive readings, too voluminous to be quoted here, in the next number of the *Romanische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte.*

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portant function of the language or its aesthetical equivalent in the text's complete tissue, in its concluded structure, always presuppose a preceding comprehension. Everything that the poetical text, thanks to its aesthetical character, reveals at the very first reading originates in the effect it makes as an on-going process. It cannot therefore be directly deduced from a description of its concluded structure as an 'artefact', however perfect may be its 'layers' and its linguistic equivalence. The structural description of the poetical text should and could be founded nowadays on the hermeneutical reflection which renders transparent the reception process. This methodological exigence became evident in the debate between Roman Jakobson versus Claude Levi Strauss and Michel Rifatterre.[44] The aesthetical function of poetical texts can be understood only when the poetical structures which have been interpreted as characteristic of the completed aesthetical object are retranslated from the objectivity of the description into the experience process of the text, which allows the reader to participate in the genesis of the said aesthetical object. In other words, and following the formula with which, in 1962, Michel Rifatterre introduced the passage from the structural description to the reception analysis of the poetical text: the text described by the structural poetics as the final point and the sum of the means realized in it, must now be considered the point of departure of its own aesthetic of reception which rules the process of aesthetical perception and therefore limits the arbitrariness of the reading which we suppose to be only subjective.[45]

My own experience begun here leads me in another direction to Rifatterre, who went on with his structural stylistics towards semiotic poetics concerned more with reception data and the 'actualization roles' than with the aesthetic activity of the receiving reader.[46] I, on the other hand, am trying to analyze this activity

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[44] R. Posner, "*Strukturalismus in der Gedichtsinterpretation*" in *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* 29 (1969) p. 27-58, particularly p. 47.

[45] Now in *Essais de stylistique structurale*, Paris 1971, p. 307 ff.; Cf. also, "The Reader's Perception of Narrative", in *Interpretation of Narrative*, Toronto 1978, p. 29.

[46] *Semiotics of Poetry*, Bloomington, London, 1978; cf. also "Instead of only looking for rules regulating narrative structures, I propose that we look for rules

in the two hermeneutic acts of comprehension as interpretation by separating the reflexive interpretation, as a phase of the second reading, from the immediate comprehension in the aesthetical perception, as a phase of the first reading. I am motivated by the desire to make the aesthetical character of the poetical text the definite and provable premise of its interpretation. In order to recognize in what way the poetical text, through its aesthetical character, allows us to understand something in advance, the analysis should not start with the problem of the meaning of a single element in the completely realized whole; on the contrary, it has to follow the still open meaning in the process of perception which the text sketches for the reader as a 'score'. The presentation of the aesthetical character typical of the poetical text—and distinguishing it from the theological, juridical or even philosophical one—must come after the orientation given to the aesthetical perception by the structure of the text, the suggestion of the rhythm, the progressive completion of the form. From the hermeneutical point of view the aethetical comprehension of a poetical text is linked to the experience horizon of the first reading. To this horizon must refer also the interpretation in the second and every following reading, if the interpreter intends to concretize a meaning of this text and if he doesn't want to benefit by the licence of allegoresis—that is to give the text a meaning originally altogether foreign to it, which can often only be done by sacrificing its form. The interpretation of a poetical text always presupposes an aesthetical perception as a preliminary comprehension; it can concretize only those meanings which appeared or should have appeared within the horizon of the interpreter's preceding reading.

Therefore Gadamer's dictum: "To understand means to understand something as an answer" has only a limited application as far as a poetical text is concerned. It can here apply only to the secondary act of *interpretative* comprehension, in so far as the latter concretizes a definite meaning as an answer to a question, and not the primary act of *perceptive* comprehension, which alone can introduce and constitute the aesthetical experi-

regulating actualization of such structures in the text, that is, regulating the very performance of literature as communication." ("The Reader's Perception...").

