

**EXPANDING THE TRADITIONAL PARADIGM:  
THE READER'S EXPERIENCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE**

by

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## ABSTRACT

### EXPANDING THE TRADITIONAL PARADIGM:

#### THE READER'S EXPERIENCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE

Texts of philosophical literature are rejected or under-appreciated because philosophical literature is inappropriately evaluated according to the traditional philosophical paradigm, according to which philosophical writing should consist of “fine and subtle distinctions, [the] circumspect marshaling of argument, [the] cautious and qualified inferences” (Danto 20). The traditional paradigm is not equipped to handle philosophical texts which adopt non-standard modes of expression and therefore do not meet the above requirements. These norms are what must be altered in order to “solve” the problems caused by the four texts I consider in the thesis: Jean-Paul Sartre’s La nausée, Albert Camus’ L’étranger, Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and Friedrich Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Using the principles of reader response criticism developed by Wolfgang Iser, I show that the reader’s experience of these texts is the key to effecting this shift. The indeterminate nature of philosophical literature creates a complex triadic relationship of author, text and reader, which necessitates an equally complex account of textual meaning.

La nausée and L’étranger are problematic under the traditional philosophical paradigm because they look and feel like novels, and the paradigm is not sufficiently flexible to allow that pure philosophy can be found in the novel format. Sartre’s La nausée is a *roman à thèse* with a clearly didactic and philosophical goal. However, because La nausée substantially reduces the reader’s concretizing role, it may be that it



is not a successful combination of philosophical and literary conventions. Camus' philosophical novel exploits the reader's invoking of norms and the creation of expectations. Too literary to be philosophy and too philosophical to be literature, L'étranger forces the reader to abandon her expectations of both disciplines. In addition, the primary character of the novel is the very embodiment of norm-breaking.

The *Phaedrus* is problematic because the paradigm is not equipped to handle the inconsistencies which Plato incorporates into the dialogue for the purpose of illustrating his preferred question and answer philosophical method. The *Phaedrus* represents an inextricable combination of narrative and philosophical argument, and requires an accordingly flexible evaluative paradigm. The dialogue is an exercise in philosophical reasoning for the reader.

Zarathustra is problematic because it appears too obtuse, too inflammatory, too opaque. Nietzsche's obscurity may well be purposeful: barriers are erected both to create and to challenge the ideal reader, who in turn models the concepts of the *Übermensch* and the will to power. Nietzsche's apparent inaccessibility is in fact by design and is therefore an essential element of the text that ought to be accounted for rather than explained away. Nietzsche creates a very particular kind of reading experience: one which poses tremendous challenges but offers rewards of similar magnitude.

I conclude therefore that works of philosophy must be evaluated according to paradigms appropriate to their variable modes of expression. The new paradigm I propose, informed by the principles of reader response criticism, enables appropriate

evaluative and interpretive standards to be invoked for each philosophical text. The reader's experience of the text should not be taken for granted, and the traditional paradigm does not appear to be equipped to handle the issues which arise from the shift toward the reader's perspective. Texts of philosophical literature should not be rejected on the basis of their mode of expression, they should not be forced into the traditional mode before their analysis, but should be evaluated according to an appropriately flexible paradigm.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There are texts in the philosophical corpus which cause trouble and torment for critics, philosophers and scholars. These texts cannot be made to make sense, either individually and internally, or in the context of the philosopher's work as a whole. I will discuss four such texts in the thesis (all of which are expressed in some literary form rather than in the standard treatise format), and I will propose a new way of evaluating those texts so that they no longer appear as problematic texts, but rather as intentionally structured works of philosophy which are worrying simply because they are different, and therefore do not easily fit into the traditional paradigm of philosophical interpretation and evaluation. My goal is to elucidate the experience of reading philosophical literature, and to show how focusing on reading and the reader can be tremendously productive. My analytic tool throughout the thesis will be reader response criticism, a group of theories which I will explain shortly.

The four texts I will discuss are Albert Camus' L'étranger, Jean-Paul Sartre's La nausée, Plato's *Phaedrus*, and Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Although each has its separate difficulties and presents unique problems in interpretation, they share one common trait: they are not typical or traditional philosophical treatises. Rather, each is expressed in a literary form which is not a standard form of philosophical expression. L'étranger and La nausée are philosophical novels, *Phaedrus* is of course a dialogue, and Thus Spoke Zarathustra, although it escapes categorization, is certainly not a typical philosophical treatise.

I will argue that philosophical literature is a valid form of philosophical expression, which, however, affects the reader in a different way than the traditional philosophical treatise. Philosophical literature requires the reader to engage with the text in a way substantially different than that of the philosophical treatise. This is not to say that the reader's experience of philosophical literature is better than her experience of philosophical treatises, but only that it is different, radically so, and that these works of philosophical literature must be recognized as different, evaluated with appropriate standards, and considered in the context of the reader's experience.

When a new and appropriate paradigm of evaluation is adopted, and the reader's experience is considered, many of the apparently problematic aspects of philosophical literature are explained. It becomes clear that works of philosophical literature are written differently than treatises, have different purposes, are different in terms of internal structure, and should be analyzed according to a different (neither higher nor lower) set of standards.

This is where reader response criticism comes in. I propose a form of reader response criticism to serve as the new paradigm which is required in order to evaluate philosophical literature fairly and appropriately. Reader response criticism fulfills two crucial shifts in thinking. First, it shifts away from the traditional concept of meaning as an archeological object, and redefines meaning as an event occurring in a temporal flow, which requires the participation of the reader in order to proceed. Second, it shifts attention from what *is* in the text to what is *not*, and explores the impact on the reader of what is left out of a text. This, I believe, is key to understanding why the philosophical

texts I consider are so troubling to some, because there is much that is not explicit, and this violates the standards which are so familiar in the evaluation of a philosophical treatise.

In addition, reader response criticism provides an account of the nature and purpose of literature. Clearly, the philosophers I consider wrote philosophical literature purposefully, and the reader response criticism account of the goal of literary works provides some insight as to why they might have made such a conscious choice. Wolfgang Iser in particular believes that literature (and, I will argue, philosophical literature by extension) is written in order to evaluate the conventions and norms of the day. The reader, as a result, is challenged to replace the void which is opened when traditional or conventional ideologies or thought systems are proven inadequate. Literature forces the reader to closely examine the conventional forces which determine her, and when she finds them lacking, as she most often does, to overcome those forces in order to establish new, improved norms. It may well be that writers of philosophical literature are issuing the same kind of challenge to their readers.

This potential connection of reader response criticism and philosophy opens the door for the reader in the philosophical process. Traditional philosophical analysis has taken the reader as a given. It has been seen as obvious that a text has a reader: too obvious to mention, in fact. Of course there is a reader, but some consideration of who she is, what she does while reading, and how the text affects her is required. It is not enough to see the reader as a meaning miner, who's sole role is to attempt to understand. The discussion which follows will show what can happen when the reader



is explored as more than an obvious but mundane bystander. It will also show that taking the reader as more than a given, far from causing additional problems, can in fact eliminate confusions in philosophical literature.

I must be clear regarding my own motivations in this thesis. I happen to believe that philosophical literature is an interesting and even fun way of accessing philosophical ideas. I would even argue that there are some topics which are more effectively expressed in philosophical literature rather than in the philosophical treatise, but I am not so foolish as to claim that philosophical literature is *better* than the philosophical treatise. I am, however, tremendously frustrated by those that insist that the treatise is the only way to write philosophy, and that what I call “philosophical literature”, while it may have some value, is certainly not philosophy. One of my goals, therefore, is to “rehabilitate” philosophical literature; to show that it is a valid way of expressing philosophical ideas and that it is not nearly as fraught with difficulties as the traditional evaluative paradigms might suggest.

Philosophical literature requires an intelligent, engaged reader; so does the treatise. Although it is tempting to fall into an active/passive dichotomy, where the reader of philosophical literature is active and the treatise reader is a philosophical sponge, this dichotomy would be a false one. However, the treatise reader is certainly *differently* engaged with the text than the reader of a philosophical text in literary form. Texts of philosophical literature, as will be explained by the new reader response criticism paradigm, are structured so as to encourage co-creative activity (reader with author), whereas the treatise requires direct engagement in order to enable

understanding, appreciation, and criticism. Readers of philosophical literature, according to the reader response criticism paradigm, have a collaborative relationship with the author, which will become clear as the theory is explained. This experience is not equivalent to the endless interpretations, criticisms, and commentaries which have been spawned by philosophical treatises.

These approaches, while certainly requiring the reader or critic to interact with the text, retain the perception of textual meaning as unchanging object rather than variable event. The collaborative relationship I will describe occurs as the reader progresses temporally through the text, and precedes any attempt to evaluate the meaning the thereby develops. Although philosophical literature is also subject to interpretation, criticism and commentary, as will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, if this is undertaken according to the traditional paradigm, the results are not always productive.

This introductory section serves several purposes. First, I will define some of the key terms of the discussion. What is philosophical literature? What is literature itself? Who is the reader, and what does it mean to read? Second, I will examine traditional views of the relationship between philosophy and style. I will consider the arguments of Martha Nussbaum, who favours the importance of style in philosophical writing, and those of Iris Murdoch, who believes style in philosophy is superfluous at best. Then I will outline the basic principles of reader response criticism, and provide a preview of the argument which follows in subsequent chapters.

### ***Definition of terms***

Some of the terms used in the thesis may be familiar ones used in unfamiliar ways, or understood in a particularly narrow context. I understand *philosophical literature*, for example, as philosophy expressed through forms usually reserved for literary works. Whereas the majority of traditional philosophical works follow the treatise format, philosophical literature utilizes forms such as novels, plays or dialogues as vehicles for philosophical expression. Two of the texts I consider in this discussion, for example, are philosophical novels, which include all the elements of literary novels (character, plot, etc.), and yet retain as their primary goal the communication of a philosophical idea. The philosophical idea is borne by the characters and plot of the novel, but is primary to both.

I use *literary form* to refer to any fictionally-based form of written expression. A traditional literary form bears a narrative. Examples include novels, short stories, plays, poems, dialogues and myths. In contrast, the traditional *philosophical form*, as I explained above, is the treatise. Literary form is the *what* of a text i.e. what *kind* of a text is this?

A *literary work* is the intentional act of its author, recorded in the literary text, but not to be equated with the literary text. The literary work emerges from its corresponding text when the text is read, or actualized, by the reader. This is the reader response criticism model of the literary work, where the "convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence" (Iser 1974, 275). The literary work, therefore, is not objectively identifiable, but is virtual, and emerges from the interaction

of text and reader. More discussion of the literary work will take place in my detailed analysis of Iser's reader response criticism.

*Text* figures prominently in reader response criticism. At its most basic, text refers to the words or marks which make up any piece of writing. However, the text is more specifically the result of an intentional act of the author. The text is a recording of the author's intention, but the reader must interact with the text before its meaning can be developed. As will become clear in the discussion of Iser's reader response criticism, the literary text represents meaning as potentiality only, for the reader must actualize that meaning by interacting with the text.

What, then, is *reading*? At its most uncomplicated, reading is the apprehension and understanding of a series of marks or words which represent potential meaning. The reader recognizes words, understands their meaning, and uses this understanding to grasp the import of the series of words which are sentences, paragraphs, and full works (novels, letters, instructions, manuals, recipes, treatises, and even street signs all involve the process of reading). Reading is the active interaction which occurs when the reader processes the text and actualizes its potential meaning in order to participate in the production of the literary work.

### ***Traditional views of philosophy and style***

The traditional view has been that style in philosophy is at best an embellishment, at worst an obstruction. By style I mean the way in which a philosophical idea is expressed, which corresponds to the discourse aspect of literature (the distinction between narrative and discourse will be made clearer in the detailed

section regarding reader response criticism). The traditional view, then, focuses on the narrative aspect (what is said) and dismisses the discourse aspect (how it is said) as unimportant, uninteresting, and bothersome. Martha Nussbaum explains that:

The predominant tendency in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy has been either to ignore the relation between form and content altogether, or, [. . .] treating style as largely decorative—as irrelevant to the stating of content, and neutral among the contents that might be conveyed. This view is that the truths the philosopher has to tell are such that the plain clear general non-narrative style most frequently found in philosophical articles and treatises is in fact the style best suited to state any and all of them. (Nussbaum 1990, 8)

This traditional philosophical paradigm is known as the *neutralist model*, which holds that the substance of the philosophical ideas communicated is paramount, and that anything else just gets in the way. The neutralist view, however, cannot account for such classic cases as Plato's dialogues. Is it possible to consider Plato's philosophy being expressed equally successfully in any other form? (Lang 1990, 12)

The typical philosophical work is the treatise, in which the philosopher lays out his ideas in a straightforward (though not necessarily clear) manner, in such a way that the reader, if sufficiently scholarly to grasp the philosophical terms and material, is directly presented with the philosopher's ideas. I argue that style is not merely an embellishment, but instead indicates a particular philosophical choice through which the philosopher communicates with the reader. The treatise itself is a stylistic choice, albeit a minimalist one. It, too, indicates a philosophical choice. My goal is to determine the ramifications of choosing a literary, reader-friendly style. Reader

response criticism serves as a tool, allowing texts to be viewed in a new and constructive way.

This is consistent with the *interaction model*, where the choice of form for philosophical discourse shapes both the substance and the content of the philosophy. (Lang 1990, 18) The style with which the philosopher imbues his work indicates an integral communicative choice. *How* the philosopher writes *what* he writes indicates a certain view of philosophy, of what it means to write, and of what role the reader should take in the philosophical process. The motivation of the philosopher in choosing a style is of significant interest. Why does a certain philosopher choose so-called non-standard styles? Is he seeking to gain a certain audience, and therefore pre-determining that audience by the presentation of his work? Does he find certain style choices simply more interesting? Or is a philosopher's choice of style an indication of the manner in which he intends or hopes for his ideas to be grasped by the reader?

Many critics support the interaction view of philosophical style. Prominent among them, as I mentioned above, is Martha Nussbaum, who argues throughout her work that style is an important philosophical choice. This choice of style embodies a philosopher's picture of truth. (Nussbaum 1983, 152) The style a philosopher uses is a clue to his view of the world and of the truth. Nussbaum believes that there are some philosophical world-views which "cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose. . ." (Nussbaum 1990, 3). These world-views need specialized language and the talents of a philosopher who can double as a narrative artist. (Nussbaum 1990, 5) Truth may be communicated in many different

forms: the philosophical treatise does not have a monopoly on the truth. Although the treatise, through its structured argumentation, certainly is a valid form of truth-expression, this should not be to the exclusion of other forms. Not only do stylistic choices indicate certain philosophical views, but some situations absolutely necessitate non-standard stylistic choices, such as the use of literary forms. Here again, reader response criticism serves as a new way of looking at controversial texts.

For example, Nussbaum explains, Plato's dialogues reflect his view that philosophy is an active process. Readers and students ought not to be mere philosophical sponges, soaking up the teachings of a philosopher without rational considerations or critical analysis. Plato strives to activate the reader's intellect, and his style reflects that goal. (Nussbaum 1983, 149) The literary elements of a work, Plato's included, are not mere decorations or distractions, but deliberate mirrors of philosophical opinions. If Plato had written basic philosophical treatises that did not require the distinctly active, reader response-like extra effort on the part of the reader, that choice would have negated his wider view of philosophy. His choice of dialogues, which illustrate characters interacting philosophically, actively discussing philosophical issues and arguing about potential tenets and solutions, is required in order for him to be true to his philosophical views. The active element of the dialogues could not be captured in the usual philosophical treatise.

The telling. . .is not accidentally connected with the content of the told. And this ought to be so whether the teller is a literary artist, whom we suppose always to be conscious of the nature of the stylistic choices, or a philosopher, whom we often think of as avoiding or eschewing style

altogether. No stylistic choice can be presumed to be neutral—not even the choice to write in a flat or neutral style. (Nussbaum 1990, 245)

The interaction between the text and the reader is at the core of this thesis. The text, through its content and composition, prods the reader, demanding a certain level of attention and intelligence. The reader responds to the prodding, and is motivated to respond to the text in such a way that she participates in the emergence of meaning from the text, and also in the production of the literary work. I argue that literary forms or techniques facilitate this reaction in the reader, and therefore that their use indicates an additional goal on the part of the philosopher, beyond the communication of philosophical ideas. The reader must struggle to interpret and therefore to understand.

Nussbaum, in “Fictions of the Soul”, identifies John Locke as one of the most determined opponents of the fusion of philosophy and stylistic issues. (Nussbaum 1983, 151) Nussbaum explains Locke’s argument that the infusion of style into philosophical discussion can only negatively contribute to the philosophical whole.

Locke. . .compares the rhetorical and emotive elements of a written text to the wiles of a seductive woman—attractive to someone in search of diversion or even pleasure, but clearly of negative value to someone actively engaged in the search for truth:

But yet, if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all. . .the artificial and figurative application[s] of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so indeed are perfect cheat; and therefore. . .they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided, and where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them. (Essays, Book 3, chapter 10; Nussbaum 1983, 151)



Some of the reasons Locke presents as objections to straying from the philosophical treatise are the very reasons for which I find the fusion of philosophy and literature of value. Why must philosophical discovery be devoid of pleasure? If a stylistically-oriented piece of philosophical writing diverts the reader and leads her to enjoy the philosophical process and the results which it yields, is this not a both a valid and a valuable experience? I believe that philosophy can and ought to be a passionate undertaking, for the passionate pursuit of truth and knowledge can only have an exciting and positive outcome.

### ***A rejection of philosophical literature: Iris Murdoch***

Iris Murdoch is another, more contemporary, opponent to the fusion of philosophy and literature. Her objections are more interesting perhaps because she is herself both a philosopher and a novelist, and yet is determined to keep her two disciplines clearly distinct. As Nussbaum explains, Iris Murdoch is “one of the few philosophers writing in English who is also a prominent literary artist.” (Nussbaum 1983, 151) As an aside, I think it is telling that Nussbaum emphasizes that Murdoch writes in English: the Continental tradition did not turn to analysis and linguistics to the same extent as did the Anglo-American tradition early this century. None of the writers or philosophers which I will discuss in the thesis are Anglo-American. The latter have become more removed from literature, perhaps to their detriment when the reader’s role is considered.

Returning to Murdoch, her interview with Bryan Magee of the BBC provides insight into her views regarding philosophy, literature, and her determination to keep

them in separate compartments. In Magee's introductory remarks, he mentions the names of philosophers who are also considered great writers; among them are all of the philosophers I have chosen for this study, with the exception of Camus, whom, I will explain, is difficult to categorize. Plato and Nietzsche are described as "outstanding examples" (Magee 264), and Sartre is picked out as a strong contemporary example. Interestingly, Locke, who I have shown to be opposed to the fusion of literature and philosophy, is described as a "pedestrian" writer.

Magee further argues in his introduction that "If a philosopher writes well, that's a bonus—it makes him more enticing to study, obviously, but it does nothing to make him a better philosopher." (Magee 264) I agree with him on both points. Yes, being a good writer makes a philosopher infinitely more interesting to read and consider; yes, writing well does not necessarily make for a better philosopher if evaluated in terms of the value of the ideas themselves. However, as will become clear in the pages which follow, I believe that there is value beyond the ideas themselves: value in terms of how the reader accesses those ideas, what she is able to do with those ideas, and what she is able to gain.

Murdoch attempts to establish a clear, unimpeachable distinction between philosophy and literature. Murdoch explains that philosophy's primary goal is to clarify, to explain, and to handle the difficult questions. (Magee 264) I have no objection to this characterization. Murdoch and I diverge when she evaluates the importance of the writing which conveys the clarifications, explanations, and answers to questions. Writing, Murdoch argues, "must be subservient to this aim." (Magee 264) Although I

would naturally agree that all forms of philosophical writing, including those that include literary elements, must retain philosophy at centre stage, the writing cannot merely be left behind, unworthy of consideration and analysis. Murdoch does realize that "We want a writer to write well and to have something interesting to say." (Magee 268) Why should philosophers be exempt from being accomplished and interesting writers?

Curiously, Murdoch rejects some of philosophy's best writers, removing them from her definition of philosophy, without apparent justification. Among those banned are Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, whom Murdoch acknowledges are "great individual thinkers...great writers" (Magee 265), but is unwilling to declare philosophers. This is one misconception that reader response criticism's new perspective will help me to dispel. Murdoch's position often borders on contradiction, for she recognizes that some philosophers can accurately be described as "literary", and yet insists that:

there is an ideal philosophical style which has a special unambiguous plainness and hardness about it, an austere unselfish candid style. A philosopher must try to explain exactly what he means and avoid rhetoric and idle decoration. (Magee 265)

Yet Murdoch does not explain why the goals of philosophy, the clarifying, explaining, and problem-solving, cannot take place within a style that is other than hard and austere. I believe that it is entirely possible for a philosopher writing in a literary form to explain exactly what he means. Properly written, the philosophy will still be accessible despite what Murdoch calls "idle decoration".

The philosopher who writes in other than a hard, austere style can nonetheless reach those readers who make the effort to access the philosophy. The inclusion of indeterminate elements, as reader response critics argue, inevitably spurs the reader to bridge those gaps and develop the meaning which is not superficially evident. In addition, I believe that the selection of the reader via the form chosen may show that a philosopher hopes to reach a certain kind of reader, and will not be concerned if the unworthy reader becomes lost in the rhetoric. Nietzsche is such a philosopher: he does not wish to be read by the herd, and his choice of style removes the herd from any possibility of understanding. The link between form and content can be quite strong: reader pre-selection via form shows clear awareness of reader ability and reader reaction. I will discuss this issue further in the context of the individual philosophers.

Murdoch very clearly would not agree with the application of reader response criticism to philosophy. She explicitly claims that the “literary writer deliberately leaves a space for his reader to play in. The philosopher must not leave any space.” (Magee 265) The thesis of this study is that leaving space for the reader – space to interpret, space to understand, space to play – is inherent to literary forms, and that the use of these forms does not preclude meaningful philosophical activity. Leaving space merely requires that the reader be recognized as an important player in the philosophical process. Philosophers who do not wish to accord the reader a collaborative role in the production of meaning are perfectly justified in writing in a way that removes all space. However, the philosophers I discuss here view philosophy in a way that requires them to include their readers, and they cannot do so without leaving some space. Leaving

this space leaves philosophers open to criticism, often inappropriately. When viewed from the reader response perspective, many of these criticisms can be defused.

Interestingly, Murdoch does recognize that Plato is the “best philosopher” (Magee 266), but is unable to fully reconcile the paradox of Plato the great literary writer and Plato the philosopher. Magee picks up on this apparent contradiction, and prods Murdoch to address the issue.

It would be interesting to hear you say something about why such a great philosopher as Plato – who himself used artistic forms, such as the dialogue: there’s obviously a lot of fiction in Plato—should have been antagonistic to art. (Magee 271)

Murdoch side-steps the question by focusing on Plato’s hostility to poetry and the poets, a topic I will discuss in detail in a later section. Murdoch recognizes that Plato’s writing is highly artistic, but seems to claim that he is so despite himself, and although she attempts, like so many others, to reconcile the paradox internal to Plato’s writing, she does not address the paradox she has created in her own argument. ‘Plato is the best philosopher. Plato is an artist. Plato is a great writer.’ However, for Murdoch, philosophy and literature, philosophy and writing, must remain distinct and separate. Murdoch’s argument simply does not follow. Plato clearly does not write in the style which Murdoch has explicitly identified as preferable, and yet she continues to hail him as the best philosopher.

Nussbaum also argues that Murdoch has missed the mark in her analysis of Plato. Having quoted both Locke and Murdoch, Nussbaum indicates that such critics of style in philosophy espouse the neutralist model, where style matters not at all. This

does not match Plato's conception of style and philosophy in the least. As Nussbaum explains, Plato's selection of style was deliberate, and he "saw clearly that the philosopher was an artist who created...a certain picture of the truth, and whose commitment to that creation led to the selection of the style that would be its fitting embodiment." (Nussbaum 1983, 152) Therefore, although Murdoch believes Plato is the best among philosophers, she does not grasp his views regarding the importance of style, and fails to extrapolate those views to her own concept of the relationships between philosophy, literature and style.

Jean-Paul Sartre's novel La nausée, an example I will analyze in detail, is mentioned by Murdoch as an exception to her separation of philosophy and literature.

I can think of one good philosophical novel which I admire very much, Sartre's La nausée. That does manage to express some interesting ideas about contingency and consciousness, and to remain a work of art which does not have to be read in the light of theories which the author has expressed elsewhere. It is a rare object. (Magee 277)

Magee seizes on this admission and attempts to force Murdoch to admit that Sartre's novel shows that a work of fiction can effectively communicate a philosophical theory. "I want to say that some major novels make use of philosophical ideas not just as material...but in ways which are structural to the whole undertaking." (Magee 277) Murdoch continues to maintain that she is "reluctant to say that the deep structure of any good literary work could be a philosophical one" (Magee 277), and will not consider Sartre as anything more than a special case. It is unclear, however, why other philosophers are not included in this categorization. Therefore, Murdoch's attempts to

separate philosophy and literature are unsuccessful. Although it is entirely clear that she would object to my project, she fails to provide a sufficiently compelling argument.

***Reader response criticism: Basic principles***

It seems so obvious that a literary text requires a reader that for a long time no one bothered to talk about her. However, when one considers the true prominence of the reader in literature, it only makes sense that she be an object of consideration. Is not literature designed to have some effect on the reader? Do authors not try to appeal to a reader's emotions, or her intelligence? At its most basic, reader response criticism is an attempt to bring the reader into the fold of literary criticism, and to explore her role in the literary triad of author, text, and reader.

As I have said, reader response criticism is a term which loosely includes many theorists, all of whom accord the reader an important role in the production of meaning in a literary text, but few of whom agree as to what that role is, how it is realized in the text, or any other theoretical details. Therefore, reader response criticism does not denote one critical theory, but rather a theoretical approach which focuses on the process of reading. Reader response critics believe the essence of the literary work is to be found in the reader's mental operations while reading a text; in her responses to the structure of the text. These critics also believe reading, and the construction of meaning, is a continually shifting and dynamic process of expectations, projections, disappointments, and violations of expectations. Reading, then, is an activity. Robert Fowler provides the following summary of reader response criticism:

Most varieties of reader-response criticism share: (1) a preeminent concern for the reader and the reading experience and (2) a critical model of the reading experience, which itself has two major aspects: (a) an understanding of reading as a dynamic, concrete, temporal experience, instead of the abstract perception of a spatial form; and (b) an emphasis on meaning as event instead of meaning as content. (Fowler 25)

Reader response criticism had been described as a phenomenologically-based theory that focuses on the connection of the reader and the text, as well as on reading as a collaborative "sense-making activity." (Suleiman 22) Because reader response criticism is an umbrella term, encompassing many different theorists, reader response critics disagree about almost everything else about the reader's role in the creation of meaning in literary texts. They disagree about what textual factors shape reader response, and how. They disagree about the status of meaning in the text: is it objective, remaining constant within the text despite variable readings, or is it subjective, and changeable depending on individual responses to the text? Although the critics agree that there is no one identifiable correct reading of a text, they disagree as to the identification of what is certainly an incorrect reading. That is, interpretation is necessarily variable, but are we willing to exclude certain interpretations as unacceptable?

I first became aware of the role of the reader as a young student of philosophy, when I read some of Nietzsche's aphoristic works. Far from understanding much of the content of Nietzsche (and not alone in my struggles, I suspect), I nonetheless recognized immediately that my experience of reading Nietzsche was far different from my experience of reading Descartes, for example. I was having trouble there, too, but for



different reasons. In Descartes, I struggled with advanced metaphysical ideas which were entirely new to me. The structure of the text itself was readily accessible; the ideas came across, but seemed beyond me. (In the same way, if I were to read about quantum mechanics, I might understand every word and still be unable to truly get my head around string theory, for example.) In contrast, in Nietzsche I struggled with the text itself. I felt constantly manipulated by the text, goaded by Nietzsche, forced to react to the text and piece together the ideas themselves on my own. Descartes I might put down if drained intellectually. Nietzsche I was tempted to throw across the room out of personal frustration.

Those who hold with the traditional paradigm of reading and evaluating philosophy look at such texts, and because they find themselves reacting personally, emotionally, as readers, rather than rationally, calmly, as scholars, determine that such texts are not philosophy. I will argue that although these texts are not traditional modes of philosophical expression, as they are not in treatise form, a non-scholarly reaction does not necessitate a text be removed from scholarly consideration. *What* is communicated (which corresponds to the narrative level in literature) is not necessarily atypical; it is the *how* of communication which is different (which corresponds to the discourse level in literature). This is how reader response criticism can help philosophy: by illuminating the importance of the *how* of philosophical literature in the context of the reader's experience of the text, fears can be allayed and the *what* can be reclaimed. That is, instead of rejecting texts of philosophical literature outright due to

the nature of the narrative level, understand the importance of that narrative level and do not reject the discourse level.

### **The reader**

Reader response criticism has several reasons for including the reader in a process which once focused exclusively on the text. First, its proponents recognize that once the author has completed a text, he effectively relinquishes control over it and it becomes entirely reliant on the reader. Therefore, if only the author and the text are included in an account of meaning and the nature of the text, the text will remain, as Plato puts it, "orphaned", without its author-parent to help it speak. This leads to the second reason for including the reader, for without her participation, the text is nothing more than inky marks on a page. The reader is required in order to enliven the potential meaning which the text has to offer.

Who is the reader of the text? The answer this question is the most common reason for separation under the umbrella of reader response criticism. There is Iser's implied reader, Fish's informed reader, Eco's ideal reader, Rosenblatt's real life empirical reader, and many more. In general, however, there are two types of reader: the real reader and an abstract reader who does not correspond to any actual reader. I have chosen the term "abstract reader" for several reasons: first, to make it clear that there is no real person corresponding to this concept; second, to avoid using any of the terms chosen by reader response critics, as this is intended as a general introduction, and not an exposition of a particular theory.

The real reader, quite simply, is any particular, individual person who reads a

certain text at a certain time. The abstract reader is perhaps best described as the reader the author expects to read his text. She is knowledgeable, attentive, and takes from the text what the author would expect her to. The abstract reader, then, is a sort of projection of the author. There is also a real author and an abstract author (again, frequently referred to as the "implied" author), the latter being the author the real reader constructs as she reads the text. The real author envisions an abstract reader, and the real reader envisions an abstract author. As Robert Fowler explains, what I have chosen to call the abstract reader is "the reader we must be willing to become, at least temporarily, in order to experience the narrative in fullest measure." (Fowler 33)

### **The reader and the text**

Although every reader response critic has some version of the abstract reader (in order to save themselves the messiness of dealing with real flesh and blood readers), how they account for the relationship between the abstract reader and the text varies considerably. Fowler (34-35) indicates, for example, that Wayne Booth's version of the abstract reader, the implied reader, is created by the author and found in the text. Wolfgang Iser's implied reader, different again from Booth's implied reader, is the result of a real reader's interaction with the text. Stanley Fish, in turn, posits an abstract reader who is created by the text itself.

Without getting into a detailed analysis of the merits of the various theories, it is sufficient to explain that the various reader response critics agree that there is a basic triadic relationship which is the foundation of the eventual creation of meaning: author (real or abstract), text, and reader (real or abstract). How these various elements

combine and how each is individually accounted for is where the reader response critics diverge. The next chapter, however, will provide a more detailed look at how Iser and Fish view the various players in the reading game.

### **Reading**

Reader response criticism recognizes the temporal nature of reading; indeed, this is a primary reason for the development of the theory. Once again, the fact that reading “takes time”, so to speak, seems almost too obvious to mention. However, the temporal nature of the reading experience affects the evaluation of many other elements of that experience. The reader does not, cannot, absorb the meaning of a text, as a whole, instantaneously. Instead, she must progress through the text, word by word, line by line, page by page, and only then can she integrate what she has read and develop some sense of what the text means.

As a result, therefore, reader response criticism refuses to see reading as goal-oriented activity, where one barrels through a text in order to get to the end and understand the meaning, or what Fowler calls the “final distillate.” (42) Instead, reader response critics are interested in every part of the reading experience, focusing on the process of reading, rather than the product of reading. Reading is an experience, a process which occurs through time, and further, as Stanley Fish explains, it is a kinetic event: the reader moves her eyes, her hands, the pages turn, etc. (Fish 1980, 43) Traditionally, reading would be perceived as something to get over with in order to get to the meaning, the meat, of a text. For reader response critics, however, the reading process itself is of greatest interest, for it is like traveling: getting there is half the fun. In

addition, the reading process is an integral part of the development of textual meaning.

### **Meaning**

Reader response criticism redefines reading as process-oriented rather than product-oriented, and it must also reevaluate the nature of meaning. Because reading is a progressive and temporal experience, meaning can no longer be consistently described as something to be extracted from the text once it has been read. (This traditional account of reading and meaning does indeed have some destructive overtones: bash your way through to the end of a text and then dig out the meaning.) This is referred to as the container metaphor of meaning, or the archeological account of meaning, and it is soundly rejected by reader response critics.

Because reading is a process, the meaning of a text develops as one reads. This also accounts for the variability of reading experiences. If meaning is there in the text, waiting to be discovered, then every reader, supposedly, if she looks hard enough, should be able to get it out. However, we know that readers experience texts in different ways, and produce different meanings. If meaning becomes an event, as in the case of reader response criticism, rather than an object to be dug out of a spatially-defined text, then variability of readings becomes much easier to account for:

If our concern is no longer the text per se but the experience of reading the text, and if the reading experience is not static but dynamic and not spatial but temporal, the meaning can no longer be described in terms of content. We must speak not of the meaning of the text per se but of the meaning of the reading experience, and in dynamic, temporal terms. (Fowler 47)

Shifting the focus away from the text as a solid and static entity forces us to consider what happens when we read a text (because, after all, this is what a text is for, isn't it?)

and what the text does to us as readers, for it seems clear that the text is designed to effect us in a certain way.

