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A Way of Reading

When Thucydides wishes to express his sense of the internal chaos brought upon the cities of Greece by the civil wars that arose during the time of the Peloponnesian War, he tells us, among other things, that words themselves lost their meaning. The Greek terms for bravery and cowardice and trust and loyalty and manliness and weakness and moderation, the key terms of value in that world, changed their accepted significance and their role in thought and life.¹ What before would have been called something like idiotic recklessness, for example, was now called stouthearted loyalty to friends; what would have been praised as prudent foresight was now condemned as cowardice. Whether or not Thucydides' report is accurate, he speaks of changes that undoubtedly do occur, though usually more slowly, for others have spoken in similar terms about great changes in language and in life. Clarendon and Burke do so, for example, in lamenting the political transformations of their respective times, and so does Proust when, at the end of his life, he finds uprooted every understanding on which he had founded his social expectations and his sense of himself. Such changes in language may, of course, be felt not as deteriorations but as great advances. The Declaration of Independence, for example, claims to create a new world when it declares its new and self-evident truths; and Thoreau, in a different way, also claims to create a new life and a new language when he goes to live by the pond in the woods.

This book is about such changes in the meaning of language and of the world: about the ways in which words come to have their meanings and to hold or to lose them and how they acquire new meanings, both in the individual mind and in the world. This means, as we shall see, that it is also about the ways in which character is formed—and maintained or lost—by a person, a culture, or a community.

One way to see what is so terrible about the world Thucydides de-

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scribes is to ask what place you would have within it. For the reader Thucydides addresses, who uses these Greek words of value to organize his experience and to claim a meaning for it, the answer is none at all: in this world no one would see what he sees, respond as he responds, speak as he speaks. Even worse than this imagined isolation for such a reader would be the threat, in some sense the certainty, that to live in this world would lead to central changes within the self. One cannot maintain forever one's language and judgment and feelings against the pressures of a world that works in different ways, for one is in some measure the product of that world.

An alteration in language of the kind I mean is not merely a lexical event, and it is not reversible by insistence upon a set of proper definitions. It is a change in the world and the self, in manners and conduct and sentiment. Changes of this kind are complex and reciprocal in nature. The change in language that Thucydides records, for example, is in part caused by events of another kind, which are only partly verbal—those of the civil war; but the changes in language in turn contribute to the course and nature of that war and do much to define its meaning. The process is reciprocal in another sense as well, for at every stage the change is effected, knowingly or not, by the action of individual people, who at once form and are formed by their language and the events of their world. When language changes meaning, the world changes meaning, and we are part of the world.

One response to the world is to make a text about it, a reorganization of its resources of meaning tentatively achieved in a relation, newly constituted, between reader and writer. This is a way of acting in the world and on the world by using the language of the world. Thucydides' *History* is a response of this kind; so are the other texts we shall examine, and so, indeed, is this book itself. Other activities are also texts in this sense, including the conversations that take place among us, at home or at the office or on the street, whenever we talk about what matters to us. We struggle to make our words work as we wish, to redefine them to meet our needs, and in doing this we remake, in ways however small, our language and our world. The reconstitution of culture in a relation shared between speaker and audience is in fact a universal human activity, engaged in by every speaker in every culture, literate or illiterate, and the texts we shall read in this book can be taken as extraordinarily powerful and instructive examples of this activity. While this book is in some sense about reading, then, it is also about "writing" in the most general sense of the term: about what happens whenever a person uses language to claim a meaning for experience, to act on the world, or to establish relations with another person.

As the title of this chapter suggests, I wish to exemplify what I call a

way of reading: a way of engaging the mind with a text, and learning from it, that will affect the way one lives both with other texts, including those of one's own composition, and with other people. The rest of this chapter will present a general account of this way of reading, but I should say now that this can only be an introduction, perhaps something of a guidebook, to what follows; for the way of reading at work here will receive its real definition, and its justification, if any, only in the reader's own experience of this text and of those it speaks about. Perhaps the best way to read this chapter is quickly the first time through and then more deliberately, after one has read one or two of the chapters that follow.

ACTING WITH WORDS

The first stage in the process exemplified here is to expand our conception of "writing," as I have just suggested, to include all action with language that appears in these texts, including not only what the author says but what he represents others as saying. In reading the *Iliad*, for example, we shall examine such events as the interchange between Chryses and Agamemnon that begins the poem, in which the old man asks for the return of his daughter and the Achaean leader denies him, and the ensuing conversations among the Achaeans about the meaning of what has just been done; in reading Thucydides' *History* we shall analyze the speeches in which the cities seek to persuade each other to particular courses of action; in reading *Emma* we shall focus on the kinds of conversation and community that Emma herself establishes with other actors; and so on.

The kind of "action with words" that we shall examine thus covers an enormous range, including in principle all that goes into the management of social life in language, from relations of great intimacy to those of great publicity, such as those that constitute national politics in Athens, England, or America. This means that the kind of text-making that this book is about is not limited to the elevated forms of poetry and history and philosophy and law but includes what happens whenever any of us acts with words in our own lives to claim a meaning for experience or to establish a relation with another. The very activity of reading in which we shall engage is itself a kind of action with words, in a sense a kind of writing; for the process is completed only in the organization and expression of our responses to what we have read.

The first step in working out a way of talking about both reading and writing, for me at least, is to recognize that these, like other human activities—such as dancing, quarreling, playing football, telling a story, even sleeping—are not susceptible to complete reduction to descriptive or an-

alytic terms. Each of these activities engages parts of the self that do not function in explicitly verbal ways, and behind all of our attempts to describe or direct them remains an experience that is by its nature inexpressible. No one can fully explain what a person does when he writes a sentence or even when he holds out his hand in a signal to stop. Writing is never merely the transfer of information, whether factual or conceptual, from one mind to another, as much of our talk about it assumes, but is always a way of acting both upon the language, which the writer perpetually reconstitutes in his use of it, and upon the reader. Action of this kind can never be wholly explained, and our talk about these things should reflect that fact.

The basic question we shall ask of the texts we read, and of the particular performances within them, will thus be What kind of action with words is this? This question will be elaborated by being broken down into two others: What kind of relationship does this writer establish with his language? and What kind of relationship does he establish with his audience or reader? To put this in other words: What kind of cultural action is this writing? and What kind of social action is it?

THE WRITER'S RELATION WITH HIS LANGUAGE

Whenever a person wishes to speak to another, he must speak a language that has its existence outside himself, in the world he inhabits. If he is to be understood, he must use the language of his audience. This language gives him his terms of social and natural description, his words of value, and his materials for reasoning; it establishes the moves by which he can persuade another, or threaten or inform or tease him, or establish terms of cooperation or intimacy; it defines his starting places and stopping places and the ways he may intelligibly proceed from one to the other. Sometimes, of course, he can use words in new ways—for the user of the language can cast new sentences and make new moves—for the most part his resources are determined by others. What does it mean that he has held out his hand, palm up, or broken a red feather, or looked down and to his right, or used the word "coward"? Such questions as these have objective answers. The ways we have of claiming, establishing, and modifying meaning are furnished for us by our culture, and we cannot simply remake to suit ourselves the sets of significance that constitute our world.