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ence of a poetical text. Given this formula, I gladly concede that the aesthetical perception of beauty also includes a comprehension:[47] not just that comprehension which must put an explicit question to the text in order to understand it as an answer, but an implicit comprehension of the view of the world disclosed to the reader in the aesthetical perception. A poem's aesthetical form reveals itself to perceptive comprehension at first not as an answer: we have here—in Husserl's words—"the eidetic reduction spontaneously fulfilled in the aesthetic experience".[48] The separation of the reflexive interpretation from perceptive comprehension of a poetical text is therefore not as artificial as it seems. It is rendered possible by the evident horizon structure of the experience of repeated reading. Every reader is familiar with the experience of a poem's real meaning becoming clear to him only in the recapitulation of repeated reading. The experience of the first reading then becomes the horizon of the second reading: what the reader grasped in the progressive horizon of aesthetic perception becomes thematizable in the retrospective horizon of interpretation. If we add to it the fact that interpretation itself can, in its turn, become the basis for an application— i.e. that a text of the past can be interpreted in order to reveal anew its significance for the present situation—it becomes clear that the unity of the triad: comprehension, interpretation and application, as fulfilled in the hermeneutical process, agrees entirely with the three horizons of the triple relevance of the theme of interpretation and of motivation. Their interplay, according to A. Schütz, defines the constitution of the subjective experience in the living world.[49]

While working out the concepts of an interpretation, and trying to thematize the three acts of the hermeneutical process, I can accept and develop the discoveries which M. Rifatterre, W. Iser and R. Barthes introduced into the analysis of the reception process. Rifatterre analyzes the reception course of a poem as an interplay

[47] In reference to *Wahrheit und Methode* p. 291: "*Auslegung ist nicht ein zum Versthen nachträglich und gelegentlich hinzukommender Akt, sondern Verstehen ist immer Auslegung, und Auslegung ist daher die explizite Form des Verstehens.*"
[48] Quoted by Gadamer in the Dubrovnik lecture (cf. note 27).
[49] *Das Problem der Relevanz*, Frankfurt, 1971.

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of anticipation and correctives, conditioned by the equivalent categories of suspense, surprise, disappointment, irony and the comic. These categories have a "superdetermination" in common which forces our attention by repeated correction of an expectation; thus it steers the reader's reception course, and therefore renders the meaning of the text being interpreted progressively definite and definitive. Rifatterre's categories are, according to my experience, better applied to the narrative texts than to the lyric ones: the reading of a poem does not so much raise suspense as to its continuation as the expectation of what I would call lyric consistence—the expectation that the lyric movement will render understandable, line by line, the once hidden coherence, and finally will create out of all the evocations, a new view of the world. Therefore to Rifatterre's negative categories of surprise and delusion must be added the positive category of the satisfied expectation of which he speaks only pejoratively, as if it were identical with the effect of the platitude.[50] Finally his model of a poem's reception presupposes o super-reader who must possess not only the sum of all available knowledge of literary history but also be able to register consciously every aesthetic impression and to refer it to an action structure of the text. In that way the interpretative competence overshadows the analysis of the perceptive comprehension, although Rifatterre is interpreting within the open horizon of the syntagmatic display of the system and of its correction. In order to avoid this dilemma I have taken into consideration not a "naïve fictional reader" but one of our own times and average education, experienced in reading poetry, without any instruction in literary history or linguistics, but intelligent enough to wonder sometimes during his readings and to express this wonder in questions. I put at the side of this average, moderately idealized reader of 1979 a competent scholarly commentator who analyzes thoroughly the aesthetical impressions of the said reader and refers them as far as possible to the action structure of the text. Since I still do not suffer under the burden of having failed to become an empiric philosopher I also accept with serenity the fact that I have not yet found the pattern for the needed empirical research of reception. I will

[50] *Essais de stylistique structurale*, p. 340

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probably be reproached with being too intelligent as a reader and not erudite enough in linguistics or semiotics, but I hope to have posed, with my experiment, at least a basis on which others can continue to build. Maybe it will help to distinguish the levels of aesthetic perception and of reflexive exegesis in the interpretation of poetical texts with greater precision than in the past. I think that the question-answer relationship will be of particular help to those who try to define, from the syntagmatic point of view, the role of the text signals as basic preambles to the consistency of the reception process. The structures of appeal, and the gaps of meaning which Wolfgang Iser introduced in neat categories into his theory of aesthetic effect,[51] can be concretized in a simple way, in the course of reception, as impellents to the constitution of the meaning, if the poetical text's effect factors are described as expectations and translated into questions which the text poses, leaves open, or answers. Rifatterre places the reception process in the dominant category of superdetermination and, though reluctantly, removes the ambiguity of its meanings. On the contrary, Iser in his *Akt des Lesens*, restores validity to the aesthetical character or fictional text by placing them under the dominant category of indetermination (and continuous determination). But I myself have described the course of reception during the first receptive reading as an experience of growing, aesthetically forceful evidence which, considered as a preliminary horizon of the second interpretative reading, opens and at the same time delimits the playing field for possible concretizations.