### ***Reader response criticism and philosophy***

The traditional paradigm of reading philosophy is not equipped to handle the narrative aspect of philosophical literature. Because the narrative aspect of philosophical literature is more readily accessible, it is off-putting to one accustomed to more direct communication of ideas. However, the shift to the reader response criticism paradigm of reading philosophy leads us beyond the narrative level and toward what has been called the *discourse* aspect of a text. (Fowler 2) The discourse aspect of a text is the way in which it reaches out to the reader and establishes a relationship based on the effect the text is designed to have on the reader and how the reader responds accordingly. That is, the tendency is to focus on the stories, the narratives of philosophical literature, and fail to consider the discourse, which is the way in which language is used to convey the narrative. The philosophical treatise does not divide into this bi-level model. Reader response criticism requires us to be aware of what the text is trying to do to us as readers, and also aware of how we respond.

Moving from the “superficial” narrative layer of philosophical literature (or any other text) toward the discourse layer (where reader and text interact) underlines another essential aspect of reader response criticism. Shifting the focus to the reader accounts for the crucial temporality of the reader’s experience of the text. Under the traditional paradigm the text is static, and meaning is therein embedded, waiting for the reader to get it out. Reader response criticism, however, recognizes that reading a text

necessarily occurs within a time frame, and that meaning therefore develops as an event, based on the reader's dynamic and temporal progression through the text. Meaning cannot be clutched and grabbed out of the text. It instead emerges gradually as the reader progresses through the text, reading and understanding. Meaning is a dynamic event which requires the participation of the reader.

When initially evaluating philosophical candidates for inclusion in this study, I used several selection criteria. First, the philosopher must use a form other than the traditional treatise for his philosophical expression, though not necessarily exclusively; specifically, the philosopher must use a literary form such as novel, poem, dialogue, narrative, etc. Second, the philosopher must explicitly discuss ideas key to reader response criticism: the nature of writing, the role of form and of style, the nature of reading, and the role of the reader herself. Therefore, philosophers such as Kierkegaard, who used various literary forms, are excluded because of a lack of discussion of the above-mentioned key ideas.

The list was soon reduced to Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, (both of whom presented possible category problems i.e. literature or philosophy?), Plato, and Friedrich Nietzsche. It became clear that the literary elements present in the work of each of these philosophers had caused significant difficulties in terms of critical controversy. It also became clear that the insight provided when reader response criticism was wielded as a new analytic tool could eliminate some traditional problems by shifting the perspective from which these philosophers' texts were evaluated.

Therefore, each philosopher has a problem to be solved, so to speak. For example, Albert Camus has never been accepted as a “real” philosopher, because his philosophical ideas were presented only in literary form, primarily fictional, with the occasional still-literature-based essay. However, reader response criticism shows that Camus did not deserve to be marginalized in this way. By focusing on the reader, it becomes clear that only literary form could so eloquently illustrate the philosophical experience of the absurd.

Sartre’s philosophical fiction was under-appreciated in similar fashion, and perhaps more so, because he also wrote “serious” philosophy in treatise form. Therefore, those of his philosophical efforts which were presented in literary form were viewed as secondary to the treatises. Although I will argue that Sartre’s philosophical novel is not entirely successful as an example of fusion of form, especially when contrasted with Camus’ novel, his literary work nonetheless attempts to accomplish unique, reader-oriented goals, such as the communication of the actual individual experience of the philosophical import of existentialism.

Plato’s dialogues are an endless source of scholarship and controversy. Perhaps most frustrating in Plato are the apparent inconsistencies which commentators have either criticized vehemently or attempted to explain away in order to preserve the philosophical integrity of the dialogues as a whole. Plato’s dialogues present a fascinating dilemma, as Plato banishes poets and poetry from the *Republic*, all the while using a strongly literary form himself. I will argue that Plato was the original philosopher/reader response critic, whose view of what it means to philosophize



obligated him to adopt a form which involved the reader in a very real sense. When viewed from the new perspective of reader response criticism, the inconsistencies do not disappear, but they are explained, and the criticism which Plato has endured is revealed as unfair. The way in which Plato writes, inconsistencies and all, is shown to match his expressed view of the nature of philosophy; however, this does not become clear until the role of the reader is considered.

Finally, Nietzsche's obscure and obtuse style and his combination of forms have been deemed an impossibly thick and inaccessible combination, and thereby philosophically pointless. That is, since we can't figure out what on earth he's saying, the philosophical value must be minimal. However, by analyzing his work from the reader response perspective, like Plato, it becomes clear that Nietzsche's use of form and style is consistent with his views of the nature of philosophy, philosophizing and understanding. When reader response criticism considers Nietzsche's perspectivism, a reader-friendly theory, it illuminates much of what previously appeared to be hopelessly muddled. Despite the difficulty of handling Nietzsche, I believe that *how* he writes *what* he writes immediately draws the reader into an inescapable relationship with both Nietzsche and his text, thereby mirroring Nietzsche's own beliefs about reading, writing, and what it takes to be an ideal reader of his works.

The detailed discussion of reader response criticism which appears in the next section focuses on the work of Wolfgang Iser, where I examine Iser's critical heritage and his specific brand of reader response criticism. I also consider the shortcomings of

his account of reading and contrast his theory with that of one of his staunchest critics, a fellow reader response critic, Stanley Fish.

Once reader response criticism is clear, in terms of its general principles, and more specifically through the work of Wolfgang Iser, I will apply it to a series of texts. First, to show how reader response criticism “works” in a literary text, I will analyze the wonderfully unique novel by Italo Calvino, If on a winter’s night a traveler. I will then apply the established new reader response criticism-inspired paradigm to the philosophical texts mentioned above. The goal is to show how a form of reader response criticism can be an analytical and evaluative tool, which can help philosophers shift away from their traditional paradigms of reading philosophy and see works of philosophical literature not as irritatingly non-standard pieces of writing, but as validly different expressions of philosophical ideas which are not as bothersome as they might first appear. The key is the reader and her experience of the text.

The analysis of literary and philosophical texts which appears in the following chapters does require me to issue one precaution. While I will be indicating the elements of the texts that elicit some response from the reader, what that response might be, according to all principles of reader response criticism, is highly variable. Therefore, I can offer two alternatives: I can speculate as to how a reader, any reader, might respond to a textual element; and I can detail my own response as a reader in my own right. I will make every effort to separate possible concretizations of a text from my own personal concretization. This, I’m afraid, is exactly what bothers those who hold with the traditional paradigm of evaluating philosophy: philosophical literature,

due to its very form, is variable instead of constant, shifting instead of stable, and dynamic instead of static. However, I hope the proceeding discussion will illustrate why these apparent negatives should not be so threatening.

## **II. A MODEL OF READING**

### **Roman Ingarden**

Roman Ingarden (1893-1970) began his philosophical career as a student of Husserl, and therefore when he turned his attention to the problems of literary works of art, he did so with a decidedly philosophical, phenomenological perspective. Ingarden seeks to adapt the fundamentals of phenomenology and apply them in turn to literary works. Ingarden analyzes the literary work as an intentional act of its author (intentional, as in object-directed). The text represents the recording of the author's intentional acts, which is in turn experienced by the reader's own consciousness when reading the text. Because Ingarden believes the literary text contains numerous indeterminacies (elements which are potential only and not realized or actualized), he describes reading as a process of the reader's consciousness: filling in the potential aspects of the text, filling out the indeterminate elements, and concretizing (Ingarden's chosen term) the literary work.

As Robert Holub explains in his work Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction, according to Ingarden "the most important activity readers undertake involves removing or filling out the indeterminacies, gaps, or schematized aspects in the text." (Holub 1984, 26) This is the activity which Ingarden names "concretization". As will be essential in my application of reader response criticism to the philosophical texts, Ingarden indicates that concretization, as an act of consciousness on the part of the reader, requires creativity, "skill and perspicuity." (Holub 1984, 26) Concretization, therefore, is simply hard work.

As a result, because she is responsible, so to speak, for actualizing the author's potentialities, the reader becomes a creative partner with the author of the text. Or, more accurately, since the reader never interacts with the author on a face-to-face basis, the reader partners with the author's intention as recorded in the text. The result of this process is an actualized aesthetic object (resulting from the literary text), which is not a reality, identifiable and separate from the work, but rather exists in the reader's consciousness. The literary work, therefore, is a schematic structure, resulting from an act of consciousness by the author, which the reader must actualize in order to complete.

In addition, because the objects represented in the literary work have no corresponding real objects existing in the world external to the literary work, these objects are indeterminate (in contrast to real objects which are completely and unequivocally determined). (Holub 1984, 24) These indeterminacies, as will become clear in the discussion of Iser which follows, are the key to the relationship which the reader develops with the text. Indeterminacies can be realized, or concretized, in many different ways. That is, the indeterminacies constitute gaps in the literary work. The reader is responsible for filling these gaps, and may do so in a myriad of different ways.

Holub uses a simple example to illustrate how these indeterminacies are experienced by the reader. "The child bounced the ball." (25), is an apparently simple sentence, but contains numerous gaps in the description of the represented object, the child. Although the reader knows what the child is doing, this is the extent of the determinate information. The reader does not know if the child is two, or ten, male or

female, what colour its hair or skin is, etc. These indeterminacies are realized or concretized by each reader in different ways, as she constructs a sort of “mind’s eye” picture of the child’s appearance (and that of the ball, for that matter). No amount of detail or contextual information can completely eliminate all the indeterminate elements of a text.

Like all other theorists interested in the role of the reader, Ingarden must defend himself against charges of subjectivism and relativism. He must account for some form of control of the reader’s concretization. Ingarden insists that the variability of the reader’s realizations of the text’s potential, though substantial due to individual experience, feelings and moods, is restricted by the literary work itself. The work is invariable and stable: only what the reader does with it is variable. That is, the work provides a number of indeterminacies which the reader fills in variably, but the indeterminacies themselves in number and kind are fixed. Because the reader cannot concretize what is already determinate, the process of concretization remains controlled by the text, and so “Ingarden thus draws a sharp theoretical distinction between the stable structure of a work and what the reader does in realizing this structure.” (Holub 1984, 27)

A full exposition of Ingarden’s aesthetics and his account of the literary work of art exceeds the goals of this thesis. This summary of Ingarden’s phenomenology has therefore been of the briefest nature (for a more in-depth account of Ingarden’s aesthetics, I refer the reader to Jeff Mitscherling’s accessible and exceptionally detailed summary and analysis, Roman Ingarden’s Ontology and Aesthetics), but it nonetheless

serves to place Iser's theory of reading and the nature of the text in an appropriate context. Iser's account of the reading process is inspired by Ingarden's phenomenology, but he is also spurred to correct what he perceives to be shortcomings in Ingarden's account.

## **Wolfgang Iser**

### ***Critical heritage***

Iser's theory is heavily influenced by Ingarden's aesthetics, as will become clear shortly, and Ingarden is mentioned continually in Iser's writings, but clearly Iser sees flaws in Ingarden's approach. Ingarden's concept of concretization, Iser argues, fails to fully account for the communication which occurs between reader and text. Concretization occurs at places of indeterminacy in the text, but Ingarden wants to restrict indeterminacy and its corresponding concretization in order to preserve the work as a "polyphonic whole" (Iser 1978, 172). Ingarden is not prepared to accept the potential splintering of concretizations that would occur if the text were rife with indeterminacy and the reader were able to concretize those indeterminacies in an infinite number of ways.

Iser argues that Ingarden's account of concretization suggests that there is communication between text and reader, as the reader must concretize the places of indeterminacy in the text. However, Iser doubts that any real process of communication could occur under Ingarden's account, because it "merely describes the actualization of schemata potentially presented by the text." (Iser 1978, 173) The reader

is not provided with sufficient latitude within the text to establish a truly communicative relationship, which would be one in which the text presented possibilities that the reader actualized. Only then would a reader become a partner in the creation of meaning.

Writing in the context of the New Criticism, and influenced profoundly by phenomenology and especially the work of Roman Ingarden, Iser differs from the latter in that he is "concerned primarily with the individual text and how readers relate to it." (Holub 1984, 83) The New Criticism is a theory and practice once prominent in American circles of literary criticism. It gained currency with the publication of John Crowe Ransom's The New Criticism (1941), and was represented most notably by I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot. The New Critics focused their literary criticism on literary works as independent entities, rather than considering aspects of biography, history or social context. Literary works were treated as autonomous objects requiring careful explication, or close reading. Although New Critics, like Iser, rejected the archeological characterization of textual meaning, rather than turning their focus to the reader, New Critics were concerned with "the elements of the work and their interaction." (Iser 1978, 15)

Iser approves of the theory's initial steps to overcome traditional literary paradigms. However, Iser believes the New Critics did not go far enough. Although the theory focuses on the interplay of textual elements, it continues to "attempt to define these functions through the same norms of interpretation that were used in uncovering representative meanings." (Iser 1978, 15) Although Iser clearly developed



his theory of reading well beyond these boundaries, the critical heritage of the New Criticism is evident, as he further developed Ingarden's phenomenological analysis of reading. Whereas Ingarden spoke of reading in general, Iser wishes to apply the theory to individual readings of individual works.

Iser rejects the archeological overtones of traditional interpretive theories, where meaning is something to be discovered and then extracted from a text. Instead, he sees meaning as an experience, an interaction, which occurs when the reader engages with the text. As such, meaning is not objective and cannot be defined in such concrete terms. Instead, it is something which the reader experiences, which explains why different readers produce different meanings from the same literary work.

As with Ingarden, the aesthetic object for Iser is no longer equated with the text as an autonomous entity, but emerges only as a result of the cognitive activity of the reader. Therefore, Iser's theoretical focus is on the reader and her activity within the text, rather than on the text itself as object. Because the reader's interpretive activity is variable, the text cannot be strictly objective. Again like Ingarden, Iser describes the text as a skeleton, containing many potentialities, or "schematized aspects" (Holub 1984, 84), which the reader actualizes. A key element of Iser's reader response theory will be how he accounts for the interaction of reader and text. How is it that the reader engages with the literary work? What is it about the structure of the literary work that permits or enables this interaction? The answers to these questions will become clear in the discussion that follows, but first, literature must be clearly separated from other types of writing.

### ***Literature vs. other writing***

Crucial to the project at hand is the distinction between literature and other forms of writing. What constitutes a literary work of art? Iser describes the literary text in terms of what it is not: the literary text is *not* a description of an object existing independently outside the text. If a text undertakes such a description, it is simply expository, and not literary or fictional. In the literary text, the objects described have “no concrete object corresponding to them in the external world, although of course they produce their objects out of elements to be found in the external world.” (Iser 1989, 6)

Let us return to Holub’s simple example of the child bouncing the ball. If this description is literary, then no determinate child exists in the real world which corresponds to the described child. Of course, there are children, in the world, many of whom bounce balls, but there is no child which is the object described in this literary excerpt. However, if the text “describes an object that exists with equal determinacy outside it, then the text is simply an exposition of the object.” (Iser 1989, 6) Such texts, with full determinacy, reduce the role of the reader, for only when there are indeterminacies to be actualized is the reader prompted to do so.

Some examples of literature such as historical novels and *romans à clef* might appear to escape Iser’s definition of the literary work of art. However, although such examples seem to be based on determinate elements, I would argue that Iser’s definition does successfully separate these types of novels from non-literary writing. The historical novel is set in an identifiable period of history, includes at least some

characters and events from history, and relies on the historical context to drive the characters and the action. However, some elements of the historical novel must remain indeterminate, for several reasons. First, it is not possible for an author to reproduce in a text exactly what occurred in a certain historical period. There will remain some elements of the novel which do not have corresponding and equally determinate elements existing outside of the novel. Second, if any author did succeed in producing such a work, which exactly replicated the setting and the characters and the action, the result would be a work of history, not one of literature.

The potential counterexample of the *roman à clef* is somewhat more interesting in that its very nature is indeterminate and requires fulfillment by the reader. The *roman à clef* is defined as “a work of prose fiction in which the author expects the knowing reader to identify, despite their altered names, actual people of the time.” (Abrams 275). This type of novel draws on reality for its pool of characters, but does not do so overtly. The reader must be “knowing” in order to identify the characters who have been assigned pseudonyms. The characters, then, are not determinate in and of themselves, though they may correspond to determinate real world people. In addition, even if the reader were to recognize the characters, they are not duplicates of the real historical characters in their true setting; if they were, the work would be one of biography, and not of literature.

Iser also believes that the level of indeterminacy is key to successfully engaging with the reader. Reading should always be active and creative, with the literary text constructed so as to engage the reader and require her to complete the text by fulfilling

its indeterminacies. However, if the text is too determinate, or too indeterminate, the reader will balk at the interaction: the result will be "boredom and overstrain", which "form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play." (Iser 1974, 275) Therefore, if the author wishes meaning to develop via the interactive reading process, he can neither have too few or too many indeterminacies. How the author is to determine the appropriate number of indeterminacies is not explicitly detailed by Iser.

### ***The implied reader***

The concept of the implied reader is essential to the understanding of Iser's account of the interaction of reader and text. The implied reader is an artificial construct which permits Iser to discuss the reading process without becoming involved in the messiness of actual readers. The implied reader is expected to respond to a text's structure in a certain way, but must not be confused with any individualized or "humanized" reader. The implied reader is an abstract concept which cannot be equated with a person of any kind. The concept is introduced in order to describe the interaction between reader and text. The implied reader has a dual connotation as both descriptor of the text and of the reader's activity, and "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process" (Iser 1974, xii).

The concept of the implied reader is so firmly tied to textual structure that it is not really a reader, but rather a feature of the text. The text is a certain way (this is the implied reader), which elicits a certain response by the empirical reader. The rationale for the conceptual awkwardness of the implied reader is that Iser wants to account for

the reader's key presence in the text, but "without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation." (Iser 1978, 34) As a result, the implied reader embodies the predispositions of the text toward actualization within a certain range, and therefore "has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text." (Iser 1978, 34) One must therefore banish all thought of an actual reader, or even an abstract or potential reader, when considering Iser's concept of the implied reader. In fact, the implied reader is that which is structured in the text to which the undefined reader will respond. The implied reader preexists but anticipates any reading process. "The concept of the implied reader offers a means of describing the process whereby textual structures are transmuted through ideational activities into personal experiences." (Iser 1978, 38)

As Holub explains, the concept of the implied reader is designed by Iser to fulfill his purposes, but is nonetheless problematic. Seeking to remove the real reader from his equation, but hoping nonetheless to validate reading as essential to meaning production, Iser makes the implied reader a double-barreled concept that refers to both the structure of the text and the reader without truly identifying what the latter is. Therefore, Iser's account of the implied reader tries to include both aspects of the text/reader relationship, and, Holub argues, fails to sufficiently define either one. If the implied reader is rooted in the text and its structure, then "to call it a 'reader' at all would be senseless" (Holub 1984, 85). In fact, "defining the term in this fashion allows him [Iser] to move to and fro from text to reader without ever clarifying the composition and contribution of either half of this partnership." (Holub 1984, 85)

The concept of the implied reader is somewhat awkward, as it suggests a reader of some variety, real or theoretical, and yet is intended to describe textual structure and reader activity. Iser, as mentioned earlier, wishes to remove the empirical, real, reading reader, and invents this term in order to embody "all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect" (Iser 1974, 34). The implied reader is a collection of conditions which facilitate the reader/text interaction, including the structure of the text and the reader's response to it. It is a natural and logical reaction to attempt to tie the concept to some sort of reading entity, be it a real person or an abstraction. However, using "implied reader" to refer to a structural feature of the text as well as to an abstract reader muddies Iser's account of reader response criticism and leaves one suspicious that he is loath to truly define what a reader, any reader, might be. If the "implied reader" is a feature of the text, then a different term ought to be used to describe one who reads that text. Otherwise, neither aspect of the text/reader relationship Iser seeks to describe is accounted for sufficiently.

### ***The repertoire***

Iser believes that literature, by telling us about reality without referring to concrete world-objects, displays a repertoire to which the reader responds. The repertoire consists of conventions, of material from social systems and literary traditions. However, in contrast with expository writing, which relies on conventions to ensure comprehension, the repertoire of literature is arranged so as to question or challenge those conventions, as the latter are removed from their real world framework. Therefore, the fictional text takes that which is familiar to the reader and creates the

repertoire for the text. However, "by reorganizing them [conventions] horizontally, the fictional text brings them before us in unexpected combinations...it de pragmatizes the conventions it has selected." (Iser 1978, 61)

Because the repertoire of the text consists of rearranged conventions, the reader feels at once comfortable and disconcerted. The conventions are familiar, but the combinations are not. Therefore the literary text enables the reader to reassess social and cultural conventions by presenting them in a different mode. As a result, the "literary repertoire can thus be seen to have a two-fold function: it reshapes familiar schemata to form a background for the process of communication, and it provides a general framework within which the message or meaning of the text can be organized." (Iser 1978, 81) The reader can then, in a context removed from her social reality, assess the norms of that society.

This repertoire, however, must be organized into some sort of form or structure. Iser names the author's organization of the repertoire "strategies". Strategies refer not only to the structure of the text, the organization of the repertoire, but also the "conditions under which those materials are communicated." (Holub 194, 88) Note that the repertoire is not fully organized by these strategies, for this would imply that the reader had no organizational work to do within the text. Nor are strategies simple modes of organization such as narrative techniques or rhetorical devices, but "instead, the structures that underlie such superficial techniques and allow them to have an effect." (Holub 1984, 88)

The repertoire of a text, and its unfamiliar combinations of familiar norms and conventions, is essential to my discussion. The repertoire will help to explain why the philosophers I consider choose to write philosophical literature, and why their texts are structured with indeterminate elements with which the reader must engage. Remember that the “repertoire reproduces the familiar, but strips it of its current validity.” (Iser 1978, 74) The repertoire does not explicitly present “alternative values” which will replace the familiar ones which the reader sees she has lost. I will consider this point in more detail later in the discussion.

### ***The wandering viewpoint***

Iser must also account for a phenomenology of reading—for how the reader operates within the structural elements I have already described. Iser introduces the concept of the wandering viewpoint as “a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text.” (Iser 1978 118) The wandering viewpoint highlights the temporal nature of the reading process.

One must grasp the temporal aspect of Iser’s account of reading and literary meaning in order to truly appreciate what his project attempts to accomplish. A text can never be grasped and processed instantaneously as a whole. Instead, the reader must progress word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph. As a result, the reader continually forms new expectations regarding what is to come in the text based on what she has already read. Each expectation is then evaluated based on what is subsequently read. Expectations are either met or dashed as the text twists and turns. Therefore, as readers, “we are continuously evaluating and perceiving events



with regard to our expectations for the future and against the background of our past.”  
(Holub 1984, 90)

Because the reader’s expectations or projections are constantly shifting given the new information presented by the text, there is a corresponding “reshuffling of viewpoints and relations that spurs the reader on to build up the syntheses which eventually individualize the aesthetic object.” (Iser 1978, 118) As the reader adopts the wandering viewpoint, she attempts to synthesize the various and changing perspectives which the text offers, thereby constructing the aesthetic object, the meaning of the text. She hopes to create a consistent and coherent object out of the text.

### ***The blank***

Iser is willing to have the reader interact with the text and to be a participant in the creation of the meaning of a text, as she fills in the indeterminacies inherent to a literary text. As a result, he must be prepared to defend himself against charges of subjectivism or relativism. How does the text regulate the reader’s response if the communication between reader and text is necessarily incomplete, face to face true communication is not possible, and the reader’s understanding of the text is not verifiable? What prevents a reader from imposing her own, incorrect, meaning on the text? Iser argues that despite the difficulties in this particular communicative relationship, the reader is to some extent restricted by the text. Although it cannot answer questions or approve certain reactions, the text does control the interaction between reader and text, via the element of the blank.

The temporality of Iser's account of reading (described by one critic as his "most important contribution to phenomenological aesthetics" [Martin 261]) allows for the differences which inevitably occur between readers in their interpretations, and even between initial and subsequent readings by the same reader. Because the reader constructs meaning on the basis of a series of projections and expectations, which are subsequently met or disappointed, there obviously will be variability in meaning production and interpretation. No two readers will develop precisely the same set of projections and expectations.

In many different yet valid ways, the blanks in the text, which are "conceptual spaces between elements of the repertoire" (Martin 261), are filled in. In the same vein, once a reader has previously experienced a text, she will not develop an identical set of projections on second reading, for she has some idea of what will follow. The blanks in the text remain, and she is still required to fill them in, but she does so in a different manner, because her experiential and contextual makeup has changed.

Blanks are the triggers which stimulate the reader's activity, although they are equally responsible for controlling that activity in order to avoid accusations of subjectivism. It is somewhat difficult to explain exactly how blanks work in the structure of the text, as they are no-things, and "blank" is a descriptor for what is not there. Nonetheless, Iser assigns blanks an important role, for they indicate to the reader that "the different segments and patterns of the text are to be connected even though the text itself does not say so." (Iser 1989, 34)

Blanks, invisible to the reader, are nonetheless noticeable (the reader is aware that some textual element is missing), and the absence of information which characterizes the blank delineates the separations between various schematized aspects. As a result, "they simultaneously prompt acts of ideation on the reader's part." (Iser 1989, 34-35) Therefore, when the reader recognizes what is missing between the various textual perspectives, and strives to fill it in, the blanks disappear and the process of meaning production is undertaken. The reader may automatically complete this process without consciously recognizing a blank and then deliberately filling it in.

The blank is, for Iser, essential to the communication between text and reader. The blank requires the reader to connect segments of text which are broken off from each other. There are segments of text which are disjointed and disconnected, and separated by blanks, which the reader must complete. Although the blanks or gaps are features of the text, the term "blank" describes what is *not there*, and what will not be there until the reader appears and begins to connect the determinate textual elements. The connections which bridge the gaps, therefore, "are the product of the reader's mind working on the raw material of the text, though they are not in the text itself—for this consists of just sentences, statements, information, etc." (Iser 1974, 278) For example, if the plot takes an unexpected turn or breaks off completely only to resume in a radically different direction, a blank results, and the reader must connect the seemingly disconnected threads in order to synthesize the text.

The blanks are also important in the reader's evaluation of the repertoire. Iser believes that most literature challenges the current norms (although how such a claim

could be verified is not clear), and Iser argues further that the blanks, and the requisite “filling in” that the reader does, serve to make the reader acquire “a perspective from which previously accepted norms appear obsolete or invalid” (Holub 1984, 94). Indeed, when I come to the philosophical texts, I will argue that their literary form of expression shares this intention: illuminating the inadequacies of current systems of thoughts and contemporary ideas in order to spur the reader to reevaluate her cultural and intellectual context, and to surpass the same.

The gaps which are left in the text spur the reader to fill them in. The reader must establish some sort of textual coherence, and reconstruct the textual flow, which has been interrupted by the gaps in the text itself. Gaps, because they are the responsibility of the reader, can be filled in different ways by different readers. Therefore, “one text is potentially capable of several different realizations”, and even further, “no reading can ever exhaust the full potential” of a text. (Iser 1974, 280) At each gap in the text, the reader must make a decision as to how it should be bridged, based on what she understands of what she has already read, and what she anticipates she may encounter as she continues to read.

As a result, Iser argues that the reader’s completion of indeterminacies illustrates the inexhaustibility of the text: each actualizing decision the reader makes eliminates future possible actualizations or concretizations. This is similar, in a simple way, to the “choose your own adventure” books popular with young people some years ago. Each choice the reader made restricted the pool of future choices. The combination of possible “adventures” was in this case, exhaustible, but nonetheless substantial, as a

result of sequential decision making. In the case of the literary text, where indeterminacies are rampant, it is easy to see how the text could be “inexhaustible”, with a countless number of possibilities presenting itself at each turn. By creating certain expectations and projecting them onto the text, “we reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an individual, configurative meaning.” (Iser 1974, 285)

Therefore, “the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations.” (Iser 1974, 280) The reader’s wandering viewpoint leads her through the text by one of any number of possible paths, and while each reader will take a different path, it is also likely that the same reader will choose a different route in future readings: “we shall tend to establish connections by referring to our awareness of what is to come, and so certain aspects of the text will assume a significance we did not attach to them on a first reading, while others will recede into the background.” (Iser 1974, 281)

The variety of views or perspectives which present themselves to the reader as she progresses temporally through the text “constitute the ‘object’ in stages” (Iser 1989, 8), and represent that which is concretely presented to the reader. These perspectives are named “schematized views” (after Ingarden). However, the connections between the schematized views are usually not provided by the text, and it is here that the indeterminacies lie, and where the reader must begin to go to work. As Iser explains, “between the schematized views there is a no-man’s-land of indeterminacy”. (Iser 1989, 8) These spaces of indeterminacy are gaps, which “give the reader a chance to build his

own bridges, relating the different aspects of the object which have thus far been revealed to him." (Iser 1989, 9)

Iser believes, therefore, that traditional accounts of literary works and of reading ignore the crucial role which the reader plays in actualizing the potential meaning found in the text. If no one reads a text, Iser argues, it cannot achieve its full meaning, for the meaning recorded in the text is potential only and must be actualized or concretized. Iser therefore avoids the formalism and objectivism of the New Criticism by not identifying meaning completely with the text. Nor, for that matter, does he identify meaning with the reader. Instead, he situates meaning ephemerally between these two poles, in the interaction of reader and text and the process which thereby results. Iser handles objections of relativism by appealing to both the restrictive text and its non-restrictive blanks. The blank is what necessitates actualization, and the text controls the range within which the blanks can be actualized and meaning thereby constructed. Therefore, the aesthetic object is not identifiable or real, but necessarily virtual. This is why Iser refers to meaning as an event, not a thing.

### ***Shortcomings of Iser's reader response criticism***

Holub argues that although Iser's theory is both attractive and potentially useful, it is flawed. Iser's model of reading is biased toward a certain class of readers: those readers who will be most receptive, namely educated students or teachers of literature. However, argues Holub, the theory lacks "analytical justification or empirical proof", consisting instead of what Iser believes to be the most likely readings by his most likely reader, who is "competent and cultured" (Holub 1984, 97). Despite Iser's wish to

remove any sort of individualized reader from his theory, he nonetheless preselects his own reader, who must be “attuned to the social and literary norms of the day” (97) in order to understand the theory itself.

I agree with Holub that Iser’s theory, although tremendously attractive and undoubtedly useful, certainly has its flaws. Iser is biased in his account of the text, for his model will not work without a certain type of text which will elicit a certain type of reaction from its reader. A work of literature must not be too obvious in its construction and its presentation of its elements, for the reader will be bored by the relative lack of indeterminacy. In the same fashion, a work of literature must not be overly obtuse, or the reader will be frustrated by an inability to bridge the gaps. Therefore, Iser’s account will not “work” for every possible literary text.

In addition, although Iser wishes to remove historical and cultural influences from the reader/text relationship, his own textual analysis presupposes historical and cultural input. Although Iser claims to wish to transcend the tenets of the New Criticism, he remains closer to that theoretical heritage than he might like to admit. The analysis of the textual indeterminacies, or the speculation of how the reader might fill in those gaps, does not seem very different from the careful interpretation or close reading of the New Criticism. (Holub 1984, 100)

Among the more serious objections to Iser’s model of reading and the reader/text interaction, as argued by Stanley Fish (a critic of Iser who will be addressed shortly in this discussion), is the distinction between determinacy and indeterminacy. Whereas objectivists claim that any work of literature has only one correct and

determinate meaning, subjectivists counter that meaning is produced solely by the acts of consciousness of the reader. Iser attempts to remain on the fence regarding this issue, arguing that the text allows different meanings while still restricting which different meanings are possible. Readers are meaning producers, but are so based only on the guidance of the text. It would appear, therefore, that “readers are apparently free to concretize in different fashions or to create different meanings.” (Holub 1984, 102)

As Holub indicates, there are numerous instances in The Act of Reading in which Iser seems to identify some sort of stable textual meaning which the reader’s activity may uncover. For example, when Iser refers to “the ultimate meaning of the text” (Iser 1978, 98), does he not imply that such a meaning exists, independently of reader activity? A text’s “ultimate meaning” would appear to be determinate and therefore beyond the scope of reader activity and cognition. Such phrases imply that meaning is within the text rather than being the result of reader/text interaction, which is precisely what Iser did not want to claim.

I will make some concluding remarks on Iser’s account of text and of reading later in this section, but the debate between Iser and Stanley Fish, his reader response criticism compatriot, illuminates some elements of reader response criticism and shows the variation which can occur under the umbrella of the term. Before considering that debate, however, a summary of Fish’s theory of reading and the reader is appropriate.



## **Stanley Fish**

Stanley Fish, whose most recognized work, Is there a Text in this Class?, appeared in 1980, began developing his theory of reader response criticism based in part on his observations of his college students. Fish's version of reader response criticism is, in many ways, remarkably similar to that of Wolfgang Iser. His definitive early essay, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics", shares much with Iser's Act of Reading. Admittedly, Fish has developed his method beyond affective stylistics, and now recognizes some of the flaws of the early method. However, in comparing corresponding early method statements, it is clear that despite later theoretical disputes, Fish and Iser are in agreement when it comes to definition of the reader/text relationship. Like Iser, Fish rejected the so-called "intentional fallacy" of Wimsatt and Beardsley, which argued that because authorial intention is inaccessible and reader response is variable, the repository of meaning in the analysis of literary works must be the text itself, as the only identifiably stable element in the equation.

However, Fish, again like Iser, believed that looking to the text, although to do so is tempting due to its apparent spatial form, and because it is "pointable to" as an object, is dangerous. The "objectivity of the text is an illusion", and relying on it ignores the essentially temporal nature of the reading process. (Fish 1981, 2) That is, because textual meaning is actualized progressively rather than instantaneously, due to the reader's inability to completely grasp the text in its entirety, the reader's experience must surely be paramount. Although the text appears physically as an objective totality, its meaning develops in a temporal flow as the reader experiences it. Therefore,

Fish “substituted the structure of the reader’s experience for the formal structures of the text on the grounds that while the latter were the more visible, they acquired significance only in the context of the former.” (Fish 1981, 2) The formalism of the New Critics, where meaning is a concluding ‘something’ produced from a spatially identifiable text, rather than a process, failed to consider this temporal nature.