That the forms and materials of speech are established for a speaker by his culture is something we all know as a matter of ordinary experience. Take, for example, the experience of argument in a simple sort of case. Suppose one person touches another, and the second objects. What can

possibly be said by the two people about this event, the one in remonstrance, the other in justification? In what sorts of argument might they engage, making what claims or appeals, accepting what modes of reasoning? Suppose the event takes place in each of the following situations: on a street corner in the black ghetto; at a labor union meeting; in the vestibule of a church; at a university faculty meeting; in the police station, one person being an officer, the other not; in a law school classroom; on a baseball field. One can quickly see how differently the arguments might go and can even imagine participating, more or less expertly, in them. Different questions would be asked of the event in each situation; the story would be told in different terms; and different feelings would be expressed, aroused, and countered. Different meanings would be claimed; different moves would be regarded as unanswerable claims to triumph, on the one hand, or as admissions of defeat, on the other. In each case the conversation would have its own shape and texture, its own kind of life; it would define a set of possibilities for asserting and maintaining meaning, for carrying on a collective life.

The resources that establish the possibilities of expression in a particular world thus constitute a discrete intellectual and social entity, and this can be analyzed and criticized. What world of shared meanings do these resources create, and what limits do they impose? What can be done by one who speaks this language, and what cannot? What stage of civilization does this discourse establish? When we ask such questions, the study of language becomes the study of an aspect of culture, and we become its critics.

The relationship that a speaker has with his language may range from the comfortable to the impossible. Sometimes one's language seems a perfect vehicle for speech and action; it can be used almost automatically to say or to do what one wishes. But at other times a speaker may find that he no longer has a language adequate to his needs and purposes, to his sense of himself and his world; his words lose their meaning. In the Iliad, for example, this happens to Achilles, who struggles with the language and values of his heroic culture, trying and failing to find a way to speak in a satisfactory way about himself and his experience. It happens also to the interlocutors in Plato's Gorgias, who are severely distressed when they are forced to face the contradictions among the platitudes by which they shape their lives. And it happens to Emma, whose language, while seemingly satisfactory to herself, is to the understanding observer utterly impossible; Emma's attempt to create a new world, based on a perverted form of a proper moral discourse, ends in fortunate failure. For each of these speakers, language loses its meaning, and the question is: What can be done about it? Can the speaker make a new language, remake an old one, or find a way to use old terms and understandings to

serve new purposes? Can he somehow reconstitute his resources to make them adequate to his needs?

But to put the question that way is to oversimplify, for each speaker is in an important sense the product of the language that he speaks, and who then can he be to remake it? Where can he stand when he tries? In Emma's case, at least, there is the additional complication that the central defect is not in her language at all—not in the resources that her culture makes available to her—but in herself, and the same can in principle be true of anyone. The question, then, is not only how one can reconstitute one's language but how one can learn from it and, in the process, reconstitute one's character and one's life.

These are questions not only for actors within these texts but for the writers of them as well. How, for example, can Homer, composing in an inherited language, created over centuries for the purpose of making a certain kind of heroic verse, find a way to examine and criticize the culture that that language was meant to celebrate? Or consider Plato: if he shows the language of ordinary Greek morality to be impossible, as he does, what language can he speak, and with what claims to meaning?

Thinking about our relationship with our language becomes increasingly difficult as we increasingly recognize its deeply reciprocal character. For while a person acts both with and upon the language that he uses, at once employing and reconstituting its resources, his language at the same time acts upon him. Language is learned only by stages and only for use and by using it; and, as one learns it, one naturally but imperceptibly undergoes changes: changes in attitude and perception and sentiment by which one becomes "acculturated," or "cultured," or perhaps "cultivated."[2] But to learn a language is also to change it, for one constantly makes new gestures and sentences of one's own, new patterns or combinations of meaning. Language is in part a system of invention, an organized way of making new meaning in new circumstances. Some of these inventions are shared with others and become common property; others remain personal, part of the process by which the individual within a culture is differentiated from others who are similarly situated. Culture and the individual self are in this view to be understood not in isolation, as independent systems or structures, but in their reciprocal relations one with the other: the only way they ever exist in the world.

Reading by Imaginary Participation

To examine the relation that a speaker establishes with his language, we must have some sense of the language itself. In reading these texts we shall attempt to achieve this in part by a method that may seem at once naive and intrusive: it is to imagine for a moment that the world of

this text is a real world, one in which we are to make our way and must ask how that can be done. This is how we shall read Book One of the *Iliad*, for example, where we are presented with a working culture very different from our own. We shall seek to understand the repertoire of claims and appeals and moves with which these actors define their motives, claim meaning for events, establish positions of their own, or otherwise act meaningfully in this world. This is reading of a reconstructive and participatory kind, an active engagement with the materials of the text in order to learn about the real or imagined world of which they are a part. The hope is that we can establish some sense of the relationship that exists between the speaker and the materials of his culture; that we can experience from the inside, with the intimacy of the artisan, if only in a tentative and momentary way, the life of the language that makes a world.

This is rather like the way in which law students learn to read cases as a way of learning about the world in which they will have to live, and perhaps a description of that process will make this one clearer. On his first day in school, the law student is given a case, or set of cases, just as they appear in the reports, without further guidance, and is asked to reconstruct them from the beginning. His job is to live over in his imagination the experience of the parties and of the lawyers, asking why this choice or that one was made, what he would have done, and how he would have explained himself. He is given a piece of the world in which he will one day have to make his way, and his task is to figure out what that world is like and how to function within it, all on the basis of extremely fragmentary evidence. His primary way of giving attention to a case is by arguing it in his head, by examining the resources for making appeals and claims on each side that constitute what we call the law. He or she tests each statement against other possibilities, wondering why it was not done this way or that, asking how things would go if the facts were changed in such-and-such a particular, suggesting a puzzle that will crack open a particular line of reasoning, proposing an innovation, imagining a way to put a point to jury or judge, and so on. "What would I do with this case?" is his constant question, and it is a complex one; for it is a way of asking simultaneously about many things: about the nature of the resources he is offered by his world; about the way in which he and others can put them to use; about the facts of a particular case; and about his capacity to imagine or to invent new ways of talking that will work in the world he lives in. When he has done, he has mastered the set of persuasive resources that his culture makes available for dealing with a particular situation, and in doing that he has defined their limits. Together, the arguments made on each side establish in the world an idealized conversation in which the resources of the legal culture for claiming mean-

ing and arousing sentiment are at once defined and exhausted and, in this way, exposed to analysis and to criticism.[3] It is as though the sea froze for a moment and we could study the waves; when the argument is done, the waves roll on until the next time someone tries to claim an order for the materials of his or her world.