Consequently the horizon change between the first and the second reading can be thus described: the reader who followed receptively, line by line, the score of the text and reached the end always anticipating from the detail the possible whole of the form and the meaning, realizes the completed form of the poem but not yet its just as completed meaning—not to speak of its "full meaning". When one recognizes the hermeneutical premise that the whole meaning of a lyrical work must be understood not as a substance, as a timeless predetermined meaning, but as a proposal of a meaning, one can expect from the reader enough discernment to see that in the act of interpretative comprehension

[51] *Der Akt des Lesen,* Munich, 1976.

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he can concretize only *one* of the poem's many possible meanings, and that its pertinence for himself must not exclude its debatability for others. Of course the reader will now, through a new reading, search and substitute for the still incomplete meaning in retrospect, from the end to the beginning, from the whole to the single detail. The open questions which the first reading left behind initially indicated things that obstructed understanding. I hope that the solution of tese problems, with the help of the work of interpretation, will result in the possibility to build from the different significant elements—in many ways still undetermined—just as complete a whole on the level of meaning as of form. The hermeneutics' premise of partiality tells us that this full meaning can be found only through a selective perspectivization and not through a supposedly objective description; it introduces the question of the historical horizon, which has determined the genesis and the effectiveness of the work and is also limiting the interpretation of the present reader. Its disclosure is the task of the third, historical reading.

This third step is the most familiar to historio-philological hermeneutics. However in this hermeneutics the reading which reconstructs history traditionally forms the first step which links historicism with the requirement that the interpreter must be detached from himself and his position in order the better to perceive the "objective meaning of the text." Bewitched by this ideal of scholarship, whose objectivistic illusions nobody believes today, hermeneutics of the classical and modern philologism used to favour the historical comprehension above the aesthetical evaluation, which was seldom even tried. It denied thereby that the aesthetical character of its text could serve as a hermeneutical bridge which other branches lacked—the only one rendering possible the historical comprehension of the art of epochs long past—and which therefore must be included as a hermeneutical premise in the completion of interpretation. On the other hand the aesthetical comprehension and interpretation remains dependent on the controlling function of the reading, which reconstructs history. This latter prevents the text of the past from being naïvely identified with the prejudices of the present and its expectations and therefore renders possible through the definite separation of the past and present horizons, the demonstration of the text's otherness.

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The discovery of the 'otherness', i.e. the particular distance in the apparent actuality of the literary work, requires a reconstructive reading; it can start by seeking the questions—often not explicit—to which in its own time the text was the answer. The interpretation of the literary text as a question should include both its answers to expectations of the formal kind, as prescribed by the literary tradition before its appearance, as well as its answers to such problems of meaning as could be posed in the historical living world of its first readers. The reconstruction of the original expectation horizons would however fall back into historicism if the historical interpretation could not serve to translate the question: "what did the text say?" into the question: "what does the text say to me and what do I say to the text?" After all literary hermeneutics has to pass, as did theological or juridical hemeneutics, from comprehension through interpretation to application. This last cannot become a pratical action but it can satisfy the just as legitimate desire to compare one's own experience with the experience of others and so to enlarge it in the literary communication with the past.

Roland Barthes' reception analysis of a story by Poe can show us what consequences can follow the omission of the separation of horizons.[52] Its strength lies in showing how the structuralistic description of the narrative principle, which explains the text as a variant of a preexistent pattern, can be transformed into the textual analysis of the "significance"; and also how this can make the text understandable as a continuous production of meaning, or more precisely: of meaning possibilities ("Forms, codes, through which meanings are possible.")[53] Its weakness lies in a naïve fusion of horizons. According to Barthes' intention, the reading should be immediate and ahistorical ("We take the text just as it is, just as we read it...");[54] it can be achieved only by a 'super-reader' who brings to the process a comprehensive historical knowledge of the nineteenth century and registers in the course of his particular reception the passages allowing the