Fish’s account of meaning is also non-archeological. It is essential to consider “language as an experience rather than as a repository of extractable meaning.” (Fish 1981, 67) Meaning is not simply something the reader must dig out of the text, but is rather a more fluid concept which develops as the reader experiences the text via her “expectations, projections, conclusions, judgments, and assumptions” (Fish 1981, 2), in the same way that Iser conceived of his reader experiencing the text. It is for this reason that meaning is not an identifiable *thing* for Fish but instead a *happening*. It develops as the reader reads and is therefore never “pointable to” as an object. One can only “observe or follow its gradual emergence in the interaction between the text...and the developing response of the reader.” (3)

Fish argues further that the mistaken projections the reader develops during her temporal progression through the text should not be completely discounted or rejected in the production of meaning. That is, the establishment of the “correct” meaning should not be the end goal of the reading process. Instead, Fish explains, even interpretive errors constitute part of the meaning of the text: “the temporary adoption of these inappropriate strategies is itself a response to the strategy of the author; and the

resulting mistakes are part of the experience provided by that author's language and therefore part of its meaning." (Fish 1981, 47)

Fish must also be prepared to account for the identity of the reader he describes throughout his theory. Like Iser's implied reader, Fish's account does not denote an actual empirical reader, but his informed reader is a "someone", in contrast with Iser's rather confusing reader-and-text based construct. Fish's informed reader is someone who is a competent and mature language speaker (of whatever language in which the text is written), and who is also competent in literary terms. The informed reader is, for example, familiar with figures of speech and literary genres. (Fish 1981, 48) Basically, the informed reader is "a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed." (49)

Fish, again like Iser, must be prepared to explain how it is that the reader is not free to produce any meaning whatsoever. Response to a given text, Fish argues, is normative to some extent, because readers share a system of language rules beyond which they cannot stray. These shared rules prohibit certain interpretations by identifying them as "deviant, impossible", and act as "constraints on the range, and even the direction, of response; they will make response to some extent, predictable and normative." (Fish 1981, 45) A native speaker of a given language, therefore, knows the collection of shared language rules, and can be counted on to adhere to those rules in the production of meaning. The reader therefore produces limited but variable interpretations.

Fish, in a later analysis of his early work, does recognize some profound flaws in his theory of reader response criticism. In his eagerness to avoid accusations of subjectivism and solipsism (the constant worries of the reader response critic), Fish was trying to have the reader both free *and* restricted. He wanted to include the reader as an essential player in the production of meaning, but he recognized that this production had to be controlled somehow, by something. Therefore, all the while attempting to distance himself from the New Critical formalism, Fish nonetheless required the text to control the reader. Somewhat sheepishly, Fish admits that:

When someone would charge that an emphasis on the reader leads directly solipsism and anarchy, I would reply by insisting on the constraints imposed on readers by the text; and when someone would characterize my position as nothing more than the most recent turn of the new-critical screw, I would reply by saying that in my model the reader was freed from the tyranny of the text and given the central role in the production of meaning. (Fish 1981, 7)

However, as Holub pointed out in the case of Iser, one cannot have it both ways. The reader must be either free or restrained.

Indeterminateness also plays a crucial role in Fish's account of reading. Because interpretive reading is not archeological, the reader must continually make "anticipatory adjustments". As she reads, she develops projections of what is to come, even in terms of what the next word may be. She always knows that the text is progressing, is going somewhere, and she attempts to guess where that might be, for she knows "that this first clause is preliminary to some larger assertion" (Fish 1981, 24).

Each sentence, therefore, is not an objective thing, but an event which has an impact on the reader. Each sentence causes her to reevaluate her projections.

Therefore, Fish does not ask what a sentence *means*, but rather what it *does*. Meaning develops only as the reader experiences the multitude of sentences which make up a text. What a sentence does to the reader, then, is what it means. Even more microscopically, Fish believes that a “reader’s response to the fifth word in a line or sentence is to a large extent the product of his responses to words one, two three, and four.” (Fish 191, 27)

This brief summary of the reader response criticism of Stanley Fish is included in order to clarify the debate which follows. Iser and Fish are both categorized as reader response critics, but, as I warned in the earlier summary of reader response criticism, this does not mean that they always agree. The spirit of the theory is the same, but the letter varies greatly.

## **The Diacritics Debate**

### ***Stanley Fish vs. Wolfgang Iser***

In his critique in Diacritics, “Why No One’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser”, Stanley Fish, following a summary of Iser’s theory, challenges some of the basic elements of the theory. Fish describes the relationship between text and reader delineated by Iser as “one of script to performer”, but “the script is not explicit in an exhaustive way” (Fish 1981, 3). Because the text is not explicit, variety in actualization of the textual potential is possible. Fish admits that Iser’s theory is tremendously attractive, for, as Holub has indicated, the theory seems to manage to be all things to all theorists without offending any of them: “The theory, in short, has something for everyone, and denies legitimacy to no one.” (Fish 1981, 6)

Indeed, Iser's theory bridges many dichotomies: it is both spatial (the text has a certain objective structure) and temporal (meaning production is a shifting, dynamic process); it is both objective (the text provides restrictive guidance) and subjective (the reader fulfills the indeterminacies individually in a variety of possible ways). The text is restrictive, but not overly so, and the reader is free, but not too free. Iser's theory of reading, argues Fish, is pluralistic, as it attempts to "steer a middle way between the poles of objectivity and subjectivity" (Fish 1981, 3). In short, like Holub, Fish believes that Iser's model of reading and of the reader/text interaction is a grab bag of tempting goodies which, when evaluated each by each, become much less impressive.

The key failing of Iser's theory, Fish argues, is the distinction between the determinate and the indeterminate, a distinction he believes will not hold. The distinction between determinacy and indeterminacy is critical to Iser's account of textual structure, for they are among the elements which both permit and encourage reader participation. The textual indeterminacies are filled in by the reader, thereby indicating meaning production that is situated neither with the text (as the elements are indeterminate) nor with the reader. The determinate elements of the text are equally important as they keep Iser from falling into the trap of subjectivism. Once again, Fish argues that Iser is attempting to have it both ways: "textual segments are presented without explicit indications of the relationships between them, and as a result "gaps" open up which it is the responsibility of the reader to close and fill." (Fish 1981, 7)

Fish believes that determinate and indeterminate elements cannot be clearly separated. There can be no true indeterminate elements in a text, because the reader

cannot place “herself outside of assumptions in order to be unconstrained by the possibilities built into a system of intelligibility.” (Holub 1984, 103) That is, no textual element can be truly indeterminate because the reader cannot divest herself of all contextual influences that might alter her actualization of true indeterminacies. Fish argues that determinate elements are equally impossible in Iser’s account, because “all creation of meaning is dependent on the ‘subjectivity’ of the reader operating within the conventions.” (Holub 1984, 103)

Therefore, no one element in Iser’s model of the text can be identified as truly stable and determinate, or as completely indeterminate. The given text, apparently determinate, will not be so due to the involvement of the subjective reader; the gaps in the text, apparently indeterminate, will not be wholly so due to the perspective and contextual framework of the reader. Therefore, “what we see or understand is always already determined by a prior perspective or framework that enables the seeing and understanding.” (Holub 1984, 103), or:

every component in such an account—the indeterminacies or gaps, and the adventures of the reader’s “wandering viewpoint”—will be the products of an interpretive strategy that demands them, and therefore no one of those components can constitute the independent given which serves to ground the interpretive process. (Fish 1981, 7)

Therefore, Iser is on shaky ground—or so Fish thinks.

### ***Iser’s reply to Fish***

Iser replies to Fish’s criticism in “Talk Like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish”, defending his distinction between the determinate and the indeterminate: “The words

of a text are given, the interpretation of the words is determinate, and the gaps between given elements and/or interpretations are the indeterminacies." (Iser 1981, 83) Iser hopes, in his model, to retain some element which controls the reader. He requires a stable element which will prevent the balance swinging over toward subjectivism. This element is the determinacies, the given aspects of a text which restrict to at least some degree the manner in which the reader fulfills the text's potential.

Holub believes Iser has missed Fish's point, or has at least chosen to sidestep it. Fish's rejection of determinacy is due to his belief that there is no controlling given present in a text prior to the reader's interpretive engagement. Of course, Fish does recognize that there are marks on the paper before the reader comes along, but "these 'givens' are meaningless—they are not even 'pointable to' as 'givens'—before we endow them with meaning as 'givens'." (Holub 1984, 104) Therefore, whereas Iser is happy to squeak through the middle of the determinate/indeterminate distinction, Fish argues that the distinction cannot hold after the introduction of the reader to the equation.

The determinate elements, which Iser intends to restrict the reader's actualizations and thereby avoid subjectivism, are flawed because "the very perception of constraints or the ability to constrain is possible only because the interpreter is already operating within a convention or under a set of assumptions." (Holub 1984, 104) Therefore, the conventions which make up the determinate repertoire according to Iser's model of the text are in fact pre-determinate, implying that meaning is not



situated between the reader and the text, but in fact arrives with the reader and her assumptions and predispositions.

A cartoon from the *New Yorker* serves both Fish and Iser as an illustration of their opposing views:

It shows a man seated in a chair, staring morosely at a television set. Above him stands a woman, presumably his wife, and she is obviously speaking to him with some force and conviction. The caption reads, "You look sorry, you act sorry, you say you're sorry, but you're not sorry." (Fish 1981, 10)

The woman's interpretation of the situation, Fish argues, will be determined by what she knows of her husband: his character, personality, physicality, voice etc. Fish's point is that our only access to the world, whether within a fictional construct or not, is biased by our act of ideation, or "the inferring of a world from a set of assumptions (antecedently held) about what it must be like." (10) We can never be presented with a completely determinate picture of the world, for we will always interpret according to our preconstructed assumptions about what the world will be like. We will certainly fill in the textual indeterminacies according to our preexisting set of assumptions, but what Iser calls "determinate elements of the text" will also be coloured by these assumptions.

Iser, struggling to maintain the determinate/indeterminate distinction so critical to his model of reading, analyzes the cartoon described above thus:

What is determinate is Professor Fish's view of the man as morose, the identification of the woman as his wife, the attributes of force and conviction. What is indeterminate is the link between the given elements (figures and captions) and between the two figures as interpreted by Professor Fish. (Iser 1981, 83)

Iser argues that Fish did piece together the meaning of the cartoon based on the elements given to him, without the aid of external reference or prior assumptions. This process, Iser claims, differs from a truly dyadic communicative interaction, where Fish would be able to draw on information beyond the givens, such as sensory input and previous knowledge of the man and his wife. Fish, Iser states, "has no point of reference outside the fiction itself" (83), and therefore cannot bring in previous assumptions in order to create meaning. Iser hopes thereby to preserve the determinate/indeterminate distinction.

Interpretation is always informed by a set of assumptions or conventions...Hence the 'something' which is to be mediated exists prior to interpretation, acts as a constraint on interpretation, has repercussions on the anticipations operative in interpretation, and thus contributes to a hermeneutical process, the result of which is both a mediated given and a reshuffling of the initial assumptions. (Iser 1981, 84)

Clearly, then, Iser's theory is reliant on some sort of separation of the determinate and indeterminate elements of the text. Just as clear, however, is the fact that these two crucial textual elements do not constitute the tidy dichotomy that Iser might like. Fish's argument is based on his belief that nothing is entirely determinate; instead, every textual element is indeterminate, and the variability is just a matter of degrees. Nonetheless, even if Fish's argument is accepted, Iser's version of reader response criticism does represent a valuable set of tools for my analysis of philosophical literature. First, because it forces the paradigm shift from meaning as archeological object to meaning as event. Second, because the indeterminate elements of the texts of philosophical literature are of greatest interest, because they cause the greatest concern

for those who hold to the traditional philosophical paradigm.

Although Fish and Iser disagree about the determinate/indeterminate dichotomy, they do agree about at least two things: indeterminate elements are inherent to literary texts; and indeterminate elements are essential to the establishment of the reader/text relationship. They even agree, for the most part, on how indeterminate elements affect the reader of a text. Therefore, although Fish's criticisms may leave Iser's theory somewhat battered, Iser's version of reader response criticism remains a valuable analytic tool.

### **A Preview: Iser's reader response criticism and philosophical literature**

Iser's reader response criticism forces us to consider how we interact with works of literature, and shows just how complicated and sophisticated this interaction is. As Holub indicates, "we cannot forgo an analysis of our own involvement with a text if we are to understand what literature is about. Nor can we any longer ignore that texts are constructed to be read...his work [Iser's] has sparked needed discussion of long-neglected issues." (Holub 1984, 106) This makes Iser's theory exceptionally conducive to application to philosophical texts, specifically those expressed in traditionally literary forms. Most philosophers, and philosophical critics, are reluctant to progress beyond the belief that *obviously* texts are meant to be read, and that *obviously* readers are active. When analyzing philosophical texts, if we remember that as texts they are meant to be read, we may enable a more productive analysis of philosophical literature. Philosophical literature is read in a particular way and requires a particular level of

activity to produce an aesthetic object, which is equivalent to philosophical meaning. Recognition of these truths will permit a new perspective regarding some traditionally problematic texts.

Traditional philosophical writing, Iser argues, "makes its selections and its decisions explicit." (74) However, literature, and, I argue, philosophical literature by extension, requires the reader to replace the gap which is left when traditional or conventional ideologies or thought systems are proven inadequate. This is a process which Iser terms "the literary recodification of social and historical norms." (74) Literature forces the reader to closely examine the conventional forces which determine her, most often to find those forces lacking, and subsequently to overcome them in order to establish new, improved norms. All of the philosophers I consider, Camus, Sartre, Nietzsche and Plato, were radicals to some degree, seeking to reevaluate and transcend the shortcomings of the normative elements of their social settings, and therefore it surely is not surprising that they chose fiction rather than the treatise to express their concerns.

This is how the texts of philosophical literature are different from the treatise: there are necessarily (due to the form chosen) indeterminate elements which the reader must complete herself, thereby interacting with the text in a very particular way. This is not an evaluative judgment. I am not claiming that incorporating literature is a *better* way to write philosophy, but rather that it is a *good* way to write philosophy, and also a *philosophical* way to write philosophy. The reader becomes a partner in the production of meaning, and, as a result, in the assessment of conventional philosophies. Texts that

attempt to communicate concrete meaning or truth are “by their very nature, independent of the individual reader, for the meaning or truth that they express exists independently of any reader’s participation.” (Iser 1989, 28) In contrast, “the literary text is characterized by the fact that it does not state its intentions.” (Iser 1989, 29)

Gaps in the treatise are either omissions of the author or lapses of understanding of the reader, rather than indeterminacies which need to be filled in. If the author omits something because he thinks it to be unnecessary, and the reader fails to understand, this is not an indeterminacy, but either an unfortunate choice on the part of the author or a shortcoming on the part of the reader. A philosophical treatise which contains indeterminacies is an unsuccessful one. A philosophical text in literary form which contains indeterminacies is a successful combination of literature and philosophy and surely represents an intentional act on the part of the writer. (This claim of the intentional nature of indeterminacy in literary texts will be argued in subsequent chapters.)

The traditional paradigm of reading philosophy does not accord such a role for the reader, since the standard philosophical treatise seeks to establish a truth which exists quite apart from the reader. The reader may access the truth by engaging with the philosophical text and seeking to understand its communicated truth, but the meaning is independent of her engagement and of the reading process. The traditional paradigm of reading philosophy is consistent with the “container” metaphor of meaning, where meaning is considered to be embedded in the text, waiting to be

extracted by the reader. According to this metaphor, the text holds the meaning, and the reader must ferret it out.

In the case of texts of philosophical literature, meaning is a process, not an entity, and the reader is required in order for meaning to develop. The reader is not the sole requirement, for meaning is an interactive process of reader and text, but meaning cannot emerge without the reader's participation. The reader is "drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said." (Iser 1989, 34) One might say that meaning in philosophical literature, according to a reader response criticism analysis, is a *how*, whereas meaning in traditional philosophical texts is a *what*.

The distinction between an author who is interested in his readership and an author who writes in order to create a reader response-like relationship with his reader is an important one. Interest in one's readership is certainly not equivalent to the deliberate enabling of creative cooperation and participation. Surely every author who writes is interested to some degree in his readership (e.g. did they enjoy it? understand it? think about it?) This kind of author is interested in the reader's reaction *to* the text. However, an author who deliberately sets up a text (using structure, form, and style) that provides space for the reader creates a relationship *with* the text. This author not only encourages but requires the reader to interact with the text to fulfill the author/reader/text triad.

The indeterminate elements of the philosophical texts which I will consider in the forthcoming analysis are there intentionally. The philosopher has written a text which is literary, and which therefore includes indeterminacies. The question is, why have

these philosophers written indeterminate texts? The answer to this question may eliminate the perception of these texts as philosophically problematic, for the philosopher structures a text that is meant to be read (beyond its obvious connotation) and therefore meant to include the reader as a meaning-producer: meant to create a certain reading experience. Reading these texts according to Iser's paradigm, rather than the traditional treatise-based paradigm of reading philosophy, should show them not to be as problematic as feared.

The specific reasons for writing this kind of text will vary from author to author, but here are a few possibilities. First, a reader response-friendly text is more fun for everyone: the author, who delights in anticipating his reader's response; the reader, who is surprised but pleased to be given "work" to do. Second, this kind of text may be required in order for some authors to be consistent with their theoretical convictions. If an author believes that reader response criticism best reflects his beliefs about the nature of reading and writing, then it follows that he should write texts that are consistent with that theory. Even further, the texts, structured in this particular way, may reflect and be consistent with an author's world view (regarding the nature of philosophy, for example).

More specifically, Iser's reader response criticism paradigm explains why literature may sometimes be preferable to the usual treatise. Iser argues that the "field of action in a literary work tends to be on or just beyond the fringe of the particular thought system prevalent at the time." (Iser 1978, 73) That is, literature, often by implicitly representing the thought systems or ideologies of the day, reveals their

failings by forcing the reader to challenge that which she actualizes. Therefore, “the literary work implicitly draws an outline of the prevailing system”, and enables the reader to “gauge which system was in force at the time of the work’s creation but also to reconstruct the weaknesses and the historical, human impact of that system” (Iser 1978, 73).

Reader response criticism serves as a springboard for the philosophical argument I will make. Philosophers who use literary forms implicitly acknowledge the role the reader plays in the creation of meaning: her reactions to the philosopher’s text are valid and valuable. The triadic relationship that I have described is encouraged. The philosopher produces a philosophical text, in literary form, that is designed to elicit a reaction from the reader. The reader, by reacting *to* and interacting *with* the text, produces philosophical meaning. She thereby fills the gaps in the philosophical text, and meets the philosopher’s requirements of an actively philosophizing reader/disciple, in accordance with the philosopher’s world-view. As I explained in the introduction, reader response criticism will provide a new way of looking at these kinds of texts—texts which have been frequently misinterpreted, misunderstood, and unfairly or inappropriately criticized.

According to Iser’s reader response criticism, then, some philosophical texts are appropriately expressed in literary form. This conclusion may provide insight into why the philosophical texts I will analyze are valid as philosophy for “the inclusion of literary elements means that the reader must use his imagination to synthesize the information given him, and so his perception is simultaneously richer and more



private.” (Iser 1974, 284) This imaginative element differs from the expository, determinate text which is typical of the philosophical treatise.

These general comments are intended as a preview for the more detailed analysis which will follow. I hope to illustrate these broad conclusions by looking at, as I mentioned in the introduction, four specific texts of philosophical literature. Because Iser’s theory of reader response criticism should now be sufficiently clear, the remaining sections of the thesis will apply that theory to specific texts. The remainder of the thesis will consist of a phenomenological, reader-based analysis informed by Iser’s theory of reader response criticism. Meaning is most often the expected outcome of analysis of philosophical texts. However, the analyses that follow, using the tools provided by Iser’s theory of reader response criticism, will not re-adopt the archeological metaphor of meaning, but instead will attempt to offer an account of the reader’s experience of the various texts based on their form, structure, and especially their indeterminacies, an inherent element of literary form. This application will utilize Iser’s theory to meet the following goals: the identification of indeterminate elements in the texts; the consideration of possible reader concretizations of those indeterminacies; and, most importantly, the determination of how this new way of analyzing these texts, this paradigm shift, removes the perceived problems from these texts and may permit their rehabilitation to full philosophical status. First, however, I feel it is appropriate to provide an analysis of a purely literary text, for this is how Iser expected his theory to be applied.

### **III. A LITERARY APPLICATION OF READER RESPONSE CRITICISM: IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELER**

The goal of this section is to examine how reader response criticism works in practice, now that it is clear in theoretical form. A secondary goal is to foreshadow the discussion of philosophical works which will follow. I have chosen for this analysis a novel by Italian author Italo Calvino, If on a winter's night a traveler. Italo Calvino was first published in 1947, and his preliminary interest in textual structure and narrative was spurred by his interest in collecting Italian folk tales. He was a remarkably prolific writer, publishing fiction every two or three years. Among his best-known fictional works are The Baron in the Trees (1959), T-Zero (1969), Invisible Cities (1974), and the work I will be discussing, If on a winter's night a traveler (1983).

Calvino died in 1985, so Traveler came relatively late in his career, published in Italian in 1979, and in English in 1983. I have chosen to focus on Traveler here because it so brilliantly illustrates and embodies a text's potential to develop a relationship with its reader, to delight, exasperate, play and manipulate. The specific reasons for this choice will become abundantly clear in the discussion that follows, but in general terms I have selected Traveler for the following reasons: it is rife with indeterminacy and therefore requires reader participation; although it is literary, it communicates a collection of broader ideas; it neatly and effectively illustrates the key elements of Iser's reader response criticism.

### ***A summary of Traveler***

If on a winter's night a traveler is far from a typical novel. It is made up of twelve numbered chapters which alternate with ten titled chapters. What exactly the novel is about is almost impossible to say, for it is at its heart about reading itself. Nonetheless, it does have a plot, which I will attempt to briefly summarize here.

The opening lines of the novel are instructions from the narrator to reader, almost like a prologue to the actual narrative. The reader is encouraged to make herself comfortable, to turn on a good light, to find a suitable chair. Who the reader truly is will not become clear, or even become an issue, until later in the book, when the person who is sitting reading the book—Laura, in my case—realizes that perhaps the “reader”, the “you” whom the narrator is addressing, is somebody else entirely.

The titled chapters of Traveler are snippets of other novels which are being read by the Reader to whom the narrator keeps referring. Calvino has chosen a collection of different literary genres, from the spy pot-boiler, to the murder mystery, to the Japanese erotic novel. These snippets are joined together by the plot of the numbered chapters. In these chapters, the Reader, who is actually the protagonist of Calvino's novel (and not the flesh and blood reader who is holding Calvino's book) goes on wild goose chase in search of a book. He has begun a novel entitled If on a winter's night a traveler, but has found that it has been mistakenly bound together with the middle of a different novel. Each apparent replacement novel he finds corresponds to another titled chapter in Calvino's novel, but he is never able to access more than the first chapter of the new novel: certainly a frustrating experience.

The Reader searches for the original novel. Actually, he undergoes a series of searches, because each time he finds a new book he decides that he would like the continuation of this book, rather than the previous one which he was actually looking for. Each fragment he finds intrigues him such that he abandons the previous. As the narrator comments, when the Reader realizes he has once again found a new manuscript: "Whatever this may be, this is a novel where, once you have got into it, you want to go forward, without stopping." (76)

There are numerous players involved in the execution of Calvino's novel. I will discuss the characters themselves in moment, but first the key contributors to the transaction are: the author, Calvino, who is represented abstractly in the text; the narrator, not to be equated with Calvino, who has been giving advice to the Reader about the proper reading of this book (it is not until later in the novel that I realize that I, as a flesh and bones reader, am not the Reader the narrator addresses); a variety of other narrators, one for each titled chapter; the Reader, who is both a character and a textual technique, as Calvino draws his reader in by convincing her that he is addressing her directly. (The confusion is increased because the Reader is also reading a novel by Italo Calvino entitled If on a winter's night a traveler); the abstract reader, who Calvino anticipates will react to the text in a particular way; the empirical, flesh and blood reader, who fills in the gaps of the text according to her own contextual information. I will discuss shortly how these various players relate to Iser's reader response criticism, but first a few words about the plot and some of the characters actually in the novel.

As the Reader searches for the elusive book, he encounters various other characters. Most prominent among them are: Ludmilla, also referred to as the Other Reader or the Second Reader, who has had the same problem with her original novel; Lotaria, Ludmilla's sister, an academic who devours texts with her analyses; Mr. Cavedagna, the furtive little man at the publishing house who lobs endless puns about books and reading; Ermes Marana, the devious translator; and Silas Flannery, the famous Irish writer who is suffering desperately from writer's block. Each character serves to advance the plot, directing the Reader like so many bumpers on a pinball machine; the Reader bounces fruitlessly from one to the other, and seems to never get any closer to finding the book he seeks.

The Reader's search for what he calls the "Right Book", interspersed with the fragments of the "wrong" books, is the primary plot line in Traveler. However, Calvino's novel is also a gentle story of how the Reader and the Other Reader fall in love over the pages of the multitude of books they discover. They meet in a bookstore because they have both discovered an error in the novel they are reading. They undertake the search for the book together, and experience some of the basics of any love story (jealousy, misunderstandings, encounters with past lovers), before uniting happily in the final lines of Calvino's novel: married, sharing a great double bed, they are reading.

The plot of Traveler is complex and convoluted, and this summary cannot hope to communicate these intricacies sufficiently. In addition, the novel makes constant oblique references to reader response and Mr. Cavedagna in particular makes enough

sly jokes about reading and books to warrant a full analysis in his own right. However, this summary should suffice for the application of Iser's reader response criticism which follows.

### ***Applying Iser's model***

Calvino's novel lends itself well to a phenomenological analysis informed by Iser's theory of reader response criticism. The novel is metafictional, in that it is not only a work of fiction, but a commentary on the same: a fictional work about the nature of fiction. It is "about writing and, more than that, about the act of reading." (Tani 114) Metafictional works virtually abandon any sense of realism in order to emphasize the collaborative role of the reader and the author in the creation of the meaning of a fictional work. I intend here to provide a phenomenological analysis of a few passages of the novel. The indeterminacies in Calvino are sufficiently rich to warrant a lengthy analysis, and there are also countless implicit references to the nature of reading, but space does not permit as detailed a look at Calvino as I might like. My purpose in introducing Calvino is to apply Iser's theory to a work of literature, where he had anticipated its application, before proceeding to the philosophical works in the later stages of the thesis.

In the discussion which follows I will refer to several readers: the Reader, who is the character from Calvino's novel; the reader, or the abstract reader, corresponding to one aspect of Iser's implied reader; and myself as a reader, for I too sat down with this book and, free of expectations, underwent the experience of reading this exceptional novel. Of course, we know from the discussion of reader response criticism that my

experience of this particular text will not be identical to someone else's, but it is nonetheless an example of how a reader may interact with Calvino's text.

As with any analysis of indeterminacies, there is some question of what qualifies me to speculate as to how those indeterminacies ought to be actualized. I do not pretend, however, to describe how the indeterminacies "ought" to be actualized, but rather how they "might" be actualized: actualizations are by Iser's definition necessarily multiple. That is, there are many different ways in which an indeterminacy may be filled in. The actualizations that I suggest are only one of the ways of filling in the indeterminacies, but are no less valid as a result, and it could be argued that the identification of the indeterminacies themselves is the most important aspect of the analysis.

As will become clear, Calvino constructs his text so that it contains countless indeterminacies. His reader is continually forced to make projections, to form expectations, only to see them dashed by what follows in the text. This process, however, is required of the reader in order for her to fully grasp the meaning of the novel as both a work of fiction and a work of metafiction. Traveler also embodies Iser's account of the temporal nature of reading. As the text unfolds, the reader never quite knows what is going on, as Calvino presents a dizzying array of literary genres, each with its own chapter. Just as the reader becomes comfortable within a genre, a chapter, and begins to believe that she understands where the novel is heading, Calvino abruptly changes direction in both plot and genre, thereby jarring the reader's expectations, just as Iser described. The reader's expectations are continually

disappointed, as will become clear in the analysis which follows. Therefore, Traveler is not only an illustration of reader response criticism, but also a discussion of it, although the discussion is implicit.

The creation of expectations in the reader begins with the first line of Traveler, where the narrator states "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*." (Calvino 3) Immediately, the reader equates "you" with herself and assumes that she is being directly addressed by the narrator, an assumption which is understandable, as here she is, on the first line of Calvino's novel, reading away. This first section, filled with instructions on how to read the novel, and speculation as to how you might have procured it, is somewhat unusual, but the reader nonetheless has no reason to believe that the narrator is addressing anyone but her (Or, she recognizes, any other reader of the text, for the instructions are sufficiently generic, and the use of the non-gender specific pronoun "you" allows the text to presumably address any reader.)

As this first section progresses, there are elements which the reader might find somewhat odd, such as the detailed description of how you came to buy the book: "...you noticed in a newspaper...You went to the bookshop and bought the volume." (4) Hmm, says the reader, that's not quite how it went, but perhaps the narrator is simply speculating as to how it might have been. This, of course, constitutes a projection on the reader's part. The beginning of this novel is not typical of the form, and she is attempting to impose order on that which appears somewhat strange to her. She does so by insinuating herself into the narrative (which, truly, Calvino has implicitly invited



her to do) and by ignoring the seemingly minor details which make her wonder whether what she is projecting onto the text is appropriate and accurate. Calvino's continual use of "perhaps" eases any discomfort the reader may feel, as it suggests the narrator is merely speculating as to how things may have gone leading up to this reading experience, rather than claiming to actually know what happened. Calvino, masquerading as the narrator, provides no determinate information which leads the reader to believe anyone other than herself is being addressed as "you".

As this unusual first section concludes, Calvino inserts comments which in retrospect address the reader's experience of this same first section: these are the elements which make Traveler a metafictional work:

Perhaps at first you feel a bit lost, as when a person appears who, from the name, you identified with a certain fact, and you try to make the features you are seeing tally with those you had in mind, and it won't work. But then you go on and you realize that the book is readable nevertheless, independently of what you expected of the author, it's the book in itself that arouses your curiosity; in fact, on sober reflection, you prefer it this way, confronting something and not quite knowing yet what it is. (9)

This passage in fact fictionally expresses the theoretical account which Iser has provided of the reader's experience of a text. The reader feels lost due to the indeterminacies naturally occurring in a literary text, and as a result forms expectations in an attempt to create order and determinacy: however, as Calvino's narrator puts it, "it won't work". What the reader had in mind for the text never entirely meshes with what the text itself presents for her.

Rather than being frustrated by this process, Calvino's narrator argues, the reader will prefer this state of affairs, "confronting something and not quite knowing

yet what it is.” That is, in agreement with Iser’s theory, Calvino’s fictional narrator believes that the reader will enjoy a text more if she is granted a co-creative role, if she must “confront” indeterminacies, fill them in, but not know if she has done so appropriately, and if she must proceed temporally through the text in order to verify her projections. With this metafictional comment, Calvino releases his reader into what she perceives as the text as such, where she will indeed, time and again, confront something without knowing (yet) what it is. Chapter one, therefore, is almost a reader response criticism commentary, which describes how the reader relates to a text, and speculating as to how she relates to *this* text.

The following chapter, titled, like the novel, If on a winter’s night a traveler, continues to create expectations in the reader, impel her to fill in indeterminacies, and also to comment on her experience of the text, almost simultaneously with her actual experience of the text. In an example of the most simple of indeterminacies, the character of a man is introduced, with the only description of him being the overcoat he wears against the rain. The reader, provided with very little information about this man, nonetheless forms a mental image of what he might look like. What this image is will depend on the reader, and this variability in actualization of an indeterminate element is perfectly valid, as it is not contraindicated by any textual elements: at least not yet.

The narrator recognizes the context in which the reader meets this character, and acknowledges the lack of detailed information: “I am the man who comes and goes between the bar and the telephone booth. Or, rather: that man is called “I” and you

know nothing else about him..." (11) Additional details about the character of this man may force the reader to reevaluate her projections, but for the moment the text permits her to fill in the blanks (as Iser would say) in almost any way. Is he short or tall, slim or fat, fair or dark, handsome or homely? None of these details are provided, and yet the reader automatically forms a somewhat more detailed picture of the man.

In fact, the text acknowledges its own indeterminacy while also recognizing the reader's expectations, and how they may very well come to be thwarted. The narrator admits to the reader that:

this would be the time to tell you clearly whether this station where I have got off is a station of the past or a station of today; instead the sentences continue to move in vagueness, grayness, in a kind of no man's land of experience reduced to the lowest common denominator. Watch out: it is surely a method of involving you gradually, capturing you in the story before you realize it—a trap. (12)

The reader is involved gradually because she gradually fills in more and more blanks, actualizes more indeterminacies, and forms more projections and expectations, which, presumably, compel her to continue reading in order to discover whether they will be borne out or thwarted. The text itself, therefore, admits of its own vagueness, and recognizes that the reader will attempt to eliminate this vagueness, and even warns her of the dangers of becoming involved, presumably because she will be forced to continue to work so hard within the text. The narrator, anticipating the reader's reaction, explains that "the more gray and ordinary and undistinguished and commonplace the beginning of this novel is, the more you and the author feel a hint of danger looming..." (15)

What is interesting in this case is that it is unlikely that the reader has perceived the beginning of this novel as commonplace, as it is surely remarkably different from any other novel she has ever read. What, then, the reader wonders, is the danger of which the narrator warns? Once again, due to the temporal nature of reading, the reader cannot appreciate or even recognize the danger until she progresses further into the text and discovers that her projections are faulty, that she has filled in blanks inappropriately, and that the indeterminacies she has struggled to eliminate continue to multiply.

The narrator also acknowledges that the reader forms expectations of the text based on what she has already read. When the character of the man meets a woman at the bar, she is introduced only as one who may have been the beauty of the town, and one who might be called attractive. Once again, the reader will form a mental image of this character, sitting beside the man. Several pages later, the narrator once again acknowledges the dearth of details provided, and almost apologetically admits that "for several pages you have been expecting this female shadow to take shape the way female shadows take shape on the written page, and it is your expectation, reader, that drives the author toward her" (20). It is as if Calvino, via the narrator and the text, knows that the indeterminacies will force the reader to create a set of expectations, and that those expectations will almost inevitably not be met by what follows in the text.