Analysis

As we reconstruct from a text the resources of meaning that its culture makes available to its members, what questions can we most usefully ask of what we discover? How, that is, can the language we are learning best be understood and analyzed? I will not attempt to set forth in this book a full schematic analysis of any set of resources, for our attention will repeatedly be drawn to other questions in addition to this one; however, it may be worth while to identify here four fundamental questions that will be constantly at work in the somewhat more illustrative and suggestive work that we shall be doing.

1. How is the world of nature defined and presented in this language? To choose examples from our texts, how can the talk we hear about the Aegean Sea, or the English Channel, or the landscape of England, or the stars of a summer night, or the great size of the American continent function as an appeal or as a claim in this world? Often, especially in the modern world, it may seem as though the speakers live in a world without nature, a fact not without its own importance. But nature usually appears after all, in the form, perhaps, of the river or desert that makes a "natural" political boundary; or of "resources" that are being depleted or conserved or of an "environment" that is being desecrated or saved; or of the "natural" fact that the fetus is a person or that gender cannot be changed. It is hard to make a language in which the facts of nature have no place.

Nature also appears in symbols and metaphors, often in ways that are obvious within the culture but not outside it. Thus we can ask What is the meaning, in this language, of the spider? Of the rose? Of the sprig of heather? Of the sow that eats her farrow? Of the north wind? Of the annual floods? Of the field of goldenrod?

2. What social universe is constituted in this discourse, and how can it be understood? One might start with the characters represented in the particular text, including the speaker, and simply ask who they are. What does it mean that we have a "vicar" here, or a "warrior," or a "cop," or a "priest of Apollo," or a "verray parfit gentil knight," or an *anax andrōn* or someone called Sir Thomas or Caesar Augustus or Chief Justice? Each of these names implies an identity that is defined by a relationship with others: the vicar is a cleric, but among clerics he is very low in status; a Chief Justice is a judge of a particular bench with a particular jurisdic-

tion, with a clearly defined relationship with other judges and lawyers; and so on.

Beyond the individual person are the practices and activities that make up the life of the social world. For example, Book One of the *Iliad* begins with a father who is seeking the return of his daughter from another man and demonstrating the way that his culture gives him to do this, by supplication and ransom. Likewise, the "Bookseller's Dedication" to Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* depends for its effect on our understanding in some detail the contemporary practice of dedicating a literary work to a wealthy patron.

Social and political institutions are such practices set up on a permanent basis. They are not objects, though that is how we often talk about them, but complex sets of understandings, relations, and activities. They are ways of talking that can be learned and understood, and they play their part in constituting a world. For example, when, in the first book of Thucydides' *History*, we see ambassadors come from Corcyra to Athens to seek an alliance against Corinth, we already know that it is here agreed that cities will at least sometimes be spoken of as if they were single entities, which can be represented by single speakers; as if they could make and break agreements, i.e., as if they were moral agents; and, as we quickly discover when we examine the speeches, as if they were capable of feeling gratitude and shame and of reasoning about justice and expediency. This is, of course, not the only way to talk about a collection of people in a place; it is a constitutive fiction, a way of talking and acting that creates a public world.

3. What are the central terms of meaning and value in this discourse, and how do they function with one another to create patterns of motive and significance?

When we look at particular words, it is not their translation into statements of equivalence that we should seek but an understanding of the possibilities they represent for making and changing the world. This can be done only by giving attention to the shape and working of the language itself. Think of such terms in our own language as "honor," "dignity," "privacy," "property," "liberty," "friend," "teacher," "family," "marriage," "child," "university," or "school." Such words do not operate in ordinary speech as restatable concepts but as words with a life and force of their own. They cannot be replaced with definitions, as though they were parts of a closed system, for they constitute unique resources, of mixed fact and value, and their translation into other terms would destroy their nature. Their meaning resides not in their reducibility to other terms but in their irreducibility; it resides in the particular ways each can be combined with other words in a wide variety of contexts. They operate indeed in part as gestures, with a meaning that cannot be restated.

Words normally acquire this sort of complexity and richness gradually, as the incremental effect of many uses by many speakers and writers. Of course, even the most powerful word may be used by a particular writer as a kind of empty cliché, while another writer may give new and complex significance to what had been an ordinary term. The text itself, that is, will often act on its language in such a way as to give its words a kind of significance within it that they would otherwise lack in the discourse of the reader. As applied to poetry this observation is commonplace, for we have long been trained to see the poem, among other things, as a pattern of images and words that acquire unique significance through their association, operating in several planes or dimensions at once. But, as we shall see, what is true of poetry can be true of prose as well, even of expository prose; and in this book we shall have a continual interest both in the nature of the resources that a particular language offers its users—in the special meanings of its words—and in the ways in which a particular writer manages to change those meanings, to good effect or bad.*

4. What forms and methods of reasoning are held out here as valid? What shifts or transitions does a particular text assume will pass unquestioned, and what does it recognize the need to defend? What kinds of argument does it advance as authoritative? What is the place here, for example, of analogy, of deduction, of reasoning from general probability or from particular example? What is unanswerable, what unanswered?

This line of inquiry is encumbered for us by that part of our own intellectual tradition that has sought to reserve the term "reasoning" for two forms of it: deductive reasoning, which is tautological in nature, and inductive, which is empirical. In this book we shall for the most part be concerned with passages that do not use these forms of reasoning, and we shall therefore need to employ different terms of description and analysis. It would be wrong, for example, to try to reduce every passage of reasoning to a scheme of propositions of which it could be said that such and such were the fact and such and such was his logic. For one reasons not only with "propositions" but with metaphors, analogies, general truths, statements of feeling and attitude, particular definitions of self and audience, certain fidelities or infidelities to tradition or consistency, and the like, and one moves not only by logic but by association and analogy and image, by what seems natural and right.†

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*Consider, for example, the way Burke gives new meaning to the word "toleration" in the paragraph quoted below, page 217.

†These matters are discussed at somewhat greater length in the Note on Fact, Value, and Reason on pages 21–23, below.

Criticism

As one reads through a series of texts in the reconstructive and participatory way I have just described, trying to bring to life and understanding the culture enacted in each and to see the achievement of the particular text against that background, description will inevitably lead to comparison, and comparison to evaluation. Are there ways in which we can criticize and judge the cultures and texts we read, admiring the resources of one, deploring the kind of life achieved in another, and so on? This means judging both the resources that a culture makes available to its members and the particular reconstruction of those resources achieved by a text we are reading. Can we become in this double sense critics of civilization—judges of culture and of individual contributions to it?