[52] "*Analyse textuelle d'un conte d'Edgar Poe*", in *Sémiotique narrative et textuelle*, ed. Cl. Chabrol, Paris, 1973, p. 29-54.
[53] *Ibid.* p. 30.
[54] *Ibid.* p. 32.

recall or association of cultural and linguistic codes. There is no question of a tie between the interpretation and the process of aesthetical perception since the latter, as *"code des actants"* in relation to the "symbolic code or field" is only one code among others (the "scientific; rhetorical; chronological; destination code", etc...).[55] Thus it becomes a reading neither historical nor aesthetical but as subjective as it is impressionistic. But even so it should prove the theory that every single text is a tissue of texts—the infinite play of a floating intertextuality in "the battle between man and the signs".[56]

The literary hermeneutics which Barthes not haphazardly considers a (for him) 'enigmatic code' is no longer interested in the interpretation of the text as a revelation of its own hidden truth.[57] To the theory of the *"textes pluriels"* and its notion of 'intertextuality', understood as an unlimited arbitrary production of possible meanings, and of a no less arbitrary interpretation, this hermeneutics opposes the hypothesis that the historically progressive concretization of the meaning of literary works follows a certain 'logic'. This logic manifests itself in the formation and transformation of the aesthetical canons and, changing the horizons of interpretations, renders possible the distinction between the arbitrary and consenting, between merely "original", and normative interpretations. The *fondamentum in re* which confirms this hypothesis can lie only in the text's aesthetical character, which, as regulative principle, allows to a single literary text, the existence of a series of interpretations different in the exegesis but compatible from the point of view of a concretized meaning. I remember the attempt, made during the second colloquium of the group *Poetik und Hermeneutik*, at a pluralistic interpretation of Apollinaire's poem *L'Arbre*. It resulted in the observation that already the distance from the poem chosen by each reader created another aesthetical perception, and that every concretization of the meaning had to ignore necessarily all other, no less pertinent interpretations. However the surprising discovery that the individual interpretations did not contradict each other, notwithstan-

[55] *Ibid.* p. 51.
[56] *Ibid.* p. 30-52.
[57] *Ibid.* p. 30.

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ding the diversity, led to the conclusion that even that 'pluralistic text' can, within the horizon of the first reading, give the perceptive comprehension a unifying aesthetical orientation.[58] This conclusion can be contested on the grounds that after Baudelaire a modern poem can give the reader this evidence of a compelling whole not in the first reading but only in the second, and that *mutatis mutandis* a poem of an older school or of another culture often reveals its meaning to the aesthetical comprehension only when the historical perception has removed the barriers and made possible an aesthetical perception which the text previously denied us. This objection gives me the opportunity to be even more precise.

The priority of aesthetic perception in the triad of literary hermeneutics requires the *horizon*, but not the temporary priority of the first reading; this horizon of perceptive comprehension can also only be acquired by repeated reading or by means of a historical comprehension. The aesthetical perception is not a universal code valid for all eternity, but one related to historical experience, as all other aesthetical experiences. Therefore the aesthetical character of Western tradition's poetical texts can furnish only heuristic data for the interpretation of texts originating in other cultures. The literary interpretation must compensate with the three activities of the hermeneutical process. It gains the chance to enlarge historical knowledge through aesthetical understanding and, by means of its spontaneous art of application, possibly to create a correction to the other applications which remain under the pressure of situations and of decisions forced on all those who are active in this world.

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[58] *Immanente Ästhetik - Ästhetische Reflexion*, ed. W. Iser, Munich, 1966 (*Poetik und Hermeneutik II*), p. 461-484, cf. p. 473 and 480: "For a concrete interpretation and a judgement concerning the quality of the poem it is not sufficient to indicate its structural principle and to describe Apollinaire's poetic technique. A series of ambiguities does not suffice to constitute a logical whole. Even if this whole, thanks to the technique with which it is realized, stimulates an ever-changing interpretation, this interpretation is neither fortuitous in its detail nor free from a fundamental orientation imposed upon it by the structure of the text. The first reading reveals this constricting aspect through the suggestiveness of the rhythm. The interpretation must accept this medium, on which the poem in based."

[59] See *Alterität und Modernität der mittelalterlichen Literatur*, Munich, 1977, cf. p. 10 ff.

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