The reader's experience of the text, even after these first two sections, is just as Iser describes in his account of reader response criticism. What makes Calvino's text distinctive is the overt way in which he establishes a relationship with his reader, which

is typical of a metafictional novel. (Tani 132) One cannot read this novel without filling in blanks, but more importantly, one cannot read this novel without being *aware* of filling in the blanks. In contrast, for example, with Iser's analysis of Tom Jones, where one of the blanks left for the reader is the significance of Mr. Allworthy's name (an indeterminate element which, I would argue, could be overlooked by some readers), Calvino makes no show of concealing the blanks in his text.

The reader is confronted with a very hazy text: this novel is addressed to "you", but it is potentially dangerous; here is a man, about whom I will tell you almost nothing; here is a woman, about whom you must now be expecting to hear more details, but your expectations will not be fulfilled: "You surely would want to know more about what she's like, but instead only a few elements surface on the written page..." (20). Indeed, the specifics of a reader's experience of this text are very difficult to discuss, for the text is more indeterminate than determinate; there is more that is *not* there than *is* there, and as a result, the potential actualizations of the text multiply exponentially and the meaning so created varies in kind.

Chapter two of Traveler is especially interesting in that the text engages the reader not only intellectually but also physically, with the ruse of the printing error. The reader (empirical) is actually made to flip pages in order to disconfirm her expectations. Throughout the initial stages of this novel, the empirical reader has been led to believe that she is the Reader the narrator continues to address. However, now told about a printing error of which she can find no evidence, she discovers that this projection is entirely mistaken. She is not the Reader whom the narrator has been

addressing so intimately: the Reader is a character in the novel. This shattered projection, of course, colours her retrospective evaluation of what she has read to this stage. Some elements of the text will now make sense to her, whereas others will have a different meaning. It will not be possible to reread this novel and produce the same set of reactions and expectations.

Once again, Iser's theory is borne out by Calvino's novel. Although I have discussed some of the theoretical shortcomings of Iser's theory, when the theory is applied to Calvino's work its basic tenet holds undeniably: when the text is made up of determinate and indeterminate elements, the reader naturally fills in the indeterminacies, develops a set of expectations of what is to come, and thereby creates meaning in conjunction with the text. It is also clear that these expectations are fluid, continually being shattered and reformed. Therefore, despite objections to some of the details of Iser's theory, on its most basic level, it works. When applied to actual texts, Iser's theory shows how the reader engages as a result of indeterminacies, and what the reader's basic experience of the text will be.

Calvino's novel is very deliberately structured so as to encourage reader participation. The novel is indeterminate on so many levels that the reader must fill in countless gaps: in the plot, the structure and even the physical pages of the novel. The deliberate use of indeterminacy in order to increase the demand on the reader, is, Iser argues, characteristic of more modern writing. As Iser explains, in "traditional" texts the process of filling in indeterminacies or gaps "was more or less unconscious, but modern texts frequently exploit it quite deliberately." (Iser 1974, 280) Dickens' work,

for example, because it is highly detailed and written in a straightforward manner, requires some completion of indeterminacies but comparatively little reader participation. The reader does the necessary "filling in" without really being aware of her effort. In contrast, Calvino's novel, although highly detailed, is anything but straightforward and the reader is aware of the interaction which is required of her. Calvino even succeeds in having the reader interact physically with the text. The ruse of the printing error has her flipping pages, rereading the previous section, and trying to uncover the error that is not in her book, but in the Reader's book.

Iser believes that much of the impetus for the reader's interaction with the text is her desire to create consistency out of chaos. She will always "strive, even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern." (Iser 1974, 283) This is the *gestalt* of the text: the experiential totality of meaning, the consistency which the reader requires be imposed upon the text. *Gestalt* "arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook." (Iser 1974, 284)

What is most striking in Calvino is the illustration of Iser's concept of the blank. As Iser explained, the structure of the text, particularly what is left out of the text, regulates the reader's reaction to that text. The blanks in the text are most noticeable when the "threads of the plot are suddenly broken off, or continued in unexpected directions." (Iser 1989, 35) This is a phenomenon which occurs every chapter in Calvino's novel. Iser indicates that blanks are most obvious when the plot is suddenly interrupted, or continues in an unexpected direction. Often these breaks in the flow of

the text, Iser argues, are emphasized by a change of chapter, which serves not to frustrate the reader, but as "a tacit invitation to find the missing link." (Iser 1989, 35) Each time the reader (and the Reader) become engrossed in a narrative (in the titled chapters), it is interrupted and the novel returns to the Reader's story (in the numbered chapters). Calvino thereby invites the reader to establish the connections between the seemingly disjointed units of the novel, to determine what is narrative and what is metanarrative, to create consistency and coherence where none is apparent.

The names of the titled chapters provide an ideal illustration of indeterminate elements and especially the effect of blanks. The series of chapter titles is itself indeterminate and requires detective work on the reader's part to be noticed, let alone solved. In fact, the chapter titles themselves form a sentence:

If on a winter's night a traveler outside the town of Malbork leaning from the steep slope without fear of wind or vertigo looks down in the gathering shadow in a network of lines that enlase in a network of lines that intersect on the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon around an empty grave what story down there awaits its end?

Beyond the initial question of what punctuation to put where, what does this mean? As the narrator in "Leaning from the steep slope" declares: ". . .the important thing is that I convey to him the effort I am making to read between the lines of things the evasive meaning of what is in store for me." (Calvino 1981, 62) Therefore, although the meaning of this hidden phrase may be significant, I further believe that the phrase is a sly commentary on the nature of reading in general, and of reading this novel in particular.



Notice phrases like “gathering shadow”, which could refer to the obstruction of meaning which Calvino has built into the text. Also consider phrases which refer to a network enlacing, intersecting, and “what story down there awaits its end?” Iser actually describes the temporal reading process as “a network of perspective”, where the aesthetic object is “a product of interconnection, the structuring of which is to a great extent regulated and controlled by blanks.” (Iser 1989, 35) Calvino’s text as a whole is favourable to Iser’s theory of reader response criticism, but he also implicitly comments on its very structure and nature as an indeterminate text. What story will the reader produce from this indeterminate network?

Due to the textual indeterminacies, the blanks, the reader invokes her natural tendency to impose order, consistency, coherence, and even meaning upon the text. However, her expectations are continually thwarted as she struggles to meet the challenges of the text. Calvino’s novel is a textbook example of how Iser’s reader response criticism works, for the reader not only completes indeterminacies and fills in blanks in an attempt to construct meaning, she also reads about the same process as undertaken by the Reader. Therefore, in order to synthesize a text about the completion of indeterminacies, the reader must complete indeterminacies.

### ***The reader as detective***

The reader of Calvino’s work, and, if Iser’s theory is considered, of literary texts in general, operates as a sort of detective, with a job to do, a puzzle to solve. The reader as detective is examined in Stefano Tani’s The Doomed Detective, a look at what Tani has termed the “anti-detective novel”. The anti-detective novel has developed in

opposition to the traditional or “hard-boiled” detective novel, and is characterized by the suspension of the expected conclusion of the novel, namely the solution to the mystery. Instead, the anti-detective novel is “full of potentialities that remain to be articulated and developed” (Tani 38), just like Iser’s conception of the literary text.

The key to connecting Calvino to Iser via the concept of the reader as detective, however, lies in the role of reader expectations. Whereas the traditional detective novel serves to fulfill the reader’s expectation of a neatly resolved conclusion/solution, the anti-detective novel “frustrates the expectations of the reader” (40). While she has expected a solution, she is met with chaos, continued mystery, and non-solution. In the same way, the reader in a literary text is met not with complete clarity, but with indeterminacies and blanks, requiring her to play detective and, in order to produce meaning, to fill them in.

Tani describes Calvino’s Traveler as a metafictional anti-detective novel because it is a “book-conscious-of-its-bookness”. (43) The anti-detective novel creates a particular relationship between the triad of author, text and reader, as Tani explains: “detection is present in the relation between the writer who deviously writes (“hides”) his own text and the reader who wants to make sense of it (who “seeks” a solution)” (43). Although not every writer will be deliberately devious as Tani suggests Calvino is, the reader of Iser’s text is also operating as detective, for the text never reveals itself to her in its entirety (due to the “presence” of blanks), and she must therefore fill in the blanks in order to make sense of the text.

Elements of reader response criticism are evident in the creation of suspense by the author of the anti-detective novel. The anti-detective novel explores the process of detection via an examination of the mystery, thereby creating expectations in the reader (expectations regarding the solution to the mystery or crime), which are then thwarted by either delay of resolution or falsification of an apparent solution. Designing the text as a sort of labyrinth or puzzle for the reader is a direct parallel of Iser's reader response criticism.

Tani acknowledges that "the relation criminal-detective/writer-reader typical of the metafictional anti-detective novel is present in any text where there is a "dialogue" (implicit or not) between reader and writer" (44), which would be any text which fits Iser's conditions for fictional status, that being no real world correlate for the fictional objects. In fact, any good reader is always performing as a detective, as she "consciously or unconsciously strives for "what is next" as well as for what is left unsaid and ultimately for the end (the denouement, the "composition" of the plot) when he reads a fiction, no matter whether it is a detective novel or not." (120)

The novel in its entirety is rife with indeterminacies: the reader is impelled to actualize them, and also to make sense of what the text knowingly tells her about her reading. It is almost as if Calvino challenges his reader: "I'm only going to tell you this much; what will you do with the rest?" What the reader does with the rest is the essence of reader response criticism and essential to my analysis of philosophical texts: as Tani explains, every reader is a detective, provided there are elements of

indeterminacy in the text. If something is left for her to do, if there are Iser's blanks to fill in, the reader interacts with the text in a detective-like way. In fact:

the text is only a means of communication and "detection" between two creators, the writer and the reader...the result of the writer's filtration and personal "rearrangement" of reality, in turn filtered and rearranged by the reader's perceptions and personal response to the writer's creation. (Tani 134)

Tani's account of the reader as detective, again, clearly parallels Iser's reader response criticism.

Not only are the reader's attempts to solve the mystery by herself disappointed, but her expectations regarding the denouement and the efforts of the textual detective are also thwarted. This results from the author of the metafictional anti-detective novel playing with the conventional elements of the detective novel, as conventions "become deceitful clues planted by the writer to rouse the attention of the reader before disappointing his expectations..." (Tani 42-43). Playing with conventions corresponds to Iser's account of the repertoire of a text. The metafictional anti-detective novel takes familiar textual elements and presents them in surprising combinations, effectively turning them on their heads.

### ***Calvino—Conclusion***

Rather than writing a work of theory to illustrate his views on the importance of the reader, Calvino has constructed a work which powerfully embodies his ideas. In addition, the novel effectively illustrates the crucial elements of Iser's theory: the indeterminacy and the blank. If the reader is unwilling to become actively involved in Calvino's work by filling in the blanks, she will be unable to truly experience it at all.

Any real understanding of Calvino requires the reader to be a detective, to flip pages back and forth, to reread, to return to the table of contents for additional clues, to *experience* the book, to become involved, rather than simply passively absorbing the words. The reader “tries to gain a perspective above the text, playing detective in an attempt to tie themes together and arrive at the true and comprehensive interpretation of the book. . .” (Sorapure 702). This attempt to gain perspective is also seen in the two philosophical novels which I will discuss next: La nausée and L'étranger. Which perspective the reader adopts in her attempts to make sense of the novels, however, remains in question.

#### **IV. PHILOSOPHY IN IMAGES: TWO PHILOSOPHICAL NOVELS**

Jean-Paul Sartre's La nausée and Albert Camus' L'étranger are both examples of "literature of the absurd". I refer to M.H. Abrams' concise account of literature of the absurd (in his excellent reference book A Glossary of Literary Terms, seventh edition, 1999) for the following description. Literature of the absurd includes both drama and prose fiction (Camus and Sartre both wrote novels as well as plays and other philosophical works), and categorizes literature that describes the human condition as essentially absurd and unintelligible. This form of literature arose around the time of the second World War, primarily in response to the traditional literary assumptions that humans are basically rational, life is basically meaningful and that social structure is an effective ordering principle. Literature of the absurd gained increased attention when the existential movement developed. The existentialists, including Camus and Sartre (despite the fact that each resisted such labelling), had a tendency to:

view a human being as an isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value, or meaning, and to represent human life—in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning, as it moves from the nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end—as an existence which is both anguished and absurd. (1)

Abrams explains in addition that literature of the absurd is necessarily a *literature*, for its proponents believed the above-described human condition could "be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd." (1) The view that human beings are painfully isolated in an alien universe which has "no inherent truth, value, or meaning" (1) is expressed in both La nausée and L'étranger. The mode of

expression, however, and the reader's access to and experience of this idea, varies greatly between the two novels.

The forthcoming analysis will consider the two philosophical novels not, I must remind you, in terms of meaning, but in terms of the reader's experience. I will show how, considering Iser's reader response criticism, especially his account of indeterminacies and their requisite reader response, the reader experiences the message of absurdity that each novel expresses. I will also explore Inge Crosman Wimmers' poetics of reading in order to consider how the fictional novel can reconcile its narrative form with a possible didactic purpose. I will also look at Iser's account of the *roman à thèse* in order to illuminate the distinction between La nausée and L'étranger. They are superficially similar in many ways: written by so-called existentialists, in novel form, from the first person perspective, in order to communicate a philosophically significant idea. However, these two philosophical novels are fundamentally different in terms of: mode of expression of that idea, the reader's participation in the novel, and their ultimate success in fulfilling their purpose.

The final goal of this analysis is to illustrate that despite the differences that I have mentioned above, both of these novels are at their heart works of philosophy and, based on an analysis informed by reader response criticism, are worthy of rehabilitation as such. The novels have been sources of philosophic controversy for several reasons. Most obviously, the novels have been rejected as works of philosophy, due primarily to their modes of expression. Because these are novels, and not treatises, the common conception is that they are primarily fictional and are not appropriate subjects of serious

philosophical discussion. However, as I have indicated, my wish is to expand the traditional philosophical paradigm to recognize philosophy in forms other than the treatise, and to do so by invoking the principles of Wolfgang Iser's reader response criticism.

Those who hold with the traditional philosophical paradigm, then, would prefer to dismiss both L'étranger and La nausée. Although they may be somewhat philosophical, the argument goes, they are inherently literary and therefore not philosophy. I will argue in this chapter that mode of expression ought not to disqualify any work from being considered philosophy. I will also argue that despite the traditionally literary novel format, the reader is clearly able to access philosophical thought. By illustrating the fashion in which the reader interacts with these two texts, by focusing on reader response criticism principles such as gaps, indeterminacies, and the evaluation of norms, I hope to rehabilitate these two works and bring them to be considered as philosophy. They are works of philosophical literature, not works of literature that happen to contain some philosophy. Evaluation according to an appropriate paradigm, and focusing on the reader experience, will show this to be so. As Camus himself said, a novel is only philosophy in images, and therefore the only good reason to exclude these novels from philosophical consideration is if the philosophy therein contained is found wanting: not in quantity, but in quality.



## **JEAN-PAUL SARTRE**

Jean-Paul Sartre is one of this century's most widely-known (and popular, in the sense that he was read even outside of the academic community) philosophers and writers. Born in Paris, Sartre taught philosophy until becoming involved in the French Resistance during the second World War. Like Camus, Sartre's notable philosophical activity seems to have been inspired in part by the impact of war in Europe. Throughout his career, Sartre wrote both philosophical treatises and works of philosophical literature. La nausée, which will be the focus of my discussion of Sartre, was among his earliest works, published in 1938. Sartre's most recognized philosophical work, written in treatise form, L'Être et le néant, appeared in 1943. The remainder of Sartre's career consisted of both philosophical and literary works: Les mouches (1943), Huis clos (1944), L'existentialisme est un humanisme (1946) and Situations I&II (1948). Sartre's philosophical novels were not fully appreciated in terms of their philosophical value. This problem is perhaps more pronounced in Sartre's case: because he also wrote traditional philosophical treatises, his novels (and plays) were considered as secondary, lesser attempts at philosophical expression.

Using the tools developed in my discussion of Iser's reader response criticism to analyze Sartre's novel seems especially appropriate since Sartre himself, in his aesthetic essay What is Literature?, directly addressed the relationships between author, reader, and text. Briefly discussing Sartre's own thoughts regarding reading may shed additional light on the structure of La nausée and the resultant reader experience of the text.

Sartre requires a writer to be socially and intellectually engaged as a direct consequence of his existential project. A writer must be explicitly and continually conscious of his readers and also of the impact which his writings may have on them. A committed, engaged writer should ask himself "What would happen if everybody read what I wrote?" (Sartre 1965, 17), and recognize the responsibility that thus arises. An existential writer is free to express his own ideas and experiences, and yet is also responsible for the impact that his expressions may have on others. This paradox, expressed in this case in the context of the nature of writing, is at the heart of existential philosophy itself.

Every writer must make stylistic choices, and Sartre believes that style is integral to intellectual expression. "One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way. And, to be sure, the style makes the value of the prose. But it should pass unnoticed." (Sartre 1965, 19) Content cannot escape form, and form determines the nature and value of what is expressed. However, style should not be directly evident to the reader. It is primary, but should *appear* to be secondary. As I will argue later, despite Sartre's own account of the delicate balance between style and content, it is not at all clear that he has successfully fused the two in La nausée. Because La nausée is consistent with the criteria delineating the *roman à thèse*, the reader's awareness of the philosophical message fused with the literary form of the novel is almost a requirement of her understanding. I will explain this point in greater detail at the conclusion of this chapter.

Like the reader response theorists, Sartre describes reading as a creative act, which is controlled in order to avoid relativism and subjectivism. Sartre refers to the reader as subject, and to the text as object. The subject and object are interdependent; each is essential for the other. The object is essential because it must be observed and respected: a reader-subject must “wait” for the object before she can react. (Sartre 1965, 37) The reader-subject is limited by the structures of the object. The subject is essential in order to reveal the object, “to make *there be* an object.” (Sartre 1965, 37) Therefore, like in the work of Iser, Sartre postulates a triadic relationship between writer as creator of the object, text as object, and reader as subject: “The literary object is a peculiar top which exists only in movement. To make it come into view a concrete act called reading is necessary...Beyond that, there are only black marks on paper.” (Sartre 1965, 34-35) Sartre also implicitly recognizes the problem of relativism with which every reader-oriented theorist must struggle. Sartre allows that reading is necessary in order to imbue the text with meaning, but also that this sense-making activity must be to some extent controlled. He therefore conceives of the text as a series of landmarks set up by the author between which the reader must navigate. The reader, therefore, is controlled, but not so much as to stifle her reading as a creative process: “...the author guides him, but all he does is guide him. The landmarks he sets up are separated by the void. The reader must unite them; he must go beyond them. In short, reading is directed creation.” (Sartre 1965, 39)

Keeping Sartre’s perception of the relationship between author, text, and reader in mind, and remembering the principles of reader response criticism, let us proceed to

a summary and reader-based analysis of La nausée itself. Once again, the purpose of this analysis is not to determine what the novel *means*, for this would abandon the meaning-as-event metaphor which is fundamental to reader response criticism. Instead, the analysis will consider how the form and structure of the novel affects the reader's experience of it, and what impact this experience has on the novel's possible status as a work of philosophical literature.

### **La nausée: a summary**

Like so many novels with philosophical import, it is hard to say what this novel is really "about". However, a thin plot line does run through the novel. Antoine Roquentin lives in Bouville (Mudville), and is researching and writing a book about an eighteenth century marquis, Rollebon. His work, however, is not going well, and his enthusiasm for his project is quickly waning. When he first read of the marquis, he felt a sense of love for him, but now finds himself disinterested and unable to write.

While avoiding writing, Roquentin spends a good deal of time in various cafés, most especially the café Mably. He also reads, and researches, at the Bouville library, which is populated by various odd characters, the more prominent of which is the Autodidacte ("the self-taught one"), who is pursuing a friendship with Roquentin, a prospect which the latter finds most distasteful. The final most prominent character is Anny, Roquentin's former girlfriend, who left him several years previously. She is much in his thoughts in the early parts of the novel, and, in the last half of the novel, Roquentin visits her in Paris at her behest. The remainder of the plot is peopled by minor characters primarily observed by Roquentin but with whom he rarely interacts.

The minor characters serve to bring to light Roquentin's alienation from the world around him and his sense that his existence weighs heavily upon him. With the exception of two particularly intense encounters, one with the Autodidacte and one with Anny, Roquentin is an especially passive character in that he actually *does* very little: instead, things happen *to* him. He appears as an observer of the plot of this novel, rather than a participant in the action. This distancing, this sense of isolation, is, as I will demonstrate, a structurally significant aspect of the novel. In the following analysis, I argue that La nausée is an example of what Iser calls the *roman à thèse*, a categorization which has a significant impact on the reader's experience of the novel and on its candidacy for inclusion among philosophical works.

### **La nausée as roman à thèse**

La nausée is most likely an example of what Iser terms the *roman à thèse* (Iser 1978, 189). The purpose of this type of novel is "didactic or propagandist", and the text is structured so as to carefully restrict and control the ways in which the schemata can be connected, or the blanks filled in. In fact, the number of blanks is reduced in order to further control the "activity of ideation granted to the reader." (189) The text is structured in such a way and with sufficient detail that the reader's imaginative activity is hardly necessary. "The thesis novel presents its subject matter as if it were a given object, and so the problem is merely to ensure the reliable communication of the thesis" (190), and as a result the reader's activity is reduced. The recording of the author's intentions is structured so as to reduce this activity.

Such a novel does not wish to inextricably involve the reader in the constitution of meaning, but is willing to permit some reader participation. However, that participation is not in the production of meaning, but rather in the establishment of reader attitude toward more evident textual meaning. The text, then, is designed to “maneuver the reader into the right position, so that all he has to do is adopt the attitude mapped out for him.” (Iser 1978, 190) Therefore, that which is determinate in the novel is assimilated by the reader and adopted as a reality, but the number of indeterminacies is strictly limited because the purpose of the *roman à thèse* is for the reader to learn what is set out in the text, not for her to construct her own meaning on its basis. In short, the *roman à thèse* reduces blanks “in order to indoctrinate.” (194)

The author regulates the ways in which the textual elements are concretized and the reader undertakes very little imaginative activity. The aesthetic object is presented as a given, rather than something that needs to be developed. As a result, the author need only “ensure reliable communication of the thesis”. (190) The textual strategies must present a “good continuation” in that there must be minimal gaps in the novel’s narrative structure in order to reduce the gap-filling activity of the reader; in this way she is able to more directly access the didactic purpose of the novel. These textual strategies are designed to dovetail the reader’s experience with the articulated meaning so that all that is required of her in participatory terms is to “adopt the attitude mapped out”. (190) The purpose is to “ensure that the given contents will become a reality for the reader.” (190)

In Sartre's case, therefore, the sense of nausea which is felt by Roquentin is intended to be communicated to the reader not necessarily as meaning, but phenomenologically, in terms of experience. Sartre hopes to bring the reader to an understanding of the existential import of nausea by having her share Roquentin's experience of it. The text itself is not particularly indeterminate, but participation or identification is nonetheless required in order for the meaning or thesis to be assimilated by the reader. The participation, however, must be "strictly controlled" so the thesis subject will be reliably transmitted. The result is the drastic reduction of the wandering viewpoint, as the author doesn't particularly want his reader wandering, for he has a specific route for her to follow in order to understand his didactic purpose.

Especially in the first half of the novel, the majority of the plot elements are observed by Roquentin; he does not participate or interact with other characters. It is an account of the world observed rather than lived in; Roquentin describes the people and scenes he encounters in Bouville as if he were a scientist looking from behind glass at specimens. This intense sense of separation from others and the world in general is symptomatic of Roquentin's sense of nausea. Even the later sections of the novel, where Roquentin relates intensely but disastrously to both the Autodidacte and Anny, Roquentin is almost a passive observer of his own existence. Things happen to Roquentin, but he does not initiate social contact of any kind. Roquentin recounts innumerable little vignettes: families in the Jardin publique; a beautiful young couple in a café; Lucie, the cleaning woman at his hotel, arguing with her lover. These vignettes serve to emphasize how alienated he is from the normalcy of life's little

moments. The collection of vignettes, Roquentin's observations, do not by themselves have meaning, but for Roquentin they are profoundly meaningful, as they are stark reminders of the burden of existence which he bears. Therefore, the reader's sense-making activity, her participation in the novel, consists in her adoption of Roquentin's identity so she can understand the meaning which he assigns to that which could appear to be everyday minutiae.

Iser argues that the *roman à thèse* generally requires the reader to adopt the hero's perspective, as is required in La nausée. Any other perspective which is presented serves only as contrast to that of the protagonist, and leads the reader toward the decision of acceptance or rejection mentioned above. Iser explains that:

The hero perspective in these works tends to be organized in such a way that, in linking it to other perspectives, the reader has a simple choice between acceptance and rejection. The blanks, as the missing links between the perspective segments, permit only these two possibilities so that the reader's participation is restricted to adopting an attitude toward a given object. (190)

Despite the reduced role for the reader (contrast, for example, Calvino's Traveler), her participation and acquiescence are nonetheless required, for if she won't "play", so to speak, the text's purpose cannot be fulfilled: "the intention of such a text can only be fulfilled if the decision is ideated by the reader". (190) In short, the *roman à thèse* reduces indeterminacies "in order to indoctrinate", and "only allows its reader sufficient latitude to imagine that he is accepting voluntarily an attitude that has in fact been foisted upon him." (194)



La nausée clearly qualifies, as it adopts the novel format but does not take advantage of the format's full set of possible tools. The novel is written as a journal, which increases the "*vraisemblance*" and encourages the reader even further to adopt the perspective of the protagonist. By intruding into Antoine Roquentin's private thoughts and his own descriptions of his life, the reader is able to step directly into his shoes and understand exactly how he feels about what happens to him. Therefore, the decision of ideation which Iser described is facilitated.

Iser's theory that characters other than the protagonist are presented in order to contrast with that character's perspective is certainly borne out in La nausée. Roquentin's sense of alienation and his disgust at his realization of his existence is strongly contrasted with the Autodidacte's sunny humanist outlook. The Autodidacte feels pleased with the world but is made to look a fool for it. If the contrasting view is meant to aid the reader in determining whether to accept or reject the protagonist's perspective, the Autodidacte is more likely to spur the reader to accept Roquentin's bleak outlook.

Although the Autodidacte seems in contrast to be a relatively normal person, friendly and interested in relating to others, he is also portrayed as somewhat simple; an innocent ("L'Autodidacte rit avec innocence" [151]). He is reading his way through the works of the Bouville library, alphabetically. That his project is admirable is not disputed, but he is almost gratingly childish about it, and is embarrassed to be found out. Unaware of Roquentin's "Idea", which remains unnameable (63), the Autodidacte seems to be a simpleton, blissfully but dangerously unaware of the existence which he

necessarily shares with all others. The Autodidacte is determined to maintain his love of and confidence in human beings despite a horrendous concentration camp experience that highlighted for him the nature of existence; however, his determination does not appear to the reader to be well-founded. Therefore, the reader is presented with a choice: she can accept Roquentin's distasteful but authentic perspective, or she can reject Roquentin in favour of a man whose attractive optimism is unjustified and who is in all other ways not a person she would like to be. The reader does not wish to be thought simple.

Roquentin's eventual and almost inevitable rejection of the Autodidacte widens the gap between the perspectives recognized by the reader even further. Although Roquentin has throughout the novel perceived the Autodidacte as troublesome (he accepts an invitation to lunch all the while thinking "J'avais envie de déjeuner avec lui comme de me pendre." (113)), Roquentin is almost begrudgingly touched by the Autodidacte's admiration of and interest in him. The Autodidacte's earnest interest and attentions are initially pleasant: Roquentin thinks to himself that he hasn't shared this sort of experience for years: "Quelqu'un se soucie de moi, se demande si j'ai froid; je parle à un autre homme: il y a des années que cela ne m'est arrivé." (150) However, the radically different way in which the two men perceive the world cannot be overcome, and Roquentin finds himself completely enraged by the Autodidacte's staunch refusal to admit to the absurdity of existence and the feelings of nausea that this realization causes. Laughing uncontrollably, Roquentin finally bursts out with the following statement of his position: "C'est que je pense, lui dis-je en riant, que nous voilà, tous

**tant que nous sommes, à manger et à boire pour conserver notre précieuse existence et qu'il n'y a rien, rien, aucune raison d'exister." (161)**

**The character of Anny, Roquentin's former girlfriend, also provides a contrast to Roquentin. However, whereas the Autodidacte is profoundly different from Roquentin, Anny is strikingly similar. Roquentin's reminiscences of their time together show that she was not an easy person to whom to relate. They shared a long distance relationship, and she would determinedly bicker with him until there remained only an hour in their time together, and then she would attempt to create a "moment parfait", a perfect moment. (95) Whereas Roquentin seems to live solely through his observations of others, Anny yearns to create one perfect vignette-like moment in her own life. She is continually upset with Roquentin for ruining such potential moments by speaking at the wrong time, or being red-headed, or just being "un sot", an idiot (95-96).**

**Anny's search for the perfect moment shows a sense of alienation from herself, for she becomes unable to live authentically in the moment, and instead looks at herself in the same way that Roquentin looks at the rest of the world: like a specimen under glass. As Roquentin thinks to himself: "Il n'y a pas d'aventures—il n'y a pas de moments parfaits...nous avons perdus les mêmes illusions, nous avons suivi les mêmes chemins. Je devine le reste—je peux même prendre la parole à sa place et dire moi-même ce qui lui reste à dire." (212) Anny and Roquentin are both profoundly aware of their existence and both feel the resultant nausea. However, Roquentin has been most affected by his alienation from others. For Anny, who seems to cultivate this distance from others, the alienation is internal.**

As a *roman à thèse*, La nausée reduces the role of the reader, because its indeterminate elements are at a minimum. Roquentin's observations are described in tremendous detail, and although the novel supposedly uses the journal style, his entries exceed those one could realistically expect to find in a journal. It would take Roquentin all day to write about what happened in his day. Therefore, the detailed descriptions leave the reader little to do in terms of concretization, and the narrative voice is consistent throughout, leaving few gaps and effectively eliminating the wandering viewpoint. In addition, Roquentin makes extensive and coherent statements regarding his state of mind; statements which are clearly designed to communicate the novel's thesis to the reader.

Therefore, among the only concretizations possible is that of Roquentin himself. Roquentin is a blank, an indeterminate element of the text which requires an act of ideation by the reader. In order for the reader to successfully access the novel's thesis, she must concretize Roquentin by accepting the assumption of his perspective, by implicitly agreeing to see the world through his eyes. If she rejects Roquentin's perspective, he remains a blank and the meaning which Sartre intends the novel to bear cannot develop. In quantity, therefore, the reader's concretizations are few. In quality, however, they are challenging and productive. This, however, does not imply a swing back to the archeological perception of meaning. In La nausée, as in other literary and reader response criticism works, meaning is not something embedded in the text which the reader must get out. However, in La nausée, the reader must fulfill a requirement before the meaning can develop through her participation. To grasp the thesis which

Roquentin's experience is meant to communicate, the reader must step into his shoes and experience it for herself. Only then can the intended meaning of the novel develop.

This symbiotic relationship is mirrored in the text by the relationship between Roquentin and Rollebon. In an entry where he realizes he can no longer write his book, Roquentin describes Rollebon as his associate: "il avait besoin de moi et j'avais besoin de lui pour ne pas sentir mon être. Moi, je fournissais la matière brute cette matière dont j'avais à revendre, dont je ne savais que faire: l'existence, *mon* existence. Il se tenait en face de moi, et s'était emparé de ma vie pour me représenter la sienne." (143) Rollebon needs Roquentin for his existence in the same way that Roquentin requires the reader of the text.

In conclusion, therefore, as an example of both literature of the absurd and the *roman à thèse*, La nausée is structured so as to create a certain experience for the reader. She is not "let loose" upon the text as she was in the case of Calvino's novel. Instead, she is asked to adopt the perspective of the "hero", as Iser says, or perhaps the anti-hero in this case. It is through her adoption of this perspective that the reader is able to access and understand Sartre's thesis regarding the nature of the human condition. The use of the novel format for the communication of this philosophical thesis is effective, appropriate, and perhaps even unavoidable. Because "la nausée" is an existential, individualized perception of the world, it is not something that could be easily expressed in a treatise, at least not with the same sense of impact and empathy which the reader gains from the novel. Sartre's choice of the novel is therefore structurally and topically appropriate; nonetheless, he chooses to make it a *roman à thèse* to ensure

that the reader's role in the development of meaning is sufficiently restricted that his philosophical thesis will be communicated, provided she chooses to accept Roquentin's perspective.

The proponents of the traditional interpretive paradigm, of course, are not pleased with this sort of approach. La nausée is not a treatise, and the traditional paradigm does not want the reader to have any role in meaning development: meaning ought to be inherently available to the competent reader. However, La nausée, even though it is in the novel format, is much closer to the preferred philosophical treatise than one might think. Although the reader participates in the text to a certain extent, her involvement is restricted by the text's intentional structure. That is, the reader must be involved due to the literary form itself, but Sartre has designed the novel so that her involvement is restricted to what Iser called a yes/no decision. No, I am not willing to adopt Roquentin's perspective, I cannot understand what he's talking about, and I think this is quite an odd novel; or yes; I am willing to adopt Roquentin's perspective and therefore to access his thoughts (and Sartre's) about the burden of existence.

## **ALBERT CAMUS**

Camus began writing drama in 1934 for a theatre company in Algiers. When Camus moved to Paris in 1940, he began to develop a philosophical literature that concentrated on social and moral issues, a group of concerns which arose at least in part from his experience of war. Camus' writings focus on humanity: the nature of the human experience, man's place in the world, justice and injustice, and other fundamental moral considerations. L'étranger and Le mythe de Sisyphe were both published in 1942. These early and definitive works were followed by La Peste in 1947, L'homme révolté in 1951, and La chute in 1956. Camus died in 1960, in an automobile accident.

Camus did study philosophy and was grouped with other philosophers under the umbrella term "existentialist" (much like the term "reader response criticism" refers to a wide variety of theorists). Camus never considered himself to be an existentialist, and so he rejected the categorization and strove to overcome it. Camus' writing is clearly different from traditional or academic philosophy, which explains the traditional paradigm's difficulty in accommodating his work. Camus succeeded in achieving a fusion of philosophical and literary elements by demonstrating the profound influence of philosophical thought on his literary writings.