This is a question to which the book as a whole is a response, and any answer will acquire meaning only as the reader comes to make and to share particular judgments in particular cases. We cannot expect to proceed by discovering and applying rules of excellence, for the judgments of which I speak are not simply intellectual processes but aspects of being and becoming. They begin as individual responses to particular moments of actuality in a text, tentatively made, which then become the object first of contemplation and reexamination, then of shared attention. What is called for is the self-education of perception and response, a process that cannot be systematized or hurried.

There are two reasons why it is difficult to talk in abstract terms, especially ahead of time, about the kinds of judgments to be made in this book. In the first place, these judgments are not purely rational or logical and therefore are not susceptible to summary at the purely conceptual level. But in the course of our work with particular texts I hope that we can gradually establish a common language in which generalization is possible. The summary in the final chapter will accordingly mean something quite different to the reader who has read his way through the book from what it would mean to one who might turn to it now. The second difficulty can be put in the form of a question. Since we are all products of our own culture, from what position can we possibly claim to make valid judgments about it, about other cultures, or about the contributions a particular writer makes to his culture, whatever it is? This is a central problem of modern thought, and one of the grander ambitions of this book is to provide a rather modest response to it. The basic idea is this: in each text the writer establishes a relation with his or her reader, a community of two that can be understood and judged in terms that are not bound by the language and culture in which the text is composed; this community can become a basis for judging the writer's culture and his

own relation to it; and, in my view, the texts examined here collectively establish a set of examples and standards by which such communities of two can themselves be judged.

But this is to get a bit ahead of ourselves. For the moment it is perhaps enough to say that many of the judgments invited in this book are akin to the judgments one regularly passes on literary or musical or other artistic works or to judgments traditionally made in legal or historical criticism. These kinds of judgments can in fact be regarded as special or particular cases of the kind of criticism with which this book is concerned, and perhaps I can call upon the reader's experience of them as a way of defining the expectations appropriate to the present work. All these are judgments, after all, about what is better and worse in civilization: they are not scientific and cannot be reduced to rules or criteria, yet they make up an immensely important part of our shared life. We make such judgments all the time, sometimes tentatively, sometimes with confidence. We share and elaborate these judgments with others and, in the process, often complicate or change them. We recognize that some of our judgments are better than others and that some of our friends are better judges than others. We have a sense of fallibility and an eagerness to improve. In this sense we are all critics of civilization already and are engaged in teaching each other how to be critics; our aim here is to learn more about something we already do.[4]

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE WRITER AND THE READER: ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY IN LANGUAGE

Our work will also have a second focus, rather different from the first. This focus is on two sets of human relationships: those established by speakers in these worlds with each other and those established by the writers of these texts with their readers. In the *Iliad*, for example, we shall see Achilles and Agamemnon, who are allies, establish an implacable hostility, and we shall see Achilles and Priam, who are enemies, establish a miraculous friendship. Plato's *Gorgias* is explicitly about certain kinds of relations established in language—the destructive flattery of what Socrates calls "rhetoric," the educative friendship of "dialectic"—and, in the conversations of which the text is made, we see examples of both. *Emma* presents a kind of taxonomy of friendships, both healthy and perverted, each of which is defined, established, and maintained in language. In Thucydides and Burke we see similar questions presented on a national or international scale. What kinds of relations can exist among the cities of Greece, for example, or among the people of England? And, to turn to our own country, what can it mean to establish a public world on the premise that "All men are created equal"?

We shall be equally interested in the relationship established between each of the writers of these texts and his or her reader. The idea of such a relationship may be somewhat novel or uncomfortable—a book is not a person after all—but I mean nothing mysterious or out of the ordinary. Every writer speaks to an audience and in doing so of necessity establishes a relationship with that audience based on the experience of reading that the text itself offers. The experience of reading is not vicarious—it involves no pretense that one is an Achaean or a Trojan—but actual and intimate, first occurring in the present, then living in the memory; and the community that a text establishes likewise has a real existence in the world. While a book is not a person, a writer always is; and writing is always a kind of social action: a proposed engagement of one mind with another.

To start with, a writer always gives himself a character in what he writes; it shows in the tone of voice he adopts, in the signals he gives the reader as to how to take that tone of voice, in the attitudes he invites his reader to have toward the world or toward people or ideas within it, in the straightforwardness or trickiness with which he addresses his reader—his honesty or falseness—and in the way he treats the materials of his language and culture. The reader is also a character in the world created by the text. For in acting on the reader as he does, the writer calls on him to function out of what he knows and is—for one who brings nothing to a text cannot be a reader of it—and to realize some of his possibilities for perception and response, for making judgments and taking positions. To engage with a text is to become different from what one was. There is a sense in which every text may be said to define an ideal reader, which it asks its audience to become, or to approximate, for the moment at least and perhaps forever.

When I say that a text asks its reader to become someone and that, by doing so, it establishes a relationship with him, I mean to speak literally, not metaphorically. Think, for example, of what happens when a person opposed to racism is told a successful racist joke: he laughs and hates himself for laughing; he feels degraded, and properly so, because the object of the joke is to degrade. He need not feel ashamed of having aggressive feelings or of the fact that they can be stimulated by racist humor, for something like that is true of anyone. Nor should he be ashamed that these possibilities are realized in him against his will, for a great work of literature might evoke such possibilities against the will of the reader in order to help him understand and correct them, and this would be an act of the deepest friendship. But the one who responds to the joke is ashamed of having this happen at the instigation of one who wishes to use those possibilities as the basis for ridicule or contempt; he is ashamed at who he has become in this relationship with this speaker. Literary texts can of course work the same way by stimulating aggressive or destructive im-

pulses, not in order to subject them to understanding, to an integration with a larger context of impulses and values, but in order to give them free rein. This is a momentary and uncorrected disintegration of the reader, and it is no act of friendship.

But in other cases the conception of the ideal reader can point to the central achievement of a great text. To consider a text discussed below, for example, one could say of Jane Austen's *Emma*—so little of which is understood the first time through or even the second—that it is meant to teach the reader how to read his way into becoming a member of the audience it defines: one who understands each shift of tone, who shares the judgments the text invites him or her to make, and who feels the sentiments proper to the circumstances. This takes time and rereading. The first time through the opening sentence, for example, the reader may not catch on to the fact that there is something wrong here:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her

But as the reader thinks about it, perhaps first alerted by the word "seemed" to a distance between the narrator and the character, he or she will come to understand that the "blessings" listed, while blessings indeed, are only "some" blessings, worth very little without other, more important blessings, chief among them the lessons to be learned by "distress" and vexation. Even on the third or fourth reading, however, even when he or she fully understands the spoiled and self-indulgent character of Emma's reverie, the reader may miss something that is essential to understanding the text as a whole, Emma's good sense and deep kindness in her treatment of her father in the passage that follows.

At the end, if the book has done its work and we have done ours, we have become better readers, and for Jane Austen this means better people as well. This is a moral fiction, not because it teaches us that vice is punished or anything like that, but by virtue of the capacities for perception and being that it realizes in its reader.

Sometimes the reader becomes a character of his own against the intention of the text, when he rejects or repudiates it. Indeed one element in the relationship between reader and writer is a kind of negotiation in which the reader constantly asks himself what this text is asking him to assent to and to become and whether or not he wishes to acquiesce. The reader's engagement with the text is thus by its nature tentative: while responding to the text he is always asking how he is responding, who he

is becoming, and checking that against the other things he is. Sometimes he is fooled, as by the racist joke, when he becomes a momentary and chagrined racist, or by the style of Ernest Hemingway, perhaps, when he becomes a sentimentalist; but sometimes—and this is the central point—he is educated, for reading is a process in which the reader himself, through a process of assimilation and rejection, response and judgment, becomes more fully one set of the things that it is possible for him to be. Reading works by a perpetual interchange between the person that a text asks you to become and the other things you are. *

The true center of value of a text, its most important meaning, is to be found in the community that it establishes with its reader. It is here that the author offers his reader a place to stand, a place from which he can observe and judge the characters and events of the world he creates, indeed the world itself. When Burke writes about the constitution of Great Britain, for example, he offers us another constitution, in his text, between himself and his readers, by which the British constitution is to be measured, and the true "dialectic" that Plato celebrates is not the activity performed by Socrates in relation to his interlocutors but that performed by Plato's text with its reader; and so on.†

This means that all literature, fictional and nonfictional, necessarily has an ethical and political dimension, for it always entails the definition of at least two roles (writer and reader) and the establishment of a relationship between them that can be seen to have both political and ethical content. (Usually a text defines others roles as well, enacted by the real or content.

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*It is of course something of an oversimplification to speak of an actual reader becoming "the" ideal reader of a particular text. Each of us brings his own set of experiences and presuppositions to the text, and each of us thus becomes, or refuses to become, his own particular version of the "ideal reader." The process of negotiation and judgment by which this happens is enormously complex, as various responses and opinions are contrasted with one another. The part of the mind that manages this process, deciding what to accept and what to reject, is what might be called the "central reader"; this is the part that a text ultimately seeks to reach and educate.

†There may of course be a disparity between the values a writer actually exhibits and those that he claims. We are all familiar, for example, with the self-righteous moralist who preaches love for all mankind but who in his talk and manners is far from loving, and we know the apostle of liberty who allows no room for argument from his reader or anyone else. What matters is who the writer actually is in his relationship with us, not who he pretends to be.

fictional people about whom it speaks, and it establishes relations with them too, performed in the ways it speaks about them.) Of course these textual relations are merely offered to us as readers, not imposed on us, and they require our cooperation if they are to become actual; but this does not mean that the offer, or the relations established by the offer, once it is accepted, are not real. To speak to another in a way that respects him or her as a source of experience and meaning and value different from oneself is to constitute a community based on values that have direct political significance; and the same can also be said of talk that reduces the reader to an object of manipulation, by appealing to one part of his experience or personality in denial of the rest. (Sentimentality is thus a political as well as an aesthetic vice.)

I hope to show that the textual community can be understood in ethical and political terms across the whole range of texts we shall read and the genres they exemplify, from epic poetry in the *Iliad* to the legal texts of our own constitutional tradition. If we can find a way to describe and judge the relations established by these texts with their readers, we shall have a ground for judging more formal and explicit political relations as well. It is such a standard of judgment that I think these texts, properly read, can be seen to offer us; it is this fact indeed, not their historical sequence, that explains their selection and arrangement.

What are the criteria of judgment these texts collectively establish? At the most general level, a statement of them will hardly surprise: recognition of the equal value of other people, and integration of the various aspects of self and experience into meaningful wholes. What I hope to show is how these conceptions arise from a reading of these texts and are given by them a vastly richer and more biting content than any summary statement can possibly have. I hope, too, to show how the logic of these values extends from the relationship of two with which we begin—the writer and his reader—to the largest political communities. These texts will, in my view, teach us how to judge our own political communities, their rulers and their policies, from the family to the nation and beyond.

THE IDEA OF READING at work in this book is not simply the old-fashioned one of the discovery of meaning, nor is it the new-fashioned one of the creation of meaning by a community of readers; instead, it is the idea of an interaction between mind and text that works like an interaction between people—it is in fact a species of that—and the expectations we bring to a text should be similar to those we bring to people we know in our lives. Just as one person does not have a fixed and identical meaning for every other person, even for every friend—even for the same friend—so a work as rich and varied as the *Iliad* does not have, cannot have, identical and fixed meanings for every reader, or every good reader,

or even for the same reader all his life. But this is not to say, either of the text or of the person, that it has no actual identity of its own or that it has only the identity that some group decides that it should have. Both have real identities, but these are too complex ever to be completely known and too alive to be fixed in a single interpretation forever. One reason this is true is that the reader, both of texts and of people, changes as he reads: one is always learning to see more clearly what is there and to respond to it more fully, or at least differently, and, in the process, one is oneself always changing, in relation to friend or to text. It is in this process of learning and change that much of the meaning of a text or of a friendship resides; a text is in fact largely about the ways in which its reader will be changed by reading it. The reader who knows Jane Austen well, for example, will not be like every other reader who knows her well, but he will be deeply different from what he would have been had he never read her at all.

The meaning of a text is thus not simply to be found within it, to be dug out like a kind of mineral treasure, nor does it come from the reader, as if he were a kind of movie projector. It resides in the life of reading itself, to which both text and reader contribute. And in this process the readers of a text can assist one another. I know that your *Iliad* will never be identical with mine, and in my reading of it in chapter two it is not my object to make it so. What I do hope is that the process by which you check what I say against that text, both as you remember it and as you reread it, will help you establish a fuller understanding of it and a deeper relation with it; and I know that the understanding and relation will be yours, not mine. What is to be sought among readings of a text, whether readings by different people or successive readings by oneself, is not identity, for there can never be that, but consistency and mutual instructiveness.

I HOPE THAT THE READER will by now have a clearer sense of what I mean when I say that this book is about reading and is meant to exemplify a way of reading. It is about "reading" defined so generously as to include writing and speaking, indeed all the ways we have of living with language and with each other through language; and it is about a "way of reading" conceived of not merely as a method of analysis but as a way of attending and responding to a text and a situation, of acting and being in relation to language and to other people. Its subject is a complex one, including the ways in which we constitute selves and communities in language and how the character we give ourselves can be maintained or lost; the ways in which words acquire and lose their special meanings; the ways in which one person can act with words to recognize or deny, to diminish or enhance, another. It is, above all, about the nature of the strug-

gle to establish and maintain a proper relationship with one's language and with other people when language, self, and community are in a constant process of reciprocal change.

Note

There are two matters treated above on which some readers may wish me to say a bit more: my expansive use of the word "language" and my view of the relation that exists among the domains of fact, value, and reason.