Although Camus didn't consider himself a professional philosopher and never presented a complete philosophical program, his novels, essays, and plays, clearly espouse a specific world view which can accurately be described as a philosophy. Camus himself clearly believed that literary forms were appropriate modes of

philosophical expression, and specifically mentions the novel format which he chose for L'étranger: "A novel is never anything but a philosophy expressed in images. . .And in a good novel the philosophy has disappeared into the images." (Camus 1969, 199) Camus has been marginalized because his oeuvre is primarily literary (novels, plays, essays). I will show that Camus' L'étranger is undeniably philosophical. Rather than asserting ideas as a philosophical treatise might, Camus' novels exhibit those ideas via literary elements such as character and plot.

I will argue in the forthcoming analysis that L'étranger, in contrast with La nausée, is not a *roman à thèse*, and instead takes full advantage of the tools the novel format allows: L'étranger includes well-developed characters, primary as well as secondary, and the plot and action are much more dramatically presented. In contrast to Roquentin, as I will argue, Camus' character, Meursault, demonstrates the absurdity of existence without completely separating himself from society and others. First, however, after a summary of L'étranger, I introduce Inge Crosman Wimmers' poetics of reading the novel in order to demonstrate how L'étranger, despite not being a *roman à thèse*, can yet have a didactic purpose without abandoning its fictional, novelistic structure.

### **L'étranger: a summary**

L'étranger is a narrative of a young man, Meursault, and the chain of circumstances that lead him to be condemned for murder. Written as a straightforward narrative from the first person, the novel opens just after the death of Meursault's mother. After Meursault's mother has been buried, the narrative follows his day to day



life for a time, describing his outings with his girlfriend, Marie, and his interactions with his neighbours, especially: Raymond, a violent man who is suspected of being a pimp; and Salamano, an old man whose primary companion is an old dog, which he beats incessantly. Other secondary characters include: Celeste, who runs the restaurant Meursault frequents; Emmanuel, a co-worker; and Masson, Raymond's friend.

The climax of the novel occurs at almost precisely the halfway point. Meursault and Marie are invited by Raymond to Masson's beach house. Raymond is being followed by a group of Arabs whose sister he has beaten. On the beach, there is a violent confrontation, and Raymond is injured by an Arab's knife. While Raymond is seeking medical help, Meursault takes a walk alone on the beach, encounters another Arab, and with the gun Raymond has given him to hold, shoots the Arab five times and kills him.

The remainder of the novel describes Meursault's experience in jail and his progression through the legal system. Here the narrative's time line accelerates, and months pass by very quickly. The action in this second half is reduced significantly, as the reader gains greater access to Meursault's inner thoughts. The focus of the second half of the novel is on Meursault's interrogation by the investigating judge and by his lawyer, as well as on the actual court case. The novel concludes just after Meursault's appeal has been rejected; he has been sentenced to death, and he is talking with the prison chaplain, whom he has refused to see several times. Meursault explodes at the chaplain, detailing the numerous absurdities of his situation and especially of the arguments made against him in court. After the chaplain leaves in tears, Meursault

feels that he has emptied himself of anger, and is now open to the “tendre indifférence du monde.” (186)

L'étranger shares La nausée's categorization as literature of the absurd. The novel has been most frequently described as a fictional statement of Camus' thoughts regarding nihilism: the world, reality and society, are devoid of meaning, which results in man's sense of complete alienation. These same ideas were presented non-fictionally in Le mythe de Sisyphe, which is often considered a companion piece to L'étranger. In Le mythe de Sisyphe, Camus explores the problem of suicide, which arises from man's experience of the absurd. The search for order and clarity which is an inherent part of the human experience will necessarily be futile, and the searcher will necessarily encounter a sense of the absurd as a result. The temptation to commit suicide is a consequence of this realization.

Those who feel the impact of the absurd, Camus argues, do not seek explanation or resolution, but rather seek to experience or to describe, because an explanation is simply not available. Because of the absurdity of existence, and the lack of meaning in life, the search for explanatory principles is futile. Those who recognize the absurd identify the futility and rely therefore on their own experience and their ability to describe their experience. This is the closest thing to an explanatory principle that the absurd man is going to get. “Pour l'homme absurde, il ne s'agit plus d'expliquer et de résoudre, mais d'éprouver et de décrire.” (Camus 1942, 131)

I include these brief explanations of Camus' perception of the absurd as stated in Le mythe de Sisyphe in order to demonstrate the potential importance of his choice of

the novel format for L'Étranger. Because he does not believe explanatory solutions are viable, it may be that Camus considered a systematic of theoretical explanation of the absurd inappropriate or impossible. The novel format, which permits the reader to adopt the perspective of a character suffering from a sense of the absurd, enables her to experience that character's feelings, and to identify and empathize with him. This method maybe a more effective mode of communicating this particular philosophical idea.

However, such speculation regarding the necessity of the novel format for the expression of the idea of the absurd is premature. First, a reader-based analysis of the novel in question must be undertaken. I begin, however, with an explanation of Inge Crosman Wimmers' poetics of reading the novel. I believe her account of the role of frames of reference and conventions, as well as the importance of the development and disappointment of expectations, will effectively serve to illuminate the reader's experience of L'Étranger. Her account will also be useful in distinguishing L'Étranger from La nausée. They are both philosophical novels, but are in other ways very different, in terms of mode of expression, use of the novel format, and, ultimately, also in terms of their success as philosophical novels.

### ***Crosman Wimmers' poetics and reading L'Étranger***

Inge Crosman Wimmers, in her work Poetics of Reading, develops a poetics specifically to handle the reading experience of the novel. She argues that the novel requires a highly flexible poetics, because its reading is inherently open: "novels are not finished products but anticipate further action on the reader's part." (xvii) The author

of the novel is aware that concretizing activity will be undertaken by the reader, and must be prepared for it, but the reader activity is nonetheless controlled to a certain extent because the action which prompts the reader's concretization occurs within the text, its conventions and strategies. Therefore, like Iser, Crosman Wimmers develops an account of reading the novel that is both open in that the reader has some participatory latitude, and closed, because the textual content and structure rule out complete interpretive chaos.

Crosman Wimmers' frame of reference poetics are consistent with the event-based development of meaning and the temporal analysis of the reading process which has become familiar through the discussion of Iser. No approach to the reading process should be restrictive. Instead, through the recognition of the role of multiple frames of reference, both pre-existing and developing, in the reading experience, Crosman Wimmers creates a flexible poetics of reading which can account for various narrative structures and various readings of such.

Crosman Wimmers attempts to develop a poetics which will be sufficiently flexible to handle the broad range of reading experiences. Whereas my guiding principle in this thesis is Iser's reader response criticism, Crosman Wimmers bases her poetics on what she calls frames of reference. Frames of reference contribute greatly to the shaping of our reading experience, and are contributed by both the reader and the text itself. For example, when reading the novel, the reader invokes a set of genre conventions, and develops an appropriate set of expectations. When a reader picks up a novel, and recognizes it as such, she expects it to be a certain kind of book. This

conventional recognition creates expectations which shape her reading experience. This may well be the problem with the philosophical novels of Camus and Sartre: the reader's expectations of the conventional fictional novel are not entirely met, and she is unable to invoke a corresponding set of conventions and expectations. The reader, and the critic, is put off because her expectations are thwarted; however, as I have discussed at length in Iser's reader response criticism, it is the disappointment of expectations which prompts the reader's participation and creates the necessary context for her concretization activity and her assistance in the development of meaning.

The novel's frame of reference corresponds to the literary convention with which we are familiar: the "novel". The frames of reference possible in the reader's evaluation of the novel are multiple. The novel is first and foremost a work of fiction, and "knowing this prepares us for the kind of communication we are about to enter into and determines our disposition toward the text...we know that we are about to enter an imagined world, not one that has any existence prior to or independent of the act of imagination." (4) The novel sets up its own frame of reference via the use of narrative and other modes of fictional discourse, such as Roquentin's diary entries in La nausée.

I think it is possible that the category problem which is faced by both Camus and Sartre in the case of these particular novels is created by disappointment of expectations. Using the novel format invokes a particular frame of reference and a corresponding set of expectations, which may in part at least be disappointed by what the reader (including the critic) encounters in these philosophical narratives. As

Crosman Wimmers argues, narrative does not necessarily imply story-telling, but this is nonetheless what the reader expects. In the same way, the reader who approaches these novels with a philosophical frame of reference will also have her expectations dashed, as the narrative structure does not correspond to the typical philosophical treatise.

These two novels, therefore, fit with neither the literary nor the philosophical conventions, and their rehabilitation depends on a combinatory approach and the development of a new paradigm and a resultant new frame of reference. If the philosophical frame of reference, or the traditional philosophical paradigm, is expanded to include works which are not expressed in the expected treatise format, these works would not appear problematic to such an extent. (One could, of course, continue to dispute the merit of the philosophical *content* of these novels, but not their right to be considered as philosophical *works*, despite their literary form.)

In fact, Crosman Wimmers argues that frames of reference should not be restricted to conventional expectations. Instead, each novel is able to develop its own frame of reference "through narrative discourse and whatever other modes of discourse the narrator may use." (4) As a result, Crosman Wimmers argues, the reader's set of expectations is a combination of both her conventional knowledge and the frame of reference that the novel itself creates. If the reader's expectations are not met, however, frame of reference is still of importance: "Even when a novel frustrates such expectations, the anticipated frame of reference plays a role. It makes us aware of norm breaking and encourages us to piece together a story from even the most disjointed

narrative fragments.” (4) Such “norm breaking”, which, as I have explained, Iser believes is the purpose of the literary work, may actually serve as a clue to the reader that there is something to discover beyond the narrative itself. (Crosman Wimmers refers to Mary Louise Pratt, who calls this norm breaking “flouting”.) L'étranger and La nausée are examples of such “norm breaking”. They are consistent with neither literary nor philosophical conventions and as a result are claimed by neither.

However, Crosman Wimmers does not restrict her account of the novel and its poetics to the narrative creation of a fictional world: “the discourse of novels is not confined to setting up and talking about the fictional world: narrative discourse can give way to explanatory, didactic, ideological, or other modes of discourse.” (14) The example Crosman Wimmers uses is that of Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu, where the narrator breaks into the narrative discourse in order to philosophize in a serious way. Although this would appear to be inconsistent with the conventions of narrative discourse, as the philosophy in the case is presented in such a way that it appears to the reader to follow the conventions of philosophical discourse, she will, or at least should be able to, switch frames of reference and evaluate the discourse appropriately.

I would argue that this is certainly the case with Sartre’s La nausée. The narrative of Roquentin’s life as presented in his diary is frequently interspersed with clearly philosophical statements regarding the nature of existence, which one would not expect to find among the minutiae of a diary. These philosophical interludes occasionally cause disbelief in the reader, as they seem inconsistent with journalistic

narrative discourse. If the reader fails to adopt a new frame of reference, this narrative shift may contribute to the reader's rejection of the protagonist's perspective, as described in Iser's account of the *roman à thèse*.

I believe, however, that Camus' L'étranger does not require a shift in frame of reference as does La nausée. Meursault's story is presented in a consistent narrative voice, and does not slip out the fictive context into serious discourse. I do not think that L'étranger is a *roman à thèse*, and as I will illustrate, I believe that it is a more successful example of the philosophical novel because it does succeed in communicating philosophical notions by altering but not frustrating reader expectations, and by effectively combining philosophy and narrative so that the reader is not required to continually shift frames of reference.

The difference between the reader's experience of Roquentin and that of Meursault is based on the mode of expression. The *roman à thèse* of Roquentin eliminates the majority of the gap-filling required by the reader. The philosophical novel of Meursault enables the reader to fulfill a process of reality-building by the "reader's active participation in filling in gaps or in identifying through empathy, with fictional experience." (21) The experience of empathy with a character is key to the reader's understanding of Camus' philosophical thought through Meursault. Although she certainly finds him to be an odd person, she is led to empathize with him and therefore to understand the nature of his experience.

L'étranger is a successful philosophical novel due to its ability to manipulate the reader's expectations and also the set of conventions she invokes when faced with the



novel format. The reader's basic set of expectations is met by the consistent use of the conventional novel format: the narrative voice remains constant throughout and the plot is well-developed, and includes characters, both primary and secondary, that are drawn in some detail. This initial fulfillment of expectations, however, serves almost to lull the reader into a false sense of security, before other elements of the novel thwart those expectations. Because L'étranger is truly consistent with the conventional novel format, the reader initially settles in expecting a "story telling" type of narrative, which would include characters she could understand and with whom she could empathize. Instead, she is met with Meursault, who behaves in every situation in a way which clashes with her expectations of acceptable or normative social behaviour. Therefore, the reader has dual expectations: that this is a novel, and that its characters will behave in a certain way. One set of expectations is fulfilled, whereas the other is not, and this inconsistency prods the reader again to attempt to make sense of the novel.

An additional spur to reader activity is the subversive way in which the thesis of the novel is presented. I think it is clear that L'étranger has a didactic purpose, despite the fact that it is not a *roman à thèse* and contains no direct statements of philosophical purpose. The message, however, about the absurdity of existence is illustrated only, and is never directly stated. As a result, the reader is prevented from switching frames of reference as she did in the case of La nausée. At least in that case, she could easily recognize the presentation of the philosophy and adjust her reading accordingly. However, in L'étranger, she must be more canny in her recognition of hints regarding the philosophical idea. Her sense-making activity is of a much different sort than in

Sartre's novel. As I argued previously, as a *roman à thèse*, the reader of La nausée is required only to adopt Roquentin's perspective in order to concretize him and hence to access Sartre's philosophical message. The reader of L'étranger must take her sense-making activity much further. She must concretize the indeterminacies represented in Meursault's behaviour, along with other indeterminacies, and as a result of her concretizations and their failure to fit with the set of conventions and expectations she has developed while reading the text, recognize the need to delve further. It is the norm-breaking nature of the text, the reader's realization that there is something more for her beyond the plot and its characters, that permits her to access the philosophical ideas.

As the reader experiences L'étranger, she feels Meursault's sense of detachment and his inability to integrate himself into society. This awareness is created not only through her sharing of Meursault's experiences, but also because she feels separated from Meursault. His actions confuse her, she does not understand his thoughts, he is just so *strange*. The reader feels Meursault's alienation from society, which is mirrored in her alienation from him as a character, and hence from the text. The unsettled environment created by Camus is intentional: the reader is not at ease while reading, and she is therefore prodded to achieve understanding of the broader issues. She cannot focus solely on the plot because she finds it so bizarre. It does not meet her expectations of what the plot of a novel, or its character, should look like. What is this about? What is wrong with this man? Why doesn't he act the way I think he should? The reader is off balance, and therefore takes a more active role in the text, attempting

to make sense of a book apparently lacking in sense. By separating the reader from her expectations, the novel creates in her a shared experience of the absurd.

L'étranger differs from La nausée is that it is not a *roman à thèse*. The narrative flow is never interrupted by direct, overt statements of philosophical import. The reader is faced with indeterminacies over and above the decision regarding her acceptance or rejection of the protagonist's perspective. Meursault's behaviour itself requires continual concretization. If indeterminate elements are caused by a rupture between the narrative and the reader's expectations of it, then Meursault is continually behaving in a way which runs counter to the reader's expectations. From the very first phrase of the novel, "Aujourd'hui, maman est morte." (9), the reader is forced to reconcile her expectations of so-called "normal" conduct upon the death of one's mother with what Meursault actually does. This attempt at reconciliation is underlined in the second part of the novel, when Meursault is tried for murder not based on his actions on the beach, but based on his failure to cry at his mother's burial. The sense-making activity that the reader is forced to undertake represents her reader response criticism-like participation in the narrative and, in addition, is the access route to Camus' well-buried thesis regarding the nature of the absurd.

The closest Camus ever comes to a philosophical statement is made by Meursault, reflecting on his time in prison. It was difficult at first, he explains, because "Au debut de ma détention, pourtant, ce qui a été le plus dur c'est que j'avais des pensées d'homme libre." (119) When he first was detained, Meursault thought like a free man. Now that he is accustomed to his cell, he no longer has these thoughts of

freedom, and thinks instead like a prisoner. Camus is most likely communicating the shift in perspective which comes about when one recognizes the absurdity of life and no longer attempts to think or act as if free.

This interpretation requires reader concretization, and is to be sharply contrasted with Sartre's novel, in which Roquentin interrupts his journalistic narrative to make direct statements about nausea and the burden of existence. Even if the reader rejects Meursault's perspective, there are still numerous indeterminacies. If the reader rejects Meursault's perspective, she may fail to assist in the development of Camus' underlying philosophical message, but the narrative itself will still be available and meaningful to her. In contrast, because the thesis of nausea so dominates Sartre's work, if the reader refuses to adopt Roquentin's perspective, there will be no sense-making activity remaining and the novel as a whole will be effectively lost to her. The philosophy is there, but it is in the indeterminate elements of the novel, and cannot be actualized without the reader's participation and her empathetic response to Meursault as a character.

His failure to meet with expectations is something of which Meursault is distantly aware. For example, when he meets Marie again and begins an affair with her, he recognizes her shock when she discovers that his mother died only the day before. (35) When Salamano loses his dog, which he continually swore at and beat, Meursault, hearing Salamano cry, thinks of his mother, though he's not sure why. (66) It is almost as if some part of Meursault recognizes that this was the reaction expected of him when his mother died. Salamano mourns an animal he didn't even seem to like

very much, but Meursault was unable to cry over his mother's casket: even further than that, the notion did not even occur to him.

Although Meursault is aware of these expectations, they do not make sense to him. He is frequently surprised by questions he feels to be absurdities: his lawyer asks him if he felt any sadness on the day of his mother's burial, and he feels that he would have been embarrassed to ask such a question. (101) His shocking statement on the following page once again forces the reader to reconcile her expectations of "normal" behaviour with what Meursault actually says. Asked if he loved his mother, he replies that of course he loved his mother but that such an answer doesn't mean anything. Instead, he claims, "Tous les êtres sains avaient plus ou moins souhaité la mort de ceux qu'ils aimaient." (102) This statement not only forces the reader into sense-making activity by filling the gap left by the shattering of her expectations, it also forces her into self-evaluation. Does she agree with this apparently horrifying statement? How can it be so? How can she make such a thought fit into her frame of reference of normal human behaviour? What will she expect next from Meursault, or is she better off to dispense with expectations altogether? As Iser explains: "the reader himself is forced to abandon every connection he had anticipated; and so as each expectation is drained, and each link severed, the senselessness of life is transplanted into an *experience* for the reader." (Iser 1978, 221)

Therefore, L'étranger, although it has a similar didactic purpose as La nausée, accomplishes that purpose in a much different way. The novel, as Crosman Wimmers' poetics illustrates, takes advantage of the reader's natural tendency to invoke literary

conventions and develop a frame of reference, including a set of expectations, which are based on pre-existing knowledge of conventions but which also develop as she reads the text. The novel takes advantage of these reader tendencies by thwarting them at every turn. Although the novel is consistent with literary conventions, no other reader expectations are fulfilled. In addition, L'étranger accomplishes its didactic purpose not overtly, as did Sartre's La nausée, but implicitly, both through its manipulation of expectations and its shattering of various norms.

### **A "good" philosophical novel?**

It is clear from the above analyses, therefore, that Camus and Sartre both wrote novels with didactic purposes in that each communicated a similar philosophical idea. However, it is equally clear that the philosophical purpose was accomplished via quite different methods, while remaining consistent in the use of the novel format. In contrast to L'étranger, where the philosophy lurked beneath the story of Meursault, in La nausée, Roquentin seems contrived to bear the weight of the philosophy, rather than to serve as a conduit to the philosophy. The question remains, therefore, as to which mode of expression of philosophical ideas is preferable: the *roman à thèse*, or the manipulation of reader expectations and literary norms and conventions.

In La nausée, because the plot is subordinate to the philosophical goal, the indeterminate elements are few, and may in fact be insufficient to engage the reader and convince her to adopt Roquentin's perspective. Roquentin's philosophical idea, his nausea, is clearly presented in his detailed accounts of his experiences. Therefore, the reader is given all the necessary material quite directly, and "there is nothing left for

him to do" (Iser 1974, 275) Because the plot is thin and the philosophy apparent, the reader of Sartre's philosophical novel has few opportunities to undertake imaginative sense-making. The reader does not have to attempt to understand Roquentin's experiences and feelings, because he tells her all she needs to know in great detail.

Although these techniques are consistent with the didactic purpose of the *roman à thèse*, Sartre risks alienating his reader. The reader who is predisposed to adopt the protagonist's perspective may in fact be more easily reached with the treatise format. The reader who does not have sufficient philosophical background to slide easily into Roquentin's shoes finds that the novel has little else to offer her. Therefore, the novel seems to fail on two counts. Because it is a novel, it is rejected by the traditional philosophical paradigm as not philosophical enough. However, because its didactic philosophical purpose is evident and predominant, it is rejected by the literary reader as too philosophical. The failure, I feel, is Sartre's unwillingness or inability to truly fuse the philosophy into the literary format.

Albert Camus, in a short review of La nausée published in his Lyrical and Critical Essays, also argues that the novel falls short in both literary and philosophical terms. Camus believes that any novel expresses some sort of philosophy (because some sense of world view will necessarily be included), but that a good philosophical novel will melt the philosophy into the novelistic structure, so that the philosophical import is not immediately evident. If the philosophy should "spill over into the characters and action", the plot will be sorely affected, and the novel as a whole will fail. (Camus 1969, 199) Although Camus does not explicitly mention the reader's experience of such a

text, his analysis of the failed philosophical novel clearly shows that an imbalance between elements of the novel format and the inclusion of philosophical ideas will negatively impact the reader's experience, due to the thwarting of her expectations, be they based on philosophical or literary conventions. The reader is unable to achieve the "directed creation" Sartre had hoped for her due to the "noticeable lack of balance between the ideas in the work and the images that express them." (Camus 1969, 201) Camus argues that Sartre failed to achieve a reconciliation of the two elements, philosophical and literary. The delicate balance between philosophy and plot is not achieved: "the balance has been broken...the theories do damage to the life." (Camus 1969, 199)

Because Sartre fails to seamlessly reconcile the philosophical and literary elements of the novel, the reader is uncomfortable making the jump from philosophy to plot and back again. Using Crosman Wimmers' terms, the reader must continually shift her frame of reference in order to appropriately evaluate and therefore understand what is being presented to her. This, however, does not correspond to the wandering viewpoint, which Iser used to account for the reader's activity when her expectations are not met. The wandering viewpoint describes the temporal nature of the reader's experience as she forms expectations regarding the fictional aspect of literature. She does not know what will happen next, but nonetheless creates a set of expectations. The wandering viewpoint, then, is what pulls the reader through the literary text.

In contrast, what Sartre requires of his reader is a continual shifting of frames of reference. She must assess the text first as novelistic and fictional, then as statement of



philosophical import, then again as fictional. She is effectively prevented from creating a set of expectations as her “wanderings” are constantly being abruptly halted. As Camus argues, Sartre allows the theories to dominate the literature, and therefore the philosophy to overcome the story. The literature is therefore damaged by the philosophy and is as a result no longer able to serve as access to Sartre’s ideas about the absurd. Although La nausée is of value both philosophically and in literary terms, because the philosophy and the literature don’t match up, Camus believes the whole must be considered unsuccessful: “Both faces of the novel are equally convincing. But taken together, they don’t add up to a work of art: the passage from one to the other is too rapid, too unmotivated, to evoke in the reader the deep conviction that makes art of the novel.” (Camus 1969, 200)

Therefore, in terms of the combinatory form of the philosophical novel, Camus’ approach would appear to be preferable as it has a greater chance of effectively communicating its philosophical idea to the reader. This is an ironic conclusion, as I believe that Sartre’s La nausée is actually much closer to the treatise format than one might expect, and certainly more treatise-like than L’être étranger. The clear expression of philosophical statements in Sartre’s novel would seem to be preferred by the traditional philosophical paradigm, as they appear directly accessible to the knowledgeable reader. However, Sartre’s use of the novel format invokes certain literary conventions and their accompanying reader expectations ends by distancing the reader from the philosophy as a result of her inability to reconcile the continual shift of conventions and frames of reference. Rather than being a work of philosophical fiction, La nausée is more like a

serial rather than homogeneous compilation of fiction and philosophy. The two conventions are not successfully blended.

In contrast, L'Étranger maintains a consistent tone throughout by holding to the conventions invoked by the novel format. The reader certainly cannot approach L'Étranger complacently, for the novel keeps her off balance by exploiting the expectations she brings to the reading experience as well as those she develops as she reads. However, the wandering viewpoint is able to develop in Camus' novel because the philosophical ideas are inherent in the reader's understanding of Meursault as a character. She is not required to continually shift her conventional expectations. Although these expectations are certainly not all met, the reader does not have to refer to a different set of conventional expectations. Instead, Camus exploits her sense of the conventional, and does not offer an alternate set of conventions when he shatters her expectations of the initial novel convention. As a result, the reader recognizes that her expectations will not be fulfilled, and that the text is rejecting norms; further, she recognizes that it is her responsibility to fill the resultant void. She does so by identifying, and therefore assisting in the development of, the philosophical meaning of the novel.

Therefore, I conclude that Sartre's La nausée, although the closer cousin to the philosophical treatise, is the less successful work in this context because of its failure to combine philosophy and literature in such a way as to facilitate the reader's access. In contrast, L'Étranger, which would certainly be evaluated as the more literary work and therefore less likely to be considered philosophical, effectively incorporates philosophy

into the literary format of the novel and takes advantage of the reader's conventional expectations to assist her in her access to the philosophical ideas, which certainly are less evident than those in La nausée. This reader-based analysis of these two texts serves several purposes. The traditional philosophical paradigm must be rendered sufficiently flexible to accommodate works that exceed the confines of the traditional treatise, but which nonetheless communicate fundamental philosophical ideas to their readers. In addition, proximity to the philosophical treatise does not necessarily make a work more successful. The reader's experience of a philosophical text will be different if it is expressed in a literary form, but this experience is not guaranteed to be an effective one. Sometimes works of philosophical literature fail to fulfill their dual purposes as philosophy *and* as literature and may be more effectively expressed as treatises. The seamless combination of two conventional genres is not an easy task.

## V. PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS* AND READER RESPONSE CRITICISM

Plato's *Phaedrus* lends itself particularly well to this analysis for several reasons. First, it is generally accepted as a philosophical work, and does not generate the same sort of controversy as the philosophical novels of Camus and Sartre or as Nietzsche's Zarathustra. It is a text that the traditional philosophical paradigm does not want to dismiss as non-philosophical. However, the *Phaedrus* is nonetheless a source of some controversy, because it seems not to be particularly well composed, and even worse, it appears to be internally inconsistent. Much effort, then, has been spent trying to make the *Phaedrus* fit into the traditional philosophical paradigm, and trying to identify a coherent line of argumentation that would mesh with a systematic account of Plato's work as a whole. I will argue that this approach to the *Phaedrus* is inappropriate and bound to be unsuccessful, for the apparent inconsistencies are intentional and the text is structured deliberately to create a certain type of reader experience. Again, throughout my analysis of the *Phaedrus*, my focus will not be directly on the dialogue's meaning, but rather on its purpose and its effect on the reader.

Of course, considerable efforts have been made to reconcile the various apparent inconsistencies in the *Phaedrus*; both the series of inconsistent arguments and the form/content problem which arises with the rejection of the written word have been much debated. Most prominent among these efforts are the studies of Eric A. Havelock, who bases his reconciliation on the oral tradition of Greek society and what he perceives to be Plato's efforts at the development of a more literate society; and, more recently, Giovanni Reale, whose distance from the traditional interpretive paradigm of

Plato is based on his inclusion of the Unwritten Doctrines, as received from Plato's students, in his interpretation of the Platonic corpus. Each approach has merit in handling some of the apparent inconsistencies in Plato's dialogues as a whole, and also specifically the *Phaedrus*. However, my focus is on the reader's experience of the text, of this particular text. Issues such as orality, the Unwritten Doctrines, the *Seventh Letter* and its authenticity, would force me into a content-based analysis, rather than a phenomenological, reader-experience-based analysis. In order to consider the *Phaedrus* in a manner consistent with Iser's principles of reader response criticism, I must be concerned first and foremost with what the text does, rather than speculating about what it means, which would tend to shift the focus back to the archeological approach. Havelock and Reale especially make some compelling arguments which contribute greatly to the overall assessment of Plato's dialogues, but in this study they would only serve to distract from what must be a clearly reader-based analysis.

Before beginning the analysis of the *Phaedrus*, however, I make some general comments on Plato's work. I will consider first the nature of the dialogue format and consider why Plato might have chosen to write in this way. Plato's rejection of poetry and the poets in the *Republic* especially, but also elsewhere, is crucial to any sort of form/content discussion of Plato's work, for it appears to be yet another contradiction that Plato rejects poetry and yet writes in a literary form.

### ***The Dialogue form***

The dialogue form, although some find it troublesome, represents an extremely flexible choice of form of philosophical expression. By writing dialogues, Plato is able

to use a wide variety of techniques of both poetry and prose. He can construct a clear, logical, straightforward argument and combine it with an evocative poetic description, or a rollicking bit of humour, without the need for a change of mode of expression. The dialogues are rather like philosophical dramas, and provide Plato with substantial latitude.

Plato's dialogues consist generally of conversations between Socrates and various interlocutors. Many philosophical issues are discussed in a wide variety of settings. Each dialogue has characters, a usually thin veneer of plot designed to bring the characters together into discussion (Socrates frequently meets his interlocutors while out for a walk), and some physical setting, usually in Athens or the surrounding countryside. The dialogue allows Plato to demonstrate what he believed to be the proper method of philosophizing: enabling the development of knowledge through a series of questions and answers. In the dialogues, Socrates does not straightforwardly argue his point of view, but rather leads his interlocutor through the knowledge-gaining process.

The dialogues, then, are dialectical, both internally and externally. That is, the dialogues are accounts of how Socrates interacts with various characters, enabling them to gain knowledge and understanding. However, the dialogues also establish a dialectical relationship with the reader; she tends to identify with Socrates' interlocutors, and undergoes the same question and answer process as she tries to understand Socrates' meaning. The dialogue form is effective because of the effort it requires of its character-participants and reader-participants. The dialectic nature of the

dialogues is “like the gardener who aids his plants but is unable to do for them what they must do themselves.” (Hamilton xiv-xv) By choosing the dialogue form, Plato provides his reader with the tools she needs to develop true understanding and knowledge, but, like the characters in the dialogues, the effort required is still the responsibility of the reader.

As I said earlier, the dialogues are like philosophical dramas: indeed, it is impossible to ignore the inherent sense of drama. The dialogues are scripts: lively, playful, and character-driven, and include settings or scenes, and unity of time and place. Although reader and critic both occasionally yearn for a straightforward, treatise-like statement of ideas, it is vital to recognize that the dialogue format is essential to the philosophy, not accidental. Therefore, the drama cannot be ignored in an appropriate analysis of the dialogues. Surely Plato’s choice of a mode of philosophical expression is not arbitrary, and it is not likely that he wrote the dialogues because he didn’t know how to write more straightforwardly. Therefore the elements which enhance and complicate the dialogues must be considered if a full understanding is to be gained. As James Arieti puts it, “Inasmuch as Plato wrote dialogues, don’t we owe him the attempt to understand his meaning in the context of his chosen medium?” (Arieti 5)

There is some debate as to the relationship between form and content in Plato’s dialogues. Because the dialogues are both inherently dramatic and inherently philosophical, which aspect dominates? James Arieti argues that the dialogues are not only dramatic, but are actually dramas, and even further that the philosophical

arguments are subordinated to the drama. Arieti bases his argument on his evaluation of a series of apparently fallacious arguments in dialogues such as the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedo*. As I will show in the case of the *Phaedrus*, such arguments cause considerable consternation among some philosophical critics, especially those who hold to the traditional philosophical paradigm. However, Arieti believes that such arguments have dramatic purposes: that is, a fallacious argument might represent not a logical slip on Plato's part but rather a dramatic and structural requirement.

Like me, Arieti is attempting a perspectival shift. It is not fruitful to attempt to make Plato's dialogues fit into a certain conception of what philosophical expression should be. These attempts, Arieti argues, are motivated by our reverence for Plato as a philosopher and our fear of the consequences should some of his arguments be shown to be nonsensical. The alternative which Arieti presents for his analysis focuses on Plato's purposeful choice of the dramatic form of the dialogue:

Instead of expending our energies in seeking to show by some tangled ingenuity that the argument actually makes sense or could have made sense if Plato had but stopped elsewhere, we need to ask a different question: why did Plato have Socrates or another character make this statement? What can Plato's purpose have been in putting so faulty an argument in the mouth of an interlocutor? (Arieti 5)

I certainly agree that Plato's dialogues should be approached as deliberate expressions of philosophy. That is, I think it inappropriate and dangerous to dismiss the dialogue form as an unimportant annoyance. The problems which are encountered in the analysis of some apparent inconsistencies should also be considered as deliberate. Why would Plato include such elements, and what relationship might his choice have with



the dialogue format? The key, I believe, is a recognition of Plato's belief in the importance of the question and answer method of philosophy.

However, I disagree with Arieti when he claims that the arguments are subordinated to the drama. Although the dramatic elements of the dialogues are undoubtedly essential to their understanding, and although the drama clearly is the vehicle which bears the philosophical arguments, it should not dominate them. The drama of the dialogues is but one aspect of the meaning they impart, and Arieti's exhortation to approach the dialogues as theatre-goers swings the pendulum too far away from the "logical nitpicking of most commentators" (5) and implies rather too casual an evaluation of some very challenging philosophy.

A more balanced assessment of the form/content relationship, I believe, would be one such as that of Michael Frede. Frede does recognize that the dialogues are literary works of "dramatic fiction" (201), but does not feel it necessary to assign either the dramatic form or the philosophical arguments a dominant role. It is a mistake, Frede argues, to assume that the dialogues are literary and the philosophy is accidental, or that the dialogues are philosophical arguments and that the dramatic or literary elements are only "adornment or embellishment which, as philosophers, we can safely disregard." (201) The two elements, philosophy and drama, are inextricably connected and we must therefore take account of each. The effort to separate the philosophy and the literature, the dialogues and the drama, fails to recognize the deliberate stylistic choice which Plato clearly made.

Because Plato's dialogues are literary works, they contain the "gappy" structure which Iser described as inherent to literary expression. Like any other fiction, the dialogues are not exhaustively explicit, for this would be impossible. Gaps are created when the dialogues are unclear, and the apparent inconsistencies seem to be irreconcilable. As I will demonstrate in the analysis of the *Phaedrus*, however, the apparent inconsistencies are actually indeterminacies which must be concretized by the reader. The effort Iser described, which kept the reader of a literary text from getting bored, is required by Plato in order to make his reader philosophize. Plato sets up his dialogues so that his reader/spectator must engage with the text, must process and synthesize it, and therefore must become herself a philosopher, jointly responsible for the meaning which develops. As readers, we must digest what we receive in dialogue format in order to break down the drama, the characters and other idiosyncrasies and attempt to arrive at "Plato's philosophy".

Therefore, the standards of a successful, well-written treatise cannot appropriately be applied to Plato's dialogues. The dialogues have a different form, different goals, a different impact, and a different relationship with the reader. Plato wanted to create a situation in which his spectators felt compelled to answer questions and resolve inconsistencies personally, thereby becoming themselves philosophers. In order to create such a situation, Plato had to write in a form which allowed both uncertainty and inconsistency without compromising his own philosophical integrity. That is, if he wrote uncertain and inconsistent treatises, he would have been deemed a

bad philosopher. In contrast, these characteristics, when displayed in dialogue form, can be considered idiosyncrasies of the drama, the characters, or the format itself.

### ***Plato's rejection of poetry***

Plato excludes the poets from the Republic because they do not possess any form of true knowledge. Poets are *inspired* to write their poems, and therefore are not in their senses when they write. (*Ion* 534a-535a) In some way, therefore, poets are 'out of their minds', and their writings are not manifestations of knowledge. The work of poets such as Homer and Hesiod should be excluded from the city, as they are likely to lead young people into error. (*Republic* II 378d) Both Homer and Hesiod compose "false" stories, which misrepresent the true nature of the gods, and young people are not able to make the distinction between fable and actual truth, or between allegory and non-allegory. The primary reason expressed in the dialogue for the exclusion of the poets from the city, therefore, is fear for the well-being of the young people, who are at risk for corruption due to the impiety and falsity of the poets.

Imitative art, because it is mimetic, is far removed from the truth: "poetry, and in general the mimetic art, produces a product that is far removed from truth. . .remote from intelligence." (*Republic* X 603b) If any imitative artist really had genuine knowledge, he would devote himself to *real* things. (*Republic* X 599b) For example, Homer imitates the way in which physicians talk. If Homer really had the knowledge of a physician, he would be a physician himself. The imitator knows nothing of reality, but only of appearance. Therefore, the imitative artist fosters corruption in people not possessed with sufficient knowledge: "the mimetic poet sets up in each individual soul

a vicious constitution by fashioning phantoms far removed from reality." (*Republic* X 605b)

Most attempts at a literary analysis of Plato's dialogues struggle with the rejection of the poets in the *Republic*, for it seems to be a tremendous inconsistency, for is not Plato himself somewhat of a poet? The dialogues themselves are intensely dramatic and certainly literary, so how to reconcile the content of the *Republic* with its form of expression? Arieti argues that the apparent inconsistencies are strictly purposeful, not mere philosophical "slip-ups" on Plato's part. There must be a reason why Plato not only *allows* inconsistencies to creep into his work, but *calls attention* to them.

...he does unmistakably and loudly call the discrepancy into question, and no reader or audience could fail to observe it. So there must be a meaning in the disparity, and, I think, the meaning is a clue to how we should interpret this and perhaps all the dialogues. (Arieti 231)

Inconsistencies in the dialogues provoke both philosophical activity and discussion by Plato's readers or audience. The inconsistencies are so obvious that almost any spectator would seize upon them and be prodded to correct them, and therefore to explore the issue further in order to produce her own, consistent explanation.

I agree with Arieti, and argue that the inconsistency in the *Republic*, like those of the *Phaedrus* which I will examine shortly, is an intentional aspect of the dialogue's structure which deliberately requires reader involvement. The apparent inconsistency, so jarringly evident, operates in fact like an Iserian indeterminacy, as the reader is forced to reconcile several conflicting issues which arise: first, did Plato think his dialogues, written in a literary form, were likely to corrupt young people?; second, if

Plato truly believed that poetic expression did not represent a valid form of knowledge, why did he write dialogues, which are literary forms of expression? Did he not think he was communicating knowledge in the dialogues?

Surely Plato could not have been unaware of the conflict between what he said and how he said it. It seems most likely, then, as I will argue in detail in the context of the *Phaedrus*, that the most troubling inconsistent elements of the dialogues, in this case the rejection of the poets, may have been a deliberate attempt by Plato to force his reader to evaluate more carefully. Clearly Plato felt the ideal setting for philosophical learning would be in an Academy, where teacher and student could relate directly to one another and the question and answer process could be the focus. The written dialogues do not permit this process; however, Plato could have his reader follow a series of questions and answers through the dramatic dialogues, and also provide her with a set of implicit problems, which she could not fail to notice, which would require her to undertake her own critical evaluation beyond the arguments presented. Therefore, the most significant inconsistency in Plato's dialogues, the problem which has troubled so many scholars, may have been designed to create just such a response: ". . .the apparent inconsistency between the context of the *Republic* and the medium of the *Republic* challenges us to engage in active philosophy ourselves." (Friedländer 231) The medium, therefore, is designed to turn the reader to philosophy, and to foster philosophical thought.

### ***Plato's Phaedrus: A summary***

Plato's *Phaedrus* is considered one of his greatest dialogues, but it is also one of his most problematic, as it appears to the critics to be internally inconsistent. I will show that the *Phaedrus* is problematic only when traditional interpretive paradigms are applied to it. When viewed as a philosophical argument, the *Phaedrus* is expected to be cogent, coherent, logical, and consistent. Frustratingly, it is none of these things. As a result, the natural tendency, when operating under the traditional treatise-influenced philosophical interpretive paradigm, is to attempt to impose unity and order upon the dialogue. This is a tendency which Iser discusses at length: faced with that which does not appear to make sense, we try to massage the textual evidence until we are satisfied that we have infused some sort of internal consistency. However, when the interpretive paradigm is shifted and the *Phaedrus* is viewed according to Iser's reader response criticism, the reader's sense-making activity is explained, and her failure to succeed at this sense-making is shown to be an intentional aspect of the text. I will begin with a brief summary of the dialogue before considering how a reader response criticism analysis eases some of the above concerns.

The *Phaedrus* opens as Socrates meets Phaedrus and joins him for a walk. Phaedrus has been with Lysias and recounts for Socrates their conversations. The setting is exceptionally casual, as Phaedrus and Socrates sit on a grassy bank and exchange speeches about love. The dialogue is divided into two apparently tenuously related sections. The first consists of a series of speeches on the nature of love. The second discusses the art of speaking and the nature of the written word.

In the first speech of the first section, Phaedrus, after some encouragement from Socrates, repeats Lysias' speech distinguishing the lover from the non-lover, concluding that the non-lover is to be preferred (230e-234c). Socrates then undertakes a commentary (234d-237a) on what Phaedrus has called a fine and exhaustive speech. Socrates argues that although he was only evaluating the speech as rhetoric, and not for content, he nonetheless finds it inadequate because it is both repetitive and extravagant.

Because he has argued that Phaedrus' speech (via Lysias) is inadequate, Socrates proposes one of his own regarding the lover vs. the non-lover (237a-241d). Socrates' speech enumerates all that is undesirable about the lover, and concludes that "the attentions of a lover carry no good will". (241c) Phaedrus expresses surprise that Socrates already reached a conclusion, as he expected that Socrates would provide a corresponding account of what is desirable of the non-lover. Socrates explains that he does not wish to "waste words" and that there is a corresponding good for every evil he detailed in the speech. However, at 242d, Socrates declares that his speech has put forth a "terrible theory", which is both foolish and blasphemous, for both he and Phaedrus have declared love to be an evil thing. The first two speeches, therefore, have been variations on the same error.

Socrates offers a second speech on the nature of love (244a-257b), one which he has from Stesichorus. This speech argues that it is not the case that the non-lover is preferable to the lover. Socrates recounts the "blessings great and glorious which will come to you from the friendship of a lover." (256e), and offers apologies to the god of love for the two previous speeches, blaming Lysias as the originator of the ideas.

However, when Phaedrus mentions that he saw Lysias criticized by a politician for being a “speech writer”, Socrates argues that this is not necessarily meant as a reproach. The discussion of Lysias and whether he should be ashamed of writing speeches develops into a discussion of the nature of speech writing (258d-274a) and good and bad writing (274b-278c), followed by a brief conclusion in which Socrates and Phaedrus offer a prayer to the divinities and begin their walk anew.

### ***The Phaedrus: A reader response criticism commentary***

The reader is almost lulled in a false sense of security and confidence by the literary narrative in which the *Phaedrus* is constructed. Phaedrus and Socrates are on a walk in the country on a hot day, and stop on a grassy bank to wait for the midday heat to subside. Considerable attention is paid in the early parts of the dialogue to the casual conversation which precedes their more serious discussions. Each argument which is presented appears at first perfectly reasonable to the reader, each being certainly eloquent, and she has no reason to expect that the characters are not presenting their speeches as representative of their own thoughts. Instead, however, the arguments have additional goals: warning the reader not to put stock in rhetoricians, and further, to reason carefully, as I will explain in more detail shortly.

*Phaedrus* is not an argument, despite the philosophical critic’s best attempt to make it be so, and consistency is only a problem if one views it as such. If the reader recognizes that the *Phaedrus*, as an account of a conversation, is in fact a literary narrative and as such contains blanks and indeterminacies, she will also recognize the author’s intentional creation of a certain kind of reading experience—and this



experience is not only the communication of philosophical ideas. A possible playful reference to the status of the dialogue as non-argument, despite its superficial appearance as such, occurs in the concluding paragraphs, where Socrates refers to our “earlier conclusions”, to which Phaedrus replies, interrupting, “What conclusions?” (277d) Truly, no conclusions have been reached, as each time an argument has been concluded and apparent conclusions established, they are thrown out by what follows. The text of the *Phaedrus*, therefore, is problematic only when it is evaluated according to traditional philosophical paradigms which require philosophical texts to be coherent wholes with expository goals. When it is recognized that the text has a secondary (or perhaps even primary) goal, the problematic aspects of the text as non-standard, non-treatise philosophy are alleviated.

It is true that the dialogue, when viewed as an argument, cannot be made consistent—in fact it does not make much sense at all, “since Socrates is continually reaching conclusions which he subsequently, and without comment, abandons.” (Fish 1980, 39) However, when the text, and its very inconsistencies (or “indeterminacies” in Iser-speak), is viewed as an invitation to the reader, its problematic elements are explained. Of course, inconsistencies are not equivalent to indeterminacies. I refer, however, to the inconsistencies in Plato’s text because the indeterminate elements found therein are troubling to those who evaluate it according to the traditional paradigm of reading philosophy. Once the apparently inconsistent elements are considered as intentional spurs for the reader, it becomes clear that they are not inconsistent, but indeterminate. The inconsistencies, then, are apparent only. The invitation, of course,

is for the reader to examine the text which is presented to her and to “examine closely premises too easily acquiesced in.” (Fish 1980, 40) Therefore, Plato has constructed an indeterminate text in the hope that his reader will notice the errors (which are glaring indeed) and will as a result become a clearer thinker, a more concise reasoner.

Indeed, the element of invitation which Fish identifies in Plato recalls Iser’s account of the experience of rereading a text. Iser explained that the reader can never have the identical reading experience, for she can never again achieve the lack of awareness of what is to come that formed her initial set of expectations of the text. Her fulfillment of indeterminacies and her projections regarding what is to come will necessarily be different on second reading, when she has some idea of what is to come. Plato’s reader, who discovers to her frustration that the argument that she has just accepted as true falls apart upon further reading, will find that subsequent readings do not show the argument in such a favourable light. Instead, as she rereads:

the statements and phrases which had seemed unexceptionable are now suspect and dubious, and that lines of reasoning which had seemed proper and to the point are now disastrously narrow. Of course they – phrases, statements, premises, and conclusions – haven’t changed...the reader has (Fish 1980, 40).

Therefore, Plato has affected his reader not by presenting a convincing and consistent set of arguments, but by presenting the exact opposite, and forcing her to determine what exactly constitutes a reasonable argument, having deviously shown her a series of arguments which individually appear to be logical, but which as a set cannot hold consistently.

Fish therefore calls the *Phaedrus* a self-consuming artifact (40), in that each realization that the reader experiences as a result of her progression through the text in effect destroys what she has already read. This again emphasizes the temporal nature of reading. Only by reading further can she realize that what she has already read cannot hold, and this realization nullifies the arguments which she has read. Therefore, reading the *Phaedrus* "is to use it up" (40). This is a process which Iser described as pulling up the ladder you have climbed in order to go higher, but is mostly clearly described, I believe, by Robert Fowler, who uses the metaphor of a railroad locomotive "with its crew tearing up the tracks behind it and re-laying the tracks in front of it, so that the locomotive can continue to roll forward." (Fowler 46) The continual process of creation and destruction of projections corresponds to Iser's account of the wandering viewpoint. The reader of Plato's *Phaedrus* rather bumps her way through the text, never sure where she will be led, and always surprised by what appears to her next.

The wandering viewpoint is especially evident at the conclusion of Socrates' first speech on love. Having found the repeated speech of Lysias inadequate, Socrates launches a speech of his own. Socrates' speech copies that of a wily lover who pretended not to be in love in order to persuade the object of his love to prefer a non-lover (the wily lover) over a lover. However, the reader nonetheless expects that Socrates will offer a speech, in which he believes, in order to contrast with Phaedrus' speech. The argument which Socrates presents against the lover seems quite convincing on first reading: the lover's desire moves him "irrationally toward pleasure" (238a), and he will therefore take advantage of his young lover; the lover will

attempt to make his favourite weak and ignorant, again, in order to take advantage; the lover will keep the young man away from the positive company of others; in short, the lover will “aim at making the boy totally ignorant and totally dependent on his lover, by way of securing the maximum of pleasure for himself, and the maximum of damage to the other.” (239b) However, once the conclusion has been reached, the reader is startled to find that Socrates rejects his own speech: “That was a terrible theory, Phaedrus, a terrible theory that you introduced and compelled me to expound.” (242d)

Such an example of the shattering of reader expectations is a clear illustration of the wandering viewpoint, with which Iser emphasizes the temporal nature of reading. Because the reader cannot grasp the text of the *Phaedrus* instantaneously as a whole, on first reading her expectation is that Socrates, in good faith, is offering an argument as an alternative to that of Phaedrus. As a result of this initial non-fulfillment of her projections, the reader will evaluate future arguments in a more suspicious way. In this way Plato is able to force his reader to be a critical evaluator. After this first reading experience, she will not take any aspect of the dialogue at face value. She will look for inconsistencies within arguments, and consider whether Phaedrus and Socrates are being consistent from argument to argument. The reader continually forms new expectations regarding what is to come in the text based on what she has already read. The apparent inconsistencies in the text of the *Phaedrus*, which cause such consternation if one is attempting to create a Platonic system, are intentional elements of the structure of the dialogue, which create a certain type of experience for the reader. The focus on the wandering viewpoint, the temporal nature of the dialogue, makes this clear. As the

reader adopts the wandering viewpoint, she attempts to synthesize the various and changing perspectives which the text offers, thereby developing the meaning of the text.

The most frustrating aspect of the *Phaedrus* is its conclusion, where Socrates claims that “nothing that has ever been written whether in verse or prose merits much serious attention” (277e), because this concluding statement seems to denigrate all that has come before. The reader, having arrived at the final statements of a lengthy dialogue, finds the protagonist claiming that what she has just read is not worthy of her attention. This apparently glaring inconsistency has resulted in significant philosophical worry, as critics attempt to figure out how to “save” the dialogue from its devastating and destructive conclusion, often explaining away the final statement. However, surely Plato, such a great philosopher, did not merely allow this statement to slip by unnoticed. It must be deliberate, but what is its purpose? Why would Plato reject the written word so vehemently at the end of a written work? The final frustrating inconsistency, the rejection of the written word itself as worthy of attention, is not an inconsistency at all, Fish argues, but rather a commentary on the experience which the reader has just undergone. The rejection is:

an exact description of what the reader, in his repeated abandoning of successive stages in the argument, has been *doing*. What was problematical sense in the structure of a self-enclosed argument makes perfect sense in the structure of a reader’s experience. (40)

The problem lies once again in the evaluative or interpretive paradigm which is used when reading the *Phaedrus*. If the *Phaedrus* is viewed as a non-literary work of philosophy with an objective, extractable meaning, then the attempt to create a sense of

coherence is understandable, although it will necessarily fail, because the text itself is not coherent, obviously. Coherence is achievable, however, Fish argues, if one considers instead the reader's experience of the dialogue as text, for "the "inconsistency" is less a problem to be solved than something that happens, a fact of response; and as a fact of response it is the key to the way the work works." (Fish 1980, 38) Under the traditional philosophical paradigm, the goal of analysis is the identification of reasonable lines of argument. However, in the *Phaedrus*, such an analysis yields what appears to be a complete muddle. Which argument corresponds to what Socrates really thinks about the nature of love? Why are the other arguments then included? Why cobble together speeches about love and speeches about rhetoric and the written word? This type of analysis simply cannot succeed unless it either ignores part of the dialogue or determines that Plato must have made some sort of error. The apparent inconsistencies cannot be made to disappear for they are actually indeterminacies which are intentional and integral parts of the structure of the dialogue. I would argue that Fish's analysis, therefore, founded on the principles of reader response criticism and focused on the reader's experience, is among the only reasonable alternatives that can explain the inconsistencies without manipulating the text.

The traditional philosophical paradigm of interpretation does not account for a reader's experience of the indeterminate elements of a text, because it does not expect to find indeterminate elements. A successful philosophical treatise is by definition determinate, and if the reader engages with it with enthusiasm and alacrity, she will grasp its meaning. However, philosophical texts written in other than the standard

treatise form require something different from the reader. She must, as Iser's theory delineates, fill in blanks, concretize indeterminacies, and be a co-creator of meaning, rather than an extractor of meaning. This is not to say that the reader's experience of philosophical literature is better than her experience of philosophical treatises, but only that it is different, radically so, and that these works of philosophical literature must be recognized as different, evaluated with appropriate standards, and considered in the context of the reader's experience.

Fish believes that the *Phaedrus* is a series of conversations, not random, but carefully arranged so that "to enter into the spirit and assumptions of any one of these self-enclosed units is implicitly to reject the spirit and assumptions of the unit immediately preceding." (Fish 1980, 38) For example, in the first speeches delivered by Lysias and Socrates, Lysias' is criticized for its poor composition, and Socrates' is criticized for its good composition. Although this initial contradiction is not acknowledged by the characters in the dialogue, the reader, who has become at least to an extent persuaded by the preceding arguments, notices it, "is certainly confronted with it, and asked implicitly to do something with it." (38)

Just as Calvino implicitly said "This is all I'm telling you; now what are you going to do?", Plato implicitly says "Notice how this doesn't make sense? What are you going to do with it?" Fish believes that Plato's intention in structuring the dialogue in this way is to force the reader to transcend the discussion of the particular issues (what is a good discourse) and instead to consider higher, more philosophically significant issues. Therefore, Fish explains,

**this early section of the dialogue will have achieved its true purpose, which is, paradoxically, to bring the reader to the point where he is no longer interested in the issues it treats—no longer interested because he has come to see that the real issues exist at a higher level of generality. (38-39)**

**At one point in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates recognizes that there is a distinction between words with stable meaning and those with fluctuating meaning, a distinction which clearly parallels Iser's separation of determinate and indeterminate elements. Words like "iron" and "silver" have objective correlates to which one can refer (263a), whereas those like "just" or "good" cause divergence in interpretation, for no two people will have the same object in their mind. Rhetoric, Socrates argues, is able to profit from these indeterminacies, by taking advantage of fluctuations and misleading listeners.**

**Iser argued above that the primary goal of literature is the presentation of social norms and conventional thought systems, in order for the readers to recognize their shortcomings, reexamine their validity, and replace them with new and more appropriate conventions. I believe that Plato's dialogues have similar intentions, in that the reader forms assumptions based on what she reads, assumptions which are consistent with her current mode of thought. However, recognizing again the temporal nature of reading, she is forced to reevaluate those assumptions by what follows from their initial formation. As Fish explains it, "the reader is first encouraged to entertain assumptions he probably already holds and then is later forced to reexamine and discredit those same assumptions" (Fish 1980, 39).**



Therefore, although the *Phaedrus* is typically described as a discussion of the nature of love, I think it is clear that love is not the true theme of the dialogue, although it is among the topics of discussion. What to make of a dialogue that appears to present a series of inconsistent arguments? I do not think it appropriate to call the *Phaedrus* an expository work like a now-traditional philosophical treatise, because it quite clearly does not present a cogent line of argument. Instead, it is made up of a series of arguments which are inconsistent, although the reader is not aware of the inconsistencies when initially presented with the arguments. As Iser argued in his account of the reader's experience, she progresses temporally through the text. As a result, the reader of Plato's dialogues cannot grasp the dialogue as a textual totality until she has reached its conclusion, and even then she will be most likely required to reread the text in order to synthesize her reading experience and the set of projections she developed as she progressed.

If this is how the reader relates to the text, what did Plato intend the text's purpose to be? For example, when Socrates delivers his first speech on the relative merits of the lover and the non-lover, the reader expects that he is presenting an alternative to the speech of Phaedrus, which he has judged to be inadequate. However, at the conclusion of Socrates' speech, which is presented as a perfectly reasonable alternative to Phaedrus', the reader is surprised to hear Socrates call his own argument a terrible, foolish, and blasphemous theory. Therefore, the reader must reject the set of expectations which she has developed (that this is what Socrates believes she ought to

think) and develop a new projection regarding the purpose of the speech. If she is not to accept its content, then why has she been asked to read it?

I think it is quite obvious that Plato did not intend for this dialogue to be a teaching piece on the nature of love, although it is often paired with the *Symposium* as an exposition of Plato's ideas on the subject. The *Phaedrus* presents a series of confused and confusing speeches on love. Nor does it seem likely that the dialogue is a how-to text on the art of speech making, as the examples of speeches are derided for their shortcomings. More likely it would represent a how-not-to of speech making. Is it possible, then, that the *Phaedrus* is a commentary on the nature and value of writing? This does not seem any more likely, as Socrates explicitly states that anything put down in writing is not worthy of consideration, and since I have just read this dialogue, Plato can't have thought writing quite so disastrous, which presents me as a reader with yet another inconsistency. So, then, what is the point of the *Phaedrus*?

I argue, therefore, that the *Phaedrus* is constructed as an exercise in philosophical reasoning. The apparent inconsistencies which are built into the dialogue correspond to the activity-spurring indeterminacies which Iser describes, and the sense-making activities correspond to the concretizations which literary texts require. The comment on the uselessness of the written word, so troubling for many philosophical critics, is yet another challenge for the reader to reconcile what she has experienced and the form in which she has experienced it. Like Fish, then, I argue that the appropriate question must be asked when evaluating the *Phaedrus*. Rather than asking what the dialogue is

*about* (which implies archeological meaning), ask what the dialogue *does*, in terms of its impact upon the reader.

The reader develops the meaning of the text and concretizes by her attempts at sense-making. The inconsistent arguments about the nature of love are her first challenge. The comments about the written word, and their incongruity with her experience (she is, after all, *reading* the comments), forces another attempt at concretization and reconciliation of indeterminacies. The important element of this dialogue, then, is not really what it's about, but what it accomplishes. The attempt to evaluate the dialogue according to the traditional philosophical paradigm, which focuses on content and argumentation, will inevitably bring troubling results, as Plato doesn't seem to know what he's about.

The apparent inconsistent elements of the dialogue, more accurately described as indeterminate elements, prod the reader's concretizations, force the reader to reason, to critically evaluate, and to reread the text in order to reconcile her temporally developed expectations with what follows. It is most difficult for anyone to accept that the *Phaedrus* is not really a treatise, an expository, verifiable truth statement, for it masquerades as such. It leads the reader to expect well-constructed arguments and unified lines of thought. This most fundamental of expectations or projections on the reader's part is the most difficult to accept in its disappointment. The attempt at unity and coherence is what Plato wants the reader to undertake. That she cannot succeed in this attempt forces a reevaluation. The *Phaedrus*, as a literary narrative, serially challenges the assumptions the reader makes. Its theme, I argue, or its purpose, is to

have the reader recognize the importance of sense making activity, and of careful reasoning. Therefore, the *Phaedrus* represents what Plato believed to be the proper medium for philosophy: conversation and dialectic (Rowe 1986a, 11). In this case the dialectic is between reader and text. Although Plato hoped for the ideal dialectical relationship of teacher and pupil, the text is able to serve as teacher for the reader-pupil, with one drawback which Plato recognizes: the text is mute and cannot respond to questioning.

Trying to impose a systematic paradigm onto what is, according to treatise standards, such an oddly shaped text, will have several possible consequences. Either the evaluator must conclude that Plato's arguments are faulty, and dismiss the dialogue as a terribly poor treatise, or the evaluator must ignore or explain away the elements which do not mesh with the paradigm: and these are the very elements which reflect what I argue is Plato's intention to design a text as an exercise in reasoning. Regardless of which option is selected by the proponent of the traditional paradigm, Plato's dialogue cannot be made to fit without doing some violence to the text.

Therefore, the *Phaedrus*, source of such critical worry (how could Plato write something so obviously internally inconsistent?), is only a problematic text when one attempts to impose unity. Clearly, unity cannot be achieved, and the text is constructed in this way deliberately. The *Phaedrus* is not an expository, verifiable truth-statement. Rather, it is a literary narrative, which serially challenges the assumptions the reader makes and the expectations she forms. The true goal of the dialogue is not to communicate ideas about love, rhetoric, or the written word, but to have the reader

**recognize the importance of the sense-making activity which she necessarily undertakes  
as the philosophical rug is continually pulled out from under her.**

## VI. LEAVING THE FIELD OF PLAY?

### FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA

Born in Prussia in 1844, Friedrich Nietzsche grew up in a staunchly religious family, and initially studied theology and classical philology before abandoning religious studies and turning to philosophy. Despite his life-long emotional instability and a series of disappointments in his personal life, Nietzsche published quite prolifically, including Human, All too Human (1878), Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883), Beyond Good and Evil (1886), and The Genealogy of Morals (1887), before suffering his final breakdown in 1889. Following this collapse, Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth controlled the publication of his pre-existing unpublished works, some of which did not appear until after his death in 1900.

Applying the principles of reader response criticism to rehabilitate Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra will likely prove to be the most difficult task of this thesis. Nietzsche's writings are exceptionally challenging on many different planes and any analysis of his work leads one into something of a mine field. The discussion which follows will approach Zarathustra from a phenomenologically informed, reader-based approach and will attempt to analyze the reader's experience of this particular text. In the case of Zarathustra, it is especially important for *my* reader to remember that the analysis is experience-based and not meaning-based. I may speculate as to the reader's ability to participate in the development of meaning, and even as to what possible meanings she may produce, but not as to the one undeniable meaning which Nietzsche intended to communicate. The reader of studies such as this one does inevitably yearn

for such an account, precisely because Nietzsche's writings are so challenging. However, do not expect to find it here, for it is not consistent with my purpose.

I should mention, however, several fairly recent books which also attempt to rehabilitate Nietzsche and are therefore sympathetic to my current project. Most notable among them are Alexander Nehemas' Nietzsche: Life as Literature, and Bernd Magnus, Stanley Stewart, and Jean-Pierre Mileur's Nietzsche's Case: Philosophy as/and Literature. Nehemas attempts to prove that Nietzschean perspectivism underlines the importance of interpretation, but that Nietzsche was still prepared to argue that some interpretations are better than others. The other primary focus of his work is to demonstrate that Nietzsche's aestheticism leads him to view the world as a literary text. Nehemas focuses to a large extent, therefore, on the style and literariness of Nietzsche's writing, and makes conclusions on this basis regarding the fit between Nietzsche's chosen mode of expression and his philosophical view of the world itself. Because Nehemas focuses on form and style in Nietzsche's writing, he necessarily does consider the role of the reader, but does not invoke the principles of reader response criticism which I have discussed here.

Magnus et al. base their evaluation of Nietzsche on what they call the "mutual shunning" (255) of the literary and philosophical camps. This self-imposed harsh distinction has been the cause of the dismemberment of Nietzsche's thought. Philosophers find literary analyses of Nietzsche "simple-minded appropriations", and literary critics find that the traditional philosophical paradigm's account renders Nietzsche "carefully domesticated" and fits him for a place in the "wax museum of

great dead (white male) 'philosophers'." (255) The end goal of the Magnus project, therefore, has been the "suturing" of what they refer to as Nietzsche's literary/philosophical thought. Their end conclusion is that the eternal question posed about Nietzsche, namely "Is this philosophy or it is literature?" is both "uninteresting and inappropriate." (255) Throughout their work, Magnus et al. argue that a combinatory approach to the analysis of Nietzsche is valid and necessary. As a result, Magnus et al. also consider the reading experience, but once again, they invoke no formal model of reading. Although their final conclusion is consistent with that of this project, their methods remain different.

Although my insistence on adherence to the Iser model of reader response criticism excludes detailed analysis of these two valuable books, I include a brief aperçu here for several reasons. First, to ensure that there is no confusion: I do not claim that I am the first to explore the reader's experience of Nietzsche's texts. Although these two works (among others) do consider the role of the reader in light of Nietzsche's unconventional style, they do not do so according to a formal model of the reading experience. In addition, due to their exclusive focus on Nietzsche, each of these works is able to consider the body of his work as a whole. In contrast, because my argument has a broader focus, beyond Nietzsche and toward other philosophical texts which have caused controversy for similar kinds of reasons, I have chosen to focus on Zarathustra as perhaps his most controversial text. Both Nehemas and Magnus et al. represent the "splitter" perspective (as Magnus et al. call it; see their page 35-37), where style is viewed as integral to Nietzsche's style and a connection is recognized between what is



written and how it is written. (Contrast this with the “lumpers”, such as Heidegger, Schacht and Danto, who base many of their arguments on the *Nachlass*, Nietzsche’s unpublished works, and view style as “an obstacle to understanding his philosophical intentions.” (36)) I undoubtedly, as should be apparent to my reader, side with the splitters. Finally, I mention these works as a service to my reader: I find them exceptionally well-written attempts to bring Nietzsche back into the philosophical fold, and to show how traditional methods of evaluation have been misguided when the literary nature of his work is considered. Those who sympathize with the current project may find these more detailed studies of Nietzsche of tremendous value. Our purposes are parallel, but not identical.

In the introductory remarks which follow, I will provide some insight into Nietzsche’s writings in general in order to illuminate the important relationship which he developed between form or style and content. I will also discuss Nietzsche’s perspectivism, which is essential in order to understand that interpretive freedom is an undeniably important part of the Nietzschean program. Examples from some of the aphoristic works will help to show that Zarathustra is not the only reason that Nietzsche is troublesome for the philosophical community. Whereas the previous texts which I have discussed can be considered as problematic in isolation, everything Nietzsche wrote is cause for controversy. I will also look at Nietzsche’s statements regarding reading itself, for he has discussed of what he believes reading should consist, as well as the characteristics of a good versus a bad reader.

I will sketch several of the key elements of the Nietzschean program which are expressed in Zarathustra, specifically: the *Übermensch*, the will to power, and the eternal recurrence. Although the introduction of these ideas would seem to tend toward the archeological approach to textual meaning, I intend the discussion of them as something of a Nietzsche primer, and I feel it is necessary in this case to discuss them briefly in order to place potential reader reactions to the text into an appropriate context. In fact, it may be that the reader needs this background information in order to fully participate in the development of meaning in the case of Zarathustra, but I will consider this point in more detail at the conclusion of this section. A brief look at the assessments of Arthur Danto will serve to show how the results of analysis can vary greatly according to the paradigm which is invoked.

The focus will then be squarely on Thus Spoke Zarathustra and the reader's experience of it as text. I will provide an overall summary of the text and then consider its structural elements and their effect on the reader's experience of the text. Specifically, I will consider: the implied reader and its connection to Nietzsche's concept of his ideal reader; the repertoire and the importance of its familiarity; and the possibility of reader overstrain.

### ***Nietzsche's use of style***

Nietzsche's unconventional use of form, including narrative (Zarathustra), aphorism (among others, "Maxims and Arrows" in Twilight of the Idols, and Human, All too Human), and series of mini-essays (The Antichrist etc.) is a primary reason for the traditional philosophical paradigm's difficulty in accepting his work as truly

philosophical. When combined with his frequently strident style, Nietzsche has been accused of being unnecessarily obtuse and of deliberately and obstinately making his philosophical thoughts inaccessible. Because form and style are so prominent in Nietzsche's writings, those who favour the neutralist model which I discussed earlier have argued that the actual philosophical content is virtually nonexistent because it is inaccessible. It is true that Nietzsche, like the other authors I have discussed, does not build an identifiable philosophical system. However, this should not exclude him from philosophical consideration. In addition, I say once more, the traditional philosophical paradigm, if expanded to include works other than the traditional treatise, will at least be able to accommodate writings such as Nietzsche's. This will become clear at the conclusion of my analysis of Zarathustra.