Language and Culture

In this book I use the word "language" as a partial synonym for the word "culture," and this usage should perhaps be explained. Of course it is not the words themselves, as sounds or writings, that constitute resources or impose limits of the kind that interest me; it is the expectations that govern the way words may be used, the understandings that define some uses as appropriate, others as shocking or impossible. And these expectations necessarily involve substantive questions. For example, what is an intolerable insult or degradation to a self-respecting Achaean warrior? What delicacy toward the feelings of others is required of an English gentleman? What ought to be the proper meaning of the words "patience" or "hypocrisy"? It is substantive understanding of this kind by which the famous paradoxes of Socrates—e.g., "It is better to suffer injustice than to do it"—can be seen as the cultural impossibilities that they are.

One might understandably wish to use a word like "culture" for such substantive systems of value and meaning, reserving the word "language" for the code in which they are signified, but I believe that such a distinction between language and culture, while useful enough for certain kinds of linguistic analysis, is for our purposes a false one. The language, after all, is the repository of the kinds of meaning and relation that make a culture what it is. In it, as I have suggested, one can find the terms by which the natural world is classified and represented, those by which the social universe is constituted, and those terms of motive and value by which action is directed and judged. In a sense we literally are the language that we speak, for the particular culture that makes us a "we"—that defines and connects us, that differentiates us from others—is enacted and embedded in our language.

For our purposes it is appropriate to use the word "language" to include the understandings by which linguistic terms and structures are put to

use, including understandings that determine shades of social meaning and expressions of attitude. Understandings governing syntax and grammar are, after all, continuous with those regulating tone of voice, social character, ironic implication, and manners generally. The term "language" can easily include all the resources for meaning that a culture makes available to its members, and to conceive of language in such a way has the merit of naturally directing our attention not to an independent system or abstract structure called a "culture" but to the relationship between the individual person, living through time, and the inherited resources for meaning and action that he or she struggles to learn and to control. Another way to talk about the basic attitudes and resources that give shape to a particular world, and limit it, would be to use the word "ideology." But that term has figured largely in battles with which we have nothing to do, and it has overtones that are hard to control; in addition, its very abstractness and objective quality remove it even farther from individual experience than the word "culture" and so render it less susceptible to confident verification or falsification by the reader. When I speak of your "language," you can confirm or deny; when I speak of your "ideology," your denials may be treated as mere defenses.

In all of this I do not mean to suggest that every question is merely a question of language or that by speaking the right way we can make anything come to pass. Both within the self and in the world there are limits on what we can do, and this book is not only about language but what lies beyond it: Achilles' wrath, the Athenians' self-love and Emma's, the persistent self-deception of which Samuel Johnson speaks. The world of language mediates between the languageless within and the languageless without. But I do mean to direct attention to the fact that, whenever we speak or write, whether we know it or not and for good or ill, we contribute to the creation of a culture, and we do so both in the way we reconstitute our language and in the relation we establish with the other person who is our reader. Every way of reading is a way of being and acting in the world.

Fact, Value, and Reason

In discussing the analysis of a language or culture, I suggest in the text that we ought not to accept sharp distinctions between discourses of Fact, Value, and Reason. These distinctions, powerfully present in contemporary intellectual life, are drawn from the physical sciences as they existed at a certain stage, and they are essential to the structure of certain forms of thought that call themselves scientific, especially to certain forms of social science. The basic idea is that there is a world of fact—brute fact or raw fact—external to the observer and that what the scien-

tist does is to observe or record that world; then, using the principles of inductive logic, he discovers the regularities by which its phenomena can be predicted. In doing this, he must obviously put his own values aside and apply only his reason to the external facts; for essential to the conception of this sort of science is the repeatable character of every discovery. This is indeed what gives these discoveries their special character as knowledge.

Obviously, this kind of enterprise has its value, but equally obviously, it is very different from the one in which I am here engaged; for my interest is in the ways in which worlds of meaning and value are constituted by people as they speak and write—in knowledge of another kind—and in these processes the lines between value and fact and reason cannot be rigidly maintained.

To start with the line between "fact" and "value": terms of what seem to be social "description" are often used as powerful terms of "value" in argument. Think of the force of such terms as "university" or "judge" or "family" or "teacher." It does not make sense to call these terms either factual or normative, for they are both at once, in a kind of shifting mixture. Sometimes they are used with one emphasis, sometimes with another, but (unless they are stipulatively defined for the purposes of a closed system) they always retain both possibilities. It would be hard to limit "poverty" or "disease" or "happiness" to purely factual uses. And, except for very limited purposes, one cannot remake the language by stripping away something called the "value component" of such terms, leaving only the factual element, or vice versa.

Likewise, there is no sharp line between "reasoning" and talk about facts and values. It is true that science has drawn such a distinction, seeking to rely exclusively on the two forms of thought, deductive and empirical, to which it gives a special standing. The appeal of these two forms of reasoning is at heart the same: each lays claim to the power of proof. Agreement with a proposition of mathematics or of science can simply be compelled by the force of a logical or empirical demonstration. But on the matters that really divide a community, agreement cannot be compelled by the force of logic or by the demonstration of facts; it can only be reached, by discussion and argument, and it is with these processes, not with the methods of logic and science, that this book is concerned. The region that can be ruled by the methods of logic and science, and by the parts of the mind that function in these ways, is, after all, rather small; and, for good or ill, much the larger part of human life must proceed without the certainties these two forms of reasoning provide. What I mean by "reasoning" in this book is thus not pure rationality of these scientific kinds but a way of making sense in an actual situation in a particular culture.

It may illuminate my point to consider for a moment two common ways of talking about values, both of which seem to me inappropriate for our purposes. One is to regard "value-choices" as outside the zone of rational talk, as though nothing intelligent or persuasive could be said on such matters. In this view, value-choices are merely preferences that cannot be subjected to intelligent and shared examination. (This is what economics does as a matter of principle.) Of course it is precisely on such questions, where the critical and creative intelligence seems so often to stop, that it is most essential to our life and culture that it function well. To define the term "rationality" or "reason" to exclude reasoning about matters of value is to demean language and to be false to experience.

The other view is to assume that the proper way to talk about values is to treat them as concepts, that is, as stipulatively defined terms in a closed conceptual structure or analytic scheme. The central assumption of this form of discourse—an assumption that is indeed essential to its logical integrity—is that words shall have exactly the same meaning each time they are used and that a word's stipulated statement of meaning could be substituted for the word itself with no loss beyond the awkwardness this would entail. But this is to deny to our most important terms their actual force and nature. In actual life our central words are what Empson calls complex words, and our central mode of discourse is what Barfield calls poetic; to deny our language and minds these resources in favor of a mode of thought impossibly mathematical would be to diminish our intellectual and social lives beyond reason.[5]

Bibliographies and Notes

PREFACE

Note

1. For an elaboration of this view, see my book *The Legal Imagination: Studies in the Nature of Legal Thought and Expression* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 757–806.