Nietzsche recognized that some disagreed with the importance accorded to style in Zarathustra, claiming that some "treated my Zarathustra, for example, as an advanced exercise in style, and expressed the wish that later on I might provide some content as well." (Ecce Homo 260) Nietzsche, by writing in the manner which he did, caused what the traditional philosophical paradigm perceived to be two serious problems. First, Nietzsche did not write in a way consistent with the standard modes of expression of academic philosophy. No philosophical treatises for Nietzsche: instead, he presented aphorisms, or narratives, or wildly hyperbolic rants. However, neither did Nietzsche write in such a way as to permit easy categorization in the literary field. Take, for example, Zarathustra: although it is a narrative, it is neither novel, nor poem, nor any other strictly defined literary form. Therefore, Nietzsche so blurred the

traditionally solid academic boundary between philosophy and literature that neither discipline has felt comfortable claiming him. He is too literary for the philosophers, and too philosophical for the literary critics. Second, even if the traditional philosophical paradigm were able to reconcile Nietzsche's literary philosophy, further alienation occurs as a result of the absolute non-systematic nature of his work. Putting aside the question of *how* Nietzsche wrote (in stylistic terms), which is bad enough, *what* he wrote also defies the expectations of the traditional paradigm, for a Nietzschean system cannot be built. The carefully constructed series of reasoned and rational arguments is simply not to be found.

One solution which has been proposed to solve the Nietzsche "problem" is to view his approach to philosophical writing, including his use of narrative and aphorism, as deliberately rhetorical, challenging the reader and hoping to assist her in confronting and evaluating some of the widely accepted apparent truths at which philosophy is expected to aim. (Magnus 1996, 5) This possible solution proposes that Nietzsche's text is constructed so as to force the reader to evaluate not only what she reads, but also the pre-existing beliefs which she holds. Therefore, Nietzsche's texts would be considered as consistent with his account of perspectivism, according to which there is no one final truth regarding the nature of reality, but only interpretive assessments of it: as in "the nature of reality as perceived by person x at time y."

A more common solution to the Nietzschean problem, of course, is to attempt to ignore the stylistic "barrier" which is perceived as restricting access to the philosophy itself. Such attempts are consistent with the traditional paradigm of philosophy and the

neutralist model, where style is considered superfluous at best and possibly even bothersome. This possible solution, as I have illustrated in the case of other philosophers, attempts to remove the philosophical ideas from the text, fit them into the mold of what is considered to be more appropriate modes of philosophical expression, and discard the stylistic elements as embarrassing self-indulgences of the writer. At this late stage in the current project, I need not reiterate that I do not consider this approach to be a "solution" at all, for it only engenders further difficulties, such as those seen in the case of Plato's *Phaedrus*.

Form and style, then, are defining elements in Nietzsche's writing. Even those who prefer the traditional paradigm and who hope to ignore form and style cannot ever truly succeed, for they must first navigate the "barrier" which they perceive the form/style relationship to be. As a result, it simply cannot be denied that the form in which Nietzsche's philosophy is presented defines how the content is accessed and processed by the reader. This, of course, is the case for any work of philosophy or literature. I make this apparently mundane statement because the traditional philosophical paradigm is so determined to ignore Nietzsche's form and style that I wish to indicate that it can never really succeed. Even if the traditional philosophical paradigm is invoked and style is determined to be no more than a nuisance, it is still part of the totality which the interpretive paradigm must handle in order to construct an account of Nietzsche's meaning.

In some passages the apparent *lack* of form is also significant, and it is here that the principles of reader response criticism become useful. Iser's reader response

criticism's primary contribution to this project is its account of the role of the indeterminate elements of a text in the reader's experience of that text. Certainly an author may record his intentions in such a way as to maximize the number of indeterminate elements and therefore increase the demands on the reader of the text. Therefore, when Nietzsche chooses to present what appear to be simple lists of random thoughts, with no connection immediately evident, the reader is forced to impose form upon the text and therefore to develop her sense of the meaning of the text. She must grapple with the lack of form and its impact on her ability to understand the philosophy as a whole. The reader's attempts to synthesize and assimilate Nietzsche's thought will necessarily "formalize" the writings, creating the structure which Nietzsche chose to leave out. Nietzsche's reader, as reader response criticism describes, is forced to become a partner in the creation of meaning.

The reader's formalization is especially apparent in Nietzsche's aphoristic works. The reader must evaluate each aphorism both independently and in the context of the text as a whole. Through this process, the reader attempts to identify some common theme, some recurring idea, that will provide her with clues as to Nietzsche's philosophic meaning or thought. A thread of philosophical thought runs through the aphorisms, tying them together, and it is this thread that the reader must uncover. For those unfamiliar with the nature of Nietzsche's work, examples of Nietzsche's infuriating obscurity can be found in Part IV of Beyond Good and Evil; Epigrams and Interludes (though obviously aphorisms are found throughout his work). Nietzsche forces the reader to engage with the text, and to attempt to interpret his philosophical

meaning. For example, "Instinct. – When the house burns one forgets even lunch. – Yes, but one eats it later in the ashes." (83); or, "So cold, so icy, that one burns one's fingers on him? Every hand is startled when touching him. – And for that very reason some think he glows." (91)

Clearly, the reader has work to do before she can even approach Nietzsche's philosophical point. There seem to be in these aphorisms more that is indeterminate than that is determinate: more that is *not* there than *is* there. What is important is that the reader is obviously completely unable to understand Nietzsche's idea on first reading, and must pause and read again, attempt to interpret, and, most likely, repeat the process continually before arriving at a viable interpretation, if one can be found at all. Although Nietzsche's writing is undoubtedly by turns aphoristic, lyric, cryptic, and hyperbolic, its appearance of disjointedness is just that: appearance. Although obvious connections between ideas and aphorisms are never clear, a coherent, though not systematic, sense of meaning can eventually be developed. As Magnus puts it in the Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche, Nietzsche "orders his fragments to achieve a given effect, suggesting but not dogmatically asserting comparisons and contrasts, while challenging his readers to draw their own conclusions." (Magnus 1996, 33)

My brief discussion of Nietzsche's style and specifically the aphoristic works has focused on the negative aspects of the stylistic choice, in terms of the additional demands placed on the reader of Nietzsche's works. However, it must also be acknowledged that despite the protestations of the traditional philosophical paradigm, the aphoristic style can, due to its concision and brevity, communicate philosophical

ideas with tremendous efficiency and impact. For example, "What does not kill me makes me stronger." (Twilight of the Idols 8) or "In order to look for beginnings one becomes a crab." (Twilight of the Idols 24) Yves Ledure, in his exploration of the aphoristically styled texts, evocatively describes the Nietzschean aphorism as like a comet, flashing with great brilliance, but only momentarily. (Ledure 427) It is therefore difficult for the reader to grasp Nietzsche's meaning initially. Like the comet that glows brightly, but then disappears, leaving the observer wondering if her eyes have deceived her, the meaning of the Nietzschean aphorism seems at the tip of the reader's fingers, but then ultimately eludes her. She is left to grope about in the darkness of indeterminacy with the hopes of putting her hands on a viable interpretation. This disconcerting experience for the reader invites her to convert to a radically non-traditional way of philosophizing, one which encourages the appreciation of multiplicity and diversity, and which never claims to offer absolute philosophical truth. This leads me, then, to a brief discussion of Nietzschean perspectivism.

### ***Nietzschean perspectivism***

Nietzsche's style encourages diversity of interpretations, as is amply illustrated in the various analyses of his work. Based on the stylistic considerations which I mentioned above, it is all too evident that as readers vary so will interpretations of his texts. This apparent problem, however, is consistent with perspectivism, a fundamental motivation underlying Nietzsche's philosophical thought. Under perspectivism, there are no absolute philosophical facts, but only interpretations of truth and of reality. (Human, All too Human 1: 1, 2) Each individual operates according to his or her own



set of concepts and beliefs, and as a result no immutable truth test can be established for any theory or interpretation of reality: truth becomes as a result what is true for a particular person at a particular time.

It is important to emphasize that Nietzsche's perspectivism is not really a philosophical or aesthetic *theory*, but more a method of *doing* philosophy and of actually *writing*, which indicates a specific outlook on the essential role of both philosopher and reader. By extrapolation, therefore, perspectivism also applies to the experience of the reader, specifically the reader of Nietzsche's stylistically challenging work. Any reading experience is inevitably tinged or coloured by the varied contextual situation of the individual. (Atwell 161) Basic factors such as language knowledge and competence, education, and life experiences will affect the reading and interpretation that any given reader will produce from a single text. (Notice how similar this description is to Stanley Fish's informed reader, who is a competent and knowledgeable language speaker, free to interpret the text but prevented from producing "deviant" interpretations by the constraints of language rules.)

In addition, because Nietzsche's perspectivism does not grant privileged status to any one perspective, both power and responsibility are passed on to the reader. There is no standard of truth to which to apply beliefs; the reader must decide what is true, relying on her own interpretations. Each interpretation, therefore, is individual, and is also necessarily determined by the defining world view of the interpreter. Each interpretation is markedly different, because each world view is uniquely determined by a myriad of possible perspectives for each individual. The reader is therefore invited

to participate in the philosophic process by “interacting” with Nietzsche’s work. As a result, Nietzsche’s perspectivism, because it does not grant privileged status to any one perspective, grants both power and responsibility to the reader. Like Sartre’s account of the joyful burden of freedom, Nietzschean perspectivism both liberates and constrains, for the individual (the reader in this case) is free to determine her own sense of the truth based on the information she is given, but she must then take responsibility for her interpretation and her account of the truth. As a reader, she must adopt joint responsibility for the meaning which develops as a result of her interaction with the text.

Nietzsche’s stylistic choices are inextricably linked to his philosophical thought. Nietzsche’s perspectivism and stylistic pluralism are sometimes confrontational and deeply personal, and Nietzsche therefore requires a reaction from his reader (any reaction—be it disgust, fascination, ire or agreement), a reaction which will inevitably result in the reader establishing her own theory of the truth in that particular context (i.e. what is the best account of the truth that I can establish based on these writings?). Because Nietzsche advocates a perspectival view of reality, according to which there is no one absolute truth, no total, final theory, his receptiveness to interpretation and his construction of a body of work in which interpretation is so crucial only makes sense. The meaning which the reader develops while reading Nietzsche consists of her perspective of Nietzsche’s truth. Perspectivism, therefore, like reader response criticism, permits interpretation and individualized meaning creation in the context of the text.

Although this is a meagre sketch of Nietzsche's perspectivism, I include it here for one important reason: the style in which Nietzsche chose to write is undeniably linked to his perception of interpretation and the nature of truth. And, the style in which Nietzsche chose to write is the primary objection made against him by the traditional philosophical paradigm. Perspectivism, I believe, provides real insight regarding Nietzsche's motivation in his stylistic choices. The indeterminate approach to writing favoured by Nietzsche embodies the principles of perspectivism and indeed illustrates for his reader the benefits, and indeed the pitfalls, of this view of the world. A look at Nietzsche's perspectival approach also shows clearly that what the traditional paradigm perceives as the problematic aspect of Nietzsche's work was most likely not problematic from his point of view. The possibility of multiple and various interpretations is in fact consistent with his views of the world, reality, epistemology and truth. Although Nietzsche was clear about how he wished his work to be read, as I will show next, and would most likely be bothered by obviously misguided interpretations of his work, this is a risk he was prepared to take in order to present what he believed to be an accurate picture of the world and of our knowledge of it.

### ***Nietzsche and reading***

Nietzsche's nontraditional philosophical style not only allows him to embrace perspectival multiplicity, but also permits a radicalization of the relationship the reader may develop with the text. In the previous discussion of perspectivism, I made some basic comments about the impact Nietzsche's perspectivism and his stylistic choices have on the reader's experience of his text. Nietzsche does in fact make some explicit

comments regarding the nature of reading and the role of the reader of the text. These comments will perhaps inform the textual analysis which follows shortly, as Nietzsche's hopes for his reader likely influenced the way in which he structured the indeterminate elements of his text.

The indeterminate and non-traditional style is, as I have explained, a tremendous challenge for the reader. However, this challenge also empowers the reader, and permits her to achieve a heightened degree of involvement and participation. She is empowered because she is granted a role in the development of meaning. As Iser explained, the indeterminate elements prompt the reader to become a co-creator of meaning in the text, and indeterminate elements are certainly prominent in Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche's stylistic choices indicate that he is not interested in spoon-feeding his truth to devoted readers: Nietzsche does not even *want* devoted readers. Nietzsche wants critical, thoughtful, and interpreting readers who have the power and the courage to accept or reject Nietzsche's version of the truth. (Nehemas 1988, 46-47) The structure of the Nietzschean text (most especially Zarathustra, as will become evident shortly) creates a climate where either the above readers are created, or the reader is expelled from the text, unable to understand it at all.

Excerpts from Nietzsche's texts seem to indicate that he was aware of the cooperative relationship established between a reader and the text. In Human, all too Human, for example, he declares that "A good book takes its time.", and more importantly, what is good in a book must evolve under the care of the diligent reader. In fact, "Good readers continually improve a book and good opponents clarify it."

(#153, 248) This would seem to indicate two important facts: first, that Nietzsche recognizes the inherent temporal nature of the reading process, though he describes this process as occurring over a number of years; and second, as a consequence of the first, that he recognizes that what is produced from a work is variable and changeable, and develops as a result of the interaction of the reader with the text. Good readers and good opponents cause a certain result (improvement and clarification), which only benefits the text as independent from its author.

Nietzsche also comments on how he would wish to be read: not in terms of interpretive outcome but in approach to the very interpretive program. In the section of Ecce Homo entitled *Why I Write Such Good Books*, Nietzsche explains that his books are so different from those of others that readers will be “spoiled” and unable to endure other kinds of books. Nietzsche therefore envisions that his books require a particular kind of reader; his perfect reader would be a “monster of courage and curiosity; moreover, supple, cunning, cautious; a born adventurer and discoverer.” (*Books #3, Ecce Homo* 264) Therefore, a good reader engages with the text, processes it, interprets it, and risks misinterpreting it. The perfect reader, empowered by the responsibility accorded her by the text, has the courage to accept that responsibility and will read the text in the most productive manner possible. The dichotomy in Nietzsche’s description of the ideal reader is interesting in that it shows such a varied set of skills which is necessary for the reader to effectively interpret. The reader is perfect, for she possesses these skills, but also a monster, as she goes beyond the control of the author. (As Nietzsche puts it, “When his work opens its mouth, the author has to shut his.” Human,

all too Human II #140, 245) The perfect reader is a courageous adventurer, but she is also cautious. The perfect reader embodies both the freedom and restriction which are inherent in the interpretive process.

Having made clear the characteristics of the perfect reader, contrast the nature of the “bad” reader. Whereas the philosopher counts on “readers who appreciate the happiness that lies in good thinking. . .” (Human, all too Human #142, 245), he must accept that not all readers will possess the ideal skills and temperament to do the philosopher’s work justice. The members of what Nietzsche derisively calls the ‘herd’ are unlikely to be up to the challenge. Rather than courageously trying to find their way through the text and develop a sense of meaning, the “worst readers are those who behave like plundering troops: they take away a few things they can use, dirty and confound the remainder, and revile the whole.” (Human, all too Human #137, 245) This is, of course, the temptation of the interpreter of Nietzsche: as is said of the Bible, one can find something to support one’s beliefs if one looks hard enough. The same is true of Nietzsche: because Nietzsche’s work requires such extensive interpretation, the risk remains that a bad reader will run rough-shod over a text, taking what she understands and can use for her own purpose. The bad reader therefore does violence to the text without the potential benefit which the perfect reader offers. The bad reader does not interpret but only uses, and makes no attempt to understand. If the reader wishes to rise above the herd, to attempt to understand, and is prepared to meet the interpretive challenges of Nietzsche’s texts, she will gain substantially by this process: as a reader, she will become a co-creator of philosophical meaning. In essence,

Nietzsche's texts consist of an invitation for the perspicuous reader to "step outside the modern rabble to become part of a drastically narrowed circle of readers and writers." (Shapiro 364)

Because Nietzsche recognizes that an important relationship exists between an author/philosopher and his reader, and because he is prepared to empower his reader by permitting extensive interpretation, he must also recognize that as an author he is not always fully understood. This fault, however, lies with the reader, and not the author. Once the author has recorded his intentions in the text, the meaning which develops on the basis of reader interaction is beyond his control. The fault for lack of comprehension or for poor interpretation lies with the reader, not the author. Even if the text itself is found to be lacking, Nietzsche believes that the apparent "paradoxes of an author to which a reader takes exception very often stand not at all in the author's book but in the reader's head." (Human, all too Human I #185, 92) Given what I have said at length about evaluation according to inappropriate paradigms, Nietzsche's view is especially interesting. The paradoxical nature of some texts is not inherent to them, but is created by the reader who evaluates and interprets inappropriately. Nonetheless, having freed and empowered the reader, having encouraged her to interact with the text and to produce a unique interpretation, the author must, like the reader, be courageous: the author must be prepared to watch the reader make mistakes.

### ***Übermensch***

The element of courage and of power which is evident in the above account of the reading experience and the relationship of the reader with the text is reflected in

Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*. Although the term has been translated variously as Overman, Higher Man, or Superman, I will retain the German word as each translation causes controversy and confusion regarding implications of the English meaning, which does not necessarily reflect the nuances of the German. (The translation of Zarathustra which I use, from R.J. Hollingdale, prefers *Superman* and therefore the direct quotations from the text will reflect Hollingdale's choice.)

Nietzsche posits the *Übermensch* in order to overcome the nihilism endemic in society. With the erosion of the Christian culture and the inevitable collapse of metaphysics, a void is created, one which must be filled. The *Übermensch* is the controlling factor which must emerge to impose order on the chaos of a post-God society. The *Übermensch* is not a specific person who will gain political control, but rather a principle towards which each individual should strive. Society, in order to be perpetuated, must achieve some new meaning, and Nietzsche believes this meaning will arise from individuals.

The *Übermensch* is essentially creative. Rather than remaining as a mere human creature, the *Übermensch* must become a creator by imposing order upon chaos and, like the reader described above, by accepting the power and responsibility offered to him or her as a result of the very lack of order inherent in the world. In many ways, the *Übermensch* is similar to Sartre's existential man, who recognizes but accepts the nonsensical nature of reality: the *Übermensch* is prepared to create order and meaning where none existed previously. In fact, although the *Übermensch* is "aware of life's terrors, he affirms life without resentment." (Kaufmann 511) In addition, the



*Übermensch* is empowered to impose meaning on the world and on his own life, for like the reader in the indeterminate text, there is no meaning which he does not himself impart.

Although Nietzsche invoked the *Übermensch* as a rehabilitative societal force, the reader of the indeterminate text is accorded a similar role and shares the *Übermensch's* experience of the void, of chaos, and of the heavy burden taken on when order and meaning are imposed. Iser explained that the indeterminate elements and the resultant chasm between the reader and the text are the root cause of the communicative reading process, and of the interaction between author, text, and reader. These indeterminate elements, clearly features of Nietzsche's writing, force the reader to surge forth and become herself a sort of *Übermensch*, for the only meaning of the text, like societal meaning itself, is the one which she herself develops.

The reader, however, does not produce meaning in a void. As was explained in detail in the discussions of the principles of reader response criticism, the reader's interpretation of the text and her creation of its meaning is necessarily based on the given element of authorial intention: the text. Although considerable latitude is possible, the interpretation and the meaning outcome is based on the text itself. When faced with a text as indeterminate as that of Nietzsche, the reader, like the *Übermensch*, must rise to the challenge and impose her sense of meaning on a text that often seems to be more gap than not, more indeterminacy than determinacy. As Iser's principles of reader response criticism outline, the reader must be an essentially creative force in triadic relationship of author/text/reader. The reader, then, is a sort of textual

*Übermensch*, and her interpretive activity correlates to the societal influence Nietzsche's primary *Übermensch* creates. The textual *Übermensch* emerges only because Nietzsche has left gaps, or voids, in his text, which the reader must fill with meaning and significance. Therefore, the reader is accorded real power when she interprets the indeterminate text, and the true challenge is whether she is prepared to accept the responsibility which is unavoidably paired with that power.

### ***The will to power***

Nietzsche posits the will to power as an explanatory principle for human behaviour. The theory is therefore based on a perception of psychology, as Nietzsche believes that the will to power, or the desire for power, is what fundamentally motivates all human behaviour. Although Nietzsche does not provide any true evidence for the establishment of his theory, it informs a great deal of his thought. The idea of the will to power can be described quite simply: all people want power, those who have some power want more, and other desires are a result of their products' ability to increase the individual's level of power. Therefore, desires involving money, career, or relationships, for example, are actually motivated by the will to power. Everything desired represents an acquisition of some sort of power.

The will to power is therefore an interpretation of the world, of the role of human beings in that world, and of the relationships between human beings. Nietzsche perceived the world as operating in a certain way, and the will to power is introduced as an attempt to explain the workings of the world. The will to power, therefore, and this is key, is a descriptive and not a normative explanatory principle. The will to

power is *why* the world works in this way, not why it *should* work in this way. Distasteful or not, the most fundamental human motivator, Nietzsche believes, is the desire to control the self, others, and the surrounding environment.

The concept of the will to power is an *interpretation* of the universe, and not an effort on Nietzsche's part to construct a metaphysics. As indicated in the above explanation of the *Übermensch*, there is no sense or meaning in the world except that which one gives it, and the imposition of that individualized meaning is in itself the exertion of the will to power. Truth therefore becomes equated with the will to power. Just as Fish explained that meaning is not "pointable to", neither is truth according to Nietzsche's explanation: under the will to power and consistent with Nietzschean perspectivism, truth is something created and imposed upon the world on an individual basis. (Hollingdale 25) The will to power, therefore, is not simply the desire to dominate others in a militaristic sense, but rather is the will to create order or meaning in the universe: to create one's truth and see it borne out in the world. Like the *Übermensch*, and as permitted by perspectivism, the will to power is inherently creative.

As a result, although the will to power is most often interpreted in socio-political terms, it equally describes the reader's experience and motivation when interpreting a text. As I explained earlier, because of the form and style of Nietzsche's texts, and in light of what he said of the reading experience and the preferred reader, the reader of Nietzsche's work is granted both power and responsibility. As an interpreter, the reader's will to power is reflected in her imposition of both structure and meaning on

the text. This exertion of the will to power is potentially available to all of Nietzsche's readers, as a result of the form of the texts themselves. Therefore, if Nietzsche's account of fundamental human motivations is accurate, the highly indeterminate text should be preferable to the text favoured by the traditional paradigm, as the will to power is more readily able to operate in the indeterminate text. There is more power available to be attained, as there are increased opportunities to impose order and an individualized sense of meaning. Although the opportunity to exert one's will to power is available to all readers, only perfect, "qualified", readers have the will to do so: the will to interpret, the will to understand, the will to navigate the labyrinth of Nietzsche's text.

The will to power, then, is consistent with Iser's account of truth and textual meaning. Meaning in a text is not something to be archeologically extracted: rather it is something which is developed and created in a partnership between reader and author. In Nietzsche's terms, meaning and truth develop as the qualified reader interpretively exerts her will to power and imposes her sense of truth upon the text. The will to power clearly applies to the reading process, provided the reading experience is of a kind of text which, like Nietzsche's texts, accords the reader a fundamentally creative role.

### ***Eternal recurrence***

Eternal recurrence, or eternal return, is an apparently cosmological theory which has implications for the current project because of its existential overtones. According to the doctrine of eternal recurrence, everything that has been will occur again, over and over, in exactly the same way. Nietzsche describes eternal recurrence as his most

horrifying thought, and has it serve as a driving theme in Zarathustra, as Zarathustra struggles to come to terms with his realization of the brutally cyclical nature of time and nature. Recognition of eternal recurrence must have “existential import for an individual.” (Magnus 1996), as she is forced to evaluate her existence with cold, new eyes, and determine if it is one that she would welcome living again. As Magnus explains, before the individual can truly and genuinely not only accept but even affirm eternal recurrence, she must consider her life to be “intrinsically valuable, worth living over and over again.” (Magnus 1996, 37)

Described in this way, eternal recurrence is clearly the “heaviest burden” for an individual to bear, but it is also a very powerful thought. Does the individual despair at the thought of reliving her life over again, down to the most painful detail? Or does she rejoice at the possibility? Does she think of her greatest sadness, or her greatest joy? Eternal recurrence therefore has the power to crush the less steadfast, or to transform those who recognize that their lives are wanting and who have the courage to improve their apparent future lot. Eternal recurrence, therefore, is an empirical cosmological theory which serves almost as an individualized truth test, which forces one to test the “ability to say ‘yes’ to life as it is.” (Copleston VII, 415) Just like the will to power and the *Übermensch*, however, with eternal recurrence Nietzsche attempts to provide an explanatory principle without straying into the minefield of metaphysics. Eternal recurrence does not require any transcendent god-like being in order to hold, for it accounts for the sense of becoming in the universe without appealing to any principle outside of the universe itself.

Eternal recurrence, as introduced in Zarathustra, is also transformative for the reader. In the same way that the novels of Camus and of Sartre invite the reader to consider her place in the world and her own sense of the meaning of existence, eternal recurrence, as Magnus and Higgins describe it in The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche, is an “invitation” to the reader. The reader is forced to consider what eternal recurrence would really be like: if everything is to recur eternally, does the reader think of the joys of her life, or of its horrors? Nietzsche “invites his reader to imagine,” and “asks his reader’s reaction to this imagined state of affairs.” (8) Once again, Nietzsche permits and enables reader participation in the development of meaning. Nietzsche posits eternal recurrence as an interpretation of the world and the reader is invited to extrapolate from Nietzsche’s interpretation, and to apply his ideas to her own life. The meaning of Nietzsche’s doctrine therefore becomes its meaning as read by a particular reader with a particular sense of her existence at a particular point in her life. Eternal recurrence truly serves to illustrate perspectivism and Nietzsche’s openness to interpretation, because it is put forth as Nietzsche’s view of the world and it is up to the reader to apply the idea to her own situation and determine its significance for her.

***Misapplying the traditional paradigm: Arthur C. Danto***

My position throughout this thesis has been that texts of philosophical literature are rejected or under-appreciated by the philosophical establishment in large part because philosophical literature continues to be erroneously evaluated according to the traditional philosophical paradigm. As in the case of the other texts I have considered, I hope to rehabilitate Nietzsche’s literature by demonstrating the value of a paradigm

shift. Arthur C. Danto's work, Nietzsche as Philosopher, is an excellent example of the misapplication of the traditional paradigm. Although Danto's grasp of Nietzsche's primary themes may be perfectly accurate, his analysis of the corpus as a whole and of Nietzsche's style of writing clearly does not do justice to the philosopher. I introduce Danto here not to ridicule him, but to show that the traditional paradigm, when no other is available, cannot help but lead to some misguided conclusions. Strangely enough, some of Danto's commentary hints at a sympathetic analysis that he would have preferred to construct had he been able to gain access to a new set of tools. Danto knows that as a traditional philosopher, Nietzsche is a mess, but he does not dare evaluate him according to any other set of standards.

An account of Danto's assessment of Nietzsche is also found in Magnus et al., Nietzsche's Case: Philosophy as/and Literature (1993). The Magnus project is similar to mine in that it seeks to reject what it calls "the Official View". According to the "Official View", philosophers, and specifically historians of philosophy, are "conceptual archaeologists" (10), who plunder the texts of the past in order to locate "treasures which may help to illuminate our times." (10) The conceptual archaeologists, therefore, adopt the meaning metaphor which Iser rejects and certainly would not be comfortable with the notion of meaning as event, for then the source of their treasure would be altered significantly. Magnus also introduces Danto to illustrate the faults of the existing paradigm, but he intends a somewhat different conclusion. The purpose of Magnus' study is to answer the question: "What does it mean to say that Nietzsche's style necessarily embodies a philosophic choice?" (11) Although this is another issue of

Nietzsche's writing which is controversial, my focus remains on the reader's experience of the text as seen through the perspective of Iser's principles of reader response criticism. Therefore, although my motivations are certainly consistent with those of Magnus, our projects are propelled by a different set of guiding principles.

Danto rightly indicates that Nietzsche has "seldom been treated as a philosopher at all." (13) At the time Danto wrote this work (1965), analytic philosophy reigned supreme, and logic and linguistics were the topics of choice. Clearly, in this context, Nietzsche would be an exceedingly difficult case to handle. Danto, rather than choosing what I would call an appropriate evaluative paradigm, determines that viewing Nietzsche in the context of analysis is acceptable as it will make the work "available to the general reader." (13) This is not to imply that analysis is a defective paradigm, but rather that Danto opted to invoke it because it was perceived to be the only paradigm available. Analysis itself is not an inherently wrong-headed approach to philosophy, but it is not always the most appropriate method of evaluation and should not be applied universally. Instead, some consideration of the nature of the work must be undertaken in order to determine the appropriateness of the evaluative paradigm. Danto's error, then, is his attempt to force the paradigm to fit Nietzsche's work, which he justifies by appealing to the predominance of the paradigm. We know, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, that Nietzsche was not in the least concerned in making his work accessible, and therefore an evaluative choice made on this basis is puzzling at best.



Danto even recognizes that his chosen approach will “precipitate some anachronisms.” (13) He justifies what he seems to admit is a wrong-headed approach by claiming that because philosophy has evolved since Nietzsche’s time, the philosopher would have written in a fashion consistent with logical analysis had he been aware of it. Danto even goes so far as to claim that Nietzsche’s “language would have been less colorful had he known what he was trying to say” (13), despite his acknowledgment that this would have made Nietzsche a less “original thinker” (13). As in the case of Plato, it is unfair to critically evaluate Nietzsche according to a set of norms which were not in existence when he wrote. Do we not owe it to a philosopher to evaluate his work based on how he wrote it, rather than how we now believe he ought to have written it? Conclusions based on speculation of what Nietzsche would have written had he only “known better” are tenuous at best.

Danto explicitly acknowledges the paradigm according to which he undertakes his analysis. In fact, his assessment of what is missing in Nietzsche is perhaps the most compact, terse statement of what I have been calling the “traditional” paradigm of philosophical evaluation. In Nietzsche, Danto argues, one does not find “those fine and subtle distinctions, the circumspect marshaling of argument, the cautious and qualified inferences which are the hallmarks of professional philosophical writing” (20). Danto is absolutely correct: these elements are to be found nowhere in Nietzsche. There are several alternatives which the critic or the reader might pursue as a result. Nietzsche could be rejected altogether as a philosopher, since he does not seem to fit with the “hallmarks” of standard philosophical writing. Or, Nietzsche could be considered

merely a poor philosophical writer, whose ideas have merit even if written in such an unacceptable manner. Finally, the option I clearly prefer, the paradigm of what constitutes professional philosophical writing could be not dispensed with altogether, but expanded. The philosophical treatise can still be required to include careful distinctions, well-constructed arguments and cautious inferences, but the door ought also to be opened to other types of philosophical writing: types which address the same crucial questions, but do so in a different way.

Danto tries to force Nietzsche into a model of logical and linguistic analysis, which will be a tight fit indeed. Analytic philosophy and its philosophers have chosen to write in a systematic, treatise-based manner, but Nietzsche should not be denigrated for choosing to do otherwise; nor should his work be effectively translated into their preferred form of philosophical expression. At one point in his introductory analysis, Danto equates the lack of a systematic approach with spontaneity and irrationality. (26) To be fair, Danto in his analysis is attempting himself to rehabilitate Nietzsche: like me, he does not want to see Nietzsche dismissed as an irrational thinker. Where we differ, however, is in our methods of rehabilitation. Danto feels that if Nietzsche is not to be irrational, he must be made to be systematic. I, however, believe that there are further alternatives beyond the false dichotomy of systematic philosophy or no philosophy at all.

It is interesting and potentially revealing that in his concluding remarks Danto seems almost apologetic about the approach he has taken. "I hope," Danto states, "that I have not merely imposed my own will-to-system upon the galaxy of fragments and

aphorisms of which his work is composed" (229). Firstly, as students in philosophy are often admonished, Nietzsche's work is not so much of a jumble at it first appears. Secondly, I think Danto has indeed imposed his own will-to-system on a corpus which, although it may not be a complete jumble, is significantly removed from that systematic style of philosophic writing which analytic philosophy so strongly prefers. Danto, like so many others, cannot see beyond the traditional strict separation of what is philosophy (careful arguments, straightforward analysis, etc.) and what is not (anything other than the above).

To close on a positive note, however, I do believe that Danto gets it right when he speculates as to Nietzsche's response to Danto's project. Although Danto believes it to be an unsatisfying reply, he envisions Nietzsche as saying: "Philosophy is a creative business, and the way is always open. Philosophy is a contest of will with will." (230) In the discussion of Nietzsche which follows, I will illustrate the importance of the will to power in the reader's interaction with and interpretation of the text. Whether Danto accurately grasps the content of Nietzsche's text is not in question here: rather, I am concerned with the paradigm he selected for the analysis of the text. Danto's chosen paradigm is clearly the traditional one, and as I have shown, it is not always appropriate: certainly not in this case.

To be fair, Danto, as quoted in Magnus, did at a later date rescind his determined claim that conceptual analysis of language and logic was the only appropriate form of philosophical expression. In an address to the American Philosophical Association in 1985, Danto says of Descartes that much of the scholarship on this philosopher has

consisted of forcing “his argumentation into notations we are certain he would have adopted had he lived to appreciate their advantages, since it is now so clear where he went wrong.” (Magnus 1993, 10) Danto goes on to admit that the philosopher is at least owed the effort to determine if his choice of form has implications for his broader philosophic project. The form of writing, then, should not be immediately dismissed and its purpose and effect should be considered.

These remarks, as Magnus shows, can clearly be extrapolated to apply to Nietzsche as well. Although Danto misapplied the “Official View”, which is similar to what I call the traditional philosophical paradigm, he at least came to see that this tendency had its faults. As Magnus moves away from his “Official View”, he analyzes form in terms of philosophic choices. I analyze in terms of the reader’s experience of the text, and hope to expand or replace the traditional philosophical paradigm so that works such as those of Nietzsche, as well as the philosophers I have already discussed, need not suffer these fates: either forced unnaturally into the mode of expression favoured by the traditional paradigm, the argument-based, treatise of conceptual analysis; or dismissed altogether as philosophy or marginalized as only “somewhat” philosophical.

### **Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a summary**

It is obvious to anyone who reads the text of Zarathustra that a straightforward description of what the work is “about” is almost impossible. To even identify clearly what philosophical ideas are discussed is difficult. Zarathustra seems to be a mosaic of different styles: poetry, parable, dialogue, sermon, philosophy, etc. Zarathustra was

published in four parts: two in 1883, the third in 1884, and the final section in 1885, although this fourth part was not published publicly until 1892. Nietzsche apparently had planned as many as ten parts for the work, but only completed four.