CHAPTER ONE: A WAY OF READING

Bibliography and Background

While I hope that my book is intelligible without secondary explanation, it may be helpful to some of my readers if I say something more about its intellectual origins and present context.

For me the beginning of reading is close attention to what actually happens in the language of the text itself, and my way of paying attention derives in part from the "New Criticism" in which I was trained. "New Criticism" is now often dismissed as outmoded and naïve, partly because of its purported assumption that each text was to be read as if it existed alone in the universe, without historical, cultural, or biographical context, and partly because of its supposedly reduced vocabulary of irony, paradox, metaphor, and organic design. But this is a caricature. The best critics of that time were guilty of neither of those vices, and those who were can be best understood if it is remembered what they were resisting: a tradition that reduced literature to something else, to a stage in a career or to a series of sources and influences. The achievement of the critical movement that is thought to have begun with Eliot was to draw

attention to the complexity and richness of the experience that a text offered its reader and to locate its central meaning there: in the process of reading it made possible and in the education, in reading and in life, that it offered.

To refer to my own experience, a great teacher like Reuben Brower would say that his aim was to read with his students in "slow motion," to unpack in detail and hence bring to understanding the process of reading itself. (For a fuller statement and exemplification of his method, see Reuben Arthur Brower, *The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951], especially chapter one.) Of course one cannot understand the experience of a text unless one understands the language (and that includes the cultural situation) of its author. It is significant in this connection that Brower's most important book was *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), which was a study of the relations that this poet established with the classical world and with his own immediate culture.

To focus on the experience of reading necessarily involves the critic in a struggle of expression and understanding, for how is that experience to be spoken of? One's attempt is always imperfect because all attempts to reduce experience to language are imperfect. The best reading thus includes a retelling, one reader's version, which can be checked by other readers against their own. This was a commonplace of the "New Criticism," and I see that it is also presented as a discovery of poststructuralist hermeneutics today (see Joel Weinsheimer, "'London' and the Fundamental Problem of Hermeneutics," *Critical Inquiry* 9 [1982]: 303–22). Such a method calls the reader's attention constantly to the relations between the writer and his language and between the reader and *his* language—relations it is my object in this book to examine in considerable detail.

Another assumption of "New Criticism" and of criticism much earlier than that, going back through Arnold and Johnson to Sidney and, beyond him, to Longinus and Aristotle, is that the activity of reading ought to be part of a larger activity of self-education; that the reader, whoever he or she may be, has something important to learn from a writer like Homer or Thucydides; and that the object of this process of education is not merely cognition—the acquisition of information and ideas—but a true education of one's own sensibility and character. It will make the reader more nearly what he or she ought to be. This view, despised as it is by some, is my own, and this book, which is at its heart a report of my own search for such an education, is directed to a reader similarly engaged.

Even while talking about it I have continued to put "New Criticism" in quotation marks, for I have great doubts about the value of talking about schools or theories of criticism in objectifying terms. Much of what is

wrong about modern critical discourse seems to me its assumption, probably borrowed from social science, that one's basic positions can be stated, in a single sentence or two, as a set of propositions that one supports, which can then be subjected to argument in defense and attack. (Is literary meaning to be found [a] in the text, [b] in the author, [c] in the reader, or [d] in the community of readers? Pick one of the above, then fight to defend it.) I think that such a method results in debates on questions that are false in the sense that they state alternatives neither of which can in any interesting way be true. Consider, for example, the contemporary theory (associated especially with Stanley Fish) that meaning is the product of the community of readers, who can make whatever poem they wish out of a Shakespearean sonnet, who can choose to make Jane Austen's beastly Mr. Collins the center of value in *Pride and Prejudice*, who can make a poem out of words they find scribbled on the blackboard, and so forth. (See, e.g., Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980], 323–24, 347–48.) In a trivial sense this is true, for we "can" of course do all these things, and there is no way to force a person who adopts a bizarre view to agree with you, as there may be in science or mathematics. But to make that kind of claim for the freedom of the critical community is to destroy the resource of a valuable distinction: between communities who properly regard themselves as free to do whatever they wish with whatever is their own—in setting up a business, for example, or establishing a college, or planning a clambake—and those who regard themselves as bound by external fidelities or authorities, for example, by the meaning of corporate documents or university statutes, or by the customs regulating a ritual observance, or by the meaning of a literary text.

Reading is simply not reducible to propositions of a simple theoretical kind, nor is argument of a theoretical sort very useful to us as readers. Reading is an activity of the whole mind, and I most fully understand your conception of reading when I know how you read, not just conceptually—so that I can repeat what you say about reading—but practically, in the sense that I have got the hang of what you do and can do my own version of it myself. Such is the conception of reading on which this book is built. In this opening chapter I do talk generally about the process, but the most important statement about the kind of reading I engage in and wish to recommend to the reader is not here but in the readings themselves. It is in the actual work, not in further degrees of explicit conceptual elaboration, that my key terms—language, reader, community, constitution, and so forth—will acquire their content.

In its focus on the experience of the reader this book can be placed in the tradition inelegantly known as "reader response" criticism (see, e.g.,

Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974].) But the view that reading literature is to be understood as a complex and interactive experience taking place over time is not original with the "reader response" critics, the "New Critics," or with anyone else. As I have said, my own sense of writing as a reconstitution of culture undoubtedly owes much to the teaching and writing of Wayne Booth (see especially "'The Way I Loved George Eliot': Friendship with Books as a Neglected Critical Metaphor," *Kenyon Review* n.s. 2 [1980]: 4–27), and in some respects I am rather close to Stanley Fish's fine book, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (London: Macmillan, 1967). In this book Fish sees Milton as teaching his reader about sin by creating situations in which he does sin, in the life of his imagination, and is corrected. The major difference between his way of reading and my own is that I am less concerned to explain how the text works from a position outside of it, as if it were addressed to others, than I am to engage with it myself and to reflect the result of that engagement in my own writing. In this sense my reading is personal as well as professional. For me one model of criticism of this kind, in which the critic learns the language of his writer and shows what that means, is Stuart M. Tave's *Some Words of Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973). Also, as I remark in the text, another tradition of reading is reflected in this book: the kind of reconstructive and participatory reading that forms the heart of a legal education.