The historical Zarathustra, a Persian prophet, founded the Zoroastrian religion in the seventh century BC. The heart of the Zoroastrian religion was the battle between two gods: one of light and good, and one of darkness and evil. (Hollingdale 30) The character of Zarathustra is a prophet of a different kind, one who wanders and preaches Nietzsche's fundamental philosophical ideas. I offer here a brief summary of the narrative of the work before proceeding to a fuller analysis.

The prologue introduces Zarathustra and his animals, the eagle and the serpent. Zarathustra descends from his cave in the mountains after a ten year exile, for he is ready to "be man again" (39) and speaks in the marketplace to a crowd gathered for a circus. The crowd, however, hears him not, though they listen, and Zarathustra is rejected. "They do not understand me: I am not the mouth for these ears." (47) Zarathustra leaves the town, awakens the next morning, and realizes that he needs companions, disciples, those "who want to go where I want to go." (51) When Zarathustra has come to this realization, he looks into the sky and sees his animals, an eagle soaring in circles, and a serpent coiled around the eagle's neck. The circular images of his animals may be the first hints at the cyclical idea of eternal recurrence.

The prologue is followed by a series of discourses, which are delivered by Zarathustra to his disciples while he is living in a town called The Pied Cow. At the end of this series, Zarathustra prepares to leave The Pied Cow, and he is followed by his

disciples, but he will not let them follow. The conclusion to Part One is an exhortation to the disciples of the value of being alone, a clearer statement of the *Übermensch*, and a hint at eternal recurrence. "And this is the great noontide: it is when man stands at the middle of his course between animal and Superman and celebrates his journey to the evening as his highest hope: for it is the journey to a new morning....All gods are dead: now we want the Superman to live". (104)

In Part Two, Zarathustra goes back into the mountains, having praised solitude to his disciples. Months and then years pass, and his wisdom increases. Zarathustra awakens one morning having been frightened by a dream, and realizes that his doctrine is being distorted by his enemies, and that he must descend again from his mountain to teach his disciples. While on the Blissful Islands, Zarathustra again teaches of the *Übermensch*, but most especially of the will to power and eternal recurrence. The perspectives in Part Two shift quite frequently, as Zarathustra delivers his speeches, or recounts dreams, or tells of conversations he has had with others. The turning point of Part Two comes when Zarathustra, having heard a prophet speak, grieves, fasts, and then sleeps for a long time. When he awakens (notice how the key pronouncements come when Zarathustra has just roused himself from sleep), he tells his disciples of a dream he has had. Troubled and depressed by the dream, which he does not seem able to interpret, Zarathustra again ascends the mountain, leaving his disciples behind him.

In Part Three, Zarathustra wanders back to the mountain cave, having forsaken his friends. Zarathustra spends the majority of Part Three alone, and speaks to himself rather than to his disciples. Part Three contains the clearest statements of eternal

recurrence, especially in the sections entitled “Of Involuntary Bliss”, “Of Old and New Law Tables” and “The Convalescent”. At this point, Zarathustra awakens, again, with the realization of the “abysmal thought.” (232) His animals come to him and care for him and he lies as if dead for seven days. When the full statement of eternal recurrence comes, it is from his animals, and not from Zarathustra himself. At the conclusion of the section, the eagle and the serpent withdraw as Zarathustra is conversing with his soul.

When Part Four opens, months and years have passed, and Zarathustra’s hair is white. A great cry of distress draws him into the forests below his cave, where he encounters a variety of characters. Zarathustra comes to see these men as the “Higher Men”, each representing an aspect of his teaching. However, it becomes evident that they have taken his teachings to a ludicrous extent, so that his teachings are distorted and ridiculous. These Higher Men, supposed atheists, end by worshipping an ass that one of them has ridden to Zarathustra’s cave. Zarathustra realizes that he does not yet have his “rightful men”, and is called to again descend the mountain in search of them.

### **Zarathustra and reader response criticism**

As I admitted in the introductory remarks to this discussion of Nietzsche, applying the principles of reader response criticism to Zarathustra will likely prove to be the biggest challenge of this project. The combination of narrative, poetry, hyperbole and other stylistic aspects make the text exceptionally difficult to handle, on a variety of levels. In addition, because of the shifting narratives and perspectives of Zarathustra, it is difficult to determine a logical method of discussion. My focus in this section,

therefore, will be the application of the principles of Iser's reader response criticism to Nietzsche's text in the hopes of illuminating its intentionality and showing Zarathustra to be less problematic than it is perceived to be, provided an appropriate paradigm is used. Specifically, I will consider the basic structural elements of Nietzsche's text which comprise what Iser calls the implied reader. The implied reader in Zarathustra creates a particularly unique reading experience which appears to be consistent with the philosophy expressed in the text itself. I will also consider Zarathustra in terms of its repertoire, and the way in which Nietzsche promotes, indeed provokes, a reassessment of contemporary ideologies and thought systems. I will conclude by considering whether the combination of the complexity of the implied reader and the occasionally unfamiliar repertoire contributes to what Iser calls "reader overstrain".

I make every possible effort to avoid entering into debate regarding the precisely correct interpretation of Nietzsche, for several reasons. First, this implies an archeological approach to meaning, which is in direct conflict with the principles of reader response criticism. Second, it seems quite likely that such an interpretation is an impossibility, and is indeed not a goal toward which Nietzsche would have encouraged his reader to strive. Finally, this debate inevitably implies a return to the traditional philosophical paradigm, where precise expression, rigorous argumentation and a systematic approach to philosophy are valued to the exclusion of alternate modes of expression and argumentation. Although this paradigm as such is not inherently incorrect, it is not universally appropriate, and I have already argued that Zarathustra is not the place for the traditional paradigm.



However, it is the case the traditional paradigm has been the one, until quite recently, most often applied to Nietzsche and Zarathustra in the attempt to produce a meaningful interpretation. As Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his article "The Drama of Zarathustra", puts it, his own first introduction to Nietzsche was a "pale and academically tamed" one (125), which dismissed the stylistic and therefore apparently problematic elements of Nietzsche's writing in order to create a sense of systematic order. I believe this is the common tendency: to force Nietzsche into the traditional philosophical paradigm like a wild horse; to trap him, break him, tame him. Or, failing this, those who favour the traditional paradigm but who recognize the value of Nietzsche's thought "prefer to find what they regard as similar discussions elsewhere in Nietzsche's works and to avoid the need to factor the fictionality of the work [Zarathustra] into their reading." (Magnus 1996, 39)

Gadamer argues, however, that Nietzsche as Nietzsche truly wrote presents a series of distinct challenges to "any thoughtful man" (125)—challenges which clearly require philosophical activity. First, Nietzsche was a radical and extreme thinker; Nietzsche neither thought nor wrote like any other philosopher, as Zarathustra so clearly illustrates. Nietzsche veered away from traditional philosophy in terms of content, method, and style of expression. Zarathustra represents the most significant departure from the traditional paradigm, and therefore "any conceptual analysis and integration of Nietzsche into the traditional context of philosophy faces unusual hardship." (126) And yet, as I have shown, this effort continues to be made. In addition, Gadamer argues, Nietzsche was a skilled writer who delighted in parody and

irony, literary techniques which are particularly in evidence in Zarathustra. As a result, the directly apparent meaning of Nietzsche's writings is like a veneer which masks the potential meaning hidden beneath. However, this perception of true meaning as being concealed does not imply the archeological approach to meaning rejected by the reader response critics. Instead, as Gadamer indicates, Nietzsche insisted that interpretation is the imposition of sense, the exertion of the reader's will to power. As Iser explained in his theory, therefore, the reader develops her own sense of the meaning of the text on the basis of the author's expressed intention and imposes that meaning as an interpretation.

Iser's concept of the implied reader may assist in determining why Nietzsche insisted on writing in the style he did, despite the problems caused by this choice. How do the stylistic features of Nietzsche's text recall Iser's implied reader? First, remember that the implied reader is a feature of the text and its structure and does not refer to any particular reader. The manner in which the text is structured is the implied reader, and it reflects the author's intention to reach the empirical reader in a certain way. As a result, the implied reader embodies the predispositions of the text toward actualization within a certain range, and therefore is "firmly planted in the structure of the text." (Iser 1978, 34) Using the implied reader as a new evaluative tool when approaching Nietzsche's texts in general and Zarathustra in particular may serve to illustrate why Nietzsche was so insistently and stubbornly difficult to understand, frustrating critics and commentators and making them wish he would just say what he had to say and dispense with stylistic intrigue.

Given Nietzsche's thoughts regarding the ideal reader of his work, one who is critical, active, and prepared to adopt her own interpretation of his work, I think it is possible that Nietzsche used stylistic strategies to encourage the development of this kind of reader, and in addition, to heighten the quality of interpretations that might be produced. Because Nietzsche, like any other writer and philosopher, records his intention in the text and obviously harbours hopes of being understood, it may be that he structures the text so as to pre-select the kind of reader who has the skills to produce an interpretation which is at the very least consistent with the intentional expression. The stylistic complications of the text pose a barrier for the reader which must be negotiated before interpretation can be attempted and a sense of meaning established. This is a barrier recognized and lamented by the traditional paradigm. However, as in the case of Plato, when one considers Nietzsche's possible motivation for the barrier, it does not seem to pose such a problem. What, then, is this motivation? It is clear what Nietzsche thought of the herd, and that the reading and interpreting equivalent of the herd are like "plundering troops" in a text. Therefore, by erecting a barrier, he could possibly "lock out" this kind of reader by presenting a challenge too great for her to handle. The more adept reader will be able to navigate the stylistic difficulties and will be more likely to produce an interpretation and impose a meaning that Nietzsche would be prepared to accept.

In the case of Zarathustra, therefore, the implied reader which Nietzsche creates by structuring the text in a certain way and including elements interpretable by a certain set of readers, is a feature of a text which affects the empirical reader in a certain

way. The stylistic elements, rather than being rejected or sidelined, are an integral part of the implied reader and must be recognized as determining factors in the experience of the empirical reader. The structuring of the text is purposeful, obviously, but is further intended to accomplish a certain sort of reading experience. As a result, it is unwise and unfair to invoke an evaluative paradigm which forces the text to be read and interpreted in other than the way it is presented. By shifting the paradigm with the help of the principles of reader response criticism, it becomes both possible and necessary to dispense with expectations of what a philosophical text *should* look like; instead, the focus is shifted to what this particular text *does* look like, and attempting to understand why Nietzsche wrote in this way becomes part of the task of interpreting the text.

It is essential though sometimes difficult to remember that the implied reader is a textual construct and not a reader, either empirical or abstract. The implied reader refers to the features of the text which are structurally combined to create a certain kind of experience for the reader. Therefore, in the case of Zarathustra, a combination of elements predispose the actual reader to develop the text's meaning in a manner parallel to its intended effect. The use of narrative structure, and specifically the pervasive sense of travelogue, serve to parallel the journey of discovery that Zarathustra himself is undergoing. That is, the important theme in Zarathustra is not the physical journeys that Zarathustra takes up and down his mountain, but the discovery that he makes as he goes: of eternal recurrence, of the importance of solitude, of the failings of the supposed Higher Men.

The use of narrative structure to illustrate Zarathustra's development encourages the reader to follow the same sort of progression. Nietzsche hopes to enable the development of Higher Men, of the *Übermensch*, of individuals both aware of eternal recurrence and able to accept it. This also highlights the temporal aspect of the reading process, because the text itself adheres so closely to a laterally evolving structure: Zarathustra is on a journey both physical and philosophical, one which is necessarily shared by the reader as a result of the structural features of the text: the implied reader. Therefore, the implied reader in this case creates an experience in the reader which mirrors that of Zarathustra himself. As Iser puts it, the implied reader anticipates an actual reader without precisely defining her, and yet the "real reader is always offered a particular role to play" (Iser 1978, 34), although the way in which that particular role will be actualized will vary according to the reader. She remains, therefore, the object of both invitation and restriction, for the text both invites her response and restricts it by its structural features.

Nietzsche's text clearly has this effect on the reader. His text invites a response, indeed requires one, demands one, and it does provide significant interpretive latitude for the reader, although she remains nonetheless controlled by what is presented to her. Elements making up the implied reader include the structure itself, as a travelogue-like narrative, and the significance of characters such as the animals, the tight-rope walker, the dwarf, the Higher Men, and indeed Zarathustra himself. It is clear to the qualified reader that these characters occupy symbolic roles in the narrative, and she is as a result invited to determine what those roles might be. Here again, the temptation is to

comment on the actual significance of those characters, but this would be to put forth an interpretation of the content of Nietzsche's text, which I am explicitly attempting to avoid. However, what the reader might do when presented with apparently symbolic characters could look like the following example: the reader who is aware (or who takes the time to discover) that Zarathustra was a Persian prophet whose religion revolved around the battle between darkness and light will be prodded to assimilate that knowledge with her direct experience of the text and produce an interpretation which incorporates the elements of the implied reader and her interpretation of those elements.

This is, of course, in direct conflict with the requirements of the traditional paradigm, and why this paradigm finds it so difficult to handle Zarathustra. The traditional paradigm is unwilling to accept textual structuring typically more appropriate to literary texts, and is uncomfortable with the aspect of response-inviting which is inherent to the literary text, and to the philosophical text which incorporates literary form. Fact-stating is to be preferred to response-inviting. The important distinction must again be made between response to a determinate text and response to an indeterminate text. A determinate text permits response but not participation in the development of meaning: meaning is presented "straight up" and the reader's response is restricted to understanding and evaluating that meaning. In contrast, the indeterminate text, like Zarathustra, requires response in order to spur the reader into the necessary relationship with the text (and, by extension, its author) in order for meaning to develop.

Therefore, Zarathustra brings about the “perspective intended by the author” (Iser 1978, 35) by requiring reader actualization of indeterminate elements, whereas the philosophical treatise directly presents that perspective. As a result, Zarathustra as text brings about a new perspective for the reader, a perspective which allows the reader to consider new ideas in a new way. The structural considerations of the implied reader in Zarathustra bring the reader to adopt the perspective of Zarathustra himself: to see what it’s like when all are blind to your message, to understand the isolation when the friends who really understand you are an eagle and a snake, and to feel the tremendous weight which the realization of eternal recurrence brings. As the reader adopts this perspective, as a result of the response-inviting and response-requiring elements of the text, the experience the author intends is created in her, for she not only sees the world through the eyes of Zarathustra himself, but her own perception of the world is equally altered.

Iser’s account of the role of the repertoire in the literary text illuminates the structural and thematic nature of Zarathustra, as well as its chronic difficulties. The repertoire of the literary text takes familiar schemata and has them serve as the background of the “action” of the literary text. Remember that the “repertoire reproduces the familiar, but strips it of its current validity.” (Iser 1978, 74) “Alternative values” which will replace the familiar ones which the reader sees she has lost are not explicitly presented, but the reader is spurred to create them. In fact, the repertoire serves as a sort of framework in which the meaning of the text may develop; it reshapes the familiar and conventional elements so that the reader is challenged to reassess those

conventions. Therefore, the familiar yet reshaped elements of the repertoire are like a “hollow form into which the reader is invited to pour his own store of knowledge.” (Iser 1978, 143)

This is especially evident in the fourth part of Zarathustra. The familiar elements of Christianity—the prophet among the people, the collection of disciples, the ceremonies of worship—are upended and made to look ridiculous. The reader recognizes the familiar elements, but it is equally clear that they are being presented to her in a completely different context, and it is this context that forces her to reevaluate her perceptions of the familiar. For example, in the chapter entitled *The Convalescent*, Zarathustra lies “as if dead” for seven days, a description which invokes two distinct Christian “myths”. Zarathustra lies as if dead and then rises again, which undoubtedly makes reference to the resurrection narrative, for he rises with a profound realization, but one which weighs much more heavily than the Biblical revelation. Given the seven day period during which Zarathustra lies, the creation myth is also invoked, but in this case the creation is of a new kind of human being: the *Übermensch*, who is equipped with a new awareness and a new ability to effect change in the world..

The prevailing norms and conventions of Nietzsche’s time are presented in such a way that the reader cannot fail to recognize that Nietzsche finds them lacking. She is therefore prodded to discover why this should be the case, and as a result she herself reevaluates norms which might be so familiar that she never considered doing so. This, then, is the important combination of gaps, indeterminacies, and repertoire, which Iser describes in an analysis of Fielding’s Joseph Andrews (Iser 1978, 145). There are gaps in



the repertoire, the reader is spurred to fill those gaps, the theme of the work is therefore realized, the author's intention fulfilled, and the meaning developed. The gaps in the repertoire are created by the up-ending of the familiar, like Nietzsche's parody of Christian ceremony in Zarathustra, and the reader is mobilized to fill those gaps and therefore to participate in the development of the meaning of the text and therefore the creation of the literary work itself. The gaps mobilize the imagination of the reader and enliven her interpretive instinct.

What happens, however, when the reader is unfamiliar with some elements of the repertoire? What if, for example, the reader does not even think to wonder why the prophet is named Zarathustra, or she fails to recognize the biting parody of the Ass Festival? Familiarity with elements of the repertoire is crucial, for it is their failings which impel reader activity. As a result, if the reader is unfamiliar with some elements of the repertoire, it follows that she will fail to recognize some of the resultant gaps in the text, and those gaps will go unfilled. Iser believes that under these circumstances, the theme intended by the author will not achieve its full significance, for the requisite activity of the reader is insufficient. That is, in that particular reading instance, the full meaning of the text will not develop and the author's intention will not be fully realized. In more straightforward terms, the reader will not fully understand the text, and will fail to appreciate all aspects of the literary work. Some allusions may "appeal exclusively to the educated reader" (Iser 1978, 145), and because it is in the reader's mind "that the text coheres" (147), the uneducated reader may be simply unable to achieve that coherence.

I do think that this is the case for Nietzsche's Zarathustra. The uneducated, or even the unperceptive or the lazy reader, will be unable to achieve a coherent sense of the important themes of the text. In fact, given what Nietzsche has to say about the perfect reader, I think it may be that he structured his text so that the "perfect" reader would be the only one able to fully actualize and appreciate Nietzsche's intention. As Iser says, texts take place on the level of their reader's abilities (Iser 1978, 207), and as a result the text actualized by the "other" reader will bear no resemblance to the text actualized by the perfect reader. The challenge of recognition and reassessment of the repertoire and the imposition of meaning may prove too much for some readers, and they will not access the themes Nietzsche intended. I will say more about the consequences of the reader's potential failure in the conclusion of the discussion of Nietzsche.

Based on the above discussion, the importance of the role of the repertoire in any literary text, and in Zarathustra in particular, should be clear. As Iser explains, the repertoire of literature is arranged so as to question or challenge existing conventions: "by reorganizing them [conventions] horizontally, the fictional text brings them before us in unexpected combinations...it deprivatizes the conventions it has selected." (Iser 1978, 61) Undoubtedly, Zarathustra represents an overthrow of ideologies via the medium of literature. Two of the most prominent themes of Zarathustra, the criticism of the Christian society and the call for the *Übermensch*, represent in themselves the desire to replace existing conventions of thought and society. Further, by using a

literary model to express his ideas, Nietzsche also enables the reader to undertake the same critical evaluation of those conventions through her analysis of the repertoire.

This is a goal which could not have been accomplished in the same way or with similar effect had Nietzsche adopted a treatise format. First, Zarathustra as a character could not have been developed as the reader's guide in the text. Second, the process of discovery undergone by Zarathustra and the reader in turn could not be reflected in an expository text. Third, the play of the repertoire, which allows the development of a critical reader and also of thematic intention, could not emerge in a treatise. I have talked throughout the thesis about the use of literary form to create a certain kind of reading experience. The kind of reading experience Nietzsche creates in Zarathustra is essential to the larger goal, which is the development of *Übermensch* capable of restructuring a failing society. The reader who successfully navigates Zarathustra exerts her will to power and is on the way to being like that *Übermensch*. This sort of critically active textual involvement is simply not possible in the framework of an expository text. (Again, this is not to disparage the treatise format, or to imply that it impedes critical activity. I claim that the *kind* of involvement enabled by Zarathustra, and the results it creates for the reader, could not be created by the treatise format.) Therefore, to create this kind of reading experience Nietzsche of necessity turned to literary elements, incorporating his philosophical thought into a narrative framework.

The goal of philosophy is to answer the crucial questions raised by the human experience of the world. Like the literary texts described by Iser, philosophy also seeks to reevaluate and replace existing conventions and faulty ways of thinking. For

example, Nietzsche has been described as a “pioneer in the demolition of ancient habits of mind and moral prejudices” (Hollingdale 16), who asks the reader to assist in the destruction and replacement of devalued values. The reader is encouraged to recognize the invalidity of the existing value system, and to work to replace it with a more appropriate set of values. Therefore, Nietzsche’s use of nonstandard modes of philosophical expression should not be so difficult for the traditional philosophical paradigm to handle, for the goals of the literary text and the philosophical text are, if not identical, at the very least parallel and compatible. The difference is that in the treatise the philosopher presents a direct case supporting his belief that the current norms and conventions are lacking, and in addition proposes a new way of thinking to replace the old. In the literary text, as in texts such as Nietzsche’s, the norms and conventions are displayed in a context according to which the reader recognizes their flaws, and it is her responsibility to formulate new alternatives.

The goals of philosophical treatises and philosophical literature are in spirit the same: it is only in method that they differ. The unique duality of philosophical literature in terms of structure and purpose erects a deliberate but purposeful barrier between the message (the analysis and replacement of conventional modes of thought) and the reader. Navigating this barrier is what makes the reader’s experience of philosophical literature unique, and not necessarily problematic. In Nietzsche’s case, the barrier is more difficult to navigate, as it is likely designed to screen out those readers Nietzsche would deem unworthy of the message itself. Therefore, rather than categorize philosophical literature as “non-philosophy”, it should be recognized that a

layer has been added to the philosophical process as a result, and that this is not grounds for removal from philosophical consideration.

***Conclusion: reader overstrain?***

I explained earlier that Iser believes levels of indeterminacy to be essential to a successful engagement with the reader. Because reading is active and creative, the text should be constructed so as to engage the reader and spur her to complete the text by fulfilling its indeterminacies. However, Iser qualified, if the text is too determinate, or too indeterminate, the reader will balk at the interaction: the result will be “boredom and overstrain”, which “form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play.” (Iser 1974, 275) In a final evaluation of Zarathustra, the possibility that Nietzsche is guilty of causing overstrain in his reader must be considered. Is the text too indeterminate, forcing the reader to leave the field of play in frustration? Is this why Zarathustra is disfavoured so consistently by the traditional philosophical paradigm? It could be that the text as an isolated work is simply too indeterminate and the reader is unable to independently concretize those indeterminacies. Her own contextual input, what the reader independently brings to the text, is insufficient to produce an effective and solid interpretation. Therefore, stylistically and philosophically, in this case is the traditional philosophical paradigm correct? Is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra simply too difficult to successfully interpret in isolation, and does it stray too far from traditional modes of doing philosophy?

It is true that the average reader, confronted with the text of Zarathustra is inclined to leave the field of play and will, as a result, fail to completely actualize the

themes of the work. However, I do not think that this is necessarily a *fault* of the text, but rather an additional *feature* which is consistent with Nietzsche's perception of the reading experience and the reader herself. The "average reader" is simply not good enough to meet Nietzsche's standards: the level of reading required by Nietzsche for full thematic realization will be achievable only by the perfect reader, who in her reading experience also demonstrates two of Nietzsche most pervasively important philosophical ideas: the will to power and the *Übermensch*. The reader who fully realizes the themes of Zarathustra is not only educated, cunning and nimble, but also invokes her sense of will to power in order to impose her interpretation upon the text, and in so doing demonstrates her readiness to undertake the role of the *Übermensch*. None of this would be possible in an expository text in treatise form. The reader, then, by reading Zarathustra and making sense of the themes of the will to power and the *Übermensch*, is in fact at the same time invoking these qualities in herself, and as a result begins to share Zarathustra's journey, becomes a partner in the creation of meaning, and achieves a multilevel sense of understanding of the themes intended by Nietzsche.

The reader is tremendously challenged and may in fact be continually tempted to "leave the field of play", but if she persists, her realizations are multiple: she realizes the implied reader, the gaps in the repertoire, the thematic structure of the text, the meaning itself, its application to herself, etc. As such, then, Zarathustra is admittedly problematic both under the traditional paradigm and in terms of the astoundingly high level of reader activity required, but the reading experience it may create is incredibly complex and could not possibly be achieved in a non-literary form. As a result, the

combination of styles and narrative forms and the *boulversement* of the elements of repertoire create a remarkable and unique reading experience.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

My position throughout this thesis has been that texts of philosophical literature are rejected or under-appreciated by the philosophical establishment in large part because philosophical literature continues to be inappropriately evaluated according to the traditional philosophical paradigm. Take for example Danto, who regretted his inability to find in Nietzsche “those fine and subtle distinctions, the circumspect marshaling of argument, the cautious and qualified inferences which are the hallmarks of professional philosophical writing” (20). This is in fact a remarkably concise description of the traditional philosophical paradigm and its frame of reference. Danto had a developed set of characteristics which he invoked when presented with a text labelled “philosophy”, and when his expectations were decidedly not met, he rejected the text rather than overhauling his expectations. These expectations—these norms, these philosophical conventions—are what must be altered in order to “solve” the problems caused by these four texts, and the reader’s experience of these texts is the key to effecting this shift.

In these concluding remarks, I will revisit the four texts, concisely outlining why each poses a problem for the traditional philosophical paradigm and demonstrating why the principles of reader response criticism permit the shift in perspective which “solves” the problem. Finally, because I have argued the traditional philosophical paradigm, which puts such stock in rigorous and logical philosophical argumentation, must be expanded in order to accommodate these so-called “non-standard” philosophical texts, I will provide a preliminary sketch of the new paradigm which I



propose. Because the use of literary formats and elements should not automatically disqualify texts from eligibility for the label “philosophical”, the conventions of the philosophical paradigm must be stretched and its expectations altered in order to permit it to accept and appropriately analyze works such as those I have considered here.

The shift to new and more flexible paradigm is informed by the principles of reader response criticism. This motivation in itself may be problematic for philosophers, and philosophical critics, who are reluctant to progress beyond the belief that texts are *obviously* meant to be read, and that readers are *obviously* active. Beyond this basic perception of the reading experience, it is essential to recognize that different kinds of texts are meant to be read in different ways, and that reader activity varies greatly from text to text. Philosophical literature is read in a particular way and requires a particularly elevated level of reader activity to produce an aesthetic object. The indeterminate nature of philosophical literature creates a complex triadic relationship of author, text and reader, which necessitates, as has been amply shown, an equally complex account of textual meaning. In contrast, the standard philosophical treatise seeks to establish a truth which exists quite apart from the reader, who may access the truth by engaging with the philosophical text and seeking to understand its communicated truth, and its meaning is independent of the reader’s engagement and of the reading process.

To summarize briefly, La nausée and L’étranger are problematic under the traditional philosophical paradigm because they look and feel like novels, and the

paradigm is not sufficiently flexible to allow that pure philosophy can be found in the novel format. The *Phaedrus* is problematic because the paradigm is not equipped to handle the inconsistencies which Plato incorporates into the dialogue for the purpose of illustrating the philosophical process. Zarathustra is problematic because it appears too obtuse, too inflammatory, too opaque: The barriers are too numerous to be acceptable to the traditional paradigm.

Specifically, however, reader response shows that Sartre's La nausée is a *roman à thèse* with a clearly didactic and philosophical goal. On the other hand, La nausée so substantially reduces the reader's concretizing role that reader alienation is possible: the reader expects in a novel, even a philosophical one, to be faced with a number of indeterminacies. However, neither her philosophical nor her literary expectations are met in La nausée, and as a result she may opt not to concretize the character of Roquentin, in effect the only truly indeterminate element in the novel. It may be therefore that La nausée is not a successful combination of philosophical and literary conventions. That Sartre was attempting to achieve the same thing as Camus—a fictional demonstration of philosophical ideas—is undeniable, but this serves to illustrate that the combination of philosophical and literary conventions is not always successful.

In contrast, reader response shows that Camus' philosophical novel exploits the natural process the reader undertakes when reading literature: the invoking of norms and the creation of expectations. Camus forces his reader to reevaluate norms on several different levels. First, the novel itself cannot be satisfactorily categorized. Too

literary to be philosophy and too philosophical to be literature, L'étranger forces the reader to abandon her expectations of both disciplines. Second, the primary character of the novel is the very embodiment of norm-breaking. Meursault shatters all expectations – of the novel's characters and of the reader herself – of what is meant by “normal” social behaviour. Camus thereby forces his reader to evaluate the norms themselves and the broad-ranging explanatory principles which are thereon founded.

Therefore, the analysis of two philosophical novels, or “philosophy in images” illustrates clearly that novels can be works of philosophy despite their non-standard modes of philosophical expression. However, it was seen in the case of La nausée that the paradigm shift does not entail that all philosophical literature is to be preferred to the philosophical treatise. In fact, the reduction in indeterminacies illustrated by La nausée shows that in some cases the treatise is the most effective choice and that a careful combination of philosophical and literary elements must be achieved in order to create the certain kind of reader experience desired. However, cases such as L'étranger show that the combination of literary and philosophical conventions can be tremendously effective; indeed that in some cases no other mode of expression could duplicate the vivid reader experience. L'étranger's play with norms and conventions and the resultant reader expectations is especially effective, as illustrated by the poetics of Inge Crosman Wimmers. However, the analysis of Camus and Sartre shows that the combination of philosophy and literary form, though potentially an effective choice, is not always the best choice.

Reader response shows that Plato's *Phaedrus* is intentionally inconsistent in order to reflect Plato's preferred question and answer philosophical method. The dialogue allows the reader to share the kind of experience one of Socrates' students might have had. In addition, because she is presented with a series of clearly inconsistent arguments, the reader is in essence being posed a complex philosophical problem which she must solve. It is also clear that the *Phaedrus*, along with the other dialogues, represents an inextricable combination of narrative and philosophical argument, and as a result requires an accordingly flexible evaluative paradigm if it is to make any sense at all. By invoking this new paradigm it becomes clear that the dialogue is an exercise in philosophical reasoning, which Plato believed had to follow a certain model, and which is in turn reflected by the dialogue form.

Finally, reader response shows that Nietzsche's unusual philosophy only appears to be so odd when compared to treatises, and further shows that Nietzsche's obscurity may well be purposeful: barriers are erected both to create and to challenge the ideal reader, who in turn models the concepts of the *Übermensch* and the will to power. Objections of inaccessibility are entirely justified, for Nietzsche's meaning does indeed require significant interpretive effort and substantial knowledge of the repertoire invoked. However, this inaccessibility is not merely due to Nietzschean obstreperousness, but is in fact by design and is therefore an essential element of the text that ought to be accounted for rather than explained away. A structural analysis of the text according to Iser's principles of reader response criticism clearly shows how Nietzsche designs his text in order to create a very particular kind of reading

experience: one which poses tremendous challenges but offers rewards of similar magnitude.

Two crucial conclusions can be drawn from the application of the new paradigm to these four texts. First, works of philosophy must first be recognized to be variable according to their modes of expression, and then be evaluated according to appropriate paradigms. Therefore, when approaching a philosophical text, the reader can invoke an accurate frame of reference by asking herself “what *kind* of philosophical text is this?”, and “what can I *expect* from this kind of philosophical text?” If the first answer is, “this is a philosophical treatise”, then the reader can, and should, expect a cogent, coherent, logical and straightforward philosophical argument. If the answer is, however, “this is a philosophical novel”, or “this is a narrative dialogue”, then the corresponding expectations must also be shifted. The new paradigm that I propose, unearthed and informed by the principles of reader response criticism, simply requires that the first question be posed. Rather than asking first “is this a philosophical treatise?” and concluding on that basis whether the text is worthy of philosophical analysis, the new paradigm enables appropriate evaluative and interpretive standards to be invoked for each philosophical text. Note the use of the word “standards”. Many of those who hold to the traditional philosophical paradigm do so because they fear that permitting the non-treatise will lead to sloppy philosophical writing, and in turn to sloppy philosophical thought. This is clearly not the case. The four philosophical works which I have discussed in detail are no less carefully constructed for not being treatises. They are simply constructed in a different manner, and are designed to create a different and

particular kind of experience for the reader. Permitting her to become a partner in the creation of philosophical meaning does not imply that “anything goes”, but rather allows her to experience philosophical thought in a uniquely active fashion.

The new paradigm is at its heart flexible in terms of the style or of the form which is deemed to be an acceptable way of expressing philosophical ideas. The new paradigm need not threaten those who hold to the traditional paradigm, for it is more like a new and updated version of the old than a rejection of it. That is, ideas which are poorly expressed in literary form are still poorly expressed and will not be validated by the new flexible paradigm. The new paradigm is at the same time, however, restrictive in terms of its evaluation of philosophical quality. Although the goal of the paradigm shift is to rehabilitate works which express philosophy via a literary format, this does not mean that all are automatically worthy examples of philosophic excellence in terms of clarity of thought, effective use of the literary form and the accessibility of the writing itself. In some cases, as was seen with Nietzsche, accessibility may be a more complicated issue than one might think; for Nietzsche, reader accessibility ties into his perception of his ideal reader, and serves as a sort of pre-selection.

Each text, therefore, must be evaluated according to a paradigm which can accommodate its complexity of thought, form, structure and relationship with the reader. This is the true goal of this thesis: first to show that the reader’s experience of the text should not be taken for granted, and then to argue that the traditional paradigm does not appear to be equipped to handle the issues which arise from the shift toward the reader’s perspective. When encountering philosophical ideas expressed in modes

other than the standard and expected philosophical treatise, therefore, don't denigrate, by rejecting the thought on the basis of its mode of expression; don't translate, by forcing the thought into the traditional mode before its analysis; instead, evaluate, according to an appropriately flexible and nimble paradigm, and only then can philosophical literature be accurately assessed. While a phenomenological analysis of the reader's experience of the text may sometimes show that access to the philosophical ideas is delayed by the combination of literary and philosophical norms, such an analysis must first be undertaken, in the spirit which allows that forms other than the philosophical treatise may successfully communicate philosophy.

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