This book's title may also suggest that it bears affinities to the modern movement known as deconstructionism. My earlier book, *The Legal Imagination: Studies in the Nature of Legal Thought and Expression* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), can in fact be read as a kind of forced deconstruction of legal language against the resistance of the reader, undertaken to confront him with a part of the truth of his situation in the world. But there I ultimately present the law as a way out, as a method of constructing a world, a self, and a life; similarly, here, the emphasis is less on the fluid conditions of life and language than on the constructive responses to them achieved in the great texts examined here. As I read Thucydides, for example, he brings himself and his reader to face an ultimate disintegration of language, community, and self, and he performs one kind of response to that predicament through the very act of reconstituting that experience; Plato performs another response in the communal remaking of language and self of the kind that takes place in dialectical philosophy. Swift, Johnson, and Austen engage in similar constructive processes in communities that gradually expand beyond two; and in reading Burke and the other political writers, we examine attempts to recon-

stitute a world at the level of the nation and beyond. Unlike most deconstructionists, moreover, as my text makes plain, I believe in the accessibility of the text to the mind of the reader and in the possibility of a coherent and shared reading of it. Thus I hope that the reader will see, that the title of this book does not express a postmodern despair but, rather, implies a kind of optimism. Of course words lose their meaning. That is what they have always done and will always do. What matters, in the face of this fact, is to understand the reconstitutions of language, character, and community that people have nonetheless managed to achieve in the texts they have made with each other and with us. My focus on the character a speaker gives himself and the community he establishes with others—on the ethics and politics of discourse—has, of course, very old roots. Plato's *Gorgias*, discussed in chapter four, is explicitly about such questions. But there are modern exemplars as well, perhaps at the moment most notably in the work of Jürgen Habermas, especially his *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); but see also Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948; Eng. trans. by Bernard Frechtman, *What Is Literature?* [New York: Harper & Row, 1965]). For a fuller explicit statement of my views on legal and literary interpretation, see my article "Law as Language: Reading Law and Reading Literature," *Texas Law Review* 60 (1982): 415–45.

I wish to identify certain other books, many close in spirit to this one, that have been enough a part of my life to affect what I say and do here, and to acknowledge my debt to them. These books would certainly include Arthur W. H Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, 2d ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1952); Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); M. I. Finley, *The Ancestral Constitution: An Inaugural Lecture* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); George A. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeiters: An Historical Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); L. C. Knights, *Public Voices: Literature and Politics, with Special Reference to the Seventeenth Century* (Totawa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1972); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Eng.: At the University Press, 1967); James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the "Iliad": The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Ian Robinson, *The Survival of English: Essays in Criticism of Language* (Cambridge, Eng.: At the University Press, 1973); Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949); E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958); and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

My conception of language as a kind of social action rather than a system of referential tags derives, of course, from Wittgenstein and is no doubt affected by J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962) and John R. Searle's *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Finally, my interest in constitutive discourse has been directly and indirectly influenced by Kenneth Burke, especially by his *A Grammar of Motives* (Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1945).

Notes

1. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 3. 82.

2. On the complex and related meanings of "culture" and "cultivate," see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958) 61–63.

3. For a fuller account of this process, see my article "The Study of Law as an Intellectual Activity," *Journal of Legal Education* 32 (1982): 1–10.

4. For a theory of cultural judgment in some respects close to my own, see Gertrude Jaeger and Philip Selznick, "A Normative Theory of Culture," *American Sociology Review* 29 (1964): 653–69. On ideological criticism and the problem of transcendence in general, see Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfort School* (Cambridge, Eng.: At the University Press, 1981); in the ancient Athenian context, see S. C. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) 209–41.

5. On these points see William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), and Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, 2d ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1952). For the best current account of the origins of the modern trichotomy of fact, value, and reason, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1981). See also Donald McCloskey, "The Rhetoric of Economics," *Journal of Economic Litera-*

ture 21 (1983): 481–516, and Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

CHAPTER TWO: THE *Iliad*

Bibliography and Background

General Works

The best contemporary accounts in English of the *Iliad*, and of the Homeric poems generally, are these: Geoffrey S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, Eng.: At the University Press, 1962) (also available in shorter paperback form as *Homer and the Epic* [Cambridge, Eng.: At the University Press, 1965]; Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960); Eric T. Owen, *The Story of the "Iliad"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947); James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the "Iliad": The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Cedric H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958). See also the excellent Alan J. B. Wace and Frank H. Stubbings, eds., *A Companion to Homer* (London: Macmillan, 1962).

The Epic Language and the Composition of the *Iliad*

Our understanding of the formulaic nature of Greek epic language derives from the work of Milman Parry, beginning with *L'Epithète traditionelle dans Homère* (Paris: Société d'éditions Les Belles Lettres, 1928). His collected papers have been published under the title *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). For summaries, see Kirk, *Homer and the Epic*, 1–19, and C. M. Bowra, "Style," in Wace and Stubbings, *A Companion to Homer*; see also Michael N. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Eric A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), chap. 6; and on oral poetry in general, Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context* (Cambridge, Eng.: At the University Press, 1977).

On what it is like to make poetry in such a language, consider the following: "The young singer must learn enough of these formulas to sing a song. He learns them by repeated use of them in singing, by repeatedly facing the need to express the idea in song and by repeatedly satisfying that need, until the resulting formula which he has heard from others

becomes a part of his poetic thought. He must have enough of these formulas to facilitate composition. He is like a child learning words, or any-one learning a language without a school method; except that the language here being learned is the special language of poetry" (Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 22). Lord is here speaking of Yugoslav bards, who also compose in a formulaic language, but he means the observation to apply to Homer as well. See also ibid., p. 36, and Nagler, *Spontaneity*, whose view it is that the singer learns not so much particular phrases as the patterns underlying them. But all agree that it is a language that he learns. For an account of the morphology and syntax of the language of Greek epic, see Leonard R. Palmer, *The Greek Language* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980), 83–101.

The Iliadic Culture

For the principal contemporary account of the values of the Homeric culture, see Arthur W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), chaps. 1–3. A. A. Long responds to Adkins in "Morals and Values in Homer," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 90 (1970): 121–39, to which Adkins responds in turn in the following volume of the same journal. A rather different view of the heroic culture was taken by Werner Jaeger in *Paideia*, 2d Eng. ed., trans. G. Highet, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), vol. 1, chaps. 1–3. A comprehensive study of Homeric culture is M. I. Finley's *The World of Odysseus*, rev. ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1965); see also Paul Friedrich, "Sanity and the Myth of Honor: The Problem of Achilles," *Ethos* 5 (1977): 281–305, and Eric R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), chap. 2.

All of these people think that the "values" of the poems are more clear, and less open to debate, than I do. M. I. Finley says, for example, "The heroic code was complete and unambiguous" (*The World of Odysseus*, 121).

I should also say that it is by no means obvious that inferences about any actual society may be drawn from the world created in the Homeric poems. This is not a picture of an actual world but of an ideal one. See, e.g., George M. Calhoun, "Polity and Society," in Wace and Stubbings, *A Companion to Homer*, 431–62. Professor Eric Havelock is so resistant to the idea that the world of the *Iliad* is real that he thinks its heroic or Mycenaean elements are a "disguise" or "fantasy," a way of representing the poet's own culture (Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice*, chap. 4). For present purposes we need not concern ourselves with this problem, for it is the world made in the text, not a real world, that I wish to analyze. For further views on the relation between the Mycenaean and Homeric civi-

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